Chapter XXIV
The Challenge of Designing User-Centric E-Services:
European Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

Harnessing ICTs effectively is one of the main vehicles for achieving the EU's 2010 strategy to become the most competitive digital knowledge-based economy. Achieving this requires innovation and a process of cultural, structural, and economical change towards the so-called eAgora. This requires that citizens are at the center of attention in the design of civic on-line developments in terms of accessibility. This chapter identifies significant challenges to the design of such user-centric e-services, by illustrating some key results of the European Union (EU) IST Framework 6 research project - IntelCities (2004). It presents the City e-governance framework developed in the research project and it shows how the contents of cities' existing Web sites do not completely satisfy the expectations of the OECD in the European cities visited by the IntelCities Roadshows. It indicates a consistent way forward for the development of the online services offered by the IntelCities e-learning platform. The chapter closes by querying whether either the European cities examined or their citizens have the appetite for the proposed eAgora that will be necessary for its effective implementation and operation.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) loom large in the EU's policies for sustainable development. Much hangs on their assumed capacity to generate and maintain more sustainable patterns of living and working. And ICTs are expected to deliver this transformation on at least four spatial scales: the EU as a whole, its regions, cities, and individual workplaces. Given the breadth and depth of these ambitions (Cooper et al., 2005), it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of successful exploitation of ICTs to the delivery of sustainable development in Europe.

The Lisbon European Council (CEC, 2000) sought to make Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". This objective was reinforced by the Commission in the *i2010* initiative which sets the strategic framework for ICT policies in the Union and underlines that: "Information and Communication technologies provide the backbone for the knowledge economy" (CEC, 2002, p.24). The Knowledge Society is seen as a key factor for growth and employment, contributing to economic and social development in Europe.

The conjoint realization of sustainable urban development within a knowledge-based society has been summarized by the notion of the eAgora illustrated in Figure 1. This is taken from the Intelcity roadmap developed under the EU's 5th Framework Programme. This roadmap projected a vision of an integrated open intelligent information city platform system to support and integrate achieving the knowledge society and sustainable development of cities. Ancient Greeks went to the Agora, a civic square used for public assembly or commerce, to do business or discuss plans for their community. Intelcity envisaged modern Europeans behaving similarly but in the eAgora. By bringing together unconnected sources of information in one place, and making that place available in digital space to everyone, from city planners, building developers, politicians, to individual citizens, the eAgora could support improved management of cities and so help in achieving long-term physical, social and economic sustainability (Lombardi and Cooper, 2007) .

In turn, this vision of the eAgora is based on wider vision of ICT-enabled participation in eDemocracy; on the active participation of citizens, using ICTs, in decision-making and on collaboration between disparate stakeholders for policy-making purposes. Such eParticipation consists of three main components (OCED, 2001):

Figure 1. Intelcity summary roadmap diagram