Chapter IV
Assessing Local Readiness for City E-Governance in Europe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter shares experience on aspects related to the methodology and modeling of a framework of City E-Governance Readiness. We discuss Europe's progress in this domain using an "e-readiness" assessment methodology: the Integrated City E-Governance Policy Model of the IntelCities Research Project (2004-2007). Practices and trends in 12 European cities are analyzed, drawing on the results of a comprehensive digital city governance survey. A set of propositions are explored about the future of city e-governance. This chapter suggests that urban governments need to refine their most relevant definition of "e-governance readiness" and the underlying goals and assumptions which shape e-governance outcomes. Cities also need to adapt their approaches strategically and in the light of the increasing demand for "good governance" in an increasingly complex and networked urban knowledge society.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, "governance" has emerged as a guiding principle of modern European democracies. In the public sector domain, it has been generally referred to as a system of rules, processes and behaviors that affect the way in which government powers are exercised on different levels, particularly as regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence (Barzelay, 2001; Blanke & Lopez-Clarosa, 2004; European Commission, 2003; Harding, 1998; Kolsaker, 2007; McNeil, et al., 2003; OECD 2003a,b,c; Pierre, 1999; Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 2000; Tat-Kei Ho, 2002; Timmers, 2004). The latter constructs are in fact the main principles of "good governance", the urban projection of which is known to lead to the more sustainable city (Castells & Hall, Eds., 1994; European Commission 2002; Van Den Berg & Van Winden, 2002). In the pursuit of the "sustainable city" in the electronic age, a recent IntelCities Integrated Project[1] developed the notion

of "city e-governance" that is principally viewed as "good governance" in which urban government uses advanced Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to exercise its powers given by the citizens based on a new organization and relationships with the stakeholders and the local community, towards achieving common urban development goals (Paskaleva-Shapira, 2005; Van Der Meer & Van Winden, 2003). This approach is radically different from other existing approaches to local e-governance. It emphasizes the broader urban aspects of ICT adoption in city governing and provides for integrated development and strategic policy-making.

During 2004-2007, the IntelCities Project brought together eighteen cities, twenty ICT companies and thirty three research groups from Europe to pool advanced knowledge and experience of electronic government, urban planning and knowledge systems and citizens participation and create a new and innovative interoperable e-government platform and services to meet the needs of both residents and businesses. To assist the architecture, evaluation and implementation of the Integrated Open System City Platform (e-City Platform), the City e-Governance Framework was developed as a novel approach to urban policy-making in the electronic age. An integrated system of policies and actions was designed to establish the basis for the necessary transformation in urban e-governance (Paskaleva-Shapira, 2005).

But, as the study has shown, the latter can be seriously hindered if initiatives are disjointed and uncoordinated by an overall framework and strategy. Although many urban governments are creating variety of electronic services and the debate on how ICT are changing our cities is in the same way growing, the work on city e-governance and its assessment of readiness remains strikingly poor. Some crucial issues of framework development are barely discussed in the literature and guidance for implementation is missing. So with this chapter, we intend to contribute to this debate by conceptualizing a framework that could guide the preparedness of the City toward an e-governance model. This emphasis fits in the recent strands of technology research in social sciences that focus on the context-dependency of the uptake of technologies (Van Der Meer & Van Winden, 2003). In our approach, we move away from the predominantly ICT-focused idea of city e-readiness, but instead stress complexity and integrated approach of e-governance on the local level. Our starting point is that, for a number of reasons, in cities the ICT adoption and application is embedded in the specific economic, institutional, social and spatial structures and processes. What is more, and as Zimmermann (2005) suggest too, in the wake of resolving complex problems by means of holistic approaches and integrated management and policies, complex strategies, nurtured with local knowledge and participation are urgently required. Accordingly, we chose this "integrated approach"[2] to developing a city e-governance readiness framework to analyze Europe's recent progress in this domain. To reveal this complexity and cohesiveness, in the first part of the chapter we preset a conceptual framework that helps us to unravel the local aspects of e-governance readiness. We introduce the concept of "city e-governance" to describe local policies and the role of government and the various stakeholders in it. We make a distinction between five key policy dimensions of city e-governance: general framework and conditions, e-services and ICT advance, government modernization, stakeholder participation, and policy innovation. We suggest a hypothesis on the interaction between the five dimensions as engine for the dynamics of the urban e-governance. We also pin point other urban policies that may influence these dynamics. The second part of the chapter is about actual city e-governance policies and practice in European cities. We illustrate this with a comparative analysis of a twelve city survey study from eight countries in Europe, representing a diversity of political, socio-economic and cultural conditions. The chapter is organized as follows: In section 2,