

Developments in electronic governance

This digest is about the harnessing of new technologies and new media to the governance agenda and to 'electronic governance'. It attempts to give just a flavour of the many and various ways citizens together with local and central governments, are experimenting with information and communications technologies (ICTs) in order to build and sustain democratic and accountable civil societies. Examples are drawn from many parts of the world with a focus on the Commonwealth and Europe (but not excluding other countries). In the UK, which is uniquely a member of both the Commonwealth and Europe, the *New Statesman* magazine recently held a competition to 'draw attention to the possibilities offered by new media such as the Internet as a tool that can help shape better government, foster social inclusion and enhance public life'. Awards made in this competition illustrate the scope of the e-governance arenas. Awards were given for effective use of new media for developing democratically accountable civil society in general, as well as specifically for advocacy, informing the public, local democracy, communicating public policy and to elected representatives who took advantage of new technology to 'improve their relationship with the public'.

www.newstatesman.co.uk/nmoutline.htm

Contents:

- 1 Open government and 'access to information and knowledge'
- 2 Governance in the information age
- 3 Community information – informing the citizen
- 4 Governments' role in creating 'knowledge societies'

- 5 Information society and empowerment

We have built into the digest a comprehensive list of key UK and international government web sites relevant to the coverage of the digest.



Open government and 'access to information and knowledge'

Citizens and consumers of government services now demand that government be more open in their dealings. Access to information and knowledge about the political process, about services and about choices available, is both a consequence, and a driver of, the information age.

A more informed citizenry is in a better position to exercise its rights, and better able to carry out its responsibilities within the community. Equally, citizens as consumers expect to be involved in the process of securing services to suit their needs, to receive a higher standard of 'customer care' from government.

The management of information is a complex task. Information has some unusual and complex characteristics:

- *infinite* – it is not used up or lost when it is given to others
- *expandable* – as it is used, more is added
- *sharable* – it can be given away and retained at the same time
- *diffusive* – tending to leak from control and secrecy
- *transportable* – almost instantly.

Information's inherent complexity requires new models of management and delivery to meet citizens' and consumers' needs. For example, innovative partnerships between government, non-governmental organisations and the private sector can take advantage of emerging technologies to begin jointly to address the economic and social challenges posed by post-industrial society.

Governments respond to the need to be more open by adopting the following principles of information management and 'stewardship', using a combination of 'new' and 'old' technologies:

Access: making information widely available to citizens, consumers of services, voluntary and private-sector organisations, staff and elected members.

Process: providing information about how to gain access and to be involved in the political process of governance.

Awareness: providing information about what will be discussed and decided, and when.

Communication: developing means for exchanging views and information.

Involvement: enabling opportunities for involvement in the discursive development of information and knowledge for governance.

Governments face some specific issues in the provision of access to information:

- how to make information widely available to citizens
- how to harness new media/information and communication technologies (ICTs)
 - how to safeguard security, privacy and confidentiality
 - capturing information once and sharing it across all relevant services
 - maintaining information (keeping it up to date and removing out of date information)
 - providing equal access to information
- sharing information with other, partner organisations.

'A more informed citizenry is in a better position to exercise its rights, and better able to carry out its responsibilities within the community.'

The advance of ICTs and, specifically, the Internet, provides opportunities to transform the relationship between governments and their citizens on a scale not witnessed since the beginning of the industrial era. While this change affects the entire governance agenda, the fast-paced onset of the digital age as it relates to 'electronic government' is of special interest.

What is electronic governance, or 'e-governance'? How does a government become 'electronic'? Electronic governance is more than just citizen services, being re-engineered by technology, or procurement over the Internet. The route to electronic governance is only now emerging, as governments and citizens around the world experiment with, and learn to exploit, new media and new technologies. Electronic governance involves new styles of leadership, new ways of debating and deciding policy and investment, new ways of accessing education, new ways of listening to citizens and new ways of organising and delivering information and services.

2

Governance in the information age

The emergence of electronic democracy within the UK, Europe and the Commonwealth

The 'story' of e-governance/electronic democracy takes us on a journey from passive information-giving to active citizen involvement:

- informing the citizen
- representing the citizen
- encouraging the citizen to vote
- consulting the citizen
- engaging the citizen.

A comprehensive discussion of the practical opportunities for e-government has recently been published (www.london-research.gov.uk/LBISN99).

Specific opportunities addressed are e-mail, web publishing, Intranet development and promoting citizen access.

Case study one: Informing the citizen

INFOCID – a single window for citizenship in Portugal

www.infocid.pt

- **single source of information for the citizen**
- **optimising resources of multiple organisations**
- **create economies of scale for information producers and distributors**
- **intergovernmental participation**
- **public network**

An integrated database sponsored by the Secretary of State for Public Administration in the Prime Minister's area. Co-ordinated by a steering committee, the project is an inter-departmental, co-operative system that has more than fifty different partners from all the ministries.

The system uses multimedia technology and allows easy and free access to information through kiosks in the street, as well as through other generally used technological media, such as computers or the Internet.

Other examples of comprehensive channels for accessing government services and archives of agendas, minutes, reports, papers, statutes, rules and regulations:

Australian Governments' Entry Points www.nla.gov.au/oz/gov

Brent Council, London Borough, UK local services www2.brent.gov.uk

Canadian Government Primary Internet Site www.canada.gc.ca/main_e.html

Cape Town Metropolitan Council, South Africa – current reports www.cmc.gov.za/council/default

Federal world government (US Department of Commerce) www.fedworld.gov

Helsinki InfoCities project www.hel.fi/InfoCities/eng

Hong Kong Interactive Government Services Directory www.info.gov.hk

Singapore One-Stop Government Web Service Centre www.gov.sg

South Africa Government On-line www.gov.za

Texas Legislature On-line www.capitol.state.tx.us/capitol/legis

UK Government Information Service www.open.gov.uk

USA Government Information Exchange www.info.gov

Wellington City Council, New Zealand – council minutes, ward meetings and archives www.wcc.govt.nz/wcc

Case study two: Representing the citizen

South Gloucestershire, UK – giving elected members access

www.soutglos.gov.uk

- **enhancing the representative role**
- **improving accessibility of citizens to their elected members**

- **developing the capacity of elected representatives to engage in e-government**
- **action learning.**

Elected members were provided with access to the local authority's Intranet and e-mail systems in a limited pilot study. Benefits and problems are being identified before expanding the scheme.

Other examples of information about issues to be discussed and how to access, and be involved in, political processes of governance:

Althingi–Icelandic Parliament (the earliest democratic parliament in the world) www.althingi.is/ekysag/nra-d/ji0.shtml

Canterbury Regional Council, New Zealand – links on every page to elected members www.crc.govt.nz/crchrome/crchrome.asp

Cape Town Metropolitan Council, South Africa www.cmc.gov.za/council/default

Chesapeake City Council, USA – council meeting agendas and e-mail the mayor www.chesapeake.va.us/council/council.html

Christchurch, New Zealand – 'Contacts' www.ccc.govt.nz/Council

Italian Chamber of Deputies – papers for the following week's parliamentary work, daily reports, live audio and video www.english.camera.it

Rajasthan, India – feedback link and telephone directory of politicians www.rajgout.org

Suffolk County Council, UK – ICT for members www.suffolk.gov.uk

Stafford County, Virginia – invites anyone to attend and speak at council meetings www.stafford.va.us/bos/speakcrd.html

Texas Legislature On-Line www.capitol.state.tx.us/capitol/legis

Wellington City Council, New Zealand – council meetings, diary www.wcc.govt.nz/wcc/counciltrs

South Africa Government On-line – general feedback and links to directory of ministers www.gov.za

United States Senate – links to personal web site of every senator www.senate.gov/senators/index.cfm

Case study three: Encouraging the citizen to vote

Newham, London Borough, UK – securing instant feedback in debate

www.newham.gov.uk

- *trailing technology*
- *involving stakeholders*
- *stimulating debate*
- *exchanging views and information*
- *producing definitive outcomes*

Some 300 delegates from local organisations participated in a community conference about the shape of Newham Council in 2010. All delegates used handsets to provide instant feedback on the issues debated. Results are instantly displayed in a graphical format.

Other examples:

St Albans District Council, UK – referendum on locally elected mayor
www.stalbans.gov.uk

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, UK – telephone voting
www.walsall.gov.uk

Oregon, USA – television debate and telephone voting on conservation in Oregon

Case study four: Consulting the citizen

Citizens' democracy – the City Information Highway of Tampere, Finland

www.tampere.fi/english.htm

- *interaction – two-way communication*
- *increasing participation by citizens in decision-making*
- *equality of access*
- *24-hour services*
- *public information and feedback*

In order to make sure that all citizens have access to the Internet services, the city government has installed computers for public use in museums, libraries, net-cafés etc., free of charge or for an inexpensive fee. Public schools (comprehensive schools, high schools, vocational colleges, etc.)

have all been connected to the Internet. Libraries have sophisticated information systems, which allow citizens to browse through library collections, make reservations, etc.

The city's information service makes it possible to follow the decisions of local government (City Council, City Board and the Boards of the different areas of the city), attend debate venues, order day care services, apply for vocational education for adults, transmit real-time images of city events, etc.).

All services are available at any hour via the Internet. The city provides an 'InfoCircle' service connecting 100 schools and libraries, and enabling all pupils to have Internet access from their home at a very moderate total cost (under 1 ecu/hour).

Other examples:

Brent, London Borough, UK – annual budget consultation
www2.brent.gov.uk

Oxfordshire County Council, UK – 'News and Features' issues for debate/response
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Poole Borough Council, UK – OpenZone
www.poole.gov.uk

New Zealand Government On-line
www.govt.nz

Case study five: Engaging the citizen on specific issues to shape policy

Community Information Programme, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, UK

www.knowsley.gov.uk

- *a vision for partnership*
- *engaging the community*
- *developing individual skills for active participation in e-governance*
- *creating the conditions for information and knowledge relevant to citizens, service users, voluntary organisations and businesses to be generated and communicated more freely*

The web site provides comprehensive, interactive information services with public access points in libraries, social services resource centres, one-stop shops, the business centre and neighbourhood centres.

Community and voluntary action groups are involved in various projects including on-line discussions in policy debates about crime and disorder.

Information on council services, voluntary services, education and local democracy is provided. The site features virtual reality tours, animation, audio, video and electronic forms. Local history sections have over six hundred photographs, sound recordings and an interactive time line.

Other examples of involvement – opportunities in the discursive development of information and knowledge for governance:

Australian Capital Territory – on-line consultation papers

www.act.gov.au/government/reports

Brisbane, Australia – 'Your City, Your Say' Community Reference Group
www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/council_information/at_work/jcys.shtml

Cape Town, South Africa – on-line discussion forum
www.cmc.gov.za/disc2_frm

Christchurch, New Zealand – publishes its City Plan and Community Plan on-line for feedback
www.ccc.govt.nz

City of Redmond, USA – invites citizens to sit on various boards, to speak at council meetings and to participate in community discussions
www.ci.redmond.wa.us/citizen

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council – Community Choice Panel
www.dudley.gov.uk/dudco/ab%5Fco/comchoice.htm

Durban City Council, South Africa – general purpose bulletin board
www.durban.org.za/forum/index

Hammersmith and Fulham, London Borough, UK – Open to Discussion
www.lbhf.gov.uk

Lewisham, London Borough, UK – Dialogue Project (Citizens' Panel) and Young Citizens' Project
www.lewisham.gov.uk/dialogue

Minnesota, USA – list of web forums, chat rooms and e-mail servers
www.e-democracy.org

Naestved, Denmark – Information Society 2000 Project
www.naeskom.dk/danish/addressliste/html/citynet.htm

New Zealand – community discussion forums
www.community.net.nz

St Albans DC – Youth Conference
www.stalbans.gov.uk

Suffolk County Council, UK – 'Have Your Say' area and 'Graffiti Wall'
www.suffolk.gov.uk

Swansea City and County, UK – Citizen's Panel
www.swansea.gov.uk

Wellington City Council, New Zealand – consultation papers, invites ideas for improvements to the city
www.wcc.govt.nz/wcc/aboutwcc



Community information – informing the citizen

Developing new partnerships

If communities and citizens are to be engaged in e-governance on a widespread basis then a common approach is needed to structure and route communication. A common approach can be used to link organisations and stakeholders, simplify access to government, empower and involve citizens, and reduce transaction costs.

The Central IT Unit (CITU) of the UK Government is in the process of developing a model that can be used by public, voluntary and private-sector organisations to channel information to and from citizens. Essential components are:

Channels – simple and visible ways for the citizen to access government and services, regardless of which department or agency is involved and regardless of the time of day or day of the week. In the private sector, channels such as travel agents

may offer services from several providers and may package services to make them more attractive to the consumer.

The emphasis is on simplifying access and maintaining consistency of information to the customer. This contrasts with the government service

sector where different providers have tended to establish their own separate outlets, each to deliver their own services, e.g. benefits offices, tax offices, job centres, etc. CITU envisages that government organisations could employ established service outlets that are used regularly by citizens, such as post offices and banks for financial transactions, and libraries and citizens' advice bureaux for information about services.

Portals – the actual method of access used by citizens, which could involve a variety of access media (telephone, e-mail, computer, digital television, etc.) providing a standard interface that will enable:

- authentication of the user
- security of the transaction
- auditing of the transaction
- receipting of financial transactions
- seeking permission from the user for the processing of personal data by the service providers involved.

Hubs – organisations and technology that sit behind the channel to bring together the various services and

information, and to distribute and route messages to and from the citizen.

Further details are at:

www.citu.gov.uk/channels/channelspolicy.htm

CITU is due to publish further guidance on standards for the interchange of information, interfacing of systems, the procurement, contracting and licensing of third party channels, and use of a common identity key by November 1999. The issue of interfacing different systems is being addressed by UK Interoperability Focus (www.ukoln.ac.uk/interop-focus). CITU recognises that local government may have a role to play as a channel for government services in general. A

number of examples exist where local government authorities are actively developing this role in pilot projects:

Essex County Council, UK – 'Seamless' (www.seamless.org.uk)

is a British Library-funded project to trial seamless delivery of community information to citizens from

a range of government, private-sector and non-governmental organisation providers. This differs from the CITU initiative in so far as Seamless focuses first on developing strong and sustainable partnerships between the providers of information and services. In common with CITU, Seamless requires development of common standards to ensure inter-operability between diverse systems and information, development of a user interface and the exploitation of electronic communications.

CIRCE – Community Information Research Programme – has investigated the potential for networking public library and local authority community information databases (www.gloscc.gov.uk/circe/index.htm).

Examples from the USA of emerging advice about the participation of citizens and consumers of government services include:

Access America (www.gits.gov/html/access.htm)

Center for Democracy and Technology (www.cdt.org)

'A common approach can be used to link organisations and stakeholders, simplify access to government, empower and involve citizens, and reduce transaction costs.'

4

Governments' role in creating 'knowledge societies'

Governments – national, regional and local – from around the world recognise that they can play a key role in creating 'knowledge societies' – societies that can exploit knowledge to derive competitive advantage using the opportunities provided by digital technology (see www.nla.gov.au/lis/govnii.html#oz for a list of national governments and reports on this topic). Perhaps the earliest example was Singapore with its 'IT2000' vision of an 'Intelligent Island' (www.ncb.gov.sg/ncb/vision.asp).

This set out five strategic thrusts:

- developing a global hub
- improving the quality of life
- boosting the economic engine
- linking communities locally and globally
- enhancing the potential of individuals.

Hong Kong has taken major steps in this direction with the recent publication of a report by the Chief Executive's Commission on Innovation and Technology (www.info.gov.hk/tib/roles/index_main.htm) and with its 'Digital 21' IT strategy (www.digital21.gov.hk/eng/digital/index.html).

The strategy sets out a vision, initiatives and targets of how government, business, industry and academia can work together to make Hong Kong a leading digital city in the globally connected world. It presents an all-encompassing strategy based on four enabling factors:

- developing a high-capacity communications infrastructure
- establishing an open and secure common interface for electronic transactions
- empowering people with the know-how to use IT
- nurturing a culture, which stimulates creativity and welcomes advances in the use of IT.

The State Government of Rajasthan, India is similarly seeking to take advantage of the information age with

schemes such as an Information Technology Park, one-point 'Government Clearance', high-speed data communications and a Software Training Institute (www.rajgovt.org/itwork/ITWORK.htm).

In Europe, the Bangemann Report (1994) (158.169.51.200/infosoc/backg/bangeman.html) identified the fact that technology itself is not the issue. The report set out recommendations for Europe to organise the exploitation of technology to develop an information society. The Bangemann

Challenge (www.challenge.stockholm.se/Projects)

has recognised a range of projects

designed to address these challenges, including enhancing public services and democracy.

The European Union-funded 'InfoCities' project (www.infocities.eu.int/html/body_info.htm)

aims to use

new ICTs to bring economic and social benefit

to local people, business and the wider community in fifteen cities and regions across Europe.

Alternative viewpoints presented by Tapscott (1995) suggest a more limited role for governments in transforming society, namely, leaving it to:

- the market
- the social sector of non-governmental organisations
- consumers, and others
- business.

In all of the strategic initiatives of governments to foster and develop knowledge societies, the issues involved are largely of a non-technological nature. The barriers are ones of leadership, policy, investment, education, organisation, (de)regulation, culture and delivery. The principal levers being used by governments are to promote and enable high-capacity telecommunications networks; to build the human capacity to exploit the technology; and to create favourable business, taxation, research and development environments.

'Governments - national, regional and local - from around the world recognise that they can play a key role in creating 'knowledge societies.'



Information society and empowerment

Individuals, communities and civil society

Individuals, communities and the organisations of civil society are being targeted by governments and other agencies with information, knowledge and learning. The objective is to create the conditions for participation in the governance of communities.

Initiatives fall into three broad areas:

- enabling participation in the information society
- creating the infrastructure for the information society
- fostering a sense of citizenship and cultural identity using ICTs.

Examples of enabling participation in the information society:

The UK Government's Information Society Initiative (www.isi.gov.uk/isi) aims to encourage businesses to take full advantage of the explosion of new ways to access, use and send information. Many of its activities focus specifically on individual IT skills, training and addressing the needs of smaller firms who feel they lack the right information to make informed decisions about adopting information and communication technologies in their business.

At a more local level, Hertfordshire Learning Grid aims to link schools, public libraries, relevant local government departments and homes via the Internet. One of its objectives is to develop a better understanding of 'citizenship' and democratic participation among young people (www.thegrid.org.uk).

In Canada, the 'Smart Communities Programme' is designed to enable communities to use information and communication technologies to empower residents and local organisations by improving access to, and involvement in, health care, education, training and business development (smartcommunities.ic.gc.ca).

Examples of creating the infrastructure for the information society:

In Denmark, the Naestved Information Society 2000 Project (www.naeskom.dk/danish/addressliste/html/citynet.htm) is developing a city-wide information highway as a vehicle for the information society.

The DALI (Delivery and Access to Local Government and Services) project in Göteborg, Sweden (www.goteborg.se) aims to empower citizens, providing them with information about the municipal political process, informing them about services and providing a medium for political debate.

Parthenay Digital Town Project (www.district-parthenay.fr) aims to assess the consequences of introducing new technologies in a small town. Internet public centres have been opened, the District of Parthenay became an Internet Service Provider and offered free Internet access to all citizens and low price PC-leasing to residents. One of the original features is an 'In-Town-Net' to involve the local community, incorporating all aspects of daily life. The originality of the site is in the fact that the creators of its contents are many: citizens, SMEs, schools, administrations, etc. Production of the contents is totally decentralised. The citizens of Parthenay have created more than 18,000 pages on the In-Town-Net. Local retailers are offering on-line shopping. The objective is to have half of the population on-line on 'In-Town-Net' by the year 2000.

The Community Access Program in Canada (www.cap.ic.gc.ca) is an initiative to provide residents in 5,000 rural and remote communities, and up to 5,000 urban communities with affordable access points to the Internet and the skills to use it.

Examples of fostering a sense of citizenship and cultural identity using ICTs:

DRIK, Bangladesh provides a photographic resource to present an alternative image of the developing world through the eyes of local photographers (www.drik.net/html/home1.html).

SCRAN is a searchable archive of Scotland's history and culture. (www.scran.ac.uk)

Moray Council, Scotland – multimedia section called 'Language, Heritage and People' (www.moray.gov.uk/scotsculture).

Los Angeles, California, USA – 'Computers in Our Future' is a project to develop eleven community computer centres in low-income neighbourhoods, managed by Community Partners, the Children's Partnership and ComputerMentor, and funded by the California Wellness Foundation (ciof@aol.com).

Examples of citizens using electronic means to affect/influence government:

Consultation using the Internet – OpenZone – Poole Borough Council, UK

www.poole.gov.uk

- **public information and feedback**
- **increasing participation by citizens in decision-making**
- **targeted – topic and interest-based**

Citizens can register their interest in topics that are posted on the web site.

They can keep up to date and be consulted on developments that match their interests by receiving e-mail whenever information in that area is posted on the site.

Other examples include:

Blacksburg Electronic Village, USA (www.bev.net/project/brochures/about.html) is an outreach effort of Virginia Technical College in partnership with the Town of Blacksburg and Bell Atlantic. The project aims to develop a virtual community, to investigate the factors that make electronic community networks self-supporting and responsive to community needs, and to create communities of interest to challenge government.

Digital City Bristol, UK (www.bristol-city.gov.uk) provides forty-two public access points to, and a forum for citizens to share ideas with the local government authority.

Lewisham, London Borough, UK – Dialogue Project (www.lewisham.gov.uk/dialogue) involves sixty-five members of the local Citizens' Panel. Facilities include live discussion, a bulletin board, questions to the Leader/Chief Executive, and links to other useful web-based information. Issues covered include housing for older people, education and community safety.

Minnesota E-democracy, USA (www.e-democracy.org) is a non-partisan, citizen-based project that aims to improve participation in democracy in the state through the use of information networks. The web site includes MN-POLITICS – a state-level political e-mail forum, city

issues forums, political and public policy announcements, and links to other discussion and news sites.

Nunavut (www.nunavut.com) is an example of a newly-formed, self-governing territory in Canada where electronic means are being used to engage citizens and businesses in the process of governance.

Seattle, Washington, USA (www.scn.org) provides free e-mail, web access, forums and storage to Seattle residents. The Seattle Community Network (SCN) functions with volunteers, free public-access terminals and is geared to engaging citizens in local government.

'People should be encouraged to give their opinions via the Internet . . . the [Hong Kong] Government's web site should be used as a forum, poll station and survey engine instead of being a passive information provider.'

South China Morning Post, 15 April 1999

Developments in electronic governance

Prepared by

Martin Ferguson, Senior Fellow in Information Management

and

Professor John Raine, Director of the Institute of Local Government Studies

at

The Institute of
Local Government Studies
(INLOGOV)
The University of Birmingham



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM

Sources used

Heeks, R. (1999) *Reinventing Government in the Information Age*. London: Routledge

Society of IT Management (1999) *Well Connected? A snapshot of local authority websites*. Northampton: SOCITM

Society of IT Management (1999) *Modernising Local Government – Moving Towards E-Democracy*. Northampton: SOCITM

Tapscott, D. (1995) *The Digital Economy. Promise and Peril in the Age of Networked Intelligence*. New York: McGraw Hill

A variety of on-line indices including:

www.kable.co.uk
www.socitm.gov.uk/rm
www.gwydir.demon.co.uk/uklocalgov
world.localgov.org
www.gksoft.com.govt
www.man.ac.uk/idpm/devtlinx.htm#itgov

Information Services Management

The British Council
Bridgewater House, 58 Whitworth Street
Manchester M1 6BB

Telephone +44 (0)161 957 7329
Fax +44 (0)161 957 7168
E-mail julie.brett@britishcouncil.org