

Panel 7: Governance of ICTs in the public sphere

Organizers:

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The next NIG conference of 2008 took place in Enschede. In the years before, the ICT-panel has always had a position in these annual conferences, paramounting amongst others into the publication of a collaborative book by Albert Meijer, Kees Boersma and Pieter Wagenaar in 2008. We would like to continue discussion about ICTs along the lines of both existing and new directions that were discussed in the 2007-panel. In this proposal, two new research themes will be elaborated on. We briefly describe the theme and its linkage with the NIG-research programme; we discuss the nature of panel and papers, and set out a schedule for invitations, abstracts and papers.

The main theme of this panel should be seen in the broader perspective of the public sector in a joined-up world. ICTs are said to facilitate this development; information can be shared with and communicated to the outside world and vice versa. Tasks performed in the public sector have to deal with this context, this shapes public organizations and management, but citizen attitudes and expectations as well.

This brings us to the following research theme that is to be explored in this panel: Governance of ICTs in the Public Sphere. This theme stems from a twofold observation in e-government research: on the one hand e-government has far reaching implications on the way governance is working and the way it is perceived by citizens. On the other hand there is there are cynics that state that e-government does not deliver what it promises. In practice e-government is mainly used for short term gains, such as speeding up operational processes. In this sense, innovation is restricted to product/service, technological and process innovations, but ICTs hardly lead to organizational, conceptual or institutional innovation. Also, if ICT is treated as a dependent factor, there is the question why ICTs as such fail? Is it really the case that most of the e-government projects fail or are expectations too high? Examples of failures in ICT projects are the setbacks in the OV chipcard project, or ICT problems at the tax authority and the UWV. When have they failed? Why do they fail or succeed? Are ICTs with regard to this different from other projects in the public sector?

In short, this leads to a twofold question: (1) How do ICTs influence government/governance and the it is used and perceived by citizens. (2) How are ICTs in governance affected in itself? In order to develop these explanations, we would like to use the NIG annual conference to gain insights on how ICT-systems in the public sphere are governed and used. In this respect, we treat ICTs as independent, as well as a dependent variable; we are concerned not only with how it affects government and citizens, but we are also concerned with how it is developed.

Research questions

As stated above, the main question of the 2008 session was twofold: (1) How do ICTs influence government/governance and the it is used and perceived by citizens. (2) How are ICTs in governance affected in itself? From this, the two following sub themes emerge:

1. The development of ICT projects within the public sector

This subtheme deals with relations between government agencies. ICTs can influence these relations, because of specific matters that have to be addressed, and agreements have to be made. The development of ICTs for instance relates to the distributions of tasks, roles and processes between organizations, and to the exchange of information. Questions that arise from this sub theme are focussing on the public sector itself. These questions are for instance:

How are these ICT projects managed? What (types of) actors and which (types of) tensions can be discerned? How does the project of development of ICT proceed? What patterns can be discerned?

2. ICTs and citizens: usability and accountability

The expectations shaped by the emergence of ICTs raises question at side of citizens and society as well. Patterns or mechanisms of successes or failures are not only characterized by the internal affairs of the public sector (theme 1), but also by the (lack of) use of citizens. The latter is regarded as an important measure for success or failure of ICT projects. Also the effects of ICT projects on society (changes in accountability) fall within this sub theme. Questions that arise from this, are:

How are government developed ICTs really used by citizens and to what extent are they used? How do actors account for ICT projects, and to whom? How do ICTs shape accountability? How do ICTs shape attitudes and expectations of citizens? How and to what extent are citizens involved in governance of ICTs?

In the NIG sessions, we would like to explore these themes through discussion of papers on these kind of questions, and through collaborative reflection on the papers that are presented. Also, we would like to explore ways in which this theme can be extended to future research and into publications.

Linkage with the NIG-research programme

The proposed research theme relates most directly to the first and third subthemes of the NIG research programme. With regard to public management in a joined-up world, we have already seen, and widely discussed, that ICTs can potentially contribute to joining up government; in this session, however, we would like to gain insight in if this actually is the case. Do ICTs actually contribute to joining up government agencies? How does this go about? Our second sub theme clearly relates to citizens and governance, the third aspect of the NIG research programme. We would like to investigate into the role of citizens with regard to the development and use of ICTs, and we focus on implications of this for governance.

Papers, Invitations and Schedule

With regard to the above, we invited authors to write papers that focused on how governance of ICTs actually proceeds. Paper could address both development and effects of ICTs, but also address other themes.