

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-1990s, 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 1990s due to the gradual erosion of the hierarchical, mainly state-centric, bases of political power. Among the core topics has been 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. Also, after the Second World War, and the 1980s in particular, international organizations and regional institutions started to gain more power in the international arena (Pierre, 2000, p. 1). Another widely discussed aspect of public governance relates to the functioning and ways of working of public-sector organizations. In fact, this theme has dominated much of the recent discourse around governance. In all, 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 governance. One important governance agenda-setter was the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Public Management Committee (PUMA), which carried out work on this topic during the first half of the 1990s, 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 (Walsh, 1995). After a gradual widening of these NPM perspectives, some people have referred to this area as new governance or new public governance. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that new governance attempts to widen the horizons inherited from the original market-oriented NPM doctrine.

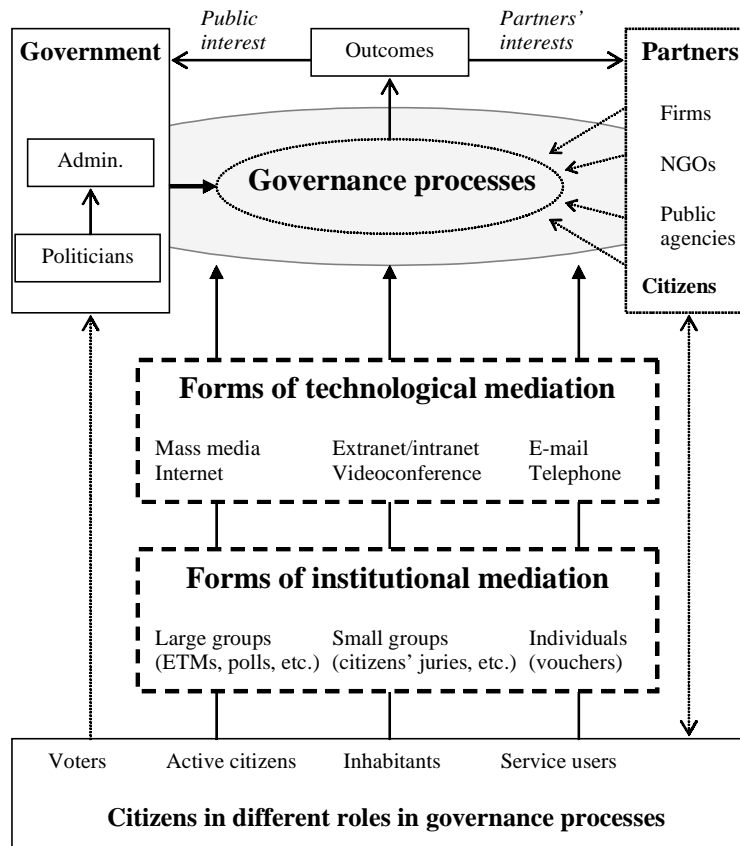
As presented above, contemporary understanding and use of the concept of governance have their roots in the changing role of the state and in a managerialist view of the operations of public organizations. These two discourses have been challenged by another approach that could be called democratic governance. 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. *Government* refers to the institutions and agents that perform the governmental functions, i.e., 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* as a process concept refers to the new modes and manners of governing within policy networks and partnership-based relations (Stoker, 1998, p. 17; Jessop, 1998, pp. 30–31; see also Kooiman, 1993). In spite of the common root of these two terms, they should not be used as synonyms. The role of government in public governance may vary considerably, with two basic models being state-centric and society-centric models of governance (Pierre & Peters, 2000, p. 29).

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

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



informal types of interaction and institutional arrangements in the policy-making, development, and service processes to pursue collective interest (Anttiroiko, 2004, p. 28).

One essential aspect of recent discussions about governance is to identify how to maintain the “steering” role of political–administrative institutions despite the internal and external challenges to them. The other element causing one of the core dilemmas of governance is the tension between public and private interests, which, in turn, pose a challenge to the democratic control of public governance.

E-TRANSFORMATION IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

E-Transformation in governance processes refers to the fact that the information society development profoundly affects the relationships of different actors, forms and channels of communication and interaction, and the entire fabric of network and partnership relations. The transformational aspect of governance leads us back to the issue

of the information society, which forms a background for understanding a wider transformative nature of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The introduction of ICTs in the public sector in the 1960s 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 started to change dramatically in the 1990s. At the core of this revolution was the Internet (Seneviratne, 1999, pp. 44–45). Along with this new wave, the democratic potential of ICTs became a global issue.

Since the 1990s, a need for reconstruction of technology along more democratic lines has become apparent. New ICTs have the potential to restructure government and to strengthen democracy, and to create a closer relationship between public administration and citizens, in particular (Pardo, 2002, p. 95; see also Becker & Slaton, 2000). It has even been said that new ICTs applied by government contribute to the emergence of a different type of governance, i.e., more “direct” government, as concluded by Pardo (2002, pp. 90–91).

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