

Open Government and Electronic Government: Some Considerations

Roland Traunmüller

Johannes Kepler Universität Linz,
Altenbergerstraße 69,
4040 Linz, Österreich
traunm@ifs.uni-linz.ac.at

Abstract. Knowledge and innovation are hailed as an important advantage. The contribution considers two trends with promising innovation aspects, namely Open Government and Electronic Government. Both trends are interconnected caused by being based on fairly similar prospects. Although the standpoints are in some way similar the resulting views are diverging. The contribution deliberates mutually influences of both areas under discussion. In concrete, one locates sustaining and reinforcing impacts as well as disturbances and frictions. Finally, some links are considered, so participatory activities, social media and mobile communication.

Keywords: Open Government, Electronic Government, Digital Government, Electronic Governance, Open Source.

1 Knowledge and Innovation

Living in the Knowledge Society has significant implications on all fields, so the economic, social, cultural and political realm. The cardinal point is competition and the position in the race. Competition is growing among countries, companies and people and accordingly, knowledge is seen as advantage. So we all strive for a society that is imbued by knowledge. Yet, we seek not only knowledge in the broad, more we look for those quite specific pieces of knowledge which lead to favourable changes. Such profound changes have different names. In Religion one speaks about reformation, in Health the label used is total lifestyle change, while in Social Sciences and Business such changes are called innovation. Basically, we seek both, knowledge and innovation.

Innovation has become a vital driver, so in Commerce for heightening productivity or in Governing for sustenance and the ability to meet societal needs. In innovation discovery and development have to meet delivery and diffusion. The state goes into a knowledge supportive infrastructure. This includes building a digital infrastructure, establishing precompetitive consortia, building clusters and hubs, fostering public-private-partnerships and offering tax incentives. Further propitious points are a soft infrastructure exploiting tacit knowledge and group relationships as well as climate of

openness. The users play a growing role in innovation processes. Innovation guided by consumers and clients may result in creating features never asked before. Quite often not a single innovation alone but a synergy of several novelties brings “the innovation” which is seen as a decisive breakthrough.

2 Open Government and Electronic Government

The contribution considers two trends with promising innovation aspects, Open Government and Electronic Government. Between them various connections along with sustaining and reinforcing impacts are found; yet frictions appear as well. No wonder, because Open Government and Electronic Government have standpoints which are as well fairly similar and diverging. E-Government aims to better serving individual citizens, communities, enterprises as well as public authorities themselves. The entire range of relationships of public bodies to clients and partners is concerned. Although technology sets the pace and creates opportunities, e-Government denotes a socio-cultural and a socio-technical domain too. E-Government means a new service architecture relying on a division of labour between front offices and back offices. Then Government is perceived as seamless while the boundaries between organizations and their jurisdictions open up. For building E-Government a holistic view has to integrate several prospects. Such perspectives are users, technology, organisation, law, knowledge as well as culture, society and politics. Literature for E-Government is vast – we cite paradigmatically some recent proceedings [3, 4 and 7] and a widely used US Reader [2].

Open Government is a governing doctrine bestowing to citizens the right to access the documents and proceedings of the government. The origins of Open Government discussions can be dated back to the time of the European Enlightenment. It was proclaimed with the name “Freedom of Press” in the American and French Revolution. In general, Open Government provides a way to improve all parts of Government. So regarding the part about citizens their participation is improved. Citizen involvement has the goal of improving public responsiveness and reconnecting voters with politics. Also when turning to the the general administrative realm, Open Government has considerable impact. Anyway, the legal and administrative domain knowledge is widened by Public Information. Then internal improvements become enabled. As references to the topic of Open Government we give paradigmatically the following citations [1, 5 and 6].

3 Trends in Open Government

Open Government has a broad scope and encompasses diverse trends:

- a) Open Source governance stresses the application of the free software movement. Open Source governance is a political philosophy: Promoting decision-making methods that better cover public interest – as they are more open and less antagonistic. Thus Open Source software should enable any interested citizen to add to the creation of policy. Further, Open Source

software is concerned with the ways under which computer programs can be distributed.

- b) Another top issue is Open Government Data. Several public institutions provide data so creating an ample demand pull. The categories of data involved comprise geographical data, micro-census, regulations, traffic data etc. Applications are created in cooperation of agencies with private enterprises.
- c) An important fact to mention is having public and private sector platforms. These provide a way for citizens to engagement. Areas concerned include citizen participation, budget spending, legislative tracking, etc. There is a ladder of involvement reaching from informing and consulting to involving and collaboration.
- d) Public value is driving maxim and linked to several individual and societal interests. Anyway, there is already an intrinsic value in having Government itself. So a lot of public information is created in any case.
- e) Additional value is generated by improving openness, transparency and accountability as well as efficiency and effectiveness. Some output of public value is quite tangible. So, as an example, efficiency is measured by higher outputs while more intense involvement rates may quantify the extent of participation.

4 Supportive Impacts

Open Government stresses openness and transparency and so promotes good governance. This will result in a more efficient and effective Government with higher user satisfaction and a lighter administrative burden. In praxis transparency means opening relevant information on budgets, plans, and events. This includes a long list, so data, documents, benchmarks, processes and meetings. The impact of Open Government can be measured. Assessing the general administrative realm, one finds an elevated feedback and an increased contact with the public. Also with regard to participation the improvements are tangible. So will Open Government lead to a better collaboration for policy formulation. Another impact is the implementation of policies; transparency and openness will accomplish a higher efficiency.

5 Conflicting Impacts

Open Government and Electronic Government have differing objectives and so occasionally tensions will occur. A potential conflict is rooted in the claim for using open source software. Under the flag of openness it is supposed to reach superior decision-making methods. Accordingly, open source software will be superior in covering public interest. It is assumed to make decision taking more open and less antagonistic. On the programme level this means using Open source computer programs. Open source as a development model promotes a universal access via free

license to a product's design or blueprint. This means that the source code is available to the general public for use and/or modification from its original design.

Whether conflicts emerge depends strongly on the application. Concerning the planning level, coexistence is quite possible. Turning to running core administrative operations conflicts between Open Government and Electronic Government will happen. When it comes to administrative operations persons in charge dislike any external interference. They prefer to stick to dedicated systems and to preserve the long-lasting connections established with renowned software providers.

Further conflicting zones are rooted in the claim for having citizens involved in Government tasks. There are basic risks connected with any employment of Social Media. One is the fear of getting many low quality contributions which generates excessive "noise." It is also feared that a divide may occur by focussing participation to elitist groups. In addition there are worries that this may lead a loss of control for public authorities.

In addition, potential conflicting zones are created with the occurrence of destructive behaviour, either exerted by individuals or by groups. The list of possible infractions is long and comprises illegal content as well as false claims on wikis. Destructive behaviour of groups occurs as mobbing of users and as insults and harassment in chat-rooms. A quite common infringement is that groups try to systematically influence ratings.

6 Impulses for Public Governance

Improving Public Governance is high on the agenda. Reforming the public sector spurs the discussion on entirely new ways for Public Governance. The aspects diverge according to the point of view. Taking the standpoint of the state we have governance as an underlying principle guiding all activities. The activities of diverse branches of Government (legislature and the judiciary included) contribute to the balancing of societal interests and maintaining the stability of societal life. Seen from the citizen having good governance is the goal, which comprises features as citizen-centric, cooperative and seamless. Seen from outside the theme has been stimulated by the ongoing corporate governance discussion in Economy.

Public Governance can be divided in three zones, so an inner zone with Public Administration, a middle zone dealing with the "policy cycle" and an outer zone overlapping the fringe between the public and the private realm. On the whole, the term Public Governance encompasses the whole scope of governmental tasks in jurisdiction, legislation and execution. Consequently, the scope is exceedingly vast. Public Governance includes: a democratic and cooperative policy formulation; citizen and civil society involvement; an efficient implementation of policies; a continuous evaluation of results; an accountability of public decision makers.

One has to note an ongoing terminological discussion. Should we change the label from e-Government to e-Governance? There are some good reasons; however the request for renaming is not strong. It can be seen as the normative power of facts - after extended use the term e-Government has become a broadly acknowledged

brand. Consequently, most authors have a split strategy. They prefer to use the term e-Government while having a broader scope in mind. This is the common linguistic feature called *pars pro toto*.

7 Social Media Exert Heavy Influence

Under the name of Social Media a new wave of web-based applications has emerged. Applications rely on the concept of the user as a producer of information. One may describe Social Media best as a set of features involving technologies, applications, and values. There are new maxims just as “users as producers” and “wisdom of the crowd”. For new technologies stands XML; new applications are given with blogs, wikis and tagging. Blogs are online notes open to comment for other users, while wikis are built by collaborative edition of content. In addition there is tagging which means co-sharing of information. Enforcing democratic processes and institutions are a leading goal; consequently empowerment runs as a red thread associated with most activities. The idea of empowering means: giving someone the power that he was deficient before.

8 Participation is an Imperative Aim

Government is supposed to support the formation of a democratic culture. So Government spurs numerous activities which can be seen as innovative and participatory processes. The range of persons and institutions is wide so comprising citizens, public authorities, elected representatives. Accordingly E-Participation draws a lot of attention. The European Parliament sees three main issues for action: the perceived democratic deficit requiring new relationships between state and citizens; reconnecting citizens with politics; competing with the complexity of decision making and legislation.

Thus “Promoting participation and inclusion of citizens in policymaking and implementation” are points that are high on the political agenda. E-Participation should facilitate more direct and more numerous links between representatives and individual voters. Participation in planning processes will bring more input to the political system. Consequently, decisions become better and more sustainable. Somehow knowledge and expertise of citizens are being “tapped”. As example here two instances:

- a) E-Campaigning means raising awareness about issues as well as engaging with people and encouraging people to engage with each other. Consequently, E-Campaigning channels the power of public opinion to advance a progressive drive. Tools used are quite easy-usable and unsophisticated so blogging, forwarding campaign information via email or making fund raising sites.
- b) Monitoring is an important point and likely targets may include: events such as elections, groups such as political unions, persons such as politicians,

modes such as proper fund spending and locations such as parking lots. In some cases it is an efficient form of law enforcement.

Initiatives are split: so in some participation projects Government have become initiative, often the civil society has organized participative actions. Occasionally facilitation of participation is organized and will improve procedure and outcome. The construction of a social environment is important for exerting e-Participation. For virtual communities tools are important. It is an advantage that most tools used are low-cost, so discussion forum, mailing list, mobile phone etc. From time to time advanced solutions are necessary such as collaborative platforms with multimedia support. Occasionally, E-Participation needs sophisticated tools, so spatial technology for visualization or mediation with the aid of an impartial third. A further point concerns smartphones allowing ad hoc documentation by making photos and sending them. This is a feature that may have a considerable impact, because photos from the location may be used by TV or in court trials.

9 Connection to Mobile Government

Mobile Business is defined as: “All activities related to a potential transaction conducted through communications network that interface with wireless or mobile devices”. Mobile Commerce has already become an important factor and Mobile Government follows vigorously. Public Administrations need to adapt key applications to be run on mobile devices. For this aim service knowledge has to be combined with a good understanding of mobile technology, especially its restrictions and opportunities. Fundamentally, having a communication device at hand makes communication patterns change. Mobile activities can count on several benefits. First to list is staying in contact with one’s tasks aided by instant access to computing and internet. This will speed up the decision process and offering a more responsive service to clients. For certain tasks an advantage is given by data capturing at the point of origin. Such a procedure heightens accuracy and reduces risky and costly errors.

Fundamentally, it means more than exerting a modern mobile lifestyle; there are concrete and substantial advantages. The demand “Keep in touch with your business” reflects a core component of client care. Managing client relationships has become crucial for agencies with an advantage for both sides. First of all, clients get a better and more individualised attention and treatment and agencies get more feedback. This gives input for administrations to improve exactness in and efficiency of their actions. In a greater view the exchange with citizens a valuable source of knowledge.

10 Conclusions

People want to live under “good governance” primarily comprising democratisation, openness and transparency. These ideals have to be mirrored in the way Government is built. Open Government and Electronic Government are both hailed, especially

when contributing to such values. Seen from the citizen point of view both, Open Government and Electronic Government, produce obvious advantages which are tangible and clearly prevail over potential conflicts.

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