Chapter VII

Tracking E-Government in South America:
Origin and Impact of E-Government Strategies in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay[1]

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Abstract

The existing disparity regarding the achievements of electronic-government development in the Southern Cone area is owed to implementation processes characterized by the coexistence of organizational isomorphism patterns along with each country's own institutional framework. Insofar as electronic government was developed within the public administration's modernization processes, and that said processes were financed almost entirely by international credit institutions, there is a similarity among the different strategies implemented; the same responds to a middle-level policy transfer process. However, institutional environments have exerted a decisive influence on the effective implementation of the original schemes, thus determining significant differences regarding the impacts of each policy. This chapter develops this perspective, understanding that acknowledgement of this path covered may

contribute to adapting strategies to the frameworks in which they have been introduced, thus fostering amortization of resources invested, survival of initiatives, and use of electronic-government benefits in the construction of an efficient and transparent public administration open to citizens.

Introduction

Initially, a technological aura surrounded electronic government and seemed to isolate it from the characteristics and influences of every state policy. However, despite the initial enthusiasm, its development has eroded the mere technological expectations, thus revealing its similarities with all public policies. Electronic government is a complex and multidisciplinary phenomenon whose benefits depend on major political, technical, and administrative efforts and understandings.

In Latin America, national e-government policies have already been implemented, and it is possible to observe the results of these features.

Upon an initial analysis, we observe the existence of projects within the region with significant results in administration transparency and efficiency. These initiatives reveal the innovation capacity of certain public organizations as well as the real benefits of the use of new technologies in state administration.[2] However, a thorough analysis reveals that at the domestic policy level, these cases are organized within the region in a pattern of similarities and differences that form an unequal development map regarding results attained.

Despite the existing multiplicity as regards each country's own features, the region accounts for homogeneous characteristics regarding the strategies implemented at the domestic level. In the Southern Cone especially, electronic-government strategies exhibit technical-formal similarities in relation to administration goals, contents, and management methods. There are similarities that coexist with each country's institutional framework, thus determining that, beyond the existence of isolated successful projects, we may observe that the capacities and impacts of each policy are significantly different.

In this sense, there are clear traces of complex political, technical, and administrative processes as regards the adaptation of the new technological proposal of a virtual government. Therefore, this chapter aims at analysing this network of electronic-government implementation projects at the na-

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