Chapter 2
Electronic Transformation of Local Government:
An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the critical success factors for employees' adoption of the unified Local Government Access Framework (LGAF), deployed for the Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece. Following an extensive bibliographical survey, an initial conceptual framework (CF1) based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) for LGAF adoption is proposed, which is empirically explored within sixteen Local Governments Organizations. The CF1 is revised using the structured-case approach. New concepts discovered during each research cycle revealed that LGAF adoption is a procedure of experiential judgement. The applicability of the TAM is investigated and the model is enhanced, exploring additional variables that affect perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and actual use. A final complementary CF2 is presented and the evaluation of this model according to the data received from the case studies is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Local Government Organizations (LGOs) hold a respectful share in contributing to economic growth and wealth of societies (Irani et al., 2005). Beyond the core administrative and democratic activities, health, education and security are among the service branches adding public value and creating the right environment for prosperous economies. The local government structures are believed to be the essence of participatory democracy. It is through local government that

citizens come into direct contact with their elected government, as the power flows from national to local government (Koussouris et al., 2008). Thus, LGOs desks are in many countries an active point of transactions between the government and the citizens.

The Greek National Public Administration System is constituted of a large number of LGOs. Particularly, there are more than one thousand LGOs, mostly municipalities that provide a significant number of governmental services to the citizens, visitors, enterprises based within their geographical limits and other governmental bodies. The exact number of services provided by each LGO varies as they have their own operational framework that depends on parameters related to the distinctiveness of each one. Such parameters can be the financial status, the local population composition, region's cultural characteristics, geopolitical and geographical attributes and other organizational and legal parameters that allow or not the LGO to offer some kinds of services (Koussouris et al., 2008). These services can be split in general categories according to their nature and entity they refer to. Some indicative categories refer to payments, applications, registries, records, certificates and licenses.

LGOs' services were, until recently, provided in a conventional way, which meant that no infrastructure had been developed for electronic services and proved the poor level of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) adoption. The conventional way of services provision demanded the physical presence of the person that applied for the service in the LGO. Thus the interested person went in a LGO to submit both the application and get the outcome of the requested service (Koussouris et al., 2008). The poor level of ICT adoption by the LGOs was the main reason behind the aforementioned situation and did not allow the electronic provision of services.

Given the importance of services offered by LGOs, it is essential, in the modern technological era, for ICTs to provide solutions in order to transform these traditionally offered services into electronic transactions. These can be initiated over the Internet aiming at the facilitation of the citizen's life, who is the eventual 'customer' of any government. LGOs service branches need to keep pace with innovation and technology developments, thus guaranteeing a lasting quality and provision of public services. The great potential of ICTs to contribute to a competitive and wealthy economy needs to be exploited in LGOs activities. Only through investment in ICT research and effective innovation concepts can the local public administration ensure an innovative, knowledge-enabled, and competitive economy.

The recent trend towards local transformational government has emerged mainly by the expressed aspirations of citizens who are placing new demands on local governments regarding the performance and efficiency, proper accountability and public trust, and a renewed focus on delivering better services and results. Thus, LGOs attempt to re-establish their mission critical operations and this has lead to persistent organizational transformations. Given this fact, currently an important number of the European regions, prefectures, and municipalities have constructed their own presence on the web. In Greece, the situation also seems to be changing recently, as many LGOs are attempting to develop their web presence, by implementing projects mainly funded by the 6th Framework Program and the Greek Information Society. These are aiming to achieve the goal of providing better services, creating new conditions for social activation and improving the communication with the citizens. Through their online presence, many Greek LGOs have also started offering various categories of online services as introduced by Moon (2002) regarding information, interaction and transaction. Modern ICTs heavily impact and shape these activities for cooperating and interacting with stakeholders within country and sometimes across borders. ICTs are changing local government structures and organizational processes producing significant business and technical benefits (Heeks, 1999). Electronic projects are becoming increasingly important for the public

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