Chapter 7

European Electronic Service Infrastructure Building – Drifting Into the Future?

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Delivery of electronic services requires a service infrastructure including organisational solutions for logistics and client-organisation interactions. We report a study covering three years of efforts by nine cities in eight European countries in developing such solutions.

We found twelve distinct “crises,” situations where goals, environment, and actors changed, and the process was found in a stage of improvisation. The overall process was largely unstructured and improvised. Stabilising factors were central government policies (national, EU), the general technical development, and market demands.

The Web was in practice a “cuckoo in the nest,” intruding in ever more activities and introducing unexpected new demands. Web projects were seen as technical projects; more important success factors pertaining to users and organisation were largely neglected. There was typically an infrastructure link missing, a body competent of managing the whole process of bundling services from different service providers.

INTRODUCTION

Many local and regional governments have followed companies in setting up Web information systems (WIS). The purposes are often boldly stated and cover economic, social, and democratic ambitions:

“The public administration shall use IT for making more effective operations and providing good service to companies and citizens. More rational work routines, more effective organisation and co-operation in the public agencies

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shall improve services and at the same time reduce costs. […….] IT shall be employed to develop contacts and interplay among the public, businesses and the public administration. Citizens’ and businesses’ public sector contacts shall be made simpler and more open.” (Gov. Bill No 1995/96:125; Toppledarforum, 1998. My italicisation and translation)

Such goals are inscribed in central government IT strategies in many countries. At the local level, however, strategies are often lacking, or outdated (Håkansson, 1996; Hansson & Johansson, 1997). This is a problem, because much of the development is in the hands of local authorities.

What happens during the process of developing electronic services; what hurdles are there, and how to get past those?

Case stories abound (IDPM, 1998), but they usually only describe ongoing projects with little analysis or comparison. Research typically falls into one of two categories: (1) exploratory sites working under non-typical conditions (i.e., Virginia Tech, 1998; Tsagarousianou et al., 1998). In such cases, special conditions typically make results less general; extraordinary resources, subsidies to providers and/or users, special user populations, etc. (2) single special issues of a technical character are covered; fraud prevention, integrity of data in electronic document exchange, public access to official records, etc.

While important, such studies give only fragmentary insights. What about comprehensive strategies for using IT for achieving the bold purposes? At the end of the day, governments must find ways of relating to WIS as a strategic medium. How can development methods be found, that is, how can early experiences be shared, evaluated, related to societal goals, and debated so as to make the transition of services into the electronic medium smooth? It seems the development so far happens much ad hoc (Greeves, 1998). Strategy documents of the kind cited above abound, but knowledge about implementation beyond things like guidelines for home page design are largely lacking.

For a city to provide services electronically is a much more complex task than it is for a company, as it encompasses a wide variety of activities and includes elements of democracy and exertion of authority as well as economic goals.

We report an attempt to examine the hurdles to successful use of the electronic medium in a local government setting.

**INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT:**

**“IMPLEMENTATION,” “DRIFTING,” OR WHAT?**

Many see technology deployment in an organisation as a rather straightforward matter of “implementing decisions” (Broadbent & Waill, 1997). From that point of departure, the problem concerns how to make things happen the way they were intended to; decisions must be “kept alive” Latour (1996, p 86). Ciborra
Shan Wang, Yili Hong, Norm Archer and Youwei Wang (2013). Global Diffusion and Adoption of Technologies for Knowledge and Information Sharing (pp. 309-340).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/modeling-success-small-medium-sized/72193?camid=4v1a

A Taxonomy of Intranet Implementation Strategies: To Make or To Buy?
www.igi-global.com/article/taxonomy-intranet-implementation-strategies/3593?camid=4v1a