

INSTITUTIONAL ISOMORPHISM BETWEEN THE TRNC AND TURKEY FOR E-GOVERNMENT STRATEGY: WHAT ENCOURAGES SPONTANEOUS ISOMORPHISM?¹

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at reviewing the TRNC e-government studies by considering Turkey's e-government best practices based on the institutional isomorphism theory with its three mechanisms, namely coercive isomorphism, mimetic processes, and normative pressures. Turkey has a lot of experience with the best practices and their successful application on e-government projects, especially legal issues, technological systems, local and governmental authorities, etc. Thus, the TRNC should make use of this opportunity by utilizing these practices and making its own strategic plan based on the national information policy. The requirements and adaptability points of e-government issues between the countries will be discussed here. Consequently, neither mimetic, normative isomorphism, nor coercive isomorphism is enough to be modeled by the TRNC e-government efforts. Instead, the concept of 'spontaneous isomorphism' was created in the study and discussed as an alternative institutional isomorphism between the TRNC and Turkey based on the Best Practices e-Government Models.

Keywords: *e-Government, TRNC, Turkey, institutional isomorphism, spontaneous isomorphism*

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Jel Classification: O3 eGovernment

1. Introduction

E-Government is a nerve-breaking period and requires a long time and radical changes for the structure and culture of public organizations. The aim of this paper is to find a suitable adaptability model for the TRNC, by considering the best practices of e-government projects in Turkey. There are strong relations between Turkey and the TRNC which come from their common historical roots. The fundamental research question of the paper is how the TRNC's e-government transition can be carried out successfully by modeling the "Best Practices e-Government Models" of Turkey. One of the main organizational theories which allow us to evaluate the nature of the changes in the context of e-government is the new institutional theory.² New institutionalism has been most attentive to processes of legitimation and social reproduction. Organizational environments are composed of cultural elements, that is, taken-for-granted beliefs and widely promulgate rules that serve as templates for organizing. Institutional reproduction has been associated with the demands of powerful central actors, such as the state, profession, or the dominant agents within organizational fields. The acquisition and maintenance of power within organizational fields requires that dominant organizations continually enact strategies of control, most notably through either the socialization of newcomers into a shared world or via the support of the state and its judicial arm (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991: 26-31). The basic research question of the theory is what makes organizations so similar. It tries to answer why there is such startling homogeneity of organizational forms and practices. Organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful. The theory argues that similar forms of institution emerge in very different social and political settings.

2. Institutional Isomorphism

The most important supporters of institutional isomorphism are DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 147). They contend that organizations are still becoming more homogeneous through bureaucratization and rationalization, and that structural change in organization seems less and less driven by competition or by the need for efficiency. This goes back to Weber who argued that there would be a tendency toward convergence around a rational legal format for bureaucracy as societies developed (Peters, 2001:103). They seek to explain (Powell and

² There are also organizational theories as to changes such as population ecology, resource dependency, organizational configuration, etc.

DiMaggio, 1983:148) homogeneity, not variation. It deals with domains of operations, principles of organizing and criteria of evaluation (Hinings and Greenwood, 1988). In the initial stages of organizational life cycle, organizational fields display considerable diversity in approach and form. Once a field becomes well established, however, there is an inexorable push toward homogenization. Organizational field is a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services and products. *Connectedness* is the existence of transaction that includes both formal contractual relationships and informal organizational level ties like personnel flows (Laumann et al., 1978; Hannan and Freeman, 1977). *Structural equivalence* (White et al., 1976) refers to similarity of position in a network structure. *Legitimacy* (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) is another important concept of the theory and argue that organization were prone to construct stories about their actions that corresponded to socially prescribed dictates about what such an organization should do. Stories were used as forms of symbolic reassurance to modify potentially influential publics (also see Mizruchi and Fein, 1999: 656).

Institutional isomorphism leads organizations to adopt similar structures, strategies, and processes (Davis, 1991; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Isomorphism has emerged from the concept of homogeneity, which indicates process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions (Hawley, 1968). The theory of isomorphism addresses the structural determinants of the range of choices that actors perceive as rational or prudent (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 149). There are two types of isomorphism in the literature (Meyer, 1979; Fennell; 1980). Competitive is assuming a system rationality that emphasizes market competition, niche change, and fitness measures.

Consequently, organizational field is a key in shaping organizational forms, processes, and beliefs. Structures and processes that are institutionally derived may be idiosyncratic to organizational field and conformity is facilitated by normative, coercive and mimetic processes (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and they conforming to rules and requirements may do so not necessarily to increase efficiency but rather to increase legitimacy which in turn increases changes for survival (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Let us discuss the above types of isomorphism in detail. Each of the isomorphism will be analyzed in terms of e-government strategy by considering the TRNC and Turkey efforts in the third section of the paper.

2.1. Coercive Isomorphism

Imply some formal consequences for failure to conform to particular operating procedures and structures (Jaffee, 2008). According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 150-51) coercive isomorphism stems from the political influences both in the formal and informal pressures and the problem of legitimacy. Such pressures may be felt as force, as persuasion, or as invitations to join in collusion. The changes that may occur within this type of isomorphism be largely on ceremonial. As a result, organizations are increasingly homogeneous within given domains and increasingly organized around rituals of conformity to wider institutions. On the other hand, organizations are decreasingly structurally determined by the constraints posed by technical activities, and decreasingly held together by output controls. Thus, organizations employ ritualized control of credential and group solidarity. A direct imposition of standard operating procedures and legitimated rules and structure also occurs outside the governmental arena.

2.2. Mimetic Processes

Refers to the tendency for organizations to imitate the procedures and structures of those organizations that are exemplary models, carry high prestige, or have successfully adapted to the environment (Jaffee, 2008). Uncertainty is a power that encourages imitation. It occurs when organizations have poor technological systems, goal ambiguity, and environment creates symbolic uncertainty. Organizational models can be diffused through employee migration or by consulting firms. Model imitating happens when organization need to respond to uncertainty. The modeled organization may be unaware of modeling or have no desire to be copied. Instead, it serves as a convenient source of practices that the borrowing organization may use. Sometimes, models may be diffused unintentionally, indirectly through employee transfer or turnover, or explicitly by organizations such as consulting firms or industry trade associations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 151). As a result, organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field. They perceive to be more legitimate or successful. The ubiquity of certain kinds of structural arrangements can likely be more credited to the universality of mimetic processes than to any concrete evidence that the adopted models enhance efficiency (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 152).

Mimetic process can occur by applying e-government strategy within public institutions in particular for the initial stage, because there is high uncertainty and ambiguousness for goals.

2.3. Normative Pressures

Operate to channel organizational behavior and procedures in appropriate, expected, and legitimate directions (Jaffee, 2008). It stems primarily from professionalization. It requires establishing a cognitive base and legitimation for employees' education. Professions are subject to the same coercive and mimetic pressures as are organizations. Moreover, while various kinds of professionals within an organization may differ from one another, they exhibit much similarity to their professional counterparts in other organizations. In addition, in many cases, professional power is as much assigned by the state as it is created by the activities of the professions. For them (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 152), there are two types of professionalism for normative isomorphism. The first one relies on formal education and legitimation which come from the university specialist. The second one refers to informal professional networks. Professional and trade associations, universities and professional training institutions are some of the organizations that for the definition and promulgation for normative rules about organizational and professional behavior (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 152). As a result, one of the most important mechanisms for creating isomorphic behavior relies on education. Institutions may imitate a model of the best practices which other institutions have through the application of one-to-one strategy.

Each of the mentioned mechanisms can serve to create organizational fields that are highly homogeneous in their operating assumptions, formal structures, and day-to-day operations (Jaffee, 2008). Thus the observed level of institutionalization may be the product of more than simply a desire to appear legitimate; it may be due to powerful normative systems supporting the appropriate organizational practices (normative), legal requirements that are enforced by the state (coercive), or the quasi-rational assessment of efficient organizational procedures and a systematic effort to institute those proven methods within an organization (mimetic) (Jaffee, 2008).

3. E-Government Literature: Concepts and Readiness

Improving efficiency and effectiveness, minimizing corruption, reducing transaction cost, emancipating the poor and marginalized communities, increasing democracy and accountability are some of the well-known advantages of e-government efforts in the literature (Misuraca, 2006; Backus, 2001, Reffat, 2003; Heeks, 2002, Kachwamba and Hussein, 2009). In the light of rapidly improving ICT, traditional government institutions need to change their services through expectations of citizens. Successful e-Government applications depend on investing the capacity of ICT infrastructure so; it is also a parallel developmental

stage of a country. According to Sagsan (2001: 91), there are several reasons which have encouraged the development of e-government these including partnership between the private and public sector, the emergence of horizontal integration and the importance of cooperative systems among public institutions, and citizens' demands on retrieving governmental information without intermediaries. Instead of defining the term of e-government, we will mention the new concepts concerning e-government such as e-governance, e-citizens, e-voting, mobile government, interoperability, and e-democracy or cyberocracy. Each of the concepts reflects any aspect of e-government stages, which is called e-government maturity (Layne, and Lee, 2001; Yildiz, 2009, Gartner, 2000, Backus, 2001, Howard, 2001; Chandler and Emanuels, 2002; Silcock 2001; Kachwamba and Hussein, 2009). Here, our aims is not to point out the stages of e-government maturity models, but to focus on the general literature on g-government by considering the e-government readiness because, in the next section of the study, we are going to evaluate TRNC efforts based on e-government readiness.

E-Government readiness for a country includes the number of computers, the amount of the Internet usage, the competency and skills of Internet users, the capacity/speed of Internet infrastructure, the capacity of increasing end-users, the number of mobile phone usage, the number of public institutions (central and local government) which have official web sites, the number of acts relating to e-government, etc. These are also some of the terms on 'information society' and e-government readiness which is one of the most important indicator of transforming information society. According to the United Nations e-Government Survey (2008), e-government readiness could be summarized using five items with their subunits, namely web measure index, stages of e-government evolution, telecommunication infrastructure index, human capital index, and e-participation index.

For countries that are at the initial stage of transforming e-government it is advised that they adopt the e-government readiness and analyze their existing infrastructure in order to determine suitability of e-government applications.

3.1. A Glance at the e-Government Evaluation of TRNC Efforts³

The TRNC is a young and new country. The roots of the Turkish Cypriots come from the Anatolia during the Ottoman Empire period (1571-1878). Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, after Sicily and Sardinia; it is the

³ Most of information on TRNC e-Government efforts rely on the Sagsan and Yildiz current study. See, Sagsan, M. and Yildiz, M. (2009). E-government in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. (ed. C. Reddick) Comparative E-Government in 409-423 pp., New York: Springer.

biggest island in the Eastern Mediterranean. It lies 65 km to the south of Turkey and 112 km to the west of Syria, its closest neighbors. After an unsuccessful and violent cohabitation experience under an unworkable constitution (Mallinson, 2005: 5-9), the Turkish Cypriot Community established its own state in 1983 under the name of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC, or North Cyprus), which is recognized only by Turkey. International diplomatic efforts are underway in order to find a peaceful solution to the Cyprus problem. The TRNC covers an area of 3,355 km², which is approximately one-third of the island of Cyprus. The population of the TRNC is 265,000 according to the 2006 Census. The political system of the TRNC is parliamentary democracy. The system of government is as follows: The president and the council of ministers form the executive. A prime minister directs and coordinates the council of ministers. The Assembly of the Republic with its elected members is the legislature. The judiciary is made up of the Assize Courts, District Courts and Family Courts, with the Supreme/Constitutional Court at the top of the judicial system. The TRNC is a unitary state. Its capital city is Lefkoşa (Nicosia). The population of the capital city is approximately 85,000. It is the main administrative and business centre of the country. Other big cities in the TRNC are Güzelyurt in the west (the major citrus production centre of the country), the resort towns of Girne (Kyrenia) is on the northern coast, and Gazimagusa (Famagusta) in the east. The economy of the TRNC is based on the services sector (Sagsan and Yildiz, 2009: 411-412).

Although a few improvements on e-government are being formed by the TRNC, there was strongly support from the top governmental level. When considering the stages of e-government transformation process (United Nations e-Government Survey (2008)⁴, the TRNC is at the emerging stage. There is an organization which is called KamuNet Senior Board, who leads e-government efforts in the TRNC and it is supported by the Prime Minister. The Board constituted an “e-Government Portal” and serves services such as citizen oriented services, private sector oriented services, and public oriented services, etc. which are still under

⁴ Stage I - Emerging: A government's online presence is mainly comprised of a web page and/or an official website; links to ministries or departments of education, health, social welfare, labor and finance may/may not exist. Much of the information is static and there is little interaction with citizens. Stage II - Enhanced: Governments provide more information on public policy and governance. They have created links to archived information that is easily accessible to citizens, as for instance, documents, forms, reports, laws and regulations, and newsletters. Stage III - Interactive: Governments deliver online services such as downloadable forms for tax payments and applications for license renewals. In addition, the beginnings of an interactive portal or website with services to enhance the convenience of citizens are evident. Stage IV - Transactional: Governments begin to transform themselves by introducing two-way interactions between 'citizen and government'. It includes options for paying taxes, applying for ID cards, birth certificates, passports and license renewals, as well as other similar G to C interactions, and allows the citizen to access these services online 24/7. All transactions are conducted online. Stage V - Connected: Governments transform themselves into a connected entity that responds to the needs of its citizens by developing an integrated back office infrastructure.

construction. The Portal gives descriptive information on tourism, health, culture, education, social life, sports, security, legacy, policy, civil society, foreign affairs, and e-government call center, and citizens. Thus, it also could be evaluated at the first stage of e-government maturity.

The legal infrastructure of e-government adoption in TRNC is protected by the Constitution. Article 21 of the TRNC Constitution, protects the freedom of communication and the privacy of personal communication. Article 30 guarantees the freedom of the TRNC citizens to use various means of communication without any kind of restriction. Article 59 gives the state of TRNC the duty of providing the adequate technologies for the education of its citizenry (Sagsan and Yildiz, 2009: 417). 'Technology Development Regions Act', 'Telecommunication Department Foundation Act', 'Right of Information Act', and 'Electronic Signature Act' allow us to understand the level of improvements on e-government adoption of TRNC with regards to legal infrastructure.

As for the local e-government applications in TRNC, only major municipalities have progressed in designing their websites and most of them are providing descriptive information that refers to the emerging stage of e-government maturity model. The findings show us that the TRNC does not have the capability of transforming e-government itself today. The lack of information literacy and awareness on the importance of e-government, inadequate professional workers among the public institutions, and insufficient governmental financial budget entails the TRNC to represent isomorphic behavior to Turkey.

3.2. Seeking a new isomorphic behavior for TRNC

Although the TRNC is a separate and independent country in the world, because of isolations it is strongly supported by the Republic of Turkey. E-Government efforts in the TRNC could also be evaluated in the same context. In other words, it can be said that there is high isomorphic behavior between the TRNC and Turkey for not only economical and social aspects, but also for technological and cultural transformation. This isomorphism can be seen at the transformation processes to e-government for the TRNC. Figure 1 tries to conceptualize the relationship between the TRNC and Turkey e-government efforts based on the isomorphic theory in the organizational literature. The model attempts to fill the 'adoption gap on e-government application' for the TRNC by taking samples from the e-government best practices in Turkey, which could be defined as organizational field within the new institutional theory. Three types of isomorphic behavior can explain the relations among the institutions within an organizational field. Unfortunately, this isomorphic behavior does not indicate sufficiently the relations

between organizational field (A) and organizational field (B) because there are little differentiations between the countries. For instance there are many institutions within organizational field (A), which includes Turkey's best practices on e-government. Each of the institutions symbolizes e-government best practice of public institution in Turkey, because Turkey has made remarkable changes on e-government.⁵ Not only best practices but also successful applications on e-government play important role to determine isomorphic behavior among public institutions. Any type of isomorphic behavior might also occur among the local and governmental institutions. For example, Söke Municipality won a prize "e-Tr Awards" in the category of "e-Services from Government to Citizens" with their project called "The Smart City Automation Systems". The achievement could be evaluated as a best practice and some of the other best practices emerged from the same organizational field (A). There may also be some isomorphic behavior such as mimetic, normative or coercive, among these best practices within the same field (A).

As for the TRNC, we indicate organizational field (B) based on Figure 1, there are some e-government practices that need to be improved and during this transformation process, the first e-government practice could point out a mimetic, normative or coercive isomorphic behavior. However, organizational field (B) should follow the organizational field (A) transformation processes by considering their best practice stages. At this point for example, mimetic isomorphism may not be sufficient to follow the best practices of (A) because there are legal and administrative differences between the fields. Due to the differences on public administrative structure between (A) and (B), normative isomorphism cannot be achieved. Also, the degree of professionalization in (B) differs from (A) in terms of performing task and applying compensation systems in the public institutions. So, all of these disadvantages allow us to seek a new isomorphic behavior in order to form between (A) and (B). This isomorphic behavior can be named "*spontaneous isomorphism*".

⁵ In order to deliver e-government best practices in Turkey, please click on <http://www.etrodulleri.org/>

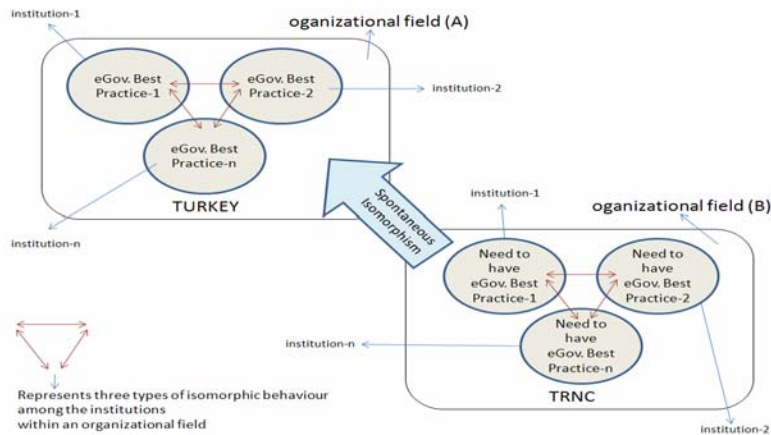


Figure-1. Spontaneous Isomorphism between TRNC and Turkey

3.3. Spontaneous Isomorphism

This type of isomorphism is not for interest behavior (financial, social, or economical) and can emerge from the fields which have common historical roots (common nationalities, common religions, common cultures, etc). There is a strong tie and reciprocal connectedness without any expectations between the fields and ‘among the institutions in the field’ (Sozen and Sagsan, 2009:69). Organizational loyalty is at the highest level and there is no domination actor. Therefore, the principle of structural equivalence has to be followed for the survival of the relationship for a long time between (A) and (B) because the principle shows that within any organizational field, one institution is equal to another at the end of the transformational process.

In the context of TRNC, this type of isomorphism could be adopted at any stage of e-government maturity in the TRNC. The TRNC need not construct a new model based on the e-government maturity, instead, it can adopt spontaneous isomorphic behavior by taking advantage of Turkey’s best practices e-government project.

4. Conclusion

Institutional theory has multiple roots and variants and has been applied in many areas of study (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), including e-government. This paper has examined how an e-government system for the TRNC can be developed and adapted by modeling the e-government strategy of Turkey from the perspective of the institutional theory. At the center of institutional theory are three dimensions

that engender the isomorphism or consistencies within or across organizations over time. These are coercive, mimetic, and normative (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The three dimensions are viewed as independent and alternative sources of organizational structuring and provide a basis for an organization to initiate (normative), influence (coercive), and provide a model (mimetic) when introducing a new system or innovation. However, in the case of the TRNC the authors have indicated that for various reasons the normative, coercive, and mimetic dimensions of institutionalization isomorphism were insufficient for the adoption of an e-government strategy based on Turkey's e-government strategy. In turn, a new form of isomorphic behavior called "*spontaneous isomorphism*" is suggested. The authors realize that the suggested isomorphic behavior is at its initial stage and requires further research to provide more insight into its implications which will hopefully eventually contribute to the theory and practice of e-government within the perspective of the institutional theory.

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