

E-MUNICIPALITY FOR CITIZEN-ORIENTED ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

What is the relationship between democracy and e-government in general? More specifically; what is the relationship between democracy and e-municipality applications within the concept of e-government? On the contrary to the common discourse, which regards as if there is an explicit and direct relationship of the subject matter, ordinary citizens are not able to see that relationship, thus tend to hesitate to approach and eventually consider the entire e-government model as artificial. What underlies the failing point? The paper argues the axiom, which always considered as underlying and deemed appropriate in e-government discussions: "the immediate relation" between e-government and e-democracy. This is done by analyzing and then assembling all the single components of this relationship. The aim of this paper is draw attention to the lack of knowledge about citizens' perception of e-government services today and eventually point out key factors for creating a change in the common perception towards a positive view while emphasizing that e-municipality for citizen-oriented administration would only be based on democratic atmosphere.

Key Words: e-government, e-municipality, citizen-oriented administration, public administration

JEL Classification: O3, H7

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet is regarded as a medium that can, at least potentially, increase participation. From the political participation point of view, Internet's most democratized facet is to increase communication and organization skills of people. "Enabling public participation in forming policies, interactive information collection, public monitoring, setting up a constructive public relation strategy and foundation for its implementation" are considered amongst Internet's advantages, comparing to other communication mediums (Kaya Benschir, 2000: 114).

Internet tools, by permitting interactive communication (news groups, e-mail lists, bulletin boards and chat rooms) allow the voice of public, to be clearly heard. Internet should not only be evaluated as a democratization factor per se, but as a tool to find its meaning in democratization process. In a post-modern world, there are too many new topics keeping the public sphere busy. The most important of them is the network of horizontal social relationships and interactions gaining strength, thanks to technologic developments. Developments in Information Technologies, have been leading to re-thinking of government, democracy, law, political parties, trade, labor and social life concepts. This has

also been a key factor affecting administrative organizations. Based on Information Technologies, e-government has been pioneering as a new structure, by emphasizing the government-citizen relationship, which had formally been formed upon duty and services comprehension. Now the government-citizen relationship is changing towards electronic communication, continuous and secure operational sphere. The most important benefits of e-government include more efficiency, improved services, better accessibility of public services and more transparency and accountability.

E-government provides opportunities in strengthen citizens' political participation, as well as assures that political power is aware of public's opinion and experiences. Thus, e-government is often referred as providing a "re-shaping change" to citizens, by political participation and has also been accepted as a modern way to strengthen and realization of ideal democratic life towards citizen-oriented administration. In the process of shifting from traditional government to e-government, a new approach has been taking over, which is based on citizen-oriented comprehension which allows to determine What underlies the failing point in Public services provisions' and provide an entire, required infrastructure. "The shift" points out that the equilibrium point of government -citizen relationship has been slipped towards citizen. These mean changes in social structure as well as in public administration bodies.

As shortly mentioned above, the need for Information Technologies which created the new approaches in work and service provision, have lead the need revision in public administration structures at all levels. It has been foreseen that, the best answer to the question about how to set sharing and participation should be e-government, based on Information Technologies. The most important contributions of e-government in our life could be listed as: "productivity, operational fluency and speed, continuous service, equality in service provision, widespread access channels, citizen participation.

2. WHY "CITIZEN-ORIENTED ADMINISTRATION"?

In democratic regimes, public sovereignty is essential. In other words, administration relationships' equilibrium point naturally shall be in favor of citizen. If believed so, why citizen-oriented administration has started to be regarded as one of the most important issues, lately? Citizen participation approach requires being sensitive to citizens' all needs.

Citizen-oriented public policy decision-making has been widely discussed with all aspects. Individuals' involvement in policy making has been increased. Thereby profiles of both public administration bodies and citizens are changing. Citizen is well aware that better solutions to traditional representative democracy and bureaucracy could be reached and they act accordingly. This reaction is the main motivating factor for the administrative change. Administration transformation is framed with citizen orientation, quality in public services, utilization of Information Technologies and transition from personnel management into human resources management, performance-based management, focusing in decentralization and enabling broader influence of democracy. The main emphasis here is citizen-oriented administration. Citizen-oriented administration is neither only referring the use of Information Technologies nor new structural reform in public administration. Citizen-oriented administration is also related to ethics impacting public administration. Transformation determines both public administration organization's structure as well as government-citizen relationships quality.

Accountability and transparency has been re-shaping public administration expanding citizen participation. It has been clearly presented that “in the name of citizen administration models” are to be failed. Public administration should respect and take notice of citizen’s “raison d’etre” - “reason for being” and work in transparency.

3. “CITIZEN-ORIENTED ADMINISTRATION” RAISE

Public space is one of the main factors of the democratic process and this is where democratic participation is realized. Any change occurring here, has an impact on democratic process. Citizen-oriented administration is one of the pillars of information society’s political system, while use of Information Technologies is one of the pillars of technologic system. These two factors are fostering each other in the transition process from industrial age into information society.

Citizen is fundamental in public administration. Giddens rejects the idea that government agencies have exercised authority on behalf of the people and instead advocate a relation in which government delivers services and citizens fulfil their obligations in a more or less contractual relation. Former technologies for exchanging information had been considerably poor. It was difficult to convey the complaints, suggestions and applications to the related governmental structures. Political bodies used to be restricted and functioned heavily. This process, by not being citizen-sensitive has now lost its effectiveness. Public administrative bodies can no longer ignore these increasing relationships density. In particular, in politics; new dimensions, such as declaration of human rights, third generation of human rights and ever-changing political regimes towards the end of the 20. Century, have all been impacting factors. It has been well understood that citizen-oriented administration could not be mentioned, without setting a good communication with citizen. Developments in Information Technologies have enhanced such communication.

It has been understood that the Information Technologies “immediacy” improves the democracy, as the new channel for democracy. According to Liberal discourse; supported by Information Technologies, e-government, facilitates participation to political process by enabling citizens to evaluate the public policies. When Giddens called “the democratizing of the democracy”, he underlined that only guarantee of democracy must be by having citizens in the focus. Citizen could only been informed via mass communication means and / or within his social network and could only share his opinions within limited scope, now are able to follow and interact through time and space free windows. This leads varieties in demands from administrations. The ways for meeting the demands are alternatives e.g.: referendums, public juries. Thanks to Information Technologies, these alternatives are increasing both in quantity and quality.

Internationally, there are basic features that shape public administration towards change such as; returning to government’ substantive role, Decreasing bureaucratic hurdles, public - business collaborations, citizen - sensitive administrative structures, re-organization of municipalities.

E-government must be based in horizontal communication, transparency, accountability, citizen-oriented and information sharing. Thus, expectations from e-government model shall match the given society’s social structure, well-planned, understandable and measureable and citizen centric. According to researches, web based services allow

interactions with public institutions, to be easier and more effective comparing phone enquiries, face-to-face interviews or discussions.

“Web based applications allow government services to be organized in ways that fit the needs of citizens rather than the requirements of the bureaucracy.” (Brown and Brudney, 2001:2).

This is the origin of e-government, as a citizen-oriented public administration comprehension.

4- E-MUNICIPALITY APPLICATIONS

E-municipality, aims to be a substantial part in the communication chain of the entire e-government model and it is regarded as a comprehensive implementation towards the national development. E-municipality is a multi disciplinary model covering fields e.g.: public administration, law and business administration, as well as technology based.

E-municipality is the best matching administrative tool with e-government / e-democracy ideals, with its “services would only well-practiced by citizen participation” approach and municipality’s direct service provision function. Municipal administrations’ productivity, effectiveness and service quality could be increased by shortening the time spent for operations and services while transparency in administration can be practiced. E-municipality’s essential role within e-government structure is to allow citizens eventually adopt the e-government idea while benefiting the daily services. Therefore, it could well be expected that best practices in e-municipality models would lead the ideal dissemination cases for e-government. Municipalities have a direct relationship with citizens and this is a key role in bringing the government closer to the consent of the governed. The role of municipality is also vital in building the perception of democracy.

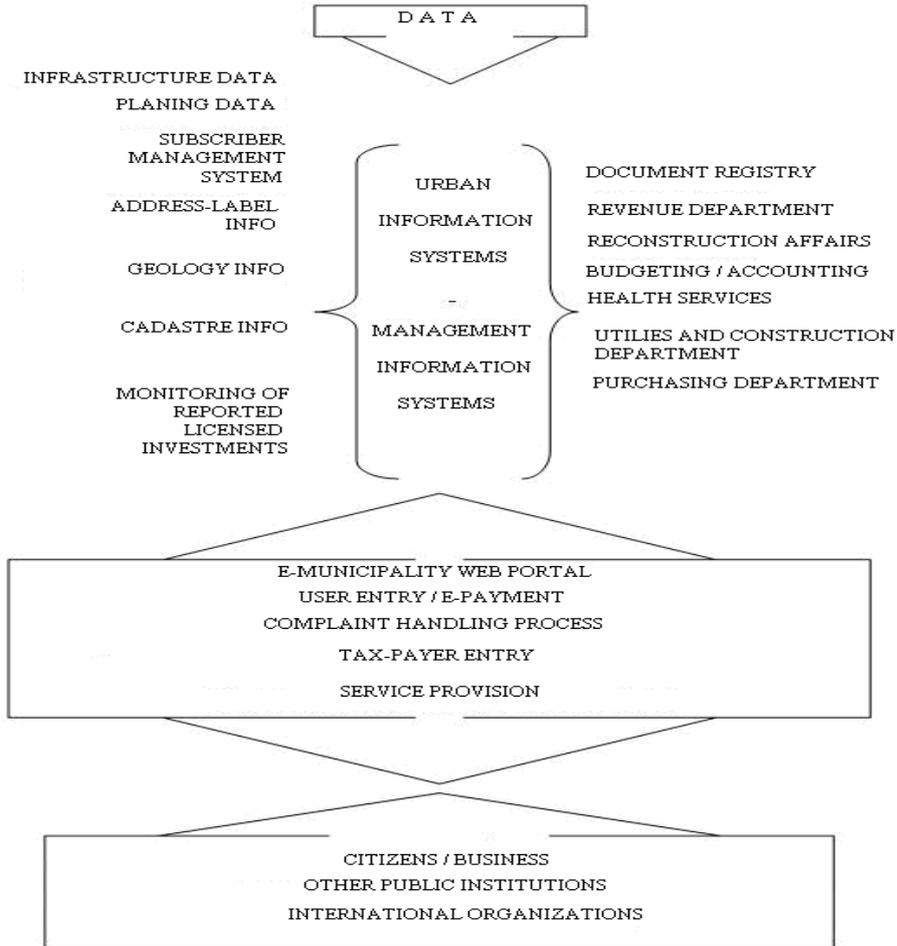
City portals allow the citizens to share opinions and be informed about municipality services and necessary documents for official operational process. Many municipal services operations are could now serve online. E-municipality, by definition is transforming the data collected and processed with the Information Technologies from the service area into city-benefit information and services. Municipalities’ progress within e-government structure would ensure public participation better and more lasting than a centralized guiding (Köktürk, 2002: 1).

Municipality e-services, primarily aim; quick access to citizen’s needs and suggestions, keeping database about service area, productive management services, protecting individual and public information and attract international investments. It has increasingly been observed that municipalities are setting new structures, using the Information Technologies focusing not only to citizen needs but citizen supervisions as well.

Early implementations of e-government have been practiced at municipality levels, such as Duisburg-Germany, Tilburg-Netherlands, Farum-Denmark, Braintree-The U.K. and Phoenix-the U.S. A.. common facts of these cases had been: (Çukurçayır, 2003: 10-19) citizen-oriented, new budgeting systems, communication with public, reducing local taxes without decreasing service quality, respecting decentralization principal, a citizenship understanding with voluntariness and participation dimensions. Municipalities, as “school of democracy”, are now taking the “school of e-government” role, with smaller span and to

be based on direct relationships with public. Along with transformation process, local service provision requires gaining national, even international experience. From construction licenses, to letters of application, many municipal services are increasingly accessible online. By providing electronic services, municipalities had to transit from passive relationship to an active relationship with the governed. Municipality services are in a wide spectrum around local communal needs; from public works to cultural services, from social services to improving economy and trade. e-municipality's service spectrum must be even expanded outside this limits and serve to thanks to innovative Information Technologies and meet the demands of both private and public institutions. E-municipality's interaction process could be represented as follows:

Figure-1: E-municipality Interaction Process Representative Flow Chart



Source: Şat: 2008: 211.

Particularly in developing countries transition process to e-municipality has brought up some hassles: as many municipalities today are computerized proceeding for Electronic filing and reporting, revenue collection, accounting, subscription fees collection, for better and faster service provision, only computer usage itself is not efficient for citizen oriented administration, in terms of benefiting of Information Technologies. There is a cost of caused by lack of knowledge of Information Technologies in municipalities. Therefore, there have been some poor-decisions due to duplicated data entry processing; as well as lack of internal organizational communication, thus badly affecting service provision process.

Many municipalities' web sites are not "user friendly". Many sites are not staff nor citizen oriented, instead, are mostly filled with "political messages" as well as "Mayer's message". Although there are mostly organizational diagrams shown, there are not clear explanations about service provisions. Municipal budget often not shared on municipalities' web sites. Like in other management for city management, usage of Information Technologies does not simply mean to have computer on each staff member's desk. The transformation should and will be depending on good information management.

5. CONCLUSION

When its role within e-government considered, e-municipality cannot be competent as democratization factor per se. However, it will be a giant step in establishing ideal democratic society. It has been observed that Information Society ideal is first perceived and practice at local level, by individuals. For local governs, time and space free access to municipality is no longer a dream. Citizen is now one of the key factors shaping the local process. Through local process' shaping trends, citizens have a better local authority to meet concrete and daily service demands. Including Information technologies in local administration is a functional and strategic effort.

If is aimed to reduce the difficulties faced, transformation should fallow a certain order with e-municipality practicing. Transformation in municipal administration primarily is a mentality manner which remarks a shift in aims and policies. Secondly, internal organization communications level up as well as organizational structure change. Lastly, there comes usage of technologies. Municipality's success depends on a healthy communication established with public. Municipalities cannot implement a good citizen-oriented administration unless considering citizens' opinions and suggestions. In this context, citizen-oriented administration could only be successful by founding upon a democratic atmosphere.

Even though not providing direct democratization, e-municipality applications are reinforcing democratic culture. Information Technologies based e-government and e-municipality applications should not be weakened by poorly implemented practices. When its role within e-government considered, information technologies based e-municipality shall be a strong medium for e-government.

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