

Democratic E-Governance

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INTRODUCTION

The changing role of the state and a managerialist view of the operations of public sector organizations gave rise to the idea of new public governance. Gradually more citizen-centered views of governance also emerged, reflecting a need to strengthen the role of citizens and communities in governance processes at different institutional levels. This development, especially since the mid-1990's, has been affected by new technologies, leading to a kind of coevolution of institutional arrangements and technological solutions that have paved the way for a better understanding of the potentials of democratic e-governance.

BACKGROUND

Discussion about governance has acquired new dimensions since the early 1990's due to the gradual erosion of the hierarchical, mainly state-centric bases of political power. The decline of the nation state and the rise of the regions and local governments as the new key players in coping with external challenges and imposing a political will within territorial communities is among the core topics. Also, after the second World War and the 1980's in particular, international organizations and regional institutions started to gain more power in international arena (Pierre, 2000).

Another widely discussed aspect of public governance relates to the functioning and ways of working of public sector organizations. The entire institutional landscape and the overall understanding of the role of public sector organizations has gradually changed practically everywhere in the world, thus fueling the discussion about public governance. One important governance agenda-setter was the OECD Public Management Committee (PUMA), which carried out work on this topic during the first half of the 1990's and as a synthesis published a policy paper entitled *Governance in Transition* in 1995 (OECD, 1995). OECD's policy lines have been more or less neoliberal, which means that governance issues were discussed and still are to a large extent within the framework of New Public Management (NPM). In essence, its message is that the approach to the management of public organizations and services needs to be based on managerialism and market-based coordination.

Contemporary understanding and use of the concept of governance has its roots in the changing role of the state and

in a managerialist view of the operations of public organizations. These two discourses have been challenged by another approach, which could be called democratic governance. It emphasizes the interactions between citizens, political representatives and administrative machinery providing a special view of citizens' opportunities to influence and participate in governance processes.

DEFINITION OF GOVERNANCE

One of the reasons behind the revival of the concept of governance was the need to distinguish between the traditional, institutionally oriented conception of "government" and more dynamic and network-based ways of thinking and working in policy processes. Thus, *government* refers to the institutions and agents that perform the governmental functions, that is, to formal institutions of the state or those of decentralized territorial governments and their ability to make decisions and take care of their implementation, whereas *governance* is about the new modes and manner of governing within policy networks and partnership-based relations (Jessop, 1998; Kooiman, 1993; Pierre & Peters, 2000; Stoker, 1998).

The way the concept of governance is used here can be specified as "public governance", which aims to pursue collective interest in the context of intersectoral stakeholder relations. In this sense, governance refers to the coordination and the use of various forms of formal or informal types of nonhierarchically organized interaction and institutional arrangements in the policy-making, development and service processes to pursue collective interest (Anttiroiko, 2004).

E-TRANSFORMATION IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Informatization as an important side of the transformational aspect of governance profoundly affects the relationships of different actors, forms and channels of communication and interaction, and the entire fabric of network and partnership relations. The introduction of ICTs in the public sector in the 1960's in most of the advanced countries started to reshape their data processing activities, such as record keeping and financial administration. Electronic systems started to replace old manual systems. This picture changed dramatically in

the 1990's. At the core of this revolution was the Internet (Seneviratne, 1999).

Since the 1990's a need for reconstruction of technology along more democratic lines became apparent. New ICTs have a potential to restructure government and to strengthen democracy, and to create a closer relationship between public administration and citizens in particular. It has even been said that new ICTs applied by government contribute to the emergence of a different type of governance, that is, more "direct" government, as concluded by Pardo (2002).

This development boils down to the idea of democratic e-governance, which combines three conceptual elements: *governance* as a process and activity area, *democracy* as an applied principle, and *information and communication technologies* as a tool. Democratic e-governance is a technologically mediated interaction in transparent policy-making, development and service processes in which political institutions can exercise effective democratic control and, more importantly, in which citizens have a chance to participate and effectively influence relevant issues through various institutionally organized and legitimate modes of participation (Anttiroiko, 2004). At a practical level democratic

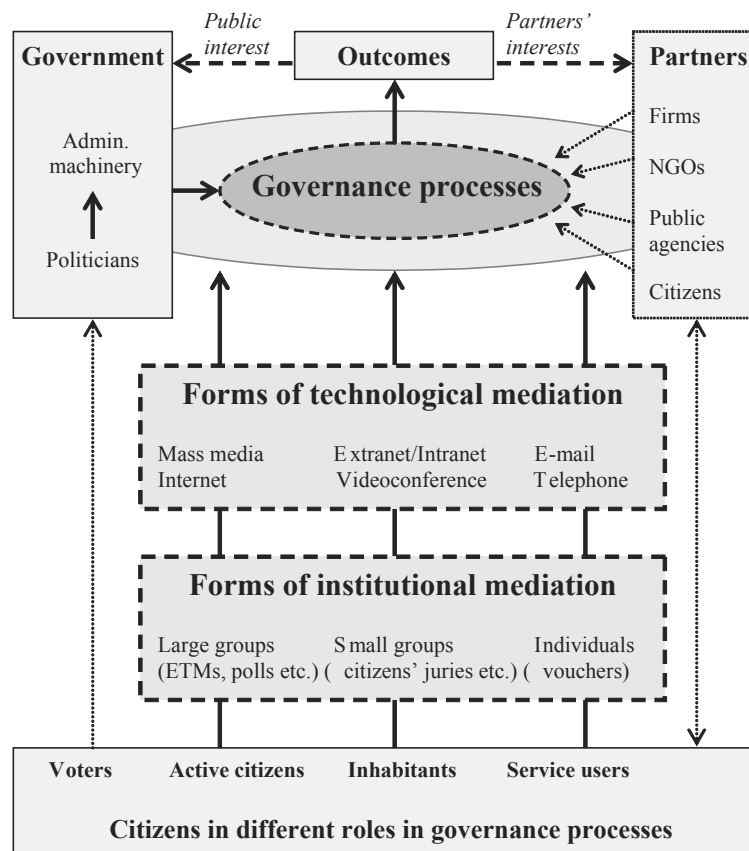
e-governance requires both institutional and technological mediation of civic and community interests in formal governance processes, as illustrated in Figure 1.

One of the expected strengths of citizen-centered democratic e-governance is its ability to combine a discursive public sphere with the decision-making sphere, and thus to eliminate hierarchical relations which characterize the contemporary representative systems of government.

METHODS OF DEMOCRATIC E-GOVERNANCE

There is nothing inherently "democratic" in governance. It can be and historically has been performed in various ways that cannot be called democratic. In the history of the institution of community governance the early modern times represent the era of elite control that since the 19th century began to transform into a conventional democratic mold having expression in the form of civic rights and representative system of government. This was followed by the rise of professionalism and managerialism in the 20th century.

Figure 1. Aspects of democratic e-governance (cf. Anttiroiko, 2004, p. 40)



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