

Comparative Analysis Framework of Policies / Strategies / Programs in E-Government

Jamal Shahin, Free University Brussels, Belgium

Abstract

This white paper intends to lay out a proposal for a framework for comparative analysis of policies, strategies and programmes in eGovernment. It first defines the difference between a policy, strategy, and programme in general terms (Section 1), and then offers a critical reflection of the predominant approaches to understanding the relationship between these (Section 2). The paper offers an insight into the way that developed trends in technological and societal development influence the process of policy, strategy and programme design and implementation (Section 3). This white paper then goes on to examine the case of the European Union (and notably the European Commission) to highlight the validity of this framework (Section 4). Concluding the paper, the final section (Section 5) will indicate further areas for research and use of the framework.

1. What is an eGovernment policy? Who makes policies and how are they implemented?

The e-government debate, launched across the world in the mid-1990s, provided an opportunity for governments to think about how to use new Information and Communication Technologies to address inefficiencies in their (mainly) back-office processes. These efforts towards improving data-handling, knowledge management and information security – to name a few of the areas covered, provided an opportunity for governments to then address how these developments could be brought directly to the citizen. 'Front-office' applications, such as online tax submissions, have been touted as a new way for governments to interface with their citizens. Transactional services, such as tax declarations and other two-way services have now either been implemented, or models for implementation are well-known. The advances have been numerous and well documented [1], and have often led to initial reflections on what comes after e-government implementation [2].

E-government, writ large, was about how governments could provide existing services towards users¹ in a more efficient and effective manner. Despite the fact that e-government is now part of most government projects, many challenges remain from the era of operationalisation of service-based e-government tools. These have led to an examination of alternative frameworks.

¹ 'Users,' in this context, refers to all stakeholders involved in government services and therefore includes civil servants, citizens and non-governmental organisations.

A brief summary of some of the policy declarations concerning e-government will clarify this point:

The European Commission has traditionally pushed an agenda for e-government which focuses upon the dual agenda of efficiency and effectiveness: “eGovernment is the use of information and communication technologies in public administrations - combined with organisational change and new skills - to improve public services and democratic processes and to strengthen support to public policies” [3]. This agenda has encouraged development in the refinement and translation of existing services to an Internet-enabled audience.

The World Bank have a similar 'instrumental' definition of e-government:

“E-Government” refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies...that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions [4].

Studies that have developed frameworks for, and evaluated e-government progress have focused upon the step-by-step approach – or linear progression – to e-government. These are thus based on the assumption that there are coherent and global frameworks that fit in different contexts. This can be highly successful in facilitating implementation of simple services, and provide added value when determining the requirements for more complex service delivery, such as the creation of portals and one-stop shops.

Best practices, a keystone in the e-government knowledge-base, has also been capable of providing insightful and encouraging examples of service design, delivery, and marketing to ensure take-up. Similarly, the use of benchmarks and regular reporting techniques to ensure that stakeholders in the e-government research and implementation sectors are fully informed have been remarkably useful. Yet these tools for policy makers lean towards the implementation of similar services in different situations that are independent of political context and environment.

2. Building an e-Government

The drive towards exploitation of new ICTs to improve relations between citizens and government is nowadays, often referred to as progress towards ‘e-government’. E-government is a term influenced by implementation of new technologies in the business world and was first used in the US (Relyea 2002: 9): e-business, a new manner of doing business in the digital age, was defined and popularised with the growth of the Internet. More recently, the “e-” prefix and the @ sign have become almost universally attached to words to identify use of ICTs such as the Internet: public administration and government have not been immune to these developments.

In an article published in *Government Information Quarterly* in 2001, two authors developed a four-stage model for implementing e-government (Layne and Lee 2001). These four stages are identified as: cataloguing, transaction, vertical integration, and horizontal integration. This model is generally accepted as the one way for a public administration to become ‘e-aware’, and the description provided here is, in a generic way, applied across the EU in governments through the coordination of the eEurope initiative. Across all stages, interaction with government is carried out by “citizen-customers” (ibid: passim). The constant reference to customers or consumers is something noted also by Silcock: “Governments have mandated the notion of

‘electronic government’ and with that they have taken to employing commercial terms, talking about channels for the retail and wholesale delivery of government services” (Silcock 2001: 100). There are variants on this four stage scheme. For example, Silcock cites a paper authored by Deloitte Research presenting six stages of e-government. This separates out Layne and Lee’s third and fourth stages into four separate stages: ‘multi-purpose portals’, ‘portal personalisation’, ‘clustering of common services’, and ‘full integration and enterprise transformation’ (Silcock 2001: 89-90). In the four and six stage schemes (or any number of stages), this quantification of the process of e-government lends itself to benchmarking and other tools of soft coordination.

A division into users, or audiences, provides another dimension of the relationship between governance and ICTs. These two dimensions (audience and ‘stage’) are represented in the following matrix:

	Cataloguing	Transaction	Vert. Integ.	Horiz. Integ.
Citizen(s)				
Business(es)				
Administration(s)				

Table 0-1 Different Dimensions of e-government Applications

Once all the boxes are filled, then according to the literature the dominant readings of e-government will be fulfilled and an e-government will have been created.

The e-government debate also links to the ‘good governance’ agenda, promoted by such bodies as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).² The e-government working group of the OECD has focused upon four major themes: vision and potential responsiveness of e-government, impact upon public administrations, implementation, and measurement issues. In contrast to the four-stage scheme commonly described as the definitive e-government process, these four themes are far more comprehensive and take into consideration many of the other factors raised in the discussion above. Within these four themes, experts have been collected together to participate in meetings that aim to provide member states with a broader perspective on the issue of e-government than they may be able to obtain in their national contexts alone. Present at these meetings have been members of governments of many member states, who work alongside invited experts at the meetings to discuss working papers presented by selected individuals.

E-government is a policy area in which the final goals have yet to be reached. Even if all the boxes in Table 6-3 were to be ticked, there would still be a need for more progress. A critique of the political goals of e-government would highlight many of the challenges that still face governments in implementing this policy and thus encourage the political debate that is needed. When e-government is examined from a purely instrumental perspective, then it clearly supports more efficient government; when examined from the perspective of the citizen, this efficiency can be beneficial, but the assumption inherent in this discourse is that the technological ‘quick fix’ will be enough to rejuvenate political institutions in the eyes of their electorates. This is not necessarily the case.

This ‘rejuvenating government’ agenda and its use of technology implicitly support the current structures of institutions is attempting to use the phrase ‘e-government’ merely to fix a broken institutional setup. Consequences emerge from a policy that attempts to harness the Internet

² This better governance aspect of e-government reforms is a recurrent theme in many plans towards building an e-government.

to strengthen existing institutions that causes most interest here. Fear of opening the Pandora’s Box has held some politicians and civil servants back; a lack of understanding has contributed to the same lack of progress in some areas of e-government implementation.

Any attempt at rejuvenation of democratic practices should also take into account that interaction with politicians and political institutions should not only take place in the polling station, but also in daily life. This is undoubtedly easier through application of the Internet. But this can also provide an administration with an insurmountable number of requests for support, leaving messages and requests unanswered and further undermining the notion that this innovation is a forward step. This can be aided through, as one example, reference to a better series of Frequently Asked Questions, development of archived mailing lists, or creation of ‘two-way guest books’.³ As Schmidtke notes regarding the city of Berlin: “often the potentially interactive communication systems are utilized in a one-way manner...There are simply no institutionalised ways of communication which, for instance, would involve the administrative staff” (Schmidtke 1998: 64-5). This is in stark contrast to the small town of Parthenay in France, where “the Mayor, convinced that before introducing new technologies an organisational change should take place, and not the reverse, decided to reorganise the municipal administration” (Herve-Van Driessche 2001: 11).

Better governance through use of ICTs	Improvement of services to businesses and citizens	Enhanced interaction between various government departments	Enhanced perception of government’s role in the state.	Enhancement of trust, and thus more faith in the democratic role of government
---------------------------------------	--	---	--	--

Table 0-2 Outlining the Major Goals of e-government Policies

Summarising the literature, Table 6-4 outlines the major goals of an e-government policy as defined by the OECD and the European Commission (various sources, cited elsewhere in this paper). It highlights the desire for an enhanced, efficient, and more effective role for government in dealing with citizens. However, despite the overwhelming acceptance of these goals by public institutions, challenges lay ahead for governments wishing to implement the change to an “e-” based government. These goals are both to be achieved internally and externally; that is within governments and public administrations, and with relations between public administrations and their users (other governments, citizens, or NGOs). The activities described briefly below represent some of the Commission’s own use of the Internet in the sphere of e-government.

2.1. E-governance and the Policy Cycle

A basic representation of the policy cycle is provided here:

- Agenda setting
- Policy formulation (or consultation)
- Policy creation (legislation)
- Implementation (the task of the executive)
- Analysis and evaluation (or monitoring)

This cycle enables us to identify five broad areas that divide up the process of policymaking. Each one requires a slightly different constituency, and logically imply a different approach to how

³ These tools are described in Richard 1999.

and why they should be involved in the process. Use of this cycle in the design of tools can improve understanding of how e-governance can be operationalised (see following section). Another way of looking at this is provided by Rossel and Finger (2007), who divide up the tasks of the state into: public service delivery, policy/rule-making, and regulation. Whether using a five-level or three-level model, the need to distinguish between different requirements and actors at the different stages is crucial to increase our understanding of how to advance in operationalising e-governance.

Therefore, rather than putting all components of the policy cycle into one single approach to e-governance, it is proposed that the stage in the policy process should be taken into consideration on an individual basis. This will facilitate a greater understanding of how to operationalise e-governance.

For example, at the agenda-setting and consultative stages of the policy cycle, representativity is not such an issue, and forums can be of increasing relevance for politicians and civil servants. Legislation (or policy creation), in our representative democracies, is a field that has traditionally been left to our elected representatives, although the Swiss tradition of direct democracy provides some insight into how this might evolve in a more interactive societal framework. Furthermore, some attempts at online rule-making in local contexts have been carried out to great success in the United States. The monitoring phase is an interesting sphere where potentials lie for greater participation from involved stakeholders as well.

3. What is a strategy? Who makes strategies and how are they implemented?

A strategy is defined as a working document by government. Objectives

4. What is a programme? Who makes programmes and how are they implemented?

Measurement, including benchmarking.

5. Policymaking and public values

Governance is a highly contested, and ambiguous, concept. Communications researchers use the term to describe how information is effectively routed through an organisation. From a public administration perspective, Kooiman *et al* describe it as “primarily a descriptive and analytical tool...a means through which we can search the pattern in which a particular social and/or political (sub-) system works and in which social forces are at work” (Kooiman 1993a: 258). In the uses cited above, it is equivalent to ‘politics’: from a political science perspective, governance is about ‘steering’ organisations (Pierre and Peters 2000). Traditionally, in political science literature, the term governance has been identified with ‘government’, but the notion of government as the sole actor in politics no longer dominates mainstream literature (Hirst and Thompson 1996: 183-184). In the words of Jon Pierre: “political institutions no longer exercise a monopoly of the orchestration of governance” (Pierre 2000: 4). In political institutions, governance is about achieving social order through both hard regulation and ‘softer’ forms of coercion. However, it would be more accurate to state that governance provides the link between politics and policy. In other words, governance is about both formulation and implementation of policy and the manner in which these are carried out.

Different in the e-governance debate to the discussions on e-government is thus a distinction between ‘government’ (comprising of politicians and civil servants) and other stakeholders that play a role in the governance of a state or public entity. ICTs do provide several challenges to the traditional mechanisms of governance, and these are described below.

5.1. ICT as a Challenge to the State

Inherent in all discussions on governance are notions that several external factors affect, indeed to a large extent limit, contemporary practice of government by public institutions. These have been outlined by Pierre as an 'overburdened' mechanism of government, lack of financial power to maintain the (overburdened) public sector, problems of coordination, and the impact of globalisation (Pierre 2000). Combined, these have led to questions such as: "what new forms and shapes the pursuit of the collective interest can and should take and to what extent we need to rethink the traditional, liberal-democratic model of the state"? (Pierre 2000:4). This is echoed by Kooiman:

Empirically we see around us that capacities of political/administrative governing systems either have crossed the threshold of diminishing returns...or are quite close to these boundar[ies]... In this situation governing systems try to reduce the need for governing (e.g. by deregulation) or shift the need (e.g. by privatisation). But a third way seems to be developed and not in terms of more 'neo-corporatist arrangements'...In the new forms of governance one can see a shift from unilateral (government or society separately) to an interactionist focus (government with society) (Kooiman 1993a).

One element common to all these factors described by Pierre and Kooiman, of which a greater understanding may help answer the question posed by Pierre, is the role that technologies such as the Internet play in helping shape forms and modes of governance (Pierre 2000). Technology plays a great, if implicit and still understudied, role in current discussions on governance and the role of governments. Mansell contends that new technologies are "bringing disparate cultural, social, and economic phenomena together across space and time in ways that we are only beginning to comprehend" (Mansell 1996: 35).

5.2. Understanding Governance

Use of the concept of governance is, to a large extent, normative in the sense that it attempts to understand and evaluate the processes of change within existing political institutions. It can either be used to encourage and facilitate change towards 'new' governance, or can be used to justify existing modes of governance in an institution, in which cases change refers to an improvement of governance within existing frameworks. In *Gouvernance: un concept ambigu*, Georges Navet describes governance as having two meanings: "En un premier sens, qui se veut précis et quasi technique, le mot 'gouvernance' désigne une manière particulière de gouverner. En un second sens, plus large et plus vague, il tend à désigner la manière de gouverner en général" (Navet 2002).⁴ Another division can be made, one of which considers the 'shape' of an institution and how it fits into the bigger picture, and the other concerning what goes on inside an institution.

The first could be labelled *Democratic Governance* (Shahin 2005). By understanding governance as the link between politics and policy, we open up our understanding of governance to new interpretations of democratic authority – the right to govern and the legitimate authority to do so. Certain readings of governance literature fit into this definition by critically approaching one of the central activities of the modern liberal democratic state: that of providing democracy. Democratic governance is more about the perceptions of the institutions from the outside.

A different category of governance studies focus upon *Institutional Governance*. Institutional governance looks from the inside at an institution's ability to govern. This is promulgated

⁴ [Translation: In one sense, which is narrow and quasi-technical, the word governance describes a particular manner of governing. In a second sense, more broad and vague, it tends to describe the manner of governing in general.].

primarily by policymakers, who started to use the term at the turn of the century: the European Commission’s *White Paper on Governance* (European Commission 2001) is one of the starkest expressions of the phenomenon. Likewise, other international organisations such as the OECD and the UN have also been using the term to describe their role in international affairs (OECD 2001; Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations) 2001). In many of these instances ‘governance’ refers to the acts of increasing legitimacy for existing institutions. It relates to the development of new tools and institutions within existing frameworks for the improvement of governance. In this category of studies, the term institution has developed into a broad concept; Table 1 looks at the intersections between Navet’s definitions and the ones posed above. It lists a highly simplified matrix of the major actors and the task attributed to each intersection. Through an examination of the table, we can see where the interests lie for the different stakeholders, and what sort of activity is carried out in which context – political or policy-related.

	Politics	Policies
Democratic governance (outside)	Citizens, social and non-govt.	Citizens, social and non-govt.
	Agenda setting	Co-legislation
Institutional governance (inside)	Institutions	Institutions
	Sustaining institutions	Implementing and monitoring policies

Table 3: Intersections between two definitions of governance

From this general overview of the tensions in definitions of governance, I now move towards a closer examination of recent innovations in the field. Most of these new innovations treat governance not as an action or a process in the traditional sense, but as a “mode of coordination” (Mayntz 1993). This tries to avoid the normative aspects of the steering present in traditional models of governance.

This closer examination also identifies a set of trends in thinking about governance and its electronic components. These are identified below as a shift to considering the vague concept of 'Public Value,' thinking about the role of democratic activity, and finally, introducing the notions of community, in its different forms. In the field of e-government, we have seen these trends emerging in recent years. A cursory glance at the titles of reviews of e-government implementation across the world show this to be true. For example, the UN's global e-readiness report's subtitle for the 2008 edition is 'From e-government to connected governance,' or Accenture's Government Executive series' reports which have, since 2001 identified growing trends towards citizen-centred service delivery in e-government, or even the development in CapGemini's Online Public Services in the EU survey (formerly known as the eEurope Benchmarking Reports), which have moved towards looking at the user-centricity of e-enabled public services.

5.3. From NPM to PVM

The focus towards the citizen is requiring new approaches to understanding how public administrations should be managed and run. One of the theories driving much of the e-government debate centred upon New Public Management. This approach to public administration placed a stress upon customer-driven service, and advocated a public service mentality that treated the public sector as a business. This produced a focus on increasing efficiency in public services that was clearly apparent in the e-government agenda. In doing so, governments ignored the broader questions raised by digital networks and focussed on how to

revive their own institutions: the discussion on the changing face of public administration and democracy was sidelined.

The goals of the e-government agenda attempted to deflect the concerns of the perceived malaise in Western-style liberal democracies regarding citizen trust and democratic participation in political institutions: the motivation for development of e-government programmes was (and still is) politically oriented. It should be viewed separately from the implementation process that is inherently technological. The goals of many e-government initiatives outline the need for this separation. These have been ambitious in some cases, attempting to turn government “inside out” and “upside down” in order to rectify this perception of failing institutions (Denhardt 1999), and thereby challenging the Weberian notion of government as a hierarchical bureaucracy (Tat-Kei Ho 2002: 435). Traditionally, government departments worked in relative isolation to each other, whereas now, prevailing ideology from the e-government ‘camp’ wishes to show that government is one single entity. This makes it easier for citizens to contact their public administrations.

Much has been written on the role of governance in the place of traditional forms of government from a public management perspective. This literature focuses upon the evolving role of the state in terms of public policy provision in a changed and changing world, which has followed two courses: globalisation and localisation. Similarly, a focus upon technology has been apparent when examining the role of the Internet and other ICTs in changing governance. The parameters of the debate are not about the need to readdress the discussion over the role of government but about the role of technology in improving current activity.

A different approach has been proposed by Stoker, that of 'Public Value Management'. Here, the public sector is not driven solely towards a goal of greater efficiency, but towards the aim of delivering more public value. One of the means towards achieving this goal can indeed be the increased efficiency and effectiveness of government services, but this remains one of a plethora of aims. Others include the need to ensure transparency, accountability, legitimacy, representation, and empowerment. In a recent exposition on the subject, Millard has described how “PVM embraces a much more multi-faceted set of relationships both within the public sector and between governments and other actors including constituents” (Millard, n.d.).

5.4. Participation and Democracy

There is another – potentially more fundamental – argument in the governance debate that highlights the need for governments to reinvent the way in which they communicate with their electorates. This relates to participation in democratic activity and legitimacy of political institutions. Tat-Kei Ho notes that traditional government bureaucracy is “often criticised for its rigidity, proceduralism, inefficiency, and incapability to serve ‘human clients’”, and this has been challenged, in part, by new governance agendas. If ICTs have a role to play in reviving democratic governance of existing institutions, it is in enhancing democratic practice: “[the] ongoing two-way communication between governors and governed” (Tat-Kei Ho 2002). Until now, however, and as mentioned in the previous section, the focus has been more on administrative units in public administration. This is a consequence of the natural boundaries that emerged between politics and policies. When these issues are viewed through the lens of governance, the divisions no longer make sense. To revive institutions and to promote democratic governance, all four quadrants in Table 1 must be addressed. Furthermore, the governance agenda itself, whilst opening up policymaking to new actors outside of the political sphere (such as community groups) does not necessarily lead to a greater perceived notion of democracy: in fact, it can provide challenges to the concept of democracy.

Building upon Easton's model of democratic institutions, Pippa Norris et al. developed a model of how citizens perceive the various institutions that comprise government and the state. The categorisation made by Norris et al. comprises of the following: Political Community, Regime Principles, Regime Performance, Regime Institutions, and Political Actors (Norris 1999). The list is arranged in order of support from citizens, who accordingly have high levels of support for the political community, or the idea of the state, but little support for the political actors who participate in the institutions. Interest in political affiliation is shown to be declining in Western Europe, which provides concern for politicians. Although these data were published in 1999, there has been no indication that the e-government agenda has facilitated a decrease in apathy towards politicians and political institutions, hence this is still an issue for concern and needs to be addressed through a more holistic approach to governance of political institutions.

Participation should not necessarily – and automatically – be associated with 'results'. A deliberative approach to democracy needs to be encouraged to ensure that the service-based approach (where citizens are treated as customers) enshrined in the e-government discourse is not carried through to the participatory and democratic aspects of politics. To put it bluntly, one cannot have what one wants all of the time, and a deliberative approach may go some way to ensuring that individuals do not think that they live in a vacuum, and will be able to appreciate 'trade offs' that emerge as a result of debate.

5.5. Communities of Place, Interest, and Identity

Governments cannot expect and will surely not desire a situation in which all interactions take place on an individual level with citizens and residents in their countries. Due to issues of exclusion, and in the interests of efficiency, some sort of intermediate point for interaction between groups with shared interests will become increasingly important as the shift from e-government to e-governance continues to develop. These have been termed 'communities'. Numerous examples of self-organising groups already exist on the Internet (witness any of the plethora of social networking communities). However, the utility of these social communities, and their relationship to the public sector are, currently, limited.

Despite the fact that there are limitations on the current application of community tools online, there is a need to address how this can be adapted towards the goals of public value. As an implication of the above considerations on public value and participation, governance institutions need to involve communities in their work. Communities, however, in this networked age, are not only territorially located, but also linked together by common interests or identities. Challenges in this field lie in the many aspects of community creation (for example, should this be done in a top-down fashion?) and in the risk of over-influence accorded to a privileged party in the policy process, which can arise when groups are not representative. However, the aim of generating input and gaining insights from community groups does not have to be to ensure representativity: it depends at what stage in the policy cycle the consulting is carried out.

6. How does technological development influence eGovernment policies, strategies and programmes?

The e-government debate, launched across the world in the mid-1990s, provided an opportunity for governments to think about how to use new Information and Communication Technologies to address inefficiencies in their (mainly) back-office processes. These efforts towards improving data-handling, knowledge management and information security – to name a few of the areas covered, provided an opportunity for governments to then address how these developments could be brought directly to the citizen. 'Front-office' applications, such as online tax

submissions, have been touted as a new way for governments to interface with their citizens. Transactional services, such as tax declarations and other two-way services have now either been implemented, or models for implementation are well-known. The advances have been numerous and well documented, and have often led to initial reflections on what comes after e-government implementation.

6.1. How Far has E-Government Taken us?

Analysis of existing policy briefs and studies reveal an enthusiasm for the potential of ICTs to help reform state apparatuses to fit in with existing models of governance: in doing so they are limited to a narrow appreciation of the potentials of future developments for the public sector. Hence the shift in discussion towards e-governance. The issue to be raised here is the wider role of the public sector in providing a space for citizens and other members of the community to interact with the public servants (and their institutions) who manage and allocate resources in society.

6.2. Challenges for ICT-driven Government

The push for a governance-related discussion on the role of the public sector in its entirety has evolved from the electronic government experience. The existing debate around e-governance focuses far more on the context surrounding ICT-driven innovation, as opposed to the positive impact of ICTs on the refinement of extant services. Several challenges arose from the early discussions surrounding e-government, and these pertain to how to strategically implement new and innovative processes into traditionally stable and inert institutions. Furthermore, one of the major considerations that needs to be taken into account involves how to engage between the research and policymaking communities.

6.3. The Linear Nature of E-government, or What Comes After Stage X?

Our understanding of the administrative drive for ICT-enhanced government is relatively complete; many studies written over the past years have tended to focus on these back office issues. However there has been a consistent desire to examine the role of the end-user of these services, which has focused upon service delivery. Early models of e-government that looked at the front office stressed this linear sense of progression in implementation that is mentioned above. These generally involved a categorisation of 'interactions' between 'government' and 'the citizen', ranging from information provision to transaction and, ultimately, intelligent processing of data from an individual's perspective. Although at the time, these models were incredibly useful for engaging governments in initial stages of implementation, the challenge has now emerged as to the subsequent steps that need to be taken to enable public services to become more adaptive and relevant to the needs and wishes of their users.

6.4. Citizen-centricity

One key element that was lacking in the discussions on e-government as a service delivery platform was the end-user. Tools and applications were being created in a supply-rich environment, with little attention being paid to the actual demand for such applications. Although surveys and detailed user-focused research was carried out, the driving factor behind e-government over the past few years was the supply of services, in the hope that high take-up would be achieved once users became aware of the ease of use of such tools. Even in the most connected of countries, however, there is a general lack of interest in use of e-government services, when compared to the provision available. Therefore, other approaches to creating sustainable and usable services need to be addressed, which fit into a broader understanding of

what and how public services should present themselves in the era of the 'long tail' (Anderson 2006).

6.5. Consumers or Participants?

The focus on government services in the e-government discourse also created a split between (service) consumption and (democratic) production in the public sector. Democratic activity, already under strain in our societies due to low participation rates and voter apathy, was little understood, and barely considered by those who were implementing service-based solutions to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of government.

In short, the need for the inclusion of a discussion around 'public value' has emerged from the strictly service-centred approach of e-government. This has led to an emergence of the term 'governance' when considering innovation in the public sector. A brief exposé of dominant literature in the field is provided below, with the intention of revealing the needs of future governance frameworks.

As emphasised above, any discussion of the relationship between ICTs and governance results in the necessity to rethink political institutions and structures: existing roles evolve and new actors emerge to fill gaps between those who are governed and those who govern. This also requires a reassessment of the relationship between research, policy, and practice in the public sector. Given the definition of e-governance provided above, and our explanation of the challenges of a new approach to interactions between the public sector and communities/citizens, and – most importantly – given the novelty of the environment, I shall limit myself to providing an overview of the trends in the application of new technological tools to promote new models of governance.

The new actors have been identified above: they are primarily groups, or communities: either of place, interest, or identity. Successful governance models need to involve these actors in different stages of the policy process, as mentioned above.

6.6. Web2.0 Technologies

So-called Web2.0 technologies, currently driving a large portion of the innovative movements on the Worldwide Web and Internet-connected appliances, provide an enormous amount of inspiration as to how political institutions and the public services they provide could be shaped in a future perspective. Interfaces that do not rely on text-based environments, and are essentially device independent, including visualisation tools, are providing new opportunities for representation of data in easier to consume formats. These tools, developed in a collaborative environment, also encourage openness in their usage, due to the way in which they have been designed, developed, and then implemented.

6.7. The Wiki Approach

The 'wiki' approach is gradually gaining a strong reputation for its accuracy and trend identification and may well be useful in a variety of different areas. Collaborative knowledge is almost counter-intuitive to most of the world (particularly so-called experts!) but has been proven to be rather accurate in various experiments (Surowiecki 2004). Examples can be envisaged in the collaboration between interest groups on the drafting of legislation (such as that on Police Reform in New Zealand).

These community-based tools are engaging stakeholders at a tremendous rate. Take-up of these, across the world, is astonishing – for example, YouTube had as many users as there are residents in Belgium within a year from launch.

6.8. The Semantic Web

The Semantic Web, with its focus on the Internet of 'things' is not a new phenomenon. However, it is only now, that the term is gaining popularity in research and applications geared towards the public sector. The Semantic Web should enable the searching and representation of data stored on the Internet in far more accessible ways, and is touted to make information retrieval far easier for all.

Public service applications making use of many of these new approaches to governance do exist. They are generally developed on an ad hoc basis and are highly dependent upon the sector and the involvement of particular individuals, at least in the start-up phases.

7. The case of the EU: An historical overview of European policies towards the Information Society⁵

It was around 1993 – when the so-called Delors White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, and Employment was published – that the Information Society became a key policy area in the EU for the Commission. This has often been considered the base point for many studies of the Information Society in Europe: research into the EU's recent policy agenda in this area is not new and this paper will not rewrite what has already been written.⁶ There are a number of reasons why the term became more popular in policymaking circles after this date, but most importantly it was a politically-motivated action designed to enhance the standing of the Commission as an actor in a governance matrix as opposed to a hierarchical system of governments within the EU. Policies concerning the development of a European Information Society (hereafter EIS) became central to the EU at the same time as the consequences of the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam and the processes of Commission and EU reform were beginning to have an effect. The Internet was becoming popular at the same time, and had, with the explosion of the Worldwide Web, become the driving technology behind the Information Society. It is in this context that an analysis of the European Commission's treatment of the EIS is crucial to an understanding of the relationship between the Internet and EU governance.

The global nature of the Information Society has been used as a justification for pan-European action to counter many pressing political issues: the EIS cannot be easily separated from other economic, political, and societal issues in Europe. The growth of the Internet has affected the way in which the Commission has developed policy recommendations that deal with areas including unemployment (European Commission 1993, 2000j); globalisation (Bangemann *et al.* 1994); research policy, media convergence, and audiovisual policy (European Commission 1997e; 1999e); telecommunications regulation (European Commission 1999d); Commission reform (European Commission 2000h; 2000i); and governance (European Commission 2001a).

In order to deal with these successfully, it will be shown that the European Commission promoted alternative forms and methods of governance to those apparent in either supranational or intergovernmental theories. The policy coordination role that the Commission has taken forms the basis of this paper: in an attempt to discover whether a new form of governance has emerged that makes use of new technologies, this paper analyses the emergence of the EIS in the EU. In line with conceptual work carried out by Shahin (2007b) - in particular the historical institutionalist approach described therein - this contribution analyses the evolution of institutions, processes, and norms that have emerged in EIS policymaking.

⁵ This section of the paper draws heavily from Shahin and Finger 2008.

⁶ Books of interest and relevance are: (Levy 2001; Mansell and Steinmueller 2002; Peterson and Sharp 1998) as three examples; other articles and documents will be referred to throughout this section.

The policies of the Commission towards an EIS have been too vast and numerous to comprehensively cover in this paper: for reasons of scope and brevity, this paper will concentrate solely upon those aspects of the EIS agenda that serve to highlight the policy formulation, strategy development, and programme implementation processes. The overview of EIS policy provides a firm basis for a more detailed analysis of one of the recurrent themes in the field: the EU's e-government agenda. Other work has built upon the overview of EIS policy analysis by concentrating on the implications for EU governance in public administration and democracy (Millard, Shahin, Warren and Leitner 2006; Shahin 2007b; Shahin and Leitner 2007). In other published work by the principal author, the focus is on eEurope and its role in developing a pan-European e-government agenda (Shahin 2007a), and an examination of the Commission itself, and how it is using the Internet to improve its own process of governance (Shahin 2008).

7.1. The Emergent European Information Society and associated policies

There was discussion of the emergence of an 'Information Society' prior to the popularisation of the Internet: these are not necessarily synonymous terms. In the late 1970s, discussion of the impact of technology on politics was at a high point in both academic and political circles: the *Information Society as Post-Industrial Society* was written by Yoneji Masuda in 1980, Langdon Winner had published *Autonomous Technology* in 1977, Nora and Minc had coined the term "télématique" in a report for the French Government in 1978. In the same year, Kenneth Laudon published a book on the relationship between technology and democratic participation. In 1985, songs were being written about the complex nature of governing a world without borders. It is in this context that the Community's early actions in the framework of the Information Society must be considered.

In the European Community, the history of the Information Society can be traced back to 1979 when the Strasbourg European Council declared that information technologies had broad economic, social, and political implications for the Community. It was during this European Council that a declaration identifying "the dynamic complex of information industries, based on the new electronic technologies, offered a major source of economic growth and social development" was written (Council 1984d). In a Communication prepared for the Dublin European Council of 1979, which is a central document for analysis, the Commission defined the Information Society as a society in which "scientific and intellectual activity of all kinds, economic transactions and the whole pattern of daily life on a subtle network of information" is apparent (European Commission 1979: summary: 1). New technologies were considered to promote this type of interaction; reducing costs of data transfer and decoding, making networks more efficient, and thus acting to raise the relevance of the Information Society in dealing with issues in business, government, and society. Before this date, although information networks had been established,⁷ the convergence of telecommunications and information had not been made so clear. As Peterson states, it was by 1979 that "'telematics' had become the new buzzword in the technology policy community, as it embraced the increasing integration of microelectronics, IT and telecommunications" (Peterson and Sharp 1998: 73).

Convergence provided added impetus to calls for Community action in the European economic, social, and political spheres. The prevalent logic at the Commission was that this increase in use of information technology would provide challenges and opportunities for the citizens and businesses of the European Community. Action was not only desirable it was necessary to ensure the future stability of the Community both economically and politically. This approach

7 Particularly EURONET. The European Informatics Network (EIN) was established in 1971, but was not active until 1976 (Abbate 1999: 125-26), (Kirstein 1999), (Roberts 1978).

was repeatedly affirmed by the Council in later years (Council 1983, 1984a, 1984d). The economic imperative to redefine European markets in a globally-competitive environment was certainly a driving force behind the initiatives implemented towards the EIS. By using this discourse of globalisation, the European Institutions were able to garner support for European-level action. The creation of an EIS was also an attempt to reinvent the European Community (and later the EU), which led to a discussion of the social and political implications of taking a pan-European approach to governing new technologies and their impact.

7.1.1. Creating the Need for EU Intervention in the EIS

After 1993, the threats of globalisation and increased reliance upon new ICTs such as the Internet have enabled the Commission to gain a greater role in governing what it has called the Information Society. This has had an impact on the role of the European Commission as a player in the global environment with respect to technology standards setting and global governance of the Internet and the Information Society. In terms of actually “making a difference” to the EU, progress has been slow, but by July 2002 there were many initiatives underway to show that European governance is being altered by the development of networked ways of thinking. There had been European public intervention in earlier years, but it was not coordinated or effective. However this need for a European intervention was made clear by all institutions in the EU from 1979 onwards.

The EU prepared many documents to discuss the nature of the Information Society, the impact on its member states and the need for a common, coordinated approach. These were not always enacted. All these documents share the belief that market forces (at least in Europe itself) are the key to success in the information age. Where legislation is necessary, it is seen as temporary, and only to allow liberalisation to occur. Alternatively, when legislation is permanent, it is minimal, and only put in place to ensure that market conditions are fair and do not impede the development of free markets. In this sense, EU policies are merely reflecting and coping with the importance of the notion of the global market in today’s society: “technology has come to be recognised as a motor for economic growth and prosperity in the international environment” (Kofler 1998). This importance can be seen as a direct attack by the Information Society on the concept of state sovereignty, and as such affects the relationship between state and citizen in the information age, as global markets have been doing for a long time. It can also be seen as a motivating reason for the EU’s increased role in the area, as the EU’s initial aim was to create a Single European Market.

The Community response in 1979 intended to prepare Europe for an EIS. It recognised that we live in an environment that was more interdependent and dynamic than previously conceived. From 1993 onwards, this complexity was realised; the Delors White Paper celebrated the strength of sovereign states and the power of global markets, and still managed to encourage action at the European level. At the same time, the challenges raised by changes in the world required new approaches to policymaking. These policy approaches involved participating with new actors, such as industry, in a different role to that traditionally known at the national governmental and EU levels. In order to be capable of dealing with the new global challenge of information and telecommunications technologies, it was believed that businesses in Europe required larger markets. Consequently, the Commission naturally recommended that the policy response should be conceived at a continental level, implying that the European Community should have a role in determining policy for the European Community’s (EU’s) member states. This had been hinted at many years previous, at the Strasbourg European Council where it was reported that European ministers were “prepared to examine possible solutions in a Community framework” (European Commission 1979: 13).

Early European Community interventions in the EIS were almost purely limited to development of infrastructure. The need for greater connectivity between citizens, business, and public administrations throughout Europe was fulfilled by the creation of trans-European information highways. These were to be built through private investment with support from European structural and regional development funding. Support for development of this infrastructure has been expressed in many policy documents from the Commission; even before the landmark Delors White Paper of 1993 the Council of Ministers recommended⁸ that these networks be developed. This has continued through to the eEurope 2002 manifesto brought out in late 1999, where all citizens (who want it) are to be given access to the Internet. Since the Bangemann Report strongly reinforced the idea that public spending in the establishment of infrastructures was to be limited, the Commission's role has been to encourage massive amounts of investment expected from private companies. That report stated "there will be no need for public subsidies, because sufficient confidence will have been established to attract the required investment from private sources" (Bangemann *et al.* 1994). The networks and their infrastructure were, henceforth if not before, to be controlled by the market.

Blind acceptance of this fact understates the crucial role played by governmental actors in promoting the spread of networked infrastructures. At the same time as trying to *promote* private support for the development of a European Information Society, the European Commission was also trying to actively *participate* in its development from technical, economic, and socio-political perspectives. The focus was – for the most part – on technical aspects: these tasks for research and exploitation of markets were part of the remit of DG XIII, now called DG Information Society.

The influence given to the Commission's research programmes in technology and telecommunications was great, and these went some way to changing the role of the Commission in the European political framework. Statements at the time, however, reveal that this was not intended to be a centralization of activity; rather, it recognised the complexity of the techno-economic situation from a dynamic and multiple-actor perspective. One could attribute to the Commission the role of resource allocator. Industry leaders were brought into the European debate and used their position to encourage national governments to participate in European markets and arenas for research and technological standards setting.⁹ Although in recent years, this focus on industry has waned: industry was not as vital in the planning stages of some policy initiatives such as eEurope.

7.2. The EIS Institutional and Policy Web in the Commission

Internally, there has been much confusion as to how to deal with the Information Society. It appears that creation of coherent European policies for the Information Society was largely ignored until the landmark 1993 Delors White Paper. Even after this, it proved difficult to implement, particularly in the European Commission itself. This lack of movement in the years after recognising the 'challenge of new technologies' was also noted in the telecommunications sector: "although the first moves were made in 1979, little was accomplished until late 1983" (Peterson and Sharp 1998: 76). Legislative action stemming from various activities in 1979 and documents from the Commission, such as the 1979 Communication detailed herein, were apparent (almost exclusively in policy and legislation relating to industry and research) but did

⁸ A recommendation is not legally binding upon member states, however, its "legal status is not always completely clear", as, at times, the ECJ has referred to them when making decisions (Nugent 1994: 213).

⁹ The CEO of Philips, Wisse Dekker, was responsible for the first draft of what became the White Paper on the Single Market. This was called "Europa 1990", and as the title suggests, set a deadline for the Single Market in 1990 (Moravcsik 1999).

not hold the political weight bestowed upon later EIS promotion activities after the Treaty of European Union (TEU) came into force in 1993. However, the discussions held in this earlier period will be shown to reflect a large majority of the policy planning that has taken place since 1993, revealing that the change in content is less dramatic than sometimes stated, and more revealing of a contiguous approach to the Commission's role in governing the EIS.

The developments prior to 1993 were mainly to create a strategy that dealt with political and technical pressures to help the economies of the European Community regain their stature in the field of information technology. In doing so, it would establish the European Community (and hence the European Commission) at the heart of the global technological revolution. The side effects of such a policy were also noted in the contemporary official documents; the shift of control over research policy has profound consequences for the role national governments can play in economic, social, and political development of the Community's institutions. However, the establishment of national research programmes and the strict control that the Council maintained over the Community research programmes minimised this impact.

In late 1999, a representative from DG XIII was assigned the task of creating an 'institutional web' of Information Society activities in the Commission. The resulting document was full of contact names in each DG in the Commission. The complexity of managing such a priority area has meant that institutional responsibility within the Commission has been rendered opaque and confusing to the outsider; the creation of this report reveals that there was a need to clarify the Commission's perspective internally as well. The internal document referred to above had the following comments on the European Commission's Information Society activities:

During the interviews a general consensus was detected concerning four aspects of the hypothesis:

1. A comprehensive view of the Commission missions and activities in the Information Society domain is not available to the "external world".
2. A coherent view is first needed inside the Commission itself.
3. There is an urgent need of information and communication strategy both internally and externally oriented.
4. A culture of internal transparency and visibility is required. (European Commission (ISAC) 2000: 105)

It is thus misleading to treat the European Commission as a unitary actor in the field of Information Society. Many DGs have been shown to be dealing with the relationship between the Internet and other ICTs and the EU. In other work by the principal author, examples such as the attempts of DG Press to create an online European public space and information portal of the EU's institutions for EU citizens (the Europa website), the development of the Your Voice in Europe portal by DG Internal Market, and the IDA Programme by DG Enterprise have been described (Shahin and Neuhold 2007; Shahin 2007, Shahin 2008). This has confused the creation and implementation of an agenda for the EIS.

EIS policy impacts upon, amongst others, Employment, Education, Enterprise, Culture, Competition, and the Internal Market: all work being done in independent DGs in the Commission. The definition of the term 'Information Society' has been interpreted in different ways by different DGs.¹⁰ This is a mere reflection of the blurred vision of the Information Society that drove Commission policy throughout the 1990s. It is revealing that in the Commission's

10 In a presentation given to officials from the European Commission in January 2000, I asked for definitions of the Information Society. Responses covered 'learning', 'work', and 'computer networks' to name but a few. Of course, the Information Society encompasses all of these: the surprising result of that question was the way in which the staff disagreed amongst each other over the varying definitions.

Report on Implementation of the 1996 Work Programme (European Commission 1996f), the Information Society was referred to in policies concerning regional development, education, employment, single market, and telecommunications policy. This shows its true horizontal nature. Affirmation of this comes from a paper presented by a Commission official from DG Research, who critiqued the significant bias “in favour of an economic and vocational definition of education which is meant to be put to the service of economic growth and technological excellence” and cited the European Parliament’s response to the EIS agenda promoted by DG XIII which resolved that “the European model of the Information Society must be driven by democratic, social, cultural and educational concerns, and not dominated by economic and technological interests” (Agalianos 1999: 4-5). The broadness of the policy area has meant that many actors external to the European Commission have also been involved in policymaking and policy monitoring. This includes non-institutional actors, such as the eris@, the European Internet Forum (EIF), as well as other EU institutions such as the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Council. The networked approach to policymaking has drawbacks for the Commission due to the large number of opinions that can be heard on EIS policies. Thus, whilst addressing their communications to most European Institutions (even when there is no Treaty-based necessity), the Commission has tried to use European Councils to promote their ideas directly to the highest political level possible.¹¹

The establishment of a DG to deal with Information Society issues alone (in 2000) was a response to the coordinating role adopted by the Commission in general policy areas, but EIS policy emerges from many DGs and cannot successfully be centralised. As a result, DG Information Society has the responsibility to introduce Information Society aspects into other EU policies. DG Information Society plays the leading role in setting and implementing the Information Society agenda, which means that other Commission services should work with this DG in dealing with these issues. This naturally accords a hierarchy to EIS policy in the European Commission that must be coordinated by DG Information Society.

Figure 7-1 outlines some of the major initiatives taken at the Commission level in the area of Information Society since the 1980s. This diagram reveals how different Commission services and DGs play a role in the implementation of the EIS agenda.

In more recent years, activities were not limited to the EU institutions either; other international organisations and national governments were slowly getting involved in Information Society policy webs. States around the world are confronting the same issues, and often offering similar answers. International organisations are also dealing with policy issues in the information age. The OECD examined the effects of the changes that developments in the Internet will have on regulatory mechanisms (OECD (Committee for Information) 1996). The World Trade Organisation looked at the role of the Information Technology on electronic commerce (World Trade Organisation 1998) as did the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 1998). Information Society policies implemented reveal a trend towards global solutions. The ITU, EU, G7/8 and many other international groups have been working together to determine guidelines and – where

11 An example of the complexity can be shown from the following (late submitted) response to the Delors White Paper by the Committee of the Regions, who welcomed “the Bangemann report, which was presented at the meeting of the Council on 24 and 25 June in Corfu, as it considers the establishment of the Information Society vital for strengthening European firms’ positions, particularly for SMEs, vis-à-vis international competition. Consequently, it is important that the European Union encourage action needed both to develop information technologies and to introduce them into the market. The local authorities and regions must be involved in selecting priority projects, so that full, efficient computerization can be achieved throughout Europe” (Committee of the Regions 1994).

necessary – global regulation. Governments found a need to interact internationally to counter the instabilities of the global marketplace. It is of interest to hear an EU official say: “We are convinced that only international efforts will give the right answers and solutions to the challenges of the Global Information Society”.¹² In 1995, the European Commission hosted an international conference in Brussels on the future of the Global Information Society (G7 Ministerial Conference Chair 1995; Nash 1995).¹³ Agreement was made between the G7 countries on the basic principles of the GIS, recognising the fact that international cooperation is a necessary requirement, even in a globalised and liberalised environment: “Jürgen Rüttgers, Bonn research and technology minister...said a world wide ‘net code of conduct’ was needed to set internationally agreed minimum standards” (Norman 1998a). At the 1998 International Telecommunication Union plenipotentiary conference, a French official stated: “all governments...have taken an interest in seeing that the Internet continues to flourish. We think the Internet is now an international phenomenon” (1998b). The same meeting agreed a resolution calling for the ITU to organise the World Summit on the Information Society.¹⁴

12 <http://www.cineca.it/untpdc/securenet/ec.html> accessed 18 October 1998.

13 Archives hosted at http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/intcoop/g8/i_g8conference.html accessed 24 July 1999

14 <http://www.itu.int/wsis/> accessed on 5 July 2004

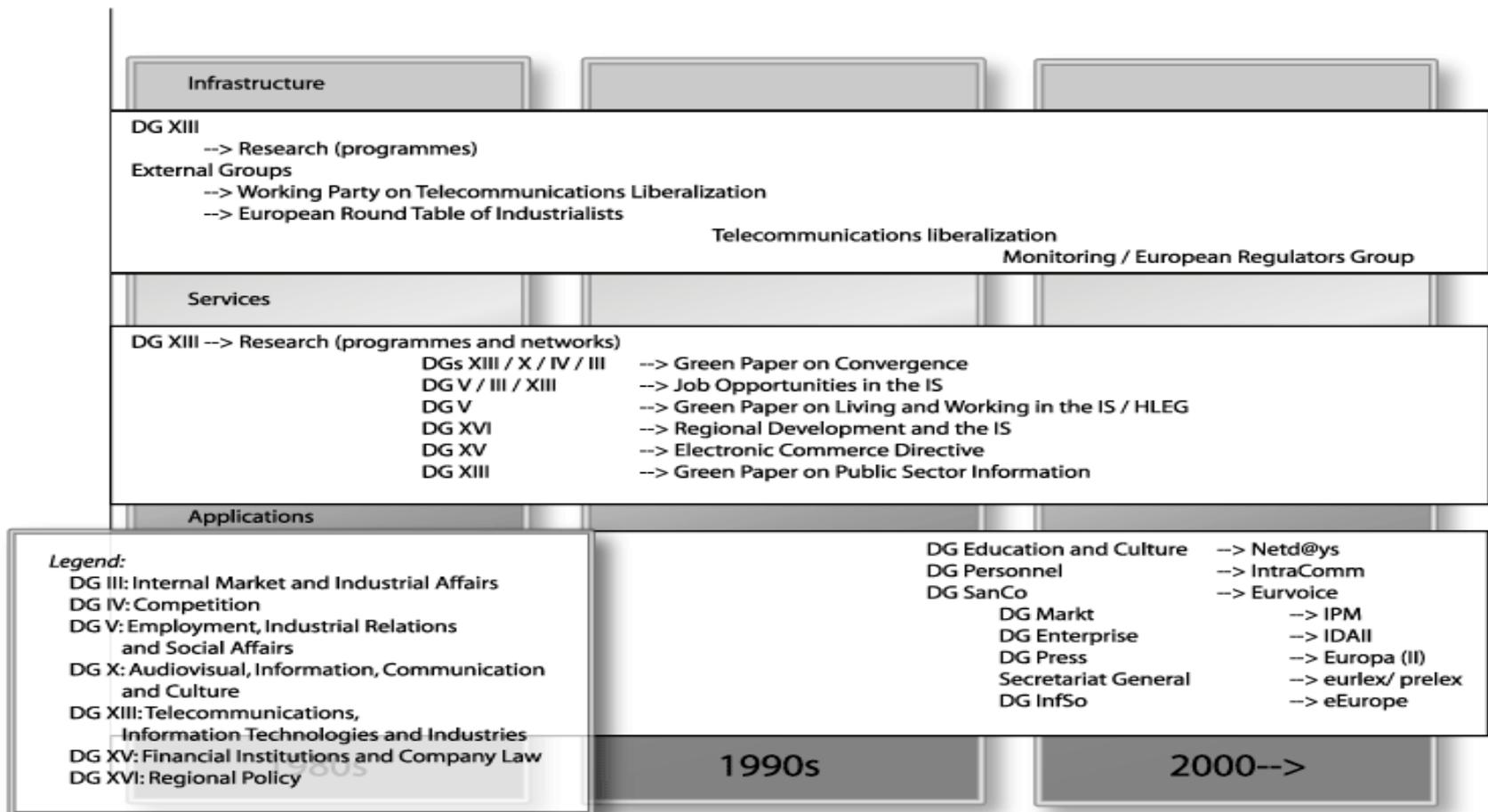


Figure 7-1 Policy Webs in the Commission: implementing the EIS

Given the level of interest in Information Society policies at both the global and the national levels, the European Commission was well placed to provide an active role in the development of policies and policy webs in the EU. The following two sections describe the activities undertaken by the European Commission towards implementation of an EIS, and cover how the EU was 'mobilised' and 'innovated' through Information Society policies that have been brought to light in recent years.

7.3. 'Mobilising the Union' in the Information Age: Programme development

It has been stated that the Commission's attempts to rejuvenate the European electronics industry until the mid-1980s had been a failure: "Collectively, it has failed abjectly to keep up with its main international competitors, the US and Japan" (Mackintosh 1986: 83). The convergence of technologies: electronics, telecommunications, computing, and so forth made this a difficult environment to regulate. The fact that "during the first 25 years of its existence, the European Community did not develop a comprehensive policy for communication media" could have played a role in this failure to keep up with the competition (Schoof and Brown 1995: 326). This partially accounts for the emergence of different political priorities from 1993 onwards, and to some extent explains the reassessment taken by the Commission of its EIS policy in the mid-late 1990s.

The intention of the Commission to create a European approach to the Information Society required more profound actions from the EU than those made prior to the Delors White Paper. It also required more than Commission Communications and international conferences. In order to mobilise the Union, a major shift in policy and in objectives was required. The manner in which policy and legislative opinions were placed before the Council of Ministers and the European Councils was subtly altered to achieve this.

Attempts started in 1993: with the Internet revolution just beginning, technological change was more apparent and profound: research laboratories and high technology industries were not to be the only recipients of benefits of new developments in technology. This time, citizens were to be direct beneficiaries of these developments. The 1993 White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, and Employment defined the Information Society as "the dawning of a multimedia world (sound – text – image) [representing] a radical change comparable with the first industrial revolution" (European Commission 1993: 13). Hyperbole as explicit as this was used "to convey the dynamism and excitement of technological developments rather than to stand as an opening to a precise historical analogy" (Mansell and Steinmueller 2002: 10-11). This dynamism on the part of the European Commission has certainly held its ground, as the eEurope initiative and its entourage of policies and initiatives clearly show (Shahin 2006, 2007, 2008). The impact of technology was to be as broad-ranging as possible, businesses, organisations, and citizens would all be affected by this radical change in 'economic and social organisation':

Companies' operations have become unthinkable without the use of ICTs... The introduction of ICTs, globalisation and international competition are forcing companies to rethink the way in which they organize their production. Where the general public is concerned, the penetration of ICT-dependent products and services into everyday activities is also striking. This generates new forms of economic and social organisation the structure of which is no longer subject to geographical constraints but depends on

telecommunications networks or teleports: teleworking is emerging as a major social phenomenon (European Commission 1993).

The subsequent Bangemann Report, outlined below, was to devise concrete projects around many of the ideas proposed in this White Paper. In the Delors White Paper, the structure of Commission activities for dealing with the opportunities of the Information Society was broken into the three following areas: infrastructure and standards setting, services, and applications, as detailed in the table below. The mobilisation of the EU had begun, but as will be shown, it was a long process, which still continues.

Infrastructure and standards	Response to GIS technological issues: need for standards and common regulatory frameworks	Reactive and Innovative
Services	Development of technological and statutory solutions to counter existing problems in EU – problems of single market, communication issues etc.	Reactive
Applications	Socio-political use of technology to improve quality of life in EU, including governance mechanisms, government administrations and other areas	Innovative

Table 7-1 Technological and Political Areas where European Commission Plays a Role in the EIS

The process towards building the Information Society was not entirely new; many programmes, projects, and initiatives put in place as a result of the White Paper were already proposed in previous years at the Community level; the difference is the way in which these were announced, and the emphasis given to them. The 1993 White Paper’s impact on the Information Society in Europe was to initiate a policy process that has made the EIS a priority area for the Commission and the European Council. After this period, mobilising the EU was not just about dealing with economic issues: the connection between regulating the SEM, European economic strength, and more ‘softer’ issues of European politics was made and a new sphere of governance opened up to the European Commission. A connection had been made between the way public administrations work and the economic development level of a country (see Shahin 2007a,b). Whether this is, in part, attributable to the emergence of the EIS is a debatable point. Evidence so far has shown that the technology has certainly helped the process, and other commentators have noted this. For example, Kofler notes that in the EU the Information Society could be used to reinforce "sovereignty and cultural identity" (see also Hudson 1998: 27; Kofler 1998). Similarly, the authors of the Bangemann Report who were not all members of the Commission or of European public administrations believed that:

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 (Bangemann *et al.* 1994).

7.4. A European Strategy?

The European Commission’s strategy to attain the main goals of an EIS is of crucial importance to the governance of the EIS and the EU. To understand the impact of the EIS on the Commission’s policymaking it is necessary to explain the history of the Commission’s strategy for an EIS. Whilst recognising that “the social usefulness of technological developments

evolves concurrently with the research responsible for new ideas” (Mansell and Steinmueller 2002: 21), it can be shown that the Commission took an approach to the building of an EIS that clearly divided the research, development, and creation of standards and applications from the actual use of the technology; this is clearly elucidated when considering ‘better governance’ as described by the Commission in their White Paper on Governance (European Commission 2001a). In this White Paper, the role of the Internet and the Information Society is minimal and completely separate from the ‘traditional’ questions raised despite the benefits of using ICTs that are mentioned in the document. Likewise, this interpretation can be applied to the establishment of research networks, which have rarely considered the role of the citizen be they user or non-user. This reflects understanding of the Internet through a utopian technological paradigm that assumes that connectivity promotes use, as opposed to an examination of how technology can be used to further claims to better governance that the Commission desires.

Earlier work has outlined the history of data networking in Europe (Shahin 2006) and it is from this context that current debates over the relationship between governance and the EIS should begin. It is necessary to note, however, that policy and legislative measures taken before the mid-1990s were not explicitly linked to the notion of the EIS in any specific or direct way.¹⁵ When considering the impact of the Internet on governance at the EU level it is important to recognise that prior to widespread use of the Internet¹⁶ there was an existing debate about the role of technology in governing European political institutions. These debates were centred on three major technological developments:

1. the development of the microchip, and the growing pervasiveness of computers;
2. the rise of the Internetworking paradigm; and,
3. the digitalization of information.

Although the social and political implications of these technological developments were raised, it has been shown that political decisions on social issues were technologically constructed, albeit driven by the overarching desire to maintain economic strength and stability. The strategy followed by the Commission in these early years was optimistic. Technological, economic, and social problems that were caused—in large part—by technological developments, were to be easily solved by technological means.

This ‘construction’ of technology and technological solutions at the European level through standards and networks, regulation and legislation, and promotion of the Information Society (at both the global and the European levels) has provided crucial evidence to prove that the creation of the EIS is more than simply a political response to a technological problem. Technologically-oriented research programmes, public investment, and standards setting are only half of the story of the EIS, which was dominant in the early years. In one analysis of standards setting in the European Community, it was noted that “a large part of the European Union strategy in this area was to use standardization as a mechanism to establish distinctly

15 Mention was made to of the need to “ensure a socially responsible approach to the control of these new technologies in a society that is experiencing radical and rapid economic, social and technological change” (Council 1983).

16 Interoperability between different systems was an evident aim even in the ‘early’ years, as Community support for EURONET, the EIN, and other networking activities shows.

‘European’ network design trajectories” (Hawkins 1996: 176).¹⁷ There are also political problems associated with Information Society policies and programmes relating to who – institutionally – should design and implement the policies. In this sense, the political solutions that were implemented can be seen to be one facet of the debate on EU governance as it concerns the role of the EU institutions.

The key goal of any pan-European strategy to the Information Society stems from the desire to attain competitiveness for Europe in the global economy. In the words of a Commission document from 1996: “It is absolutely essential for the future of all sectors of the economy and for Community citizens that Europe succeeds in [the information and communications] sectors” (European Commission 1996e). The challenge was to national governments to give up their sovereign control over high technology markets. These challenges were also represented by the global nature of new ICTs. Conventional wisdom held that in order to compete in a globalised economy, European member states needed to work together. The potential provided by new technologies for economic development, despite the collapse in the stock markets that took place at the turn of the 21st century is phenomenal. The convergence of media enabled by digital networks is changing the scope and nature of production of services and products. Digital networks such as the Internet enable the commodification of information. There is clearly a direct connection between information/knowledge on the one hand, and economic factors on the other. Information or knowledge and economic development are closely connected (Mansell and Wehn 1998b). The debate over the ‘new economy’ which is still ongoing, would tend to suggest that great advantage can be made of new ICTs for economic development (Johnston 1998; OECD 2000, 2002; Soete 2000). The communication potential of new ICTs, which enables information and knowledge to be brought together independent of geography is also of importance. Leonard Dudley notes that economic growth generation during the Industrial Revolution cannot be explained by “innovation clusters in production and transportation technology” alone (1999: 597). Changes in communications technology are given special attention in his model, as they provide the infrastructure over which new innovations are disseminated (ibid: 610-11). By extending Dudley’s model, the Internet thus becomes a central motivating force in future innovation. The European Commission had recognised this in early 1997 with the publication of a Communication entitled *The Competitiveness of the European Information and Communication Technologies Industries*, which laid out a number of main issues and existing policy initiatives which needed further attention from member states and the Commission in order to “force the pace and ensure that European ICT industries are at the forefront of market and technological evolution” (European Commission 1997b: 1).

Liberalisation and the SEM also affected edicts from the EU on the need for a coordinated strategy in the policies and programmes of the EIS. In 1996, the Commission wrote an Action Plan on the topic of innovation. In what could be considered an early version of the coordinating role of the European Commission in the European political space, this Action Plan resulted in the production of three ‘lines of attack’ that needed to be addressed by the EU’s institutions and member states. They were: the need to foster an innovation culture; to

17 Hawkins also commented that the instrumentalist approach to standards setting for political purposes is problematic (ibid., see also p. 186), but an evaluation of the standards process is beyond the scope of this contribution. It suffices to say that the European Commission was attempting to get involved in the standardization process from an early stage, believing that political objectives could be achieved through technological means.

establish legal frameworks that promote innovation, and; linking research funding to innovation (European Commission 1996c).

Added to the economic strategies such as liberalisation, innovation, and globalisation are political issues related to the implementation of the EIS; a strategy was in place at the Community level for this as well. The European Commission used the subject of the EIS to try to ensure a European Community response was forthcoming to answer broader questions of economic prosperity and stability. In rather dramatic prose the 1979 Communication stated:

In social and political terms the new technologies could offer new tools for individual development and expression, new possibilities for small to medium-sized enterprises, new communication facilities for distant regions, new facilities for the underprivileged, whether the handicapped or the immobile old. Will they be used for these redeeming purposes or as an instrument for reinforcing central political or corporate power? These questions have hitherto been largely debated on a national basis. Since they are fundamental for the future of European civilisation it is time to ask how the Community can help to ensure a positive answer (European Commission 1979: iii).

8. Future areas for research

To follow

9. Bibliography

To follow