ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT MEETS QUALITY MANAGEMENT. A STUDY OF CITIZEN CHARTERS FOR ELECTRONIC PUBLIC SERVICES IN SPAIN*

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Resumen

El artículo aborda la experiencia de las Cartas Ciudadanas para los Servicios Públicos Electrónicos, desarrollada en el gobierno central español. Provee (1) evidencia sobre el uso de un instrumento de reforma del sector público que apunta a la transparencia administrativa y está orientado hacia el ciudadano. (2) Además, el autor plantea la existencia de un potencial de convergencia entre la gestión de la calidad y el gobierno electrónico, que deriva de un caso concreto, pero también de trayectorias y experiencias propias de los dos tipos de reforma, especialmente en las administraciones públicas. El artículo usa una metodología de estudio de caso y un enfoque comparativo para el estudio de experiencias pasadas de estrategias implementadas tanto en gestión de la calidad como en el gobierno electrónico. El artículo presenta ideas novedosas respecto a la necesidad de impulsar estrategias híbridas de reformas de la gestión del sector público que permitan un encuentro entre las necesidades y las expectativas de los ciudadanos en un contexto de administración electrónica.

Palabras Claves: Gobernanza Electrónica, Gestión de la Calidad, Nueva Gestión Pública, Gobierno Nacional, España.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the experience of Citizen Charters for Electronic Public Services (CCEPS) in the Spanish central level of government. It provides (1) evidences about an ongoing public sector management reform instrument addressing administrative transparency and orientation to the citizens in Spain. (2) Besides, the author points out the potential convergence between quality management and eGovernment, derived from this concrete case, but also previous experiences and trajectories of both type of modernization strategies, specially, in bureaucratic public administrations. This article presents a case study methodology, using a comparative approach addressing the study of past experiences and trajectories with quality management and eGovernment strategies. This paper provides fresh ideas about the necessity to adopt hybrid public sector management reform strategies, to transform government addressing the importance of electronic public services and the quality standards required to meet citizens requirements and expectations in eGovernment scenarios.

Keywords

Electronic Governance, Quality Management, New Public Management, National Government, Spain.

1. Introduction

This article presents an analysis of Citizen Charters for Electronic Public Services (CCEPS), a new public sector management instrument recently adopted within the Spanish central government. Service quality became an area of growing interest in public administration during the last decades. More recently, the diffusion of digital era governance improvements promoted the diffusion of electronic public services world wide. Bearing in mind the previous, public sector organizations are now exploring synergies between quality management techniques and *e*Government, facing increasing demands of progresses in the orientation to the citizens and the transparency of digital means.

Next pages display some evidences and conclusions related with CCEPS in Spanish central government. Even if the diffusion of these new public sector management instruments is very recent, the capacity to generate synergies between quality management and *e*Government deserves singular attention. To do so, a detailed fieldwork was deployed during the first three months of 2006. In the first instance, it implied the search, identification, and analysis of CCEPS then available in units and agencies of the Spanish government. Also, personal interviews were implemented in order to complete the information. Finally, an exhaustive documentary analysis was deployed using official strategies, documents, and norms emanated from Spanish ministries and agencies related with this public modernization area.

The first section will provide a general overview of the last public sector reforms, addressing the importance of the citizens and administrative transparency. Secondly, there is a section particularly devoted to the diffusion of quality management and *e*Government ideas in comparative perspective, using citizen charters and electronic public services. Then, there is a detailed analysis and discussion of the experience with CCEPS in Spain. Finally, the author provides a final assessment and discussion with last comments and future prospects.

2.   In search of citizens and administrative transparency

During the last thirty years different and various reform strategies and policies have been formulated to transform public administrations in different politico-administrative contexts. In general, the rubric New Public Management (NGP) inspired a number of processes of administrative modernization in developed countries, providing not only some theoretical principles, but also a toolkit to implement such aspirations (Barzelay, 2001; Osborne y Gaebler, 1992). In that context, the economic globalization was consolidated the 'rolling back the State' movement was prompted, as well as a certain flavour of public sector decline. This was the starting point for

the adoption in different institutional settings of new administrative schools of thought under the *new institutional economics*, based on a market orientation, and tools and techniques of private sector organizations (*managerialism*) as philosophical and practical ideas for public sector reform (Hood, 1991; Pollit, 1993).

There was a common diagnosis in the international level about the problems of traditional bureaucracy as organizational system for public services, being among the most salient problems of public bureaucracies the incapacity to attend customer needs and the lack of transparency within the administrative black box (Hughes, 2003, Lane, 2000). Even in rhetorical terms, those analyses invoked the demand of growing approximation to the citizens, surpassing the traditional tendency to ignore public customers (Vigoda, 2002; Vigoda & Golembiewski, 2001). At the same time, it was extended the idea of enlarging administrative transparency, breaking through public management opacity, above all, in public service implementation (DeLeon & Denhardt, 2000).

First, there was a clear attempt in public sector organizations to transform the nature of the relationships with the citizens. The potential of the metaphor of citizens as consumers of public services was rapidly extended to underline their importance as recipients of public policies and products, with some special rights and duties derived from the political dimension of that interaction. Second, the idea of administrative transparency was reinforced in a moment in which public administrations were confronting a more complex context blurred by growing networks of agents. The administrative transparency was even a more difficult objective than the approximation to the citizens, because the former implied real participation in decision-making processes. This idea was alien or even opposed to the logic of private sector companies, and was supported on the political dimension of public sector and the distinctive nature of the context to provide services to the citizens (Fountain, 2001). Different routes were explored in order to introduce both general objectives. This paper tackles with two of them particularly: the adoption of instruments, systems and techniques related with quality management in public sector organizations, and the use and diffusion of information and communication technologies and networks for administrative systems digitalisation in public service delivery.

3. Implementing quality management and electronic government

Citizen charters (CC) and electronic public services (EPS) are among the strategies related with quality management and *e*Government that more attention have deserved in the agenda of administrative reform. On the one hand, quality management in public administration was originally twofold: a continuous process that integrates adaptation and change; and the idea that change, as permanent improvement, is associated to deeper processes of communication and participation with the citizens. CC have been adopted in different politico-administrative contexts, although their results have been unclear, above all, in continental countries. On the

other hand, *e*Government has implied the progressive informatization of public sector organizations, giving innovative opportunities for greater transparency in the relationships with citizens, by means of a new channel to provide information to the public and open up the internal machinery of traditional bureaucracies. However, the SPE (Servicios Públicos Electrónicos) based model adopted to boost *e*Government has also implied notable lacks in those initial aims.

3.1 Citizen charters in comparative perspective

CC has been used to improve the quality of public services offered to the citizenry in different contexts within the industrialized democracies. The CC initiative first started in the beginnings of the 1990s in the United Kingdom, as a second generation product of the thatcherist public sector reform strategy, with the explicit objective to transform radically the services offered by public administrations, emphasizing results and client satisfaction, and using dynamics of private sector organizations (Bynoe, 1996; Lo Schiavo, 2000). In that regard, it was stressed the logic of the market, and underlined the customer sovereignty with respect to service delivery. In both cases, the original aspiration was to solve the magic equation: "doing more with less, and doing it nicer" (Gore, 1994). The subsequent development of CC implied different implementation strategies addressing various institutional settings, so its practical fulfilment has presented various styles, according to macro politico-administrative traditions and micro policy implementation styles, as confirmed in the Spanish case.

The term CC has been defined in various contexts with different implications. In general, CC apprehends the idea of developing strategies to introduce some quality standards in public service delivery, with a common view to extend the logic of consumer sovereignty. In essence, CC are a quality strategy that offers a type of consumer guarantee, being an explicit objective to improve the responsiveness of public services providers to clients or users (Pollit, 1994), also they are based on the common idea of extending the market logic of consumer sovereignty to public service provision (Walsh, 1995).

The implementation of CC has been different addressing countries situated in different macro politico-administrative traditions. Pollit & Bouckaert (2004) place in one extreme of the spectrum Anglo-American countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and United States, as the most prone to the new instruments related to public management reform, and also the most permeable to the adoption and diffusion of NPM instruments. In general, CC has been contemplated like a set of objectives that should be reached in public service delivery. Those objectives are defined by means of verifiable, quantitative and qualitative standards through evaluations carried out by independent units dedicated in exclusive to this work (McGuire, 2002).

In the other extreme, continental countries designed CC with contents that have implied more gradual changes and also less substantive. The principles established within CC in countries as Italy, Belgium or France, also Spain, have not impacted so much in doing competitive public

services, devising standards or providing a greater capacity of choice to the users, according to the market rules in the Anglo-American cases (LoSchiavo, 2000). In general, CC in continental countries have been used to improve internal procedures and, in some cases, they have intended to extend users rights as citizens, using concepts such as equality, accessibility, neutrality, and confidentiality of personal data. However, neither CC were conceived as a consumer contract guaranteeing service standards, nor commitments of CC were more than mere specifications, with a narrow customer perspective (Olías de Lima, 2003)

In Spain, the extent of CC has been major quantitatively than in other continental countries, even if the initiative was adopted some years later. During the last months of Felipe González Socialist Party government in 1996, the Spanish central government and under a broader quality management project, was first discussing the "Cartas de Servicios", inspired by the CC initiative in the United Kingdom (other experiences also copied the UK, like the "Chartes des services publics" in France, "Cartas dei servizi" in Italy, "Carta para a qualidade nos services" in Portugal, or "Chartes de l'utilisateur de services publiques" in Belgium). Finally, the "Cartas de Servicios" were launched some years later during the Aznar' conservative government in 1999, through the Royal Decree 1259/1999.

Olias de Lima (2003) has pointed out that the CC within Spanish central government included three types of objectives related to the orientation to the citizens. First, democratic legitimacy, by means of the diffusion of information and accountability for services funded with public money; second, citizen rights and their guarantees, doing effective the influence of the citizens in the contents of public services; and, finally, those affecting the improvement of services, in this case, consolidating evaluation systems. Nevertheless, it was evident the undervaluation of qualitative success factors, being more prominent the total amount of *Cartas de Servicios*, a typical attitude of public-law culture, dominant in Spanish public administration.

3.2 Electronic services in public administration

Electronic public services (EPS) delivery is the most extended strategy for *e*Government development. During the first years of the eGovernment 'boom' the relationships between government and ICTs has been dominated by consumerist views, what is more, EPS guided by the NPM philosophy, predominated with the importance of ICTs benefits for organizational efficiency and efficacy, with a restrictive perspective of citizens as consumers of information age services (Wimmer, 2002; Lenk & Traunmüller, 2002). In fact, the first wave of *e*Government reforms has been influenced by the private sector approach to the information society, obscuring the opportunities to provide information and promote participation opportunities to the citizenry (Leitner, 2003; Leitner & Criado, 2006).

Before the spreading of the World Wide Web in the beginning of the nineties, the possibilities to use the ICTs and the Internet in public administrations were already appreciable. As assumed

by some authors (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998; Dunleavy et alia, 2006; Heeks, 2006), in the decade of the 1960s and late public administrations lead the process of technological innovation and implementation using computers to support tasks for basic management (information systems development, management of payrolls or accounting applications), however in some extent they lost this position in the subsequent decades. Other authors identified in that moment two opportunities for the electronic services in the public environment, keeping in mind that the basic objectives were diverse (Taylor *et allia*, 1996: 266): "one is to implement major improvements in the speed of response, efficiency, and accuracy of public services, often by emulating techniques that have been well proved in the private sector. The other is to bring government closer to citizens and to encourage broader and more active participation in decision making by developing an infrastructure for 'electronic democracy' capabilitie". Modernizing government has been explored addressing the first option.

This approach was speed up with the spreading of the web in public administration during the last decade. The importance of the web originates from the fact that it was the technology that prompted the social and political diffusion of the Internet in the early 1990s and its diffusion in governmental sites was also impressive. Different analyses of public sector web sites have been undertaken, they have almost exclusively addressed the potential for public service delivery, adopting rankings of *e*Government readiness and efforts in groups of countries, regions, or municipalities (West, 2004; 2005). In general, those studies have concentrated on observations of how company web sites have performed, but the extend of progress is more questionable within the public sector (Dunleavy & Margetts, 2002), even if they confirm an important development pattern for this article: the growing importance of EPS delivery in the majority of *e*Government strategies, developments and projects.

This EPS based model has been consolidated during the last years in public administrations of different levels within the member states of the European Union, including Spain. The reasons of this situation are various, although here we provide some hypothesis. First, it is important to remark the positive role of EPS, as well as the advantages associated with them for users and public administrations, underlined in various reports from the European institutions and a number of national *e*Government strategies. Nevertheless, here it is underlined their strategic design and original focus on an excessively consumerist perspective (Bekkers & Korteland, 2006). Although it is not the objective of this paper, an acceptable although not completely exhaustive explanation of the development of this strategic option is engaged to the Information Society public policies developed by the European Union during the nineties of the past century, since they have had an extensive echo within the vision extended among government of member states and their sub-national authorities (Alabau, 2004). Fundamentally, *e*Government policies were oriented to finance and implement technological applications offering services that could be rapidly extended among the public, above all, telematic transactions with organizations and

businesses, growing the so called European Information Society. The problem was the almost mimetic translation of that movement into governmental settings, being EPS delivery as the priority and in a similar fashion than in the private sector electronic commerce.

Spain was also part of that extended vision identifying *e*Government with EPS. The abovementioned perspective was adopted in broad terms within the salient strategies and actions plans designed to develop and enhance *e*Government in Spain, from *INFO XXI* (2001-2003), to the current "Moderniza" (2005-2007). Previously, the adoption and diffusion of informatics and information technologies in Spanish central government was very important (Casarrubios & Criado, 2005; Martínez, 1984). Nonetheless, those new capabilities of the Internet and the promotion of the Information Society displaced the debate towards public services digitisation, without a reflection on the connotations and consequences of this process, or alternatives to engage the citizens more than mere consumers of electronic public supermarkets.

4. Convergence of strategies? Citizen charters for electronic public services

Recently, there is a revitalized interest in the potential of quality management systems and *e*Government instruments in different national contexts. The objective of this section is to understand the extent and possibilities for a combination between both strategies, as well as the form in which that could affect to the relationships of public administrations with the public. In the following pages, it is presented in some detail the recent experience with Citizen Charters for Electronic Public Services (CCEPS) in Spain that implies an incipient convergence between both quality management in public administration and *e*Government, in general, and citizen charters (CC) and electronic public services (EPS), in particular.

4.1 Origins and formulation

The origins of CCEPS within the Spanish politico-administrative context are very recent. The first mention within an official document of the AGE was in 2003, when the *Soto Commission*[1] evaluated the INFO XXI Spanish action plan for the information society. In the final report, the *Soto Commission* stated a number of general recommendations in different areas to pave the road for the Spanish Information Society. In the particular section for *e*Government was mentioned

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1   The panel of experts, being the majority of them from private companies, adopted the name of "Soto Commission" from its president, Juan Soto Serrano (Honour President of Hewlett Packard Spain). The rest of members of this standing group were as follows, in alphabetical order and with the name of their native organization: Ms. Belén Amatriaín Corbi (Telefónica Publicidad e Información, TPI), Mr. Juan Arena de la Mora (Bankinter), Mr. Jesús Banegas Núñez (Asociación Nacional de Industrias Electrónicas, ANIEL), Mr. Luis Bassat Coen (Bassat Ogilvy Iberia), Mr. Gabriel Ferraté i Pascual (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya), Mr. Juan Pí Llorens (IBM), Mr. José Manuel Serra Peris (Auna Telecomunicaciones), Mr. John de Zulueta (Sanitas). Secretario: Mr. Leopoldo González-Echenique y Castellanos de Ubao (from the Ministry of Science and Technology).

"the necessity of an agreement between regional and central governments to periodically publish a list of electronic services available and develop indicators that could evaluate their use by citizens and businesses" (CEESI, 2003: 30). In addition, it was addressed the convenience of building a minimum set of standards in public service delivery, developing electronic services and their use for the citizens. This was the first formulation, although vague and in rhetorical terms, that linked the relevance of adopting specific standards in public service delivery and the new attributes of electronic services.

Assuming previous recommendations, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry for Public Administrations approved in April 2003 the Action Plan for the Electronic Administration Development in Spain (APEADS) ("Plan de Choque para el Impulso de la Administración Electrónica en España"). This specific initiative for *e*Government promotion was adopted at the same times that *España.es*; the second Spanish Action plan addressing the Information Society development. The APEADS was divided into four areas and nineteen measures, with an explicit reference to service quality in *e*Government through Measure 4 "Cartas de Servicios Electrónicos" (Citizen Charters for Electronic Public Services, CCEPS). The adoption of the "Soto Commission" recommendations was primarily oriented to improve the external communications with citizens, giving them information about services available on the web, although the formulation implied certain ambition related with the future needs to create standards and rights associated to EPS, in line with previous quality management standards for physical public services:

> "Citizens will be informed about electronic services available, posting quality compromises adopted during delivery, specific incentives to use them, also rights related to them. In so doing, there will be addressed clear indicators and metrics about services use and quality, to be defined by the Information Technologies Observatory of the Council for Informatics and the Enhancement of Electronic Administration.
>
> The Ministry for Public Administrations will be responsible for updating trimonthly this information, in coordination with the rest of ministerial departments".
>
> (MCyT-MAP, 2003: 18-19)

This was the first concrete definition of CCEPS within an official document of the Spanish central government. This administrative innovation required a legal mention to the Royal Decree 1259/1999, which then regulated quality management systems. On the other hand, the Ministry for Public Administrations assumed the responsibility for Measure 4 implementation and the coordination of ministerial departments to do so. From October 2003, the Spanish central government disseminated a list of EPS available and a group of standards for quality service

delivery within this digital sphere.

More recently, the Royal Decree 951/2005 has regulated explicitly CCEPS. The new Royal Decree provides a new framework for the quality management strategy, trying to articulate the improvement of public services delivery. At the same time, it develops a strategy with different quality instruments and techniques, and for the first time it clearly links them with *e*Government through CCEPS, with the addition to the general strategy for quality management. The abovementioned Royal Decree 951/2005 tackles directly with the CCEPS:

> "1. Departments and units with operative electronic services will publish electronic citizen charters, besides the previous citizen charters, informing to the citizens about services available electronically, technical use specifications, and quality compromises during delivery.
>
> 2. Electronic citizens charters, adopted as stated in articles 10, 11 and 12, will be available both on the Internet and paper means".

<div align="center">(art. 13. Royal Decree 951/2005)</div>

4.2 Organization and initial implementation

Introducing a new Royal Decree to reinforce the CCEPS can be seen as a classical law-oriented measure, however it opened up a new landscape for quality management in the digital age within Spanish government. In organizational terms, the direction of CCEPS was not initially clear. At the outset, the unit for managing implementation, General Inspectorate for Public Services, depending on the Ministry for Public Administrations, was alien to its initial adoption. Besides, leadership of the APEADS was under the control of the Spanish Council for Informatics ("Consejo Superior de la Informática"), a tech body within the same Ministry for Public Administrations.

In that regard, personal interviews have confirmed that the Royal Decree 951/2005 has changed the organizational dependency of CCEPS, providing new responsibilities to the recently established General Directorate for Quality, Evaluation and Inspection of Public Services, and involving a group of senior managers experienced in more organizational-oriented reform. In some extent, it implies that CCEPS may lack in the technological side, because there is no specific mechanisms to coordinate the role of the Spanish Council for Informatics (actually Spanish Council for the Electronic Administration) and also the General Directorate for Administrative Modernization, both key agents for technological implementation of horizontal projects related with *e*Government in Spanish central government, one of the aspects that should be change in the nearest future.

Leaving aside the organizational infrastructure, it is also important to provide a general overview of the extension of this instrument in the Spanish government. In quantitative terms, the extent of CCEPS has been partial. At the end of the fieldwork for this research, thirteen CCEPS were approved, in five different ministries, within executive bodies or line departments,

all of them previously displaying CC (see Table 1). Even if the quantitative extent of CCEPS was limited, especially within an organization of the size and complexity of Spanish central government, the adoption has been produced within important agencies and units in terms of areas of activity and key Ministries, with strong quality management past experience, as well as substantive institutional presence on the Internet. More than broaden quantitative expectations, the Spanish government assumed a demonstrative focus addressing distinct sectors of Spanish central government, with a common and genuine interest on the convergence of quality management and *e*Government strategies.

TABLE 1: Citizen Charter for Electronic Public Services

Unit	Type	Ministry	Date of publication of CCEPS in the Official Spanish Gazette
Web services of the Official Spanish Gazette (Servicios Web del Boletín Oficial del Estado)	Executive body	Ministry of the Presidency	Jan. 15th 2004
Virtual Shop of the Official Spanish Gazette (Tienda Electrónica del Boletín Oficial del Estado)	Executive body	Ministry of the Presidency	Jan. 15th 2004
Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas)	Executive body	Ministry of the Presidency	Jan. 15th 2004
Centre for Constitutional and Political Studies Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales)	Executive body	Ministry of the Presidency	Jan. 15th 2004
General Directorate for the Cadastre (Dirección General de Catastro)	Line department	Ministry of Economy	Jan. 28th 2004
General Directorate for Personnel and Public Pensions Costs (Dirección General de Costes de Personal y Pensiones Públicas)	Line department	Ministry of Economy	Jan. 28th 2004
Nacional Institute for Public Administration (Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública)	Line department	Ministry for Public Administrations	Feb. 25th 2004
General Directorate of Personnel-Army Passive Groups (Dirección General de Personal-Clases Pasivas Militares)	Line department	Ministry of Defense	Mar. 12th 2004
(Administration Council for the Crown Heritage) Consejo de Administración de Patrimonio Nacional	Executive body	Ministry of the Presidency	Mar. 24th 2004
Social Institute for Army Forces (Instituto Social de las Fuerzas Armadas)	Executive body	Ministry of Defense	Jul. 6th 2004
Spanish Superior Council for Sports (Consejo Superior de Deportes)	Line department	Ministry of Education	Aug. 27th 2004
(Fund for the Exploitation of Services of (Fondo de Explotación de los Servicios de Cría Caballar y Remonta	Executive body	Ministry of Defense	Mar. 2th 2005
Instituto para la Vivienda de las Fuerzas Armadas	Executive body	Ministry of Defense	Nov. 22th 2005

Source: Own elaboration from internal documents of the Ministry of the Persidency

On the other hand, content analysis of CCEPS confirms that they have reproduced some of the most relevant dimensions of conventional quality management instruments. Overall, CCEPS displays the general flavour of CC, with some of the limitations and features identified before within European-continental public administrations in terms of orientation to the citizens and administrative transparency. As a result of the institutional inertia in the Spanish experience, the Royal Decree 951/2005 has regulated with similar tone both instruments, CCEPS and CC, not only in terms of direction, monitoring and evaluation, but also in aspects like the administrative transparency boundaries and the scope of the orientation to the citizens.

The content analysis of CCEPS also offers evidences about the direction of this strategy in terms of conjunction of quality management and *e*Government strategies. In general, CCEPS provide information about the EPS delivered by the unit, with some technological specifications of use (generally, identified with data processing requirements, identification of software required to manage the information, digital certificates and identification prerequisites, etc.) and some quality standards for EPS offered to the users, some rights and commitments derived from them, however they do not surpass the restrictive approach derived from the conventional CC. For example, this is the case of the "Virtual Shop of the Spanish Official Gazette", a pioneering unit in adopting quality management strategies and electronic means to deliver public services.

This example illustrates the limits and scope of CCEPS in Spanish central government. As abovementioned, CCEPS of the "Virtual Shop of the Spanish Official Gazette" enumerates the principal EPS provided by the unit, in this case, services of the electronic shop, virtual shop of the Spanish Official Gazette; electronic search of the books available in the general Library; book selling using credit card with different types of postal facilities; personal alert services to receive via email announces of public auctions and competitions for public works and services within the area of individual interest (AlertBoe Service); and personal services to access general legislative information published in the Spanish Official Gazette, also European information of national interest adopted by the Official Journal of the European Union (BoLex Service). In second place, it states the technological specifications of use within the web site, like Internet navigator (Explorer 5.0, Netscape 7.0 or superior, or other supporting CSS 2.0); the need to pay via credit card; and the final postal delivery of services. Finally, it offers some of the service compromises of the unit: delivery during the two following days from the date of purchase (time until delivery to the transportation company), and a maximum of four days (if urgent post company) or ten days for the rest of cases. Are those compromises linked to legal or economic rights for the citizens? This is an aspect that CCEPS does not mention.

On the other hand, personal interviews do not corroborate the hypothesis of substantive changes in the focus of EPS within agencies studied. In general, Spanish senior officials describe public services in the digital age following mainstream aspects of the aforementioned Information

Society discourse. In other words, the CCEPS initiative has not achieved cultural changes in personnel involved on implementation tasks or the diffusion of renovated citizen accessibility and public transparency facilities. In fact, they underline that it has not been challenged the traditional *e*Government focus based on a restrictive vision articulated over EPS, that also predominates in the international scene.

IMAGE 1:   Citizen Charter for Electronic Public Services. Virtual Shop of the Spanish Official Gazette (Boletín Oficial del Estado)

Source: Spanish Official Gazette

5. Assessment and discussion

The analysis of CCEPS in Spanish central government has developed partially the study of relationships between service quality and *e*Government. At this starting stage, the adopter units have not clearly described next steps to promote in the future the convergence between CC and EPS in Spanish central administration and in so doing, how changes will be introduced in public sector quality management and EPS delivery. In that regard, the analysis of the

regulation, organization and contents of CCEPS prevents from predictions about radical changes or transformations, as it has been pointed out before. In the meantime for future new adopters, the central unit managing this strategy has not altered the most relevant CCEPS components described before within a more recent implementation textbook, in which they have been identified aspects with more specific instructions for doing the most of subsequent implementation phases (MAP, 2006).

At the same time, some organizational and normative changes have been adopted during the last months. On the one hand, during 2006 was created a new unit, Agency for the Evaluation of Policies and Public Services ("Agencia de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas y los Servicios Públicos"), to rapidly enhance evaluative practices related with public services, also in the digital sphere. In that regard, among the objectives of this recent agency are the "promotion of quality in public services as a compromise with the citizenry, favouring the participation of the public and administrative transparency" (art. 6.2 Agency regulation). On the other hand, from 2007 new legislation will regulate the access of the citizens to electronic public services. Law 11/2007 of Electronic Access of Citizens to the Public Services will provide to the citizens by general law important and clear rights when dealing with the public sector using digital means. Both recent initiatives will probably boost the modernization agenda of Spanish central government in terms of service quality and *e*Government, hopefully more than with rhetoric words.

Even if results of CCEPS adoption have been limited, it is also clear that this strategy is interesting for future practical and academic exploration. At first glance, it is difficult to implement change in public administration, addressing not only institutional traditions and politico-administrative regimes, that constrain these dynamics in traditional bureaucracies, but also the abovementioned trends related with quality management and *e*Government strategies in continental countries. However, this experience also underlined the convenience of convergence between quality management and eGovernment in upcoming public sector reform strategies. In the future, the concrete approach to CC and EPS will provide an opportunity to rediscover the significance of the public service ethos in the digital era governance (Dunleavy *et alia*, 2006), addressing potentialities to transform government in broader terms within liberal democracies. This opens up the discussion about some final aspects.

First of all, the initiative analysed here is a truly new experience in the international context. The diffusion of CCEPS within the Spanish government has not been very ambitiously implemented, in spite of the potential to introduce innovations within the emergent public digital environment. In that regard, this paper has identified a set of different problems and has provided some general reflections addressing the importance of the institutional settings in which administrative reforms should be adopted. The importance of past experiences producing path dependency deserves specific attention from the academic point of view.

Secondly, the links between quality management in public sector organizations and *e*Government strategies is an attractive road to be explored in the future. Convergence is the word behind CCEPS, however the initial evolution of this strategy does not confirm inmediately the hypothesis of synergies surpassing limitations in the focus adopted by the Spanish government. In part, those limitations relayed on the original and previous developments of CC and EPS. Probably, it will be required a preceding revision to arrive to different results from that conjunction.

Thirdly, in spite of previous comments, it still exists space to unfold part of the potential that the integration of quality management and *e*Government may represent. Addressing initiatives such as CCEPS could benefit from the interest of agencies involved on them to innovate exploring new answers for the complexity represented by the convergence of digital means to interact with citizens and the necessity to make more transparent the access and interaction with the internal machinery of government.

In that regard, there are essentially two approaches to increasing the sovereign power of consumers of public services. The first is to make providers more responsive to consumers by consultation and more accountable to government and the community through performance monitoring. Consumer power depends on the effectiveness of voice mechanisms. The second approach is to make providers more responsive to consumers by providing consumers with choice based on competition between providers of public services. The majority of cases public administrations use voice mechanisms in the form of monitoring performance against specified standards and complaint mechanisms. In that regard, *e*Governement could integrate and make more uncomplicated a wide range of quality assurance tools including quality awards, benchmarking, providing information to the citizens and clients, complaints, redress and suggestions techniques, consultative mechanisms or setting service standards.

In sum, convergence of quality management and *e*Government could become a hybrid administrative strategy adopted by public administrations in search of continuous improvement and innovation. Addressing the situation of more bureaucratic public administrations, as those as the Spanish, the approach of this paper implies a combination of previous and broad strategies and techniques of reform, bearing in mind the importance of past modernization trajectories. This requires understanding the ecology of systems in which the increasing complexity of government is bounded, as it needs to firmly maintain public values to obtain future gains from those reforms. Needless to say, public sector organizations require their own approaches, identify specific problems and implement cultural oriented policies, far from following mimetic private sector and consumerist views, if benefits from (often) very costly adaptation efforts are expected to be gained.

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