

Chapter 7

Re-Territorialising Governance and the State: Exploring Advancements in Property Taxation Systems Databases in Karnataka, India

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ABSTRACT

Attracted by the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), political actors across the world have adopted computer-based systems for use in government as a means of reforming inefficiencies in public administration. This book chapter critically examines the convergent use of the new digital technologies and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) within the reform of government administration, through the in-depth examination of a central case study focused around a collaboration between the government of the Indian state of Karnataka and the non-profit eGovernments Foundation, from 2002 to 2006; a partnership which sought to reform existing methods of property taxation via the establishment of an online platform-system across the municipalities of 56 towns and cities within the state. The research analyses prevailing actor behaviour and interactions, their impact on the interplay of local contingencies and external influences shaping project implementation, and the disjunctions in these relationships which inhibit the effective exploitation of ICTs within the given context.

INTRODUCTION

This book chapter critically examines the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in governmental reform processes for political, economic, and social development. Over the course of the last two decades, globalisation and a burgeoning growth in Information Technology have been rapidly dismantling traditional barriers to trade, travel, and communication; and ICTs are seen, today, to possess the potential to change government institutions and their fundamental mechanisms of service

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delivery, together with the capacity to bring about transformations within existing relationships between governments and citizens. When considered historically, developments in communication technologies have resulted in changes to the manner in which governments function, altering existing administrative processes and challenging public agencies to find new ways in which to communicate and interact with their citizens. This observation has held particularly true for the new, digital information and communication technologies; whose rapid, global proliferation has enabled the electronic production, transmission, processing, communication, and consumption of increasingly vast quantities of information.

In consequence, although the idea of a communications network spanning the globe is not new, development actors across the world, attracted by the ‘hype and hope’ of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), have, more recently, adopted computer-based systems and related digital platforms for strategic use in government as a means reforming the inefficiencies inherent within public service provision. Much has been written about e-governance from within a growing stream of scholarly and practitioner literature on ICT-for-development, generating countervailing perspectives wherein optimistic, technocratic approaches are countered by far more sceptical standpoints on technological innovation. Although a number of these electronic government or ‘e-government’ projects have achieved significant results; evidence within the literature and from the field indicates that despite the reported success stories, the rate of project failure remains particularly high.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This book chapter critically examines the role that the convergent use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) plays in the reform of government administration through the in-depth examination of a central, case study-focused enquiry concentrating on a collaboration formed between the government of the Indian state of Karnataka and the non-profit, private sector-based eGovernments Foundation from 2002 to 2006; a partnership which sought to reform existing methods of property tax collection via the establishment of an online collection and payments system across the municipalities of 56 towns and cities within the state territory.

In recognising the need to turn property tax into a viable revenue instrument that delivers high tax yields without compromising on citizen acceptance, the eGovernments Foundation, on contract with the Directorate of Municipal Administration (State Government of Karnataka), developed and rolled-out an innovative, open-source-based software platform; aimed at digitising property tax records, and at cartographically mapping the impact of tax-related administrative processes, to track compliance and to check and curtail tax evasion. The research advanced herein, therefore, engages with the political circumstances and psychological contexts circumscribing the strategic development, adoption, and use of ICTs within the process of government; through the in-depth examination of a central research case study concerned with the use, and the impact, of the Internet and Internet-related technologies on municipal government operations within a developing world context.

In particular, the research analyses actor behaviour, motivations, and interactions surrounding the conception and maintenance of e-government software platforms; thereby facilitating societal and democratic transformations. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of the ‘Ecology of Games’ and the ‘Design-Actuality Gaps’ model, both of which recognise the importance of a multitude of diverse motives and individualistic behaviour as key factors influencing organisational reform and institutional change, this research chapter contributes not just to an understanding of the role of ICTs in Indian public

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