IFIP WG 9.4 Conference "ICTs and Development"

Critical View of E-Governance Challenges for Developing Countries

Neki Frasheri
Institute of Informatics and Applied Mathematics,
Academy of Sciences of Albania

< This research was assisted by an award from the Social Science Research Council's Program on Information technology, International Cooperation and Global Security >

What is the problem ?

"throughout the world, ICT are generating a new industrial revolution… this revolution adds huge new capacities to human intelligence and… changes the way we work together and the way we live together"

The country is experiencing a real technological leapfrog ...

- ***Telecommunication, Gsm, Internet ...***
- ***Local & metropolitan networks in public administration ...***

What is the problem ?

- ***what are perspectives of ICT impact in developing countries;***
- ***are we doing our best to assure efficiency in deployment of ICT;***
- ***how we need to collaborate with developed countries and international organizations in order to narrow the so called "digital divide".***

Where we are ...

- Ministries represent 40% of domain names registered under "gov.al"; others are government agencies, 80% of them have small active web sites, maintained in house or by ISP s. The ministry that has outsourced all IST maintenance, it has only a domain name.
- Institutions such as of Customs & Taxes do not have web sites, while they are more advanced on deployment of ICT. Other agencies have web sites, publishing their activities on projects, tenders etc.
- Social insurances are lagging behind (example: the social insurance number is not introduced yet, despite several years of working on it).
- Emerging ideas for the creation of "information centers"
  - Interfacing local administrations with citizens
  - Dedicated mainly for marginal communities
  - Undertaken by Soros Foundation, USAID, World Bank, etc.
  - How they will evolve and survive ?

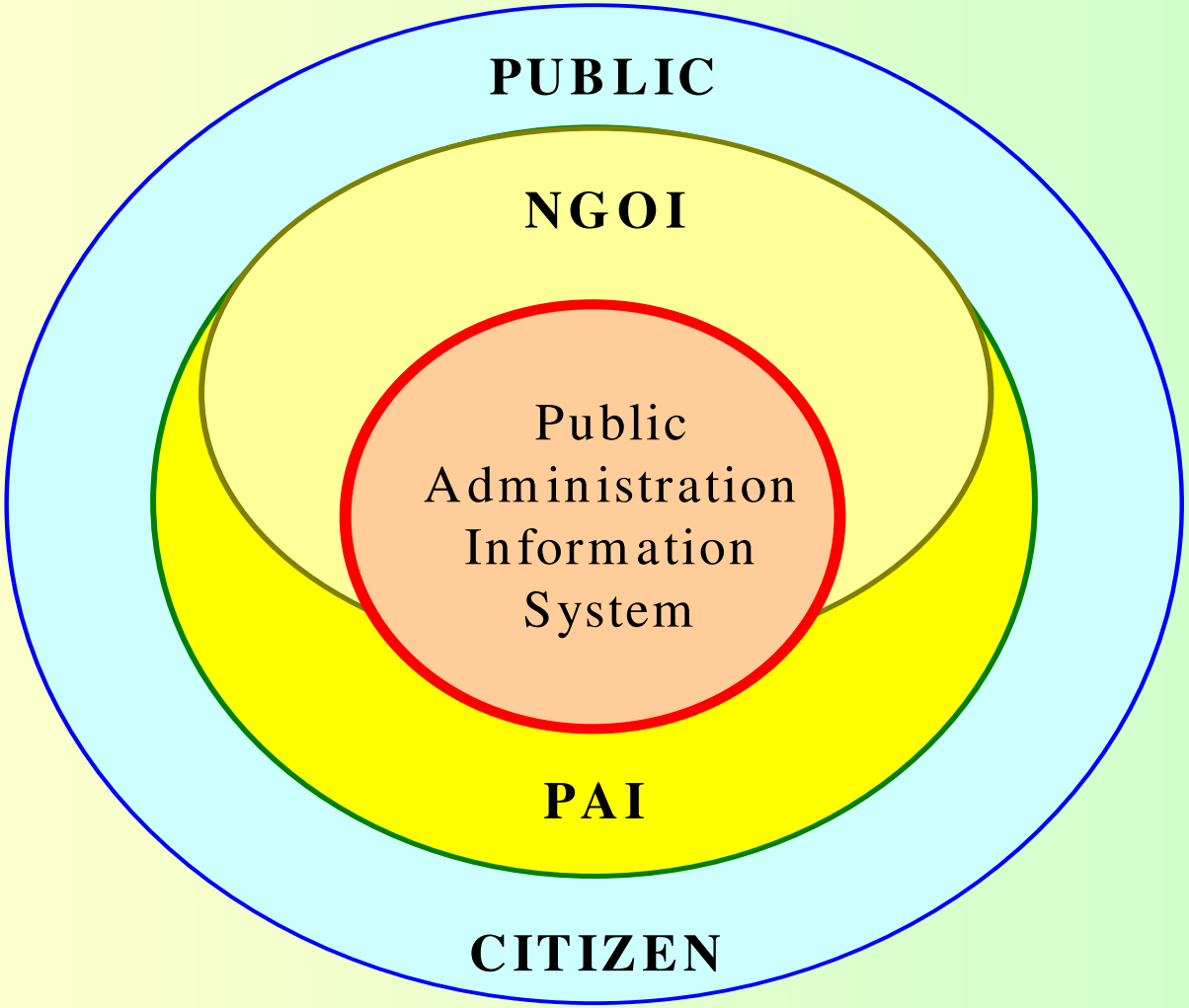
Where we are going ...

"Despite all of the advantages of science and the ways in which it is changing the world, science does not remake the human mind or alter the power of the human spirit," [Wriston]

- Widespread use of ICT is changing radically our world, our work and our living in community.
- ICT is creating a worldwide public space (*Cyberspace*), breaking all borders of space and time.
- All communication-related human activities are extended in this new public space.
- More important Cyberspace will be as public space; more human problems will emerge there.

In this context new ICT phenomena do not resolve problems, but simply shift them in another dimension.

Public ICT environment



NGOI = non governmental organization Interface
PAI = public administration Interface

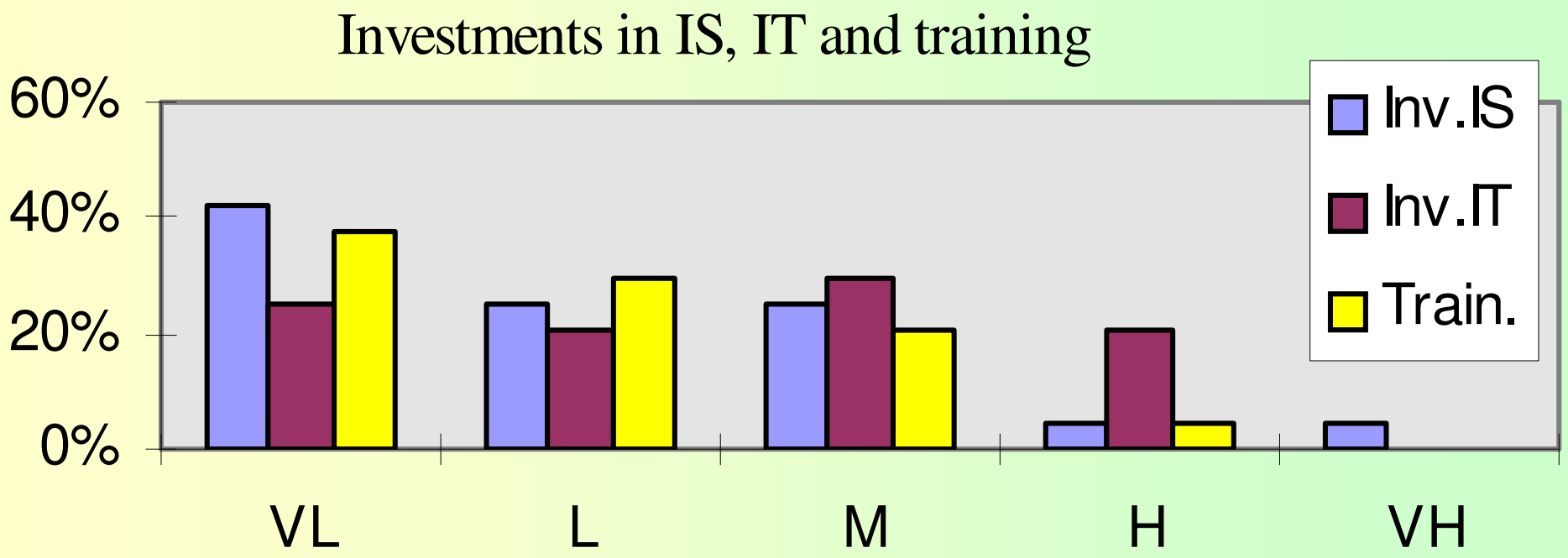
Consequences of ICT ...

- ICT cracked government's monopolies, amplifying social & political fragmentation, enabling NGO, leading to new policy-making.
  - ironically, it reminds the old postulate of socialist times, that "organizations of masses are branches of the party"…
- Decentralization increases the need of interoperability between autonomous IS implemented in different levels of government. Interoperability is a way to balance between control and monitoring.
  - may it be strategic decentralization shadowed by operative re-centralization => a hidden way to strengthen monopolization.
  - we need new working ways:
    - within government permitting joined-up thinking,
    - between government and public for accountability
    - within communities supporting concerted actions and building social and economic development.

Experience from other countries

- Examples of dialogue between citizens and governments are mainly in developed countries, or "half-developed" countries (India, Malaysia, etc. where there are communities highly developed.
- In many cases ICT is used simply as an alternate media for information processing, but this is ...
  - **far from transformation and democratization of governance.**
- ***"the e-governance gap is increasingly separating developed and developing countries, and elite and ordinary citizens within developing countries"*** [Heeks]
- ***"marginal communities to reengineer themselves to meet the requirements of a knowledge-based network economy … [they] must integrate their economic activities, and thicken their institutions by reinforcing their local and regional ties."*** [Garcia]

Albanian experience - Investments

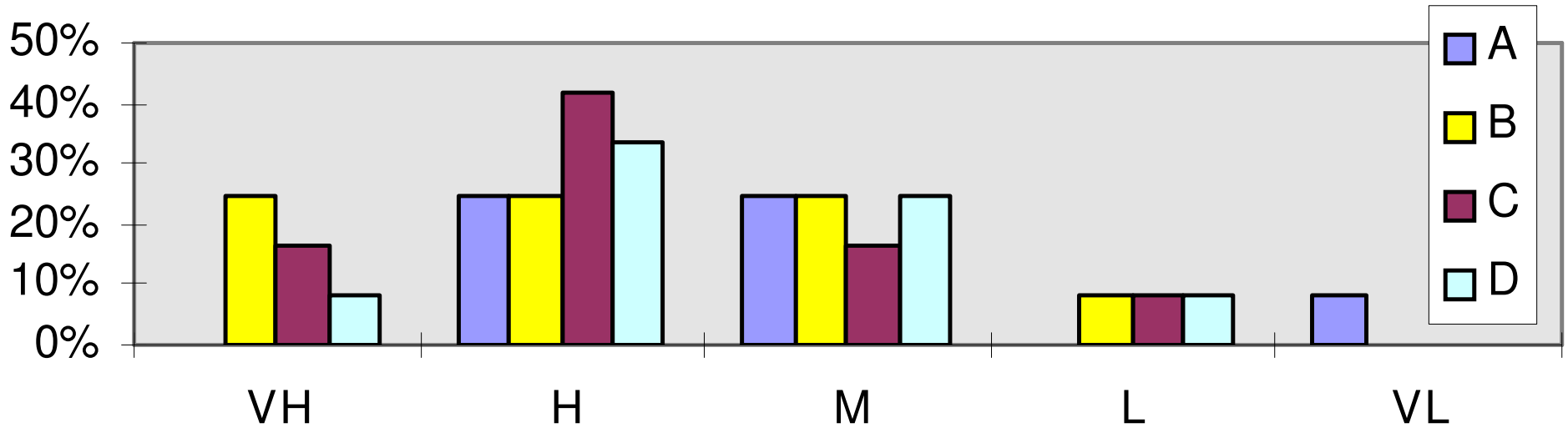


VL=very low; L=low; M=medium; H=high; VH=very high

- **Technology is overestimated, but only in a part of institutions**
- **Usage and training is generally underestimated**

Albanian experience - Problems

Factors related with the knowledge of problems



VL=very low; L=low; M=medium; H=high; VH=very high

A - Solution found before understanding problems

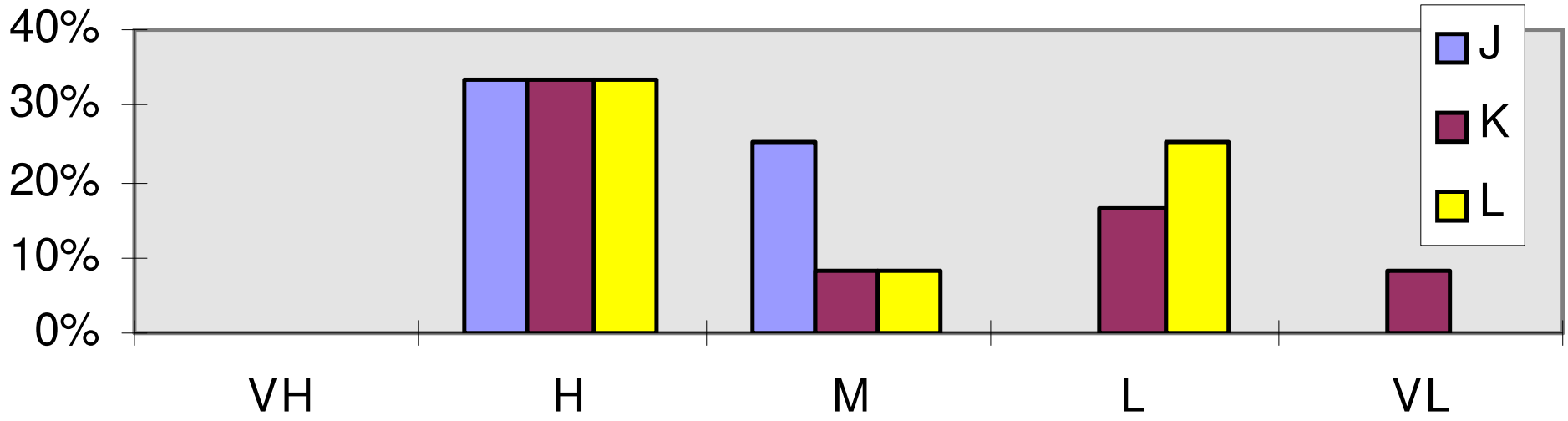
B - Misunderstanding user requirements

C - Non involvement of end-users

D - Misunderstanding the importance of employers

Albanian experience - Approaches

Impact of practices for deployment of ICT



VL=very low; L=low; M=medium; H=high; VH=very high

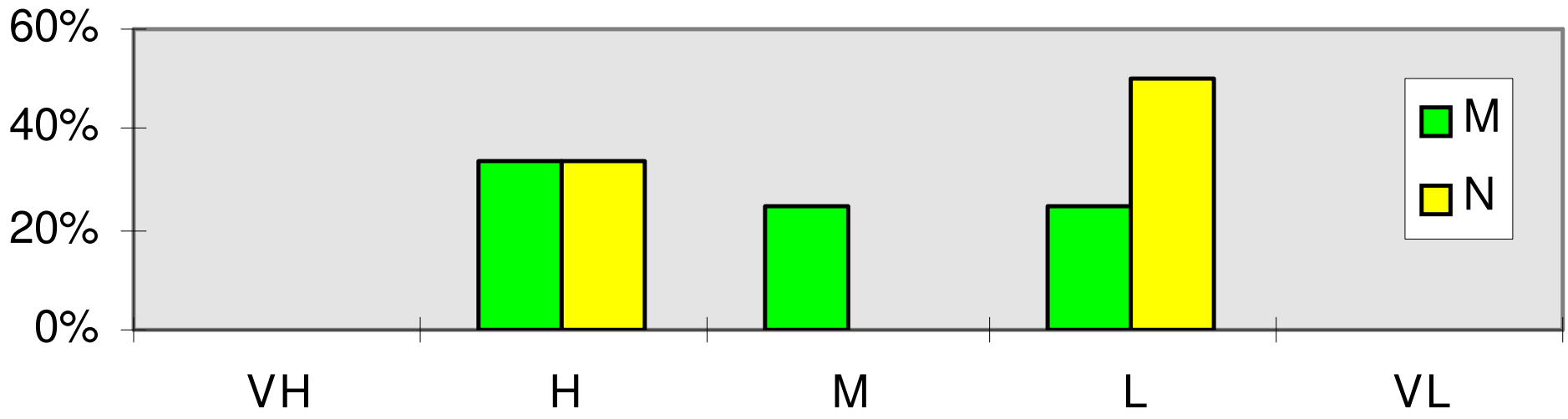
J - Drawback of step-by-step approach

K - Strategic planning compared with improvizations

L - Improvization leads to sub-optimal solutions

Albanian experience - Strategies

Importance of bottom-up versus top-down strategies



VL=very low; L=low; M=medium; H=high; VH=very high

M - Evaluative bottom-up strategies

N - Analytical top-down strategies

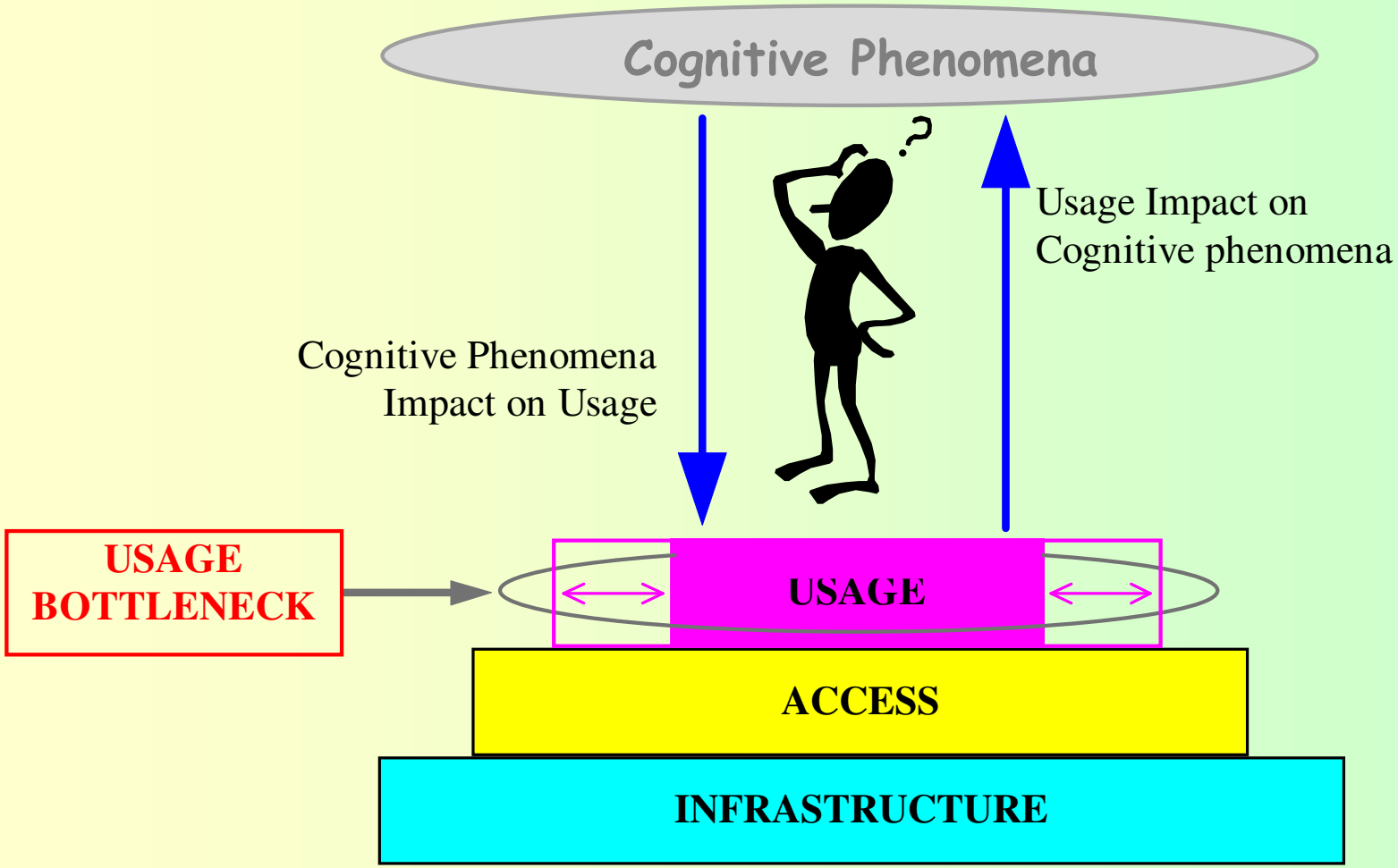
Albanian experience - Practices

- **ICT people in public administration consider all these factors as relatively important (average High).**
- **Despite this consideration, the balance of investments is not built in such way to neutralize their negative impact.**
- **This is because the real but not considered factors with negative impact to deployment of ICT may be reformulated as follows:**
  - **Building ICT infrastructure without structured IS**
  - **Manipulation of project implementation & deployment**
  - **Confusing production knowledge and conceptual knowledge.**

Bad example: the practice of PMU-s (Project Management Units)

ICT Bottleneck

[D'Arquette & Bimber]



ICT versus Institutionalization

- The bottleneck lies in the “usage” that would develop cognitive phenomena, to lead them in changing the way of living and working
- Usage implies Institutionalization, “***that means the process by which a practice or organization becomes well established and widely known, if not universally accepted***”

  [Mainwaring]
- ”For such institutional reforming processes to have success, beside crisis and ideology elements for a reform a third element is necessary, ***the political will to do the reform***”

  [Heeks]

Institutionalization implications

- **The best way would be a blending of both strategies that would promote bottom-up development of autonomous systems, assuring their interoperability through a top-bottom approach.**
- **That is a "central coordination" in a "distributed environment":**
  - **Decentralization of public administration, followed by improvement of monitoring procedures.**
  - **Development of open systems in public administration, to support monitoring and accountability.**
  - **Assurance of interoperability between autonomous systems in a distributed environment, composed by public administration, NGOs and SMEs.**
- **How to match complexities of 'political will' with requirements for institutionalization ?**

"digital divide" versus "scientific divide"

- We are repating errors neglecting even our own history
- The DCs realities does not fit well with the 'western rationality'
- Many of problems are already warned by social sciences
- It is a GAP between social sciences, technology makers and decision-makers in developed countries
  - the story of technology assessment movement
- What we need:
  - the political will to develop the country
  - clear political objectives how to do it
  - an institution building strategy,
    - considering ICT as part of institution building process

… as the way to bridge rationality gaps ...

THANK YOU