Chapter 7
eGovernance 2.0:
Implications of Social Computing on Public Services

Gianluca Misuraca
European Commission & Joint Research Centre,
Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, Spain

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this chapter are purely those of the author and may not in any circumstances be reguarded as stating and official position of the European Commission.

ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the results of exploratory research conducted by the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, which aims to collect and analyse evidence and to assess the significance of the impact of social computing (also known as Web2.0) on public services in order to better understand its implications for governance. After introducing the rise of the social computing phenomenon and its trends in the public sector, which are of crucial importance to both government-citizen relations and organizational and institutional aspects of government (what is referred to as governance), the chapter argues that the emerging wave of openness—that is implicit in social computing-enabled applications—could lead to a new phase for eGovernance. The chapter also explains that social computing has multiple areas of potential impact on governance which need further systematization, in both conceptual and methodological terms. Social computing has a potentially disruptive impact on government-citizens relations, on public sector organizational and institutional design, and the way public services are created and delivered. There are also signs that there will be fundamental shifts in the relation between government and citizens that could result in new ways of "public value creation," which are worth further investigation. Social computing can play an important role in the innovation process in the public sector by supporting profound transfor-

mations which would allow citizens to take an active part in policy-making processes. Social computing applications can promote the modernisation of existing governmental functions by supporting the optimization of back office procedures, by streamlining and consolidating information flows, and by exploiting knowledge sharing mechanisms for administrative purposes. Finally, the chapter discusses the key findings and provides conclusions and future policy and research indications. Social computing's multiple impacts on governance need to be further documented in order to fully understand in which areas of the policy cycle it can play a role and in which not. To make it an effective part of governance systems and society at large the best way to embed it in public sector strategies and policy making mechanisms needs to be determined.

INTRODUCTION

The Exponential Growth of Web2.0: What is there for Governments?

In 2005, O'Reilly popularised the term "Web 2.0"—also referred to as the "social web" or "social computing"—which describes a new and potentially disruptive stage in the development of the Internet. The concept has since become hugely popular - if not hyped - and has thus created as much confusion as consensus about what it really means. There is no coherent definition of Web 2.0: instead it is a conceptual set of principles and practices (Madden & Fox, 2007). These principles and practices originated from the observation that the Internet was far from dead after the burst of the dot.com bubble at the turn of the 21st century. Although the Internet crisis caused a substantial shakeout of Internet firms, it also marked a turning point for the web. A whole new range of successful Internet applications burst onto a scene in which online communities with a strong bottom-up character play the key role, and where the mobilisation (aggregation, syndication) of user-generated content is the main function. The nature of these applications gave rise to the term "the social web."

Most remarkable, and perhaps not comparable with what went before, is the exponential growth of this new generation of applications, both in terms of the number of applications and the number of users. According to Gantz et al. (2007), in 2006 the amount of content created, captured and replicated on the Internet was about 3 million times larger than the information contained in all the books ever written. They believed then that this would keep on growing in the coming years and that by 2010, 70% of Internet content would have been created by individuals. The lightning speed with which the trend has spread is also remarkable. It took barely three years for social computing to grow from a marginal community to become the dominant Internet trend it is today. For instance, it is estimated that, in 2008, 41% of Internet users in Europe were engaged in Web2.0 applications, interacting in a broad spectrum of commercial, leisure and social domains (Punie, et al., 2009).

According to O'Reilly, the success of many Web 2.0 applications is based on smart ways of using the web as a platform for data management, particularly by exploiting the connectivity and collective intelligence of users. Web 2.0 services exploit connections between users, as these connections provide manifold opportunities to create added value. Not only are users actively consuming content, they are also taking on distribution roles in peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing, and content creation roles in the case of user-generated content. Users actively rate and tag content (a phenomenon known as folksonomy), download content, comment on it, and discuss it with their

Related Content

Transformation Rooms: Building Transformative Capacity for European Cities
Gudrun Rita Haindlmaier, Petra Wagnerand Doris Wilhelmer (2021). *International Journal of Urban Planning and Smart Cities (pp. 48-69).*
www.irma-international.org/article/transformation-rooms/280153

Facilitating Knowledge Sharing in E-Governance: Online Spatial Displays as Translating Devices
Jarkko Bambergand Pauliina Lehtonen (2012). *E-Governance and Civic Engagement: Factors and Determinants of E-Democracy (pp. 149-172).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/facilitating-knowledge-sharing-governance/60077

E-State: Realistic or Utopian?
Nnanyelugo McAnthony Aham-Anyanwuand Honglei Li (2017). *International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age (pp. 56-76).*
www.irma-international.org/article/e-state/175851

Constructing Multicultural Society on Web: Minorities on Information Society
Vildan Mahmutolu (2015). *Management and Participation in the Public Sphere (pp. 323-336).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/constructing-multicultural-society-on-web/131229

The Inherent Difficulties and Complexities of Voting Electronically: An Overview
Dimitrios Zissisand Dimitrios Lekkas (2015). *Public Affairs and Administration: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 48-73).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-inherent-difficulties-and-complexities-of-voting-electronically/127844