

Chapter XLIII

Local E–Government in Malaysia: An Empirical Investigation

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ABSTRACT

Despite the many quarrels and complaints about the quality of local government in Malaysia, it continues to be an important part of the overall governance system of the country. Information and Communication Technologies, particularly the Internet, have been prophesied to massively transform the quality of governance and government including local government. This chapter examines the local government development with reference to Web-based services of a cross-section of local authorities in Malaysia. The academic nature of the chapter pertains to examining issues surrounding Web site design and quality of information within the local government in Malaysia. The practical aspect of the study concerns with ascertaining if local authorities in Malaysia are ready to embrace the challenges in the information age, with particular emphasis on the ability to offer value added E-Services via local government Web sites. The survey results paint an extremely uneven and a very infant picture of E-Local government in Malaysia. The local authorities, just as other public agencies, have some way to go to tap the full potential of the Internet to render services to their public. They are still at the broadcast or publish stage of E-Government development. Much must be done to improve the design, the responsiveness, the information currency, and the interactivity dimensions of the digital window to propel local government into the national E-Government changes that are quietly taking shape. Only then can Malaysia's E-Government initiative reap the maximum benefits offered by the information age.

INTRODUCTION

Within the national governance systems, the federal government is the centre for most discussion, followed by the 13 state governments and the 144 local authorities that make the local government. Fifty percent of the Gross Domestic Product is generated from areas under the charge of local authorities. Some 14.57 (62% of total population) millions people lived urban areas in 2005 and this figure is forecasted to reach 16.85 million (63.8% of total population) in 2010 (Ninth Malaysian Plan (NMP), 2006:360). Most, if not all, urban citizens live in local authority administered areas. As the population becomes urbanized, local government grows in direct importance to the welfare and the quality of life experienced by a majority of the citizens of this country. Local land use planning and control, hawking and business premise licensing, basic disposal services, environmental control, and social and recreational facilities are within the purview of local authorities. The local government has been since independence plagued by a multitude of problems arising from its financial, personnel and administrative shortcomings. The advent of ICT especially the ubiquitous Internet has opened up new possibilities to expand and improve services at all levels of government. Much of the e-Government attention has been focused on the federal and to some extent the state government. The local e-Government has been relatively quiet despite some remarkable developments in some urban local authorities. This paper is aimed at visiting the state of e-local government to bring the local e-Government development or lack thereof into the national stage. This will provide a balanced picture of e-Government development in Malaysia.

E-Government in Malaysia

E-Government is variously defined but the common focus is on the application of ICT to improve the internal management of the government, to

offer more flexible and convenient services to the public and to a limited extent, to enhance public participation and democracy (Seifert & Relyea, 2004; Wyld, 2004; Maniam et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2007). The interface between the government and various sections of the public is used to describe e-Government development more specifically. Figure 1 shows the different interfaces where ICT can and is deployed to enhance the quality of the government-public interaction with special reference to local government.

The Malaysian government has envisioned a technologically advanced society and implicitly, a technologically enabled government through Vision 2020 launched in 1992. Alongside with the launching of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996, the government has lined up several flagships E-Government projects namely, Project Management System, Human Resource Management Information System, E-Procurement and General Office Environment intended to transform the government from paper-based, unintegrated islands of agencies and departments to an integrated and networked government. The move towards a digital or electronic government is progressing slowly along the government to government route (G2G) and also along the government to citizen path (G2C). The public sector ICT vision aims to provide more efficient and better quality services by leveraging on the multimedia capabilities of the ICT to facilitate resource sharing between government agencies and to become a citizen centric entity in its service delivery (Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Manpower Planning Unit (MAMPU), 2003: 6). The 8th Malaysian Plan (2001-2005), Knowledge-Based Economy Masterplan (2002-2010), Public Sector ICT Masterplan, 2003 and the 9th Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) recognized and strategised for the transformation of the government particularly the public service. Although many of the projects are mainly aimed at developing inter and intra-governmental transaction capabilities, the agency-public interface is still

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