Chapter 12

E-Government Development in Serbia: Challenges, Issues, and Opportunities

Sanja Bogdanović-Dinić
University of Niš, Serbia

Nataša Veljković
University of Niš, Serbia

Leonid Stoimenov
University of Niš, Serbia

ABSTRACT

Attaining highly efficient e-Government in developing countries is a true challenge. These countries are struggling with many internal issues that are preventing them from providing budgetary resources for investing in ICT infrastructure, staff education, developing strategies, and enacting laws and policies. However, realizing the benefits that e-Government can bring, both to citizens and administration, these countries are working hard towards implementing e-Government and are achieving great results. As one of the developing countries, Serbia has been struggling for years with e-Government ideas. It started with humble implementations nearly ten years ago by publishing only a few informational services, but quickly made significant progress. The efforts made are worthy of recognition while experience gained is of considerable importance not only for Serbia’s further advances in this area but also for all other developing countries as an example and guidance to solving similar problems. This chapter provides an overview of the current state and history of e-Government development in Serbia and presents important issues and challenges influencing Serbian adoption of e-Government, which can be recognized in other developing countries as well. The chapter also addresses other issues and challenges that are now facing developed Governments, but which are on the way to developing nations as well. Even though these countries are not currently setting their focus on them, they should not be ignored nor neglected—indeed these should be included in developmental plans and strategies in order to successfully overcome them when the time comes.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of e-Government has been increasing during the last few decades. With the emergence of Internet and high achievements in processing capacity over the 1990s, following the radical and innovative technology advances in 2000s, a comfortable environment for ICT usage has been created. The term “e-Government” was introduced in the late 1990s where part “e” of the term implied technology driven government (Office of the Vice President, 1997; Grönlund & Horan, 2004). The invention of the term was influenced by the Internet and ICT driven communications. However, the concept of using IT in government places its roots long before the Internet revolution. Kreamer (1977) speaks about “faith in technology” that will extend local governments in a sense of technology driven data transfers, implying technology usage within government for the purposes of internal business operations. Modern “technology driven government” concept is more citizen oriented and is focusing on technology usage for implementing and deploying external services that will enable citizens to accomplish administrative work, which would normally require addressing public offices, without leaving their home or work place. Since the first appearance of the initiative of introducing IT in government until today, the concept has drastically evolved from a simple idea to a whole e-Gov field of practice that has its goals, purpose, is legally arranged and represents a key feature that every Government strives to.

The development of e-Government started unevenly in the world countries. While some have embraced the newly created concept and started to develop and implement strategies for its introducing and implementing, others were struggling with internal problems that prevented them from thinking in the new direction. As a result there is a distinguished difference between countries with developed and countries with poorly developed or undeveloped e-Government. The state of e-Government development matches the economic development of the country, that is, countries with highly developed economy have highly developed e-Government while countries with weak economy have weak e-Government. That fact is perfectly logical considering that e-Government development requires high investments into infrastructure, equipment and people including education and maintenance (Signore, Chesi & Palloti 2005; Ndou, 2004). Developing countries struggle with budget limitations and therefore have very poor investment power. Nevertheless, there are more issues that developing countries are facing with than just those budgetary oriented. Ndou (2004) categorizes these issues into three distinguished areas: transformation areas; users, customers, actors and their interrelationships; and e-Government application domains. Transformation areas refer to internal (use of ICT for interrelating governmental departments and offices and thus integrating governmental data), external (ICT usage for opening governments towards citizens and businesses enabling them a greater access to governmental information) and relational (ICT as a means for services integration) areas. The second issue relates to governments, businesses, citizens, employees and their interrelationships. Government to citizen relation in terms of talking, listening and continuously communicating increases the trust and adds to accountability, democracy and improvements of public services. Government to business relation encourages e-procurement and the development of e-marketplace. Government to government relation refers to interaction between national, regional, local or international government organizations in terms of interchanging tools, knowledge, experiences and thus enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of their business processes. Finally, government to employee relation suggests an effective way of e-learning for employees, knowledge sharing and numerous opportunities for professional advancing. These relations lead to the third identified issue which considers e-Government application