

EURACADEMY, 2nd Summer School
Information Society and sustainable rural development

The citizens:e-government
for better access to public administration services
and the improvement of governance

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**The citizens (and the entrepreneurs): e-government for
better access to public administration services
and the improvement of governance**

e-government: what it is about?

- improved access to public administration services for citizens
and for business
“better o- line than in line”

- participation and involvement in local affairs, provision of local information

Why are these important?

- they enhance the quality of life
 -
- they strengthen local democracy ,accountability and the quality of governance
 -
- they build community links and foster social cohesion
 -

- they help local businesses to become competitive and make an area more attractive for business

e-government and access to public administration services

Why is e-government more important for rural areas?

For rural areas access to public services is critical:

- people living in rural areas had always to travel to a town to conduct routine administrative transactions

- now public offices located in rural areas are being closed down at increasing rates; they become uneconomical to run as a result of depopulation and governments pursue cost cutting policies

How can ICT improve access?

In principle virtually the whole of most administrative procedures can be conducted at a distance, on-line through the internet:

All that the citizen or a business has to do is:

- obtain the necessary information through the internet
- download the application forms that have to be filled
 - fill the forms and submit these electronically

At the other end all that an official at the public office has to do is:

- - download the submitted application
- collect electronically any supporting information or documents that are necessary from other public services directly
 - process the application
- forward the requested document to the applicant electronically to be downloaded or send it by post where it is physically necessary

From the digital office to the digital society:
Phantasy or a realistic prospect?

- it depends on the country
 - it will take time
 - but there is progress

EU policy (e-Europe 2005) and structural funds for on-line access to public administrative services:

- 12 services for the citizen
 - 8 services for business
 -

The current position in the European Union of the 15

Proportion of public services on-line:

2001: 45% 2002: 55%

Services to citizens: 47%, Services to business: 68%

Top member states: Ireland: 85%, Sweden: 81%,
Finland: 70%, Denmark: 69%

Top service: VAT 88%

What are the barriers?

Technological and institutional barriers:

- protection of personal data
- acceptance of electronic signature
- authentication of official acts
- secure payment systems

Organisational – administrative barriers:

- complicated – bureaucratic procedures
- difficulty in computerising administrative procedures
 - difficulty in updating procedures
- lack of inter-agency linkages/interoperability
 - paperwork culture

Territorial and user related barriers:

- lack of access to internet, lack of computer literacy, lack of advanced ICTs and services (e.g. broadband):
more acute in rural than in urban areas
- inability to conduct transactions without help (low level of education, old age, etc)
more acute in rural than in urban areas
 - personal contact culture:
stronger in rural than in urban areas

Can these barriers be overcome?

- it depends on the country
 - it will take time
 - but there is progress

Technological and institutional barriers:

The can be dealt at national or supranational (EU) level

Barriers from public administration

They can be dealt at national level and sometimes at local level

Territorial and user barriers:

They can be dealt at national and at local level

Key to local policies in rural areas is public access points

But they could and should be multi-purpose facilities that can serve a purpose that is much broader than just access to public administration services:

- Access to public administration services
- Access to and personal use the internet
- Training in basic computer and internet skills
- Access to computer facilities and to internet for business or personal use

Examples of initiatives:

Canada: initiative for rural areas

- Community access program for of up to 50.000 inhabitants
 - 5.000 communities in 200, 10.000 communities in 2003

France: national initiative:

- 7.000 public access points for 2003
- multimedia culture spaces, centres for youth and culture, local employment agencies, public libraries, post offices

Greece: national initiative

- citizen service centers: 700 in 2003, 1.000 in 2004

Issues for public access centers:

Scope and role:

- narrow/passive: use ICT for local service delivery
- broad/proactive: use as vehicle to promote Information Society

Ownership and control: local, regional, national

Funding and sustainability:

- start-up costs, operational/staff costs
- public funds, voluntary work, business income
- local skills – technical and animation skills

e-government – e-democracy for participation, accountability and social cohesion

e-democracy

- replicate electronically existing practices (e.g voting)
 - - invent new forms of consultation and participation:
 - ✓ electronic forums to debate local affairs
 - ✓ access to municipal debates and decisions
 - ✓ feedback to policy makers regarding local projects and policies
 - ✓ direct communication through e-mail to elected officials
- build community links and networks

A networked society? a digital town?

The case of Parthenay, France (population 18.000)

A global, community centered, bottom-up, approach:

- ICT was put explicitly to the service of community cohesion
- it was seen as a means to involve citizens in community affairs, support local associations, citizen run community projects, etc.
- it was built on an already established municipality strategy to involve citizens and strengthen community cohesion

In-Town-Net portal:

- is a virtual representation of the district, its activities and people
 - it opened in 1996 and now contains 24.000 pages that provide economic, social, cultural, administrative, tourist information
- content is contributed by the municipality, associations, companies, individuals, the local radio, etc
- designed for citizen participation and interactive communication
 - Council deliberations are accessible through the internet
 - councilors have their individual e-mail addresses
 - there are virtual forums to conduct debates on local affairs
- there are virtual networks for the “exchange of knowledge” and a “local exchange service”
 - applications for official documents can be made electronically