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Europe – Digitally Alive in Dublin



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Workshop 2: going smart and accessible in public services and cities

Results from online exchanges and activities

Public Services: Being a world leader in eGovernment means that we balance the needs of the citizens with those of government; we are open, responsive and accountable; we ensure interoperability of data, across sectors and across borders and we reach out to the less advanced countries.

"My" ideal public administration puts my needs first, gains and retains my trust and provides a user experience similar to the ecommerce and social networking sites. It is no longer document focused, but data driven. The administration never asks me twice for data they already hold.

When public services are offered on-line they improve quality of life: I save time and money, eventually paying less tax thanks to the efficiencies it brings. It also improves the business environment. Nobody should be excluded.

Web accessibility: It does not cost much to achieve accessibility if you do it right from the start. But a key issue is specifying precisely what is required. Several contributions suggested that one does not need a big budget, particularly if done from the start and using smart solutions. However, there is a lot of misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the guidelines. Awareness on accessibility requirements and lack of understanding of guidelines led to the issue of training as a key catalyst for change. Several reported difficulties of interaction between developers and users when developing an accessible web site. Open data helps with implementing, monitoring and evaluating accessibility. Twitter comment highlighted the need to consider all disabilities, suggesting there was too much emphasis on the blind.

Smart cities: Switching to smart cities means primarily a change of behaviour from the citizen to the local authority and the industry. Other on-going initiative suggested that the energy footprint can be reduced up to 50% adopting more sustainable behaviour. Long-term policies and initiatives are needed since cultural change is something very hard to achieve. ICT can be the enabler of the change.

Also an issue is what does the term 'Smart cities' actually mean? The definition varies depending on who uses it (European Institutions, national level, regions, civil society, outside Europe (US). Some include also culture and education as well as health, water and all the service utilities. And can 'Smart cities' really reach the sustainability goals? There are some examples in countries outside Europe, for example in Abu-Dabi, where a 'smart' city was created from scratch. If the technological results are quite promising, the replication to other cities seems quite difficult (expensive, and culturally far away from the local culture). 'Smart cities' mean also smart inclusion, and yes, 'smart cities' are already happening!

Key points from the discussion at the workshop

The common element between three sessions was the willingness from the private and public stakeholders to increase the quality of life of citizens. There is a general willingness to listen to citizen's needs before acting. On the other hand, there is an increased awareness from people, especially the young generation, which will give the impulse to the industry and the local authorities to make progress.

Public Services: User centricity is key. There has to be a balance between the needs of government and those of citizens. Basic enablers (skills, research, infrastructure, once-only principle) need to be in place. Administrations must be responsive and accountable; we need organic and adaptable system evolving from needs of citizens; cross border eGovernment and cooperation to tackle high-level societal issues.

Trust is essential for eGovernment to function, but the question is how to gain it? We can learn from e-commerce & social networks: down to constant iteration, continuous improvement on feedback and data. Administrations should move from documents based to data driven operations. Transformation of administrations goes beyond technology: it involves change processes, getting rid of "silos", for example. Administrations must embrace innovation.

Digital by default has benefits for citizens such as ease of use, flexibility, convenience and with it better quality of life. Administrations become more open, flexible, they create business opportunities and savings. However, we must make sure that no citizen is left behind.

Web accessibility: When public sector develops a website they have to decide on the level of accessibility requirements that can be very detailed and comprehensive or less detailed and simple. Whatever they choose, they need to get accessibility in the requirements from the beginning. Public sector also needs to make sure they include regular checks already in the tender specifications. Training and information are also needed, and this does not only concern web developers.

Using open data for web accessibility is a new way of thinking and could be used for compiling feedback from users, to benchmark accessibility and to share information. It could be a way of sharing progress but also a way of getting help in solving problems. It could also be used to create good and usable apps.

Usability can also be improved by improving design. Users need to be involved in the design phase. Content Management Systems as well as templates need to be accessible. There could also be certification of websites that are accessible and working with open source and crowd sourcing gives opportunities for people to find new solutions. Finally, user testing is needed from the beginning and not just at the end and awareness and training are prerequisite.

Smart cities: The transition to smart cities is important in the context of the environmental challenges. One of the main issues is the availability of data, crucial for achieving innovation and switching to smart cities. There is a need to break silo information, the owners of the data model need to share information and knowledge, avoiding doubling of costs, efforts, and reducing the impact. Interoperability is an essential precondition for smart cities, since different sectors and systems need to 'talk' to each other. At the same time, data has to be trustworthy and timely.

The technology already exists, but not the integration of different technologies in different systems, for example in water and energy sectors. A lack of a holistic vision of smart cities that would be including healthcare and e-government services is also an issue.

[Digital maturity scorecard](#) (Dublin) will be measuring the impact (metrics essential to see the impact and the change). Similar actions are proposed in the [Smart Cities communication](#) (COM(2012)4701) The use of existing technologies (web platform, internet, apps) can transform our democracy into a participative governance, participative citizenship and participatory democracy. This is the future.

Smart mobility is an essential component of smart cities. It means safety and sustainability, preventing accidents, decreasing the energy footprint and traffic jams (stress). Mobility stakeholders (private and public) take into account the cultural changes and try to adapt to the changing behaviours (e.g. car sharing, co-driving etc.)

Smart cities also mean sustainable districts, where public administration needs to change its approach and to break silos, while the industry needs to respond to create the right urban infrastructure to support the change in the city.

Citizens wish to be more involved and they need to have the tools to measure their environmental footprint. Smart meters and smart grids are an example to increase citizens' awareness and resource optimization and efficiency.

Moving towards smart cities implies huge investments. How to finance these? The discussion turned around the different modalities of financing, and new forms of co-financing projects were proposed: crowd-funding; city-funding, co-financing by H2020 and Structural Funds, involving (socially responsible) banks. In addition, new business models are needed, cooperation with utilities, tax incentives, and reusing passive infrastructures to be extended for other services is also important.

Although cities share many challenges, each city is unique and there is no one solution fitting all. Therefore before any investment or any foreseen change, a careful analysis of the retrofitting, regulatory framework, the social, cultural and economic conditions must be done.