

Towards Citizen-Centered Local e-Government — The Case of the City of Tampere

Ari-Veikko Anttiroiko
University of Tampere, Finland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The city of Tampere is the third largest in Finland with some 200,000 inhabitants. It is one of the leading middle-sized high-tech cities in Europe. It started to commit itself to e-government in the early 1990s, even though the development process actually took off in the wake of the Internet revolution of the mid-1990s. This case description discusses how this process actually evolved. Special emphasis is placed on what means the city used in order to provide citizens with access to electronic information and services, and what kind of services it preferred when building its e-service palette from 1995 to 2002.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Tampere — A Middle-Sized Industrial City

The city of Tampere is situated in Finland in Northern Europe. Like the other Nordic welfare states, Finland has a strong public sector with a decentralized structure. This is why the role of local government is essential to the functioning of the society.

Tampere is the third largest city in Finland with some 200,000 inhabitants. It is an inland city and the center of Tampere Region, which is one of the most dynamic regions in Finland, the place where, for example, Nokia Corporation was born.

City Government

In the Finnish system of local government, collective decision-making authority at a local level is vested in the city council. There are 67 members in the Council of the City of Tampere elected to serve for four years at a time. The City Board, with 11 members, wields the highest executive power. It represents the city and is responsible for its overall development, urban planning, and financial management. In the political structure of the city, there are also committees and boards responsible for key services, such as social welfare and health care, education, culture and recreation, technical services, and environment.

The *line organization* of the city is led by a City Manager, Mr. Jarmo Rantanen, the CEO in the city administration. The organization of the city administration follows a conventional functional division of labor. There are about 12,000 permanent employees in the city government.

Organization of E-Government Activities

Major strategic decisions concerning e-government are made by the City Council, whereas related executive functions are the responsibility of the City Board. As to administrative, preparatory, and development functions, the actual work is done by administrative machinery within the line organization, and occasionally with the help of project organizations and partnerships. Since the early 1990s the basic line was and still is that e-government activities are seen as much as possible as a part of the everyday work and development of administration.

The general administrative responsibility in the e-government activities of the city rests with the *Communications Unit*, which implies that in the case of Tampere, the communications and content aspects are emphasized more than the technology side in managing e-government. The Management Group for Information Management has a rather low profile, as it mainly follows the e-government development and ties online services to back-office operations. The Information Technology Center takes care of the implementation of certain solutions when requested by the organs of the city government. Lastly, the production and maintenance of content for e-government applications are decentralized to a large extent to service sectors and units. Both general IT management and Internet operations are based on in-house arrangements.

SETTING THE CASE

Theoretical Perspectives to Democratic E-Government

Among the first urban theorists to pay attention to the intersection of cities, people, and technology was Manuel Castells, whose *The Informational City* (1989) pioneered social theoretical analyses of the transformation of cities and regions under the impact of a restructuring of the capitalist system and a technological revolution. Since then the literature on theoretical approaches to information society and cities has proliferated (e.g., Graham & Marvin, 1996; Borja & Castells, 1999; Downey & McGuigan, 1999). One of the core messages in this strand of urban studies was the need to strengthen local authorities' connections, both to global networks and to local civil society, in order to

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