Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management
Volume 7 Issue 2 / May 2012

DEVELOPING E-GOVERNMENT FOR BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES WITHIN EUROPEAN UNION

Monica Daniela TEŞU
Bucharest City Hall, Splaiul Independenţei 291-293, Bucharest, Romania
moniedi2003@yahoo.com

Abstract
The aim of this study is to reveal the progress in developing e-government services within the European Union. Currently, the issues of e-government development and political priorities for European public administrations are very much debated. First, some reasons for developing e-government services in the European Union are disclosed, and second, the recent evolutions of e-government services in Romania are analyzed. The findings of this study reveal that developments over the last years have brought a significant step closer to the achievement of a good sophistication stage and online availability of public services. Furthermore, there is a need for taking a series of measures in order to develop the e-government services, from which the citizens, the businesses and the public institutions could benefit.
Keywords: E-government, Public administration, Public services, Online sophistication, Full online availability.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of electronic public services enters nowadays in a new phase, which is mostly determined by reengineering of existing processes of public government. Public sector by its nature, based on information and communications, is ideal for international increase of efficiency and quality. Public government disappointment is triggered by bureaucracy, information abuse for internal purposes, increasing cost of transactions and mostly because of lack of responsibility for the client. Especially in European countries the problem of ever-growing public sector is present, making the concept of the efficient e-government even more important (Spremic and Brzica, 2008, Popescu, 2009).

E-government is about using the tools and systems made possible by information and communication technologies to provide better public services to citizens and businesses. These technologies are already widely used by government bodies, just as in private enterprises, but e-government involves much more than just the tools. Effective e-government also involves rethinking organisations and processes, and changing behaviour so that public services are delivered more efficiently to the people who need to use them (Colesca and Alpopi, 2010). Implemented well, e-government enables all citizens, enterprises and organisations to carry out their business with government more easily, more quickly and at lower cost (European Commission, n.d.).

Overall, these days, the role of government in society is changing towards increasingly involving the citizen as a participant that is involved in the policy process and as a user in the design and delivery of public services. The main trend in e-government services is to deliver personalised services that respond to users' needs (Dinu, 2009). Whereas historically the emphasis of e-government was on efficiency (government doing 'more for less') it evolved to include the promise of effectiveness (in which a balance needed to be found between collective needs and individual demands). Nowadays emphasis moves towards involving citizens and businesses, and providing (personalised) services (efficient and effective) in an open and transparent way, while guarding the private interests of different stakeholders (groups and individuals). In such a partnership, accountability becomes even more important and explicit (Botterman et al., 2010, p. 16).

2. REASONS FOR DEVELOPING E-GOVERNMENT SERVICES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Some time ago e-government was a bold experiment, but now it is seen as an important tool for public sector transformation. The reason for this may be found in the fact that e-government has progressed to the point where it is now a force for effective governance and citizen participation, both at national and local levels (United Nations, 2010). Generally speaking, e-government refers to the intensive use of information and communication technologies in providing the citizens an improved access to information related to public administrations as well as in providing them outstanding service quality (Spremic and Brzica, 2008, p. 260).

The aim in the European Union is that by 2015 European public administrations to be "recognised for being open, flexible and collaborative in their relations with citizens and businesses. They use e-government to increase their efficiency and effectiveness and to constantly improve public services in a way that caters for user's different needs and maximises public value, thus supporting the transition of Europe to a leading knowledge-based economy" (European Commnission, 2010, p. 4). The Malmö Declaration sets out 4 political priorities for all European public administrations:

- Citizens and businesses are empowered by e-government services designed around users' needs and developed in collaboration with third parties, as well as by increased access to public information, strengthened transparency and effective means for involvement of stakeholders in the policy process.
- Mobility in the Single Market is reinforced by seamless e-government services for the setting up and running of a business and for studying, working, residing and retiring anywhere in the European Union.

Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management
Volume 7 Issue 2 / May 2012

- Efficiency and effectiveness is enabled by a constant effort to use e-government to reduce the administrative burden, improve organisational processes and promote a sustainable low-carbon economy.
- The implementation of the policy priorities is made possible by creating the appropriate key enablers and by establishing the necessary legal and technical preconditions (European Commnission, 2010, p. 4).

The types of electronic services vary greatly in public sector. It is natural to expect that services are integrated into processes and information systems of the organization that provides them. However, in public sector organizations it is common that departments and units provide services to citizens rather independently. Departments have different processes and information systems which are not connected. In many cases information is stored in separate databases. This may be enough when services are oriented to information delivery between the public administration and the citizens. For example, providing downloadable documents and forms is simply offering documents in electronic format and making them accessible through the internet (Sirkemaa, 2010, pp. 768-769).

Web portals can be considered as a primary vehicle for facilitating e-government initiatives. Vast majority of person-to-person interactions among individuals and public administration can be eliminated or, better yet, reallocated to on-line services, thus eliminating unnecessary queuing, hence increasing public administration efficiency. Processing forms, registrations, issuing various permits are just few of the benefits for the citizens (Simurina et al., 2008, p. 229).

True e-services need to be developed around user needs. Transferring existing papers, files and information from different agencies into web, and placing some hyperlinks between them is not enough. The services should be integrated, enhance self-service and trust so that users see the added value of electronic services. Technologically, users should be able to complete most of their transactions online. Easy-to-use, robust and trustworthy services are needed so that more users start using e-services in public sector (Sirkemaa, 2010, pp. 768).

E-government as such is seen as a “good” thing by both businesses and citizens. Whereas there is certainly room for improvement, in particular in serving citizens and businesses even better, individually, there is a strong appreciation of what e-government brings in terms of better access to services, more clarity on services (i.e. what is exactly available, to whom, and how) and even improvement of services as thinking about new ways of delivery leads to rethinking needs of citizens and merits for citizens and society (Botterman et al., 2010, p. 73).

The availability of innovative technologies such as social networks has increased the expectations of citizens in terms of responsiveness when accessing all kinds of services online. However, cross-border e-government services are few and, even where e-government services are offered, the majority of EU citizens are reluctant to use them (European Commission, 2010, p. 3).

Even though the steps of getting to the fully functional e-government solutions make a lot of sense, it should be noted that the dominant culture of respective countries may impede this process in a very peculiar way. Although there may be a law on electronic signature and this method can be used safely and in the same manner as officially signed and stamped document, users of such document may still want physically "stamped and signed" document. Furthermore, it may be required in formal proceedings as credit application and alike, especially dealings with sensitive legal issues as ownership and registering ownership with respective institutions. Thus, it may be considered useless in formal proceeding even though electronic documents may be used (Simurina et al., 2008, p. 224).

There is clearly a need to move towards a more open model of design, production and delivery of online services, taking advantage of the possibility offered by collaboration between citizens, entrepreneurs and civil society. The combination of new technologies, open specifications, innovative architectures and the availability of public sector information can deliver greater value to citizens with fewer resources (European Commission, 2010, p. 3). There is an almost infinite potential in development of electronic services in the public sector. Typically, services that are provided through the internet are connected to sharing information. Public sector services are mostly connected to information – and internet is a very efficient way to gather and share it (Sirkemaa, 2010, pp. 768).

A number of technical and legal pre-conditions need to be put in place to enable the implementation of the actions that will enhance e-government services in Europe. These include the promotion of interoperability across borders, which would allow - among others - sharing of information, deployments of one-stop-shop approaches, Europe wide use of (national) electronic identity solutions and payment schemes. Interoperability is supported through open specifications and the development of key enablers such as electronic identity management and stimulation of innovation in e-government (European Commnission, 2010, p. 13).

Users of online services want to use services that provide them with a full case-handling in an efficient and effective way, making use of different channels in their own proximity. The online services developed by the private sector deploy the different Web 2.0 tools that are available (and are being constantly developed) in order to provide the users with the kind of value-added experience that they

Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management
Volume 7 Issue 2 / May 2012

are seeking. In fact, private sector initiatives (e.g. Google or Facebook) function based on a sense of nearness to, or fit with, the user's needs (Deloitte, 2010, p. 22).

3. RECENT EVOLUTIONS OF E-GOVERNMENT SERVICES IN ROMANIA

The progress of e-government services delivery can be measured using two core indicators: "online sophistication" and "full online availability" of public services, which are assessed against the five-stage maturity model in place since 2001 (Capgemini et al., 2010, p. 244). This model reflects how businesses and citizens can interact with public authorities. Governments' service delivery processes are described according to the following stages:

(i) Information.
(ii) One-way interaction.
(iii) Two-way interaction.
(iv) Transaction.
(v) Targetisation.

The fourth and fifth stages can be referred to as "full online availability". The unit of analysis for the "online sophistication" and "full online availability" indicators are the websites of e-government service providers in the 32 benchmarked countries whereby services can be provided by multiservice (e.g. portal) or by specialised provider websites. These websites are assessed against the five-stage maturity model, i.e. examining whether the sites are informational, allow for one or two-way interaction, are transactional or proactively provide certain services. The survey covers the provision of 12 citizen services and 8 business services (Capgemini et al., 2010, p. 245) that are revealed in table 1.

Typically a public service for citizens would be for example a declaration, notification of assessment of income taxes, or job search services offered by labour offices. A public service for businesses would be for instance social contribution for employees, declaration and notification of corporate tax, registration of a new company, or public procurement.

From a citizen's perspective, online interaction with public authorities typically takes the form of obtaining information from public authorities' websites, downloading official forms or sending filled in forms. On the other hand, online public services for businesses for interacting with public authorities are either used for obtaining information, obtaining forms, returning filled in forms full electronic case handling, or submitting a proposal in an electronic tender system (e-procurement). Commonly, online public services are therefore differentiated into information services (e.g. obtaining information from

authorities' websites), communication services (e.g. making an appointment online with a practitioner) and transaction services (e.g. sending filled in forms) (Empirica, 2006, pp.14-15).

TABLE 1 - THE BASIC 20 PUBLIC SERVICES

No.	Public services
A.	**Citizen services**
1.	Income taxes
2.	Job search services
3.	Social security benefits • Unemployment benefits • Child allowances • Medical costs • Student grants
4.	Personal documents • Passport • Driver's license
5.	Car registration
6.	Application for a building permission
7.	Declaration to the police
8.	Public libraries (catalogues, search tools)
9.	(Birth and marriage) Certificates
10.	Enrolment in higher education
11.	Announcement of moving
12.	Health-related services
B.	**Business services**
1.	Social contribution for employees
2.	Corporate tax
3.	VAT
4.	Registration of a new company
5.	Submission of data to statistical offices
6.	Customs declaration
7.	Environment-related permits
8.	Public procurement

Some figures (information society indicators) could describe the Romanian general developments, relevant as e-government developments prerequisites. These information society indicators in Romania as compared to EU27 are revealed in table 2.

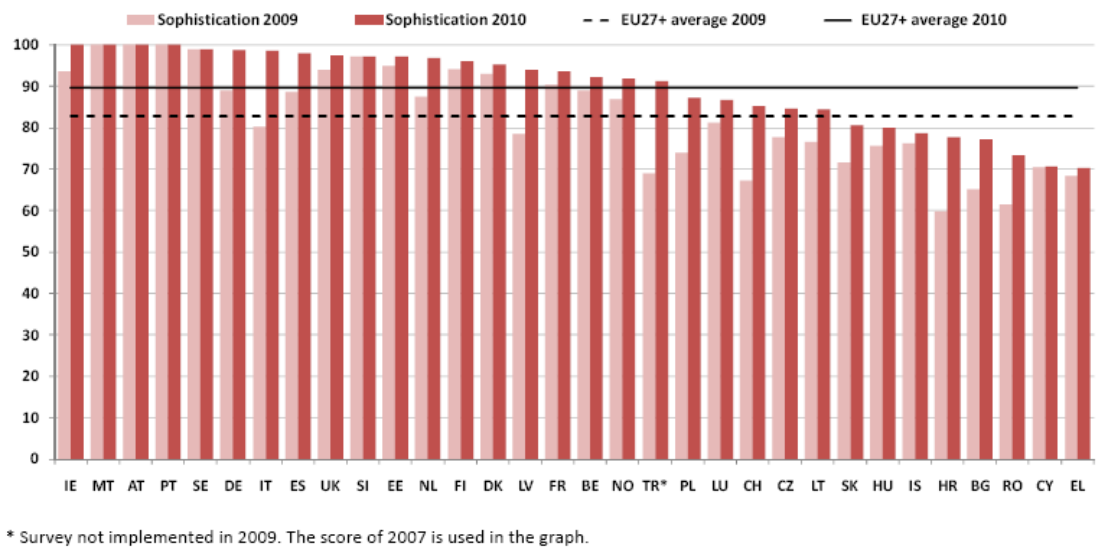
TABLE 2- INFORMATION SOCIETY INDICATORS

No.	Indicators	Romania	EU27
1.	Overall ICT expenditure (as % of GDP)	1.1	2.4
2.	% of households with broadband connection	23	61
3.	% of enterprises with broadband	52	86
4.	E-government usage by individuals (%)	8	41
5.	E-government usage by enterprises (%)	50	75

Source: Capgemini et al., 2010, p. 207

The online sophistication of public services in Romania reaches 73%, while the average in the EU27+ is 90% in 2010 (figure 1).

Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management
Volume 7 Issue 2 / May 2012



* Survey not implemented in 2009. The score of 2007 is used in the graph.

FIGURE 1 – ONLINE SOPHISTICATION OF SERVICES RANKING 2009-2010, IN %
Source: Capgemini et al., 2010, p. 7

As figure 2 reveals, in Romania, the online sophistication for business services stands at 89% (compared to 94% for the EU27+) and online sophistication for citizen services is also at 63% (compared to 87% for the EU27+) (Capgemini et al., 2010, p. 208).

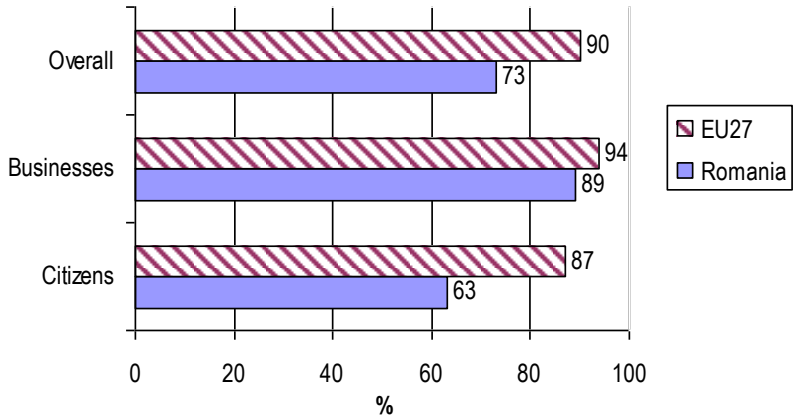


FIGURE 2 – ONLINE SOPHISTICATION OF SERVICES IN ROMANIA AS COMPARED TO EU27
Source: Capgemini et al., 2010, p. 208

As regards the second indicator, with 60%, Romania's full online availability is below the EU average of 82% (figure 3). In the full online availability ranking, Romania now ranks 29th out of the 32 measured countries.

According to Capgemini et al. (2010, p. 207), the best practices in Romania as regards the e-government services are the following:

(1) Romania's National Electronic System (http://www.e-guvernare.ro/).

(2) VPO electronic payment platform (http://www.ghiseul.ro/).

(3) SEI -Romanian IT-based Educational System (http://www.portal.edu.ro/).

(4) Secure Electronic Invoicing Service (http://selis.unipi.gr/selis/main/index.html).

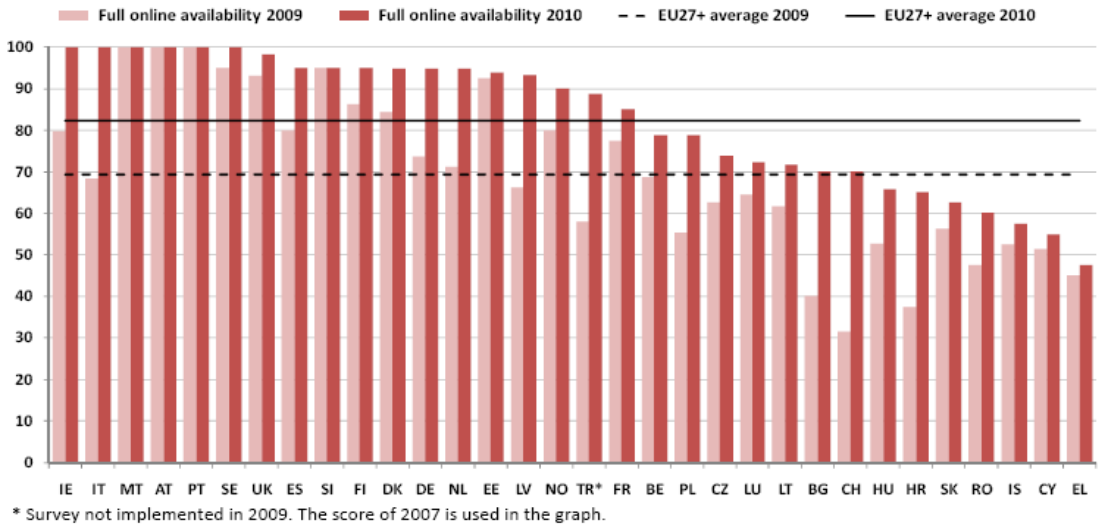


FIGURE 3 – FULL ONLINE AVAILABILITY RANKING 2009-2010, IN %
Source: Capgemini et al., 2010, p. 8

The Romanian electronic system *www.e-guvernare.ro* was conceived as a unique access point to services and information of the central and local public administration. Through the development of this portal the decision makers aim to promote transparency, to increase the administration efficiency by reducing costs and birocracy, to ensure a large permanent accessibility to public information and services, and to prevent and fight corruption by electronic means (Centrul Naţional de Management al Societăţii Informaţionale, n.d.).

The main strategic priorities for Romania in the field of e-government (Capgemini et al., 2010, p. 207) could be:

1. Setting up e-Romania including its e-government strategic component.
2. Modernising public administration.
3. Large scale adoption of IT in relation to the business environment, citizens and public administrations.
4. Improving the competitiveness of ICT, R&D and Innovation sectors.
5. Implementing EU directives relating to public electronic services.

E-government has a number of corresponding points with legal acquis, including privacy, access rights to specific confidential content, public access to public government information and information security.

Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management
Volume 7 Issue 2 / May 2012

The solution of such public government can be seen as an effort to improve management and effectiveness of public services using technological resources (Spremic and Brzica).

The United Nations E-Government Survey 2010 found that citizens are benefiting from more advanced e-service delivery, better access to information, more efficient government management and improved interactions with governments, mainly due to increasing use of information and communications technologies by the public sector. Most countries have published a tremendous amount of information online, many going beyond basic websites to provide national portals that serve as a major starting point for users to connect to government services in different ministries. At the same time, many developing countries need to devote additional energy to transactional services as well as the electronic means of engaging citizens in public consultation and decision-making (United Nations, 2010, p. 59).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study has revealed that developments over the last years have brought a significant step closer to the achievement of a good sophistication stage of online public services. The online sophistication of public services in Romania reaches 73%, while the average in the EU27+ is 90% in 2010. However, with 60%, Romania's full online availability is below the EU average of 82%. The e-government services are key tools for improving urban management and a higher level of e-government services development is needed in order to transform the interactions between public administration and the citizens and businesses.

The e-government can play an important role in Romania's development, which may compensate these delays with good strategic frameworks and state reforms. By developing efficient e-government services it is possible to increase the transparency of various systems in Romania such as justice, public procurement, health, social protection, etc. Nowadays Romania has the opportunity to put into practice the state reform and to build many electronic public services by using already known knowledge, results and experiences of other European countries. Hence the government should take a series of measures in order to develop the e-government services, from which the citizens, businesses and public institutions could benefit.

REFERENCES

Botterman, M., Schindler, H.R. and van Dijk, L.V. (2010). *Study on eGovernment scenarios for 2020 and the preparation of the 2015 Action Plan. Trend Analysis (D3) SMART n° 2009/0069*. Retrieved March 12, 2012, from <http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/studies/completed_studies/docs/smart_2009_0069/trend_analysis.pdf>.

Capgemini, IDC, Rand Europe, Sogeti and DTi (2010). *Digitizing Public Services in Europe: Putting ambition into action, 9th Benchmark Measurement December 2010*. Retrieved March 12, 2012, from <http://www.epractice.eu/files/Digitizing%20Public%20Services%20in%20Europe%20Putting%20ambition%20into%20action%20-%209th%20Benchmark%20Measurement%20-%20December%202010.pdf>.

Centrul Naţional de Management al Societăţii Informaţionale (n.d.. *Sistemul electronic naţional e-guvernare*. Retrieved May 12, 2011, from <http://www.e-guvernare.ro/Default.aspx?LangID=4>.

Colesca, S.E., Alpopi, C. (2010). Quality of electronic government services. A fuzzy analysis, *Quality - Access to Success,* 11 (7-8) , pp. 88-95.

Dinu, V. (2009). Dimensions of quality in services, *Amfiteatru Economic*, 26 (1) , pp. 243-244

Deloitte (2010). *User expectations of a life events approach for designing e-Government services, Final Report, SMART 2009/0075*. Retrieved March 12, 2012, from <http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/docs/studies/smart_2009_0075/life_events-final_reports_final.pdf>.

Empirica (2006). *Benchmarking in a policy perspective. Report no. 4 Public services*, final, Bonn and Brussels: Empirica.

European Commission (2010). *The European eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015, Harnessing ICT to promote smart, sustainable & innovative Government*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2010) 743. Retrieved March 12, 2012, from <http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/action_plan_2011_2015/docs/action_plan_en_act_part1_v2.pdf>.

European Commission (n.d.). *ICT for Government and Public Services*. Retrieved March 12, 2012, from <http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/index_en.htm>.

Popescu, L.G. (2009) From partnership to co-governance in public services through a quality strategic approach :I. the strategic model of the quality cycle, *Quality - Access to Success,* 10 (12) , pp. 42-48.

Simurina, J., Hruska, D. and Markovic, M. (2008). E-Government in Croatia: A Comparative Analysis, *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics*, 5(5), pp. 222-232.

Sirkemaa, S. (2010). *Towards Integrated Electronic Services in Public Sector*, Latest Trends on Computers (Volume II), Athens: WSEAS Press, pp. 766-770.

Spremic, M. and Brzica, H. (2008). Comparative Analysis of e-Government Implementation Models and Progressive Services, *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics*, 5(5), pp. 260-269.

United Nations (2010). *United Nations E-Government Survey 2010. Leveraging E-Government at a Time of Financial and Economic Crisis*, United Nations New York. Retrieved May 12, 2011, from <http://www2.unpan.org/egovkb/documents/2010/E_Gov_2010_Complete.pdf>.

Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management
Volume 7 Issue 2 / May 2012