Chapter VIII
E–Government in the Knowledge Society: The Case of Singapore

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ABSTRACT

A key component of the knowledge society and the urban form that accompanies it is the increasing importance of information and communication technologies in daily life. It is clear that in cities around the world, the use of information and communication technologies has increasingly become part of everyday life including in the business of government. This chapter considers the role of e-governance in Singapore and in particular the potential for the Singapore e-government model to mature fully. The establishment of e-government has been an important policy goal within contemporary Singapore government. Recognizing the gains to be made by harnessing information and communication technologies to strengthen and streamline the business of governance, Singapore has successfully developed its e-government sector across three strategic plans focusing on developing a world-class e-government experience that will delight customers and connect citizens. This chapter reviews the development of e-government in Singapore, focusing on the outcomes of e-government strategic plans, and discussing issues and outcomes associated with developing a fully mature e-government position.

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INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly apparent that contemporary urban society is deeply rooted in the broader processes of globalization, social and economic transformation, and a move to the so-called knowledge era. Mazarr (1999), in his book *Global Trends 2005*, illustrates that contemporary history is about the transformation of human society. Quoting Peter Drucker, Mazarr (1999, p. 1) argues that “every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself—its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions.” What these authors and others are discussing is a move to a new period of social and economic organization. A move that impacts on all areas of social and economic life. Within this changed worldview, urban areas are increasingly seen in terms of polycentric network cities (Batten, 1993, 1995), informational cities (Castells, 1989), world or global cities (Hall, 1984; Sassen, 1991, 1994; Shachar, 1994), or knowledge cities (Ergazakis, Mtaxiotis, & Psarras, 2004). These new emerging city forms are associated with different social and economic divisions and new economic and political structures, and raise a host of significant new questions for the urban scholar to ponder.

The rise in technological developments has been an important part of these transformations. Dramatic developments in information technology are transforming society, challenging our nation’s many governments to keep pace. In line with these developments, the issue of e-government or electronic government has become an increasingly important area of academic and policy research. As e-governance grows in popularity, Web pages are becoming the new face of government providing information, allowing feedback, and generally streamlining the business of bureaucracy. With the growth of e-government has come a growing interest in understanding the processes and outcomes surrounding e-government development.

Technological and bureaucratic development has been a continued research theme, as have understandings of the broader social issues surrounding the development and uptake of e-government. It is this last research theme that this chapter focuses on. The chapter makes a contribution to the growing literature dealing with the development of e-government and its broad social implications by considering the development of e-government in the Republic of Singapore. Specifically it focuses on the initiation of policy frameworks which have aided the development of an e-government presence, and the social implications and issues surrounding this development. In what follows the chapter first discusses briefly the development of e-government in a broad sense and then more specifically in the Singapore case. Following this the chapter considers some of the manifestations and issues surrounding a broader e-government presence in Singapore, before turning to some concluding comments.

BACKGROUND: CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

A key component of the knowledge society and the urban form that accompanies it is the increasing importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs). While the widespread use of modern technology is among the key criteria for any well-developed city, in those places with an increasing global role or those which are vying to become regional knowledge cities or creative cities, the widespread dissemination of ICT across all facets of society and economy becomes crucial. It is clear that the arrival of ICTs as major components of society has impacted on our lives in ways that may have never been imagined by the handful of users who first began to ‘go online’. The terms *being wired* or *online* are now part of everyday usage, and once ordinary tasks and activities have, all of a sudden, been prefixed with ‘e’. We now read and hear about e-learning, e-shopping, e-business,