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# Think Paper 4: eGovernment strategy across Europe - a bricolage responding to societal challenges

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Version No. 3.0

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# Think Paper 4: eGovernment strategy across Europe - a bricolage responding to societal challenges

Michael Blakemore, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2006

Version No. 3.0

*Prepared for the eGovernment unit, DG Information Society and  
Media, European Commission*

[http://europa.eu.int/egovernment\\_research](http://europa.eu.int/egovernment_research)

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# 1 Key Messages

The European Commission continues to provide strategic influence by 'binding' together the national and sub-national strategies of eGovernment. This is undertaken through key processes:

- **Promoting innovative change** to manage the complex balance between the finance and resources, organisational change, and meeting the needs the and expectations of citizens
- **Championing the citizen** as a consumer of government services
- Maximising the flow, and use, of **good practice** throughout Europe
- Focusing on eGovernment as a **trustable service brand**

Good eGovernment will enable organisational transformation and citizen centric agendas by:

- Championing 'diversity' in an enlarging EU, while **synthesising major learning lessons** for all levels of government
- **Confronting 'failure'** in the same context that business does – a learning experience, not a disaster to be hidden at all costs
- Analysing the complex landscapes of governance throughout the EU, identifying trends, and setting citizen and business **relevant development agendas**
- Identifying important processes of the **consumption of governance**, not its technological production; focusing on citizenship, dignity, inclusion, rights and responsibilities
- Supporting the development of **citizen-relevant measure of eGovernment**, at spatial levels that go beyond administrative space, to functional space

## 2 From production to consumption - changing perspectives on the eGovernment brand

The 'brand' of European Union (EU) eGovernment has developed through a process of mediation between the complex landscapes of national and sub-national strategies that are becoming more diverse with EU enlargement. In the early years of this decade key messages of the eEurope plan<sup>1</sup> focused on overcoming conventional problems of government using ICTs, on widening access to ICTs, and reducing the geographical unevenness of Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> EUROPE. (2001a). *eEurope 2002: Impact and Priorities*. Brussels: European Commission. March 13, Report COM(2001)140 Final, 19 p. [http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/europe/news\\_library/pdf\\_files/communication\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/europe/news_library/pdf_files/communication_en.pdf)

Emphasis was placed on speeding up government services, both in efficiency and in response, and maximising the mobility of citizens and businesses through pan-European eGovernment projects<sup>2</sup>.

From initial service automation approaches, eGovernment agendas have developed to cover diverse emphasis on; inclusion ('no citizen left behind'<sup>3</sup>); effectiveness, for example through quality of service; organisational strategies, such as the 'transforming' of government organisations<sup>4</sup>; and in working together with the private and the third sectors so that the strengths of each are used strategically to deliver 'public value' to citizens. 'Transformation' is not new conceptually, since it was at the heart of the introduction of information systems into government in the 1980s, and it was central to organisational reform in the 1990s<sup>5</sup> which looked at the use of entrepreneurial approaches to service delivery. It does however, re-invigorate challenges where "at its most advanced level, e-government could potentially re-organize, combine, and/or eliminate existing agencies and replace them with virtual organizations"<sup>6</sup>.

The overall eGovernment brand has therefore matured from an early focus on the 'production' of eGovernment, to one of relevance and value to citizens - the 'consumption' of eGovernment. It has proceeded through a path from eAdministration, to eGovernment, eEnabled services, and recently to eGovernance and citizen/consumer consumption and experience of services. For the EU the uniformity models of the early years gave way to a wider agenda that looks towards 'building' pan-European services<sup>7</sup>. This means realising the importance of interoperability<sup>8</sup>, and the consumption agenda looks not at the 'push' of automated services to passive citizens, but at the complex behaviours of citizens and the challenge for ICT models to "truly model conventional interactions between citizens and expert public officials"<sup>9</sup>.

As with a commercial service, eGovernment is a dynamically developing brand<sup>10</sup>. Brands are not imposed, but are developed and contested, feeding both off positive feedback from customers (customer relationship management), and learning from the negative aspects of consumption, whether it be through problems with a delivery channel, or through opinions expressed by consumers<sup>11</sup>. In the interconnected communication networks of the Internet reputation and trust are fragile<sup>12</sup>. Citizens increasingly can express opinions independent of

<sup>2</sup> EUROPE. (2001b). *Ministerial declaration: eGovernment - a priority for Europe*. (November 30) European Commission, [cited December 1 2001]. [http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/eeurope/egovconf/documents/press2.doc](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/egovconf/documents/press2.doc)

<sup>3</sup> REDING, V. (2005). *eGovernment in i2010 - citizens first*. (November 24) European Commission, [cited June 3 2006]. <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/05/731&format=DOC&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

<sup>4</sup> EUROPE. (2005). *Ministerial Declaration: approved unanimously on 24 November 2005, Manchester, United Kingdom*. (November 24) European Commission, [cited November 25 2005]. <http://www.egov2005conference.gov.uk/documents/proceedings/pdf/051124declaration.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> OSBORNE, D. & GAEBLER, T. (1992) *Reinventing Government : How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, New York, Addison Wesley.

<sup>6</sup> BONHAM, G. M., SEIFERT, J. W. & THORSON, S. J. (2003). *The Transformational Potential of e-Government*. (January 3) Maxwell School of Syracuse University, [cited October 25 2006]. <http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/maxpages/faculty/gmbonham/ecpr.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.eurogov.eu/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> EUROPE. (2004). *Working Paper on eGovernment Beyond 2005 - An overview of policy issues*. Brussels: European Commission. September, 22 p. [http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/activities/egovernment\\_research/doc/working\\_paper\\_beyond\\_2005.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/egovernment_research/doc/working_paper_beyond_2005.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> RICHTER, P., CORNFORD, J. & MCLOUGHLIN, I. (2004). *The e-Citizen as talk, as text and as technology: CRM and e-Government*. (Volume 2, Issue 3) Electronic Journal of e-Government, [cited February 20 2005]. <http://www.ejeg.com/volume-2/volume2-issue3/v2-i3-art7.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in November 2006 the UK Government in effect marked its ending of the eGovernment brand, to now be part of the 'Transformation' brand. <http://www.kablenet.com/kd.nsf/Frontpage/C72FDB2D55E1330B802572250042149F?OpenDocument>

<sup>11</sup> TORRES, L., PINA, V. & ACERETE, B. (2006) E-Governance Developments in European Union Cities: Reshaping Government's Relationship with Citizens. *Governance*, 19, 277-302.

<sup>12</sup> URRY, J. (2003) *Global Complexity*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press.

any official government channels, for example sending emails to politicians, and then to view the responses<sup>13</sup>. A challenge then is how to make eGovernment a trusted brand, and there are shared experiences with e-commerce that communicate the long time it takes to build trust in a brand.

## 3 EU25 - different paths, convergent goals

The EU approach to citizen-centric eGovernment is placed within a complex of development across European space, and with over time with differential starting points and rates of progress.

### 3.1 Dynamics, Uncertainty, Culture and Power

First, as noted in the previous section, there is the changing eGovernment agenda. Second, there is the situation whereby enlargement of the EU introduces new turbulence into the existing eGovernment strategy. This both includes member states whose economies are not as strong as many other in the EU<sup>14</sup>, and states whose political legacy has allowed them to take a 'clean sheet' approach and construct new democratic governance structures.

Third, there is a combination of linear and non-linear outcomes. While nations such as Denmark continue to refine their strategy, other such as Estonia can 'leap-frog' over other states through the rapidity of strategy implementation. Estonia was praised in 2000 for its eGovernment strategy where politicians vote online and give Webcasts<sup>15</sup>. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in the 2004 study on eGovernment in Central Europe<sup>16</sup> ranked Estonia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic above comparative eGovernment leaders like the UK and the Netherlands in terms of availability of online services. By 2006 80% of Estonian taxpayers filed their returns online<sup>17</sup>. The Estonian foreign minister had also acknowledged in 2004 that "Estonia is a small country ... You can do things in a small country fast if you have political will"<sup>18</sup>, so size also matters.

However, in 2006 the EIU<sup>19</sup> produced updated rankings that showed the work that is yet to be done to raise Estonia (ranked 27 out of 68 states assessed) to the level of Denmark (ranked

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<sup>13</sup> HEARFROMYOURMP. (2006). *HearFromYourMP*. (March) HearFromYourMP.com, [cited March 13 2006].

<http://www.hearfromyourmp.com/>, KABLENET. (2005). *Hear from your MP online*. (November 22) Kable Government Computing, [cited November 23 2005]. <http://www.kablenet.com/kd.nsf/Frontpage/A3A5023D618F2231802570C1003C417D?OpenDocument>,

MYSOCIETY. (2005). *WriteToThem.com Beta Test*. (March) mySociety, [cited March 23 2005]. <http://www.writetothem.com/>

<sup>14</sup> Hence the use of structural funds at regional level both to reduce inequalities, and also as Commission Danuta Hübner noted on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2006, "to draw on the experience and best practice of high performing regions and to transfer this to regions wishing to improve"

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1526&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

<sup>15</sup> PERERA, N. (2000). *The Little Country That Could*. (December 11) Industry Standard, [cited April 10 2001].

<http://www.thestandard.com/article/display/0,1151,20451,00.html>

<sup>16</sup> EIU. (2004). *E-government in Central Europe: Rethinking public administration*. London: Economist Intelligence Unit. August, 21 p.

<http://www.eiu.com/>

<sup>17</sup> IDABC. (2006g). *The majority of Estonians submit tax returns electronically*. (August 28) European Commission, [cited August 31 2006].

<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/5770/194>

<sup>18</sup> FULLER, T. (2004). *In Estonia, e-banking, e-commerce, e-government*. (September 13) International Herald Tribune, [cited September 20

2004]. <http://www.ihrt.com/articles/538408.html>

<sup>19</sup> EIU. (2006). *The 2006 e-readiness rankings*. London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 24 p.

[http://graphics.eiu.com/files/ad\\_pdfs/2006Ereadiness\\_Ranking\\_WP.pdf](http://graphics.eiu.com/files/ad_pdfs/2006Ereadiness_Ranking_WP.pdf)

first in the list with a score of 9.0). The EU's own 2006 Public Service rankings now note "Estonia has moved from 8th to 3rd place and successfully entered the top 3"<sup>20</sup>. Estonia's 'clean-sheet' strategy shows an 'emergent' strategy, implying that a strategy is not scoped, planned, and then enacted exactly as the plan stated originally. Instead, it learns as it proceeds, and plans mature and change according to emerging challenges. For this reason, the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Communication "has recently drawn up a plan on how to merge the public sector's information system into one logical whole"<sup>21</sup>.

Fourth, there is uncertainty – in effect unexpected or unpredicted outcomes produced by global events (for example SARs, climate change, or terrorism), demographic change, or local events such as sudden political change. For example, the current debate over paradigms such as the 'Swedish' economic and social governance model, where the economic activity is finding it hard to sustain an ageing population, shows that models are subject to uncertain change. However, the Scandinavian governance models continue to demonstrate good practice, and continue to build on high levels of citizen engagement with government, and a citizen-focus by government for example through eMunicipalities in Norway<sup>22</sup>.

Fifth, there are very real cultural differences between EU State public administrations that mean the transformation agenda will be enacted unevenly between them. Consequently, the promotion of a model such as New Public Management will be both interpreted and enacted differentially. In France, for example, "ideological underpinnings of the NPM debate do not find a receptive terrain in French public administration"<sup>23</sup>, and Cole warns of the "case specific factors that will influence the extent of reform, such as the ideology of public service, the civil service code, or the honeycomb organization of the French state. The Economist noted similar issues in the reform of French business: "Unless France manages to introduce such reforms, its economy will struggle to recover, and any growth will be largely jobless"<sup>24</sup>. The varied approaches of States, regions, and stakeholders, further detail the diverse eGovernment landscape. The German state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) is enacting its 'Action Plan 2009', involving more cooperation with Federal level activities, the promotion of new ICT infrastructure, and "electronic authorisation and participation procedures"<sup>25</sup>.

As with the Administration constraints noted above, sectoral interests may promote particular power emphases within an eGovernment agenda. For example, the UK Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM) is promoting Chief Information Officers as being the people to lead transformation agendas, because they have "a mix of business, organisational and change-management skills"<sup>26</sup>. The ICT industry promotes large centralised IT projects as underpinning wider transformation. Successful examples of this approach include the Austrian

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<sup>20</sup> EUROPE. (2006b). *Online Availability of Public Services: How Is Europe Progressing? Web Based Survey on Electronic Public Services. Report of the 6th Measurement*. Brussels: European Commission. June, i+88 p.

[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/benchmarking/online\\_availability\\_2006.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/benchmarking/online_availability_2006.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> BALTIC. (2005). *Estonia's IT development slowing*. (December 14) The Baltic Times, [cited December 16 2005]. [http://www.baltictimes.com/hot1.php?art\\_id=14215](http://www.baltictimes.com/hot1.php?art_id=14215)

<sup>22</sup> NALRA. (2006). *eMunicipality 2009 – the digital leap*. Oslo: Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS). February 1, 39 p. <http://www.ks.no/upload/77518/eMunicipality%202009.zip>

<sup>23</sup> COLE, A. & JONES, G. (2005) Reshaping the State: Administrative Reform and New Public Management in France. *Governance*, 18, 567-588.

<sup>24</sup> ECONOMIST. (2006b). *Reforming the unreformable*. (October 26) Economist, [cited October 31 2006].

[http://www.economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=8048364](http://www.economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8048364)

<sup>25</sup> IDABC. (2006a). *Action Plan 2009*. (October 30) European Commission, [cited November 2 2006].

<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/6239/194>

<sup>26</sup> IDABC. (2006b). *CIOs identified as key players in transformation of public services*. (October 30) European Commission, [cited November 2 2006]. <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/6232/194>

Federal Budgeting and Bookkeeping System project which was “part of a larger effort to implement ERP technology throughout the Austrian Federal Government as part of a government-wide public management reform effort”<sup>27</sup>.

### 3.2 ‘Failure’, Partnerships, Networks and Complexity

Political opponents, and the technical media, often highlight perceived failures of reform or ICT projects. There is a need for a more reasoned reflection on ICT projects not meeting original expectations. For example the UK Department of Work and Pensions call centres suffered from only 84% of calls being answered in 2005-2006. A core problem is not, however, the technology or the staff, but a bewildering range of 55 telephone numbers that citizens can use, and “the department’s technology will not enable your call to be transferred to the right service”<sup>28</sup>. While the design of the ICT solution can therefore undermine the service intentions, problems also can occur in the lack of investment in the human resource aspects of organisational change, for example training and innovation<sup>29</sup>, and more directly the lack of consequences of failure is an issue; “top civil servants feel they are not held accountable for poor performance and that Parliamentary scrutiny of them is ineffective”<sup>30</sup>.

There has been a re-prioritising of partnership approaches, for example public/private partnerships, or the involvement of the ‘third sector’ – NGOs and voluntary organisations for example. Partnership governance “contains within it three contesting sub-discourses”: the management and measurement of participation, the “consociational” aspects of working together and having influence, and the extent to which all parties are participating”<sup>31</sup>. This often involves governance through what Pattberg terms “at-a-distance relationships” that require “adjustments of behavior toward mutual goals but also shared norms, principles, and roles”<sup>32</sup>. To date the emphasis in such projects has often been management through audit and performance management, and at times the use of public-private partnerships can become confusing – is the priority one of managing the cash-flow of public finances, or one of delivering better quality services, and does responsibility rest with the public sector partner or third/private partners<sup>33</sup>? The ‘Breaking Barriers to eGovernment’ project delves further into the constraints in eGovernment service delivery<sup>34</sup>.

Community-level strategies, local partnerships, can involve working with organisations who champion excluded sectors, to enrich “the relationships between representative and participative systems energising local political processes”<sup>35</sup> – in effect binding together the

<sup>27</sup> SWAN, I. (2006). *Public Return on Investment (ROI)*. (September 13) European Commission, Impact of eGovernment Conference: Helsinki (13.09.06), [cited October 26 2006]. [http://www.egov-goodpractice.org/event\\_details.php?&eventid=125](http://www.egov-goodpractice.org/event_details.php?&eventid=125)

<sup>28</sup> KABLENET. (2006). *DWP computers 'unreliable'*. (November 2) Kable Government Computing, [cited November 3 2006]. <http://www.kablenet.com/kd.nsf/Frontpage/AD3F5B315A0494B28025721A003391FE?OpenDocument>

<sup>29</sup> DAVIES, W. (2005). *Modernising with a Purpose: A Manifesto for a digital Britain*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research. July, vi+79 p.

<sup>30</sup> IPPR. (2006). *'No price for failure' in Whitehall*. (August 7) Institute for Public Policy Research, [cited August 29 2006]. <http://www.ippr.org.uk/pressreleases/?id=2257>

<sup>31</sup> SKELCHER, C., MATHUR, N. & SMITH, M. (2005) The Public Governance of Collaborative Spaces: Discourse, Design and Democracy. *Public Administration*, 83, 573-596.

<sup>32</sup> PATTBERG, P. (2005) The Institutionalization of Private Governance: How Business and Nonprofit Organizations Agree on Transnational Rules. *Governance*, 18, 589-610.

<sup>33</sup> BBC. (2005). *Tube PPP 'cost public purse £1bn'*. (March 30) BBC, [cited March 31 2005]. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4395621.stm>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.egovbarriers.org/>

<sup>35</sup> RACO, M., PARKER, G. & DOAK, J. (2006) Reshaping spaces of local governance? Community strategies and the modernisation of local government in England. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 24, 475-496.



production and consumption processes, and going beyond participatory democracy activities to partnerships in service construction and delivery. There is, however, the risk of central agenda conflicting with these initiatives if the emphasis is more on “local needs and issues and that there would be enough effort required to draw these aspects together before looking beyond the locale”<sup>36</sup>. In Ireland, the development of Strategic Policy Committees at local level also identified concerns including “the role of marginalized groups, the equality of participation and the need to hold decision-makers to account”<sup>37</sup>. In summary, “yesterday’s world was made up of isolated organizations and islands of information. The world of tomorrow will be one of ecosystems and collaborative networks”<sup>38</sup>.

The landscape of eGovernment strategies throughout the EU continues to present a complex of approaches, including centralisation, decentralisation, partnerships and privatisation. The management and ownership of the strategy as it is implemented is undertaken through a complex of bureaucratic management, regulatory domains, contracts and partnerships, metrics and performance assessment. The motives for undertaking any one approach also are complex, ranging from financial pressures, efficiency gains, to the shifting of responsibility from government to another sector, for example through privatisation.

In helping member states to share experiences, and to identify common ground and future strategy, there is value for the EU to continue to analyse the complex landscapes of governance throughout the EU, identify trends, and set citizen and business relevant development agendas. It also can continue to identify strategically important processes of governance consumption rather than technological uniformity of production. This will include citizenship, dignity and technological relevance (inclusion), rights and responsibilities (information content, ethics, and privacy). Furthermore, even the inclusion agenda needs reflective evaluation, for example the emphasis on ICT access for the elderly, which is both a political goal as well as an inclusion goal – the elderly are becoming a powerful electoral lobby. There is therefore the risk of policy distortion, and the Economist expressed concerns in the UK; “Political parties, which are in the market for votes, cannot be entirely blamed for putting the claims of the elderly before those of the young. But it is short-sighted, unhealthy for democracy and wrong in itself”<sup>39</sup>. Inclusion has the potential to generate new exclusions.

## 4 Good Practice or Best Practice?

Sharing experiences is has been a fundamental action for the EU through initiatives such as the Good Practice Framework<sup>40</sup>. It has been an important initiative in stimulating the structured exchange of experience throughout Europe, but the methodologies by which good practice is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> CALLANAN, M. (2005) Institutionalizing Participation and Governance? New Participative Structures in Local Government in Ireland. *Public Administration*, 83, 909-929.

<sup>38</sup> LAMOUCHE, D. (2006). *There are 3 major technological trends that are of fundamental importance to tomorrow’s connected world.* (October 28) World eGovernment Forum, [cited October 25 2006]. [http://www.worldegovforum.com/article.php3?id\\_article=1288](http://www.worldegovforum.com/article.php3?id_article=1288)

<sup>39</sup> ECONOMIST. (2006a). *In defence of the young.* (October 26) Economist, [cited October 31 2006].

[http://www.economist.com/world/britain/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=8081771](http://www.economist.com/world/britain/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8081771)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.egov-goodpractice.org/>

assessed has been a difficult process of balancing objectivity and quantification: is innovation and excellence generic, or is it context and geographically sensitive?; where and how can best practice be transferred? There remains a powerful geographical logic for such an activity as the EU expands to include new members, and the thematic logic for the activity is provided above in the context of changing national strategic priorities. Enacting the communication of good practice, however, involves a difficult balance between sharing experience, providing advice, prescription, and judgement.

- Sharing experience – encouraging communities of practice

This is very much the approach of the Good Practice Framework, which balances a self-submission process with a keyword and context searching facility. Such an approach builds on the willingness of projects to submit their details, but it does not then go on to providing value-judgements on the quality of the projects. Similarly, the promotion of ‘success stories’<sup>41</sup>, promotes that sharing of experience without the fear of judgmental evaluation. However, there still is an uneasy relationship between the use of the term ‘good practice’ and the attachment of a formal quality label to a project that is deemed to demonstrate ‘good practice’.

- Providing advice – research

Beyond those activities at national levels, this includes the EU IDABC eGovernment Observatory<sup>42</sup>, OECD<sup>43</sup> eGovernment research, and at the global level UPAN<sup>44</sup> (UN Division for Public Administration and Development Management). Activities focus on symposia, seminars, funded research, gateways, country-level reviews.

- Strategic prescription

Through resource initiatives such as EU Framework funding, recently having involved funding lines of eGovernment, eTen, eInclusion, the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework<sup>45</sup>, and now with eParticipation<sup>46</sup>.

- Judgement – awards

This involves encouragement, reward, and the opportunity for social and professional networking between projects at conferences and awards ceremonies. In 2001, 2003, and 2005 for eGovernment in the EU this involved the eEurope Awards<sup>47</sup>. Competitions occur regularly at national level or best practice, for example: In the Czech Republic by evaluating “innovation or originality; contribution to either improving the service to the public or in reducing administrative costs; contribution for employees of local administrative bodies; use of EU funds or unusual sources of financing”<sup>48</sup>. Technical best practice in Germany: “In the German version, together with background information on ITIL and IT service management, the KBSt has put two studies on-line: Standards für IT-Prozesse (Standards for IT Processes) and ITIL und Informationssicherheit (ITIL and information security)”<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/egovernment\\_research/success\\_stories/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment_research/success_stories/index_en.htm)

<sup>42</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/egovo>

<sup>43</sup> <http://webdomino1.oecd.org/COMNET/PUM/egovproweb.nsf>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.unpan.org/egovernment.asp>

<sup>45</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise\\_policy/cip/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/cip/index_en.htm)

<sup>46</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/egovernment\\_research/eparticipation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment_research/eparticipation/index_en.htm)

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.egov2005conference.gov.uk/e\\_awards/index.asp](http://www.egov2005conference.gov.uk/e_awards/index.asp)

<sup>48</sup> IDABC. (2006h). ‘Smart Municipality’ competition puts spotlight on local eAdministration. (October 23) European Commission, [cited October 25 2006]. <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/6217/194>

<sup>49</sup> IDABC. (2006c). eGovernment best practice guide. (October 23) European Commission, [cited October 25 2006]. <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/6218/194>

- Judgement – benchmarking, rankings and quantifying ‘best practice’

This activity is grounded on what Lotti states: “you can't measure it, you can't manage it”<sup>50</sup>. Ranking is undertaken either through benchmarking or classifying projects against a set or pre-determined norms, the logical outcome being that those at the top of ranked lists must be demonstrating ‘best practice’. At a global level OECD is developing a strategy for the production of “Management in Government: Comparative Country Data”<sup>51</sup>, stressing that there is “limited consensus on causal relationships”. Consequently there is some argument that the limitations of benchmarking – “Apples and pears compared, context and processes overlooked, policy-learning and transfer obliterated” - could be avoided by ‘bench-learning’ which is a “learning process building transformative capacity”<sup>52</sup>, for example in the context of ‘Content Interoperability Technologies’<sup>53</sup>.

The outcomes of rankings often have an impact and influence well beyond the robustness of methodology. There usually is widespread media coverage with the release of annual global rankings from Brown University<sup>54</sup>, Accentures’ classification of service delivery programs of more than 20 national governments<sup>55</sup>, or the EU Online Availability of Public Services survey<sup>56</sup>. Benchmarking and league lists have mattered more at the production end of eGovernment, and other than reports in the mass media, impact only in limited ways on the perceptions of citizens. Consequently, there has been a gradual move away from these metrics, to more reasoned attempts at understanding what citizens, as customers and consumers, really think about eGovernment

Approaches to ranking and benchmarking have ranged from the mathematical to the subjective. A mathematical derivation is proposed by Wang and colleagues, who assess citizen consumption of services through “a measure of the performance of Web-based information seeking”, involving the interaction of three vectors of measures: “citizen’s characteristics; characteristics of information task; and, the characteristics of government Web site”<sup>57</sup>. Such numerical precision is not usual, and broader approaches include; the EU eUser project which recently reported that “locating the relevant on-line service, using eServices efficiently, dealing with poor or patchy quality of content, and limitations in service functionality”<sup>58</sup>; the TeleCities ‘eCitizenship for All European Benchmark Report 2005’ addresses governance, the restructuring of services, employment and innovation, education

<sup>50</sup> LOTTI, S. & MANCINI, C. (2006). *The impact of e-government in the Regions: results and future perspectives*. (September 9) European Commission, Impact of eGovernment Conference: Helsinki(13.09.06), [cited October 26 2006].

<sup>51</sup> OECD. (2005). *Management in Government: Feasibility Report on the Development of Comparative Data*. Paris: OECD. November 29, Report GOV/PGC (2005) 10, 21 p.

<sup>52</sup> CODAGNONE, C. (2006). *Bench-learning in government - reflections from eGEP experience and beyond*. (September 13) European Commission, Impact of eGovernment Conference: Helsinki(13.09.06), [cited October 26 2006]. [http://www.egov-goodpractice.org/event\\_details.php?&eventid=125](http://www.egov-goodpractice.org/event_details.php?&eventid=125)

<sup>53</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/5703>

<sup>54</sup> WEST, D. M. (2006). *Global E-Government, 2006*. Providence: Center for Public Policy, Brown University. August, 26 p. <http://www.insidepolitics.org/egovt06us.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> ACCENTURE. (2006). *Leadership in Customer Service: Building the Trust*. Accenture, [cited September 21 2006]. [http://www.accenture.com/xdoc/en/industries/government/acn\\_2006\\_govt\\_report\\_FINAL2.pdf](http://www.accenture.com/xdoc/en/industries/government/acn_2006_govt_report_FINAL2.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> EUROPE. (2006b). *Online Availability of Public Services: How Is Europe Progressing? Web Based Survey on Electronic Public Services. Report of the 6th Measurement*. Brussels: European Commission. June, i+88 p. [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/benchmarking/online\\_availability\\_2006.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/benchmarking/online_availability_2006.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> WANG, L., BRETSCHEIDER, S. & GANT, J. (2005). *Evaluating Web-based e-government services with a citizen-centric approach*. Proceedings of the 38th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences - 2005, [cited June 4 2006]. <http://csdl2.computer.org/comp/proceedings/hicss/2005/2268/05/22680129b.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> IDABC. (2006e). *eUser survey reveals governments are only halfway there in user satisfaction*. (October 9) European Commission, [cited October 16 2006]. <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/6189/194>

and knowledge<sup>59</sup> - this approach acknowledges that citizen's consumption experiences of eGovernment cannot be isolated from their wider societal experiences and actions.

There continues to be value in seeking the development of citizen-relevant measure of eGovernment at levels that go beyond administrative space, to functional space, such as benchmarking inclusion, public value, or eDemocracy processes. For example, only compare 'states' and 'regions' if there is a justifiable homogeneity between the areas. There is little statistical logic in comparing Luxembourg versus Germany, since that highlights mainly the 'ecological fallacy', not real statistical differences.

## 5 Bricolage – eGovernment strategy is complex, even when the message is simple

The political messages of the i2010 Strategy continue to promote European societal goals of; reducing poverty and exclusion; promoting competitiveness and job creation; to achieve the highest possible rates of participation in the democratic process; to ensure that government delivers the services needed by citizens, through the channels they want, but not necessarily to deliver the services itself; and, achieve the goals cost effectively<sup>60</sup>. Financing change and innovation remains challenging in the context of "shrinking budgets, long term ROI, ICT costs too high"<sup>61</sup>. The overall emergent picture of eGovernment strategy could be summarised by Claudio Ciborra's 'Control and Drift'<sup>62</sup>. An original strategic plan (a control statement with goals and endpoints mapped out) 'drifts', because plans seldom are enacted perfectly as planned – this is quite normal in business. This conceptualisation provides a useful continuum between the political binaries of success and failure. Ciborra valued incremental learning, design change, "systematic serendipity", gradual breakthroughs, and learning from experience.

The EU eGovernment classifications of 2006<sup>63</sup> clearly communicate the current bricolage. Iceland recognises the need for administrative reform. Turkey has strategies being centrally developed and imposed. Croatia lacks coordination, with "heterogeneity of systems and software in use across the government". Romania has emphasised "efficiency, transparency, accessibility and responsiveness to citizens, while reducing bureaucracy and corruption". Sweden aims to develop a "24-hour Public Administration" which "must build on a close co-operation between the different government authorities and levels of government". Poland is working on access to the Internet, ICT literacy, the development of content, and educational access. Denmark is looking at organisational 'modernisation' that may not deliver linear cost savings, because "there is an expectation of increased costs for the public sector because of

<sup>59</sup> EUROCITIES. (2005). *eCitizenship for All benchmark Report 2005*. Brussels: Eurocities. November 25, 34 p. <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/5179/5671>

<sup>60</sup> EUROPE. (2006a). *i2010 – First Annual Report on the European Information Society*. Brussels: European Commission. May 19, Report COM(2006) 215 final, 12 p. [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/annual\\_report/com\\_2006\\_215\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/annual_report/com_2006_215_en.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> LOTTI, S. & MANCINI, C. (2006). *The impact of e-government in the Regions: results and future perspectives*. (September 9) European Commission, Impact of eGovernment Conference: Helsinki(13.09.06), [cited October 26 2006].

<sup>62</sup> CIBORRA, C. (2002) *The Labyrinths of Information*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

<sup>63</sup> IDABC. (2006d). *EU: eGovernment in the European countries – 6th edition*. (September 29) European Commission, [cited October 25 2006]. <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/5094/254>

the higher proportion of elderly people in the population, fewer people in the work force, and thus fewer people to recruit for public sector tasks”.

Spain continues to invest in ICT infrastructure for the Information Society, with specific attention in 2007 on inclusion of elderly and disabled citizens through the Digital Citizenship programme<sup>64</sup>. Estonia has a plan through to 2013 which will cover access, knowledge, employment and productivity, public sector reform, with a goal that by 2013 “citizen satisfaction with public sector e-services will amount to 80%”<sup>65</sup>. eGovernment strategies will continue to show emergent characteristics, further underpinning the heterogeneity of the European governance landscape. Any ‘drift’ in strategies need to ensure that the ‘transformation’ agenda does not move back to organisational re-engineering agenda of ‘re-inventing government’, but promotes the development of an ICT strategy that underpins the implementation of organisational change.

For the European Union there will continue to be a tension over the continuing development of national eGovernment strategies, and the EU’s attention to transnational eGovernment services. On one hand, therefore, organisational change within individual member states serves to contribute to internal strategy. On the other hand, the transnational agenda of the EU promotes organisational change to serve pan-EU needs. As a result there is a complex ‘ballet’ of national policy working with “‘proto-policy’, i.e. an ‘agenda’ that it promotes both via other areas of competence, such as the internal market, and through programmes such as eEurope 2005, i2010, IDABC, and to a lesser extent, research/development programmes such as IST and eTEN”<sup>66</sup>. Furthermore, any emphasis on the ‘third sector’, noted above, will also challenge the EU in its current policy that such organisations tend not to be ‘legal entities’ that qualify for EU funds.

## 6 Conclusion

Transforming organisations to deliver citizen-centricity will continue to benefit from flexible strategies at the European level, particularly ones that help to understand the complexity and diversity of the eGovernment landscape, which promote constructive sharing of good and bad experiences, which promote the building of measures of citizen-centricity and public value, and overall, which focus on the strategically important processes of the consumption of governance, rather than its technological production. In the context of citizen, organisational, and business heterogeneity should the EU structure stakeholder dialogue differently to achieve greater impact? What can Member States realistically learn from each other’s strategies and experiences when the context is different? And, are citizens really concerned whether it is eGovernment, or something else that delivers them relevant and robust services?

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<sup>64</sup> IDABC. (2006f). *Government gives budget boost to information society*. (October 30) European Commission, [cited November 2 2006]. <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/6234/194>

<sup>65</sup> PÜÜA, M. (2006). *Measuring eGov impact in Estonia*. (September 13) European Commission, Impact of eGovernment Conference: Helsinki(13.09.06), [cited October 26 2006]. [http://www.egov-goodpractice.org/event\\_details.php?&eventid=125](http://www.egov-goodpractice.org/event_details.php?&eventid=125)

<sup>66</sup> BAPTISTA, M. (2005). *e-Government and State Reform: Policy Dilemmas for Europe*. (Volume 3 Issue 4, pp 167-174) Electronic Journal of e-Government, [cited July 15 2006]. [www.ejeg.com](http://www.ejeg.com)