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Layout: Pascale Schürmann

E-mail addresses for editorial correspondence:
<nicolet@acm.org> and <rfoalvo@ati.es>

E-mail address for advertising correspondence:
<novatica@ati.es>

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and Patentability”**

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Presentation

Landscape of e-Government at the Dawn of the 21st Century

Gumersindo García-Arribas and Francisco López-Crespo

1 Introduction

To prepare a sufficiently comprehensive rundown of all that is important in present day *Electronic Government* (e-Government) is somewhat of a complicated task, since to speak about administration, electronic or otherwise, is to speak about the myriad affairs that link us to the public authorities in every moment of our lives. Our approach has been to describe and illustrate the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the “*methodical organization of the management of services and the enforcement of acts and regulations within a particular political sphere, working independently from the legislative and judicial authorities*”, which is how *Public Administration* is defined in the Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy.

By e-Government we understand the Public Administration heavily supported by ICT. In line with this approach, this monograph aims to describe to the reader the common aspects of electronic public services and also the issue that we consider of paramount importance: the huge opportunity that the evolution of these technologies offer Public Administrations (PAs) today for an in depth change in the very way they provide service to citizens and enterprises. Limitations of space regrettably oblige us, on this occasion, to omit important aspects of this approach, such as the regulatory framework, or the changes to administrative procedures that may come about due to the gradual disappearance of paper and paperwork as their main support.

Neither, obviously, have we been able to go into any depth about prospective studies on e-Government or other issues that are occasionally confused with it, like the relatively recent concept of *e-governance*. Nor have we examined the changes that ICT may bring about at election time or the effect that the ongoing influence of citizens’ opinion may exert on governments’ decision making, although the paper “*Scotland: On the Road to e-Democracy?*” by **Eberhardt Bort** addresses one of these important topics.

Once we had chosen the headings we would be using to structure our article, we noticed, to our surprise, that they were not so very different from the ones used in past issues dedicated to this topic, some as old as the monograph published in issue number 85 of *Novática* (March–April 1990)¹. Could it be that technology in PA had stood still? We don’t think so. It would

appear that any similarity lies only in references to the presence of permanent improvement processes in PAs, while, as readers will see, what lies behind this list of ‘wrapper titles’ reveals a very different situation from thirteen years ago.

Some of the contributions in this monograph – which opens with introductory articles from **Erkki Liikanen**, Commissioner of Enterprise and Information Society at the European Commission, and **Reyes Zatarain del Valle**, Director General of Administrative Organization in the Ministry of Public Administrations of Spain – are centred on the connection between e-Government and the wider issue of the Information Society, as is only to be expected given that they are inextricably linked. These articles give the reader a closer insight into the several aspects they have in common, their importance to

Guest Editors

Gumersindo García-Arribas is a graduate in Physical Sciences (Automatic Computing) from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain, has a master’s in Information Systems and Technologies Management. As the Technical Advisor for Information Systems at the Spain’s Ministry of Public Administrations his work is centred on the field of IT cooperation in Public Administration developed by the Superior Council of Informatics and the promotion of electronic government. Prior to that he was working at the National Employment Institute and the Ministry of Work and Social Security in various capacities related to IT training, communications networks, and the development of information systems. He is the Executive Secretary of the Conference of Iberoamerican Authorities on Informatics (CAIBI) and he was the first director of the PC Magazine in Spanish. He occasionally collaborates on various technical publications.
<gumersindo.garcia@map.es>

Francisco Lopez-Crespo graduate in Physics from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain, and has an M.A. in Public Administration from the University Institute Ortega y Gasset. He is Head of Telematic Systems at the Spain’s Ministry of Public Administrations, and is responsible for Superior Council of Informatics policies regarding the use of telecommunications and information system security, and the promotion of electronic government. Prior to that he worked at the Ministry of Economy and Finance, coordinating or directing IT projects related to budgetary accounting and legality control. He is secretary of the GTA and SSITAD (Technical Committee for the Information System Security and Data Protection) groups and Spanish representative in European Union and OECD fora. Founder of the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies, CEPIS, and member of the Board of Directors of ATI.
<francisco.lopez@map.es>

1. *Novática* no. 185, March–April 1990, <<http://www.ati.es/novatica/1990/085/nv085sum.html>> (in Spanish). There have been other monographs of this journal on the same subject in 1992, 1993 and 1995.

society and the heavy responsibility the public authorities have for configuring and developing them.

Hence the article by professor *Narciso Pizarro y Ponce de la Torre* “*e-Government and the ‘Network Society’*” which analyses this relationship, reflecting on the genesis of formal organizations; or the contribution “*Free Software in Extremadura: LinEx*” by *Carlos Castro-Castro*, who uses the topic announced in the title as a springboard to present a complete overview of an institutional action plan for the development of the Information Society promoted by the Regional Government of Extremadura, Spain.

2 A Shift to an External View

ICT in PAs have for many years been fighting a battle for ‘efficiency’; in other words, the ongoing improvement of internal management processes, which have gone from the paper file to the database, and from manual procedures to big information systems. We have had years of creating and consolidating a powerful back-office, principally built to meet the specific needs of the various government offices. As long ago as the early 90s this computerization process had spread to the great majority of civil servants’ jobs at every level and it could be said even in those days that administrations were functioning with computers on a massive scale.

After that long period in which ICT was confined to a support role for internal bureaucracy, the focus of its use began to move outwards, towards interaction with citizens and enterprises. One decisive legal milestone initiated this process. Very early on in comparison with many of our neighbouring countries, in 1992 the Spanish legislator decided to grant full legal validity and effect to citizens’ relations with the Public Administration in the exercise of their rights “*via electronic, informatic or telematic techniques and means*” (Art. 45 of the Act 30/92 on the Legal Regime of Public Administrations and Common Administrative Procedure). This relation was regulated four years later by the Royal Decree 263/1996, developing the aforementioned article 45 of the Act 30/92, and was strengthened by the personal data protection act and the regulation of digital signatures, to mention just some of the most important legislation.

The passing of this legislation coincided with a considerable boom in Internet access, which means that we can start talking about e-Government in Spain as of 1996. Ministerial departments, Agencies, Regional and Local Government departments and agencies immediately saw the possibilities afforded by the new channel as a way to reach the citizens, and they rushed to open websites on the Internet. By late 1999 there were already nearly 2,000 public websites registered² offering a wide range of possibilities which, although the service began to move towards being of a more transactional nature, at this point in time was mostly informative. (Naturally, there are notable exceptions to this generalization, perhaps the most obvious being the case of the Spanish Tax Agency, AEAT, which since

1997 has been providing personalized tax services to citizens and enterprises with fully guaranteed authenticity and confidentiality, having been a worldwide pioneer in the use of Internet for the provision of online services to taxpayers.) In this vein we present two articles on best practice cases: one at European level in “*A Best Practice for Every Service in Europe*” – that includes the AEAT experience – extracted from a report by the consultancy firm *Cap Gemini Ernst & Young*, and another one at the Local Administration level – “*e-Government in a Small City: CAVI (Catarroja Virtual Town Hall)*” by *Fermín Cerezo-Peco*.

3 e-Government, Efficient Government

For many public authorities the Internet immediately meant a great step forward in *availability* – websites are open 24x7 – and in *accessibility* – they give citizens and enterprises access to information plus a certain degree of interaction with whatever authority is involved from their home or offices. For some time these two aspects, availability and accessibility, were reason enough to have a site on the Internet. The next step to be taken was usually to provide the forms required for whatever procedures the office was handling, firstly by downloading them as document files which had to be printed out, filled in by hand and then presented using the conventional channels, and later by filling them in online. It is obvious that for some time, as happened in the commercial sector, the temptation initially was merely to transfer ‘paper solutions’ onto the Net, with very little or no rethinking of the problems to be solved.

But as has always happened in the past – because it is in the very nature of technology – those simplistic approaches tend to last a very short time. It is unusual for the computerization of procedures not to bring about an almost inevitable process of simplification. And if “*rethinking things before automating them*” was the most valuable idea to come out of the application of ICT to the internal and external processes of PA, now it had become absolutely crucial if the Internet and the powerful technology developed around it were to be put to efficient use.

Thus, over and above its amply demonstrated ‘effectiveness’ in the business of PA, ICT has for some years now been battling to achieve ‘efficiency’ in the simplification and integration of the services provided to citizens and enterprises.

These days PAs are looking very seriously into the right way to provide these services to their customers online. And a common feature which is emerging from these reflections by governments of different countries, is that the Internet and the current state of ICT development allow PAs to adopt a citizen oriented approach, providing public services organized around their centres of interests and life episodes, such as having a child, moving house, starting up a business etc., and not so centred on the structure and organization of the PAs themselves as happens now.

Without a doubt the most important requirement for this new citizen oriented service approach to work is for their to be a fluid communication between institutions and systems. This communication tends to get bogged down, firstly due to organizational barriers, sometimes founded on legal and political reasons, but sometimes just on cultural resistance of the “*this*

2. At March 1 2003 the total number of Public Administrations websites in Spain is 2,596: 187 belonging to the Central Administration, 219 to the Regional Administration and 2,190 to Local Administration.

Public Services for Citizens.	
1.	Payment of taxes
2.	Job hunting via Job Centres
3.	Aid from Social Services:
	* Unemployment benefit
	* Family benefits
	* Medical expenses (refunding or direct payment)
	* Student grants
4.	Personal documents (passport and driving licence)
5.	Car registration (new, used and imported)
6.	Building licence application
7.	Reports to the police
8.	Public libraries (availability of catalogues and search tools)
9.	Application for and issue of certificates (birth, marriage).
10.	University matriculation
11.	Notification of change of residence
12.	Health related services (e.g. interactive advertising of services available at different hospitals; medical appointments)
Public Services for Enterprises.	
13.	Social Security contributions for employees
14.	Declaration and presentation of corporate tax.
15.	Declaration and presentation of VAT
16.	Registration of new companies
17.	Provision of data for officials statistics
18.	Customs declarations
19.	Environment related permits (including reports)
20.	Public procurement.

Figure 1: Basic Public Services which the European Commission Has Defined as Reference Services to Gauge the Evolution of e-Government in the EU member states.

is how things are done around here” type which has been traditional in a heavily compartmentalized PAs. And secondly, due to technical barriers and problems of interoperability between systems and technologies which in many cases have been inherited from the past and simply have not been built in order to talk to each other.

To get an idea of the inescapable need for intercommunication and collaboration between the different administrative bodies, you need only take a look at the chart below (see Figure 1) showing the basic public services which the European Commission has defined as reference services in order to gauge the evolution of e-Government in member states. In Spain, of these twenty services, twelve for citizens and eight for enterprises, fourteen of them (plus the Central Administration – called General State Administration in Spain) have some component requiring the intervention of some autonomous government body, and nine of these the intervention of a local administration.

While it is conceivable that in the medium term some of these organizational barriers will tend to disappear under the weight of influence that the existence of global networks will bring to bear, in the short term the main mechanism to iron out difficulties of this type will be the cooperation and agreement between public departments and agencies. The instruments of coordination and the fora of cooperation have always been of great importance to public ICT, but now they are quite simply indispensable. And we are not only talking about interdepartmental

and inter-administrative cooperation, but also about cooperation with the private sector, because the extent of collaboration with certain services within the private sector such as banks, chambers of commerce, etc. adds value to the services that the Public Administration provides. Access to electronic public services should also be possible from other applications and other computerized services belonging to the private sector with which they are related. Here we have an environment ripe for public-private collaboration, especially with the technology providers. [See “*IT Research, Innovation, and e-Government*”, by **William L. Scherlis and Jon Eisenberg**].

In terms of interoperability difficulties of a technical nature, we have to say first of all that the outlook is more favourable than ever before. The battle for IT interoperability in PAs goes back a long way, and in the past interoperability had to be based on more or less ‘intrusive’ or standardizing procedures, forcing the adoption of the same platforms, operating systems, etc.). But fortunately the ICT industry has evolved towards a broad consensus on basic standards in matters of data processing and communication, many of them closely linked to the evolution of Internet, thereby creating a far more comfortable situation for large organizations like Public Administrations. Today’s technologies like web services and XML (eXtensible Markup Language), firmly supported by the sector’s major players, offer unprecedented possibilities of application intercommunication, data exchange and the use of common services between heterogeneous systems. Public Administration needs to pursue these and other industry standards, using them to define and implement interoperability frameworks and common data schema tailored to their specific problems. [**Juan Pérez-Vilaplana** develops these ideas on interoperability and other crucial aspects of the development of advanced e-Government in his article “*Technology for e-Government: A Study Case*”].

4 Great Expectations

It should be clear to anyone that we are at a very important moment in the evolution of the use of ICT in public management. Known variously as “Electronic Government”, “Online Government”, “e-Administration”, “e-Government”, etc., this new generation of technologies has shrugged off the merely instrumental function it had had for years of providing support to management, and now takes centre stage in current local political agenda with two much more ambitious aims: to achieve a radical modernization of public service, as we have already mentioned, and also to be a driver and example for global information society (and economy) programmes. The countries of the European Union, both individually and collectively, are a very clear example of this new approach and they have set a deadline by which 100% of their procedures for citizens and enterprises will be available online. [In “*The Take off of Online Public Services in Europe*” **Juan-Vicente Hernández-Alonso** shows us the most recent snapshot of the European e-Government landscape, based on the global report which the consultancy company Cap Gemini Ernst & Young carries out periodically for the European Commission; **Miguel-Ángel Amutio-Gómez** outlines the far reaching importance of networks and services supporting European public policies in

his article *"The Construction of a Pan-European e-Government: The IDA Programme"*, focusing on the IDA (Interchange of Data between Administrations) programme; *"The (r)e-Balancing of Government"* by **Jeremy Millard** focuses on government process re-engineering and on how PAs need to change and respond to e-Government].

In international meetings these days we often hear those responsible for public services in the countries that are making best use of the new possibilities of technology talk in unequivocal terms about results: "...we had a problem transacting those transport permits involving several different central and local services. With the procedure's new design and the interconnection of the agents over the Internet, we have cut the three months the whole process used to take down to less than a week on average..."; or "...the problem with those aid applications was that they all came in at the same time. Now we simply redirect the task of analysing the forms to a series of units in other cities with less work: we don't have to move either people or paper, just data over our Intranet...".

But it is in the field of the 'reconstruction' of many procedures and services involving the citizen where the new technological landscape will show the most spectacular results in the coming years – in fact, the results can already be seen. The unprecedented fact is the existence of a sophisticated data network which reaches homes and businesses thereby making it possible for them to interact with the administrations. On the screen of their PC (or their third generation mobile phone or their digital TV if we look just a little further into the future) citizens can have the possibility of contacting all the government offices involved in the solution of their problem simultaneously. So what is the sense in keeping differentiated and uncommunicated 'windows' open to the public? Citizens have the opportunity to see PA as a single service provider and can reasonably expect the communication and interchange of information, between either departments or administrations, to happen whenever necessary without their having to do anything other than give their consent when personal information is involved.

For example, the recent Spanish Royal Decree 209/2003³, which as well as regulating telematic notifications and registrations also foresaw the replacement of the paper certificates citizens had to provide with electronic certification or data transmission between the different administrative bodies, is an important step towards a real simplification in relations between PAs and their customers. For a start, it puts into practice a basic principle of any minimally integrated and citizen oriented Public Administration: not to ask a citizen for documents or certifications that the administration itself provides and so already has. Though this Royal Decree is in principle limited to the Central Administration, the extension of these principles and the tools to implement them to the rest of the

administrations is of vital importance if this step forward is to be consolidated.

In addition to the above, there are another series of aspects and lines of development which are essential to e-Government's march towards maturity and which in one way or another are mentioned and commented on by the various contributions in this monograph. Below we give the briefest of summaries:

- A return to the rapid growth rate of Internet access and of the general increase in technological culture are indispensable if e-Government is to be an important part of the social fabric of all the European countries.
- With regard to the widespread decentralization of competencies in Public Administration and the growth of relations with other European administrations, we need to continue building a solid network not just of interactions between services, but also of common services where necessary.
- The reuse of certain aspects of information systems, as is the case with interoperability, can now be tackled under better conditions than in the past.
- Information technology security based on certification and the mutual recognition of those certificates is an essential priority in order to build trust in the use of technology and promote its dissemination.
- The use of public key infrastructure and other associated technologies, like cryptography, has proved to be well suited to certain electronic public services of prime importance to citizens and enterprises. The creation of electronic National Identity Document, the improvement in interoperability between the different certifying authorities, and the mutual recognition of digital certificates are all examples of areas in need of promotion and priority attention.
- Public services should take a leaf out of the book of the best private initiatives by incorporating CRM (Customer /Citizen Relationship Management) techniques in their relations with their customers, with a view to ensuring coherence in the responses customers get via different communication channels and at different times, and a more personalized and effective treatment. Administrations must strike a compromise between this ever more personalized treatment and the most scrupulous respect for the protection and handling of personal information.
- The technology used in e-Government shares many aspects with those required by e-Commerce in general, but even so it is necessary to promote research and innovation in the specific field of public services, taking into account the great many requirements that differ from those of the business world. This is an area crying out for public-private collaboration, especially with technology providers.
- It is almost a cliché to say that the successful exploitation of innovation depends on the ability of human resources or the organization to assimilate it. The training of civil servants in the use of technology in the administrations is absolutely vital, now that many of them are no longer just carrying out merely routine tasks but have now become, to a greater or lesser degree, 'knowledge workers'.

3. ROYAL DECREE 209/2003, of February 21, regulating telematic registrations and notifications, and the use of telematic means to replace paper certificates for citizens.
<<http://www.map.is/csi/pg2023.htm>>.

The challenge which ICT is now facing in the Public Administration arena is how to meet these great expectations. The by no means inconsiderable state of development which electronic public services have attained in many European countries has been arrived at in a rather ad hoc way, without much in the way of planning or strategic guidelines. Nevertheless, the results are by no means bad. But we have reached a point when the decisive intervention of the coordinating bodies (rather lacking in recent years) has become vital if we want to develop a new generation of integrated electronic services, ones which are really useful for the citizens. But in a process that up to now has shown great signs of vitality, we have to be careful to avoid

incoherence, dispersion and the high cost of having to 'invent the wheel' in a hundred different places at the same time from creeping in, causing us to miss a great opportunity to modernize our Public Administration.

I hope that a monograph on this subject in *Upgrade* and *Novática* in the not too distant future can begin by saying that e-Government is now simply government, and that the famous expression "come back tomorrow" made popular by the Spanish writer *Mariano José Larra*, and the all too familiar pilgrimage from one window to another has finally become just literature.

Translation by Steve Turpin

References of Interest

Without in the least claiming this to be an exhaustive list, below you can find a number of resources related to e-Government as a complement to those included in the articles of this monograph, with the aim of opening up a small window to the enormous amount of documentation available on the subject for interested readers, both online and off.

Europe

- eEurope Action Plan 2005: <http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/index_en.htm>.
- Interchange of Data between Administrations (IDA): <<http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/ida>>.
- e-Forum, Forum for European e-Public Services: <<http://www.eu-forum.org/>>.
- eContent Programme, Improving access to and expanding use of Public Sector Information: <<http://www.cordis.lu/econtent/psi/pubsec.htm>>.
- European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA): <<http://www.eipa.nl/home/eipa.htm>>.

Journals/News Services

- KableNet. E-government news (UK). <<http://www.kablenet.com/>>.
- Federal Computer Week (USA). <<http://www.fcw.com/>>.
- IDA report & IDA e-government news (EU). <<http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/ida>>.

Organizations, Congresses

- International Council for IT in Government Administration (ICA). <<http://www.ica-it.org>>.
- Conference of Iberoamerican Authorities on Informatics (CAIBI). E-government in Ibero-America. <<http://www.caibi.org/>>
- Iberoamerican conference on Smart Cities. <<http://www.e-local.gob.mx/digitales.htm>>.
- OCDE, Public Governance and Management, E-government, Knowledge Management and the Use of IT. <<http://www.oecd.org/>>.

Documents/Books

- "Online Availability of Public Services: How Does Europe Progress? Web Based Survey On Electronic Public Services" by Cap Gemini Ernst & Young. <<http://www.capgemini.be/pdf/CGEY-EuropeOnlinePublicServicesOverallReport.pdf>>.

- Study commission for the Development of the Information Society and in particular its recent final report of recommendations to the Government (April 1 2003) "Grasping the opportunity of the Information Society in Spain". <<http://www.cdsi.es/sugerencias.htm>>.
- Report on IT Resources of Public Administrations. <<http://www.map.es/csi/pg5i30.htm>>.
- MCyT/SEDISI, Information Society Metrics 2001. Madrid: Ministry of Science and Technology, 2002.
- HOLMES, D. EGov, e-business strategies for Government. London: N.B. Publishing, 2001.

National e-Government Programmes

- Australia: NOIE, National Office for the Information Economy. <<http://www.govonline.gov.au/>>.
- Canada: Government of Canada, Government on-line. <http://www.gol-ged.gc.ca/index_e.asp>.
- France: Ministère de la fonction publique, de la réforme de l'Etat et de l'aménagement du territoire. Administration Électronique. <<http://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/reforme/admelec/index.htm>>.
- Italy: Autorità per l'informatica nella Pubblica Amministrazione (AIPA). <<http://www.aipa.it/>>.
- Singapore: Singapore Government Online Portal. <<http://www.gov.sg/>>.
- Spain: Superior Council of Informatics and for the Promotion of e-Government (Consejo Superior de Informática y para el impulso de la Administración Electrónica). <<http://www.map.es/csi/>>.
- United Kingdom: Office of the eEnvoy. <<http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/>>.
- USA. The Official Web Site of the President's E-Government Initiatives. <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/egov/>>; U.S. General Services Administration. EGov Strategies, <<http://www.estrategy.gov/>>.

Legislation

- Superior Council of Informatics and for the Promotion of e-Government (Consejo Superior de Informática y para el impulso de la Administración Electrónica), Standards regulating the use of electronic, informatic and technologies by the General State Administration. <<http://www.map.es/csi/pg3413.htm>>.
- DAVARA & DAVARA, Yearbook on the Law of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) 2002, Madrid: published by Fundación Airtel, 2002