Chapter 10

E-Government Gateway Development in Turkey: Some Challenges and Future Directions for Citizen Focus

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to elaborate on the development of the E-Government Gateway (EGG) in Turkey, and the underlying issues of citizen-oriented e-Government. First, background information on the academic perspective of citizen-oriented e-Government development is provided. Then the historical development and current status of e-Government in Turkey, as well as detailed information about EGG are shared, offering a country-specific and practical perspective to the literature. Future direction of EGG and e-Government development in Turkey that emphasizes the citizen perspective is also elaborated. It is hoped that the good practices, lessons-learned, suggestions and prospects regarding this EGG case will shed light on previous experience and pave the way for further progress for citizen-oriented e-Government development not only in Turkey but also in other nations.

INTRODUCTION

Masterminding a single website, which can be referred to with various names such as One-Stop-Shops, Gateways, Portals, with its front and back office operations for the provision of government services to citizens’ and other stakeholders who use information and communication technologies (ICT) is a recent trend and focus in e-Government practice and academic research. As a part of this trend, Turkey has initiated its own project to establish an E-Government Gateway (EGG).

In this chapter, the main aim is to elaborate on the development of EGG in Turkey by describing some challenges that have been experienced, lessons learned from the past, and in addition enumerating some current prospects and suggestions for the future. Taking into account some basic characteristics and shortcomings of the Turkish
public administration system, the chapter will make an evaluation of EGG. A specific focus of the chapter will be on the public sector supply of e-Government services and citizen demand for current e-services provided by the EGG. It is hoped that the good practices, lessons-learned, suggestions and prospects regarding this EGG case will shed light on previous experience and pave the way for further progress for citizen-oriented e-Government development not only in Turkey but also in other nations.

BACKGROUND

Academic Perspective on Citizen-Oriented E-Government Development

According to Arif (2008), “e-Government applications need to be citizen-oriented for the government agencies and the end users”. This orientation could mean “an effective mechanism in order to ensure that development processes incorporate customer needs, an emphasis on usability, the incorporation of accessibility, the effective use of cultural markers”, each of which, according to Arif, could require separate research.

Since the idea of providing citizen-oriented e-Government services has become a common issue among researchers and practitioners, a variety of approaches has been proposed to put it in place. One of the recent concepts on this issue is finding a mechanism or method to measure the degree of citizen satisfaction levels with e-Government services. This is vital to putting citizens’ need and preferences first instead of those of the bureaucracy (Bekkers and Zouridis, 1999).

Another significant concept in this area is e-inclusion programs. In order to ascertain that all parts of the society enjoy the benefits of e-Government applications, certain public policy steps need to be in place. For instance, underdeveloped regions of countries, the elderly or the handicapped, and those with low incomes should be kept in mind, when bringing public services online. The needs and expectations of these groups should be taken into account. Specific awareness and promotion campaigns focused on these groups should be conducted in order to insure that no citizen is left behind. The European Union (EU) has made its commitment to the e-inclusion concept on the basis of six sub-categories of issues as follows (European Commission, n.d.):

1. e-Accessibility
2. Age Inclusiveness
3. e-Competences
4. Socio-Cultural e-Inclusion
5. Geographical e-Inclusion
6. Inclusive e-Government

Taking a citizen-centred approach in e-Government applications is also on the agenda of the EU. The provision of high quality public services is one of the keystones of the i2010 program for achieving a European Information Society. Public services play an important role in the route to an inclusive European society. According to a recent report, “The e-Government policy environment has evolved from ‘bringing public services online’ to a concept of effective and user-centric service delivery in an inclusive and competitive European society”. Based on this idea, the i2010 e-Government Action Plan emphasizes five priorities (Capgemini, 2007):

1. No citizen left behind
2. Making efficiency and effectiveness a reality
3. Implementing high-impact key services for citizens and businesses
4. Putting key enablers in place
5. Strengthening participation and democratic decision-making

With the advent of ICTs and e-Government applications, a kind of “buffer” (Arif, 2008) is created between the agency and the citizen. This
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