

Chapter 14

Building the Digital Government in Regions: Success Factors and Institutional Barriers in Spanish Comunidades Autónomas

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ABSTRACT

The author traces the unfolding of modernisation efforts in the region of Valencia in Spain, showing a number of assemblages whose study requires developing varied employing complementary approaches and concepts. The inclusion of regional governments as important actors in modernization processes is put forward and explored in the case of Valencian Comunidad Autónoma (Autonomous Community). The chapter shows how the interplay of institutional practices, the development of new forms of organization to provide e-government services and the unfolding of regional policies within Spain and Europe all contribute to make e-government what is now in the region of study.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter tackles with some basic questions about eGovernment with a regional perspective: is it growing the importance of regional governments in the information age political environment? Is there a specific regional administrative modernization agenda? Which institutional factors shape regional electronic public administration developments? There is an increasing importance of regional government around the European Union, specially, in countries with strongly decentralised

politico-administrative systems. This paper outlines a precise regional perspective to comprehend the global electronic government (eGovernment) phenomenon. In so doing, next pages deal with a country case (Spanish *Comunidades Autónomas*, in general, and *Comunidad Valenciana* region, in particular), with extensive regional competencies and socio-economic as well as political and legislative power. This study takes into account the significance of contextual institutional and historical factors, and internal institutional settings, that shape the evolution of administrative reforms, also in regional perspective.

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Internationally speaking, one can emphasize an extensive lack of analysis addressing the regional level of informatization and *eGovernment*. It is almost ironic that in this period of a global economy, an emerging network society, and ICTs, regions and regional government have been re-discovered again. A number of concepts such as regional development, regional government or regional governance have been a common place in the literature of geography, economics, political science or public administration during the last decades (Keating, 1985). However, '*there is a heightened interest in the region as a locus of political, economic and cultural activity*' (Tomaney & Ward, 2001: 1). In the last decade, this debate has turned into the concept of *new regionalism* and the idea that regions around the world are looking for new ideas and new competencies. Thus, the overall *objective* of this article implies providing evidences from a case study about success factors and institutional barriers for regional *eGovernment* development.

Methodologically, this chapter presents a detailed case study taking into account one of the Spanish *Comunidades Autónomas*. In brief, the interest on the regional level of government in Spain derives from the relatively successful process of devolution deployed during less than three decades. In that regard, this layer of regional governments and public administrations, together with modernization processes, grew up rapidly, resulting in case studies with interest for *eGovernment* scholars. In particular, the case of the *Comunidad Valenciana* is that of one of the most developed Spanish regions, in terms of informatization and ICTs diffusion, evolving under the monitoring of European Information Society regional strategies. In so doing, this region inaugurated links and connections with other pioneering regional cases in Europe.

Data for this study was gathered using different *data collection techniques*. First, thirty four semi-structured interviews with senior officials within the regional administration (i.e. successive general

directors of ICTs and *eGovernment* central management unit, top civil servants governing ICTs in ministries and more technical profiles within the Valencian regional administration), as well as other actors from different context organizations with relevance for the case (i.e. managers and consultants from technology companies, academic consultants, etc.). Complementary sources of data derived from a documentary analysis of public strategies and internal documents about administrative reform and *eGovernment*, as well as statistical data from different public and private institutions. The fieldwork was deployed from 2004 to 2007, being funded by a research grant of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science.

This chapter operates as follows. Firstly, it provides an approach to the theoretical framework, using different perspectives rooted in political science and public administration studies. Second, it delivers a description about the external and historical context for an electronic public administration in Spain. Third, it addresses in detail the analysis of the case study evolution. Then, a final discussion will be opened concerning the most salient aspects derived from previous sections, as a resume of results, unfolding final ideas about a future agenda of research with a regional focus.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section draws together different theoretical perspectives to support the following analysis. During the last years, different aspects and dimensions of *eGovernment* have been studied using diverse objectives, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks. Danziger & Andersen (2002), Heeks & Bailur (2006), Ya & Brestschneider (2007), and Yildiz (2007) review articles have pointed out that variety of approaches to *eGovernment* phenomena, '*the first decade of academic e-government research was dominated by studies that focused on the observation and evaluation of the output of e-government initiatives (...)* This study makes

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