

# **E-government and the transformation of public administrations in EU countries: Beyond NPM or just a second wave of reforms?**

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## INTRODUCTION

- At the beginning of the twenty-first century **the challenge** to governments is **to engage citizens in democratic activities** and **to improve citizens' trust in governments** (SALA, 2003).
- There is a hope in many countries that **information and communication technologies (ICTs)** will increase **the degree of interest** and **involvement** of citizens in politics.
- The interactivity of the Internet is also expected **to improve government accountability** making government more responsive to the needs and demands of citizens.

- In the same way as in the 1990s there was **global pressure** for introducing **New Public Management (NPM) reforms** in the public sector globalization is creating an offer of **interactive initiatives** are putting public bureaucracies worldwide under pressure **to change and innovate** the way in which they relate to citizens.
- However e-government **aims at beyond NPM reforms**; the goal of e-government is **to transform** the relationships between the public sector and society and **to explore** new channels of service delivery.

- The **objective** of this paper is to study **the development of e-government initiatives** at **regional and local level** in the EU through the opinion of those **agents** directly involved in the projects.

- According to Schedler and Schmidt (2004), there are two kinds of studies:

  - those which have been published **by governments or by consultants** and

  - those which have been carried out by **academics**.

The former have **interests** in the development of e-government; so, *a priori* the results shown by the latter group of studies should be **more objective**.

## E-GOVERNMENT AS A TOOL OF GOVERNANCE IN PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS.

- **Governance** is a flexible pattern of public decision-making.

Five principles underpin **good governance**: openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence (White Paper on European Governance).

- The advent of **e-government** has provided new opportunities to **enhance governance**.

- At present, there are **various interpretations** of what e-government means. The differences are not just semantic but reflect **priorities** in government strategies.

- The definitions fall into two groups:
  - - In the first one e-government is defined as the **Internet** (online service delivery) and other **Internet-based activities** focused on the delivery of services.
  - - In the second group e-government is defined as **a capacity to transform public administration** through the use of **ICTs**.
- The **narrow approach** is simply the **translation of e-commerce** private sector experiences to the public sector (one-way delivery of static information, provision of e-services and back office initiatives -e-administration-).
- The **broader approach** embraces the **whole range** of governance and administrative projects including e-democracy, e-voting, e-justice, e-education, e-healthcare,...

## METHODOLOGY

- 1) We sent a questionnaire to the **five biggest cities of each EU country**, and **regions** or other **sub-national** level administrations, in order to know their **degree of development of e-government initiatives** (we obtained responses from 48 of them).

From the answers received, we selected **the group** of regional and local governments with the **highest degree** of experience in e-government developments.

- 2) This group, called '**panel of experts**' in our survey, was invited to participate in a **Delphi study** focused on the **identification and analysis of relevant factors** which could **condition** the implementation of e-government initiatives.

- The Delphi method is a systematic means of **synthesizing** the judgments of experts.
- The technique comprises a **series of questionnaires** sent to a group of experts, designed **to elicit individual responses** to the problems posed and to enable the experts **to refine their views** as the group's work progresses.
- In **each** succeeding **round** of questionnaires, **the range** of responses will presumably decrease and the median will move toward the "best" answer.
- The main features of the technique are **anonymity** and **feedback**.

- The application of this method followed these **steps**:
  - 1) **selection** of the panel of experts to be interviewed,
  - 2) development of the **first round** of Delphi interviews,
  - 3) analysis of the **first round responses**,
  - 4) preparation of the **second round** of questions for interviewees,
  - 5) analysis of the **second round responses**,
  - 6) **third round**, and
  - 7) the synthesis of the **final results**.

During the **central months of 2004** we interviewed the group of **eighteen** regional and local governments with **high performance** in e-government developments (panel of experts) about:

- 1. Top drivers for the development of e-government
- 2. Top barriers to e-government development
- 3. Top priorities in creating benefits for the citizens
- 4. Top benefits for the administration
- 5. Top benefits for the government
- 6. Top fears in e-government implementation
  - - among citizens
  - - within administrations
  - - among governments
- 7. Information facilities provided on government web sites
- 8. Facilities which enhance "ease of use" on government web sites

- - In the **first round** the interviewees were asked **to score** each issue included in Annex 2 **from 1 to 4** (4 very important, 3 important, 2 marginally important and 1 unimportant)

according to **its relevance** in the successful development of e-government. If the **mean value** of answers (Column A) was between 1 and 2 or between 3 and 4 the opinion of the experts had reached a **consensus**. The answers with a mean value between 2 and 3 were sent to the experts **to be considered again**.

- - The issues involved in the **second round** (column B) mean that their contribution to the success of e-government implementation **is not clear** for the experts interviewed.

	Stage 1: information		Stage 2: interaction		Stage 3: two-way interaction		Stage 4: transaction		Total
	N	% row	N	% row	N	% row	N	% row	N
Income taxes	5	27.78%	6	33.33%	2	11.11%	5	27.78%	18
Job search services	3	16.67%	5	27.78%	9	50.00%	1	5.56%	18
Personal documents	4	22.22%	10	55.56%	3	16.67%	1	5.56%	18
Car registration	5	27.78%	7	38.89%	4	22.22%	2	11.11%	18
Application for building permission	4	22.22%	9	50.00%	1	5.56%	4	22.22%	18
Declarations to the police	5	27.78%	9	50.00%	2	11.11%	2	11.11%	18
Public libraries	3	16.67%	2	11.11%	6	33.33%	7	38.89%	18
Certificates	8	44.44%	3	16.67%	5	27.78%	2	11.11%	18
Enrolment in higher education	6	33.33%	3	16.67%	7	38.89%	2	11.11%	18
Changes of address	7	38.89%	5	27.78%	3	16.67%	3	16.67%	18
Health related services	10	55.56%	5	27.78%	2	11.11%	1	5.56%	18

TABLE 2: Public services for business online

	Stage 1: information		Stage 2: interaction		Stage 3: two-way interaction		Stage 4: transaction		Total
	N	% row	N	% row	N	% row	N	% row	N
Social contribution for employees	8	44.44%	6	33.33%	1	5.56%	3	16.67%	18
Corporation tax: declaration. notification	4	28.57%	2	14.29%	5	35.71%	3	21.43%	14
VAT: declaration. notification	5	33.33%	1	6.67%	5	33.33%	4	26.67%	15
Registration of a new company	4	22.22%	5	27.78%	4	22.22%	5	27.78%	18
Submission of data to statistical offices	3	21.43%	7	50.00%	4	28.57%	0	0.00%	14
Customs declarations	6	46.15%	3	23.08%	3	23.08%	1	7.69%	13
Environment-related permits	5	27.78%	9	50.00%	3	16.67%	1	5.56%	18
Public procurement	6	33.33%	6	33.33%	5	27.78%	1	5.56%	18

## MAIN FINDINGS

- Questionnaire and Delphi study answers show a **high degree of convergence across countries about the benefits, barriers and fears** surrounding the implementation of e-government projects in the EU.
- The first questionnaire shows that, at present, **most regional and local governments** have opened a Web site **to deliver information and/or services. Globalization** is putting public bureaucracies worldwide under pressure to **change** and innovate **the way in which they relate to citizens**.
- Nevertheless, they are at early stages. Most e-government projects are centred on the **'narrow concept of e-government'**, which entails a gap between the rhetoric of potential e-government benefits and those which have actually been brought about.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- Governments are interested in opening a Web site because of their concern **for giving an image of modernization rather than in transforming** the way in which **they relate to citizens**.
- E-government has started in almost all EU countries focused on putting information and public services online, which **translates the e-commerce philosophy** to the public sector, even though some postulates of NPM, such as **the need for customer-driven organisation, have not yet been applied sufficiently** in many European Continental countries.

So, one main challenge for EU continental governments to get through the early stages of e-government will be to **identify actual user needs** and to design e-government web sites directed at the identified target users.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- Today, worldwide governments recognise ICTs as **powerful tools** for **enhancing citizen engagement in public policy-making** and as a way of **enhancing citizen trust in governments**. Nevertheless, little concern about e-democracy topics can be found in the answers of the panel of experts.

- Answers from the questionnaire and the Delphi study show that **ICTs** are an enabler which **requires active political and managerial involvement, dedicated budgets and staff**.

In the private sector ICTs have brought about increases in productivity. **The public sector cannot use ICTs to replace people** lest it leave out a substantial portion of the population, since many citizens still do not have access to the Internet. So, the provision of additional resources for the development of e-government and e-governance projects is necessary.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- E-government initiatives are still predominantly non-interactive and non-deliberative.

- Even though e-government is still at an early stage, simply moving a service from offline to online -even at the billboard stage- and making it available on the Internet is a significant service improvement for many users, since information and transactions are now available 24/7/365. The user benefits are more flexibility and time-saving.

- E-government is not likely to reshape governance in the short-term, since e-democracy initiatives are not on the agenda of most EU countries. At present, it is little more than a promise not included in the budget.

<b>1. TOP DRIVERS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF E-GOVERNMENT (19)</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>
Better internet penetration	3.7	
Dedicated budgets	3.5	
Free internet access	3.4	
Cross-departmental co-operation	3.4	
Knowledge sharing inside the country	3.3	
Strong leadership from government	3.2	
Appropriate legal framework	3	
Availability of approved standards	3	
Incentives for innovation	2.8	3.2
Long term political goals and objectives	2.5	3
Appropriate skills within the administration	2.3	2.8
Aggressive national targets	2.3	2.5
European benchmarking (peer pressure)	2.1	2
Availability of specific software packages	1.2	
Increased co-operation between public and private sectors	1	
Knowledge sharing with other countries	1	
<b>2. TOP BARRIERS TO E-GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENT</b>		
Resistance to change within administration	3.6	
Concerns about security and confidentiality	3.5	
Lack of co-operation between administrations	3.2	
Lack of political will and drive	3.1	
High technology set-up costs	2.5	2.8
Lack of skills among citizens	2.5	3
Lack of high level championship	2.3	1.6
Limited availability of financial resources	2.1	1.6
Concerns about risk and fraud	1.8	
Lack of skills amongst adm. staff	1.6	
Citizen unresponsiveness	1.6	
Lack of good e-Gov examples to learn from	1.3	
Lack of technology / trained public sector IT staff	1.1	
<b>3. TOP PRIORITIES IN CREATING BENEFITS FOR THE CITIZENS</b>		
Access for all citizens	4	
Access 24/7	4	
Improved access to administrators and information	3.8	
More transparency	3.8	
Improved efficiency	3.5	
More cost efficiency	3.5	
Participate more in democracy	2.6	3
Improved quality	2.6	3
More accountability	2	2.3
<b>4. TOP BENEFITS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION</b>		
Better customer satisfaction	3.9	

<b>More flexibility</b>	3.4	
Less tedious tasks	2.7	2.9
More autonomy	2.6	2.1
New career opportunities	1.9	
Better salary	1.2	
<b>5. TOP BENEFITS FOR THE GOVERNMENT</b>		
<b>Reduce cost</b>	3.7	
<b>Give country competitive advantage</b>	3.3	
<b>Rationalise procedures</b>	3.3	
<b>Improve image of administration</b>	3.1	
<b>Asset in European integration</b>	3	
Improve citizens well being	2.8	3.1
Improve local businesses health	2.8	3
Stimulate adoption of new technologies	2.4	2
<b>6. TOP FEARS IN E-GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTATION</b>		
<b>AMONG CITIZENS</b>		
<b>Not all will have access</b>	4	
<b>Loss of confidentiality</b>	3.6	
<b>Increased control by government</b>	3	
Inability to use technologies properly	2.4	2.8
Loss of democracy	2	2.6
Loss of human contact	1.8	
Decrease in operational efficiency	1.5	
Decrease in service quality	1.4	
Access to public services more difficult	1.1	
Decrease in cost effectiveness	1	
<b>WITHIN ADMINISTRATIONS</b>		
<b>Inability to use new technologies properly</b>	3.5	
<b>Increased pressure from users/customers</b>	3.2	
<b>Inability to cope with increased speed</b>	3	
Increased control on individual performance	2.6	3.2
Job cuts	2.6	3
Loss of individual power	2.3	2.7
Increase competition among employees	2	1.3
Loss of existing benefits	1.7	
Loss of human contact	1.3	
<b>AMONG GOVERNMENTS</b>		
<b>Digital divide</b>	3.6	
<b>Absence of real change</b>	3.1	
Failures of e-government projects	2.7	2.8
High cost of implementation	2.7	2.5
Attacks and frauds by hackers	2.4	2.7
Increased accountability	2	1.8

<b>7. INFORMATION FACILITIES PROVIDED ON GOVERNMENT WEB SITES</b>		
Archive search facilities	4	
Download button for regulations	4	
Frequently asked questions for regulations	4	
Statement of current activities	3.8	
What's new section	3.8	
Basic responsibilities	3.8	
Regulations of organisation	3.3	
Future strategy	3	
Archive for what's new section	2.8	2.5
Mission Statement	2.5	3
<b>8. FACILITIES WHICH ENHANCE "EASE OF USE" ON GOVERNMENT WEB SITES</b>		
Downloadable forms	4	
Link to webmaster	4	
Page usable without graphics	3.9	
Special access technology available	3.3	
Search engine or link to engine provided	2.7	2.2
Forums or chat rooms provided	1.3	