Benchmarking Municipal E-Government Services: A Bottom-Up Methodology and Pilot Results

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ABSTRACT

Local governments play an important role as the main contact point for citizens and deliver many more and varied services than any other public administration. Nevertheless, the field of local e-government services (or local e-administration) lacks benchmarking methodologies and rigorous surveys. Existing e-government benchmarks mostly address the national level and do not cater for this wealth of locally provided e-services. Cities are also very diverse, but research shows that European cities share an important number of common services, making benchmarking look feasible. The paper proposes a benchmarking methodology to fill this gap, facing the complexity of this multiplicity and variety. It starts by a bottom-up hierarchical catalogue of services created through participation of the cities. The benchmarking goes beyond service provision, so far measured through maturity, and analyses acceptance by users. The paper discusses the parameters introduced and how to measure them. The paper addresses the issue of the presentation of the results, which is important to help city managers to improve the service provision, its quality and acceptance. The methodology was applied in a pilot study of 15 quite diverse medium and large European cities, and its results are presented within the context of validating the methodology introduced.

Keywords: Benchmarking, e-Government, Electronic Services, Local Government, Services Adoption

1. INTRODUCTION

Up to now, the overwhelming majority of e-government benchmarks deals with the national level, which is too general to assess and compare city development of e-government. The few existing local e-government benchmarks usually focus on the city’s web site characteristics and content, where service provision is only one of the components. Some of them pay attention to the services maturity, a better measure of provision, which includes their quality, but...
the adoption of these services by the citizens, which should be a key performance indicator, has been largely ignored so far.

In addition, most of the benchmarking results are given as an aggregated index and the subsequent ranking of benchmarked organizations. This approach is of very little use in terms of providing recommendations to improve e-services, which is what cities are interested in. Knowing whether a city is higher ranked than others does not help to compare specific local e-government services or to identify good practices to learn from.

A benchmark specific for cities should be based upon, and take into account, the rich range of e-services they offer. As its number is large, grouping services in meaningful areas matching cities, citizens and business interests, is necessary to provide a meaningful comparison. The grouping should keep diversity to allow international comparisons as well.

Service sophistication is not a guarantee of success. Therefore, beyond measuring services maturity, adoption should be taken into account. Moreover, to be really useful, this rich and diverse information of each city should be presented in a more comprehensible way to improve the e-administration.

This paper presents and discusses a new bottom-up benchmarking methodology specifically tailored to cities e-administration, as based on a meaningful grouping of services. The methodology takes into account both service provision and citizens’ adoption. The results are presented in ways alternative to summarization into aggregated indices. Presenting maturity and adoption together across the categories of services allows to grasp the overall development of e-administration, uncover heterogeneities in its development, and reveal correlations. Other indicators proposed measure coverage and diversity. City maps show each of the cities e-administration profile with respect to the average, across the different categories of services. New indicators allow cities to identify what services in which cities seem to excel, offering hints of good practices where to learn from.

The rest of the paper analyses first the existing methodologies designed to benchmark local government e-administration, and then presents and discusses the proposed methodology in detail, including its application in a survey among 15 European cities. The survey results are presented and analysed from the point of view of the validation of the methodology. Finally, the paper discusses the contributions made, and indicate future avenues of research.

2. RELATED WORK ON BENCHMARKING ELECTRONIC PUBLIC SERVICES IN THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Both practitioners and academics have been interested in benchmarking e-government services because e-services together with official websites are amongst the most visible parts of e-government (Janssen, 2003) and have a high impact on the constituency through the use of electronic channels. They play a front-end role in public administration, and that maintains e-services at the focus of policy-makers and public managers.

There are well accepted e-government maturity models or stage models that make easy to perform a maturity assessment of e-services provided. As a lot of academics pointed out (Janssen, 2003; Kunstelj and Vintar, 2004; Griffin, Foster and Halpin, 2004; Heeks, 2006; Lee, 2010) these models measuring service sophistication are well known, comprehensible and simple to apply, and are thus widely used in benchmarking.

Although this paper does not aim to discuss the existing (national) e-government benchmarks, it is worth to discuss the methodology and the applicability at city level of the most relevant ones. The CapGemini Ernst & Young benchmark (CapGemini, 2003), developed for the European Commission under the framework of the eEurope action plan and launched in 2001, was designed to promote the online availability of public services amongst
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