



Chapter VII

Measuring E-Government in Italy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes our experience in establishing an Observatory for the measurement of the impact of e-government policies onto the efficiency and the effectiveness of the Italian public sector. Such an Observatory is based on evaluation procedures different from those used in other measurement exercises, such as e-Europe or those belonging to the Big Five consultant groups. Moreover, the adopted definition of “e-government” is slightly different than the usual one, as it takes into account not only the mere providing of e-services, but also the whole impact of ICT in terms of transformation of Public Administration — both at a “front-” and at a “back-office” level. What has made us think about a new evaluation method is the desire for a standard, transparent (i.e., one that everyone understands) system, which, while it takes into account the overall level of e-government, the type and number of online services, and their ease of access and quality, also considers policy actions which flavor the spread of electronic government applications, both inside and outside the public sector.

INTRODUCTION

ICT is opening new and interesting scenarios in terms of the relationship between citizens, businesses, and Public Administrations (PA). These agents now have to interact more than ever among them, using the advanced systems which technological progress has put at their disposal, with an undeniable increase in efficiency and effectiveness.

E-government is making giant strides in all the most advanced corners of the globe, laying down the first technological substrate for the Digital Society to be able to come about. As far as Italy is concerned, this process is to be seen in the many innovations from 1997 onwards which have characterised changes in the PA, whether in its internal and external dealings, or — more precisely — with a view to bringing them into line with Italy's decentralization and development requirements. These two trends when taken together (local government computerization and restructuring) are the most powerful motor for change in the public sector.

The models currently being used to evaluate the impact of these two drivers of change, however, do not seem wholly adequate, and they can be broken down into two groups: (a) those which measure the state of advancement of online services, as is the case with *e-Europe* benchmarking, and (b) those which tend to make more “qualitative” judgements, although still only in online services, and their completeness and sophistication, as is the case with the methods developed by the Big Five consultant groups. In both cases, something is missing from these approaches. The first type of measurement risks tying the judgement of transaction-type evolution in innovation strategies to the provision of a series of public services, but completely leaving out, for example, any measurement of how widespread the service is, how it is carried out, or how closely it measures up to what the constituency actually need. The second type of method is a little more “obscure,” given that it measures parameters which private companies do not fully publicize. The danger here is that judgements about the “overall maturity” of online public services often mean the questionable reduction of some countries to second-class status.

What has made us think about a new evaluation method then is the desire for a standard, transparent (*i.e.*, one that everyone understands) system, which, while it takes into account the overall level of e-government, the type and number of online services, and their ease of access and quality, also considers policy actions which flavor the spread of electronic government applications, both inside and outside the public sector.

In an area which is undergoing such rapid evolution, laying the foundations for measuring what the impact of new technology on the PA is (and especially what it will be), it is vital that the future policy direction of central and local government be measured. With such a long-term view, then, an Observatory has been established within the Italian Office for the Innovation of the Public Administration (UIPA) in order to examine the impact of ICT on the PA, taking into account all impulse, control, and updating policies for the paths the Italian PA will have to undertake to improve its internal and external efficiency.

The guiding objective in the early stages of the project is to work with a restricted number of central and local PAs in order to see how well the model could work, so that the civil servants involved could evaluate performance improvements brought about by the introduction of new technology. Any improvements would be both in the provision of a public service (mainly to citizens and business, but also to other branches of local and central government), and in increased efficiency within the PAs themselves. In the long term, when the model has proven to be effectively able to show the main reasons for change brought about by the introduction of ICT in the PA, the Observatory could help policy makers in the decision-making process, as the real effect of efficiency policies could be shown to each and every branch of local and central government.

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