

Chapter 46

Setting the Dutch E–Government Interoperability Agenda: A Public–Private Partnership

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ABSTRACT

Like national governments across the world, Dutch government pursues an active policy towards e-government interoperability, both with businesses and citizens, as well as across government bodies. This chapter provides a case study on how Dutch government has approached the issue until today, including issues of policy setting, governance, standardization, and openness. Starting from a short historical overview, recent developments are described, such as the new action plan “Netherlands in Open Connection” and the establishment of Dutch government Standardization Board and Forum. The latter has recently adopted a seven-item interoperability agenda and prioritized four of the items: open standards, interoperability governance, service concepts, and semantic interoperability.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a case study on the Dutch approach to e-government interoperability. It addresses governance issues involved and ap-

proaches applied by Dutch government, as well as the contents of its recently issued interoperability agenda, which is a result of a strategic public-private partnership.

The chapter presents a description of the history, policy objectives, decision-making process, and results of this ‘polder’ partnership. We charac-

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terize such a partnership as a strategic and critical prerequisite for achieving interoperability at a national scale. The current Dutch E-Government Interoperability Agenda lays out a restricted set of actions, thus focussing public-private interoperability co-operation and implementation for the years to come.

We also discuss two specific examples of this approach, concerning business-to-government e-invoicing and the implementation of the standard World Customs Information Model.

BACKGROUND

Until the mid-eighties of the former century the Dutch government's ICT policy strongly focussed on the internal efficiency of governmental bodies itself. Large standardized information systems were created, automating voluminous governmental administrations (Van de Donk & Van Dael, 2005; Van Dijk, 2001). The allocation and management of computer hardware and later on the efficiency and effectiveness of governmental operations became the main orientation.

Triggered by technological innovations like EDI at the end-eighties more awareness arose with respect of the possibilities of computer supported internal and external communication. In the first place, policy implementations focussed on internal communication and cooperation and on the management of internal information systems itself. Especially within the Customs domain in that time frame first ICT supported external governmental services were introduced. With the establishment of these inter-organizational systems new data interchange related issues became relevant. Although differently defined, interoperability aspects also arose in literature: "*inter-organizational systems are telecommunications based computer systems used by two or more organizations to support the sharing of data or applications between users within the different organizations*" (Cash Jr, 1987), "*electronic data interchange systems are*

co-operative inter-organizational systems that allow trading partners to exchange structured business information electronically between separate computer applications" (Swatman & Swatman, 1992).

The introduction and the growth of the Internet as a network of networks forced governmental policy making to open up for rapidly arising new social and business developments.

At the start of the new millennium, the electronic government agenda was linked to themes as: the role of the electronic highway in further economical development, stimulation and regulation of the information society and the accessibility of governmental information by electronic means. 'Electronic government' was no longer perceived as the automation of governmental processes but instead as the "*continuous optimization of services delivery, constituency participation and governance by transforming internal and external relationships through technology, the Internet and new media*" (Gartner Group, 2000).

Nowadays e-government is more and more perceived as a governance instrument enhancing transparency, participation, service delivery and law making and enforcement. In that respect the Dutch Cabinet in its action plan *The Netherlands in Open Connection* (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2008) formulates social goals as: good partnership from citizens, sustainability of information and innovation, and a reduction in administrative burden. Interoperability between businesses and governments, between citizens and governments, and between governments bodies themselves is stated in the action plan as a necessary condition for achieving these social goals. The Dutch Cabinet refers to interoperability as the power of (information) systems to be able to exchange data and information by electronic means within and between organizations. Interoperability is marked as an essential prerequisite for a future-proof development of services and applications enabled by ICT, thus founding an open and interoperable electronic government.

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