

Chapter 2.29

“It’s the Mobility, Stupid”: Designing Mobile Government

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at mobility and the term government to describe influencing factors for the process of designing mobile government. A detailed review of perspectives on mobility and a subsequent examination of the government term is given to reach a better understanding of what mobile government can be. Furthermore, four questions are refined which are aimed at helping to first justify and assess a possible m-government service and second to classify this service in a given context. By focusing on mobility as a key component of mobile government, the author hopes to aid developers and researchers alike with designing new and better mobile services within the public sector.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile government as a subject of debate, research and actual services is gaining momentum within the field of electronic government. The number

of mobile phone users is exceeding the number of fixed line phones and, though at a slowing pace, is still growing. With the recent roll-out of mobile broadband data services such as UMTS or Wireless LAN, one gets the idea that we are still just looking at the tip of an iceberg.

So far, e-government has allowed for a faster, more convenient and often value-added delivery of public services. It has started a regrouping and rethinking of processes in many administrations, helped to create a new and improved access to various services, and also supported citizen participation in political processes. Even where it is not obvious to “front-end users” like citizens, e-government has in many cases boosted the more efficient gathering and processing of data. Information and communication technologies in governmental organizations have reduced cost, redundancies, and errors, thus speeding up the handling of services.

Nevertheless, mobile technologies, however unknown their real value still is, will take this development to an even higher level. Not only are such mobile services promising more efficiency,

faster and less erroneous processing of data, but also an improvement of service as a whole through direct contact with citizens. “As painful as e-government transformations have been, the challenges of dealing with an always-on society and workforce will be even more daunting. Service delivery, democracy, governance and law enforcement will all be affected” (Di Maio, 2002).

Mobile government by itself can still be considered in its “infancy” (Zálešák, 2003)—when it comes to governmental organizations we can assume a “transitive state” (Kushchu & Borucki, 2004, p. 830). The services currently considered to deserve the label mobile government range from W-LAN in public buildings to stand-alone mobile applications. They depend on, utilize, or incorporate features of mobile technologies. In-between these two extremes, we can observe a vast variety of services such as mobile information via SMS, mobile tickets for parking or trains, and alike. Hence, it is rather unclear what we talk about when we actually refer to mobile government.

The definitions given in the literature vary slightly. Some describe m-government as “a functional subset of all-inclusive e-government” (Arazyan, 2002) respectively saying, that technologies used for m-government “are limited to mobile and/or wireless technologies” (Llallana, 2004) in comparison with e-government. To others, m-government is “a complex strategy for efficient utilization of all wireless devices” (Zálešák, 2003) with the goal of “improving benefits to the parties involved in e-government” (Kushchu & Kuscu, 2003).

Defining m-government as a form of mobile business, some see it as a connection between Internet and mobile communications offering context-dependent and highly individualized information and not huge amounts of data (cf. Frischmuth & Karrlein, 2002, p. 15). By ruling out mobile yet stationary interaction as well as random wireless connections, m-government is considered restricted to public mobile services

that need time-critical information access (cf. Thome, 2003).

If an application fits one of these definitions or if it falls short of certain features is a debate of its own and shall not be the issue here. Whether one talks about mobile government, mobile e-government, or mobile public services is a semantic issue. The process of planning, developing, designing these service offerings is, however, important. In this process, several sets of interests need to be aligned to allow for a coherent offering in the first place.

We will look at mobility, government, and the scope of connotations to each term with the aim of describing factors to be considered in the design process of such a mobile service in the public sector. Requirements toward mobile services from both sides will be detailed and combined.

As a first step, the following second part will review the term mobility from a technological, economical, and sociological perspective. As a result, a set of questions will be derived to pinpoint issues to consider in the context of being mobile.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the involved parties, the third part will subsequently examine the government term. By separately looking at the organization, the actors, and the processes, the scope of this term becomes clear. To what extent these subsets and their goals can be combined will be discussed alongside a brief description of important challenges.

Following these separate considerations, part four will discuss the interaction of mobility and government and thus give an overview of factors to consider when thinking about mobile government. This will be concluded with an outlook into future developments.

MOBILITY PERSPECTIVES

Mobility in a general sense is understood as a form of *being mobile*. The adjective “mobile”

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