

Foreword

Whenever decision-makers are presented with a new technology that will change society, they are typically sceptical—and rightly so. Technology evangelist, either out of sincere conviction or of industrial interests, too often promised a techno-deterministic solution to all societal problems. None more than Morozov (2013) is able to depict this approach in the title of his book: “To save everything, click here. The folly of technological solutionism.”

The advent of web 2.0 was hailed by many as yet another hype. Indeed, because of its definition, experts immediately started “leapfrogging” directly to the advent of web 3.0 and 4.0. What is surprising today is how deep and long-lasting has been the impact of the “2.0” metaphor across all societal domains. Almost 10 years after the invention of the term, the implications of the change remain alive and pervasive. Almost every aspects of human life has been touched, and one can find analysis on love, religion, science, art—anything 2.0.

Government is one of the main impact area. E-government scholars know too well how slow and difficult change is in governmental culture. Yet the adoption of the 2.0 culture and technologies has been surprisingly fast, for government standards. The main driver has not been evidence though: as scholars, we’ve been unable to convince policy-makers about the importance of this phenomenon.

The drivers of adoption have rather been more prosaic. Firstly, the traditional institutional isomorphism: as Codagnone (2005) puts it, “each single organisation/institution tend to imitate the most legitimated and/or successful players in their population of reference (we could call them Champions), in order to become legitimised too, and to reduce uncertainty about their future”. After Obama was elected (with the substantial role of social media), his first act was to sign a presidential memo on transparency that was imbued with the 2.0 culture; European government soon followed this example. Secondly, citizens pressure: the adoption rate of social media proved to be simply too staggering to be ignored. Citizens were talking (often negatively) about government on social media, and government had to join the conversation. Thirdly, civil servants themselves started using these tools (often without permission) and created the change from within.

These factors led to an organic, rather than rationally planned, adoption of government 2.0 across governments. This was probably inevitable in view of the very

nature of “2.0” technologies and should not be considered as negative in itself. However, this unstructured, bottom-up adoption led to a reality of many fragmented and improvised 2.0 initiatives. Decision-makers were put in a position where 2.0 initiative were suddenly a “must”, without being equipped with the intellectual tools to design, run and evaluate them. This is probably the reason why it is fair to say that while adoption of government 2.0 is almost universal, its impact is far from being demonstrated. There were a lot of “wheels” being reinvented, and disparate projects were launched in very different fields (from service delivery to political campaigning) without integration.

Most of all, what became apparent was the lack of strategic framework guiding these initiatives. Too often openness, participation, social media presence have been considered as goals in themselves without integrating them in the correct institutional framework.

This gap in evidence-based, theoretical and strategic framework is what this book helps to address by providing an original and insightful combination of perspectives that will be useful to researchers and policy-makers alike.

Firstly, it provides a rich global coverage, bringing together concrete cases across America, Europe, Africa and Asia. This sheds light on less known excellent examples of open government (such as Greece and Brazil), and provides original lessons learnt on high-impact cases such as Pakistan and Arab countries.

Secondly, it illustrates the institutional richness of government 2.0 by presenting both local and national cases. It is particularly interesting to compare the municipal-level cases presented in different context such as US and Sweden.

Another fundamental aspect is its very complete coverage of domains previously treated separately: service delivery, policy-making and politics. It is an often ill-understood aspect of government 2.0 that these different domains call for different but deeply integrated strategic approaches.

Thirdly, while being centred on case studies, it brings together a high-profile set of theoretical models underpinning each paper that offer a very useful overview of the literature in the domain.

This continuous iteration between the richness of real-life case studies and the strive for modelling, abstraction and sound theory-building is probably the single most important contribution of the book.

Of course, the avid reader will not be completely satisfied with the answers in this book. For all the effort in building sound theoretical frameworks, this is just a first step in the right directions. Contributors point explicitly to the limitations and research challenges encountered, and it is clear that the emphasis remains still too much on the supply side and not enough on uptake and impact. Yet there is much to learn from the research presented here, both in its actual results and in the direction of the effort.

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Case Studies in e-Government 2.0

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