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Electronic Governance of the Algerian Archive: Descriptive analytical study

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Abstract: This research addresses the topic of e-governance for the archives sector in Algeria, considering that the development and modernization of this important sector cannot be discussed in isolation from the digital transformation process and the use of information and communication technology. This requires a set of principles and standards that must be adhered to in order to ensure the success of digital transformation projects for archives. The more those belonging to the archives sector are aware of the importance and necessity of e-governance and the more everyone's efforts are combined, the more this means the success of digital transformation operations for archives in various public institutions. This research reached a number of results, the most important of which is that no institution can dispense with e-governance as it is the secret to the success of digital transformation operations. Consequently, e-governance for the archives sector in Algeria is an inevitability, not a choice. Two detailed proposals have been suggested that would contribute to the advancement of the archives sector in Algeria.

Keywords: E-governance, Archives, Digital Transformation, Modern Technologies, Public Institutions, Algeria.

Introduction:

Joining the convoy of modern technologies by governments and institutions has become axiomatic, as no one has the choice to refrain from this trend; it is an inevitability for everyone without exception. How can a government or institution, regardless of its size and the nature of its activity, have a place in this world while being isolated from modern technologies and their many and renewable uses? Today, the conversation is about emerging technologies and artificial intelligence.

However, despite the importance of this digital transformation, which inevitably includes the archives sector, it is worth noting the failure of many digital transformation projects. This leads us to question the real reasons behind this failure. According to the researcher, the absence of e-governance is one of the most important reasons that led to this negative result, which this research will attempt to shed light on, highlighting its importance and role in the advancement of the archives sector in Algeria through its effective contribution to the success of the digital transformation process for archives at the national level.

A. Problem Statement:

The process of digital transformation of archives in Algeria requires relying on the e-governance style, through commitment to a set of basic principles, rules, laws, and standards. These would ensure the success of this vital process and push it forward towards the renaissance of the sector and the achievement of the strategic goals for which archives institutions, centers, and services were created. Experience has proven that abandoning this style of administration and management necessarily means failure in programmed projects, or at least not achieving results in a satisfactory manner.

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In light of the above, this research seeks to study this important topic starting from the following main question: To what extent does e-governance contribute to achieving the renaissance of the archives sector in Algeria ?

B- Research Questions:

This research raises a number of sub-questions that can be summarized as follows:

- What is the reality of the archives sector in Algeria in light of the trend towards digital transformation ?
- Is there awareness of the principles and rules of e-governance among those belonging to the archives sector ?
- Has e-governance been adopted as a style in managing archives institutions, centers, and services?
- What are the difficulties and problems associated with e-governance ?
- What are the future prospects for overcoming these difficulties and reaching the development and renaissance of the archives sector in Algeria ?

C- Research Objectives:

This study aims to:

- Identify the current reality of the archives sector in Algeria in light of digital transformation.
- Take a look at the awareness of e-governance principles among those belonging to the archives sector.
- Identify the difficulties and problems associated with e-governance in archives.
- Present proposals that the researcher deems necessary, useful, and implementable, to reach the development and modernization of this vital sector.

01- Governance:

The term governance appeared in 1997 after the emergence of the financial markets crisis in East Asia. It corresponds to the English term "Governance," meaning good governance or rational management, i.e., reliance on laws and standards that determine the relationship between the management of companies or institutions and individuals, groups, bodies, and entities of stakeholders and rights holders or those dealing with them, in a way that ensures the success of investments and increased profits as well as achieving effective control (Al-Mashhadani, 2020, p. 3).

It is also defined as that system through which institutions are managed, directed, organized, and monitored, or the procedures that direct and manage companies and monitor their performance, ensuring access to achieving their mission and the goals drawn for them, and thus ensuring the interests of all parties whether they are managers, employees, customers, partners, shareholders, and others (Al-Shammari, 2012, p. 8).

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines it as a set of relationships between the company's management, its board of directors, its shareholders, and other stakeholders. Corporate governance also provides the structure through which the company's objectives are clarified, and the means of achieving those objectives and monitoring performance are determined (Tariq, 2006, p. 120).

The World Bank defined it as good governance synonymous with optimal management that seeks to answer various specific criticisms directed at countries and companies that question structural reforms managed in a top-down manner (Al-Khudairi, 2005, p. 54).

From the above, governance can be defined as a style of managing institutions based on the application of principles, laws, and standards, whether related to resource management or relationships, in order to ensure management efficiency on the one hand and achieve the institution's goals and mission on the other.

02- E-Governance:

It is the use of information and communication technology in the administration and management of institutions according to the principles, laws, and standards of governance, with the aim of developing and modernizing the performance and services of these institutions using the best adopted styles and methods.

03- Principles of Governance:

The principles of governance are summarized in six basic principles:

A- Transparency: It means the freedom of information flow and its access to those concerned without restriction or condition, because monopolizing information and withholding it from those concerned loses the trust of these individuals or groups of stakeholders in the administration, and this will be reflected in their behavior, and consequently affect the relationships between them and the institution's management.

B- Participation: Institutional democracy requires the participation of individuals belonging to the institution in the institution's management, especially in policy-making and decision-making, which makes these individuals feel a sense of belonging to the institution, meaning their loyalty to it and increased performance.

C- Accountability: The concept of accountability refers to the existence of codified and established ways and methods that enable holding every official in the institution's management accountable, and then encouraging and motivating them upon sincerity and dedication in performing tasks and responsibilities, and punishing upon negligence or breach of trust (Al-Nadawi, 2017, p. 12).

D- Responsibility: It is the readiness to perform the tasks, functions, and duties placed on the shoulders of every individual in the institution's board of directors, as well as the consequences upon default or negligence, which requires permanent vigilance and close follow-up of various operations within the institution.

E- Justice and Equality: This requires treating everyone equally, and making opportunities available to everyone without exception or discrimination whatever the reason, and preference between individuals should be based on competence, performance, and achievement.

F- Independence: It is the ability to practice the job with freedom and independence, far from external pressures such as dictates from certain parties, or internal ones such as prioritizing personal interest over the institution's interest in what is known as a conflict of interest (Al-Nadawi, 2017, p. 13).

04- Principles of E-Governance:

There is a set of e-governance principles that can be limited to the following:

A- Added Value: Through focusing on creating value to meet the needs of beneficiaries, and this is achieved through two important factors: service quality and achieving competitive advantage.

B- Strategic Alignment: It means the occurrence of consistency and harmony between the institution's goals and the technologies used in terms of their efficiency, suitability, and effectiveness.

C- Resource Management: This includes both human resources through the quality of technological training for employees, as well as technological resources that must be acquired and used. The administration must know the technological resources necessary for technological investment and evaluate them, and ensure the possibility of their achieving the institution's goals.

D- Performance Measurement: This relies on a set of indicators to measure the performance of workers and the quality, adequacy, and effectiveness of the equipment and technological means used, as well as the quality of services and the extent to which they achieve beneficiary satisfaction, through statistical and quantitative analysis of data and information.

E- Risk Management: This requires familiarity with the various risks facing the institution related to the adoption of information and communication technology, especially those related to information security and digital preservation (Yousef, 2013, pp. 363-364).

05- Basic Components of E-Governance:

E-governance consists of the following elements:

A- E-Administration: This requires generalizing the use of information technology in most of the institution's administrative operations.

B- E-Services Delivery: Because this type of service provides accuracy and speed as well as cost [savings] for the institution and the beneficiary or customer alike.

C- E-Participation: Concerned individuals can participate in policy-making, decision-making, and expressing their opinion remotely through many modern ways and methods such as electronic voting, opinion polls, and others.

D- Policy and Legislation Environment: It is necessary for the legal system to keep pace with the digital transformation process and answer various questions, so as not to leave a legal vacuum that constitutes an obstacle to programmed projects in various institutions.

E- Infrastructure Readiness: Delivering communication networks to various geographical areas, especially remote ones, is a challenge in which the state must succeed, because it is a basic requirement for the success of e-governance.

F- Internet Access: The availability of Internet service with the required quality—here we speak of fiber optic technology, meaning high Internet speed—and cost affordable to users (Al-Issawi, 2003, pp. 36-37).

06- Benefits of E-Governance:

E-governance achieves many benefits, among which we mention:

- Efficiency of performance and services through the properties of accuracy and speed.
- Transformation from closed institutions to open institutions with high performance.
- Increased communication between society and institutions.
- The ability to provide information with more credibility.
- Using the institution's resources more effectively.
- Making automated and remote services available saves effort, time, and cost for the institution, the user, and the beneficiary alike.
- Spreading the culture of transparency and fighting corruption.
- Partnership with beneficiaries in decision-making processes in institutions (Ahmiya, 2014, p. 9).

07- Indicators for Measuring E-Governance:

To measure the level of e-governance in websites, there are several elements used in evaluation, through which the activity and effectiveness of websites are measured and compared. The United Nations, in cooperation with the American Society for Public Administration, has been supporting an international working group since 2003 working to measure e-governance through the websites of institutions most used by users in 100 American cities.

Generally, there are five elements that can be relied upon in measuring e-governance:

A- Privacy and Security: Where the private information and data of individuals and bodies must be preserved from any form of infringement and violation.

B- Usability: This means the ease of using the site and its distance from complications, appearing in the number of visits and the performance of various operations by a large number of users.

C- Content: This element concerns the content of the site in terms of information, regarding its quality, reliability, and method of presentation.

D- Available Services: Here, reference is made to several types of services: services directed at citizens, services directed at employees, others for partners and shareholders, others for specific groups, and so on.
E- Public Participation: Through the interaction of a large number of users, communicating with the institution, and expressing opinions (Abdullah, 2022, p. 351).

08- Archival Governance based on the Code of Ethics:

The Code of Ethics was adopted by the International Council on Archives (ICA) at the World Congress in Beijing, China, in 1996. This code stipulates ten basic principles:
- Archivists protect the integrity of archival material and thus guarantee that it continues to be reliable evidence of the past.
- Archivists appraise, select, and maintain archival material in its historical, legal, and administrative context, thus retaining the principle of provenance, preserving and making evident the original relationships between documents.
- Archivists protect the authenticity of documents during archival processing, preservation, and use.
- Archivists ensure the continuing accessibility and intelligibility of archival materials.
- Archivists record, and be able to justify, their actions on archival material.
- Archivists promote the widest possible access to archival materials and provide an impartial service to all users.
- Archivists respect both access and privacy, and act within the boundaries of relevant legislation.
- Archivists use the special trust given to them in the general interest and avoid using their position to unfairly benefit themselves or others.
- Archivists pursue professional excellence by systematically updating their archival knowledge and sharing the results of their research and experience.
- Archivists promote the preservation and use of the world's documentary heritage, through working cooperatively with the members of their own and other related professions (Bahousi, 2022, pp. 866-870).

One can rely on the principles of the Code of Ethics established by the International Council on Archives the highest international body overseeing the archives sector globally to achieve archival governance and rational management according to the most effective scientific and standard ways and methods. This is based on the experience of the Council and its members, which extends for decades in the field of managing and running archives across various countries of the world, thus achieving management efficiency and quality and elevating the archival profession.

09- The Reality of Digital Transformation of Archives in Algeria:

The researcher attempted to stand on accurate information or statistics regarding the addressed topic issued by official government institutions, but unfortunately, they were not found. Consequently, reliance was placed on published and unpublished scientific studies that dealt with a number of topics falling under the digital transformation of archives in Algeria, such as: digitization, computerization, automation, automated systems, and others. The general observation that can be drawn when analyzing most of these studies is the delay of archives in the field of digital transformation. Here, we can mention for reference the experience of computerizing the archives of the Directorate of Education for the Wilaya of Constantine; the completion rate of this project reached 3.79% within five years of its launch (Balian and Aknouch, 2019, p. 327). This is despite the existence of a number of relatively encouraging experiences, especially in digitizing archives in many institutions in multiple sectors such as the local communities sector, the education sector, economic institutions, and others. If we take the experience of digitizing the archives of the Directorate of Land Survey for the Wilaya of Mila in a recent study, 50% of this service's holdings have been digitized (Baouta, 2024, p. 43).

However, such projects remain local initiatives of these institutions and do not fall within a national policy or strategy for the digital transformation of archives. Hence, the dominant feature is the lack of interest in the digital transformation of archives in Algerian institutions across various sectors.

It should be noted that Algeria has taken significant steps in the field of e-administration by transforming various administrative operations from the traditional form to the digital form. This matter has included various sectors, with disparities between one sector and another and one institution and another. But generally, Algeria has taken notable steps. We can mention here the local communities sector, where public service has improved significantly after generalizing the use of information and communication technology in various municipalities and wilayas, as well as the platforms provided by the supervising ministry to modernize and facilitate public services for citizens. The same applies to the labor, employment, and social security sector, the education sector, the higher education and scientific research sector, the justice sector, and others. What is criticized about these great achievements is their neglect of archives, such that they remained confined to traditional methods that time has surpassed.

10- Archives in the National Strategy for Digital Transformation:

Certainly, the National Strategy for Digital Transformation consists of broad outlines, but there was elaboration on some topics such as startups, which means focusing on the economic aspect. It is noticeable that there was no mention of digitizing archives or reference to this topic in this strategy, pending the issuance of regulatory texts detailing more on the mechanisms of implementing this national strategy. However, it is noteworthy to point out the Government Data Center project. This is an important and vital project because it provides cloud computing services to public institutions such as data storage and hosting websites and platforms, thus breaking free from the monopoly of foreign centers on these services. But what about the digital transformation of archives in public institutions in various sectors ? This strategy does not answer this question, at least for the time being, pending the issuance of new texts on this subject.

11- The Relationship of the Reality of Digital Transformation of Archives in Algeria with E-Governance:

The researcher believes that the absence of e-governance is one of the most important reasons behind the reality of the digital transformation of archives in Algeria, which is characterized by a delay in the field of using modern technologies. This stems from the prevailing practices in managing and running archives, which are dominated by traditional methods that have lasted for decades. Adopting the e-governance style to achieve the digital transformation of archives in Algeria requires changing mentalities first, then practices second, which requires great work in this field. Perhaps spreading awareness of the necessity of applying e-governance falls primarily in achieving this desired goal.

Accurate diagnosis of the reality of digital transformation of archives in Algeria, which has been expressed as dissatisfaction in most studies and even during many scientific events, and identifying the real reasons behind this reality, greatly facilitates addressing this reality, or at least contributing to improving and developing it, and then setting a plan or strategy to upgrade the archives sector in the field of digital transformation.

When relying on professional experience and published and unpublished scientific studies on this subject, the principles of e-governance are almost missing in the reality of the archival profession in general, whether related to transparency, participation, responsibility and accountability, justice and independence. Perhaps this matter is not to the same degree from one service to another and from one center to another, which is logical, but the dominant feature is as described. This prompts us to emphasize once again the necessity of combining the efforts of all those affiliated with the archives sector in Algeria, starting with the General

Directorate of Archives in Algeria, archivists, unions, related associations, and others, to entrench the principles of e-governance in the reality of the archival profession.

12- A Strategy for Modernizing Archives Using Modern Technology Proposed to the General Directorate of National Archives:

The General Directorate of National Archives is the supervising body for the archives sector in Algeria. Decree No. 88-45 dated March 1, 1988, which includes the creation of the General Directorate of National Archives and defines its competencies in Article Two, states that among its tasks is the preparation of annual and multi-year work plans and programs in the field of national archives and their implementation (General Directorate of National Archives, 1988, p. 369). Therefore, setting a national strategy for using modern technology in archives is a basic requirement for modernizing the archives sector in Algeria. In this context, we propose the following strategy:

A- Defining Objectives: Which are represented in:

- Modernizing and updating the archives sector in Algeria and upgrading the archival profession by keeping pace with technological developments occurring in the world in this field.
- Preparing the appropriate environment for moving towards e-administration, or what is called the readiness of technological infrastructure.
- Raising the level of qualification and developing the competencies and skills of archivists in the technological field through preparing modern and effective training programs.
- Benefiting from modern technological techniques and applications in the field of archives (documentary software, electronic archiving, network technology... etc.).
- Coordinating with various sectors to address the problems and difficulties faced by the archivist in light of the traditional environment, in order to transition to working in the digital environment.

B- Forming a Technology Development Directorate:

It is important to establish a directorate specifically for technological development at the level of the General Directorate of National Archives, in addition to the three existing directorates. It would be entrusted with the task of supporting and following up all activities related to the use of modern technology in archives, whether related to acquiring equipment, software, or designing networks. This directorate can also support and monitor electronic archiving projects in archival services and centers.

C- Preparing Training Programs for Archivists in the Technological Field:

It is also necessary to assign the Sub-Directorate of Programming and Training affiliated with the Inspection Directorate to prepare programs for training archivists in the technological field. In these programs, modernity and the competence of trainers should be taken into account, and they should be built on the actual needs of archivists, so that they contribute to improving their level and developing their technological skills.

D- Updating Legislative and Regulatory Texts:

Working on updating the archival legal system is a very important and necessary measure, considering that legal texts are the basic reference for administrative work. To the extent that these texts keep pace with developments in managing and running archives, especially using modern techniques to develop and improve archival work methods, this means preparing a suitable work environment for digital transition in archives services and centers.

E- Implementation, Evaluation, and Correction:

It is also necessary to determine the mechanisms for implementation, follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation to apply this strategy, through regulatory texts that define the tasks of the proposed Technology Development Directorate. This directorate could have branches at the regional or wilaya level as dictated by field conditions, thereby standing on the difficulties and problems facing archives services and centers and those responsible for computerization projects in embodying this strategy. Then, contributing to providing appropriate and effective

solutions in cooperation with the administration of institutions. It is possible to set alternative plans if necessary, so that projects reach their conclusion achieving the outlined goals.

13- An Executive Program for Computerizing Institutional Archives Proposed to Public Institutions:

The executive programs set by public institutions are the core of the matter, because they are the actual means of implementation, especially if there is political will among the managers of these institutions to embody the digital transformation strategy and policy, and to move forward towards embodying e-administration in the public institution. And then working to develop and upgrade the archives to join e-administration, because it is an organic component in this institution and its primary task is collecting, processing, preserving, and making available archival documents. This requires the institution's administration to support the archives service, and indeed to work to upgrade and develop it by all possible means, foremost of which is providing the requirements for computerizing the archives service. This proposed executive program can include the following steps:

- Placing the embodiment of e-administration at the forefront of the institution's management priorities, and thus paying attention to the computerization of the institution's archives as a basic component in the institution's management and placing it within priorities as well.
- Forming an archives service computerization team comprising: archivists, computer science specialists, and every individual or body that can contribute to the success of the project and achieving its outlined goals.
- Supplying the archives service with electronic equipment and connecting it to the internal network and the Internet, taking into account the elements of quality and adequacy.
- Organizing training sessions to train archives employees and qualify them in the technological field, taking into account the elements of quality training programs and continuous training.
- Acquiring appropriate documentary software with the consultation of both archivists and computer science specialists. It is better to choose a unified automated system among all archives services in the sector's institutions, taking into account cost, maintenance services, and employee training. In this regard, it is recommended to acquire open-source software.
- Adopting Electronic Document Management (GED) as a work style in the sector's institutions, and then preparing the infrastructure, providing the necessary conditions, and training employees on using this new style of management, including the archives service.
- Allocating a special budget to cover the costs of computerizing the archives service.
- Encouraging the archives service to contribute to profitable activities within the framework of the productive institution, especially for service institutions, through training interns in archives, especially those coming from other institutions, or providing consultations in the field of archives to support the process of financing computerization projects.

14- General Research Results:

From the above, we conclude the following:

- E-governance has extreme importance in the success of managing and running institutions of various types.
- E-governance is a basic and vital part within corporate governance.
- No institution can dispense with e-governance as it is the secret to the success of digital transformation operations.
- The delay of the archives sector in Algeria in the field of digital transformation.
- E-governance for the archives sector in Algeria is an inevitability, not a choice.
- The participation of scientific and professional competencies in the advancement of the archives sector in Algeria is more than a necessity.
- The necessity of combining efforts between all those belonging to the archives sector, whether related to the supervising body, researchers and academics, professionals, associations and professional unions, and others, in raising the challenge of advancing the archives sector in Algeria.

Conclusion:

We conclude finally that e-governance for the archives sector in Algeria is an inevitability that all concerned must sense the importance of, and indeed embody on the ground, as it is the most effective way to make digital transformation operations successful. Adhering to the principles, laws, and standards of governance will inevitably lead to pushing technological projects forward, and putting them into effect according to the best and finest ways and methods. This would contribute to upgrading archives institutions, centers, and services at the national level, and thus moving the archives sector a qualitative leap towards development and modernization, God willing.

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