

Good Urban Governance and Smart Technologies: A German City as a Best Practice Case of E-Government

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“E-government is about government.”

(Lenk 2005)

Smart technology in the following context is understood as the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). ICT have already changed governance policies in the past and will even do more so in the future. This change is taking place in many regards, which cannot be explored here in more detail, but one consequence of the increasingly intensive penetration of the daily and political urban life by ICT is a growing global competition between cities and megacities.

As progressing urbanisation is an unavoidable consequence of progressing globalisation, the number and size of cities grow mainly in Asia. Because of the growing number of cities, they are going to compete globally for attracting the smartest people, the smartest businesses and the smartest urban governance model.

ICT drives globalisation and confronts cities and megacities worldwide with more and more comparable problems in spite of all the historical, cultural, social and economic differences that influence the living conditions of each and every city. Quickly, cities of India will face more and more comparable challenges for the urban governance (health service, education, traffic, urban planning, public services and utilities) like cities in Germany – as strange as this remark may sound today.

Without doubt, smart technologies are changing urban political governance. During an early euphoria in Germany about what smart technologies all can help to improve, sometimes political governance became a hostage of ITC business and lobby groups that walked around the country to predict management and governance problems that allegedly only could be solved by the newest version of a specific ITC application. Later it turned sometimes out that either the predicted problem did not occur or the marketed and sold ITC application was unable to solve it.

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In both alternatives, a waste of misled multimillion-euro investments had been the consequence. Smart technologies are driving political federal, state and urban governance. Today there is a broad understanding on the German political federal level, that political urban governance has to drive the use and application of smart technologies. Smart technologies can only deliver the means to improve urban governance; it cannot substitute bad governance. Governance deficits can only be solved by the governance itself (of the people, of the political parties and of the other stakeholders of the political governments). Therefore, E-government is about government.

Electronic government means the settlement of management processes in the context of public governance and administration by the application of Information and Communication Technologies (Reinermann 2003, pp 381–440 (381)). It comprises the entire public sector, consisting of public administrations, public associations and public business enterprises on all levels. On the one hand E-government addresses the internal management of the administration in order to improve the internal administrative procedures by the application of modern ICT. In the context to improve the internal service quality, E-government aims to accelerate the settlement of the administrative file, to reduce costs, to improve the cooperation between various administration departments and sector by a free flow of data and information and to reduce and to simplify complex internal procedures. On the other hand, E-government looks at the external communications partners of public administration. It concerns communication processes with other government sectors, (government to government – G2G), with private business companies (government to business – G2B) and to non-profit organisations (government to non-profit – G2N) and (government to citizens – G2C) (von Lucke and Reinermann 2000, p 1). Meanwhile, a broad sector in academic sciences discusses and analyses the political and legal implications of E-government for the public governance and administration that cannot be discussed here.

The potential of the ITC applications in government administrations was recognised by the Federal German Government, too, to make the administration more efficient and more transparent and to improve the participation of citizens in the administration process and in the government, too.

In order to regain the supremacy about the fast modernisation processes of ICT and to lead it to the benefit of an improvement of governance and administration, the Federal German Government sets up an E-Government Platform (“IT-Planungsrat”). Representatives of all government levels (federal, state and municipal) participated in it to launch an E-government strategy (E-Government Strategy 2012).¹ This all-inclusive top-down approach guaranteed a harmonised common approach with the chance of complete interconnection and data exchange where legally possible and to avoid separate individual ICT solutions by single municipalities.

The following contribution describes how the German city of Delmenhorst improved its urban governance by smart technologies. This small German town with 80,000 inhabitants was chosen as the best practice case, because many challenges by the application of smart technologies for urban governance are more

¹E-Government strategy, launched by the IT-Planungsrat, http://www.it-planungsrat.de/DE/Strategie/negs_node.html, seen at May 14, E-Government strategy 2012.

easy to demonstrate than in a complex governance structure of a city with millions of inhabitants.

Before this city analysis, the particularities of German urban governance have to be briefly presented and contrasted with the Indian urban governance model in Bangalore.² Besides this, the E-master plan of the German state of Lower Saxony has to be described as Delmenhorst is located in this state. After all, some lessons learned from the best practice case of Delmenhorst may be drawn even for an Indian megacity like Bangalore in spite of the fundamentally different political, cultural, social and economic environment.

The German Urban Governance Model

German cities enjoy a particular right of municipal autonomy, guaranteed in and by the constitution. Historically this constitutional guarantee of municipal autonomy is rooted in the administrative reforms of the Prussian political reformers Baron Stein and Lord Hardenberg (Püttner 2008, pp 1141–1173 (1142)). In 1808 both recalled the passed autonomy of German mediaeval towns to improve the citizen participation in public affairs and to engage the Prussian citizens against Napoleon's military invasion and occupation in Russia. These reforms helped to contribute to the foundation of a long German constitutional and administrative tradition of municipal autonomy – by the way, in stark contrast to the British model of urban governance in Great Britain and the Commonwealth. Those reforms were implemented in the year of 1808 in the Prussian City Charter (“Preußische Städteordnung” from 1808). During an era, when at the same time parallel to the process of industrialisation this one of urbanisation took off, these municipal reforms proved to be more and more helpful to respond to the challenges of urbanisation just until 1980 – even during the periods of Prussian and German monarchies.

“The law has to be granted to all municipalities and to govern all matters of local community within the legal framework by themselves,” Article 28 Para 2 of the German constitution reads. In application of this constitutional law of municipal self-governance, the voters among 80,000 inhabitants of Delmenhorst elect a mayor, who is in office for 8 years, and 42 other members of the municipal council for 5 years each. The mayor is at the same time head of the municipal administration. As the city of Delmenhorst is not part of the community of other districts, the mayor is directly responsible for all other local matters to the responsible minister of the state government of the state of Lower Saxony.

As head of the administration, he exclusively recruits the civil servants for the municipal administration. As to the urban planning, the city of Delmenhorst is exclusively responsible for the use of land within the territory of the city as well as for the planning and maintenance of local streets within this territory. Regarding the planning of state and federal highways, this city has to be included in the planning processes as well.

² The author is aware that there is not one similar urban governance model for all cities in India, but at least three different ones in different States.

The city has to administer its own financial resources. The financial revenues for municipalities are granted by Art. 106 of the German constitution. The city receives 15% of the federal income taxes, 2.2% of the federal VAT and the entire business tax for business licences granted by the city. For local services, cities are able to demand their own fees (like for the local public swimming pool, local bus transport, etc.). The planning of land and the budget have to be approved by the city council. In contrast to the overlapping responsibilities of the municipal administration of Bangalore, the administrative responsibilities in a German city are clear-cut and strongly separated (office for businesses licences, office for construction permissions, etc.) and regulated by law. If it is about municipal services, shortcomings can be claimed by the citizens at the courts.

In comparison with the mayor of the megacity of Bangalore with 8.4 million inhabitants, the mayor of Delmenhorst with 80,000 inhabitants is a political heavyweight. The mayor of Bangalore is elected just for 1 year by the council and has little responsibilities, no autonomous income resources for the city, no exclusive planning authority and is surrounded by the Government of Karnataka and its administration consisting of civil servants he has not appointed.

This constitutionally and institutionally weak governance of Bangalore cannot be changed and improved by smart technologies. It is a government problem. That makes the application and introduction of smart technologies for the urban government of Bangalore even more complicated and complex.

E-Government Master Plan of Lower Saxony

The E-Government Masterplan of Lower Saxony of 2010 updated the E-government master plan from 2005³ to implement the federal E-government strategy for the improvement of transparency and efficiency of the German administration and to improve thereby the quality of the public services and the administration service for the citizens, and the information and participation of citizens in the local administrative affairs.

The focus of the masterplan is foremost on the improvement of the quality of services for the citizens to enable them to receive an easy, clear and understandable online access to all services of the state and municipal administration. This project “Citizen and Business Services” (CBS) pursues to connect all municipal administrations with the online services of Lower Saxony and to update the services regularly. Other objectives are:

- All forms of the administration are put online and shall be downloaded and printed out.
- One service portal service point “www.service.niedersachsen.de” directs the citizen to all information, forms of online services.

³ Cf. http://www.mi.niedersachsen.de/portal/live.php?navigation_id=14926&_psmand=33, (May 14, 2012) leads to the E-masterplans of 2010 and 2005 and to the e-government strategy of Lower Saxony.

- If the citizen is once registered and identified in a central service portal online, he shall be able to sign electronically all forms, applications and online services to the extent legally and technically possible.
- There will be implemented a tailor made online service for the set-up of companies and business resources.

For the improvement of the efficiency and transparency of the administration in Lower Saxony the exchange of data, information and files among many different local and State administration and within each administration itself shall exclusively be sent electronically. The use of paper shall become an exception. There are until today concerns as to the security of the sending of electronic data files. Regarding the unification of the central personal management system for the whole state it has to be stated that administrative procedures that have to include safe payments and procurements are lacking still today the required ultimate technological security standards.

Smart Technologies and E-Governance in Delmenhorst⁴

The present status of the implementation of these objectives of the Lower Saxony Masterplan in Delmenhorst looks like the following: as to the electronic data exchange between the administrations of the municipality and the State of Lower Saxony, the city of Delmenhorst is completely connected with and included in the data exchange system of the State of Lower Saxony. The State of Lower Saxony is still going to develop various services like, for instance, the payment service for administrative services. At which point of time, this service can be offered locally, too, cannot yet be predicted realistically. Up to now, there is still not yet one municipal public service established which can exclusively be settled electronically. Since August 2011, the city of Delmenhorst has a completely newly restored Internet presence. Via the website "www.delmenhorst.de," local citizens can find all administrative services of the municipality and of the state as well as of the responsible civil servant to talk to. Besides this, Delmenhorst is electronically connected closely with some federal administrations as well. For the issuance of an ID card, for instance, the local citizen office sends all personal data via the State of Lower Saxony to the federal central registration office for IDs. The citizen immediately receives the new ID at every local citizen office. The city of Delmenhorst has its own server. Every civil officer is connected to it. For every civil servant, basic ICT knowledge is a requirement for the qualification for the job.

As to the improvement of information about the municipal administration and services of Delmenhorst for the citizens, the efficiency and transparency of the administration and thus of urban governance are considerably progressing. The saving of time and administrative salaries is obvious, but difficult to measure by exact figures. Fundamental innovations like the entire completion of the administration

⁴ The author owes many thanks to Patrick de La Lanne, the mayor of Delmenhorst, for his frankness to give all relevant information about the status of the implementation of E-government in the municipal administration in the interview on May 13, 2012 in Delmenhorst.

procedures for granting licences, social aids, etc. and the completion of the EU payment service have still to be finalised. In both these areas technologically safe solutions that meet all legal requirements are still in demand.

Even more distant in the future is the development of the complex of electronic political voting. As Delmenhorst has to deal with a high number of foreign migrants from Turkey and Eastern Europe (around 60% of the inhabitants), around 45% of the citizens have still not even a basic ICT knowledge to use the online services of their city.

Conclusion

The fundamental precondition for the use of the entire potential of smart technologies and applications for the urban governance in Bangalore is to improve the urban governance itself. The 74th Amendment of the Indian Constitution, many Indian innovative initiatives,⁵ commissions⁶ and high task force reports⁷ already demand and suggest that the federal states like that of Karnataka have to grant the right of municipal autonomy and self-government to their cities like that of Bangalore.

India has the longest written constitution in the world. In 1947, it was influenced by the British constitutional thinking that didn't acknowledge the advantages of municipal autonomy apart from London and Delhi. That is why the UK today sees comparable political struggles to grant a larger municipal autonomy and an institutionally strong mayor to British cities to respond to the challenges of urbanisation on the local level.⁸ This British constitutional heritage of a firmly centralised federal governance helped India early after Independence to establish one united state on the South Asian continent at the first time in history. But today, all major problems of urbanisation for Indian (mega)cities (traffic, health, education, public utilities, urban planning) can only be solved by a stronger degree of municipal autonomy. It is time for India and her states to liberalise themselves from the last of British colonisation. The German model of municipal and constitutionally guaranteed autonomy is not entirely applicable to an Indian urban governance model for Bangalore, but it might offer some orientation.

Only then political governance can drive smart technologies and the modernisation of their applications instead of becoming their hostage. The potential for

⁵ Compare: Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Dec. 3rd, 2005.

⁶ Government of India, Second Administrative Reforms Commission, Sixth Report, Local Governance, October 2007, pp 198–220.

⁷ The High Powered Expert Committee (HPEC) for Estimating the Investment Requirements for Urban Infrastructure Services, March 2011, pp 89–116; Report of the Expert Committee, Governance in the Bangalore Metropolitan Region and Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (“Kasturirangan Report”), March 2008, pp 23–29.

⁸ “Elf englische Städte sollen einen Bürgermeister erhalten” (Eleven English cities shall get a mayor), Neue Zürcher Zeitung, May 3, 2012.

smart technologies in the urban governance is huge. Improving the efficiency and transparency of the municipal administration, various deadlocks in the urban governance can be overcome. It requires a sufficient smart technology education of every civil officer and of course of every citizen of Bangalore. This education could be particularly helpful for the socially weak in Bangalore. But for the running, heading and managing of such a smart technology revolution in urban governance, a politically and institutionally strong mayor in Bangalore is needed. In comparison with the mayor of a little German 80,000 inhabitants town of Delmenhorst, who is elected for 8 years and the only head of the municipal administration with autonomous, legally guaranteed revenue resources, the one-year mayor of the megacity of Bangalore looks institutionally rather weak because of his constitutionally limited authorities (“Just a pawn in the political game?”, 2012) – unable to use the unlimited knowledge and technical expertise of smart technologies, available only in Bangalore.

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