Book Review

Current Issues and Trends in e-Government Research, Donald F. Norris (Ed.), 2007, Cybertech Publishing, Idea Group Inc., 319 pages with index

During the last ten years, Electronic Government has evolved into a multidisciplinary endeavor with relevance for both the professional and the academic communities. Although the use of Information Technologies (IT) by governments around the world well preceded e-Government, it was the Internet that increased the interest of policy makers, public managers and the general public in using IT to improve and transform government activity. The book brings together the works of twenty influential scholars, mainly from the United States, but also from Canada, New Zealand, Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Denmark. Their articles were originally published in the *International Journal of Electronic Government Research*. Nine of these papers were updated for this book.

The volume balances discussions of e-Government at the local, national and regional levels with reflections on organizational processes and research trends in the field.

Four chapters are dedicated to state and local practices. In Chapter 1, James Melitski and Marc Holtzer describe and compare e-Government web sites of 100 municipalities worldwide, using an assessment framework based on five core web site dimensions: usability, content, service, privacy and participation. Their exploration shows differences between continents in both the presence and quality of municipal web sites. Interestingly, the region in which all municipalities included in the sample have a web site is South America, followed by Europe, Asia, and North America. In Africa, 67% of the municipalities in the sample have no web site. Less surprisingly perhaps, municipalities in OECD countries have better web sites than do municipalities in non-OECD countries.

In Chapters 8 and 14, respectively, Donald Norris and Christopher Redick explore the determinants of e-Government adoption at the local level in the USA and Canada. Norris used a series of focus groups with local government officials in the USA to explore the main reasons for the adoption of e-Government and the ways and extent to which the adoption process has affected e-democracy use. His findings demonstrate that citizen participation is not a reason for US local government officials to adopt e-government, and that e-democracy is not on their radar. Main reasons for adoption are to create an alternative channel for contacting citizens about services, to promote efficiency, and to join the e-Government bandwagon. Redick explores key factors driving citizen-initiated contacts through electronic means in Ontario, Canada. He concludes that citizen demographics have no impact on these contacts. Organizational factors, such as available IT budget and IT staff, and the number of e-services offered by the surveyed municipalities, have the strongest influence on citizen-initiated contacts. His findings also suggest that e-Government supply has the potential to drive demand.

Chapter 6 focuses on information security determinants of information systems in public education institutions within a Midwestern US state. Alison Radl and Yu-Che Chen explore the effects of organizational, technical and contextual factors on information security in different school districts. Factors include the size of the school district, software used, awareness, commitment and technical competence related to security, as well as the availability of technical support and a technology coordinator. The authors use the so-called Confidentiality, Integrity and Availability (CIA) model to understand and explore information security. Their findings demonstrate that district size or software selection do not impact

significantly on security. Technical support has the most influence on all security dimensions, while security awareness, commitment and technical competence have an impact on some dimensions of the CIA model.

Five chapters explore a variety of e-Government issues at the national level, including the transformation capability of IT, understanding of e-Government, corruption, democracy, and participation. In Chapter 3, Jeffrey Roy assesses the first years of e-Government in Canada (1999–2004), with a special focus on the extent to which e-Government has transformed government activities. He argues that e-Government is "not only a new way to operate in the public sector, but a new way of organizing politically and acting in concert with other stakeholders and the public" (p. 59). However, institutional constraints have challenged the ability to collaborate, share information, and transform government activities and structures. Thus, although these initial years of e-Government in Canada show important progress in the modernization of services, the political transformation and re-distribution of power among main stakeholders remain important challenges for the future.

Chapter 7 is the first of four chapters devoted to democracy and participation. Kevin Esterling, David Lazer and Michael Neblo build an interesting model to evaluate the quality of United States legislators' web sites. The model is based upon five dimensions: content, audience, usability, interactivity and innovations. The main finding is that these web sites are "a purposeful response to the representative political situation" (p. 158). In other words, the representative's electoral situation, including factors like tenure and margin of victory, has a strong impact on the quality of the web site.

Chapters 2 and 11 explore participation and democracy in the European Union (EU). In Chapter 2, Pipa Norris explores the influence of Internet use on political activism. She distinguishes four types of political activism: vote-oriented (voting in formal elections); campaign-oriented (being a member and/or campaigning for political parties); cause-oriented (signing petitions, politically-oriented consumer behavior, participating in legal protests); and civic-oriented (belonging to civil, social or religious associations). She finds that Internet use affects cause- and civic-oriented activism more than it does voting or campaign-oriented activism. Norris concludes that the Internet will strengthen social movements and interest groups more than other more conventional channels of participation. Although the correlation between Internet use and political activism is consistent across the 18 countries in her study, there are important differences in terms of Internet use. While a little more than half of the population in the Nordic countries uses the Internet, less than a quarter of the population in the Mediterranean Europe and post-Communist countries does.

In Chapter 11, Harald Mahrer looks at the participation phenomenon from the parliamentarians' point of view, exploring the so-called "middle man paradox." This phenomenon has emerged in the e-Government literature as an explanation of the observed success of e-Government projects that are designed to improve administration and services (e-administration), in contrast with the lack of progress in projects oriented to improve political participation and citizen engagement (e-democracy). The paradox is based on research findings that identify politicians as important inhibitors of e-democracy projects. Mahrer explores parliamentarians' attitudes towards e-democracy and e-administration in 25 countries in the European Union. Confirming the paradox, his findings indicate that all parliamentarians support e-administration, actively promoting its inclusion in their countries' e-Government agendas. However, they are much less interested in the promotion of e-democracy, mainly because they believe that their societies are not ready for it.

Chapter 9 focuses on IT adoption and its effects on democracy at a national level. Using secondary data from sources such as the United Nations, Zlatko Kovačić explores relationships between e-readiness,

democracy, corruption and globalization levels in various countries. He only finds significant relationships between democracy and e-readiness. He concludes that there is a need to improve the measurement of e-readiness in order to obtain a better image of the potential of IT use for creating public value.

In Chapter 10, Herbert Kubicek and Hilmar Westholm present perspectives from a group of European Union experts on IT investments and policies. The chapter assesses the robustness of technical tools for e-democracy to guide IT investments in government. The group of experts analyzes the suitability of technical tools such as email, newsgroups, or online forums in three plausible scenarios for the future of the European Union. The most robust tools are better at informing the public, promoting communication and consultation, and encouraging active participation in the three scenarios. As a result of the analysis, the group concludes that IT is not a key component of participation, but is defined by stakeholders and issues. However, the analysis also suggests that "generic applications that separate functionality, presentation and content" constitute an apparently robust technical trend to follow.

Two chapters reflect on e-Government-induced Business Process Change (BPC). In Chapter 4, Jochen Scholl explores the motives and strategic approaches influencing BPC in government organizations. Chapter 5 continues the theme of Chapter 4 with a focus on technical and organizational factors affecting BPC in government. Given the scarcity of literature of IT-induced BPC in government, Scholl explores 16 propositions from the private sector literature, contrasting them with the perceptions and experience of 30 senior public managers from New York State and Washington State in the US. He concludes that IT-induced BPC in government has many commonalities with BPC in the private sector. However, BPC projects in government require more consensuses among key stakeholders. Moreover, BPC projects in government usually take longer than projects in the private sector because of legal and other regulatory requirements.

The final two chapters present trends in e-Government research based on the review of published work in e-Government Conference Proceedings (Chapter 12) and academic journals (Chapter 13). In Chapter 12, Åke Grönlund and Annika Andersson report on perceived improvements in the quality of e-Government research. However, findings suggest that e-Government as a research area is still rich in descriptive studies with very little emphasis on theory development or testing. Kim Viborg Andersen and Helle Zinner Henriksen, in contrast, find that, although e-Government is not a unified field, it is not as immature as Grönlund and Andersson claim. However, they found that e-Government research needs more input from public administration and public policy scholars, including increased research efforts in areas like collective values, public policy and democracy.

This book is a valuable collection of research as it fills important gaps in the literature. First, most of the research activities presented in this volume are empirically based, interesting efforts to develop or test theories of e-Government. These efforts help us to further understand the determinants and impact of e-Government adoption and implementation. In addition, many of the chapters focus on the influence of IT on democracy and public participation, areas which Andersen and Henriksen identify as opportunities for e-Government research.

However, the chapters in the book confirm Andersen and Henriksen's view that e-Government is not yet a single cohesive field. This fact is apparent in the diversity of terms and definitions used by the authors. There is consensus, though, on the conceptualization of the use of IT in government to create efficiencies, provide information and services, improve public administration operations and processes, increase participation, and transform relationships between government and stakeholders. A brief definition of terms would have been an effective way of working through terminological differences in this volume, while reaching consensus on concepts.

Other recurrent themes of the book are the transformative capacity of IT in government activities and in balancing power relationships between government and society. From the different perspectives

in the book, it is possible to conclude that the transformative capability of e-Government remains an unfulfilled promise. Apparently, to fulfill this promise, governments around the world will have to overcome barriers, such as institutional arrangements or politicians' interests, after changing their strategic approach towards e-Government. Furthermore, a clear weakness of the book is the lack of research samples from the developing world.

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