



GINIE: Geographic Information Network in Europe

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New Issues for the European GI strategy: eGovernment

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**Author: Chris Corbin
Partner: EUROGI**

**Project Co-ordinator
University of Sheffield – USFD**

**Partners
European Umbrella Organisation for Geographic information – EUROGI
Joint Research Centre of the European Commission – JRC
Open GIS Consortium (Europe) – OGCE**

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1 Definition

“eGovernment is the use of information and communication technologies in public administrations combined with organisational change and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic processes and strengthen support to public policies.” (EC 2003c, page 7)

“eGovernment is the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and particularly the internet as a tool to achieve better government.” (OECD 2003, page 23)

2 Introduction

With the widespread and growing exploitation of ICT within government and the impact that ICT has had on society Governments all across the world have initiated eGovernment programmes. The objectives of these programmes vary depending upon the eGovernment definition that has been adopted by respective Governments. However all of these programmes include one or more of the following objectives:

- To improve efficiency.
- To improve services.
- To improve democracy through bringing the Citizens closer to Government.
- To improve the whole life cycle of the policymaking and implementation process.
- To achieve more within a reducing budget.
- To link up government departments. i.e. transparency.
- To fuel the Information and Knowledge economies.
- To sustain good governance.

The progress that governments across the world have made with respect to their eGovernment programmes are regularly analysed and reported on by the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the European Union, the International Telecommunications Union and a wide range of international Research Organisations. These reports demonstrate that eGovernment is a worldwide phenomenon.

Within the European Union (EU) the European Commission (EC) in a recent Communication¹ summarises its vision as to the purpose of eGovernment as:

“eGovernment enables the public sector to maintain and strengthen good governance in the knowledge society. This means:

- (1) **A public sector** that is open and transparent: governments that are understandable and accountable to the citizens, open to democratic involvement and scrutiny.
- (2) **A public sector that is at the service of all.** A user-centred public sector will be inclusive, that is, will exclude no one from its services and respect everyone as individuals by providing personalised services.

¹ EC 2003c page 8

- (3) **A productive public sector that delivers maximum value for taxpayers' money.** It implies that less time is wasted standing in queues, errors are drastically reduced, more time is available for professional face-to-face service, and the jobs of civil servants can become more rewarding.

In short, eGovernment is helping to establish a more open, inclusive and productive public sector, in line with good governance. This is the pre-condition for a public sector that is prepared for the future.”

3 EU eGovernment Policy: An overview

The EU policy on eGovernment has steadily evolved since the publication in 1993 of the White Paper on *Growth competitiveness, and employment: The challenges and ways forward in the 21st century*. [EC 1993]

The white paper set out two thematic development areas - *Information Networks* and *Trans-European Transport and Energy networks*; together with an action plan for each to boost employment within the EU. The *Information networks* action plan included:

- Promote the use of Information technologies.
- Provide basic trans-European services.
- Continue to create an appropriate regulatory framework.
- Develop training on new technologies.
- Improve industrial and technological performance.

In December 1999 the EC launched the *eEurope: An Information Society for All* initiative, which embraced eGovernment. The key objectives of the initiative were²:

- Bringing every citizen, home and school, every business and administration, into the digital age and online.
- Creating a digitally literate Europe, supported by an entrepreneurial culture ready to finance and develop new ideas.
- Ensuring the whole process is socially inclusive, builds consumer trust and strengthens social cohesion.

The *eEurope* initiative proposed to deliver these objectives through ten action lines³:

1. European youth into the digital age.
2. Cheaper Internet access.
3. Accelerating E-Commerce.
4. Fast Internet for researchers and students.
5. Smart cards for secure electronic access.
6. Risk capital for high-tech SMEs.
7. *eParticipation* for the disabled.
8. Healthcare online.
9. Intelligent transport.
10. **Government online.**

² EC, 1999, page 2

³ EC, 1999, page 5

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The aim of **Government online** was to make public information more easily accessible by extending and simplifying Internet access. It was envisaged that this would stimulate the development of new private sector services based on the new data sources that become available. The potential benefits of Government online were given as⁴:

- It will bring government services closer to the citizen.
- It can reduce government expenditure by cutting bureaucracy and red tape.
- It will create jobs in value-added services providers.
- It will create better Europe-wide market information.

The targets for Government Online for delivery by the end of 2000 were agreed as:

- Member States should ensure easy access to at least four essential types of public data in Europe: legal and administrative information, cultural information, environmental information and real time traffic conditions and congestion data.
- Member States and the Commission should extend the use of the Internet to ensure consultation and feedback on major political initiatives. The aim would be to go beyond simply publishing legislation and white papers on the web and establish a discussion and feedback forum possibly with independent moderators.
- Member states and the Commission should ensure that citizens have two-way electronic access to basic interactions (e.g. tax forms, applications for funding etc.), which enables them both to receive information and submit returns.

The European Council at its meeting in Lisbon in March 2000 invited the Council and the Commission to draw up "*...a comprehensive eEurope Action Plan using an open method of co-ordination based on the benchmarking of national initiatives, combined with the Commission's recent eEurope initiative as well as its Communication 'Strategies for jobs in the Information Society'*".⁵ In response the Council and the EC in June 2000 published the eEurope 2002 action plan, which was adopted by the European Council at its Feira meeting.

The main objectives of eEurope 2002 were⁶:

1. A cheaper, faster, secure internet.
 - Cheaper and faster Internet access.
 - Faster Internet for researchers and students.
 - Secure networks and smart cards.
2. Investing in people and skills.
 - European youth into the digital age.
 - Working in the knowledge-based economy.
 - Participation for all in the knowledge-based economy
3. Stimulate the use of the Internet:
 - Accelerating e-commerce.

⁴ EC, 1999, page 16

⁵ EC, 2000, page 1

⁶ EC, 2000, page 2

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- **Government online: electronic access to public services.**
- Health online
- European digital content for global networks
- Intelligent transport systems

The targets for **Government Online** for delivery were⁷:

- Essential public data online including legal and administrative, cultural, environmental and traffic information. By the end of 2002.
- Member States to ensure generalised electronic access to main basic public services. By 2002/3.
- Simplified online administrative procedures for business. e.g. fast track procedures to set up a company. By the end of 2002.
- Develop a co-ordinated approach for public sector information, including at the European level. By the end of 2000.
- Promote the use of open source software in the public sector and e-government best practice through exchange of experiences across the Union (through the IST and IDA programmes). During 2001.
- All basic transactions with the European Commission must be available online (e.g. funding, research contracts, recruitment, procurement). By the end of 2001.
- Promote the use of electronic signatures within the public sector. By end 2001.

At the European Ministerial Conference held in Warsaw in May 2000 the candidate countries agreed to launch a similar initiative to eEurope named eEurope+ 2003, which was launched at the Gothenburg Council in June 2000. The eEurope+ Action Plan encourages capacity and institution building, improves overall competitiveness and allows the Candidate Countries to leverage their strengths to the advantages of their citizens and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Information Society. (Ref: http://europa.eu.int/comm/gothenburg_council/eeurope_en.htm)

In May 2002 the EC adopted a follow up action plan to eEurope 2002 when it published a communication *eEurope 2005: An Information Society for All* running from 2003 to 2005. The plan was launched at the European Council at its meeting in Seville in June 2002 and adopted by the January 2003 Council meeting. The aims of eEurope 2005 are to stimulate secure services, applications and content based on a widely available broadband infrastructure.

“The eEurope 2005 action plan is based on two groups of actions, which reinforce each other. On the one hand, it aims to stimulate services, applications and content, covering both online public services and e-business; on the other hand it addresses the underlying broadband infrastructure and security matters.

By 2005 Europe should have:

- Modern online public services:
 - o e-government
 - o e-learning services
 - o e-health services
- a dynamic e-business environment

⁷ EC, 2000, page 23

and, as an enabler for these:

- widespread availability of broadband access at comparative prices.
- a secure information infrastructure.⁸

One of the key aspects of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan is the establishment of an eEurope Consultative committee⁹, which aims to advise the Commission on the implementation of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan. The group comprises of two Chambers, the first Chamber composed of one or two representatives from each Member State at Director General level, and the second Chamber which may be composed of up to 40 members representing a high level expertise from private sector or civil society, in areas of key importance to the eEurope Action Plan.

In October 2003 the European Parliament and the Council agreed a common position and a budget of €21 million for the MODINIS programme. The MODINIS programme will monitor the progress of eEurope, locate and disseminate good practice and initiate actions to improve network and information security.

4 eGovernment barriers and issues

The time to develop and implement eGovernment is long as outlined in the timeline shown in Annex A of this document. Within this period ICT has continued to advance and has changed considerably. It is widely recognised that technology is not a barrier to the delivery of eGovernment, it is however recognised that due to the time taken to implement eGovernment solutions the technology utilised may have well moved on.

The EC is currently of the view¹⁰ that Governments at all levels need to address a number of difficult issues if eGovernment is to be fully and successfully implemented. These issues include:

- Safeguarding trust and confidence in online interaction with governments.
- Ensuring widespread access to online services so that no digital divide is created.
- Ensuring interoperability for information exchange across organisational and national boundaries becomes a reality.
- The development of pan-European services that support mobility in the internal market and European citizenship.

The OECD in its report *The e-Government Imperative* identifies the barriers that are impeding the development of e-government as:

- Legislative and regulatory barriers, which can impede the uptake of e-government.
- Budgetary frameworks, which can restrict e-government initiatives.
- The adoption of e-government solutions can lag behind technological change.
- The digital divide impedes the benefits of e-government.

⁸ EC, 2002, page 2

⁹ Details of the eEurope Steering Group mandate and composition are available at the following URL: http://europa.eu.int/information_society/europe/2002/action_plan/steering_group/index_en.htm

¹⁰ LIIKANEN, Erkki (2003)

The UK government's National Audit Office¹¹ in a research report published in 2002 considered the cultural barriers to e-government from two perspectives, the supply side and the demand side and offers approaches as to how to overcome them. The report includes as an annex a quiz for government organisations implementing e-government.

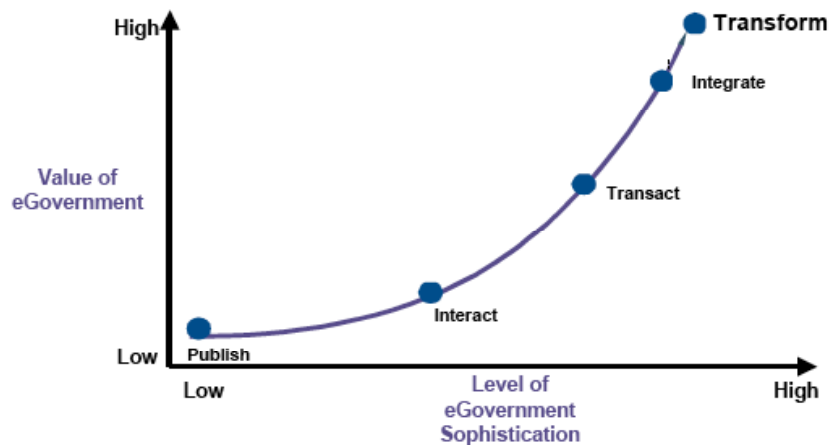
5 Investment in eGovernment

The financial investment in ICT within government and that of eGovernment is substantial. Within the EU for 2002 this is estimated by the EC¹² to be about "€30 billion which was spent on the ICT part of public administration (administrative services only, excluding health, defence, education, etc). Of this an estimated €5 billion, growing rapidly at 15% p.a., was spent on ICT for eGovernment. However, this is only a fraction of the total spending on eGovernment, since there is a significant accompanying investment in (re-) organisation and training."

Within Europe the UK¹³ is one of the largest investors in public sector ICT where investment is estimated to be €16.85 billion in 2003 rising to €18.92 billion by 2005 driven by the need to meet e-government deadlines for putting services online.

With such large investments an issue that is increasingly facing Governments is the long payback period whilst eGovernment initiatives mature as shown in FIGURE 1.

FIGURE 1: eGovernment Maturity Curve¹⁴



6 eGovernment GI related Issues

Many in the geographic information (GI) community believe that GI and the associated technologies have the potential to play a significant role in the delivery of eGovernment in that it can contribute to the implementation of cost effective

¹¹ NAO 2002

¹² EC 2003a page 10

¹³ IDA eGovernment News – 20 October 2003 – EU & Europe-wide – Policy/Strategy

<http://europa.eu.int/ISPO.ida/jsps/index.htm>

¹⁴ Source: Value Creation in eGovernment projects. Danish Government. Page 6.

sustainable evolutionary eGovernment implementations through the use of GI and the associated technologies. One of the key attributes of GI and the associated technologies that sustains this belief is its ability to provide a seamless view of disparate data sets and to present data and information in ways that are easy to assimilate by a wide range of citizens. It is however interesting to note that GI and the associated technologies are hardly ever mentioned within the many documents related to eGovernment, whether they be about Europe or other regions of the world! It is also noticeable that the contribution of GI and the associated technologies to eGovernment is not being picked up by the various eGovernment observatories at the global, European or national levels. There is clearly a role for the GI community to articulate the value of GI and the associated technologies to the eGovernment programme(s) and to publish case studies and best practice that demonstrates this value or how to obtain such value. Possibly one of the reasons for this is that many policy and decision makers may still hold the view that GI and the associated technologies are expensive, are specialised and involve heavy images such as topographic maps which are expensive not just from the acquisition perspective but also in computing power and bandwidth to process and deliver the information to the users access point. There is a need for the GI community to raise the awareness that these views are no longer valid due to the latest techniques for holding and referencing GI. The issues that may need special consideration within the EU GI strategy within the eGovernment context include the following:

Issue 1

The role(s) of GI and the associated technologies within eGovernment programmes are not currently registered and as such there is a need for the GI community to clearly demonstrate and present how GI and the associated technologies can contribute to the success of eGovernment programmes.

Issue 2

GI and the associated technologies are pervasive in nature and as such are an integral part of any eGovernment strategy. The GI strategy at any level whether it be local, regional, national or pan European; needs to build upon and complement the existing eGovernment strategies and not be presented as a separate entity or strategy. There is a need to raise the awareness that spatial processing techniques have an important role in locating, handling and presenting data and information, which can be beneficially exploited within eGovernment implementations.

Issue 3

Many of the infrastructure needs for a spatial data infrastructure (both hard and soft) are already included within many of the eGovernment programmes and as such there is a need for the GI strategy to focus on those requirements that enable the value of GI and the associated technologies to be beneficially exploited and to raise the awareness that the GI strategy is additive or inclusive.

Issue 4

A large percentage of public sector data has a geographic reference. Most of this data is stored, secured and maintained within back office systems. Many back office systems currently sustain operational services and are proving difficult to migrate towards the eGovernment data interoperability standards. There is a need for the GI community to consider how GI can be organised to assist the migration of these

backend data stores such that the eGovernment services and the data interoperability requirements become a reality.

Issue 5

One of the barriers to the take up of eGovernment services is trust and privacy by citizens and businesses alike. GI and the associated technology has the potential to locate and bring together a wide variety of data occurrences from different data sets (repositories), which could compromise the privacy of a data subject even though each of the individual data sets by itself would not compromise the privacy of the data subject. There is a need to for the GI community to address this issue and to explain how the privacy of data subjects will not be compromised. This needs to be supported by education and implementation guidelines.

Issue 6

A key requirement for the implementation of eGovernment services is that they are available to and can be accessed by all in society, i.e. they are inclusive and avoid the creation of a digital divide. There is a need to consider how GI and the associated technologies can be utilised in the presentation of information as well as the collection of data across a wide variety of delivery mechanisms as well as the needs of individual citizens. For example how to include citizens that are partially sighted, blind, colour blind, arthritic, unable to read for whatever reason.

Issue 7

To deliver eEurope there is a need to consider the cross border requirements, which include:

- The need for semantic interoperability. There is a need for further research into how this can be handled and delivered within a GI context in a responsive and sustainable way.
- The need for pan European basic GI reference data sets to be quickly assembled and put into place. Examples of these data sets include various thesauri (geographic place names for Europe, post codes for example) that are available in different languages (both typographical (fonts) and verbal), street and property address files that will enable data interoperability at all levels – physical, application and presentation. The GI strategy needs to address how these data sets could be created and used commencing at the local level and then through a process of integration to the regional, national to the pan European level.
- There is a need to prioritise those GI data sets that need to be completed (fully populated for a given geographic area) aligned and integrated that enable and support seamless operation of applications. The priority should be given to those data sets that would provide the largest return.
- The need for common co-ordinate systems. For the extremities of Europe there may need to be dynamic adjustments. There is a need prior to data sets being amended to hold the common coordinate reference for research to be undertaken to establish whether this is required and if it is how can it be cost effectively implemented.
- The need to review IPR the current method of implementing IPR protection through mandatory statements that appear on GI related information systems. Due to national differences many IPR protection statements may not be understood or relevant.

Issue 9

The need to address the cultural issues, for example those related to data sharing, perception and trust of others, organisational issues, reluctance to adopt new methods, value judgements as to the ability of others to interpret data and information, all of which need to be addressed within a GI context.

Issue 10

There is a need for aspiration control with respect to the time it will take to reach full interoperability in a cost effective and sustainable way.

Issue 11

There is a need for the broad GI community to be represented in the eGovernment advisory roles throughout Europe to ensure GI and the associated technologies are used where applicable and exploited for the benefit of all.

Issue 12

The implementation of eGovernment is resource intensive with a long pay back period. There is a need for case studies, benefit analysis, best practice that demonstrate that GI can contribute to sustainable cost effective eGovernment solutions.

Annex A: European eGovernment timeline

European Union eGovernment Time Line	
Date	Description
Actual	
5.12.93	European Commission White Paper. Growth, competitiveness, and employment: The challenges and ways forward into the 21 st century. COM (93) 700 final
17.07.97	European Commission publishes a Communication on The Social and Labour market dimension of the Information Society: People First – The Next Steps
30.03.98	Council decision to adopt a multinational Community programme to stimulate the establishment of the Information Society in Europe (Information Society)
8.12.99	European Commission publishes a Communication on a Commission Initiative for the Special European Council of Lisbon, 23 and 24 March 2000. COM (1999) 687
14.06.00	Council and European Commission publishes an Action Plan <i>eEurope 2002 An Information Society for All: Action Plan prepared by the Council and the European Commission for the Feira European Council.</i>
16.06.01	Candidate Countries with the assistance of the European Commission publish eEurope+ 2003 A co-operative effort to implement the Information Society in Europe.
5.04.02	European Commission publishes a consultation document for a Future Policy paper on pan-European Government e-Services. ENTR-D-2/PMU D (2002)
28.05.02	European Commission publishes a Communication eEurope 2005: An information society for all. An action plan to be presented in view of the Seville European Council. 21/22 June 2002. COM (2002) 263 Final
26.07.02	European Commission publishes a Proposal for a COUNCIL DECISION adopting a multi-annual programme (2003-2005) for the monitoring of eEurope, dissemination of good practices and the improvement of network and information security (MODINIS). Brussels, COM (2002) 425 final 2002/0187 (CNS)
8.07.03	European Commission publishes a proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on <i>Interoperable Delivery of pan-European eGovernment Services to Public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens (IDABC)</i> Brussels, COM (2003) 406 final 2003/0147 (COD)
26.09.03	European Commission publishes a Communications <i>The Role of eGovernment for Europe's Future</i> COM (2003) 567

The progress of particular Directives can be obtained from the EC PreLex database at the following URL: <http://europa.eu.int/prelex/>

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