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CHALLENGES OF TRANSFORMATION FROM E-GOVERNMENT TO E-DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

The impact of information revolutions on public administration necessitates the establishment of new mechanisms or international management structures. Effective public administration and e-democracy can be realized through the participation of citizens and civil societies in the socio-political decision-making process. In the literature, different concepts of e-democracy and e-government exist. The paper investigates views on the transformation of public administration and the formation of e-democracy. Despite the different approaches to e-government and e-democracy, it can be concluded that e-government is established by the higher level of the hierarchy to serve the government interests. In contrast, e-democracy reflects the interests of citizens and emerges from the lower level of the hierarchy.

KEYWORDS

Public administration, electronic government, electronic democracy, direct democracy

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of information communication technologies (ICT) affects social, economic and political life. Specifically, developments of ICT, electronic government (e-government) and the forming of electronic democracy (e-democracy) mechanisms have significantly modified public administration and political processes. Currently, advanced technologies and the requirements imposed on public services are transforming the functions of e-government. For the formation of efficient public administration mechanisms, the development of a new e-government concepts targeting direct democracy is essential. Civil rights and widespread participation in social processes and decision-making facilitate efficiency and democracy in public administration.

The analysis of the published scientific literature on e-government in 2005–2010 in developing countries reveals an increase of interest in several research areas, including research methodologies and paradigms, higher quality scientific research and the development of a conceptual basis for e-government (Wahid, F. 2012). The main research topics include the factors affecting the development of e-government, the impact of e-government on governmental entities and citizens and the link between ICT infrastructure and e-government (Zhang, H. et al. 2014).

The informatisation process is part of the trajectories of all countries. As a result of the rapid development of ICT and the effects of information revolutions, the considerable digital divide among governments in different regions of the world will be observed in near future.

2. INFORMATION REVOLUTIONS AND E-GOVERNMENT

In globalization processes, the role of information in society is increasing. If we consider the evolution of society from the perspective of the broadening role of information in human life, several information revolutions are apparent (Fang, I. 1997; Robertson, D.S. 1990). The establishment of new communication tools and the emergence of new technologies in the sphere of information processing have led to the reformation of the relations between the government and citizens.

Through the process of computerization, informatisation relieves workers from everyday routine tasks by providing secure access to information resources, leading to the opportunity for high-level automatised information processing in the government, production and social spheres. Economic development and the informatisation of social relations stimulate reforms in government administration in accordance with the demands of the information age. The formation of e-government leads to transformation in all spheres of society, which creates qualitatively new information and communication environment for the realisation of direct democracy (Drucker, P.F. 1999). In comparison with an industrial society, more information is produced and consumed in an information society. This, in turn, causes the share of intellectual labour to expand, requiring people's creative skills and increasing the need for knowledge.

All countries implement the informatisation process differently depending on their level of development. There are national informatisation programs pursued by the governments that take into account local characteristics. The rapid development of information technologies and the impact of information revolutions will lead to digital divide between regions of the world in the near future. The incorrect selection of informatisation strategy can affect all spheres of activity. According to another approach, information revolutions are one means of transforming financial-economic relations globally. In the near future, information revolutions could substantively affect public administration mechanisms and lead to the formation of new political structures.

The impact of information revolutions on public administration necessitates the establishment of new mechanisms or international management structures. Specific mechanisms include a well-developed infrastructure to enable the rapid adaptation to any changes in public administration and a legislative framework for the protection of intellectual property rights.

3. FROM E-GOVERNMENT TO E-DEMOCRACY

Communication or information revolutions alter management concepts and political technologies. These modifications necessitate the formation of e-government as a technological solution to several management issues, and the projection of relations between the state and citizen to the virtual space. In this regard, the attempts to increase the activities of governments and to creating electronic space to achieve political power are understandable.

Rahman, Sh. et al. (2014) identify the potential factors of applying e-government in their literature review on e-government, classifying those factors into four categories: institutional, resources, access opportunities and legal aspects. Chen, Y. C. and Knepper, R. (2005) suggest tools and strategies for the application of e-government. Ozkan, S. and Kanat, E. I. (2011) shows that an increasing number of countries have adopted the e-government strategy after considering the advantages such as the strengthening of activities in the sphere of public administration and increased efficiency. Shareef, M.A. et al. (2011) state that e-government formation depends on technological issues and the complicating human, social, cultural and economic factors. Bwalya, K.J. et al. (2014) comment on problems encountered in the sphere of e-government formation in developing countries. Alshehri, M. and Drew, S. (2011) have analyzed recent research regarding the stages of e-government and existing problems and advantages in e-government. The research of Siskos E. et al. (2014) recommends a system consisting of eight criteria to assess e-government. The assessment of e-government is based on four parameters: infrastructure, investment, electronic processes and users' attitude.

The research shows that the views of researchers on the realization of reforms in public administration and the concept of e-government formation differ. Some researchers suggest that the initiatives completely differ from previous approaches or that e-government formation increases the efficiency of governmental activities and forms an implicitly new public administration model. Other researchers have a more cautious stance and consider e-government as a new tool for solving the existing problems. In this regard, three elements of e-government have been identified (Schedler, K. and Scharf, M.C. 2002; Schedler, K., and Schmidt, B. 2004):

1. Electronic democracy and participation –the formation of public opinion and decision making with the help of electronic tools (e-voting, citizen networks, etc.)
2. Electronic production network –a tool for cooperation among public institutions and civil society institutions.

3. Electronic public services –the provision of services to users, citizens or the business sector via national, regional or local portals.

The first element is related to a political system in general, and the other two elements can be seen as the continuation of the reforms achieved at any level (Schedler, K. and Scharf, M.C. 2002). Efficiency in administration can be achieved through the active participation of citizens and civil societies in the process of political-administrative decision making. According to some researchers, the transition from the term e-government to e-democracy is necessary [Wimmer, M. 2003; Meier, A. 2012; Williams, R.W. 2006; Carrizales, T. 2008]. The framework of this process is built through an increase in the trust of government agencies and a corresponding trust in citizens. The development of democratic institutions and the use of ICT and information infrastructure for the purpose of broadening the participation of citizens in public and political processes reflect the essence of e-democracy (Meier, A. 2012; Carrizales, T. 2008; Anttiroiko, A.-V. 2003]. In the broad sense, e-democracy can be defined as the engagement of citizens and organizations in political processes by considering their thoughts and opinions. Reviewing the evolution of the notion of e-government reveals several important phases of its development. First, the notion of “teledemocracy” emerged with the creation of cable television at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s (Becker, T. 1981; Becker, T. 2007). According to some researchers, teledemocracy can be viewed as the precursor of e-democracy. Teledemocracy is expressed as enabling the participation of citizens in any political debate by using the television and telephone at the same time. The viewer of any political event on television can participate in that event by using the telephone. The main purpose of teledemocracy was the participation of citizens in political processes and the realization of structural reforms based on the existing technical feasibilities of communication tools (Becker, T. 1981; Becker, T. 2007). However, in the 1980s, the experiments conducted using the television and telephone neither determined the establishment of new form of democracy, nor the efficiency of the participation of citizens in political processes.

The first stages of the formation of e-democracy confined citizens’ access to information to that which was publicly important, and included the opportunity to vote on government decisions. In subsequent evolution processes, the opportunities of both parties were widened and an opportunity was created to select the extent of participation in processes of citizens (Kaczmarczyk, A. 2011; Hill, K.A. and Hughes, J.E. 1998; Hilbert, M. 2009). This was considered to be an opportunity for citizens to express their opinion freely at any level of decision making and to increase transparency considerably.

In the literature, different concepts of e-government and e-democracy exist. ICT experts believe that e-democracy must be viewed as an integral part of e-government. Experts on the social sphere have the opposite perspective, which is that e-government must be viewed as an integral part of e-democracy. It can be concluded that e-government is created by the initiative of the upper level of the hierarchy for the purpose of serving government interests. E-democracy can emerge from the lower level of the hierarchy as it reflects the interests of citizens. If the state responds to current trends, e-government can be a strong and effective administration mechanism that solves several social problems and initiates a direct dialogue between the citizen in a democratic society and the government, that is, a transition from a representative democracy to direct democracy.

Effective public administration and e-democracy can be realized through the participation of citizens and civil societies in the socio-political decision-making process. E-democracy promotes more effective relations among the citizens, between the citizens and government structures and between civil society and the business sector. Different approaches to e-democracy exist and those are subject to criticism. The contradictions between the e-government concept which is essential for achieving reforms in the spheres of public administration and e-democracy have been debated in the recent literature.

4. CONCLUSION

Different considerations concerning the efficiency level of e-government have been proposed. E-government formation has altered the structure of public administration, while the knowledge economy has caused advanced technologies to develop rapidly and become an integral part of government activity. E-government improves the efficiency of government structures and facilitates the formation of democracy. The complete openness of governmental activities to society and the opportunity for citizens to directly participate in proposing solutions to governmental and local issues via online voting constitute the basis of e-democracy.

Despite the different approaches to e-government and e-democracy in the literature, it can be concluded that e-government is established by the higher level of the hierarchy to serve the government interests. In contrast, e-democracy reflects the interests of citizens and emerges from the lower level of the hierarchy. Hence, the realization of the concept of e-government is directed toward the development of e-government, and establishing effective mechanisms of e-democracy will alter the views how to manage society.

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