

Chapter 50

The Development of a Regional Health Information Infrastructure in Greece

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ABSTRACT

This chapter draws on empirical research carried out during the years 2003-2006 on the development of a regional health information infrastructure in Greece. Using the theoretical framework, this chapter examines the multilevel context, action arena, and outcomes in the case, placing great emphasis on the property rights put forward and negotiated between key stakeholder groups, as they strive to develop an information infrastructure. Drawing on the more recent outcomes of these negotiations, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the consequences of these outcomes for the region of Greece, and more broadly, for European Information Society programmes.

INTRODUCTION

In 1993, the European Council requested that a report be prepared by “a group of prominent persons” on the specific measures to be taken into consideration by the European Community and the Member States for the development of information infrastructures (Bangemann et al., 1994, pp.1). The Bangemann Report as it became to be known urged the European Union to put its faith in market mechanisms to enable its Member

States to meet its increasing information needs and challenge more technologically advanced countries like the USA and Japan. This did not mean more public money, financial assistance, or protectionism as the report professed. Rather this meant (Bangemann et al., 1994, pp.4):

fostering an entrepreneurial mentality to enable the emergence of new dynamic sectors of the economy... [and] developing a common regulatory approach to bring forth a competitive, Europe-wide, market for information services.

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In a tone that is reminiscent of the infrastructural ideal of the integrated, standardized city of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Bangemann report noted (1994, pp.5-6):

Given its history, we can be sure that Europe will take the opportunity. It will create the information society. The only question is whether this will be a strategic creation for the whole Union, or a more fragmented and much less effective amalgam of individual initiatives by Member States, with repercussions on every policy area, from the single market to cohesion... The widespread availability of new information tools and services will present fresh opportunities to build a more equal and balanced society and to foster individual accomplishment. The information society has the potential to improve the quality of life of Europe's citizens, the efficiency of our social and economic organisation and to reinforce cohesion. ... Fair access to the infrastructure will have to be guaranteed to all, as will provision of universal service, the definition of which must evolve in line with the technology.

The report continued with a number of proposals based on specific initiatives involving partnerships linking public and private sectors. This is where the report began to shift its focus from the infrastructural ideal and to recognize the need for private investment avoiding monopolistic, anticompetitive scenarios—without however recognizing that private investment could also lead to the very splintering of their envisioned information society.

The proposals in the Bangemann Report were followed by the action plan *Europe towards the Information Society*, which contained four action lines: a) the adaptation of the regulatory framework for telecommunications to facilitate infrastructure liberalisation; b) the promotion of network, services, and content applications; c) the harnessing of the social and cultural impacts of the information society; and d) concrete actions

to promote the information society (European Commission, 1994; Sancho, 2002).

The Lisbon Summit in March 2000 noted the challenges of the transition to the information society by articulating the need to establish a competitive platform that would simultaneously sustain the European social model and maintain social cohesion and cultural diversity (Council of the European Union, 2000). Furthermore, a new open method of inter-state coordination was adopted for the acceleration of the translation of European goals into national policies. This method was supposed to combine European coherence with national diversity. It operated by initially setting European guidelines in each policy domain, then identifying best practices and reference indicators, and, finally, leading to national plans consisting of concrete targets in accordance with each nation's case (Rodrigues, 2002). The purported aim was to develop a knowledge economy with social cohesion and to promote convergence in Europe.

The new open method of coordination has been applied to a number of policy domains, including infrastructural policies in the context of the *An Information Society for All* initiative (European Commission, 1999). This initiative set out ten priority areas for joint action by the Commission, the member states, the industry, and the citizens. After the Lisbon Summit and the informal Ministerial Conference on the Information and Knowledge Society a month later, the eEurope priorities were clustered around three main aims: a) cheaper, faster, and secure Internet; b) investment in people and skills; and c) stimulation of the deployment of the Internet. An action plan was subsequently prepared by the Commission and was endorsed at the Feira Summit in June 2000, placing specific targets to be reached by specific deadlines by governments and the private sector in member states. The subsequent *eEurope 2005* action plan also set out to stimulate Internet services, applications, and content so as to improve the underlying infrastructure through the promotion of broadband and increased awareness of security matters. It

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