

## Book Review

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Cullen, Rowena and Hassall, Graham (Eds.) (2017) *Achieving Sustainable E-government in Pacific Island States*, Springer Publishers (Public Administration and Information Technology Series).

The volume “Achieving Sustainable E-government in Pacific Island States”, edited by the New Zealand based researchers Rowena Cullen and Graham Hassall, provides readers with an extensive volume of sources and initiatives for the analysis of the current implementation of e-government solutions in the Pacific. This region consists of thousands of islands, divided into more than 40 island groups, which again amounts to three major sub-regions, Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. Despite of their seemingly close location; their size, population, economic development, cultural, political orientation, languages, and resources, needs to be included in order to classify these islands, and to identify the specific and local challenges for the development of e-government solutions.

The book is divided into fourteen chapters. Chapter 1 describes the complexity of the so-called Pacific Island States, including political, social and economic differences. The authors address the demand for cooperation between the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) in common projects utilizing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to the further development of e-government services. This is probably the most important chapter of the volume as it describes the significance of PICs as a case study for the development of e-government. The message presented in this chapter does not only demonstrate potential areas for further investigations, it also serves as a source of inspiration to run similar applications in other developing states.

In Chapters 2 and 3, the authors highlight the role of aid agencies and development partners in supporting e-government initiatives, and the authors present several policy frameworks that can be applied in the development of e-government projects. It is important to mention that despite the efforts made by aid agencies, and development partners, the PICs need to lay the foundation themselves through their own legal frameworks, and only apply suggested advice from overseas actors as general guidelines. Only this may lead to an advancement of e-government applications and solutions for citizens and business. Nevertheless, local contexts should be taken into account by giving priority to sensible policy sectors such as e.g. health and education, and to specific aspects such as enhancing transparency and increasing data communication.

Chapters 4 and 5 look at the development of telecommunications and expansion of mobile technology within the PIC region. The high penetration of mobile phones within the PICs provides the opportunity to develop basic public service solutions (which is described more in detail in the subsequent chapters). The potential of furthering mobile government (m-government) is in fact prominent in the PICs given the high percentage of the population having access to mobile phones. Even communication via SMS (without using the more advanced smartphones) could make a difference during initial phases of establishing e-government services. More attention is needed from the public sector, industry and academia to develop solutions such as m-service, m-health, and m-participation in the PICs.

One of the key challenges of e-government is the digital divides. Unfortunately, this problem cannot solely be resolved through technological means. In fact, any analysis of digital inequalities needs to include other issues such as social, political, and economic factors.

Chapters 6 to 12 are dedicated to the description of existing public e-services in the PICs. These include governance and financial management (Chapter 6), justice and parliamentary applications (Chapter 7), statistics, information and communication (Chapter 8), primary industry and rural development (Chapter 9), climate change and risk analysis (Chapter 10), health sector (Chapter 11) and education development (Chapter 12). Some of the common problems while seeking to implement e-services are related to inequality and economical differences between countries. To mitigate this challenge, the different authors show the importance of cooperation between actors, the support from external funding bodies, and political support (including resources). Additionally, the authors demonstrate that one of the most important challenges to executing national ICT-projects is the lack of coordination. Without a faster proliferation of ICTs, the PICs will be limited in the advancement of e-government, and will continue to fall behind other regions.

Chapter 13 is dedicated to the use of existing ICTs in Pacific Island Countries in enhancing e-participation and e-democracy. The chapter shows how existing technologies can be applied to politically engage citizens. The development of e-participation and e-democracy aligns with a maturity political model, willing to include requests and needs from the society without closing communication means. Some of the cases presented in this chapter, demonstrate how governments around the world control the citizens' access to different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, etc. The exercise of citizen's rights goes together with opening links between public administration, business and citizens.

Finally, Chapter 14 summarizes the contributions presented in previous chapters and highlights the critical factors to be taken into consideration for the development of e-government projects, including the importance of local contexts.

This volume is well integrated and the empirical data and sources presented in each chapter gives readers the opportunity to go from the identification of problems in the local context of the PICs, moving on to the presentation of practical frameworks to support the implementation of digitally enabled services, to describing existing solutions. The book is suitable for all academics and policy makers interested in practical applications in developing countries. The book presents good examples on how e-government projects can be applied in local situations with limited resources and highly challenging environments. Nevertheless, the book would have benefitted from a chapter, or a section, with a benchmark of the developments made in the past years and indicating future plans and trajectories in the PICs. This opens up the possibility to not only extend this work, but also to present the readers with how the different services are matching citizens' demands, and possibly make a difference to the citizens' life.

This book represents a great effort, and contributes to the development and research in the areas of e-government, e-Services, e-Participation, e-Education, and e-Justice in all developing countries. I would like to invite all researchers in this area to pay attention to the recommendations and findings presented in this book.

### **Dr. Luis Terán**

Professor, Department of Computer Science, Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas ESPE, Ecuador, lfteran1@espe.edu.ec

Assistant Doctor/Lecturer, Information Systems Research Group, University of Fribourg (UniFR), Switzerland, luis.teran@unifr.ch