

Measuring levels of supply and demand for e-services and e-government: a toolkit for cities

1 Document information

1.1 Author(s) and Institution(s)

MEMORI is the research institute of the University College of Mechelen. MEMORI's expertise is in the following research fields:

- public communication;
- communication of non-governmental organisations;
- local participatory democracy;
- local e-government.

Elke Van Soom is researcher at Memori since August 2008. She has a master in Communication Sciences (VUB 1993) and worked from 1993 to 2008 at the Flemish Public Broadcaster VRT as audience researcher, project leader and policy maker. At Memori she manages research projects on tourist marketing and e-government.

Memori is engaged in several research projects that are modelling concepts for advanced, interactive digital communities & provide a framework for evaluation and development of local e-government policies. This research brief is based on the project proposals for these research projects.

Each concrete project proposal is customised according to the city's wishes and needs, but basing it on a fixed model enables comparison and benchmarking of the results.

1.2 Intended audience

This document gives some background information for cities/municipalities who want to align their e-government policies and services with the user's wishes and needs.



2 Digital City Development: getting to know your audience in 5 steps

Most cities offer some kind of e-government services, from a simple e-mail form to the most sophisticated applications. Often this offer is mainly content- and technology driven, and not based on the needs and expectations of the different target groups. In order to develop a well balanced e-government vision and operation, it has to be more than a (re)organisation of technological platforms. It has to be founded on the relationship between a government and its different target groups: citizens, companies, associations.

The best way to map out this relationship is a well balanced survey that looks at the digital services and information from both a demand perspective (citizen, local companies and associations) and a supplier's perspective (municipality and city services).

Such a survey should:

- Identify the use, needs, areas of interest and priorities of the different target groups regarding local e-government
- Inventory and analyse the existing digital services
- Evaluate supply and demand, with concrete advice on priorities in digital development in short, middle and long term.
- Be broad enough to count as a zero base measurement, in order to be able to realise relevant succession surveys

In order to realise these targets, 5 work packages are usually defined:

1. Supply perspective: inventory and benchmarking

Inventory and evaluate the existing digital services and information provision and compare it to the product catalogue. Most important in this phase is linking the digital services catalogue to the city's general and e-government policy. It is of vital importance that e-gov services and solutions are embedded in the municipality's global and communications policy. E-government is not just about technology!

When this inventory is made it can be benchmarked against cities of comparable size and function.

2. Supply and demand perspective: list of indicators

The goal is to develop a set of indicators to

- Map the citizens' ICT and internet usage
- Map knowledge and use of local e-government services
- Detect barriers and stimuli for use of internet and local e-government

These indicators should answer to the SMART-principle: be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely.

The indicators are used for measuring the city's current digital status in order to check the feasibility of new services and opportunities. They need to be objective and fairly general. Specific data, evaluations and opinions have their place in work packages 3 and 4.

3. Demand perspective: local e-gov points for attention & citizen's priorities

Gain a balanced insight in knowledge and attitude towards and use of digital city services and information sources. In depth analysis of needs, areas of interest and evaluation of possible applications.

The best technique to get this in depth view are focus group interviews. Focus group research is based on facilitating an organized discussion with a group of individuals selected because they were believed to be representative of some class. Discussion is used to bring out insights and understandings in ways which simple questionnaire items may not be able to tap.

4. Demand perspective: develop a representative image of local e-gov use, take up and priorities

In this work package we set out to establish (in a representative way) how the population feels about the current and future (possible) local e-government services.

Goal is to obtain representative numerical data about knowledge, attitude, usage and appreciation of local website and digital community services and information sources. Best technique is a broad survey, either written, telephone assisted or face to face, based on a fixed questionnaire.

5. Integration – indicators and recommendations

Finally all elements from previous work packages should be integrated in a coherent whole. The result should be a balanced report that levels policy with user needs (all users, from individuals to companies and local organizations) and embeds short term recommendations (including quick wins) in a long term vision.

3 Further information

3.1 Contacts with expertise within Smart Cities partnership

Elke Van Soom is researcher at Memori since August 2008. She has a master in Communication Sciences (VUB 1993) and worked from 1993 to 2008 at the Flemish Public Broadcaster VRT as audience researcher, project leader and policy maker.

Memori has conducted several of these research projects for Belgian cities and service providers.

3.2 Document history

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www.smartcities.info

www.epractice.eu/community/smartcities

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