PUBLIC MANAGEMENT CHANGE AND ONE-STOP GOVERNMENT: EXPERIENCE FROM THE GREEK CITIZEN SERVICE CENTER (CSC)

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Abstract

This paper aims at leveraging the effect of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on the realisation of the public administration's change effort from the old to the new public management model. Towards this aim, it discusses the experience from the Citizen Service Centers (CSCs), an initiative implemented by the Greek government, in response to the One-Stop-Government vision shared by most European countries. The case data discussed hereinafter derives from desktop research as well as interviews with executive officers of the Ministry of Internal, Public Administration and Decentralisation (M.I.P.A.& D), which is the coordinating authority for any change program within the Greek public administration.

1. Introduction

The growth of the public sector in the 1970s and early 1980s set the scene for subsequent pressures for reforms. Therefore, governments worldwide, engaged in ongoing high-profile and comprehensive reform plans. Implemented through a wide range of different change programmes, these reform plans encompass a wide range of issues [1]:

- Changes in the relationships between the central, regional and local level of administration,
- Changes in the organizational design of public services,
- Changes in the principles of financial management,
- Changes in the design of public policies,
- Changes in the evaluation of administrative outcomes and outputs.

A privileged field of administrative reforms is that of the relationships between state and society or between public services and citizens. From Sweden to Spain and from Portugal to Greece, reform policies have been put on the map in order to transform public management.

All these reform plans push bureaucratic public structures to change in favour of new managerial practices in order to become more efficient and respond better to the needs of citizens. Most reforms are oriented towards managerial restructuring of the public

organizations with the aid of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The new technologies enable government and its agencies to provide quality services that offer choice and convenience to individuals and enterprises alike. These might include self-service by citizens and other new service delivery channels not dependent on individual government departments through One-Stop-Government and Electronic Government initiatives [2].

This paper aims at discussing the experience from the implementation of the Citizen Service Centers (CSCs), a physical one-stop-government case, in Greece and the contribution of new technologies in realizing the public management change.

2. The New Public Management Model

Public management reform is a deliberate change to the bureaucratic structures and the processes of public organizations with the objective of getting them to run more efficiently [3]. Change may include the redesign of key procedures for serving the citizens, the setting of quality standards for health and education or change of the system by which public servants are recruited, trained, appraised and promoted.

The relevant literature provides a number of analytical or synoptic definitions of what New Public Management (NPM) is. There are at least two components that any definition of NPM must consider: the notion of "public management" and the notion of "reform" [4 - 8].

Therefore, the "new public management" school of thought has broadly influenced public management reform, and has introduced new managerial practices that put more emphasis on the market and transform the bureaucratic structures of public organizations. In general, this movement could be seen as a transformation from public bureaucracy to a model of more flexible administration. The literature gives a rather heterogeneous view of what NPM means (see e.g. [9 – 18]:

- New Public Management as *an efficiency drive*. The main aim is to improve productivity and efficiency through adequate structural adaptations and human resources management policies, by forming a regulatory relationship between fiscality and costs.
- New Public Management as "*downsizing and decentralization*". This entails a shift away from large, hierarchical, bureaucratic organizational forms towards more decentralized, networked and flexible ones, while it concentrates on structural changes and empowerment of local authorities.
- New Public Management as "*search for excellence*". Through a focus on quality in "back office" operations, this trend concentrates on learning in organizations, releasing of "entrepreneurial" thinking at all levels of the organization, deregulation, etc.
- New Public Management as a "*public service orientation*". Utilizing a renewed focus on citizens and customers as the crucial reforms, with an emphasis on quality of service ("front office"), consultation, and involvement, this perspective has evolved towards the "stakeholders idea" that advocates, in the private sector, that corporations have responsibilities beyond maximizing profits for shareholders. The public sector involves responsibilities towards employees, suppliers and community groups of a non-profit nature. Yet, a stronger service quality orientation involves public consultation and leads to public services that are more relevant to needs and more responsive to demands. Countries increasingly identify the improvement of service delivery as a priority issue, emphasizing service quality aspects, and, in a few cases, focusing on efficiency through means, such as streamlining of structures and procedures.

The last theme - NPM as the "public service orientation" - leads to the one-stop-government vision, where citizens get access to a wide range of public services via a central service point. Such a service point may have either a physical form (e.g. a citizen help center) or virtual form (e.g. a government portal), or even adopt a hybrid form. In any case, technologies have a role to play in facilitating the transfer from the old to the new public management paradigm.

3. Implementations of the "One-Stop Government" Vision in Europe

In this section, we discuss the reactions of the European countries in the implementation of the EU vision for the One-Stop-Government through examination of three representative examples; those of Ireland [19], Italy [20] and Spain [21].

3.1. One-Stop Government in Ireland

In 1995, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) was promoting the idea of electronic public service delivery in their publication, Electronic Information and Transactions - A Call to Government. Some recommendations of this report include: electronic publication of government documentation; electronic access to public registries; electronic filing of tax returns; email access to Government Departments; greater use of Electronic Document Interchange (EDI) in the provision of public services; and a clear strategy to address the needs of the Information Society in an Irish context [22].

One vision which the IBEC report urged the Government to consider was 'Window into Ireland', a concept built around a single access point to all Irish information. Government should play a useful role in creating a definitive "window into Ireland". This could only be achieved through a central server acting as a host for all government information resources and also as an index to all Irish information. Such a window should act as a launching point into government, commercial, academic and organisation information services. It should also act as a menu into local information services located throughout Ireland [22].

The key policies which established a foundation for the development of One-Stop-Government in this country are: the Strategic Management Initiative; the national framework for the integration of public services (REACH); the Information Society strategy; and the Better Local Government programme. These policies are inter-dependent as developments in one area have a knock-on effect and consequences for other aspects of public administration. The Irish Government seems to be aware that One-Stop-Government can only be realised through a package of wide-ranging measures and is working towards implementation on a number of levels.

While seamless One-Stop-Government is far from a reality in Ireland, development towards One-Stop-Government is slowly happening on a phased basis. Two paths to realising One-Stop-Government are being pursued, these are the physical one-stop-shop (where several government services are available in a physical building or space) and the electronic one-stop-shop (where information or services are available electronically from the one information kiosk / web site / cd-rom). Each of these dual approaches to One-Stop-Government can offer different levels of service to the public. The physical one-stop-shop can house local authority council services, local offices of government departments, and organisations from the non-statutory sector. At present, electronic government services can offer information only or customised information. The availability of full government

services in an electronic environment requires legislative and technological developments to be in place as a pre-requisite to transactions between the public and the state.

3.2. One-Stop Government in Italy

Since the early seventies Italy has begun a complex and long reform process of the public administration, with the main goal of finally achieving a full attainment of the Republican Constitution of 1948, which clearly referred to a decentralised administration model. According to this model there are now in Italy different levels of administration: Central State, Regioni (regions), Province (districts), Comuni (town administrations) [23, 24].

More recently, in the last decade, the Italian Parliament has issued a number of reforms that concerned both the co-operation among different levels of public administration, and the interaction between the administration and the citizens. Two major goals are perceived in this reform process. First, to simplify the dialogue and the communication between the citizens and the public administration, and, second, to improve the communication between the different branches of the public administration.

A main example of simplification of the relationship between citizens and public administration is given by the polyfunctional windows and the URP (*Uffici per le Relazioni con il Pubblico*), i.e. offices for the relationship with the public, that every administration was required to set up by a law passed in 1994 [25, 26]. These offices, that should be found in any branch of the public administration (e.g. ministry, town administration, health care service) have the specific task to directly handle all citizens' requests on the current state of the administrative procedures they have started or would like to start, to deliver to them all the documentation concerning them and detained by the administration that they are entitled to access, and in general to give directions on all the services supplied by that particular branch of the administration.

Nevertheless, the most interesting examples can still be found in local administrations, especially town administrations (*comuni*), since these structures have a rather large degree of autonomy, and can therefore more easily introduce experimentation in reshaping administrative procedures and introducing new technologies. Therefore many town administrations have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, self-service windows, electronic id cards, and networks connecting different administrative offices [27].

An important element is also the attention that the Central Government and the Parliament have constantly given in the last two decades to problems connected to the introduction of information technology in the public administration. Preliminary studies were carried on in the eighties, that led later to the appointment in 1993 of the Authority for IT in the Public Administration (*AIPA, Autorità per l'informatica nella Pubblica Amministrazione*). According to the law, the task of AIPA is to promote, co-ordinate, plan and control the development of information systems within the government's central organisations and agencies, through their standardisation, interconnection and integration.

Among the important achievements of AIPA are the project of the Public Administration Unified Network (RUPA), and other important IT infrastructure. This has setup an important framework, as far as network and security problems are concerned, to develop new applications that could meet adequate quality standards, and set up the necessary technological premises for the future integration of different systems. Moreover, AIPA is also performing financial control tasks, including auditing and evaluation of costs and benefits of

the administrations' projects, and activities related to IS/IT procurement. Finally, AIPA is also performing education tasks to improve IT competence in the public sector, and to control the activities developed by the administrations in this area.

3.3. One-Stop Government in Spain

The concept of One-Stop-Government (OSG) in the Spanish public administration context usually refers to a single contact point between citizens and public authority. In some cases, this point is pictured as a 'single window' in which either administrative information or transactions have been integrated, so as to make it easier and quicker for citizens to comply with bureaucratic requirements and procedures. In other, more recent cases, single windows have been defined and marketed as citizen-oriented bits of the public administration apparatus. Orientation to citizens means both being responsive to their demands, and being ready to inform them about their rights – rather than just facilitate their compliance with the law. Some times, the creation of single windows has involved the redesign of inter-faces between different administration levels in terms of communication flows and virtual boundary-setting, as well as the reorganisation and integration of several administrative units.

From the early and mid-nineties, the scale and scope of OSG experiences have been enlarged and deepened by the wider use of ICT both in local governments and Autonomous Community governments. ICT do not only open single windows to one public organisation, but also to a network of internationally connected public and private organisations – like the Infoville network, to which some Spanish local councils are connected. The terminology about OSG that is used in political discourse has also changed. The emphasis is now put on using ICT for improving both the services provided to citizens and the interactions between citizens and public administrations. Thus, ICT is expected to improve service quality and efficiency, to increase transparency and accessibility, and to help bring public administrations closer to citizens. In order to meet these expectations, it is necessary to facilitate access to electronic services to citizens, to reengineer organisational structures and processes, and to develop more efficient communication and cooperation mechanisms between different organisations. And these requirements have to be met in a context of budgetary retrenchments and restrictive human resource management policy.

The most important function pursued and fulfilled by OSG is information. Facilitating citizens' access to public information means not only re-orienting public administration to citizens (opening the organisation to the outside), but also trying to get closer to them. The expansion of Internet has led many public organisations to get on-line through their own WebSites. However, although Internet offers the possibility of not only informing, but also communicating, this latter function has much less been developed. Information tends to be transmitted in one direction (from public administration to citizens) in answer to citizens' demands. Another very important function that has also been the focus of OSG experiences is the possibility of fulfilling day-to-day bureaucratic transactions at single windows. For example, obtaining certifications, obtaining licences, paying bills, applying for entitlements, and registrations. These transactions may be processed by telephone, kiosk, Internet, or physical location in OSG offices. In some cases, ICTs are also being introduced as an instrument for enhancing local economic development, mainly by some Local Councils and some Autonomous Governments. For example, Webs about industrial areas have proliferated over the past few years. These Webs offer detailed information that is useful for firms and enterprises that may be interested in locating their activities in the area. This information includes the location of industrial services, physical access to industrial zones, industrial land pricing, digitalised maps, etc.

4. Experience from the "One-Stop Government" Implementation in Greece

4.1. Origins of the Citizen Service Center (CSC) Concept

For many years, the Greek Public Administration has been functioning according to a bureaucratic model, which is rooted in multiple events and systems that have occurred and developed in the past [28, 29, 30]. The slow integration of technology, non-adherence to EU regulations and lack of decision making at management level are just a few issues, which account for the inefficiency of the Greek public sector.

These shortcomings in the operation of the Greek public sector have had a strong negative impact on the interaction between the Greek State and citizens. Citizens confronted with the inflexibility and inefficiency of the public sector have lost trust in it. The Greek government, facing the citizen's displeasure towards public sector institutions, had to employ new managerial practices in order to provide more efficient services to citizens. More specifically, it had to set new standards for public services by improving the relationship between citizens and government, dealing with citizens in a helpful and courteous manner, reducing the time taken for fulfilling requests, simplifying procedures, and eliminating redundant formalities. The objective should not 'only' be to improve the relationship with citizens but also to improve cost-benefit ratios and enhance public servants' skills and motivate them to take initiatives in driving through the much necessary administrative modernization. The key guiding vision behind the changes that were about to take shape was a strong orientation of the public services towards the citizens.

The Citizen Service Centers (CSCs) are designed based on the "one-stop-shop" philosophy with the purpose to deliver more efficient services to citizens from a single point of interaction [31]. The main purpose of this reform is the progressive simplification of administrative processes and their integration into a system of transactions, which is shared among public administrations with a singular interface for the citizens; the CSC Offices. From the citizen's point of view, the new service system provides a significant advantage in terms of accessibility and reliability of public services. Compared to the previous situation, people no longer have to interact with several administrations, both local and central with sometimes-unclear boundaries of intervention and responsibility, to obtain information, authorisations or other services.

The implementation of the CSCs is strongly underpinned by Information and Communication Technologies and supported by extensive training of public agents. The development of the CSCs is organised by the Ministry of Internal, Public Administration and Decentralisation (M.I.P.A.& D) in cooperation with all the Municipalities, the Regions and the Prefectures of the country as well as with the technological companies responsible for design, implementation, maintenance and development of the Information Technology supporting the transaction processes. Consequently, the CSCs constitute an effort to import a new model of transactions in the public sector based on the NPM principles. More specifically, the basic objective of this effort was to separate the "production" from the "services" in order to deliver more efficient information to citizens.

4.2. Structure and Operation of the CSCs

The structure of the CSCs is determined by the Greek Law 3013/20002. Each CSC follows a top-down structure, with an office manager at the top and several permanent and temporary

employees in the back and front offices. The managers and directors of the CSC are permanent employees (public servants) that are mainly placed by the municipalities of the specific region and are authorized to sign official documents, while, in contrast, they are restricted to make decisions in the daily operation of the CSCs. **Figure 1** illustrates the whole operation of a CSC from the time that a citizen first comes into contact with the office until his/ her request is completed.
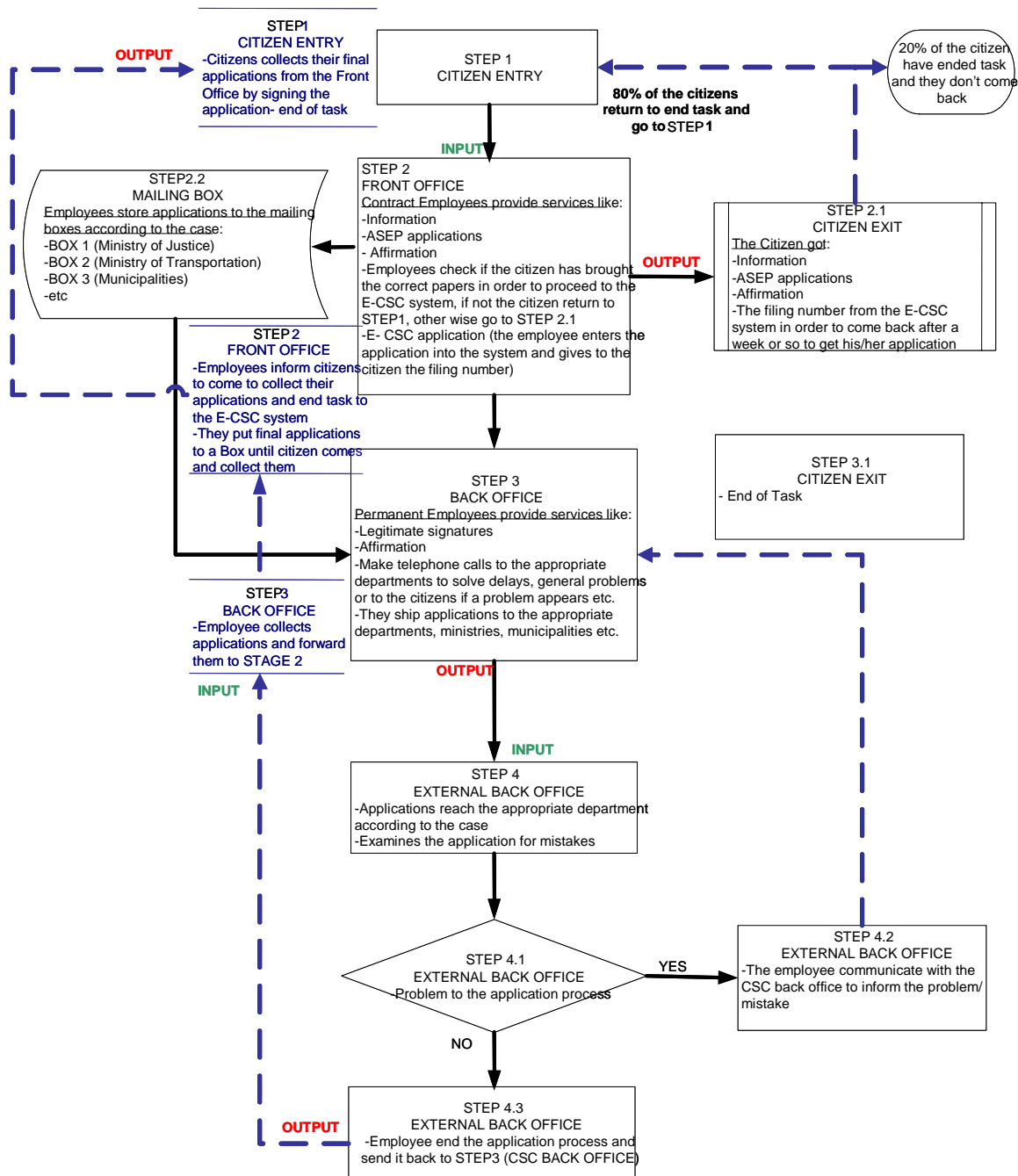
Figure 1: Micro Level Operation of the CSC - Four (4) Key Steps [31]

Step 1: Citizens usually go to a CSC to avoid dealing with various different public entities and because they can accomplish most of their requests through the CSC system. The CSCs operate based on different processes and communication between different actors and players, with the purpose of providing more efficient services.

Step 2: Upon arrival at the CSC of their choice, citizens address themselves to a front-office employee, specifying their request or the issue they wish to deal with. The employees in the front office are responsible for giving information to the citizens about who is accountable for the implementation of their request and also to advise them about all the supporting documents that are required for the completion of their request.

For the implementation of a process, two approaches are usually followed:

1. The first approach is when the employee deals with an request where the citizens require only simple information. In this case, there is no need to open a file for the citizen and the transaction comes to an end (Step 2.1) as soon as the citizens provide the necessary information enabling the execution of the request on the spot.

2. The second approach is when an employee deals with a process that doesn't require the transaction of the CSC with any other institution. Such a process may be the affirmation of a public document where the transaction ends as soon as the employee in the back office completes the request (Step 3). The employee names the transaction as "other service" and does not open a file for the citizen, while the citizen's request receives an end (end of task) and the citizen then exits the system (step 3.1).

In the case that the process requested by a citizen necessitates a transaction of the CSC with other public institutions, the steps required are described below:

1. The employee at the front office gives the citizen an application form of request to complete. This application by itself includes the name of the responsible institution and a precise list of the supporting documents that are needed. If the citizen had a previous transaction with any other CSC, all related information will be registered in the information system and automatically appears on the computer screen.

2. For those citizens that have already collected and brought all the necessary documents required for the completion of a request, a new file is created into the e-CSC system. Two types of files exist. Simple files and complex files. For the simple files, we consider the collection of all the basic applications/documents that are required for the execution of "single-departmental" processes. In the case where a transaction can be accomplished by the CSC alone, the employees create a file that includes separate sub-files. The sub-files serve the purpose to organize all the documents that are required in an efficient way. A file cannot be considered complete until the sub-files are created. In contrast, the complex files apply to the "multi-departmental" processes where more than one public institution is involved. The advantage of the creation of these files is that they give the opportunity for the CSC employees to monitor the whole process in the different entities, as it unfolds.

Step 3: When a file includes all the necessary documents, then it moves to step 3, which is the back office. The employees in the back office are responsible to check if the documents they receive are correct and if not, contact the citizen to bring the correct ones. If the documents are acceptable, then the employees contact the appropriate authority, and send it the file to in order to implement the citizen's request.

Step 4: As soon as the file is delivered to the authority in charge (step 4), the employees of the back office are obliged to monitor the process. There are occasions when the authorities request more documents or they identify mistakes in the existing file. In this case a coordination mechanism is activated between the CSC and the public entities (authorities) to reach a solution. In the event of a problem, the CSC back office employees are informed and

are in turn obliged to contact the citizen to inform him/her of the problem (step 4.2). More precisely, the steps that are followed are:

1. The responsible public entity fails to deliver the required supporting documents to the CSC because an error has occurred (i.e. missing documents, wrong applications, etc.),
2. The CSC employee contacts the citizen and informs him/her about the failure or delay (by fix or mobile phone, or by e-mail),
3. If the citizen can bring the correct documents, then the process continues; otherwise
4. The file closes without success,
5. End of process.

In the case that the public institution does not identify any mistake or error on the file, then the process proceeds as normal and the complete file is sent back to the CSC (step3). The back office employees that receive the file pass the file to the front office (step 2) where the employees inform the citizen of the completion of the request. The file then is considered complete and the process is ended. Specifically, the steps that are followed are:

1. The responsible public institution sends the complete file to the back office employees of the CSC,
2. The front office employees of the CSC contact the citizen about the completion of the task,
3. The file closes with success,
4. End of process.

In the majority of cases files are completed with success and citizens get what they asked for. Sometime, errors are recognised and dealt with when the front office employees recognize an error in the very beginning of the process; such as missing documents. In this case, the Front Office Staff instructs the citizen to return with the required documents and restart the application from step 1.

4.3.   Information Systems and Technologies Applied to enable One-Stop Government

For the efficient operation of the CSC, an information system called e-CSC is developed. This information system is used for recording all transactions between citizens and the CSCs. The records are created in real time, which allows the CSC employees to know at each moment where a process stands (open, closed etc), and what remaining steps are required for the completion of the process. In addition, the system gives employees a picture of the total number of processes they handle. When a citizen arrives at a CSC for the transaction of a process, the employee accesses the e–CSC system and follows the steps outlined below [31].

1. The employee uses the search engine of the system to find the electronic application appropriate for the request of the citizen. The search is made by the application's title or by its code (if known).
2. Once the application is identified, the employee informs the citizen of the required supporting documents for the specific process.
3. When all the necessary documents are collected a new file is created
4. The employee then enters the citizen's personal information into the system. In the case that the citizen has a previous transaction with the CSC, then the citizen's details already exist in the system, so this step is not necessary.
5. The process receives a protocol number.

6. Once the application forms have been completed and signed by the citizen, the citizen receives the protocol number for the application which enables the citizen to easily follow up on the process.

An advantage of the system is that employees can update any process anytime. It also enables employees to use the system for all types of applications. Furthermore, the use of new technologies that e-CSC entails and supports the system enable the CSCs to reduce unnecessary processes. For example, if a citizen wants to issue a "family share" statement, the CSC employees can forward the applications, through the use of Internet, directly to the three public entities that need to be involved: the tax office, the registry office and the directory offices. When the necessary tasks have been accomplished, these entities send all the necessary information directly back to the CSC, which in accordance sends all the completed applications to the municipality in order the new entry/ registry to be accomplished. **Figure 2** shows this transaction that are of the type "Citizen to Government" (C2G) and "Government to Government". (G2G) The C2G type includes the transaction between citizens and the CSC, while the G2G are those transactions among the CSC and other governmental entities. The use of new technologies (i.e. Internet) has simplified many processes for the advantage not only of the citizens but also towards the functioning and operation of the CSCs.
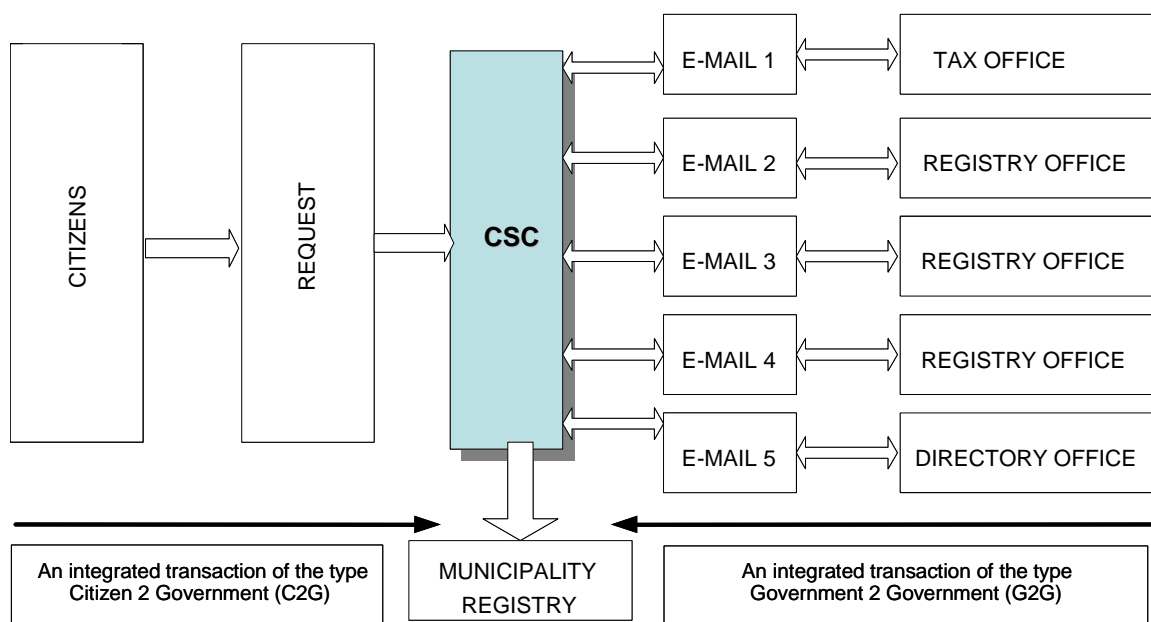
Figure 2: The Internet use on C2G & G2G transaction, based on Executive Officer Documentation (M.I.P.A.&D.) [31]

5. Conclusions and Future Research

The above analysis aimed to describe the operation of the Citizen Service Centers (CSCs) in Greece. This analysis presented in every detail all the processes that are needed for the operation of the CSCs. It constitutes an innovative change effort for the Greek Public administration that tries to introduce new managerial and administrative practices and issues that are harmonized to the European Union directives together with private sector practices. In this paper, we tried to describe the operation of the CSC with the purpose to present the Greek effort in implementing the One-Stop Government vision. Particularly, we used the

CSC change effort as the unit of our analysis, and we tried to study the unfolding of this change effort from both a system- and a process-oriented point of view.

Although data was collected from a broad range of sources, and key informants were interviewed, we were not able for reasons of time and resource availability to collect data from citizens on their perceptions and opinions about the development and functioning of the CSCs. Future research could close this void by integrating explicitly or even focusing on the role of citizens as driving forces, moderators or active parts of ongoing public management change processes.

The CSC initiative examined in this paper implemented the "public service orientation" management through a rather hybrid form, which means that its operations were accomplished with traditional means and with the aid of information systems. Our future research plans includes deeper investigation of the determinants of effective technology-driven change within public institutions. In our current study, we saw that technology and information systems played a key role in transition from the old to the new public management paradigm. Future research is oriented towards investigating the impact of a virtual one-stop government initiative, such as a governmental portal, on the efficiency of the government operations, and eventually the citizens' satisfaction. Such initiatives are funded by the Greek Information Society Programme and are currently under implementation by a great number of local and regional government authorities (e.g. municipalities, prefectures, etc.).

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