

Chapter 36

E–Government Challenges in European Countries

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ABSTRACT

To what extent and in which direction does the recent so-called “shift from e-Government to e-Governance systems” take place in European governments? Much has been claimed and written about the influence of e-Government on the modernization and growth of public sector initiatives in Europe. Little is known, however, about how the shift from e-Government to e-Governance takes place in European governments. In particular, in this chapter, an overview of both challenges and advantages of implementing e-Governance strategies is presented, by examining how closely and critically intertwined e-Government and e-Governance are in European countries, with particular reference to the emerging ones. In fact, according to the European Commission indexes, European countries have been split in two groups: Pioneers (P) that are the “best-in-class” EU members, and Followers (F) that have only recently undertaken their path towards the ICT and e-government implementation and still have to foster the e-governance development. The authors judge this comparison as particular instructive in order to draw out some lessons that can be learnt by emerging countries about how to face these challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, e-Governments in the public sector have significantly evolved (Garson 2003, 2006; Osborne & Plastrik 2000). With reference to Europe, information systems and information

technology have thrived over the past 20 years, inspired by different strategies of implementation issued by the European Union (EU) over time. While the European Union defines strategies and goals which are valid for all member states, each country has the freedom to adapt them to its peculiar social, administrative and economic context. Therefore differences arise as regards

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the range of services provided via e-Government, the quality of new information technology tools implemented in governments, and the level of e-Governance achieved, in terms of e-participation, e-democracy, overcoming of the digital divide, and e-inclusion (European Commission 2007a).

With the aim of investigating to what extent e-Governance systems perform e-Governance in the public sector, we judge as particularly instructive to consider thirty-one different national cases in Europe, including all EU countries plus four candidate countries. These cases show different levels of e-Government results achieved, i.e. high, medium and low ranking levels according to European Commission indexes (European Commission 2007b). In particular, European countries have been split in two groups: Pioneers (P) that are the 'best-in-class' EU members and Followers (F) that have only recently undertaken their path towards the ICT and e-government implementation and still have to foster the e-governance development.

The comparison among these countries will constitute the basis for the discussion about the influence of the shift from e-Government and e-Governance in European countries. Furthermore, we judge as particular instructive this comparison in order to draw out some lessons that can be learnt by emerging countries about how to face these challenges.

This paper is structured in four sections. The second section sets up the scenario of e-government implementation providing context and theoretical framework for e-government and e-governance in Europe and examines how closely and critically intertwined they are. The third section provides an overview of both European e-Government and e-Governance dimensions, and describes how typically they develop in the public administration by analyzing the experience of different EU countries. The main path and challenges of shifting to e-Governance in supporting public governments are presented in the fourth section. Finally, in the conclusions we summarize the analysis highlighting the importance of shifting

from e-Government to e-Governance in terms of advantages and challenges of such development, with particular reference to emerging countries and their path.

2. CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR E-GOVERNMENT AND E-GOVERNANCE IN EUROPE

Although previous studies focused on and described the implementation of e-Government in European countries under different perspectives (Dunleavy *et al.* 2006; EIPA 2003; Hood 1983; OECD 1997, 2003; Santos & Heeks 2003, Heeks 1999, 2006), there seems to be a missing link: to what extent does the recent so-called "shift from e-Government to e-Governance systems" take place in European governments? Research has delved into the factors that inhibit or promote the adoption of IT systems and e-Government in general in the public sector. However, the relationship between e-Government and e-Governance is not clearly outlined. E-Government has an impact on accountability and performance (Orelli *et al.* 2010; Reddick & Frank 2007) that still remain the scope of any public management reform in the Western world (Bouckaert & Pollitt 2004); thus there might be a strong connection between e-Government and the ultimate goal of any e-Governance initiative.

The underlying assumption of our analysis is that the implementation of any governmental program requires 'technologies' (Miller & Rose 1990). Technologies are devices for intervening (Hacking 1983), and they include notation, computation and calculation, procedures of examination and assessment, etc. Today's information technologies (IT) play the most important role. It may be argued that technologies reflect public policy implementation and service delivery regimes, which span from the old *Public Administration*, to *New Public Management* and the more recent *New Public Governance* (Osborne 2009). In terms

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