Chapter IX
E–Government in Slovene Municipalities:
Analysing Supply, Demand and its Effects

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, 3 main aspects of municipal e-government in Slovenia are investigated thoroughly: supply, demand, and the view of municipal officials. After the review of studies in the field, the results of 3 empirical studies are presented. While the supply-side aspect of municipal e-government has been investigated within several studies, the view of external (citizens) and internal (municipal officials) users of municipal e-government have been rather neglected in the past, and the same is true for effects measured in this field. This chapter fills these gaps. The results revealed that municipal Web supply is poor, which is reflected in citizens' satisfaction as well. Surprisingly, municipal officials are not well aware of possibilities e-government offers to them and to their customers. In addition, they believe that positive effects brought about the introduction of e-government are not significant, while among negative effects larger range of tasks, heavier workload, and increased complexity of tasks are stressed. At the end of the chapter key findings are summarized.

INTRODUCTION

For quite some years development of e-government is high on the list of political priorities in many countries; however this does not mean that all segments of the public administration and all tiers of the state progress with the same speed and success. In many countries local government receives more attention and is better developed in this field as it is the case with federal or central state. In Slovenia the situation is the opposite. According to several studies, e-government in Slovenia is relatively well developed but these findings are by en large related to the e-services provided by the state, however the same cannot be argued in general for e-services provided by the local level administration.

Slovenia is a small country; its population is about two million, independent since 1991 when former Yugoslavia fell apart. Since then, Slovenia has a two-tier administrative system, which received its current shape in 1994 when Slovenian Parliament passed the Law on Local self- government on the basis of which the 65 former (still Yugoslav) communes were transformed according to the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Practically all functions of the state at the local level, most typically issuing personal documents and all kinds of permits, were transferred on the new established 65 administrative units while all functions related to the local affairs and life were transferred on the 210 new shaped municipalities. Most of municipalities (52 %) are rather small with less than 5000 residents (GOLSGRP, 2007) and according to the law they are autonomous in relation to the state level administration.

This legal and political autonomy of municipalities is probably also the main reason for the differences in the level and speed of development between them as well as between the state and local self-government in many fields including e-government. Namely since the year 2000 Slovenian governments passed several strategic documents concerning development of e-government which apparently speeded up the process of development of public e-services provided by the state administration. In particular in line with the strategic documents on development of e-government put in force by the government in 2001 and 2006 respectively, a great number of e-government projects was started which contributed to the very fast development of public e-services for citizens and business in practically all ministries and governmental agencies. According to the latest Capgemini measurements carried out in 2007 (Capgemini, 2007), Slovenia took second place concerning the level of development of on-line public services. However, this relatively fast progress of the state administration in implementing e-government bypassed in many ways the local level self-governments, i.e. municipalities.

By most indicators Slovene municipalities do not participate in this successful story, even though Slovenian internet users, for example, visit their municipalities' websites most often (62%), while the state e-government portal is visited less frequently (31%) (Vehovar and Zupanič, 2006). We suppose that there are several reasons for this situation. On the one hand unified strategic documents mentioned above, which seems to have played an important role at the state administration were not enforced at the local level, hence there was no unified approach and platform on which municipalities would be able to build their e-government systems and solutions. On the other hand, great diversity in the size and development level of newly established municipalities additionally decreased their developing capacity.

At the Institute for Informatization of Administration, University of Ljubljana we have been investigating the state of e-government in Slovene municipalities since 2001 on a yearly basis. However the most thorough research has been made during the years 2005-2006 as part of a much wider study "Measuring e-government user satisfaction" (see Vintar et al., 2006). Due to the limited space we will try to focus in this

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