Chapter II

Electronic Government–Efficiency, Service Quality and Democracy

Åke Grönlund
Umeå University, Sweden

The theme of this book is electronic government (eGov). The Introduction briefly outlines the general framework. The following chapters investigate specific issues and cases. In this chapter, I shall give a brief overview of the broad range of initiatives and activities that over the past several years have made up the foundations–politically, organizationally and technically–for electronic government.

eGov concerns both internal and external use of IT, for internal administration as well as for external services. It is about more IT use, better use and more strategic use. In this chapter, we shall focus on the external use, that is contacts between government and citizens and civil sector organizations, government and business, and among government organizations. The reason for this include the fact that this is the novel kind of IT use–internal IT use has been going on for decades, even if the amount and sophistication is now reaching new heights–and the kind that is seen as the most interesting component, and incentive, in restructuring government operations, for instance by increasing cooperation among government agencies and providing self-service facilities to citizens.

Electronic government has not so far attracted a great amount of research. The eGov history contains a number of political initiatives and an IT business that sees government as a white spot on the map, so far underutilizing IT, as compared to businesses as well as to the IT potential. In the overview below, we will therefore find a number of practical examples, but not much research of the kind we find about IT use in the business sector–about management strategies, alignment between IT and organization, knowledge management, collaborative work, power relations, to mention a few things (in the following chapters, though, several of these topics are discussed).

This chapter has three sections, named after the book title: The Design section overviews the visions and political initiatives that have formed the concept and current

practices of electronic government. The Applications section gives some examples to show the breadth of the field, and the Management section concludes by bringing up some issues that are important to the field of electronic government, but have so far not been discussed in a coherent manner with bearing on IT use in government.

While the mission of this book is to collect some emerging research in various fields and bring that to bear on the design and management of government, this is clearly possible only to a small extent today. The issues discussed at the end of this chapter thus go beyond what we have been able to achieve in this book, and should be seen as input to an eGov research agenda.

DESIGN

eGov in a Nutshell

Even though it is the rapid increase in Internet use that has sparked the recent hopes for "electronic government," the concept refers not only to more use of IT in the public sector. It is also about governments wanting to become more strategic in their IT use. The need for strategic thinking comes from several developments, including a general trend to restructure government operations by means of deregulation, outsourcing and competition; the advent of a cheap, unifying technology standard; and the increasing use of strategic IT tools in business, e.g., Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Workflow Management Systems (WMS) and Data Mining tools.

eGov is usually presented as using IT to:
- Provide easy access to government information and services to citizens and business.
- Increase the quality of services, by increased speed, completeness, process efficiency and other.
- Give citizens opportunities to participate in democratic processes of different kinds.

Focus is typically on external services, but one important idea is to use these to make internal operations more efficient, for instance by relying on self-service.

The Idea of Electronic Government

There are several lines of development behind the idea of electronic government. IT itself is obviously one, but we shall start by taking a look at another important background, the political initiatives and agendas.

As so often when it concerns political initiatives concerning IT use, electronic government has its origin in the USA, dating back to the early 1990s. The ideas were rapidly copied by the European Union, and have since been forming political agendas in Europe in parallel with the U.S. development.

From a North Atlantic perspective, the guiding initiatives are the following:
- The U.S. National Information Infrastructure Initiative, NII, 1993 (NIST, 1996) and Reinventing Government (NPR, 2000[1]). The concept of an information highway was coined and served as a guiding vision for the electronic physical infrastructure.
- The European Bangemann report of 1994 followed suite, translated the information highway into Infobahn and followed the American initiative when the visions of building a fiber infrastructure was concerned. The ideas of reinventing government were, however, not incorporated at that time (European Commission, 1997).

26 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/electronic-government-efficiency-service-quality/9994

Related Content

Citizen Participation via Mobile Applications: A Case Study on Apps in Germany
Lisa Beutelspacher, Agnes Mainkaand Tobias Siebenlist (2018). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 18-26).*
www.irma-international.org/article/citizen-participation-via-mobile-applications/226265

A Framework for Public eServices Transparency
Rui Pedro Lourenço (2023). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 1-19).*
www.irma-international.org/article/a-framework-for-public-eservices-transparency/317415

Local Democracy Online: An Analysis of Local Government Web Sites in England and Wales
Lawrence Pratchett, Melvin Wingfieldand Rabia Karakaya Polat (2008). *Electronic Government: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 3687-3703).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/local-democracy-online/9954

E-Democracy Policy in Queensland
Monika Henderson, Fergus Hogarthand Dianne Jeans (2008). *Electronic Government: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 2858-2866).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/democracy-policy-queensland/9900

Community Policing in India: Transparency through E-Governance
Sudha Arlikatti, David Wachiraand Sarah Gregory (2010). *Citizens and E-Government: Evaluating Policy and Management (pp. 435-448).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/community-policing-india/42570