E-Governance in Slovenia: Part I

by Uroš Pinterič

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,

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<th>Figure 1. Slovenian Legislation Concerning E-Governance</th>
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<td><strong>Before 2001</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2001–2004</strong></td>
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Uros 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@sidp.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
input personal data once they have already provided the
necessary information electronically to another institu-
tion of government (such as for obtaining a passport).

The most recent important e-governance develop-
ment 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 certain-
ly 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 technolo-
gies have enabled government organizations to inte-
grate 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 pro-
tect privacy, all employees do not have access to all types
of data.

Use of secure intranet connections has enabled gov-
ernment entities to conduct formal sessions even if all
participants are not physically present on-site. The “cor-
respondence conference” (conference call) is one of the
most developed forms of communication via modern
IT in Slovenia. No other form of modern communica-
tion (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 conse-
quence. According to unofficial data, public servants in
Slovenia quite broadly use e-mail as a form of commu-
nication 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 technol-
ogy 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 infor-
mation flow between citizens and government organi-
zations. 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 com-
munication, 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 com-
pare theory with practice.

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