

E-Governance in Slovenia: Part I

by Uroš Pinterič

Learn how Slovenia is attempting to reform its public management infrastructure by adopting strategic and legal frameworks that enable e-government and by using the Internet and its applications for intra- and inter-organizational communication.

This article is the first of four in a series on e-governance in Slovenia. Development of modern information-communication technology is pressuring democratic states to reform their public administration into more effective and flexible organizations capable of providing all necessary services to citizens in the shortest time and most user-friendly manner possible. Slovenia, a small country of two million people living on slightly more than twenty square kilometers, is no exception. It has already adopted the necessary legal and strategic framework to enable e-government. Slovenian public institutions first used the Internet and its applications for intra- and inter-organizational communication.

Other elements of Slovenian e-governance will be presented in future articles:

- ◆ A new citizen-centered focus, including municipality, national government, and administration communication with citizens
- ◆ Internet applications, including cases of actual implementation at different levels of government (e-taxes, e-urban planning, etc.); barriers, solutions, and feedback; and governmental portals (for citizens and the business community)
- ◆ A comparative view of Web pages (of the National Assembly, executive branch, ministries, etc.).

Strategic Framework

As part of the process of public administration reform and in pursuit of a new public management approach, Slovenia adopted several strategies. The most evident changes were in the field of public information sharing and privacy protection. Laws in these areas provide the basic precondition for developing e-government and e-governance approaches. In this context, e-government is the use of modern information technology (IT)—especially the Internet—for achieving better and more user-friendly administration. Moreover, e-government is electronically supported public service, while e-governance means fully exploiting the possibilities of information-communication technology tools in public organizations and processes. In this sense, e-governance is more sophisticated than e-government.

The transformation of the Slovenian public administration from bureaucratic to modern has followed the logic of new public management and e-governance approaches. Slovenian legislation concerning e-governance has traversed three basic stages (Figure 1).

Creating an Information Society

Here, we will stress only the most important elements of both strategies and other legislation that has enabled systemic change in modern e-government. These changes will not only influence administrative reform, but will also change Slovenia into an information society.

In 2001, Slovenia adopted the *Strategy on e-performance in public administration of the Republic of Slovenia 2001–2004*. This reform lays out the technical framework for e-government. It offers quick, simple, qualitative, and low-cost IT services to citizens and public servants in a way that doesn't much advance knowledge of the organizational structure or processes of different public institutions. Most of the benefits are reaped via governmental Web pages and e-government portals.

In 2004, the government adopted the *Strategy on work and development of Slovenian public administration on the World Wide Web*, which defines the content of Slovenian e-governance. These provisions define Slovenian public management on the World Wide Web,

Figure 1. Slovenian Legislation Concerning E-Governance

Before 2001	The government adopted the necessary legal framework, such as a privacy protection act, a law on access to public information, and laws that made it possible to set up systems to support modern and flexible administration.
2001–2004	The government pursued two important strategies—one for e-government and the other for the e-governance aspects of Slovenian public administration.
Post-2004	Additional legislation and amendments were adopted, and some government directives were accepted, helping make the implementation of e-governance a reality.

Uroš Pinterič is a PhD candidate in political science and an assistant at the faculty of social sciences, University of Ljubljana. If you wish to contact him or obtain more detailed information on sources (including those in Slovenian), he can be reached at uros@sidip.org

envisioning (in 2004–06) that all information on government services and other forms of interaction between government organizations and its citizens will become broadly available via the Internet. This is to be accomplished by systematically developing and employing the Internet image across public institutions and by strengthening the effectiveness and user-friendliness of Slovenian public services.

Clearly, the main difference between these two strategies is the latter's facilitation of citizen access and use. Another important element of the second strategy is its emphasis on ensuring that all public servants are able to use computers and other information-communication technologies, including the Internet and e-mail.

Notwithstanding these reforms, both strategies involve more of a technical fix of the problem of e-governance in Slovenia than a solution to the more vexing human resources issues—both with our citizens and public servants. In this regard, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's view on the introduction of e-government as “putting lipstick on a bulldog's face” is probably pertinent. That is, creating Web pages and adopting strategies do little

good without complete reform of the internal and customer service processes. Stuart Culbertson also argues that implementation of new models of e-governance with old structures alone only results in a new electronic outlook.

Legal Framework

The legal framework, enacting strategies as well as preparing the field for e-governance, consists of the Administrative Procedures Act, Privacy Protection Act, Public Information Access Act, and other lesser pieces of legislation and directives. The Administrative Procedures Act was the first legislative initiative recognizing electronic communication as a valid form of administrative communication within the Slovene public service. Responses to such communication are required within thirty days of receiving an e-mail. This legislation also enables sharing of information via the Internet with greater privacy protection between the citizen and government as well as between different institutions of public administration when dealing with personal data. Furthermore, citizens no longer need to



PMA
PROFESSIONAL MANAGERS ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 77235
National Capital Station
Washington, DC 20013
Phone: 202.874.0126
Fax: 202.874.1739

For membership go to: www.ProManager.org

'The Voice of Leaders in Public Service'

input personal data once they have already provided the necessary information electronically to another institution of government (such as for obtaining a passport).

The most recent important e-governance development is the governmental directive on administrative management (UL 20/2005), which implements the Administrative Procedures and Public Administration Acts by defining specifically how public agencies should communicate with Slovenian citizens via the Internet and its applications. This binding directive will certainly frustrate Slovenian civil servants if citizens become fully informed of the full range of rights they have. One of the most important provisions is that public agencies must answer citizens' e-mails within fifteen days.

Culture of Information Technology

State organizations are collecting and managing an enormous amount of disparate information. But access to certain types of information often has been limited by the physical location of the database. New technologies have enabled government organizations to integrate these databases and provide access to all necessary information from any computer connected to a secure intranet system. Now, it's the user name and password that allow access to appropriate data. Of course, to protect privacy, all employees do not have access to all types of data.

Use of secure intranet connections has enabled government entities to conduct formal sessions even if all participants are not physically present on-site. The "correspondence conference" (conference call) is one of the most developed forms of communication via modern IT in Slovenia. No other form of modern communication (Internet) with or within the Slovenian political system is running more smoothly and effectively.

Another important element, integrated databases with common access, enables all connected computers to rapidly obtain information. The most developed and well known example is our legislative database, where users can quickly find all actions at any stage in the legislative process. This database makes the legislative process more transparent and reduces the number of printed copies of official gazettes needed. For civil servants, this enables a much quicker search for legislation, one that can be made without memorizing all the official gazettes. Use of such intranet and common databases also speeds up the administrative and policymaking processes.

On the down side, this speedy, hi-tech mode of service has a potentially destructive human consequence. According to unofficial data, public servants in Slovenia quite broadly use e-mail as a form of communication among themselves, but they are much less eager to use it in communication with citizens. This is truer of older civil servants, many of whom do not use IT more than absolutely necessary, and most are not interested in additional training in this area. Thus, the administrative culture, rather than the lack of technology itself, appears to be the greatest obstacle to effective use of IT.

Conclusion

Slovenia has a well developed strategic and legal framework that can provide a fruitful base for the growth of e-government and e-governance. The most important characteristics of this legal framework are its provisions on secure and uninterrupted two-way information flow between citizens and government organizations. This information should be provided in the shortest term possible and in a user-friendly way. Equally important is one-stop shopping or, better yet, a seamless, interactive system that gets the user to the information and facilitates customer service transactions efficiently and effectively—even across organizational boundaries. In this way, citizens can expect to find the answer to their problems whether they turn to the right organization or not. As a result of more effective communication, well managed e-governance (in Slovenia or any other country) will help government become more flexible and responsive to its consumers.

In subsequent articles, we will use information on the legal foundations found in this article as the basis for analyzing what is actually happening in Slovenian e-governance on the ground. We will attempt to compare theory with practice. ✧

References

- Culbertson, Stuart. "Building E-government: Organisational and Cultural Change in Public Administrations." In E. Lynn Oliver and Larry Sanders, eds., *E-Government Reconsidered: Renewal of Governance for the Knowledge Age* (Regina: Saskatchewan, 2004).
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. *Evolve! Succeeding in the Digital Culture of Tomorrow* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001).
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *The e-Government Imperative*. Paris, 2003.
- Zakon o upravnem postopku. Ljubljana: Uradni list Republike Slovenije. (Act on administrative procedures.)