

E-GOVERNANCE: ANALYTICAL REFLECTIONS

E-GUVERNARE: REFLECȚII ANALITICE

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SUMMARY

Today's global health crises (Covid-19 pandemic) reminds us once again how useful and important is the information and communication technology (ICT) for world, states, governments, public and private administrations, and of course for each citizen. When the public institutions (educational entities, post offices, public service providers, public medical institutions, central and local administrations etc.) and private (bank and financial institutions, private service providers etc.) have been closed in order to reduce and stop the extension of the virus, the ICT has a crucial role in assuring the continuity of life and the social and economical vital activities. That is way in this article we are going to examine and analyze the role and impact of ICT upon governments and public administrations. So we'll discuss about e-governance and how this modern tool can ease and streamline the activities of public administration authorities and citizens. In a complex, uncertain and changing context in which public administration is developing its activity, the social and financial crises demand innovation not only in public services, but within the whole bureaucratic system of public governance.

Keywords: government, public administration, public services, pandemic crises, information and communication technology, e-governance, e-government, decision-making process, streamline.

REZUMAT

Actuala criză globală de sănătate (Pandemia Covid-19) ne reamintește încă o dată cât de utilă și importantă este tehnologia informațională și de comunicare (TIC) pentru omenire, state, guverne, administrațiile publice și private și, bineînțeles, pentru fiecare cetățean în parte. Când instituțiile publice (entități de învățământ, oficii poștale, prestatorii de servicii publice, instituțiile publice medicale, administrațiile centrale și locale etc.) și private (instituții bancare și financiare, prestatorii de servicii private etc.) au fost închise pentru a reduce și chiar opri răspândirea virusului, TIC are un rol crucial în asigurarea continuității vieții și activităților sociale și economice vitale. Tocmai de aceea în acest articol vom examina și analiza rolul și impactul TIC asupra guvernelor și administrațiilor publice. Vom discuta deci despre guvernanta electronică și modul în care acest instrument modern poate ușura și eficientiza activitățile autorităților administrației publice și a cetățenilor. Într-un context complex, nesigur și în continuă schimbare în care activează administrația publică crizele sociale și financiare solicită inovare nu numai în serviciile publice, ci și în cadrul întregului sistem birocratic de guvernare publică.

Cuvinte-cheie: guvern, administrație publică, servicii publice, criză pandemică, tehnologia informației și comunicațiilor, guvernare electronică, guvern electronic, proces de luare a deciziilor, eficientizare.

Introductory aspects. The actual Covid-19 pandemic state shows us again how important is the information and communication technology (ICT) for each of us and for the public administration also. This pandemic situation which is so painful for everybody and which has stopped the world in place reminds us that ICT can assure the continuity of administrative, educational, financial processes and also, why not, to save lives. In these moments when the entire world, each country, city, person have to maintain the social distance and to avoid the physical contacts for not to expand the pandemic consequences the ICT is the proper solution and tool to help us in this mission. How the world in these hard times would have looked without the ICT and internet? I think is a difficult question for everybody.

The ICT has and others benefits for the world, with regard to protect the environment (the bureau's employees have the possibility to work from home, a method called teleworking [1, p.10], so they are saving time, money and protect the environment not going to the office), speeding the administrative procedures (almost all the public services to be delivered electronically), saving time and resources (time needed for going to the office, to the central and local public authorities, to the post office, to the financial institutions, to the shops etc.), offering the real possibility to citizens to take part in the public life and of course reducing the corruptions phenomenon from public institutions.

Thus in this article we are going to examine and analyze what impact has the ICT upon public administration including the decision-making process and also to find out how it can change the life of citizens. We'll discuss about e-governance, e-government, the goal of public administration and the interferences between

public administration, ICT and citizens' interests.

The form and content of e-governance and the interferences with public administration and citizens. Today, the Internet is a tool that shapes lives in many respects. For some, the Internet is an open source of information, and for others it is a means by which they manage their bank accounts, shop and use public services. The internet has become the public space of the 21st century-the world's town square. The rapid pace of technological development inspired the creation of increasingly advanced information and communication technology (ICT) solutions that are capable of radically transforming both public institutions and private organizations. ICT offers tools for innovative interactions between a government and its citizens and smart ways to provide public services [2].

Researcher D. Tapscott mentions that ICT causes a „paradigm shift” introducing „the age of network intelligence”, reinventing businesses, governments and individuals. Paradigm shifts prevail in the public sector too. The traditional bureaucratic paradigm is being replaced by competitive, knowledge based economy requirements (such as flexibility, network organization, vertical and horizontal integration, innovative entrepreneurship, organization learning, speed up in service delivery, and a customer driven strategy) [4, p. 1-6].

The use of ICT to provide information to citizens and to connect citizens and governments has been called e-governance or e-government in the research literature. However there are voices that suggest that e-government is only a subset of e-governance, consequently e-government and e-governance cannot be defined in the same way and must be viewed differently. E-government is a generic term that refers to the delivery

of government information and services via the internet, while e-governance is a broader idea that refers to the use of ICT by government and private organizations to execute the functions of managing effectively [5; 6]. So, if e-government is understood as the use of ICT to promote more efficient and cost effective government, facilitate more convenient government services and allow greater public access to information, and make government more accountable to citizens, then e-governance is a wider term which covers the state's institutional arrangements, decision-making processes, implementation capacity and the relationship between government officials and the public [7].

Thus e-governance is the use of ICT by the government, civil society and political institutions to engage citizens through dialogue and feedback to promote their greater participation in the process of governance, while e-government is focusing largely on improving administrative efficiency and reducing administrative corruption, involving citizens in the governance process by engaging them in interaction with policymakers throughout the policy cycle and at all levels of government [6; 7].

M. Backus defines e-governance as the application of electronic means to the interaction between government and citizens and government and businesses, as well as to internal government operations in order to simplify and improve democratic, government and business aspects of governance [8].

E-governance consists of three components: e-administration (improving government processes); e-citizens and e-services (connecting citizens and services); e-society (building interactions with and within the civil society). In this sense, e-governance has two complementary aspects: a political aspect, which focuses on

enabling democratic participatory processes by engaging citizens, and a technical aspect, which focuses on government operations and processes.

E-government is defined as a process of reform in the way governments work, share information and deliver services to external and internal clients [9, p. 25]. It involves the automation or computerization of existing paper-based procedures, prompts new styles of leadership, new ways of debating and determining strategies, transacting business, listening to citizens and communities, and organizing and delivering information - essentially new ways of governing. Hence, this process, which consists of using, enhancing, inventing and managing e-government tools for governance purposes, is called e-governance. The „e” part of both e-government and e-governance stands for the electronic platform or infrastructure that enables and supports the networking of public policy development and deployment. Again, might be noticed that e-governance is a wide concept that defines and assesses the impact that technologies have on the practice and administration of governments, on the relationships between civil servants and the wider society, and on interactions with elected bodies or outside groups, such as not-for-profit organizations or private sector corporate entities [9, p. 25-26].

The World Bank defines e-government as the use of information and communications technologies to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of government. It can be seen as simply moving citizen services online, but in its broadest sense, it refers to the technology-enabled transformation of government – a method to reduce costs, while promoting economic development, increasing transparency in government, improving service delivery and

public administration, and facilitating the advancement of an information society. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and cost reductions [6; 7].

The UN describes e-government as utilizing the ICT for delivering government information and services to citizens [10].

According to S. Clift, there are five goals for e-government that promotes democracy and effective governance, as follows: better government decisions; increased citizen trust in government; increased government accountability and transparency; ability to accommodate the public will in the information age; involvement of stakeholders, including NGOs, business, and interested citizens in new ways of meeting public challenges [11, p. 645].

E-government is one type of innovation in the public sector, which gained supporters among national governments and spread across economies at various stages of development [3]. The researcher H. Marquette says that countries adopt e-government as an innovation for the promotion of transparency in public administrations, for improving efficiency, and strengthen government's relations with citizens. E-government is an innovative breakthrough for the provision of higher quality services and greater engagement of citizens in administrative processes of government [5].

Generally, the more services that are available online and the more widespread their use, the greater the impact that e-government will have. In addition to the internet, mobile phones offer an even more convenient channel through which to distribute government information. By utilizing text messaging, governments are able to send out region-wide and specific emergency warnings, provide up-to-the-minute information upon request, and in

essence make governments accessible to the people no matter where they may be, at any time [9, p. 30-31].

Most of the authors with concerns towards electronic governance research emphasize that e-government approach can bring the government closer to citizens, overcoming the hurdles of bureaucracy, curbing corruption and making decision-makers more responsive to people's needs [3; 6]. E-government represents the introduction of a great wave of technological innovation as well as government reinvention, a tremendous impetus to move forward in the 21st century with higher quality, cost effective government services and a better relationship between citizens and government [6].

In accordance with the above-mentioned researchers we are also convinced that e-governance together with e-government are the only tools which can open the administrative decision-making processes and make it more transparent and more participative. It offers opportunities for citizens to participate directly in decision-making process, by allowing them to provide their own ideas and suggestions in forums and on-line communities [4, p. 9]. Community creation, forums, continuous interaction and communication between government and its citizens contribute further to the decision-making process. By means of active participation in government discussions, citizens can contribute their own ideas, and share their knowledge and information. This will in turn lead to building trust in government and improving the relationships between the government and the governed [4]. Considering citizens as governmental customers, listening and understanding to their needs and requirements, is essential for a better decision-making process. However improvements in the speed and quality of decision making depend great-

ly on the willingness of governments to be empowered with new information, the capability of staff to process the large amount of information, the prevailing cultural values as well as the motivation of governments to shift from a hierarchical public administration model to a flexible, less centralized model [4, p.11].

S. Bhatnagar and T. Anderson referring to the case studies of developing countries and analysis of e-government initiatives, conclude that increased access to the internet and the prevalence of e-governance raises transparency and accountability, lowers unethical practices, rationalizes policies and significantly reduces corruption [2, p.19].

D. Shim and T. Eom argue that ICT or e-government can reduce unnecessary human interactions between citizens and public officials in administrative processes, which is the likely cause of bribery and corruption [5].

So, we observe how the authors bring to the light the interrelations between e-governance, corruption, and decision-making process. Once we get rid of corruption, the decision-making process is becoming more rationale, more transparent, more impartial, and more responsive to people's needs [7].

Lack of transparency and citizen involvement, resistance by entrenched bureaucracy, corruption, regressive policy and regulatory environments and unskilled human resources are the factors that contribute to failures in implementing the e-governance process. The issues of the lack of readiness, adoption and use of e-government (ICT and related services and practices) are often grouped together under the term, e-readiness. We believe that the e-readiness of all government stakeholders (politicians, senior managers, middle managers and employees) is also an important factor for suc-

cessful e-government deployment, usage and adoption. E-readiness assessments are performed to determine a country's capacity to use and apply ICT. These are primarily focused on the extent to which governments have the capacity to implement applications and users have the capacity to take advantage of them. They help to determine which types of services can realistically be provided, which barriers are likely to be encountered, and which complementary initiatives are necessary to enhance their impact and sustainability. Indeed, citizens and government stakeholders (politicians, managers and employees) are varied in their ability to understand government services and in their desire and ability to use digital systems. Hence, governments must develop the knowledge and capabilities needed to respond to these challenges and, simultaneously, to deal with ongoing issues in political, economic and social arenas. These issues generate risks which may limit the government's opportunity to be successful in adopting e-government [9, p. 27-32].

It has been observed that e-governance follows an evolutionary maturity model. Thus, M. Backus presents an overview of such a model which shows that, by the early 1990s, e-governance initiatives started with the creation of a web-based presence, through which a government entity could electronically deliver and disseminate information to the public. The information stage was then followed in the mid-'90s by an interaction phase, enabling citizens to communicate with a governmental entity via email and to initiate a transaction by downloading the related forms. The transaction then needed to be completed at the office counter. E-governance initiatives have since advanced in maturity and sophistication and reached the third stage, known as transaction.

Transactions can be initiated, fully completed and finalized online without any need to physically visit the government office. It is a more sophisticated stage that requires regulatory changes and amendments to legally allow online payment and digital certification. The fourth emerging stage is known as transformation, in which all information systems are integrated and the public can complete G2C and G2B services at one (virtual) counter [9, p. 33-34].

Once again, we notice, that through e-governance, citizens have the opportunities to participate to the decision-making process via the internet at all the stages, and even to influence it. So, if the government creates the necessary ITC infrastructure, with other words - implement the e-governance paradigm, the citizens have the real chance and right, to take part in the decision act. But this thing to happen, the decision factors need to take the right decision, with regard to the willing and engagement of implementing e-governance, and the explanation of the advantages of implementing it. The success of e-government systems depends on how citizens perceive the value realized from using those systems.

In their research, M. Pang, G. Lee and W. DeLone found that IT resources should create public value through five organizational capabilities: the public services delivery capability, public engagement capability, co-production capability, resource-building capability, and public-sector innovation capability [14].

Thereby six overlapping dimensions of the public value of e-government are identified with regard to improved public services, improved administrative efficiency, open government capabilities, improved ethical behavior and professionalism, improved trust and confidence in government and improved social value and well-being [13, p. 170].

The public value dimension of improved public services refers to different service improvements offered by e-government (the adoption of digital platforms for the purpose of improved public services propositions and deliverables, improved access, and delivery of public services). E-government-enabled improvements are in terms of better services to the citizen, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, cost-reduction, transparency, accessibility, citizen engagement and the balancing of interests in the delivery of public services [13, p. 170-171].

K. Omar, H. Scheepers and R. Stockdale consider that service improvements should not only relate to the quality of public information and services, but also relate to many factors such as increasing the quantity of public information and services, and the provision of more inclusive public services (public (citizen)-centered services and personalized public services such as special provision for the disabled, language support for minorities, online advice, etc.) [16].

The dimension improved administrative efficiency includes purposes of efficiency, effectiveness, increasing quality, and lower cost for administrative processes, systems, and services. It also concerns keeping government operations systematic, sustainable, flexible, robust, lean and agile, better management of public resources and economy. Improved administrative efficiency also relates to reducing the administrative burden, reducing bottleneck and queues in the delivery of services to citizens, increasing quality of processes and services to citizens, enabling better communication, collaboration and cooperation in the public administration, and enabling public empowerment and capacity building, better organization, and efficient use of IT. Other improvements to the administrative efficiency

are related to making government operations more responsive through transparency, participation and inclusiveness. Via e-government, humans can be removed from the decision-making chain, rules can be formalized and embedded in the IT and thus deliver (to some extent) greater fairness, honesty, equality, reduce or eliminate the risk of corruption and abuse of the law by public servants [13, p. 171].

W. Castelnovo argues that the open government value is obtained through the achievement of democracy dimensions such as openness, transparency, participation and collaboration. A transparent environment is established by a proactive dissemination of timely information to citizens, thus making citizens well informed and able to participate in decision-making. Also, in today's dynamic environment, open government would then support government or public organizations to collaborate, or be in partnership with other public organizations or with private-sector businesses to deliver quality public services [13, p. 171; 17].

The dimension improved ethical behavior and professionalism is related to foundational values which include, but are not limited to responsibility to the citizens, proper and efficient use of public funds, facilitation of the democratic will, integrity, honesty, fairness, accountability, economy or parsimony, rectitude, legitimacy, rule of law, effectiveness, coherence, adaptability, impartiality, objectivity, trustworthiness, openness, collaboration and participation [13, p. 171; 15].

The dimension improved trust and confidence in government refers to social trust, trust that is gained from the extent to which the government secures public information and privacy of citizens, and to the public trust, that is the way public organizations manage economy, public resources and delivery of services. E-gov-

ernment can improve public trust through increasing transparency, citizen participation and by providing the public with more control of actions and decisions of their government [13, p. 171-172].

Trust can be gained through increased reliability and security, to this effect governments should be more flexible and agile to cope with emerging challenges, protect foundational values of trustworthiness, openness, robustness, reliability, accountability and security. Trust via transparency is created when public organizations disclose their decision-making processes and procedures through e-government, and also by allowing and increasing citizens' participation in public discussions [13, p. 171-172].

The value dimension social value and well-being includes values created by governments for the family, community and other relationships. Enabling freedom, capacity building, empowerment and equal rights impacts the individual and household health, security, satisfaction and general well-being, impacts citizen's income, assets, property and wealth. The increased ease of doing business can create a value for citizens as such, in terms of the country's better economic conditions that in the long term can contribute to increasing the citizens' well-being and quality of life. Well-Being is also supported by e-government through facilitating a better management of public resources by means of online (zero paper) applications and transactions, by improving the quantity and quality of services to citizens, etc. The dimension social value and well-being of e-government relates to the ability to support governments in achieving better outcomes in areas of peace, security, poverty reduction, public health, employment, crime rates, improved environment and better educational achievements [13, p. 172].

Concluding remarks. As we've done with the presentation and analysis of the form and content of the e-governance process, including and e-government, might be noticed that these modern social tools that express the innovative paradigms available for private and public sectors have a lot of benefits for citizens.

If we couldn't realize till now how powerful and how useful is the e-governance, now in these difficult times is the last our chance to do it.

In a summarized way we can emphasize the following strong aspects of the electronic governance:

1. Contribution to the safeguarding the age of the planet. E-governance offers the possibility to reduce a lot the material consumptions which pollute the environment. The actual world's leaders must understand, beyond the economic interest, that tools like e-governance together with another modern technologies (recycling, production of clean energy, reduction of gas emissions etc.) can save the planet, reducing the climate change in a such way, that these natural resources to be available for future generations.

2. E-governance is the expression of efficiency and effectiveness in the public sec-

tor, including and public administration.

3. ICT has the necessary attributes to ease the life of citizens, facilitate their access to public and private services and streamline the activities of the public and private administrations.

4. E-governance has the necessary technological capacities to reduce corruption and useless spending from public sector.

5. E-governance offers the possibility to citizens to participate to the public life including decision-making process, thus, having the opportunities to control and monitor how the public resources are utilized by public authorities.

6. In difficult times like actual Covid-19 pandemic state ICT can save lives and assure the continuity of social, economic and political activities.

That's why is for a paramount importance that the public authorities to make the necessary investments in national and local ICT infrastructure, to facilitate the access of the citizens to electronically tools, including and internet, and also to develop regular public campaigns about how to use the e-governance possibilities and how important are these for them and for the state.

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