



E-SERVICES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

- EDITORIAL

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1. Background and Scope

The interest for public e-services is rapidly growing. Government agencies are developing and launching e-services in large proportions. These endeavours are partially governed by international and national programs. The expectations for the 24/7 government and its accompanying e-services seem to be high among different stakeholder groups. There is a great need for research on the introduction of e-services in public administration. The eagerness among decision makers should be counterbalanced by reflective and penetrating research. This involves both conceptual and empirical knowledge development. Research can contribute to direct e-service development into paths favourable to citizens as well as to other stakeholders.

With this as a background we initiated a research workshop that took in place in Borås, Sweden on 31 October 2006. The workshop was labelled “International Workshop on E-Services in Public Administration” (WESPA) and it was co-located with the 4th International ALOIS Conference (Action in Language, Organisations and Information Systems), which took place the days after the WESPA workshop.

In the Call for papers for the WESPA workshop we gave the following list of possible topics:

- The e-service concept
- Policy programs for e-services (international and national agendas)
- E-services at local authorities vs. government agencies
- Intra- organisational vs. inter-organisational e-services
- One-stop government and portals for e-services
- E-services and e-democracy
- Classification models for e-services (e.g. stage models)
- Legal and organisational barriers to e-service development
- E-services and citizen trust
- Public-private partnerships

- Challenges in public e-service development
- E-services and redesign of public administration processes
- E-services and governmental knowledge management
- E-services in relation to street-level bureaucracy
- Identification and authentication in e-services
- E-service benefits for citizens vs. government agencies
- E-services and other channel strategies
- Methods for e-service development
- User interface design of e-services
- Experiences from e-service development
- Evaluation of e-services
- E-services in the light of service theory
- E-services in the light of public administration theory

2. Procedure

Eight papers were selected for presentation at the workshop based on a review round among our international Program Committee (see section 3 below). Full papers were submitted to the workshop and each paper was reviewed by three members of the Program Committee. After the workshop five papers were selected for possible inclusion in this special issue. The selection was mainly based on those papers getting the highest score in the review round prior to the workshop. These five papers were revised by their authors based on comments made at the workshop and after this revision they were submitted to the Special issue. We had now a new review round with two reviewers for each paper. The reviewers in this round can be found in section 3 below. Based on comments and suggestions from reviewers and guest editors, the authors made a final revision of their papers.

Among the papers there are two papers that are authored by the guest editors. The decision to accept these two papers rests on the editor-in-chief of IJPIS, Bo Sundgren.

3. Reviewers

The following scholars were participating as reviewers in the Program Committee of the International Workshop on E-Services in Public Administration in Borås:

- Alessandro Ancarini, Italy
- Linda Dawson, Australia
- Sara Eriksén, Sweden
- Olov Forsgren, Sweden
- Keith Horton, UK
- Ulf Melin, Sweden
- Carl-Erik Moe, Norway
- Diego Navarra, UK
- Björn Niehaves, Germany
- Agneta Ranerup, Sweden
- Maddalena Sorrentino, Italy
- Bo Sundgren, Sweden
- Richard Vidgen, UK
- Helle Zinner Henriksen, Denmark
- Svein Ølnes, Norway

- Olov Östberg, Sweden

For the special issue we have had the following group of reviewers:

Alessandro Ancarini, Italy
Linda Dawson, Australia
Are Vegard Haug, Norway
Marianne Lykke Nielsen, Denmark
Carl Erik Moe, Norway
Björn Niehaves, Germany
Maria Wimmer, Germany
Maddalena Sorrentino, Italy
Svein Ølnes, Norway
Olof Östberg, Sweden

4. Papers in this Special Issue

The first paper is written by Lars Norén and Agneta Ranerup. It focuses on the relationship between the individual and the state which is now more often than previously mediated by public e-services. An emergent phenomenon in this respect is the various forms of devices supporting choice of education that are provided through portals. The question that Norén and Ranerup deal with is how portals, which contain different devices, support choice in educational markets. Two portals run by national public authorities in Sweden concerned with educational issues have been chosen as material for the analysis. A first conclusion drawn in this paper is that the devices integrate a sequence of advanced calculations, which aim to contribute to a choice of education. Secondly, the authors distinguish between a mechanical and a pedagogical character of integration. A third conclusion is that the devices connect the objectives of government authorities with choices in educational markets and are therefore part of public policy implementation. Finally, it is argued that the seemingly simple procedures for calculation might affect individuals' entire lives, a fact which adds an ethical dimension to the design of this kind of public e-services.

The second paper is written by Göran Goldkuhl, who questions in what way a public e-service is a service to citizens. This question has driven a practical inquiry into a planned e-service application for municipal child care. A requirements specification for an e-service application was investigated. The e-service application was found to lack proper information about child care supply options, and rules and regulations concerning the child care. Important changes of social relations between municipality and parents were not communicated. The citizen was mainly seen as an information supplier and not as someone to serve. Goldkuhl's results from this practical inquiry have been abstracted into an evolving practical theory. This practical theory consists of a definition of public e-services and abstracted patterns of e-service actions. The practical inquiry has been informed by practical theories all founded in socio-instrumental pragmatism. As basis for the study, a special elaboration of the concepts of practical inquiry and practical theory is made in this paper.

The third paper is written by Karin Axelsson, Ulf Melin, and Anders Persson. They adopt a communication perspective on forms in public e-services. This perspective emphasizes that the main purpose of such forms is to facilitate communication between citizens and government agencies. The form is perceived as a tool for performing communicative actions. A communication analysis (CA) method, originally developed for systems requirements engineering, is applied on a public

form; i.e. the medical certificate used in connection with a citizen's application for a provisional driving license in Sweden. The CA method consists of a set of questions related to three communicative categories; conditions, actions, and consequences. The CA method is used in order to explore the communicative roles of forms in public e-services. As a result of the communication analysis four multi-functional purposes of citizen and government agency communication are discovered by the authors. These purposes contribute to the understanding and evaluation of forms in public e-services. The communicative roles, and their multi-functional purposes, are important design features to focus in the development of e-services and electronic forms. Besides these findings, another outcome is that the CA method has been tested in an e-government context. The communication perspective, as well as the CA method, contribute with useful insights in this context.

The fourth paper is written by Martin Henkel, Erik Perjons, and Jelena Zdravkovic. They highlight the fact that different domains, such as the health care domain, can benefit from an increased use of e-services. However, factors such as vendor lock-in, the lack of standardized infrastructure and quality criteria can slow down the creation and use of e-services in a domain. To encourage the development of e-services there is both a need for simplicity – to enable new actors to use and provide e-services, and a need for regulation – such as defined standards and quality levels. In this paper the authors present the concept of a service collaboration environment – a sustainable model for e-service evolution that facilitates the maintenance of the balance between simplicity and regulation. The theory of competitive market forces is applied to define a set of service collaboration environment guidelines that aims to enable increased use of e-services by stimulating new service consumers and providers to enter the environment. These guidelines can be applied to drive the evolution of e-services in a business domain.

The fifth and last paper is written by Seppo Sirkemaa. He argues that in public organizations there is a need for providing services electronically through the Internet. However, pressure to do with ever smaller resources is a reality, especially in IS departments of smaller municipalities. The author suggests that cooperative arrangements with other public organizations, external service providers and businesses should be considered since they can be helpful in IS management and development activities. The paper shows that this is also the case in development of e-services. Understanding the needs of users, citizens or clients is also increasingly important in providing successful e-services.