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Chapter II

Introduction to Democratic e-Governance

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ABSTRACT

The concept of governance has its roots in the changing role of the state and in a managerialist view of the operations of public administrations. These two discourses have been challenged by another approach, which could be called democratic governance. It emphasizes the interactions between citizens, political representatives and administrative machinery providing a special view of citizens' opportunities to influence and participate in policy-making and related processes. This perspective opens up a view to the practices in which institutions, organizations and citizens steer and guide society and communities. It provides citizen-centered view of governance which is quite different from managerialist and institutionalist perspectives. Such approaches as communitarianism, teledemocracy, participatory democracy and direct democracy have been presented as alternative modes of governance. In regard to technology, democratic e-governance is based on the idea that new ICTs can be used to facilitate interaction, communication and decision-making processes, thus having a great potential to strengthen the democratic aspects of governance.

INTRODUCTION

This book is about how information society development affects government and governance. As this discussion touches upon relatively new phenomena, some conceptual clarifications are called for. What follows is a description of the concept of governance, with special reference to the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to contribute to transformation toward democratic e-governance.

EMERGENCE OF THE CONCEPT OF GOVERNANCE

From State-Centrism to New Governance

The roots of the concept of governance can be traced to the classical Latin and ancient Greek words that refer to the steering of boats. In France, in the form of *gouvernance*, it has been known since the 14th century. For a long time, it overlapped with the concept of government. It was used mainly to refer to constitutional and legal issues concerning the conduct of affairs of the state or the direction of specific institutions or professions with multiple stakeholders (Jessop, 1998, p. 30; Pierre & Peters, 2000, p. 1). Discussion about governance has intensified and acquired new dimensions since the early 1990s, especially in the Anglo-American world.

The erosion of the traditional basis of political power, the rise of nongovernmental organizations, the increases in partnership relations between public and private organizations, and the emergence of a new order in global governance have changed the entire institutional landscape practically everywhere in the world. One of the outcomes of this development was the discussion of the decline of the nation-state and the rise of the regions and local governments as the new key players in coping with external challenges and imposing a political will within territorial communities. Also, after World War II, and the 1980s in particular, international organizations and regional institutions started to gain more power in the international arena. An emerging new model of global governance brought about new challenges to individual states (Pierre, 2000, p. 1). This state-centric discussion becomes understandable in the light of the dominant role of the nation-state in Western societies in the modern era. As convincingly expressed by Held (1997), both in international order and in control of society, it was the nation-state that became the dominating center of power. In the 1980s and the following decade, this particular authority has been challenged.

Even though the nation-states are still, when considered from the perspective of factual power politics, extremely powerful political entities of our time, many competing centers of power have emerged in the institutional field and, furthermore, various regional, international, and supranational institutions have challenged no less than the sovereignty of the state (Held, 1997; cf., Weiss, 1999). Even if the discussion about the decline of the nation-state reflects one essential aspect of this change fairly well, this is not the focal point of the present discussion. Rather, what has gained wide attention is the new situation in which territorial governments and other public entities need to work alongside private corporations, nongovernmental organizations, civil society actors, and other public bodies in decision making, service, and development processes.

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