The information technology revolution that has swept across the world has changed the way the governments work and interact with their stakeholders. This explains why digital government or electronic government (e-government) has become one of the most important topics in the public sector reform agenda. Such an e-transformation in government and public governance has its roots in the 1950s when some few professionals and academics started to speak about the computerization of public organizations. For several decades the discussion was meek, concerning mainly the use of computers in internal operations of public administrations, such as accounting and recordkeeping. Wider perspectives started to gain ground as late as 1980s in the wake of the introduction of personal computers and the merge of computers and telecommunications. Yet, the most fundamental recent turn in the information technology revolution was the Great Internet Explosion of 1993-1994 and the increased popularity of World Wide Web (WWW) in particular. Since then the transformative power of e-government has been generally recognized. The Encyclopedia of Digital Government discusses topics that are at the core of this ongoing transformation.

When Dr. Mehdi Khosrow-Pour of Idea Group Inc. in late 2003 invited us to edit a new encyclopedia on electronic government or digital government, we were eager to grab the opportunity. We had, together with our colleague Professor Reijo Savolainen, just edited a book titled eTransformation in Governance: New Directions in Government and Politics (IGP, 2004) and were keen to continue our ongoing intellectual journey towards the better understanding of e-transformation in government. With the continuously increasing interest in this topic all over the world, we felt that the time was ripe for such an endeavor. This is how the project got started.

Let us remind here that in spite of the slight differences in their connotations, we use the terms “digital government” and “electronic government” (e-government) synonymously. Our starting point has been to avoid one-dimensional or too narrow conceptions of digital government. This has allowed us to provide an open forum for academics and experts to present their views of digital government and related topics, which in turn has made it possible to create a collection of articles that reflects the richness of topics, concepts, approaches, and contexts in this new interdisciplinary research field.

Another reason for applying fairly broad conception of digital government was the paradigm shift in the political and administrative sciences themselves, sometimes expressed by the phrase “from government to governance.” This refers to a general transition from hierarchical, command-and-control-oriented government toward citizen- and stakeholder-oriented, initiate-and-coordinate practices of public organizations. Such new orientations and practices have had their direct implications to digital government discourse. Thus, digital government is used here as a flexible umbrella concept that depicts the dynamic relationship between new trends in public governance and constant technological development.

The concept of digital government may be further divided into various subcategories, including such internally-oriented categories as e-administration, e-management, and e-organization and more externally-oriented areas such as e-service, e-governance, and e-democracy. It includes also more recent technology-driven conceptions, like u-government (ubiquitous government), m-government (mobile government), and g-government (GIS and GPS applications in government). E-government-related terminology is strongly interrelated, which has led to blurring of conceptual boundaries and caused occasional conceptual confusion. A good example is an occasional confusion between concepts of e-government and e-governance. In order to bring clarity to this field and to provide a coherent structure of the publication, we have paid special attention to the systemization of the conceptual field of digital government. The list of contents of this encyclopedia reflects this endeavor. It is our conceptual roadmap of the field in question and serves in placing articles in the most appropriate sections within a comprehensive structure. It goes without saying that many of the topics are closely interrelated, and similarly, many contributions fall into several categories. However, we believe that the structure we have used here—as seen in Contents by Section and Category—serves this publication well enough and possibly also contributes to a better understanding of the conceptual field of and discourses on digital government.
This encyclopedia is divided into 12 sections and over 50 categories. Key topics include: The concept of digital government; e-transformation in government and public governance; e-government policy and regulation; international e-government; state and local e-government; public e-management; IT management and planning in public organizations; e-administration; office systems; work processes; e-human resource management; knowledge and information management; e-government project management; e-commerce in government; evaluation of e-government; electronic service delivery; management of e-services; access solutions; user interfaces; various types of e-services (e-health, e-social welfare, e-school and e-learning, e-law, etc.); e-citizenship; public e-governance; e-democracy; e-participation; e-politics; e-rulemaking; e-voting; technological solutions in digital government; and social issues and dilemmas of digital government (e.g., digital divide, e-inclusion, e-development, access to information, digital rights management, privacy, cyber warfare and terrorism, and ethics of digital government). This is not an exhaustive list, but serves our purposes well enough. Having digital government in focus, generic aspects of information and communication technologies were given a minor role, not least because there are a range of encyclopedias and handbooks available on this topic, such as Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Vol. I-V (Idea Group Reference, 2005), edited by Mehdi Khosrow-Pour.

To ensure that this publication provides the best possible coverage and in-depth knowledge of digital government, we invited experts, practitioners, and scholars from all over the world to contribute to the encyclopedia. They represent various academic disciplines (e.g., information science, computer science, management science, administrative science, political science, sociology, economics, communications studies, and business studies), national and regional cultures, and scholarly and practical traditions and approaches. Of hundreds of proposals some 250 articles, written by more than 400 authors, were finally accepted to be published in the encyclopedia. The quality control followed conventional academic review procedure, in which each submission was forwarded to two to four reviewers on a double-blind, peer review basis. Most of the authors of this encyclopedia as well as most of the members of our International Advisory Board contributed to the review process. In addition, more than 100 external reviewers were involved.

All entries are written by knowledgeable, distinguished scholars from many prominent universities, research institutions and expert organizations around the world. What we particularly strived for was a wide geographical coverage of the global scientific and practitioner community involved in the project. We did this to show what are both the development phases and the current understandings of digital government in different parts of the world. This has made it possible to paint an authentic picture of the cultural differences in understanding and approaching digital government and in dealing with the current and emerging context-specific issues of digital government. This also widens the topics discussed in the Encyclopedia, thus making the Encyclopedia a useful publication that will appeal to a wide international readership. What our editorial policy implies is that the final selection of articles reflects not only the most up-to-date academic and practical knowledge in the field, but also the ways in which the various topics are currently discussed and understood around the world.

The Encyclopedia of Digital Government is presently the most comprehensive academic publication available in the field of digital government. With more than 500 people involved, the encyclopedia project has been, if not the biggest, at least one of the biggest international collaborative projects ever in the field of digital government.

The Encyclopedia of Digital Government offers a broad picture of the issues, concepts, trends, and technologies of digital government. The challenges and future prospects faced by governments at different institutional levels and in different parts of the world are also described in many articles. With some 250 articles, this three-volume set provides a broad basis for understanding the challenges and issues faced by public organizations as they strive for more efficient, responsive and transparent government through the use of emerging technologies. In all, we believe that the Encyclopedia of Digital Government contributes to a better understanding of theory and practice of the e-transformation in government and public governance. It is our hope that this publication and its vast amount of information will assist academics, students, experts, developers, managers, decision-makers, and civic actors all over the world in enhancing their understanding of digital government and even in making the world better place for us all.

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