What Lessons Can We Learn for “Good e-Government” From a User-Centred Evaluation of the Websites of European Capitals?
Research-Based and Genetic Learning in the Study of Administration and Law

Margit Christa Scholl, Technical University of Applied Sciences Wildau, Wildau, Germany

ABSTRACT

From an E-Government perspective, modern public administrations require a high degree of accessibility, simplified modes of communication, transparent processes, and services that are available electronically. This article addresses the issue of whether, in a Europe-wide comparison, the websites in question offer products and services in a way that is not only intelligible and transparent for users but also efficient and functional. The websites were analysed using the evaluation tool TEDS®MOODLE as part of a student project, whose ratings are presented, to establish research-based and genetic learning as part of the study programme of administration and law. A general finding of the websites of seventeen European capitals applying an E-Government perspective is that the main challenges are in the evaluation categories Adjustment, Further Performance Features – as there are time and cost savings as well as security and safety aspects – and Affection, as indicated by the general satisfaction factor in the user evaluations. The article discusses the transferability of the student results to citizens. Moreover, the article discusses the fitness for purpose of the evaluation tool, and its utility for learning processes, in particular for research-based and genetic learning among students.

KEYWORDS
Citizens E-Participation, E-Government, Evaluation Tool, Research-based Learning, Transparent Processes, User Expectations, User Experiences, Website Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Public administrations are trying to modernize their processes via E-Government activities and offering services on their websites. But what are their objectives and how are these being implemented in their web presence? And how clear and functional are the websites of European capitals for users? Success in using online information portals might be largely dependent on the information being presented in an intelligible way, on its accuracy, on the functions the portal offers and its user-friendliness, and on the general build and design of the website. This has been investigated in a Europe-wide comparison using a finely structured evaluation tool as part of a student project adopting an E-Government perspective, whose ratings are presented in this article. However, no scientifically uniform definitions of E-Government have been established to reliably explain what E-Government actually is. Moreover,
not only does it overlap with other terms such as Open Government (Nam, 2011; Janssen et al. 2012) and Social Media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) but it has also seen further evolutions in the form of Smart Government and Smart Governance (Scholl & Scholl, 2014).

While Government websites, online information systems, and E-Government platforms are being increasingly implemented and used worldwide, this increase has often not been actively matched by user acceptance. The development is often generally done “for” and not “with” the citizen. Bertot et al. (2008) point out, the dilemma inherent in providing cost-saving, citizen-oriented, and efficient services is that the government has known little about what citizens want from E-Government. What do users feel about the quality of these websites as information artefacts? How can they be involved in a co-design process? The article’s first objective is to show the current state of play in Europe and to demonstrate how the user experience can be utilized to achieve concrete improvements in the design, functionality, and services of such information artefacts – namely, the websites of European capitals – using the research-based evaluation tool TEDS*MOODLE, as well as to examine the possible limitations of this tool. The second objective is to raise student awareness regarding the implementation of E-Government services using a scientific evaluation method. From this perspective, one has to have in mind that technical systems, platforms, and websites are also turned into sensitive instruments of intentional social intervention (Lessig, 1999). Last but not least, one further objective of the article is to gauge whether such student projects can be used to establish research-based and/or genetic learning in study programmes at universities of applied sciences.

Bertot et al. (2008) attach particular importance to the qualitative evolution of E-Government services, whereby the user experience (UX) should be explicitly taken into consideration in the development of IS (Garrett, 2011; Scholl, 2015). According to Tullis & Albert (2013), the UX is not something nebulous but by and large includes three elements: an involved user, an HCI between the user and an information artefact (IA), and the user’s concrete experience of the IA. Added to this is the fact that citizen-oriented E-Government needs to serve very different user groups – including, for example, foreign nationals who want to get specific information about the country (Bertot et al., 2008) or have come there as tourists. Consequently, various challenges have to be met to produce a website that offers a positive UX.

On account of this heterogeneous terminology in E-Government, the students as evaluators have gone back to the Speyer definition of E-Government for the interpretation and possible transferability of these case study results. The Speyer definition specifies that the classical realms of application in E-Government can be assigned to the three different levels of interaction: Information, Communication, and Transaction. In its most basic form, E-Government comprises electronic information services (E-Information) such as information systems (IS) for citizens, tourists, and businesses as well as IS for committees and specialized uses. Extending these or other similar information services to include options for information exchange, dialogue, or even participation (E-Participation) creates the additional functionality needed to provide electronic communication (E-Communication). The third level of interaction between citizens or businesses and administrations and government is represented not only by form-filling solutions (E-Forms) and online transaction services (E-Transactions) but also by the provision of goods and products with electronic payment systems (E-Commerce) and general services (E-Services). In this respect, current international research results indicate definite similarities as well as differences between, for example, private-sector E-Commerce and E-Government: “Transaction processing was found more sophisticated and of far higher volume in commerce than in government” (Barzilai-Nahon & Scholl, 2010).

Independently of such differences, all the areas of application of E-Government require coordinated business operations (E-Workflow) capable of handling so-called front- and back-end processes (see also Homburg & Bekkers, 2002; Weerakkody et al., 2006) if the services are really to work. And across
The Role of Multinationals in Recent IT Developments in China
www.igi-global.com/chapter/role-multinationals-recent-developments-china/11451?camid=4v1a