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“e-Government in Greece”

The state in modern times is considered to be gradually involved with two main challenges: localization of everything non-mobile and non-productive and globalization of everything mobile and lucrative. The financial and legitimating challenges and competition in the concept of the continuing technological progress –the so called New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) - created the need for a “new public management”. In this need, e-Government was shaped.

However, as it has been suggested by Burn and Robins (2003: 26) in their excellent study ‘Moving towards e-Government: a case study of organizational change processes’, “e-Government is not just about putting forms and services online. It provides the opportunity to rethink how the government provides services and how it links them in a way that is tailored to the users’ needs”. E-Government, therefore, is the future establishment of a new flexible and continuing changeable government-to-businesses and government-to-citizens interrelationship (see Davison, Wagner & Louis, 2005, ‘From government to e-government: a transition model’, *Information Technology & People*, 18, (3), 2005 pp. 280-299).

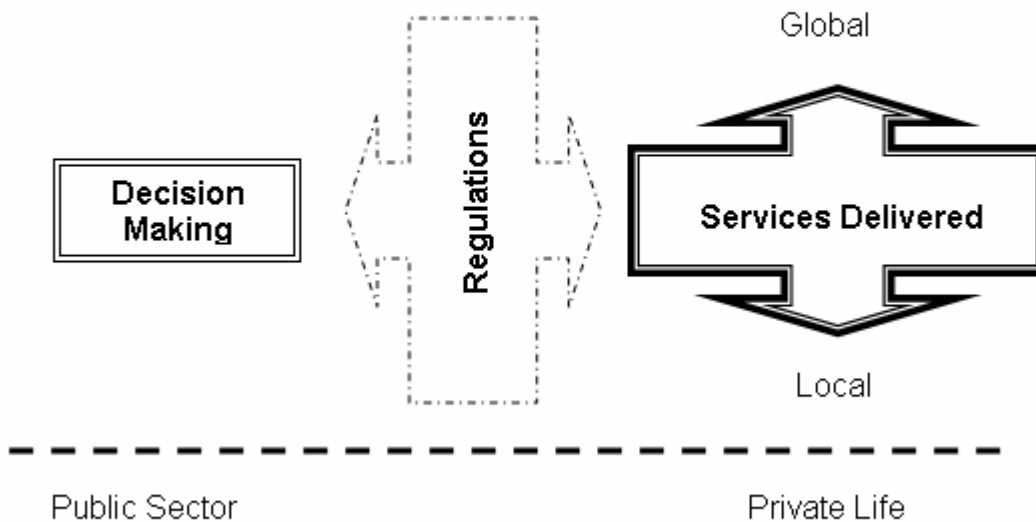
In Europe, e-Government is considered to be one of the main goals for the future. Hence, a project was lunched under the title: ‘*e-Europe 2005 action plan: An information society for all*’. Likewise, in early September 2005 a Communication call for synchronized actions that can provide a broader accessibility to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has been announced. Main issues in the EU agenda on ICT are based on three contact elements in between government and business relations, such as attaining information, downloading forms, and returning filled-in forms. Throughout Europe, however, companies intend not to use the returning filled-in forms electronically. According to the Tech Europe (22/2/2005), only a percentage of 21% of individuals is frequently accessing information via e-Government’s establishments in the European Union, whilst the 10% is downloading official forms, and even less is returning filled-in forms. The numbers of e-Government users in Denmark, Finland and Sweden as well as the United Kingdom are more than the remainder of the EU member states.

In Greece, e-Government is at an early stage of establishment. If we consider and agree that e-Government has five basic infrastructure elements, in Greece only two are actually functional. In particular, e-Government requires a Portal on utility issues, or in other words an enterprise information portal (EIP), a wide range Network namely that can cover effectively Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), metropolitan area networks (MANs) or local area networks, an e-Identification infrastructure (e-II)– known as Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) – an e-Procurement infrastructure (e-PI), which is basically a system for purchase and sale of supplies and services throughout the world wide web as well as numerous other info and networking systems such as the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP). Finally, Knowledge Management (KM) infrastructure is the organization, formation, distribution and steering of knowledge within organizations and institutions.

From the above mentioned basic functional elements of e-Government, it can be argued that Greece has a minor success in getting a functional Portal known as Citizen Service Center (KEP) (www.kep.gov.gr that is the official site of KEP provides access to public service information and to a number of standard administrative procedures). The rise of Citizen Service Centers, according to the White Paper entitled ‘*Greece in the Information Society: Strategy &*

Actions, has perfectly coincided with the deployment of the network forms part of the *Ariadni* programme that digitizes around 800 clerical procedures and can be submitted via the Centers. By the use of e-kep platform, an IP network can be accomplished that files users' requests and creates an e-directory that secures the use of 'certified digital signature'. The significance of this system is centered on its feature enabling real time on-line transactions between Citizens and public administration.

e-Government Towards Services Delivery:



The second element that is needed for a functional e-Government system is the existence of a Network. In Greece the National Public Administration Network (SYZEFXIS) is in use. The Greek public sector network SYZEFXIS provides sophisticated telecommunication and information services to over 1,000 public organizations and institutions by the use of four VPNs. It is harmonized with the development of MANs in roughly 50 municipalities across the country. Unfortunately, even though the Network seems to work well and be implemented, the e-II, e-PI and KM are not properly developed and deployed yet. This creates a problem for the whole system and for the future functioning of Greek e-Government.

The need for a fully functioning e-Government system in Greece is well known by both the former and the current Government. Under the pressing challenge of the national deficit, the Greek Deputy Finance Minister, Mr. Adam Rengouzas, has stated that the government's "aim [is] to attain e-government as soon as possible." (Xinhua News Agency 21/6/2005).

Additionally, during the 3rd E-Government Forum entitled as 'Government of the Future', Mr. Alogoskoufis, Minister of Finance, stated that

"unfortunately, because of the lack of consistent planning during the first three years of the 3rd Community Support Framework's implementation, [i]n Greece the concepts of an Information Society and e-government were considered as a jumbled sum of IT projects in the public sector, which by some magical manner were expected to ensure an improvement in the state's productivity, simply transforming 'wooden' stamps into electronic ones".

He also pledged that:

“...the government, via the Information Technology Committee, will unveil a new ‘digital strategy’ for the country during the next planning period, 2007-2013 [...] The new digital strategy will place the citizen, whether she or he is a businessperson, student, employee etc, at the centre of the Society of Information program” (Financial Times Information 29/5/2005).

Another key factor, however, which may best explain why e-Government has been unfruitful in Greece is the very limited access of the citizens in the World Wide Web. Only 17% of Greece’s population has the necessary internet access and digital literacy (only 7.2% with e-learning support and training), with 24% of Greeks using computers, 1% of households with broadband connection and 21% of enterprises with broadband connection. E-commerce, including usage of the Internet by individuals for purchasing and ordering goods or services as well as enterprises having purchased and received orders via Internet, has shown a 5.2% increase. As far as the interaction between individuals or enterprises and public authorities is concerned, information sharing and administrative interrelationship is less than 10% (Eurostat 2003-2004). This data is not very promising and therefore cannot guarantee a successful implementation of e-Government.

Having said that, the Citizen Service Centre Internet portal has gradually developed by receiving over 9 million visitors each month, and there has been an increase in the numbers of users occurring in 2003 - mainly young users, such as students - accessing government websites for consultation; a rate that is almost doubling in Greece every year.

Mr. Alogoskoufis has stated that:

“Greece, despite the fact that it has lost valuable time over the past decade in terms of exploiting information technology and e-government [according to Eurostat (2004) the government spent 1.2% of EU-25 GDP], it can now find its pace. In order to achieve this it must exploit every possible tool within the framework of a digital strategy being prepared by the government”.

Yet, as is usually the case, the governing party and the major opposition party appear to be blaming each other for the lack of the aforementioned infrastructure and more importantly for the deficiencies in policy- and decision-making in regards to e-Government development and functionality (Financial Times Information 29/5/2005).

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