

ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: AN ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEB SITES IN TURKEY

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—Abstract —

Electronic government (e-government) has been transforming the relationship which governments have traditionally had with the citizens and render governments' services and information to be more efficient, accountable, effective and accessible. Web sites are the key tools of e-government and the right channel for communication and service provision. Web platforms provide governments to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, strengthen democracy and public trust. This is much more important at local levels as the most basic public services are provided in the cities and citizens are most connected to government. As web content and use continues to increase, local governments monitor regularly and enhance the quality of their sites to attract and satisfy users. This study tries to evaluate the e-government development and early practices in Turkey through greater municipalities. The research analyzes the official web sites of sixteen greater municipalities in Turkey and evaluates them in terms of main e-government categories. The categories determined for this research according to the literature are; services provided, information available, security, government transparency/openness, and citizen outreach/interactivity. It is important to see the results to assess and discuss the current condition of local e-government implications in Turkey by means of government transparency, information flow and citizen participation.

Key Words: *e-government, greater municipal web sites, citizen interaction, government transparency*

JEL Classification: O35, O39

1. INTRODUCTION

New information and communication technologies (ICT) have not only changed the way ordinary people communicate, work, and live but has also transformed the relationship that governments traditionally used to have with the citizens. By moving the traditional services to the Internet most governments are in the process of implementing a complete transformation of processes, internally and externally. Almost all developed countries have been launching comprehensive e-government practices for various citizen demands about access, transparency and improved governmental services. E-government seems to presents quite a number of challenges for both public administration and citizens as the early implications in various countries are globally apparent for their outcomes like promoting efficient and cost effective government practices, facilitating easy access to information and government services, making government more

accountable to citizens and providing the parties to listen each other for the interaction feature of new media.

The development of e-Government as a modern state management also includes local government as a part of public administration. The advantages of using ICT within business processes have long been recognised in the private and public sectors, in the latter of which they have become increasingly notable through the growing participation of the citizens in the information society and their awareness and competence to use ICT (Kunstelj & Dečman, 2003). When it comes to local administration, e-government implementations are offering a number of benefits to local citizens; more democracy for interaction feature with local authorities, practical daily life e-services and easy-to-access information.

Experience in OECD countries has shown that e-government can support government efforts to reduce spending and increase public sector efficiency and performance, as well as long-term policy effectiveness (OECD Report, 2008). The main problem at this point is the digital divide phenomenon for citizens. Because the concept of digital divide involves not only access to physical ICT platforms, but goes further to include the concept of e-Inclusion. E-inclusion entails engagement and participation in different socio-economic frameworks using ICTs (Bwalya, Plessis & Rensleigh, 2012; 46) While on the part of government citizen involvement means and requires easy accessibility, transparency and accountability; on the citizen part however that involvement requires primarily digital literacy in order to create the demand of participation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Defining e-Government

The common point of various definitions about e-government is that it points out basically the use of new information technologies in order to deliver the public services to related stakeholders by computer mediated way. Kumar and Best (2006) define e-government as the use of information and communication technologies in the public sector to improve its operations and delivery of services. United Nations (2008) e-government description is as changing the way citizens interact with the government through the use of new information and communication technologies. For e-government to be successful, governments should engage their citizens and incorporate their views, expectations and concerns into policies. This knowledge will build greater trust and confidence between citizens and their governments.

At the beginning of Millennium, information technology research and advisory company Gartner Group, put forward an e-government description as “the continuous optimization of service delivery, constituency participation, and governance by transforming internal and external relationships through technology, the Internet, and new media”(Gartner, 2000)

Means & Schneider’s e-government description in their book which seems to be one of the milestones of e-government revolution (2000; 17) is “the use of electronic information to improve performance, create value, and enable new relationships between governments, business and citizens. E government builds links between government entities and their customers and suppliers; it connects jurisdictions, customers, units of government and locations”. By this description they especially remark value creation, relationship and interaction points.

According to WorldBank (2009), “e-Government” refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions.

The initial face of e-government was the website, initially static in form but soon enriched to become a portal’ with online functionality and multiple purposes. During the 1990s as countries and other jurisdictions began to develop a web presence, it became intuitive that an online reiteration of government departments and agencies would not be the most effective way of developing more transactional and interactive capacities in an efficient and effective manner. (UN, 2008:71)

While e-government adoption has been increasing globally for the last years, the adoption rate of various countries is not same. Generally, developing countries, are lagging behind in e-government adoption compared to developed countries The United Nations’ Global e-Government Readiness Report put Turkey on 76th place among the 192 surveyed member states of the UN countries. (United Nations, 2008).The readiness incorporates web measure, telecommunications infrastructure, and human capital indices.

To measure the assessment of web performance the primary criteria are governments' way of providing e-government policies, various applications and tools to meet the growing needs of their citizens for more e-information, e-services and e-tools. It measures the online presence of national websites, along with those of the ministries of health, education, welfare, labour and finance of each Member State (UN, 2008).

West (2007a: 22) points out that by complementing traditional functions of government through online service delivery and by encouraging interactivity, e-government has the potential to reduce the gap between the representatives and their electorate in modern politics.

The eGovernment applications, at the beginning, used to be practiced as carrying public services to digital/online platform and then have evolved to a concept of effective and user centric service delivery in an inclusive and competitive world. The literature offers us a number of models presenting the development of e-government. United Nations’ description about e-government development is as an evolutionary phenomenon, starting with presence on the web, providing the public with relevant, basic information. The development is then described in a number of levels, from (1) *emerging presence*, (2) *enhanced presence*, (3) *interactive presence*, (4) *transactional presence*, (5) *connected -networked presence* (United Nations, 2008: 16).

2.2. E-Government Development in Turkey

The emphasis on information society policies in Turkey started in the 1990s to create a knowledge-based economy that would be based on higher-value-added production. First initiatives of e-government, such as the Internet tax project of the Ministry of Finance and the central

population management system date back to 1998. However, economic and political instability prevented the governments from developing long-term projects. (Çayhan, 2008: 3)

In 2002, the First National Information Congress was held by the government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This congress led to the realization of the e- transformation project. (Arslan, 2007) The “e-Transformation Turkey Project” was developed in 2003 where Turkish government launched a new project, namely “e-Transformation Turkey Project” that aims to accelerate Turkey’s transition to information society. State Planning Organization (SPO) has been identified as the responsible body for the coordination of the project and Information Society Department was established within SPO to carry out all coordination activities regarding information society. (SPO, 2003).

According to the InternetWorldStats’ statistics by September 30, 2009 Turkey’s internet penetration per population is 34,5 % . Turkey is the leader by internet usage growth rate of 1,225.0 % between 2000-2009 . (InternetWorldStats, 2009). While OECD statistics shows Turkey lagging behind EU neighbours on many indicators such as Internet penetration and computer ownership, extensive progress has been made in e-government initiatives. The majority of the public services are accessible through the national portal and the design and layout of the portal is good. The Turkish national portal scores 72% being close to the EU27+ average of 75%, with room for improvement in the area of personalisation. (European Commission Capgemini, 2007).

The results of the research (West, 2007b) conducted and renewed every seven years by Darrell M. West, from Brown University, among 198 countries Turkey ranked 8th has in terms of e-government applications in 2007 and therefore managed to advance her position, which was previously 35th. According to 2009 global e-Readiness rankings and scores report prepared by Economic Intelligence Unit in co-operation with the IBM institute, Turkey ranks 43rd after Brazil with a readiness score of 5.34 over 10 where the top three countries in the rankings are Denmark, Sweden and Netherlands. (EIU, 2009)

Since 2005, overall co-ordination of state ICT projects has been centralised with the Information Society Department within the State Planning Organization drawing together representatives from public institutions, NGOs and universities.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND THEIR INTERNET USAGE

Today, the explosive growth in Internet usage accompanied by rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and e-commerce/e-business in the private sector has put growing pressure on public entities to serve citizens electronically (Ho, 2002).

New information and communication technologies provide concrete opportunities for municipalities to improve governance in terms of transparency, participation and decentralization. In addition, advanced ICTs can enable local communities to achieve autonomous administration in communication with central government. This can finally lead to the harmony of balance and control of power between central and municipal authorities.

Being a form of local authority, municipalities can be considered bridges that bring together citizens and public administration, dealing mainly with services that directly affect citizens. The importance of municipalities depends on their highly and continuous citizen engagement as they touch the ordinary citizens' lives in their everyday life practices. That closest link comprises various services from road maintenance to individual security and local environment protection while the central government are responsible for more distant issues.

The main factors motivating municipal governments and citizens to use of the Internet is that new media technologies provide both parties with more flexibility as to when they can retrieve information or interact for problem solving. The growth of metropolitan areas and the need to better accommodate residents in a changing and transforming society by means of information society must be considered may be the main reasons for municipalities to increase their presence and engagement on the Internet.

Reduced cost and the desire to promote public participation at the municipal level are some other factors driving municipalities to get online. As municipalities take on more responsibilities handed down from senior levels of government, there is a need to provide a wider range of information to residents. Publishing information in paper form is an expensive undertaking. On the other hand use of the Internet allows municipal governments to provide detailed information in a paperless environment at a reduced cost.

Local e-government is not only an online presence to enhance the citizen services quality, speed of delivery and reliability of services to its citizens and to business but a democratic mechanism fulfilling its responsibilities by attempting to increase accountability, transparency and quality of services by adopting ICTs to modernize and change the way their administrations work. (Arslan, 2007).

3.1. E-Transformation of Local Governments in Turkey

There are totally 81 provinces and 3200 municipalities in Turkey where 16 of them are greater municipalities (also called metropolitan cities). (YerelNET, 2009).

Municipalities in Turkey have been moving toward embracing Internet technology for the recent years. They have been implementing various electronic applications (e-municipality) to serve the citizens according to the e-government transformation.

According to the results of Municipal Web Services Research which was conducted by Turkish Statistical Institute-TurkStat for the first time, among the 662 municipalities in Turkey with population above 10000, 99 % have Internet access and 82 % have Intranet application . 64 % of the above mentioned municipalities have corporate websites, while 24 % of those who doesn't have websites are planning to establish one in a year time. Some of the other remarkable results are as follows (TÜİK, 2006);

- Among the information on the websites of the municipalities, the contact information and completed and ongoing jobs have the biggest share (% 94 and % 92).

- 82% of the municipalities having higher population (>250000) in their localities updates their websites on a daily basis. The municipalities which do not update their websites are found mostly in localities with the population group 10000-20000 (%28).
- % 30 of the municipalities uses newspapers and magazines, % 54 uses billboards, and % 43 uses other websites for the promotion.
- % 52 face the problem of qualified staff, % 28 software costs, and % 28 permission for e-signature collection while providing web services.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to reveal the current e-government practices of 16 greater municipalities in Turkey. The names and web site addresses of those municipalities are found in local governments portal “Yerel Yönetimler Portalı” <http://www.yerelnet.org.tr/>. The research is based on a comprehensive analysis and assessment of only 16 greater (metropolitan) municipality official websites in Turkey. The websites were analyzed in a week period, the first week of December 2009 based on four main dimensions.

The 16 greater municipalities in Turkey in alphabetical order are ; Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Bursa, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Eskişehir, Gaziantep, İstanbul, İzmir, Kayseri, Kocaeli, Konya, Mersin, Sakarya, and Samsun.

The present study adapted and integrated some of parameters used by the researchers for web site evaluation and measurement practices in different metropolitan cities in diverse countries, and also took into consideration the key elements of public sector web sites as accountability/openness; efficiency; participation; effectiveness/responsiveness which are defined by OECD as official public institutions criteria (Ho, 2002; Kaylor et al, 2001; Holzer & Seang 2007). The majority of the studies in this field, analyses and evaluates the web pages according to its content, and the availability of the e-services.

Depending on the above mentioned literature about the public sector web sites evaluation, the assessment criteria for this research is limited by the presence of four different and main features which are;

- Information availability
- Services provided
- Transparency/Openness
- Citizen outreach/Citizen Participation

For information availability category , primarily access to public/government documents were searched and also the availability of some other features like news and current events (international, national and local), links to major public agencies/departments websites, links to major newspapers and journals, subject area index, government laws and regulations, and the use of multimedia were searched as well. Each site is examined if audio and video files of public events, speeches, or meetings were available.

Municipalities are the closest point of service for the citizens and enterprises. Services provided online or as it is also called E-services of municipalities describe the use of electronic fully

executable services having access to all the necessary information online and usually providing the final service – a fact that makes their e-Services Portal a very important link in the e-Government chain. Online services provide opportunity to lower the cost of service delivery and make services widely accessible to the general public. To assess online service delivery of Turkish metropole municipality web sites, both the fully executable services in which the entire transaction can be done online and service guidelines that inform citizens how to get things done are included. These features not only include services or service guidelines of municipalities but of the other governmental or non-governmental institutions as well “24/7 days. For this category the web sites are analyzed in depth and the services were determined. The services municipalities give may change from country to country according to governmental laws/rules etc.. Therefore the services for Turkey are special for this country. The typical common global executable services of the municipalities seem to be applying business licences, tax enquiry and online tax payments, and some city services like online transportation timetables and ticket purchases, city travel cards etc..

The wide availability of web tools to elaborate on public data makes the impact of transparency much bigger. Free publishing platforms such as blogs, mash-ups like GoogleEarth, visualization tools like ManyEyes, plus all the free and open source software used in web 2.0 projects to, for example, distribute the work of monitoring government activities between many people. These tools make public data much more relevant and understandable – and enhance the impact of transparency.

Government websites has a major role of enhancing transparency and openness of the governing body in a democratic process. Public sector transparency is fundamentally about effective communication on public policy between governments, business and other civil society stakeholders (CIME, 2003). To evaluate the degree of transparency and openness of each municipality website in this study, the features such as information on bidding for public projects, employment opportunities for civil service, price index of major goods and services, and areas where citizens can pour out their grievances and expose public officials’ crimes and bad behaviors are searched and analyzed. Furthermore, websites were assessed on their capability of connecting government officials with ordinary citizens. The first feature of citizen outreach/responsiveness is Governor’s/Mayor’s Mail Box. Other features include discussion forums, chat rooms and public opinion surveys as a feedback mechanism. Features also include e-mail address, office phone number of the main office of each municipality and English or minority language accessibility. This category involves also the opportunity for disabled access to the Municipal web site as well.

E-participation can be considered one of the main tools that provide both central and local government institutions with citizen engagement by establishing dialogue through virtual communication ways, offering also opportunity to develop e-democracy in local authorities . The transformative nature of Web allows individuals to become a publisher or to talk with authorities directly which also means and represent a profound change of power relationship in public sphere. By enhancing government’s ability to request, receive and incorporate feedback from constituents, policy measures can be better tailored to meet the needs and priorities of citizens. For e-participation to be successful and to become the norm, governments need to create an environment that allows citizens to voice their views online and more importantly, to create a feedback mechanism which shows citizens that their views are taken seriously. This requires trust between

citizens and their governments, as well as a robust infrastructure that allows citizens access to decision makers.

5. MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Available Online Information

E-government provides greater access to government information that includes the functions, duties, organizational structure, administrative procedures and regulations of governments.

Table 1 shows information provided by greater municipalities' websites in Turkey. Of the 16 municipal websites reviewed, all the sites (100%) provide Government/public documents and local news. 8 of them provide links to other agencies (like Water and Sewerage, Electricity or Gas Distribution companies of the city, or other government agencies, ministries etc.), 8 of them provide Audio/Video Clips, 6 of the sites have links to News Media, 3 of them provide live cameras in the city, where the citizen can monitor the traffic. In "Other" category, 2 of them give information about Mayor's daily program. Eskişehir municipality provide online live radio broadcastings. Ankara leads the list in this category.

Table 1 : Information provided by Greater Municipality Websites in Turkey

Municipality	Gov.- Public Documents	News/ Events	Media Links	Other Links	Audio- Video Clips	Live Cameras	Other
Adana		x	x	x			
Ankara	x	x		x	x	x	
Antalya	x	x	x	x			
Bursa	x	x	x				
Diyarbakır	x	x					
Erzurum	x	x		x	x		
Eskişehir	x	x			x		Police radio, Eskişehir radio
Gaziantep	x	x	x	x			Historical info.
İstanbul	x	x			x	x	Mayor's daily programme
İzmir	x	x			x		Environment protection
Kayseri	x	x		x			
Kocaeli	x	x			x		Mayor's daily programme
Konya	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Mersin	x	x			x		
Sakarya	x	x					
Samsun	x	x	x	x			

5.2. Services Provided

Municipalities are facing quite a number of challenges by e--municipality services, basically provision of unmediated direct services to citizen users without the need of traditional paper work.

To assess online service delivery of Turkish metropole municipality web sites, both the fully executable services in which the entire transaction can be done online and service guidelines that inform citizens how to get things done are included. These features not only include services or service guidelines of municipalities but of the other governmental or non-governmental institutions as well “24/7 days”.

Table 2 : Number of services provided by Greater Municipal websites

Municipality	Executable Services (Total number)	Service Guidelines (Total number)
Adana	1	6
Ankara	2	7
Antalya		2
Bursa		5
Diyarbakır	2	2
Erzurum		4
Eskişehir		3
Gaziantep	2	3
İstanbul	4	9
İzmir	4	10
Kayseri		8
Kocaeli	1	2
Konya		7
Mersin	1	3
Sakarya	1	
Samsun		3

Among the sites examined, as Table 2 indicates, 9 greater city municipalities (56.25%) offer some kind of executable services. İstanbul and İzmir lead the list with 4 executable services each. The online executable services İstanbul greater municipality provides are; online application for city travel card, professional license applications, online İGDAŞ payment (İstanbul Water & Sewerage company), online municipal document tracking. İzmir greater municipality provides online İZSU payment (İzmir Water Company), Medical Analysis Results for Esrefpasa Hospital of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, online tax liability inquiry, towed vehicle inquiry, online municipal document tracking .

While Ankara and Gaziantep greater municipalities provide student loan and social aid applications in common, Kocaeli municipality only provide online city card application and Mersin provide MESKİ (Mersin Water company) debit query and payment as executable services. Diyarbakır greater municipality provides online DİSKİ payment (Diyarbakır Water Company), tax debit and cemetery query, Sakarya municipality provides tax debit query, and Adana greater municipality provides online professional office premises /licence application as executable services.

In terms of service guidelines, there is much variation among greater city municipalities. The most common guidelines and service informations provided are ; Municipality Wholesale Market Hall,

weather forecast, air quality, water quality, pharmacies on duty, city gas-water-electricity subscription guidelines, city transportation timescale (either bus-subway train or ferry) , city water company price lists. The maximum and minimum prices for fruit and vegetables in the Municipality Wholesale Market Hall are announced and updated every day in the websites of 6 municipalities. These are Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Eskişehir, İstanbul, and İzmir. İstanbul and İzmir municipal websites also announce the fish wholesale market prices daily as well.

Kayseri greater municipality provide disabled bus and university buses free of charge and give information about how to use them and give related links. Therefore this is considered in services and guidelines category when designing this research. This fact is valid also some other features which are considered in services category although they might be undertaken as information available category as well. However when the content of these features are analysed in depth, they are considered under the suitable category by the researcher. Kayseri also give information guidelines about driver penalty scores.

Gaziantep greater municipality provides only three service guidelines which are birth delivery ambulance service guidelines, home accidents guidelines and GAMEK- art and career education service and guidelines different from the other municipalities took place in the research. Bursa greater municipality provides library information bank services and guidelines.

Table 3: Measurement of Transparency/Openness of Municipal Websites

Municipality	Bidding Information	Employment Information	Annual Reports	Grievance Box	Budget Fullfillment	Knowledge acquisition
Adana	x	x				x
Ankara	x			x		x
Antalya	x		x		x	x
Bursa	x	x				x
Diyarbakır	x					x
Erzurum						
Eskişehir	x					
Gaziantep				x		
İstanbul	x	x		x	x	x
İzmir	x					
Kayseri	x		x			
Kocaeli	x	x	x			
Konya	x		x		x	x
Mersin	x		x		x	
Sakarya				x		
Samsun	x			x		

5.3. Transparency/Openness

In the literature there is no commonly agreed definition of transparency, they vary according to disciplines, and emphasize different aspects of the concept. Based on the literature some of the concepts point out the basic elements of public sector transparency as providing citizens with timely available of information about local services, legislation, regulation and other public measures and processes in an open two way communication model. Some other deal with the

broader objective of transparency – governments’ visibility and “openness to the public gaze” or successful “communication of policymakers’ intentions”.

Transparency involves core measures for informing the public about policy and these measures are of universal relevance. The broader view of transparency relating to successful communication about policy requires consideration of national institutions, values, preferences and ways of doing things. While these practices are of near universal relevance, they involve a narrow view of transparency. They focus on concrete measures that promote and protect rights to public sector information. A broader view is that transparency is what results from successful two-way communication about policy between governments and other interested parties (CIME, 2003).

Transparency exposes government behaviour to citizens’ scrutiny. In doing so, and in combination with existing free tools for publishing and collaboration, it enables citizens to reduce information asymmetries, monitor government performance and expose inefficiencies, thereby stimulating innovation. Transparency can support the innovative civil servants inside government.

Among the total sites assessed, 81.25% of the greater municipality websites provide information on public contract bidding, 25 % have information on civil service position openings, 31.25 % provide online Annual Reports, 25% provide budget fulfillment information, 31.25 % provide Grievance box, and 43.75% provide knowledge acquisition feature.

Only 4 of the city sites (Adana, Bursa, İstanbul and Kocaeli) have information on job openings where Bursa have employment information only for disabled citizens and Kocaeli for fire company. They not only listed the application requirements for job openings at government agencies, it announced test results of applicants as well.

Government openness and transparency is also a way of combatting and controlling corruption issue which seems to have been prevalent especially in developing countries occurring at all levels of governments. The research revealed that non of the greater municipal web sites in Turkey have an 'Accusation Box' which is a significant detail giving citizens the opportunity to report corruption of public officials anonymously. On the other hand 5 city sites have a Grievance Box where citizens can report their own negative experiences. These boxes are called generally “desk” and they are represented as “blue/ white desks” or “Help Desk” where any kind of complaint can be stated.

Table 4: Measurement of Citizen Outreach/Participation/Responsiveness of Municipal Websites

Municipality	Mayor’s Mail	Any Contact No./Fax	Online Survey	Municipality Hotline/Redline	English/Minority Lang.	Citizen Participation
Adana		x			English	
Ankara		x		x	English	Project Bank
Antalya	Mayor’sTel.	x	x			
Bursa		x			English	Project Bank
Diyarbakır					English/kurdish	
Erzurum					English	
Eskişehir					English-	

				German
Gaziantep			x	English
İstanbul	x			English
İzmir	x			English
Kayseri	x			English
Kocaeli	Mayor's Tel.	x	x	English
Konya				6 languages
Mersin			x	English
Sakarya			x	English
Samsun			x	

5.4. Citizen Outreach/ Citizen Participation

The findings of Table 4 represents websites prepared with features connecting ordinary citizens with their local municipalities. The key features analyzed include Mayor's direct Mail Box, discussion forums, municipal hotline, online surveys, availability of English/minority language, any other implication for citizen participation.

Internet and web platforms have radically changed the conditions for disadvantaged social groups. Disabled ones are one of those groups and web accessibility gives them equal opportunity with the others to disseminate their ideas, make their voice to be heard by local authorities, municipalities or others and interact with them. With regard to disability access, none of the greater municipalities in Turkey have websites providing such access. On the other hand 35 % of cities in OECD countries have websites providing disability access for the blinds, whereas only 9% of cities in non-OECD countries have that capacity. In addition, about 14% of cities in OECD countries have websites providing disability access for the deaf, while only 9% of cities in non-OECD countries offer it according to a longitudinal assessment of worldwide municipal websites. (Holzer & Seang, 2007: 71).

Of the assessed greater municipal websites in Turkey, there aren't any virtual chatrooms or discussion forums application. Only 25% (4 of them) have an online survey. Samsun's survey is about municipal transactions while the others are different, like the actual government agenda in Turkey. The Web platform however can function as a public sphere for the process of social communication where opinions are expressed, synthesized and coalesced bilaterally.

With the exception of 3 websites, which makes only 18.75% (İstanbul, İzmir and Kayseri), none of them provide Mayor's e-mail address in their sites, 12.50 % (Antalya and Kocaeli) provide Mayor's direct telephone and fax numbers instead of mail box, 5 of them (31.25 %) have some form of contact information including partly postal address, phone and/or fax numbers, e-mail addresses of some departments, as well as names of senior officials, the rest have no contact information. This data is the contrary of TÜİK's statistics about 600 municipalities in Turkey as "among the information on the websites of the municipalities, the contact information and completed and ongoing jobs have the biggest share (% 94 and % 92)". Therefore it is obvious that smaller municipalities use the contact information more than the greater city municipalities.

Public outreach, concentrates on the availability of information for different language groups and for diverse purposes. It comprises foreign language translation - whether the website is translated in at least one language.

Of the assessed municipal web sites 81.25% of them provide a foreign language option whereas 62.50 % of them offer one language which is English, and 18.75% (3 of them) provide more than one foreign language option. Eskişehir greter municipality offer English and German language options, Diyarbakır offer English and Kurdish and Konya is the leader of this category by offering 6 different languages; English, German, Arabic (2 different Arabic country languages), Swedish, and Japanese. Samsun and surprisingly Antalya -although the city's great tourism potential-, don't offer any foreign language options.

Municipal planning process needs citizen participation in information society as this can improve local authorities ability to respond to the needs of the local community and to build public policies together with the citizens. It allows for better targeting of resources based on the articulated needs and priorities of the population, leading to more efficient use of resources. Creating channels and conditions for citizens to exercise voice and to demand accountability can also lead to greater transparency in local government affairs. In this research it is highlighted that Ankara and Bursa municipalities ask a kind of citizen participation by the "Project Bank" implication. This might be considered a way of motivating and integrating citizens to produce projects for their city and also these projects are awarded.

6. CONCLUSION

This study tries to identify an overview of greater city (metropolitan) website use in Turkey. It explores the key features of municipal websites in terms of online information, electronic services provided, government transparency/openness and citizen outreach/citizen participation. Overall, e-government has played a considerable role in providing some kind of information and delivering some services while playing less significant role in improving government transparency and citizen outreach and participation.

It is encouraging to see that all the greater city municipalities in Turkey have Internet presentation through their own websites, yet most of the sites are a mere informative nature and show an asymmetrical one-way communication process instead of interacting. They provide some basic information about the institution and the work of the municipal council and administration in general. Municipalities enable access to databases with information about local events, enterprises, local transportation timetables by a majority. Municipalities have yet to develop the use of electronic communication to achieve effective business outcomes and higher quality of citizen interaction to constitute more public interest policies.

E-government leads to more efficient, transparent and service-oriented public administrations. Indeed, "e-government is a driver of not only more sophisticated service channels for the most sophisticated technological users (a critically important group often spurring innovation and service improvement), but also a platform for expanded participative capacities for the citizenry as a whole, improvements in the relevance and transparency of public policy decisions and a vehicle for building trust in government" (United Nations, 2008, p.167).

Governments shows openness, which makes them more trustworthy for the citizen – the sovereign in any democracy. By building trust in government and better public policies, strengthening government citizen relations enhances the legitimacy of government. E- democracy refers to activities that increase citizen involvement including virtual town meeting, open meeting, cyber campaigns, feedback polls, public surveys and community forums ,such as through e-consultation, e-voting. (Coleman & Gotze, 2002 : 24).

Cyberspace in general as a public sphere and E-government applications presence of the government institutions have been offering new opportunities for citizens to become informed about, discuss and participate in political activities, and contacting directly public officials. However the study revealed that municipalities' engagement with citizens in Turkey is at a limited stage as they use their website presence mostly to inform and less to interact with citizens.

In terms of providing online public services, Turkey has staged considerable progress along European standards. However e-municipality assessment of Turkish greater city municipalities doesn't seem satisfactory. It can be said that the sites show low interactivity, low transparency and low public outreach. In regard to United Nation's evolutionary e-government model, great majority of the Turkish municipal web sites are at the level of "enhanced presence".

The government modernisation programmes aim to make local public services more transparent and accountable. In order to be competitive in information age of the world, local governments' online presence in Turkey should efficiently fulfil the needs of citizens and become a completely integrated online one shop portal to meet the UN evolutionary e-government objectives, and therefore must be promoted especially in terms of transparency, openness, citizen participation, and outreach.

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