E-Governance Development in Africa: Overview of Barriers and Challenges for Urban E-Planning

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ABSTRACT

This note explores trends in e-governance development in Africa and examines barriers and challenges confronting the development of Urban e-Planning in the continent. It has three main sections, besides the introduction and conclusion. The first is focused on e-governance development in Africa, examines the overall context of ICT in Africa and assesses e-government progress in Africa; the second deals with the barriers confronting e-planning; and the third discusses the challenges for e-planning implementation in Africa. Despite the overall negative picture of e-governance development in Africa that emerges from this review and the huge barriers it is confronted with, there are signs that it is feasible to have a rapid and sustained progress in the field of Urban e-Planning in the near future. However, considering the low level of conventional urban planning development in the continent, gradual implementation of e-Planning solutions in African cities is recommended.

Keywords: Barriers to E-Planning in Africa, Challenges for E-Planning in Africa, E-Governance, E-Government, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Africa, Urban E-Planning

INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of information and communication technologies in public administration associated with the rapid diffusion of the Internet is one of the main changes experienced by governments and municipalities worldwide in the last decades. This has been described as the move from government to e-government and has been defined in different ways. This transformation in the way government works and relates with citizens and other stakeholders has multiple objectives. Among other objectives, it seeks: to improve citizens’ access to government information; to increase dialogue between government and citizens and other stakeholders; to share knowledge within the community; to allow more efficient service provision; to increase transparency and effectiveness in all tiers of government (Fountain, 2001; 2005; Millard, 2008; Carter & Weerakkody, 2008; Borja & Castells, 1996). A similar change has been experienced in the field of urban planning, described as the move from planning to e-planning (Silva, 2010; 2013; Wallin et al., 2011; Horelli, 2013). In addition to this shift from government to e-government, the organization and the way government works is also

DOI: 10.4018/ijepr.2013070105
being impacted by another process: the move from the traditional hierarchical model of public administration towards networked modes of public service organization and delivery (Silva, 2004) taking advantage of networked forms of organization (Powell, 1990). This process is described as the shift from government to governance (Kooiman, 1993; Castells, 2000; 2007; Castells et al., 2005; Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Silva, 2004) and has important consequences in the way urban planning is organized.

The UN Public Administration Program defines e-government as the use of ICT and its application by governments for the provision of information and public services to citizens and organizations. For the OECD (2003: 23) e-government is “the use of new information and communication technologies, and particularly the Internet, as a tool to achieve better government”. For Coleman (2005) e-government is a mixture of e-administration with e-democracy in the sense that it combines services based on electronic information transactions with citizen participation through the Internet and other digital tools. Other authors put emphasis on the delivery of information and services online with less or no reference to the political dimension. Whatever the exact definition, all tend to agree that e-government includes a broad range of activities, grouped into three main areas: government-to-government, government-to-citizens, and government to business. Government to government is the main component of e-government (e.g., data sharing and transactions between different public departments and government tiers); government to citizen increases and facilitates citizen interaction with government (e.g., payment of taxes, licenses, other forms of transactions); and government to business includes, for example, procurement of goods and services by the government and the sale of public goods and services. In sum, e-government can be seen as the efficient online provision of government information and public service delivery, as well as a form of citizen’s empowerment through access to information and participation in public policy decision-making.

The combination of these two processes, governing through networks of institutions (governance) and the use of new information and communication technologies (e-government), is usually described as the move towards e-Governance (Fountain, 2006). While the most visible changes do occur at the level of central governments, there is also ample evidence of a similar and equally intense movement towards e-Governance in sub-national tiers of government, namely at the level of local and urban government. Nancy Odendaal (2003: 586), focused on Durban and Brisbane, defines e-governance as “the ability of government agencies to interact with the public on-line in the delivery of services and in fulfilling their pre-designated mandates”. Linked with these changes, a new urban planning paradigm – Collaborative Planning (Healey, 1997; 2003; Innes et al., 2000; 2003) – emerged in reaction to the rational planning paradigm, namely against its hierarchical and top-down policy making process, emphasizing citizens’ participation in the planning process and the role of networks and partnerships as well.

This change in the way governments work, in all tiers of public administration, is also visible in African countries, though with enormous differences between countries and cities. In the case of Africa, the public sector reforms implemented in several countries in the context of the structural adjustment programmes contracted with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, in the last decades, under the principles of ‘good governance’ and its emphasis on privatization and deregulation (‘Washington Consensus’), consisted in attempts to cut the public sector and to make it more efficient. These adjustment programmes included also measures to improve service delivery under the general principles of New Public Management, which was in part responsible for the introduction of forms of networked governance, replacing the traditional hierarchical model of public administration inherited from the colonial period.

Until now, only a limited number of studies have examined the issue of e-government in African countries (Burke, 2012), with most
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