eGovernment knowledge in EU Regions (including Czech experiences)

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The paper is presenting some considerations about regional eGovernment in the frame of a wider discussion about shared democratic values, global concerns & trust, empathy & cultural identity. Main conclusions are based on brief evaluation of experiences of several EU regions, members of eris@, European Regional Information Society Association, which were gathered during 2 years of activities of eGovernment Working Group in the frame of IANIS+ project (www.ianis.net), financially supported by the European Commission. Regional experiences were presented in personal discussions, roundtables, Case studies and summarized in the Guide to Good Practices in eGovernment.¹

eGovernment take-up in Europe has many forms and faces, with a range of more or less successful local, regional and national eServices which has appeared across. Unfortunately, those services are still islands of automation which often cannot work together. It seems that European administrations are still underestimating the interoperability aspect, although a certain consensus was reached in numerous discussions about different faces or layers of eGovernment interoperability, as a multi-disciplinary field with technical, organization, legal, human and societal aspects. Probably, the term ‘eGovernment’ is not the most appropriate for this coming period and in the Age of Access it is better to consider networked Citizens, Businesses and Governments. Probably some other term will appear to reflect better the need for definite internal re-organization of public administration in sense of change of the system and process architecture, interoperability of all kinds and innovation. Anyhow, the core of the challenge is the need for organisational change with the main barrier in the way of thinking of all stakeholders, which is changing very slowly in comparison to the development of ICT.

It is difficult to apply the new kind of interrelations between individuals, organizations and Nature, enabled by ICT especially to such comprehensive domain, as governance. Difficulties in implementation of eGovernment with the same success across different regions show the need for re-thinking of traditional approaches. Experiences of regions help us to realize the need for more complex understanding of organizational changes, which are knocking the door of each regional politician and public administration sooner or later.

Facing the need for organizational change, regional European Public Administrations behave different, depending on the cultural and economic background, level of ICT adoption and on the maturity of the democratic system. Those most advanced are providing a lot of G2C and G2B eServices : e.g. German region of Bremen is providing more then 100 on-line services, UK regions about 200, while regions from NMS (new member states) are providing less then 10 and not all of them are 100% electronic, but often are combined with the “paper” phase. In general, regions from NMS still have a complicated transition period with a lot of difficulties with not fully developed democratic mechanisms, where even a small mistake in re-organization of public administration structure and processes could block the transformation process for a significant period.

After some period, when eGovernment was something like Mission Impossible for NMS, some of them has reached visible progress, as Estonia, and some are still in the first phase of integration of back-office, as the Czech Republic. There are still too many barriers, including those most serious in minds of people, and this put the human aspect in the centre of problem in NMS, where the lack of interoperability of people and processes creates one of the basic

barriers. Introduction of a new, different kind of social interactions are there in a close connection to the development of democracy and civic society. On the other side, there are also lots of positives, such as high dynamics of economic growth and development, big potential of educated employees, rich natural resources, good territorial positioning.

All European regions, independently to the stage of implementation of eGovernment, show still a big lack of knowledge about proper tools for measurement and evaluation of the success and real benefits of eGovernement projects. Regions have difficulties how to make the local governments more efficient and effective, how to inspire them to use benefits of innovation in eGovernment. It is necessary that regional authorities are aware and have the tools and manuals, how to measure the economic effects. But they can’t stop on this. They need to be able to explain to citizens and to themselves the wider impact of eGovernment. Why this big effort for implementing of particular project was done? What is the value for the regional community, for the region? What are broader social, political and economic benefits of eGovernment?

During last few years some steps were done in this direction, and we could mention some of existing European measurement and benchmarking activities:

- IDABC study, Background Research Paper, 20052;
- Member States measurement initiatives of various nature and scope3;
- The OECD overviews of business cases for eGovernment;
- The 2005 UK Ministerial eGovernment conference in Manchester conclusions, which has addressed take-up and impact, provide first measurement results and strategy analysis.
- eGEP project, initiated by the Commission under MODINIS programme, a study into financing, economics and benefits of eGovernment 4

Regions can’t speak about the impact of eGovernment without understanding of the input side and the whole economic of eGovernment projects. Before the beginning of any eGovernment project, regions are interested to be aware of expected spending, related to such project. Besides direct costs for Hardware and Software, Telecommunication, Connectivity, special CRM systems, Call centres and other predicted and planned elements of the project, it is necessary to broadly define costs of organisational change, related to the particular project, including higher demands on educational level of personal involved.

The last in-depth analyses and recommendations on these issues could be found in the Expenditure Study of eGEP project, funded by DG INFSO. The project suggests a simplified Rule of Thumb guideline for the main cost components and their break down for the five year perspective. The study presents also the result of the quantitative assessment of ICT and eGovernment Expenditure by public administration.

According to the eGep project, eGovernment Cost Element Structure could contain the next components:

SET UP

I. Planning Phase:

II. Implementation Phase:

PROVISION

4 www.rso.it/egep
The study of eGEP project has come to the conclusion, that the costs of RTD can’t be strictly limited to technological RTD, but may include such costs as research on user needs, on the ways to increase take-up, how to better target services and on improving usability etc. According to last studies, the budgets of eGovernment projects need to calculate almost 50% of costs for organisational change (including internal, inter-institutional reorganisation and cooperation, costs of change management, initial training costs etc.).

It corresponds with observations of IANIS+ project, that costs for the competent human involvement in realisation of eGovernment projects are therefore very required. There is an urgent need for a new type of public administration stuff with relevant educational background (eSkills, Information Management and Organisational Processes, basics of Social and Political sciences). Unfortunately, this is not envisaged in regional projects and still is not reflected in the structure of finances allocated for eGovernment projects.

Understanding of economics of eGovernment project creates one of the basic conditions for success of innovation in regions and for higher engagement of citizens into transformation of social interactions. It enhances “social trust” and supports civic society, making input into the growth of democratic values. Regional communities start to be very sensitive to a clever spending of public resources and start to be interested in effective and efficient public spending.

Efficiencies can be composed of several indicators, such as reduction of cost per unit, increase of productivity, sharing processes and data re-use, people change (behaviour, skills, leadership, awareness), etc. This set of indicators reflects the financial and organisational value of eGovernment projects.

Whilst effectiveness comes from integration process and may be focused on social dialog and growth of public value alongside with inclusiveness of public services. It may include simplification of procedures/reduction of administrative burdens, accountability, growth of public value, multi/channel approach, integration, etc.

All regions, which are seeking for multidimensional qualitative assessment of the public value potentially generated by eGovernment, need to take also into account such democratic attributes as Trust, Openness, Transparency and Accountability and of cause Participation. This could be developed into more detailed set of performance indicators, which could reflect the growing social capital and together with civic engagement may strength Social Trust. Thus, efficiency, effectiveness and democracy create the basic framework for the measurement of Public values of eGovernment projects.

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<th>Democratic attributes/regional marketing</th>
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Visions of the region future
“Turnover” of the population (coming in and out)
Participation in regional, international networks etc.

All these elements are bringing positive characteristics to the regional community and making input into attractiveness of the particular region, which could be used for “regional marketing” and positioning. Of course, in order to observe innovation at regional level, it is also necessary to take into consideration specifics of regional culture in influencing the success of eGovernment projects and of knowledge society related policies in general.

In practice of political leaders, including those regional decision makers there could be used several strategies for creating of a new kind of social interactions, e.g. building of: Moral trust, Economic trust, Political trust, Social trust, and Technological trust. The last one, Technological trust, is explained as an emphasis on technological democratization, “adopting technological innovations to make government more efficient, inclusive and accessible for citizenry such as eGovernment and eParticipation”5

*e-Participation* is enhancing participatory representative democracy and opening new channels for citizens and civil society interactions in democratic processes, is emerging as the logical development of e-Government to e-Democracy and a new challenge for tomorrow’s Europe. *New technologies are bringing into this field a lot of new possibilities and tools, which need to be evaluated and used properly, especially in new democracies in transition.*

We need still to ask ourselves, if our society is now really an Information Society, in which low-cost information and ICT are in general use and in which ICTs have brought about deep changes in our ways of working and living, maintaining democratic values. eDemocracy is demanding a specific model of democratic governance to achieve Information Society goals, where participation of citizens and governments is a fundamental pillar.

For regions it is a real challenge to integrate results of European research and innovation efforts in eParticipation practice. Within this integration effort, the reference could be made to some first results of the European Network of Excellence DEMO-net (www.demo-net.org), which has set the basics for the dialog of distinct stakeholders. Several categories of topics relevant for eParticipation research were identified, such as: political-strategic issues, organisational (covering also legal aspects), public value generation issues, social and socio-economical, socio-technological and pure technological, etc.

This corresponds to the statement of the Lisbon Council about effects of ICT-use on social participation (social networks, social capital and community building), political participation (voting behaviour, party membership and other forms of civic engagement), and economic participation (participation in the labour market, skills, wages, quality of work). While political-strategic aspects are mainly dedicated to political debates, principles in models of democracy, engagement of people and organisational issues refer to the organisational structures of governments, stakeholder issues, skills required by the

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participants, resource management, responsibilities and cooperation in democracy participation matters.

As it was stated by DEMO-net experts, implementation of principles of eDemocracy and eParticipation is possibly affecting traditional democracy models, which creates specific difficulties especially for new member states in their transition. From socio-technological side it is quite essential to separate, when engagement or participation of citizens begins and how to distinguish between policy participation and social participation.

It is necessary also to mention the danger of political elitism for new democracies, which could appear under existing forms of representative democracy. That’s why the need for Transparency of political and policy processes, identified by DEMO-net stakeholder’s workshop as political challenge for Europe, could be especially urgent for new member states, including Czech Republic. It is evident, that the work of different kind of communities, including research communities and NGOs, could enrich social dialog about democratic values in order to reach shared European targets: open administration, freedom of information, inclusive government, etc. For regional level it is essential, that while political-strategic aspects are mainly dedicated to political debates, principles and models of democracy and engagement of people, organisational issues refer to the organisational structures of regional governments, as well as stakeholder issues, skills required by the participants, resource management, responsibilities and cooperation in democracy participation matters.

EPMA, which was set by the Czech region Vysocina and BMI Association (NGO)\(^6\) is working in the DEMO-net project in cooperation with Czech experts from several Czech universities and from public administration with the objective to define the Value framework for eParticipation at least for regional level in order to pick up forms and tools of eParticipation, relevant to the actual level of maturity of society. Our core research is to inspire creating of practical eParticipation typology, which will take into account several issues:

1. Maturity of civil society (factors as: forms of democracy, national political environment, parties and their programmes, engagement of citizens in the political life, role of communities – local and thematic, role of NGOs, openness of political representation)

2. Communication between governments and citizens (factors as: strategies and tools for interaction at national, regional and local levels of governance, conditions for fully interactive communication)

3. Stage or level of information society (factors as: main socio-economic indicators, national technological potential, ICT literacy of citizens, politicians and PA staff, internet penetration, PC and mobile equipment and other indicators of information society)

For the contemporary stage in this field in the Czech Republic, we presume, that the use of eParticipation technologies is directly linked to the required and politically supported levels of interaction (communication) of governments and citizens, according to the level of maturity of civil society. \(^7\)E.g., till now there was no political order to introduce mature eParticipation tools and technologies at some level of governance, and the interaction is mostly presented as “one-way” communication.

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\(^6\) www.epma.cz

From the point of the interactivity, the majority of municipalities are only fulfilling their information duty according to the Act on Freedom of Information (Act No.106/Sb), which supports “one way communication”. The process of strengthening of interaction side of communication framework is going very slowly. The author could confirm this also by own observations as a member of evaluation team for national competition of municipal web sites Golden Crest.

On the other hand, according to the results of sociological researches, it is a very often case, that Czech citizens have no interest to communicate with their public administration and remain passive. As the most frequent reason for their own passivity people are mentioning lack of time and resources, but the opinion of analysts is different. They propose as the deeper reason for citizens passivity the hectic character of the society in transition, the very process of transformation from „quiet“socialistic period into demanding phase of competition in the capitalist society”8.

Speaking about eParticipation, we need to hold in mind the specific recommendations, outlined during different level discussions of eGovernment policy challenges, which highlight the need to create permanent dialog of all stakeholders for better utilization of knowledge into regional practice. These include, on the content side: communicating research; shifting from a focus on operational research towards examination of the impact of eGovernment implementation, continuing to focus on Public Values, whilst also learning from other regions. In eParticipation domain even more, then in pure eGovernmnet area, it is necessary to reach a consensus between all members of civil society: researchers (including multi-disciplinary integration), local and regional governmental organisations, businesses and citizens.

8 Alena Vaňhalová, SOCIOweb, webzine č.3, 2005