Information Society and eGovernment:
Linking European Policies

Information Society and Media

European Commission

The Information Society brings important benefits for governance and democracy. To help ensure this promise is fulfilled, the Information Society Policy Link initiative is linking Information Society projects with relevant European policy-makers in areas as diverse as electronic voting, support to democratic processes, online democracy, citizen-centred access to public services, support to local and regional governments, and efficiency and transparency in key public services.

Digital Vision

Challenges for eGovernment and eDemocracy

eGovernment is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in public administrations – combined with organisational change and new skills – to improve public services and democratic processes and to strengthen support to public policies.

Administrations in Europe at all levels have been quick to use ICT as a key tool for modernising public services, re-engineering administrative processes and empowering citizens. They are adopting eGovernment as a way to become:

- more open and transparent, and to reinforce democratic participation;
- more service-oriented, providing personalised and inclusive services to every citizen;
- more productive, delivering maximum value for taxpayers' money.

In short, eGovernment is a route to better governance.

Despite major progress, many critical issues and opportunities remain. Firstly, we need to ensure access to public services for all. This means offering access through a wide choice of devices – PC, digital TV, mobile devices, or public internet access points – so as to ensure the highest possible level of inclusion. With security and privacy of high concern, trust and confidence in public services and in online participation need to be an integral part of eGovernment strategies.

eGovernment services should be delivered in a seamless way, regardless of whether the provider is a local, regional, national or European administration, or whether the user is in their own country or another Member State. Interoperability – the technical inter-linking of systems, information and ways of working – is an essential step in realising this seamless delivery.

Other issues include better use of public sector information, improving public procurement, and finding better means to define and measure productivity in the public sector. We also need to intensify efforts to exchange, and learn from, the substantial base of good practices that exists across Europe's public administrations.

Information Society Policy Link

eGovernment Policy

eGovernment is an important element of the Lisbon strategy: world-class public administrations that make effective use of ICT to deliver public services will make a major contribution to modernising the European economy and society, while reinforcing social cohesion.

The EU's policy for eGovernment is set out in the Communication The Role of eGovernment for Europe's Future (COM(2003) 567 final), which was adopted by the Council in November 2003. The Communication emphasizes that eGovernment should have a strategic focus. It should help achieve the Lisbon goals, reduce barriers to the internal market for services and mobility across Europe, and assist effective implementation of national policies and regional or local development. It outlines the barriers to overcome in modernising public administrations with the help of ICT, and presents a roadmap of actions.

New legislative provisions for public procurement – known as the European Framework for Public Procurement - have recently been introduced which are accompanied by a comprehensive three-year Action Plan. This sets out a strategy and identifies all legislative and non-legislative measures required to eliminate obstacles to cross-border electronic procurement and ensure interoperability of electronic procurement systems.

By improving the relationship between people and governments, eGovernment is also relevant to the creation of a common European Union immigration policy and ensuring the rights of EU citizens.

In addition, the Public Sector Information Directive adopted in 2003 is designed to make it easier for content producers to use and add value to information produced by the public sector. This will both provide useful content for the development of the Information Society and make public sector content more accessible to more people.

Finally, the EU Constitutional Treaty introduces a number of important provisions aiming at more democratic, transparent and accountable EU institutions that are closer to the citizen.

Where the Information Society meets eGovernance and eDemocracy

eGovernment constitutes a policy priority touching upon any area where governments and administrations have a role to play. Increasingly, these areas have a strong European dimension, for instance public procurement, creation of a common European Union immigration policy, ensuring the rights of EU citizens, and making public sector services more accessible to citizens.

The Information Society can support these goals in many ways, from monitoring of electoral processes to more transparent public procurement. Innovative use of collaborative ICT has been one of the most effective tools for lowering the barriers to political participation and empowering citizens.

Connecting cutting edge Information Society projects to relevant eGovernment and eDemocracy policies will help both European institutions and national and regional administrations to better meet the Lisbon goals.

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Information Society Activities

Fifth Framework Programme

The Fifth Framework Programme helped to foster a new approach to eGovernment research, focusing on integration and modernisation of government services rather than the "silo approach" which had characterised previous work in this field. In particular, the approach was driven by users' perspectives.

Two main areas were addressed: **Smart Government** (36 projects, €61m EU funding) and **eDemocracy** (11 projects, €15m EU funding), with an emphasis on projected needs in the period 2005 to 2010. Relevant projects were also funded under other action lines, notably in the research domains Knowledge Management, Trust & Confidence, and IST Socio-Economic Research.

Many of these projects have already completed and delivered their final results, which in some cases forms the basis for further work in FP6. Other projects are still running.

Sixth Framework Programme

In the Sixth Framework Programme, IST's research for eGovernment is guided by two major objectives: the realisation of the European Research Area and contributing to the Lisbon strategy.

Research is structured around two core challenges: firstly, the 'front-office' where advanced eGovernment services are provided to businesses and citizens that are interactive and secure; and secondly, the 'back-office' where user-driven organisational transformation will help European administrations become more dynamic, interoperable and service-driven. The work emphasizes the use of open standards as a means of ensuring the interoperability of eGovernment solutions. Open source approaches are also being investigated.
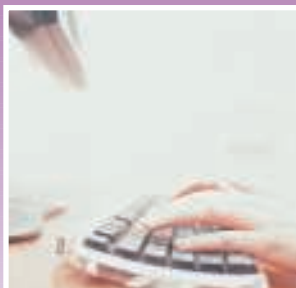
eGovernment research is expected to be a catalyst for further eGovernment policy developments and through them to increase the scale and impact of eGovernment investment in Europe.

Other Activities

eGovernment is a priority area under eTEN, primarily for the practical realisation of eEurope's objectives on eServices. Projects address the deployment of a broad set of applications and generic services in areas such as online public services and eParticipation. Particular emphasis is placed on conformance with the European Framework for Public Procurement, where relevant.

The eContent Programme has as one of its aims better access to public information. As well as being a key source of raw material for the digital content industry, this information can also provide a basis for new or improved eGovernment services.

Recognising the need to disseminate best practices and reward exemplary achievements, IST has launched the e-Europe Awards for Innovation in e-Government. These are awarded at the annual eGovernment Conference, the next of which will be held in Manchester in November 2005.

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Next Steps

The research synopses and policy cases presented here represent only the first stage in linking Information Society activities to EU policies. Information Society & Media DG is working with relevant Commission DGs to establish policy interfaces to improve synergies further. A virtuous circle should develop, with improved communication between researchers and policymakers ensuring that:
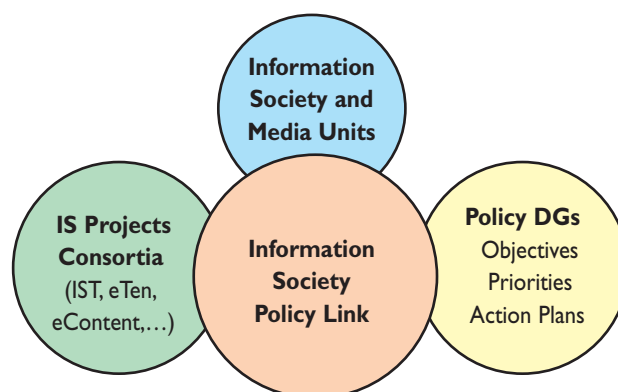
- Information Society and Media programmes better reflect relevant EU policies;
- EU policies better account for Information Society technologies;
- ICTs are better applied to meeting Europe's challenges.

At a later stage, specific actions will be launched addressing policy-makers in national and regional administrations in Member States, European institutions and national parliaments.

Getting Involved

The *Information Society Policy Link* initiative links policy-makers and researchers in a number of ways, so as to leverage the benefits of Information Society & Media projects for European policies. A variety of activities are planned, including a series of Policy Workshops and events targeted at the European policy community.

Project Consortia play a crucial role in the development of this joint effort, providing a valuable source of information for European policy-makers on relevant technological developments, as well as improving the quality, impact and awareness of their own projects for the benefit of EU policies. Organisations involved in past or present Information Society projects with relevant activities or results are invited to contact the Initiative at the address shown.

Information Society and Media Units

IS Projects Consortia (IST, eTen, eContent,…)

Information Society Policy Link

Policy DGs Objectives Priorities Action Plans

Information Society Policy Link at a Glance

Information Society related actions constitute a considerable effort of the European Union. For instance, Information Society Technologies (IST) research has been the largest thematic priority in the EU's Fifth (1998-2002) and Sixth (2002-2006) Framework Research Programmes. Together they represent an investment of over €7bn in IST research, and are complemented by programmes such as eContent (€100m) and eTEN (€315m), which focus on digital content and eServices deployment respectively.

The projects funded by these programmes offer benefits to all areas of Europe's economy and society. To fully realise these benefits the technologies need to be linked closely to European policy-making in the relevant areas.

Information Society Policy Link is an initiative of Information Society & Media DG to identify and reinforce links between its projects and relevant EU policies. More than 3000 projects from Information Society programmes are being analysed, identifying a wealth of concrete results that support EU policies across all of the principal policy domains.

By exchanging information and experiences, the Information Society Policy Link initiative aims to ensure that results from European ICT research provide greater leverage, both in implementing current policies and shaping priorities for the future.

Further Information

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Europe's Information Society: Thematic Portal
http://europa.eu.int/information_society/