

Innovative and adaptive pan- European services for citizens in 2010 and beyond

Evolution of Pan-European
eGovernment services:
Case Studies

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Summary

This report presents and analyses six eGovernment services in Europe. It is part of the EUREGOV project on 'Innovative adaptive pan-European eGovernment services for citizens in 2010 and beyond', which provides insights in how Pan-European eGovernment Services (PEGS) evolve and how they affect the organisation of government services and the relations between government and citizens. Its purpose is to learn how cross-border and pan-European eGovernment services develop and how this development can be stimulated by policy interventions. The cases that have been analysed, are:

HELP, a best practice one-stop-shop internet portal of the Austrian government that provides a wide range of e-services and that is organised along life events (birth, marriage, housing, starting a business, etc.).

SOLVIT, an Europe-wide on-line problem solving network to deal with misapplications of Internal Market law by public authorities to avoid legal proceedings.

NETC@RDS, an eHealth service providing mobile European citizens with easy access to health services.

e@SY Connects, an advanced regional eGovernment service that provides citizens with equal access to citizen information and services, that uses mobile phones and digital TV besides computers as channels to distribute information.

Belgian Social Security, a multilingual service that provides information to citizens and improves data exchange and collaboration between more than 2000 social security institutions in Belgium.

Media@Komm Transfer, an initiative aimed at developing transferable best-practice concepts of e-services while taking into account established e-government standards and procedures.

The analysis in this report focuses on five issues: the different development paths of PEGS, organisational issues, barriers to be overcome, the impact of PEGS on legitimacy of government, and problems of cross-border good practice transfer. The findings on these five issues can be summarised as follows:

a. The main challenge for the future development of PEGS is to expand upon existing services

Some PEGS have been developed as a top-down pan-European initiative by the European Commission. In the case we studied, Solvit, this development was centrally managed and implemented, but it can also be facilitated by the Commission by linking services in Member States. Few of these top-down pan-European initiatives exist at this moment, and the scope for these to come along in the near future is limited.

Rather, more future PEGS are likely to develop bottom-up on the basis of existing e-service initiatives on the Member State, the regional or the municipal level. Thus, PEGS can develop on the basis of e-services built by some leading actor in one of the Member States who seeks out counterparts to develop a joint or linked-up service, or they can be built by a consortia of national actors and with support of the European Commission (as in the case of NETC@RDS). PEGS can also develop bottom-up as a single national e-service opens its doors to citizens at home and abroad. Apart from that, we may see ever more 'cloning' of e-services through good practise exchange, where convergence takes place across Member States, without services being integrated on a pan-European scale.

The challenge that this bottom-up development poses, is at least as much organisational as it is technical. It involves getting people together, rallying them behind a common vision and coordinating their efforts. It requires an impetus for cooperation and a willingness to support and contribute to a system that has a public good character. Furthermore, it needs somebody who is in charge that has a well defined authority to decide in the face of conflicting interests, as well as arrangements to make sufficient budget available for development and maintenance.

b. An integrated e-service must be backed up by a professional community and a governing board

An e-service needs a back-office of people that know each other and feel a sense of common purpose. It needs a governance structure in which the interests of various stakeholders are represented. This can be a board representing service providers as well as providers of the infrastructure and citizen-users. Main functions of the board are to organise commitment, to articulate user needs, to explore technological opportunities, and to secure the required budgets.

Current new internet technologies make it possible for public authorities to organise their services in a user centred way, starting out from user needs ('life events'). This requires public service organisations to adapt their routines accordingly.

c. A shared ambition and opportunity for self organisation are important to overcome resistance to change

To make public service organisations receptive for a radical change of routines requires an inspiring vision and ambition, backed up by political pressure and high level commitment. Simultaneously, involvement and experiment on the

shop floor must be invited to mobilise expertise and to stimulate creativity and processes of 'open innovation'. Initiative must be rewarded. It helps if the focus of innovation is on quality improvement, rather than on cost saving. Learning and feedback mechanisms have to be organised, in order to avoid inventing the wheel too often. Cross-organisational learning mechanisms can also help to foster a sense of community among service providers and to reduce the perception of uniqueness of ones own organisational needs and characteristics. This can contribute to overcoming the not-invented-here syndrome.

d. PEGS may contribute to citizens' involvement and legitimacy of government

PEGS can contribute to a sense of community and citizenship by providing people with more detailed information on the workings of government and public services, on rights and obligations, and on procedures. In addition, they can increase transparency by providing them with a better insight into what happens e.g. to requests they file to government organisations (in which stage of processing are they, who is working on them, what is happening, when can they expect an answer or a decision) through 'tracking and tracing'. PEGS can furthermore recruit input from citizens in decision making trajectories or stage platforms for discussion on government plans, or link into and cooperate with private or the voluntary sector internet mechanisms and platforms.

PEGS can contribute to widening the outreach of public services by lowering thresholds and making access easy. An interesting possibility to do this, is to use multi-channel access platforms that make use of mobile phones and digital interactive television in addition to computers.

e. Cross-border best practice transfer of e-services requires foremost agreement on standards

As user needs tend to be varied, the demand for uniform e-services that are delivered all across Europe (uniform 'content') is limited, but the scope for a uniform or integrated service delivery system ('infrastructure') is substantial. A delivery system consists of hardware, software, rules and processes. An integrated system requires common standards regarding e.g. design principles of web content, technical interfaces, and database architecture (e.g. the structure of digital medical records, legal databases, social security databases, and so on). If common standards can be developed to hold all across Europe, this would greatly help the development of supranational e-services. However, given that different countries have already invested heavily in national systems, integration by the development of interfaces is a second best alternative.

The report concludes by summarizing the main elements identified above in eleven points that should be kept in mind when developing a strategy for PEGS in Europe. These points are:

1. It is important to keep in mind from the outset that the main challenge in the development of PEGS consists of integrating existing elements of

e-services and of integrating e-services with complementary traditional services, much more than of building a new system of service delivery.

2. The development of a PEGS needs a shared vision and a community that backs this vision. This has to be organised. The personal element is important in this context. If people are supposed to take care of the provision of a common service all across Europe, they have to know each other and to be able to rely upon each other.
3. High level political pressure and political backup are of great help to get PEGS off the ground and should therefore be secured at the EU level.
4. An e-service requires a governance structure in the form of a board in which all stakeholder interests are represented. The board should be made responsible for articulating user needs, for organising commitment and for raising budgets for developing and maintaining the service.
5. Someone must be in charge. There has to be a systems director who oversees the project and who has the authority to take decisions in the face of conflicting interests, e.g. on when to standardise specific features, on when to go for incremental change or radical technical improvement.
6. PEGS should be developed to be robust and flexible. This implies: making use of open standards, building systems out of self contained modules, and preparing for new technical opportunities, e.g. in the field of interactive applications ('web 2.0').
7. To mobilise creativity and develop innovative e-services, there must be opportunity for self organisation on the shop floor. This holds for public authorities and service providers, but also for citizens and private initiative. Initiative must be rewarded.
8. Public authorities and public service providers must be stimulated to transform their organisation and work routines to fit in with service delivery through e-channels.
9. Clear agreements should be developed on the exact difference between infrastructure and content (infrastructure being generic and a public good, and content being specific and a private good) and on what belongs to each category. Compare for instance the way rail transport and energy are organised in many countries these days: there is a separation between the infrastructural network (tracks and railway stations, power lines) and the services that are delivered on the network (train services, power deliveries); different suppliers compete on the network. Such a way of organising can be used to make the system flexible, adaptable and innovative.
10. The development and maintenance of infrastructure can be outsourced to private partners. This can benefit diffusion of good practices as

private firms have an incentive to actively market own their e-service delivery systems.

11. A system of evaluation of existing practices and of knowledge management must be organised to prevent the wheel to be invented too often. Learning and feedback loops should not only be organised on the level of the specific e-service, but also at the aggregate level. Therefore, an EU repository that informs public authorities on existing best practices and available expertise should be developed. In addition to this, a transfer agency facilitating best practice transfer and take-up should be established.

1. Pan-Europeanisation of eGovernment

1.1. Introduction

This report is part of the EUReGOV project on 'Innovative adaptive pan-European eGovernment services for citizens', commissioned by the Directorate-General Information Society of the European Commission. The purpose of the overall project is to provide insights in how Pan-European eGovernment Services (PEGS) evolve, in their impact on the organisation of government services and on the relations between government and citizens / businesses. The scope of PEGS and how their development and spread can be further supported, provide the focal points of this report.

eGovernment services in Member States are mainly services provided by national and local institutions. The ongoing integration and expansion of the EU however demands increasing eGovernment services in European dimension. Pan-Europeanisation of eGovernment is therefore an important issue at the level of political declarations and European policies.¹ Driving forces of pan-Europeanisation of eGovernment are the obligations related to the implementation of the EU Services Directive, the EU level administrative burdens reduction targets, the i2010 eGovernment Action Plan,² and the ICT Policy Support Programme towards eProcurement (Europe-wide tendering) and eIdentity management.³

Leaving behind the arena of political declarations and programmes and instead considering the practical level of developing and disseminating eGovernment solutions reveals that no significant general ambition to develop PEGS has become evident so far. Following Glott and Haaland (2007), we therefore define PEGS for this research in a broader sense.⁴ Our definition captures PEGS

¹ See, for instance, Weehuizen and van Oranje (2007), p. 6.

² See European Commission 2006. The action plan largely aims at increasing cooperation among EU Member States to establish eGovernment services that have real tangible benefits to citizens and businesses across Europe.

³ See the European Commission's Information Communication Technologies Policy Support Programme (ICT PSP) (European Commission 2007). See furthermore the report on the workshop "Re-inventing the Wheel? – Transferring Best Practices in eGovernment" that was organised in the framework of this project in November 2007 (Quast and Glott 2007).

⁴ Glott, R. and Haaland, K. (2007).

in a narrow sense, i.e. eGovernment services that operate already on (pan-)European scope, as well as services that are supplied on local, regional or national levels, but bear a potential to expand geographically or contain elements that appear meaningful for the development of PEGS. Under the definition applied here Pan-European eGovernment Services (PEGS) are:

- a. provided by or on behalf of European public sector entities,
- b. at local, regional, national, or supra-national level,
- c. by means of interoperable trans-European telematic networks (e.g. the Internet),
- d. in order to perform public administration tasks, including provision and exchange of information and provision of participation opportunities for citizens,
- e. that meet a demand of other public entities and particularly demand of other citizens at any geographic level,
- f. for “material” services as well as for the generation of civic attitudes that address pan-European tasks or improve citizens' identification with the EU,
- g. with the potential to be extended towards a majority of EU member states (instead of, for instance, only in countries with the same language, like UK and Ireland or Germany and Austria),
- h. by either being designed to expand or by containing elements (of, for instance, service integration, interoperability, or eInclusion) that could feed in the design of future eGovernment services on pan-European level.

1.2. Purpose and research themes

The purpose of the case studies is to learn how eGovernment services develop in practice and how this development can be stimulated by policy interventions. In particular we, sought to gain insight into the following issues that may be relevant in the development of PEGS:

a. What is the innovation challenge in developing PEGS: building or integrating?

In principle, two ways of developing PEGS are possible. They can be built from scratch as eGovernment services with a pan-European scope or they can develop by expanding existing services through service integration. Both ways follow typical implementation paths (top-down or bottom-up) and come with specific challenges that must be mastered:⁵

Building a new system to deliver services (new infrastructure, software, business model, organisation) means that innovation is the main challenge, i.e. developing ideas for new services, technologies and forms of organisation. The implementation of

⁵ Weehuizen and Van Oranje (2007) distinguish three types of PEGS, the ones that are launched top-down at the European level, the ones that spill over from one country into the next, and the ones that are the product of a fusion of different national initiatives. The latter two both develop bottom-up.

newly built eGovernment services follows top-down procedures, which requires planning, managing, testing and control.

Expanding from systems that already exist (bringing all kinds of services together in one system of delivery, across borders) means that integration is the main challenge. Platforms must be created, procedures and technologies must be standardised, interfaces must be designed, best practices must be communicated and implemented across different service providers, and common business models must be developed. Communication and access to information, getting people together and helping them to cooperate in an effective governance structure is probably one of the most critical success factors of such a bottom-up approach.

Building a new system of services might call for a strategy of developing, piloting and rolling out, while integrating existing elements may need much more of a bottom-up approach, a strategy that provides ample room for 'trial and error' and for a gradual expansion of the services that are made available.

We refer to the first type of e-service as top-down or supranational PEGS. Those that exist today and that are truly European in scope and coverage, have in most cases been created by the European Commission. They have been developed on a European scale right from the outset. The second type of e-service we call bottom-up or multinational PEGS. So far, there are few national eGovernment services that have developed into true multinational PEGS.⁶ Cross-border public service activities are in early stages of development. However, the trends towards service bundling and networking of public authorities may give an impetus for PEGS to develop in the future on the basis of best practice transfer of national eGovernment solutions to other countries. In this report, we shall be looking at services that show such potential.

b. What is the relationship between technology (infrastructure plus software) and organisation?

Regardless of the development model, the development of e-services has consequences for the agencies that are responsible for delivering these services. The delivery of e-services usually implies the integration of different services into one system (one-stop-shop), or of different databases or platforms. Especially if the services on offer are designed to be truly user-focused, organised around user needs and not around the provider, i.e. in a holistic, demand oriented instead of supply oriented way, this probably has implications for the organisations that back up these e-service portals. The service agencies have to coordinate, to agree on business practices, to agree on who is responsible for what, to maintain together a common infrastructure.

⁶ One example is the Schengen Information Systems (SIS) for data exchange between government law enforcement agencies of EU Member States that was set up by national governments without EC involvement. Another example is the EU customs system that is managed by the European Commission, but has a fully federated structure, built on existing Member States' systems by both Member States and the Commission.

c. How do interests and incentives affect the development of PEGS?

Any development of e-services, on a national level and on a European as well, is affected by all kinds of vested interests. Some of those are of help while others may pose barriers to be overcome. These problems may be general in nature,⁷ but are likely to be aggravated when the geographical scope of e-services widens and cultural distances between participants in the service delivery system increase.

When e-service provision is mainly a route towards process innovation, resulting in cost savings and layoffs, the consequences may only hurt public sector organisations. For instance, jobs may get lost, functions may either disappear or become less gratifying, and organisations may lose power, as people that used to obtain services delivered to them in person now help themselves by communicating with a machine – a website. If a public service provider feel threatened by these developments, it may be reluctant to search for the most efficient ICT application and be unwilling to share (possibly strategic) information, unless there is an incentive that overrules these disadvantages.

When e-service development is also about product innovation, about new services, about user-centric service provision, the interests of all parties involved in the development of an eGovernment solution can be diverse. There can be conflicts of interest between e.g. ministries or DG's, or between different layers in government (European, national, municipal). The willingness to take over work previously delivered by other organisations, to provide information to external parties, and to agree on common standards might vary between the actors involved. In this context, free rider behaviour might become a problem when developing e-services, as agencies, municipalities and governments can all wait for each other to develop e-services and thereby a proof of concept for others to copy or to improve upon.

d. What is the impact of PEGS on legitimacy and support of government?

The i2010 Benchmarking Indicators⁸ and the eGovernment Economics Project (eGEP) Measurement Framework⁹ consider improving democracy (through openness, transparency and better participation opportunities) as important cornerstones of e-services. PEGS may thus be a means to promote civic attitudes on a European level.

PEGS are first and foremost designed to deliver to citizens and businesses the services to which they are entitled. In addition, they are important channels of information that can be used by public authorities to show how they deal with

⁷ See on these issues the website of the Breaking Barriers to eGovernment project (<http://www.egovbarriers.org/>).

⁸ See i2010 High Level Group (2006).

⁹ eGovernment Economics Project (eGEP) (2006).

information, how they handle requests and how they go about taking decisions. Also, these channels can be used to conduct a dialogue and actively involve citizens and businesses in answering needs and reaching decisions. This may bring supranational public organisations closer to the citizen and add to public support of European government institutions and increase their legitimacy.

e. What are typical difficulties in cross-border best practice transfer when developing e-services?

It must be expected that the development of cross-border (European) e-services pose additional challenges over and above the usual ones that are encountered when developing eGovernment at the national scale. These additional challenges might have a different character, depending on the development model (top-down building or bottom-up integration).

When solutions are developed on the national level, the possibility of transfer of this solution to other countries is often not considered to be a design criterion. Obviously there are language barriers, which may provide a stronger obstacle for eGovernment services that evolve from national level (through service integration). Legal barriers (e.g. laws governing privacy, the security of internet traffic, public access to certain types of information) and policies (regulation) may also provide a significant barrier for PEGS to evolve. Many services, especially in the social security and the health care sector, are delivered by distinct national systems. Compatibility of procedures and routines poses practical barriers to cross-border best practice transfer.

By addressing these issues, we hope to draw conclusions as to what would constitute a viable policy strategy to develop PEGS in fields where the European Commission or Member States feel that Europe-wide service provision is called for.

1.3. Case selection and methodology

For the purpose of this project, we studied six cases of eGovernment services, of which four in great detail and an additional two for comparison. These were classified as good practices with regard to the evolvement of Pan-European eGovernment Services (PEGs). Evaluation criteria for the selection of these case studies were a high impact on EU objectives, such as economic growth (or other economic benefits, e.g. cost savings), eInclusion, improvement of quality of life, and improvement of service provision through better service products or organisational and technological innovations. Based on the above definition and related to the i2010 Benchmarking Indicators and the eGEP Measurement Framework, following criteria have been applied in order to select cases for further examination in case studies:¹⁰

- Generating civic attitudes (towards pan-European scope);
- Capacity to expand geographically or to be transferred easily to other countries;

¹⁰ See Glott and Haaland (2007).

- Big scope of users;
- Strong benefits for users;
- Process innovation;
- Product innovation;
- Technological innovation;
- Technological standard / diffusion of new technologies;
- Economic factors (cost savings, productivity gains, spill over effects);
- Degree of service integration;
- Reduction of bureaucratic burden for public authorities and citizens.

The case studies have been carried out using a combination of a review of project documentation combined with interviews undertaken with specialists from different fields that are closely involved in the set up and maintenance of the services that were scrutinised. The interviews were semi-structured. Interview guidelines were developed specifically for each case in order to covering all topics that are relevant with regard to the evolution of PEGS from the four thematic fields as described above. These topics derived from the guidelines for the case studies as elaborated in WP2D1 and can be summarised in following thematic fields:

- objectives and evolution of the service,
- organisation,
- services provided by the PEGS (level of service integration),
- diffusion / transferability (geographical expansion),
- opportunities and barriers (lessons learned).

The interviews were undertaken by phone and were being recorded to enable later playback, short interviews have been recorded in written form only. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed in form of a summary of the conversations as well as interesting observations made by the interviewer.

Results from the case studies were combined with information gathered at a workshop on best practice transfer in eGovernment that was held in Brussels in November 2007 to draw up this report.¹¹

1.4. Organisation of the report

The next Chapter provides an overview of the cases that have been examined. Chapters 3 to 7 present the results of the case studies along the lines of the research questions outlined above. In Chapter 3, we examine how PEGS come into existence, grow, and disseminate. Chapter 4 discusses organisational issues that occur when PEGS are developed. The role of interests in PEGS development is discussed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 examines the impact of PEGS on citizens' participation, and Chapter 7 illustrates difficulties that appear to be typical for eGovernment services that are provided across borders. Chapter 8 provides the lessons learned from the case studies with regard to the research

¹¹ See note 4 above.

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questions and draws conclusions regarding a strategy for the development of PEGS.

2. Overview over the case studies

For this report, six eGovernment services have been examined as case studies, two supranational (SOLVIT and NETC@RDS) and four national (HELP, e@SY Connects, Belgian Social Security and Media@Komm Transfer). In this section we provide a general overview of the case studies. The first four described below have been studied in detail, the last two partly, covering only selected features.

2.1. HELP

HELP¹² is an example of an e-service that has the potential to develop into a multinational type of PEGS. The service is an Internet platform (or portal) that was initiated in 1996/97 by the Austrian federal government and administered by the chancellor's office. It delivers services to everyone who has to deal with Austrian authorities and institutions. It provides a best practice model of a one-stop-shop and thus a good example of how eGovernment services meet the requirements demanded by article 8 of the Service Directive. This directive requires European governments to provide all kinds of services in electronic form.¹³ The scope of the obligation established in article 8 is very wide because it covers a large variety of services, requires the possibility to complete all formalities and procedures by electronic means and demands that electronic procedures be available both for national and foreign service providers, i.e. also in cross-border situations.¹⁴

¹² See www.help.gv.at.

¹³ "Procedures by electronic means: 1). Member States shall ensure that all procedures and formalities relating to access to a service activity and to the exercise thereof may be easily completed, at a distance and by electronic means, through the relevant point of single contact and with the relevant competent authorities. 2). [...] 3). The Commission shall [...] adopt detailed rules for the implementation of paragraph 1 of this Article with a view to facilitating the interoperability of information systems and use of procedures by electronic means between Member States, taking into account common standards developed at Community level." (see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32006L0123:EN:NOT>).

¹⁴ Though HELP has been selected as a PEGS that exemplifies how eGovernment services can cope with the requirements from the EU Service Directive it must be noted that HELP existed before the Service Directive came into existence.

HELP is organised along 'life events'. The essential goal of this structure is to make it easy for the user to find, understand and relate to the content provided. When the service was founded in 1996/1997 it covered only eight life events (driving license, car registration, passport, identity cards, marriage, divorce, birth and death) – today it covers almost 200. HELP is offered in German and English and addresses Austrian citizens as well as people from other countries who live and / or work in Austria or who have any kind of interest in this country.

The architecture and technology of HELP is offered to organisations in other European countries and, according to those who are responsible for the project, it has thus become one of the leading eGovernment applications in Europe, meanwhile also implemented in three regions in Germany (Baden-Wuerttemberg, Saarland, and Saxony).

2.2. SOLVIT

This eGovernment service provides a good example of how eGovernment services can facilitate administrative processes through informal coordination and communication. SOLVIT¹⁵ is a supranational PEGS. It is an on-line problem solving network, established and coordinated by the European Commission and operated by the Member States. Member States work together to solve problems caused by the misapplication of Internal Market law by public authorities, without legal proceedings. Everyone (citizens, businesses) who has a complaint about a public authority can file this issue in his mother tongue. Using SOLVIT is free of charge.

Those who use SOLVIT often benefit a lot since it helps to avoid time- and money-consuming legal action. SOLVIT offers a route to solving a problem much faster than a formal complaint. It thus helps to reduce administrative burdens for public authorities, citizens and businesses.

The role of the European Commission, apart from coordinating SOLVIT, is to provide database facilities and, when needed, to speed up the resolution of problems. The Commission also passes formal complaints it receives on to SOLVIT if there is a good chance that the problem can be solved without legal action.

¹⁵ See http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/site/index_en.htm.

2.3. NETC@RDS

NETC@RDS¹⁶ is another example of a supranational PEGS. It is an eHealth service providing mobile European citizens with easy access to health services. It is currently still in a testing phase but will surely have a very high impact once the far-reaching aims of this service have been realised. NETC@RDS is part of the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), which is a proof of entitlement for European citizens to receiving necessary (non planned) medical care abroad, but inside the EU/EFTA.¹⁷ The EHIC has replaced the previously used E111 (paper) form. NETC@RDS will advance EHIC from an eye-readable to an electronic device (eEHIC).¹⁸

NETC@RDS will be provided across Europe, but is currently only accessible in pilot regions in 15 Member States. Users can make use of the service in their mother tongue. Once through the tests, it is designed to be immediately operational on a pan-European scale. So far, the service can only be used when one is travelling or temporarily resident outside one's home country and staying in one of the pilot regions. The number of potential users will increase enormously once project is finally implemented.

NETC@RDS will benefit users by providing easy access to health care services abroad. For health care providers it will provide a reliable source of information on insurance entitlements and it will facilitate interstate billing and clearing procedures. The eEHIC will be developed into a smart card with many advanced functionalities. It will use a Europe-wide IT-infrastructure to provide easy information exchange related to health services and ensure fully electronic cross-border billing of health services. For the future, the consortium envisages the development of a common electronic database for improved health insurance billing and clearing applications.

2.4. e@SY Connects

e@SY Connects (e@SY = Electronic services for South Yorkshire)¹⁹ is an example of an advanced regional eGovernment service that shows potential to develop into a multinational PEGS. It is a project of the local governments of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield in South Yorkshire, UK. e@SY

16 See <http://www.netcards-project.com>. NETC@RDS is in line of the overall eHealth strategy of the European Commission, which focuses on better use of ICT for improved provision of interoperable high quality health services to (mobile) European citizens. See European Commission (2004, 2006a, 2007a, 2007b) and European Council (2006).

17 Each Member State is responsible for producing and distributing the EHIC on its territory. It can be either a specific card or on the rear side of the national card. At current, more than 150 million EHICs are circulating in Europe.

18 See Nader, N. (2007).

19 See <http://www.easyconnects.org.uk>.

Connects provides citizens with easy access to citizen information and services. eInclusion is one of the major policy goals in Europe, and e@SYConnects provides one of the most advanced and successful examples of how eGovernment services can master this challenge.²⁰ Mobile phones and digital television are the main devices to provide access to information to those with no or insufficient computer experience.

The scope of users is large, as e@SY Connects has become a vital information channel for many thousands of people in Yorkshire. The benefits for users as well as for providers are obvious, as e@SY Connects has allowed the public and private agencies involved “[...] to identify and meet more effectively the needs of the people and businesses they serve across existing boundaries”.²¹ eInclusion is a major goal of e@SY Connects.

Technologically, e@SY Connects is very innovative, as the simultaneous use of the internet, the mobile phone, the digital television and traditional information channels had to be created from scratch. The usage of open standards facilitates the integration of different services and applications. In the beginning, service innovation was less of an issue than integrating different information channels and providers. A considerable degree of service integration has been accomplished, which comes along with a reduction of bureaucratic burdens. Nowadays, the focus has shifted toward developing and offering new services.

2.5. Belgian Social Security

Another example of how a network of databases can reduce administrative burdens for public authorities, businesses, and citizens, is provided by Belgian Social Security.²² This project has been initiated and is operated by the Crossroads Bank for Social Security and the National Office for Social Security. Its aim was to improve collaboration and digital data exchange between more than 2000 social security organisations in Belgium. For citizens, companies, and professionals in the social security sector, Belgian Social Security works mainly as an information provider.

The portal makes use of the fact that all citizens in Belgium have an individual identification number and a social identity card (an official memory chip card that can be used for identification at any contact with the social sector), and that all companies have a single identification number. To enable all actors in the field of social security to join the network and to be able to process all sorts

²⁰ See also Ministerial Declaration on eInclusion (2006), which emphasises the opportunities provided by ICT in order to achieve improvements with regard to the i2010 goal of eInclusion.

²¹ Quoted from the November 2006 executive summary, available at <http://www.easyconnects.org.uk/pdf/1106.pdf>.

²² See <https://www.socialsecurity.be>.

of documents, the ePortal is based on open standards. The degree of service integration is very high, as all social security-related services are covered.

The service is provided in French, Dutch, and German. Some information is also given in English. The service is offered to nationals, Belgian citizens who work abroad but are still related to the Belgian social security system, and to citizens of other countries who work in Belgium. All Belgian companies, more than 220,000 employers, use the system to provide the social security institutions with the required data about their employees. Employers benefit because they do not have to reproduce the social security data manually any longer. Employees benefit as transactions are conducted much faster than through a paper-based system and security and reliability of transactions are improved. The system has been offered to other countries, but so far no take-up has taken place.

2.6. Media@Komm Transfer

Media@Komm Transfer²³ is an initiative of the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour and is our final example of a (potential) multinational PEGS. It builds upon the Media@Komm initiative (1999-2003) that developed more than 300 advanced eGovernment solutions for German municipalities. Media@Komm Transfer aims at developing transferable best-practice concepts while taking into account established e-government standards and proven procedures, including the expansion of international contacts and co-operation to promote the digital integration of Europe. With regard to serving citizens' needs, it probably cannot compare to the other eGovernment services that are discussed here. However, since it intends to harmonise the development of local e-government and promote the transfer of best practices and know-how, it provides a very instructive showcase of how procedures, technologies, and services that are developed in one public authority can be implemented in other public authorities, regions, and countries.

Media@Komm Transfer is based on 20 local authorities ("transfer municipalities") from across Germany that have founded an e-government network. The consulting company Capgemini has been selected as "transfer agency" in order to control and co-ordinate the activities in the transfer municipalities. In practical terms, Media@Komm Transfer harmonises concepts, procedures and technical aspects such as formats for data exchange, links developments that have been made in parallel and without knowledge of each other, and improves thus the interoperability of e-government procedures.

The benefits for citizens as well as for public authorities are substantial because it reduces duplication in development efforts, and it makes government services faster available, easier to use and more transparent due to the harmonisation. The degree of service integration is very high, which leads to a reduction of bureaucratic burdens.

²³ Accessible through <http://www.innovatorsclub.de>.

MERIT

3. Development paths of PEGS

3.1. Getting PEGS started

The circumstances under which eGovernment services of whatever type come into existence are multifaceted, but at least three conditions must be fulfilled to get a true PEGS off the ground:

There must be some impetus for increased coordination between different eGovernment service providers.

At least one actor must take on responsibility for the integration and re-organisation of services and maintenance.

Enough budget must be available.

Impetus to coordinate

The establishment of a PEGS typically involves a coordination challenge. In the case of the bottom-up development of a PEGS on the basis of dispersed existing e-services, there is a need to coordinate the public authorities that provide these services. Often there is a wish to reorganise services in a user-centric way and to make access to services as easy as possible. Both HELP and e@SY Connects are illustrative in this respect. The main reason for the Austrian government to develop the HELP-portal was to bundle services and information provided by different public authorities. Citizen orientation was the primary goal, concentrating on information that is useful, easy to understand and easy to find. Confusion that is experienced by users on what office to visit or what forms to fill out and where to deliver them should be overcome by providing all this information in one place. e@SY Connects was founded to provide easy access to citizen information and services. The aim was "... to design a simple to use system and provide a front-end interface that non-computer users could use to access information and interactive services. The e@SY Connects approach enables people with no knowledge or experience of using Web/Internet services the ability to access the information and services".

In the case of top-down establishment of a PEGS, the coordination challenge is of a different kind. If an initiative for an eGovernment service is launched on a Europe wide scale, the cooperation of local public authorities in Member States must be organised and the service needs to be integrated into local administrative structures. SOLVIT is a case in point. Its functioning depends

upon the commitment of national public authorities to cooperate. SOLVIT tries to resolve issues regarding the application of common market law in an informal way through direct personal interaction in different national SOLVIT-centres, thereby avoiding legal procedures. Its success is explained among other factors by the fact that it operates on an informal basis, which makes integration in local administrative structures easier. Also for NETC@RDS coordination is a main challenge. Its functioning depends upon coordination of health authorities and health services in Member States. Whereas SOLVIT keeps the technology relatively straightforward and relies upon coordinating informal personal interaction between public authorities to make the system operate, NETC@RDS tries to solve the coordination problem by developing advanced technology and by introducing technical standards among all organisations that contribute to the system.

Coordinating actor

Whether a PEGS is launched top-down or develops bottom-up, for it to be successful there must be an actor that takes on responsibility. This can be the European Commission, like in the cases of NETC@RDS and SOLVIT, or local public authorities. e@SY Connects was created by the local governments in South Yorkshire with the support of national and European funding, aimed at improving the economic structure of South Yorkshire.²⁴ The maintenance and further development are carried out by the e@SY Connects consortium and especially its board, which also became responsible for the funding after the initial funding from the national government and the EU ended.

In the case of HELP, the initiative was taken by the Austrian Ministry of Finance, but not without problems and hesitations. This ministry initiated the project together with a private company, Net Value,²⁵ that developed the concept of the portal and the idea of life events to structure the contents of the service portal. At the outset, the Ministry supported the concept, but it did not have a budget for its realisation and therefore postponed the implementation. Then the project was taken over by Net Value together with Austria Telecom, the latter being interested in sponsoring it to promote the usage of its telephone lines and internet connections. Thus the decision was taken to implement the HELP portal in the beginning of 1997. When the portal opened, it was received as some kind of sensation. It was recognized in the media that this was a real citizen oriented project that was not too difficult, not using difficult words, not being legally oriented, which is really in the language of the citizen and understandable. This public reaction made the Finance Ministry regain the initiative and buy the portal back from Austria Telecom.

²⁴ e@SY Connects evolved from an initiative ("SYCOP" – South Yorkshire Coalfields Online Project) to help developing the region of South Yorkshire, which was traditionally characterised by coal mining and suffered a severe economic decline in the 80s and 90s. SYCOP was established in 2000 and was funded until 2002, by the European Commission and the UK Treasury. After this initial period, the city council of Barnsley was interested in maintaining the project and looked for partners among other municipalities and organisations in the region. In this process, SYCOP was renamed and became e@SY Connects.

²⁵ More information about Net Value and its projects can be found on <http://www.net-value.com/>.

Budget

Obviously, to get a PEGS off the ground, sufficient budget is needed. It often appears to be hard to raise sufficient budget, because financial benefits of e-services are difficult to estimate. The direct financial costs of e-service portals are to be found in the infrastructure and in labour for creating content, programming new applications, answering questions, and coordination. For instance, in the case of HELP, the project has been transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the Chancellors Office because of budgetary problems. The infrastructure is now owned by the Austrian government's computing centre (which is responsible for the technical administration of HELP) where the chancellor's office rents capacity on the servers. There has been no estimation of the direct financial benefits that derive from the HELP portal. Overall, interviewees seemed to agree that the financial impact is 'medium' at the moment, but that it had the potential to increase when more high impact transactions are being added. The main benefits stem from the reduction of workload elsewhere in the public administration apparatus and a more efficient processing of transactions. Thus, as is often the case with innovative investments in the public sector, the benefits do not necessarily accrue to the same organisations that take the decisions or bear the costs.

3.2. Further development of PEGS

Once an eGovernment service has been launched, the main challenge is mostly increasing its coverage, either in terms of content, or of geographical scope, or both. In general, e-services are not created from scratch, nor are they launched in a void. They often develop by building upon other existing initiatives and by integrating them into a common portal. For instance, HELP was created to integrate services from different portals in one place. Different Austrian municipalities already maintained e-service portals. Therefore, already in the end of 1998 the HELP project team started to encourage Austrian municipalities to provide hyperlinks on their websites to relevant information within HELP. This was done to ensure that descriptions and procedures did not differ among municipalities. Content from municipalities, regions and national institutions was stored in one place. In turn, this information is provided back to the websites of municipalities, ministries and a whole range of other institutions. This led to a de facto standardization in information and procedures. To encourage the municipalities to link to HELP, a partner system was developed in which municipalities were mentioned in HELP with addresses and basic information. HELP started out with providing e-services to citizens. In the year 2000, this was taken one step further to address business needs as well. HELP now provides information on how to start a company, how to pay taxes, as well as how to employ people.

Media@Komm Transfer was a project specifically designed to discover how to expand the geographical scope of best practice eGovernment services. It revealed how best practices in municipal eGovernment can better be transferred on a national, international, and pan-European scale. The project resulted in a set of guidelines for best practice transfer based on the practical

experiences gained in German model cases. Media@Komm Transfer lists the following critical issues:

A common vision and strategy from all actors already when an eGovernment solution is in the planning phase. This vision and strategy must not be project specific; it can also be developed by public authorities, economic actors (e.g. chamber of commerce), private initiatives, and the like, in order to become a general vision of eGovernment in a country. This would help overcoming the problems arising from too many isolated efforts to find solutions for the same problem, which results in a manifold of solutions that approach the same problem in different ways, so that no potential user can easily decide which solution would be best for him.

Effective organisation, project and change management. This requires a fundamental modernisation of traditional administrative structures and processes, with clearly defined tasks and responsibilities and intensified collaboration with external partners.

Cost-benefit analyses: improved citizen participation may result in additional work at the administrative level. Each element of an eGovernment solution should be considered with regard to its purpose and the expected benefits and its cost.

Technologies should be *adapted to user needs*, especially with regard to the implementation of electronic signatures, security issues, and the channels through which other public authorities, citizens and businesses can access the services.

Staff in public authorities and involved external partners must be *trained and motivated* in order to ensure that the eGovernment solution achieves its goals and satisfies the needs of service providers and users.

Promotion of eGovernment solutions require coordinated *communication*, internally within the public authority as well as to the external public.

Sustainable resources must be secured, especially financial means, technical infrastructure, and trained staff. eGovernment services require maintenance and periodic modernisation.

Legal aspects, especially *IPR issues*, must be considered seriously when an eGovernment solution is created with the aim to disseminate it.

4. Organisation of PEGS

4.1. Governance structure

The governance structure of the cases that we analysed, are all rather similar in the sense that a board of (main) stakeholders manages the network of all involved parties. This board can reach a remarkable size and usually contains public sector institutions as well as private companies and institutions of the voluntary sector. For instance, besides the local governments of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, the board of the e@SY Connects consortium consists of representatives of health authorities, emergency services (Ambulance, Fire and Police), voluntary groups, the Yorkshire Forward (a regional development agency), the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, a job centre, and many associate members, such as carers and local business organisations. The board operates independently of the participating organisations, though collaboration between board and partners is tight, due to personnel overlaps. The chair of the board usually changes every six months. Tasks and responsibilities within boards are usually clearly defined on a formal level, but as particularly the case of HELP indicates, informal arrangements help the network to function and to meet user demands.

Close involvement of the board with the e-service organisation is crucial to maintain focus and to ensure budget. For instance, the board of e@SY Connects and its partnering organisations gather information on user needs and satisfaction with the service through surveys and focus groups (addressing specified groups of people) and collaborate with the voluntary sector and groups of juveniles and disadvantaged. Furthermore, e@SY Connects is funded by the partnering organisations in two ways. There is a general financial contribution and there are project-specific contributions. This model ensures that projects to develop e@SY Connects maintain the active support of the majority of its members. It sometimes prevents specific projects to go through because of lack of financial means in case they do not meet the interests of enough board members.

4.2. Day-to-day operations

As the various e-services we studied vary widely in mission and scope, the organisation of their day-to-day operations differs substantially. The organisation of SOLVIT is relatively straightforward, because it is basically dedicated to providing only one type of service. The challenge of making SOLVIT work, is in keeping the participants in the various Member States committed to it and have them supply the required labour input. All together, there are 30 SOLVIT centres, one in every European Union Member State and an additional three in Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, plus the SOLVIT coordination centre in Brussels. Most SOLVIT-centres belong either to the ministry of foreign or economic affairs. The Commission SOLVIT support team in Brussels provides the SOLVIT-centres with day-to-day assistance regarding legal, technical and procedural issues. It also maintains and develops the database and the websites, implements promotional activities and develops promotional instruments, monitors quality and performance and organises regular workshops.²⁶

To make an eGovernment service work, the personal element in the day-to-day operations appears to be really important. Behind the technology, there is a community. This is also illustrated by SOLVIT, where all the people we talked to emphasised the importance of regular contacts between the colleagues in different countries, by phone, email, and face-to-face. The SOLVIT coordinator in Brussels organises regular meetings of all SOLVIT employees, in Brussels as well as in Member States. One of the interviewees said: “We have contact all the time. To ask for the status, to require more information, to ask for opinion: that is the strength of SOLVIT. We meet two or three times a year, we do workshops on legal issues, case discussion, database issues but we also get personal contacts in small dinners and informal meetings which is crucial for success. We are really willing to help each other. We are there to help citizens and businesses regardless of nationality. We are not there to defend our own administration. The network that is established is the most innovative about SOLVIT. We know each other and have really good contacts. The database is the tool for these contacts and for formalizing and supporting them.”

To keep a portal like HELP up and running, requires a somewhat more complicated organisational structure. In the case of HELP, its operations rely on an interplay of the Chancellor’s Office, the government departments, Net Value, and the Austrian Computing Centre.²⁷ The Chancellor’s Office is the leading organisation, responsible for editing raw information on life events that is delivered by ministries, municipalities and other involved parties before it is fed in the HELP portal (see Figure 1). In principle, the ministries are

²⁶ SOLVIT 2006 Report. According to the report, SOLVIT centres spent on average 16.5 man months on SOLVIT tasks in 2006, but staff levels vary from 1 to 59 man months per centre.

²⁷ The Computing Centre is a shared service centre that is working for the ministries of internal affairs, finance, justice, the chancellor’s office as well as other public bodies. This institution, in which the Austrian government holds a 100 percent share, is the leading IT-service provider of the Austrian public administration. See <http://www.brz.gv.at>.

responsible for answering questions in which they have their competence. In practice, however, only 20 percent of the questions are answered by the ministries where the other 80 percent are being answered by the Chancellor's Office. This is in some cases due to resistance and time constraints within some of the ministries, and in some cases to the fact that sometimes information from different departments is required.²⁸ Net Value's contribution to HELP nowadays consists mainly of editorial work on the content that is added to the portal, ensuring a consistent look and feel of the website and assisting the Chancellor's office in decisions regarding the development of the portal. The Austrian Computing Centre is responsible for all technical issues involved in keeping the platform running and taking care of daily problems as well as for the development of new applications. At the Centre, three people are working full time on HELP, one of whom takes care of the day to day operations while the remaining two take care of the development of new applications.

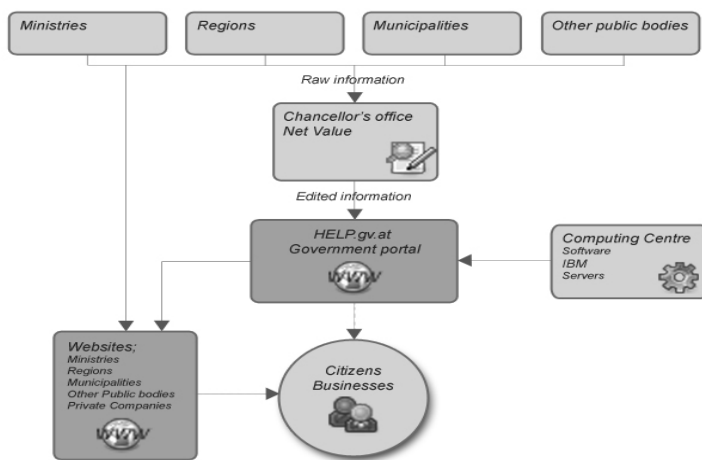


Figure 1: the flows of information in HELP (Source: www.Help.gv.at)

As more organisations get involved in the development and maintenance of an e-service, the day-to-day organisation of service delivery gets even more complicated. That is demonstrated by NETC@RDS, which is a consortium consisting of about 30 core members that each have cooperation partners in their own country. Thus, a large number of health sector institutions, including hospitals, pharmacies, medical practitioners and other health professionals, dentists, health insurances, health fund organisations and regional governments, in 15 EU countries²⁹ together build up the NETC@RDS network. Operators are mainly health care providers in hospitals and ambulatory health care offices. Altogether there are 305 service providers (medical units) with a

²⁸ The life event “apprenticeship” for example requires input from around nine ministries and institutions that have responsibilities in this area. If a specific question is asked, it can be complicated to determine who should answer. This mostly ends with the Chancellor's Office doing the job.

²⁹ These are: Austria, Czech Republic, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

total of 566 work stations (so-called NETC@RDS service points) operating in these 15 Member States. It is due to this complex structure that NETC@RDS is still in a long-lasting testing phase. Another reason for this extensive testing is that the IT infrastructure required for the electronic European Health Insurance Card (eEHIC) is not yet fully developed. Some functionalities of the smart card have so far only been tested in labs.

Unlike SOLVIT, the NETC@RDS project is not backed up by a well defined community of service providers. None of our interviewees was able to oversee the complete NETC@RDS network. Most were only able to describe the project on the local level. This makes institutionalisation of procedures and clear definition and allocation of governance responsibilities ever more imperative for the service to succeed.

5. Common barriers to be overcome

5.1. Common barriers

In our case studies, we came across three barriers that hamper the development of PEGS:

Conflicts concerning power and responsibilities (turf wars): the development of common eGovernment services often depends upon the transfer of power from dispersed public authorities, for instance in Member States, to a central coordinating body.

Organisational resistance: the offering of services to citizens through new e-channels introduces uncertainty and leads to reluctance on the shop floor level in the many public authorities.

Budgetary problems: the problem to make the benefits of an investment in eGovernment services visible, develop a mechanism to spread the costs among the beneficiaries so as to avoid free rider behaviour, and thereby to secure a lasting stream of funds.

Turf wars

Supranational PEGS in particular have to struggle with the fact that they are implemented with pan-European scope, but can deploy their full efficiency only when Member States are prepared to adjust their national service systems to accommodate them. Member States must accept losing some control over service delivery and have to compromise on ways national services are designed, run and delivered. When interests of Member States' public authorities or service providers are not aligned with the interests of EC institutions, it turns out that PEGS are usually in a weak position. This is illustrated for instance by the SOLVIT-case. Although the establishment of SOLVIT was based on an agreement between the European Commission and the Member States, it took quite a while before national public authorities in these Member States were willing to collaborate smoothly among each other and with other EC institutions. The management of SOLVIT stresses the need for an intensification of the collaboration between public authorities in Member States and for SOLVIT to become formally involved in decision-making that is related to internal market law. It even requests a "cultural change" from other

public authorities in order to enable faster and less bureaucratic conflict resolution.³⁰ Similar problems appear when PEGS rely on decisions of other European institutions. In both cases, PEGS representatives demand more influence on decisions affecting e-service provision to secure common standards and procedures across borders.

Organisational resistance

Reorganising tasks and the active involvement of citizens in the provision of public e-services may result in uncertainty, reluctance and resistance on the shop floor. In Austria, the HELP-project was launched by officials in the Ministry of Finance. In the inception phase, it caused a lot of resistance, primarily in other ministries, but also in the Ministry of Finance itself. For instance, employees with a legal or technical orientation tended to be reluctant towards the idea of organising e-services around life situations and focusing on easy to understand content. They found the approach too vague and unstructured. Others did not like the idea of direct interaction with citizens through web forums, as they expected processes to become more complicated and time consuming. Some people in other ministries felt that they had to contribute to a project from which they did not expect to benefit (enough). Others feared a decrease of independence and a loss of influence and power when passing on tasks and responsibilities to the administrators of HELP.

A common form that organisational resistance may take, is the so called not-invented-here syndrome. There is a resistance to implement best practices developed elsewhere and a tendency to exaggerate the uniqueness of ones own needs and characteristics. The required amount of adaptations to e-services on offer is exaggerated or the adaptation of an application is totally rejected.³¹ For instance, potential adopters of HELP often insisted that, in spite of the proven quality of the concept, all kind of adaptations were made before they would implement the application in their environment. According to the representative of Net Value, these adaptations were not always adding to the quality of the application. Furthermore, tailoring the system to each adopter's particular needs may reduce the degree of interoperability between systems. Another inhibiting factor can be the interests of large and powerful IT departments that capture projects and convince policy makers of the necessity to develop the application in-house, in order to protect their position within the organization.

³⁰ See also the SOLVIT annual report of 2006.

³¹ Common reasons for the "not-invented-here syndrome" are a perceived feeling of loss of control over the development of the project, not being well informed about best practices or a feeling that the solution does not match with organizational culture. Although this could be part of the explanation, it should be kept in mind that implementation of an application almost always requires a translation of the concept to a different institutional context. Though this may result in new innovations and improvements, there is a risk that unnecessary adaptations are made at the expense of quality and interoperability (Katz and Shapiro 1985).

Budgetary issues

A collective infrastructure for the provision of e-services, like any infrastructure, has the characteristics of a public good. It is therefore vulnerable to free rider behaviour. When some consortium partners in a PEGS feel that the financial burden or the financial benefits are not equitably distributed, this is bound to cause tensions. This possibly leads to a bias in the development of new services towards those services that may meet the interest of specific consortium members of a PEGS, rather than meet citizens' needs. The willingness to financing management activities that help administering and promoting the PEGS but do not serve the particular interests of the consortium members may also become problematic, because consortium members tend to spend money rather for their own purposes than for the general purposes of the PEGS. For example, although e@SY Connects is widely supported in the region, the willingness of consortium members to spend money from their own budgets on financing staff working directly for e@SY Connects is sometimes limited. The same applies to the development of services that may help to promote e@SY Connects (and that may meet strong user demands) but do not meet the particular demands of the clients of a majority of the consortium members. In these cases, a culture of "give-and-take" appears helpful to overcome these constraints.

5.2. Ways to overcome barriers

In the cases we studied, various ways had been found to surpass the barriers encountered in the process of developing and expanding an e-service. Prominent among those are:

- Providing incentives: finding ways to make the provision of e-services attractive for the organisations and the people involved.
- Applying political pressure: providing political backing of the project and making it high profile.
- Promoting 'self organisation': giving people dealing with the day-to-day problems of setting up and maintaining the e-service enough leeway to use informal contacts, to experiment and to find optimal solutions by way of 'trial and error'.

Incentives

An obvious incentive to overcome resistance or to gain support for e-services is the expectation that it will help to reduce workloads and administrative burden. For example, the less people were involved in the technical or administrative tasks involved in implementing HELP, the stronger was their willingness to support it. For this reason, there was also support from those ministries where the staff was overburdened with administrative tasks. For them, supporting HELP meant a reduction of workload, because they only had to provide information but were not obliged to take responsibility for the implementation process in technical or administrative terms.

Experiences with the introduction of the HELP-format in Germany on the state level in Saxony show that a careful management of the process may help to

overcome resistance and the not-invented-here syndrome. In particular, a key success factor was that the Saxonian government could be convinced to define the content of the website first, with the technical specifications and requirements from the underlying platforms and software in a second step. In Austria as well as in Baden-Wurtemberg the technical specifications were made first and the content had to adapt to this framework. It turns out that when content is defined first, transfer and take-up of the system proceeds more smoothly and ease of use, not only for citizens and businesses, but for public authorities as well, increases.

Political pressure

Another means to generate support, is to make the provision of eGovernment services a high profile 'official' project by providing it with high level, political backing. In the case of HELP, it helped that the portal was presented by the end of 1998 to the cabinet of Austrian ministers in order to secure more support from all the ministries involved. This ensured that the project received an official status and created a situation in which there was more pressure on the ministries to cooperate with HELP. HELP also benefitted from positive coverage and explicit support in the Austrian media.

Self organisation

Giving those who are in charge of an e-service project the right to use informal ways of information gathering and decision-making helps circumventing resistance that emerges in formal contexts (staff meetings, management meetings, etc.). Within HELP, for instance, the project team is allowed to work around ministries and to use semi-official channels, such as chambers of lawyers and notaries, to get information when ministries are unable or unwilling to cooperate.³²

³² Within the project of Baden Wurttemberg this isn't allowed which makes the data gathering (on life events) a more complicated task. However, hand it also created incentives to deliver more of an effort to gain support from the ministries which may be beneficial for the long run.

6. The impact of PEGS on legitimacy of government

6.1. Ambitions

The introduction of PEGS is not only driven by an ambition to improve public service delivery. Additional goals are to improve citizens' participation and to reinforce democracy by fostering civic attitudes. These are major policy goals, as expressed in the i2010 Benchmarking Indicators. These dimensions of the scope and impact of eGovernment are measured in projects such as the eGovernment Economics Project Measurement Framework (eGEP). The basic idea is that democracy can be improved through openness of processes and standards, transparency of decision-making and rules, and better participation opportunities for citizens. These factors increase the legitimacy of government. Since e-services can be designed in such a way that they contribute to meeting these demands, PEGS may become a powerful means to add to the support and legitimacy of government institutions on a European level.

6.2. Preconditions

From our case studies, we learned that there are four preconditions that must be met if an e-service is to contribute to the wider goals of reinforcement of civic attitudes and democracy:

Obviously, to have an impact, an e-service must be *widely accepted and used* by citizens. This applies surely to HELP, which shows over 300.000 visits per month with an average length of stay of over ten minutes. In Austria, HELP has become the main (virtual) contact point for citizens when they have to deal with their public administration.

E-services must contribute to *transparency*. Transparency helps citizens to evaluate the quality and efficiency of the services they receive. Quality delivered through a digital channel can mean a reduction in information search costs for citizens. Also, transparency can contribute to generating trust in the political and social system of Europe. Like in the case of SOLVIT, where conflict resolution when EU law is misapplied helps to generate citizens' trust in EU law and