Chapter 19

E–Government in a Federal State:
The Case of the Introduction of E–Government in Germany in the Early 2000s

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ABSTRACT

After reluctance in the 1990s, Germany finally, in the early 2000s, actively began to pursue the modernization of its administration through online government. The federal initiative "Bund online 2005" with an investment volume of 800 million Euro was one of the largest government online projects worldwide. Other initiatives, like BayernOnline in the economically most dynamic German state, Bavaria, started on the regional level. Nevertheless, in international studies Germany regularly scored moderately in "e-readiness." The focus on services for citizens and the neglect of business services, especially on the federal level, is one of the reasons. A second reason is a lack of modernization, when bureaucratic procedures are merely digitalized instead of using digitalization for reform. A third challenge is the complicated interaction of various levels of government in a federal state. This chapter first gives a short overview over e-government initiatives and results in Germany. Afterwards, the e-government initiative of Bavaria, "BayernOnline" is presented. Then, the problems of e-government in Germany (neglect of e-government options for business, lack of modernization, compatibility and competition in a federal state) are discussed, followed by a discussion of e-government as one instrument to contribute to a solution of economic problems in Germany. Finally, a view ex-post looks at the results of the "Bund online 2005" initiative and how it helped to overcome bureaucratic inertia in Germany. E-federalism, the interplay of the introduction of e-government on different (federal, regional and local) levels of government certainly needs a balance of competition and cooperation, but should not be seen as a problem for the introduction of e-government per se, but rather as a chance for fruitful competition for the best concepts of e-government.

Table 1. The four steps of e-government. Source: Seliger (2002)

Steps towards e-government	Example
One-way communication	Posting of information on the internet
Two-way communication	Queries and Search functions, e-mail communication
Exchange of value and sensitive data	Payment of taxes and fees, renewal of licenses
Integration of e-government services	Life-event portals for citizens, e.g. for house construction

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of e-government has often been measured along more technical lines. However, the more e-government develops also in those countries, which initially were rather reluctant for this approach, like the continental European states like Germany, it becomes more clear that the problems of e-government are not only technical, but involve economic, political and sociological, even ethical considerations. Moreover, the prior characteristics and organisational features of a state (central or decentralized and federal, with a large bureaucracy or a small one, welfare state or liberal state) is important for the success of e-government approaches. In this chapter, the challenges of e-government in a federal, highly regulated continental European state, namely Germany, are considered. Germany for a long time in international rankings lagged behind many other European nations, though being basically a technologically advanced nation. Only in the early 2000s this has changed, when a federal, more centralized approach to e-government was taken. Interestingly enough, the German example is often disregarded exactly because of its federal approach, where e-government solutions are mainly offered on the regional and local level and no single governmental agency or source is implementing these solutions (see Lenk 1998, p. 125).

In purely technical terms, typically the way to e-government includes four steps, as can be seen from Table 1. The first step is one-way-communication, the use of web-sites for posting government information. The second step is two-way-communication, allowing certain forms of communication between the government and users, for example the formulation of queries. The third step towards e-government is the exchange of value and sensitive information through the Internet, for example the payment of taxes and fees, the renewal of licences etc.. The last step is the offer of an integrated government service portal, which does not any more organize web-sites around current administrative features, but rather organizes web-sites around ‚life events‘, for example housing construction, schooling etc. (for a discussion see Seliger 2002). Also, the benchmarking of e-government using often technical indicators, for example in measuring service maturity and service delivery. ‘E-readiness‘, another important benchmark, measures the capacity to participate in a networked world, for example in the McConnell International study of 2001, which measured in 53 countries the criteria of connectivity, e-leadership, information security, human capital and the e-business climate (McConnell International 2001).

While e-infrastructure and –readiness measure the technical side of e-government, an important question is the focus of e-government. In Germany, the focus was long time on the possibilities of increased participation of citizens (e-democracy) and partly, in some regions, on the modernization of administration, again mainly for the use of citizens. However, the importance of e-government for business, especially in the crucial field of public procurement, which in the economies with a large share of the state in GDP like Germany is highly important, had been rather neglected.

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