

The Two “G” of the Internet: Globalization and the e-Government

Senior Lect. Gabriela GROSSECK, Ph.D.
West University of Timisoara

This paper explores two major aspects of the role of Internet in Globalization and e-Government. In these areas, Internet has had a special impact, thus contributing to the radical change of the way in which state institutions are organized and function, of the economic activity, and of the way in which citizens work, live and communicate on the whole. The fact that these processes are global can be followed on three major coordinates: geographic, the area of coverage and involvement. We'll also explore the four concepts and paths to be followed in order to obtain a “re-engineering of governing” in the Information Society: e-citizen, e-democracy, e-politics and e-state.

Keywords: *Internet, Globalization, e-Government.*

For ten years we have been living in a new era: the era of the Information Society. This society, based on knowledge and information, was called by Alvin Toffler, the well-known American futurologist, the society of “the third wave” (by contrast to that of “the first wave”, based on agriculture, and to that of “the second wave”, based on industry). A few decades ago, Marshall McLuhan talked about “the global village”. He managed to render through this phrase the fabulous impact that the new information technologies have on our lives. They connect quickly the inhabitants of our planet, compress distances, integrate financial and trade markets, and increase the globalization of production. They also facilitate the emergence of some ‘planetary’ problems which require global approaches such as global warming, protecting drinking water springs, massive illegal migration determined by poverty, inter-ethnic and military conflicts and, last but not least, the internationalization of organized crime (drug traffic, human traffic, gun traffic), and international terrorism practiced by groups endowed with the most sophisticated weapons, etc.

The fact that these processes are global can be followed on three major coordinates (Grădinaru, 2000; Dăianu, 2000/2001), namely:

- **Geographic** - the process is worldwide, but there are differences among regions or countries.

- **The area of coverage** - we are witnessing the change of the traditional economic, military, and administrative activities, as well as of the culture, spare time, and health care into information activities.

- **Involvement** - scientists, industrialists, bankers, politicians, and increasingly common citizens are involved.

Concerning the global expansion, we can observe three main centers: the USA, Europe (the Northern countries which are members of the EU) and the countries from South East Asia (especially Japan). In these areas, the new information and communication technologies have had a special impact, thus contributing to the radical change of the way in which state institutions are organized and function, of the economic activity, and of the way in which citizens work, live and communicate on the whole. The government decision-making factors became aware of the fact that the countries they managed ‘experimented’ a radical change and acted towards the most equitable distribution of the benefits of this Information Society, in order to avoid the birth of *information have* and *information have-nots* groups. This is the greatest danger that can surface in this new type of society: the capitalization and polarization of information.

However, the event that truly revolutionized the way in which the great mass of citizens perceived the Information Society was the *exponential proliferation of the Internet.*

People were thus for the first time aware that PCs are an easy and rapid access gate to universal science and culture, as well as a window towards learning and permanent knowledge. Hence, a first important step was taken towards the very essence of the Information Society, namely the addition of the concept Knowledge Society. Each year new concepts that benefit from the particle 'e' are discovered and launched. From the efforts of the years '95-'96 of introducing the concept of *e-commerce*, we have come in '98-2000 to promote the concepts of *e-business*, *e-learning*, *e-democracy*, *e-library*, *e-government*, etc. Basically, today we can talk about the concept of **e-everything**, which is at the same time revealing and challenging.

However, we mustn't forget that the new technologies also raise worrying questions. Bill Joy, co-founder and head of the research department at Sun Microsystems, shocked the readers of the *Financial Times*¹ by sketching a possible apocalypse, in case the progress made by microbiology, robotics and nanoelectronics wasn't subjected to efficient regulations or to strict control². The fears of the American scientist are shared by some and rejected by others. But they hint at problems such as exercising control in a democratic and ethical society, the relation between private and public life, the citizen's right to protection of privacy, the dangers that the new technologies entail for humankind (including those related to possible 'controlled' or 'provoked' genetic mutations), etc.

*

By using the Internet it is possible to achieve an interactive communication between the citizen and the administration, between the citizen and the governmental bodies (in order to increase the contribution of the citizens to the political life), as well as between public institutions (solving some problems requires cooperation between different ministries, fi-

ancial bodies or other governmental institutions).

Through its specific features, the Internet aids all those involved in the governing process, its implementation being based on: modern communication techniques that the Internet has established: email, Web, chat, etc.; data bases, computers, web servers, local networks (Intranet), which communicate flawlessly, as well as information management applications.

In a modern society like the Information or Knowledge Society, the role of governments needs to be adapted to the changes in the economy. Thus, the governmental process has to be regarded as a business process whose main aim has to be the diversification and improvement of the quality of services for the citizens, as 'clients' of the government. To the same effect, the phrase "reinventing the government" is more and more used. It aims to identify strategies of rethinking the fundamental values of the main governmental services, the radical improvement of the services offered to citizens, reducing the costs and reconsidering the administrative processes and procedures. There are at least four concepts and paths to be followed in order to obtain a "re-engineering of governing" in the Information Society:

▪ **e-democracy**. The Internet offers the opportunity to both extend and consolidate the democratic contribution to governing, as well as to deepen this demonstration of democracy.

▪ **e-citizen**. The talks that are carried out nowadays on e-forums and in the media focus particularly on the new citizen of this Information Society. The influence the Internet has on the development of democracy and of public life has become an important issue. It is difficult to accept today that a government can limit conditions of access to electronic networks, through some forms of censorship (the Internet might entail the risks of unlawful manipulation). At the same time, it strengthens some attitudes and thoughts in favor of a genuine democracy.

▪ **e-politics**. Demonstrations of e-politics are becoming more and more obvious, especially

¹ Although the discovery of the human blueprint is an exceptional one, it is probable that it would not entail great implications (*The Human Blueprint Is Unveiled*, *Financial Times*, June 27th, 2000).

² *Why the Future Does Not Need Us*, *Wired Magazine*, April 2000.

due to the significant increase of on-line election campaigns and of Internet-based forms of organization. These will contribute decisively to the rewriting of the rules of the political competition and of the political lobbying.

▪ **e-state.** In a global world, spurred by the electronic integration of markets and by the growth of economic interdependence, we are witnessing the birth of a “virtual state” (Rosencrance, 2000). Some analysts even talk about the irrelevance of borders. In reality, the increased difficulties in gathering taxes, in spending public money, and in regulating social and economic life, will raise serious questions about the way in which governments will manage to exercise their prerogatives. One of the problems was that by large-scale implementation of the new technologies at government level we might get the same materialized benefits:

- *a better relationship between government and citizens:* offering better services, with greater accessibility, an easier communication and the standardization of interaction means;

- *saving time, reducing bureaucracy and diminishing corruption* at government level;

- *efficiency and reducing public costs* (management expenses);

- *transparency of the governing process* with regard to the way in which public funds are spent;

- *answers to a large number of social problems;*

- *solving public acquisitions faster;*

- *an increased financial discipline:* developing e-business at national level, creating new competitive advantages for Romania, etc.

Under the circumstances, it is obvious that the Information Society state will have different basic responsibilities which will allow it to manage the e-government process and at the same time to meet the challenge of the global integration process. E-government is pioneer work not only for Romania³. It is not

a mere recipe that can be adopted and applied, but it depends on the peculiarity of each country, on its level of development, on the mentality, culture, etc. The transition to e-government will by no means happen overnight; on the contrary, it will be a long and intricate process.

The development of e-business has led to an economy that works non-stop. Thus, companies depend more and more on the technologies which best manage the information placed at the client's disposal. The dynamics of today's global market requires answers, products and prompt services, and the trained consumer asks for more options, high-quality services and fast delivery, at competitive prices. The market has changed, shelves packed with products are no longer representative for it. Products are now displayed on high-resolution touch-screens, available 24/day, 365 days/year. The ‘work hours’ have lost their meaning, the Internet-based economy is permanently creating new challenges for the business field as well as for the government. Still, nowadays, less than 5% of organizations understand what e-business means and how it can be used as a strategic work instrument. Taking up e-business may, in time, lead to constraints and losses. The e-business process must develop according to the needs. The IT systems must be designed in a structural, modular manner which is able to cope with change and development simultaneously. And a strategy, more than just raw technology, is needed in order to achieve this.

The development of e-commerce poses numerous strategic problems in the field of public administration, as well as legislation problems for creating a commerce code which will include e-commerce, intellectual property protection, confidentiality and safety. Furthermore, access problems generated by the telecommunication infrastructure, problems regarding the contents of on-line information and technical standards to ensure the free flow of information without affecting the

³ Still, in 2004, during the World Congress on Information Technology (WITSA, World Information Technology and Services Alliance), Romania received the World Excellency in IT Award for „E-

Government Projects“, for the www.e-guvernare.ro portal.

safety, interoperability, easiness to use or the scalar quality of the system, will also have to be solved.

MCIT-THE STATE AUTHORITY IN THE FIELD - www.mcti.ro

In Romania, the Group for Promoting Information Technology, run by the minister of MCTI (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology), is responsible for taking decisions. Despite pessimistic voices that argued: "Romania is not developed enough for such initiatives", over 40 projects have been successfully completed by the MCIT until present, which proves that it "can be done" in Romania as well.

Here are some examples: the management of documents at institutional level, the *e-auction* system designed for public acquisitions, the electronic public opinion poll system, or the *e-Job* system for finding a job. Other examples are: the informational system regarding the degree of implementation of the *e-Europe+* plan, the *e-Market* system designed for acquisitions of goods and services, the *e-Tax* system for paying taxes by electronic means, etc.

It is equally important to ensure an even contribution of all regions to the Information Society, through decentralization and encouraging regional initiatives. Otherwise, real, insurmountable technological discrepancies will surface and will deepen, as well as a discrimination of inhabitants outside urban areas, especially in developed countries.

Bibliography

1. Dăianu, Daniel, „Cât de nouă este noua economie?”, CRPE nr. 24/iulie 2000.
2. Dăianu, Daniel, „De ce stârnește globalizarea atâtea pasiuni” în *Revista Secolul 21. Globalizare și identitate*, nr. 7-9/2001.
3. Grădinaru, Giani, „Perspective de protecție a mediului în societatea informațională”, *Revista de Informatică Economică* nr. 4(16), 2000, p. 59-62.
4. Rosencrance, Richard, *The Rise of the Virtual State. Wealth and Power in the Coming Century*, New York, Basic Books, 2000.
5. Schauer, Thomas, *The Sustainable Information Society - Vision and Risks*, TNS Emnid, FAW Ulm, 2003.
6. Toffler, Alvin, *Al Treilea Val*, Editura Z, București, 1996.
7. www.mcti.ro