

# E-GOVERNMENT AND E-SERVICES PORTALS

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**Abstract:** The paper covers a range of e-government and e-services portals mainly addressed to citizens that contribute to improving the life of the civil society.

The emphasis of this article is on the digital initiatives belonging to the European area, mainly e-government and e-services initiatives and projects developed and financed by the European Commission.

**Keywords:** digital environment, information technology, e-government portals, online environment, e-services, cross-border interoperability, LSP, SPOCS.

## 1. Introduction

Since, knowledge, its production and distribution, represents one of the major challenges facing the world today, creating, assembling and exploiting complementary aspects of knowledge constitute the foundation of cultural and social expansion, as well as economic growth. In a society where knowledge represents the main competitive advantage, owning knowledge becomes increasingly a source of power therefore [6]., by paraphrasing Andre Malraux's quote[13] “ the 21st century will be about information or it will not be at all .

Moreover, the traditional aspects of the information are now obsolete, seen as how today, in just a life span of 40 years, almost 25% "Figure 1" of the world's population uses Internet [14] – thus online means of information access.

	Country	Internet users	% of pop.
	World	1,581,571,589	23.6%
	European Union	308,967,801	63.2%
	People's Republic of China	298,000,000	22.4%
	United States	227,190,989	74.7%
	Japan	94,000,000	73.8%
	India	81,000,000	7.1%
	Brazil	67,510,400	34.4%
	Germany	55,221,183	67.0%
	United Kingdom	43,753,600	71.8%
	France	40,858,353	65.7%
	Russia	38,000,000	27.0%
	South Korea	36,794,800	76.1%

**Figure 1. 2011 global Internet usage**

Source: <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/facts/2011/material/ICTFactsFigures2011.pdf>

Seen as how in such a short amount of time, the Internet has become such a big part of the citizen's life, it is only natural that we would dedicate time into studying the social phenomenon it has become.

Therefore, although we shall concentrate more on the issues that have risen within the EU space, we shall also briefly bring into discussion other examples of good practice from important stakeholders and states that have developed, are developing or will develop their digital environments dedicated to their citizens and other interested parties.

## 2. Worldwide and EU digital initiatives

Nowadays almost every country has its online information portal for citizens, for tourists and stakeholders [12], thus bringing people together, closer to each other than they have ever been, and more importantly, closer to the information they need.

In 2010 as a natural follow-up to the "i2010" initiative, the European Commission launched the "Digital Agenda for Europe - i2020" "Figure 2" – a plan for the EU's online environment for the next decade: 2010-2020. The Digital Agenda is Europe's strategy for a flourishing digital economy by 2020. It outlines policies and actions in order to maximize the benefit of the digital revolution for all of Europe's citizens.



Figure 2. The "Digital Agenda for Europe" logo

Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/digital-agenda/publications/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/digital-agenda/publications/index_en.htm)

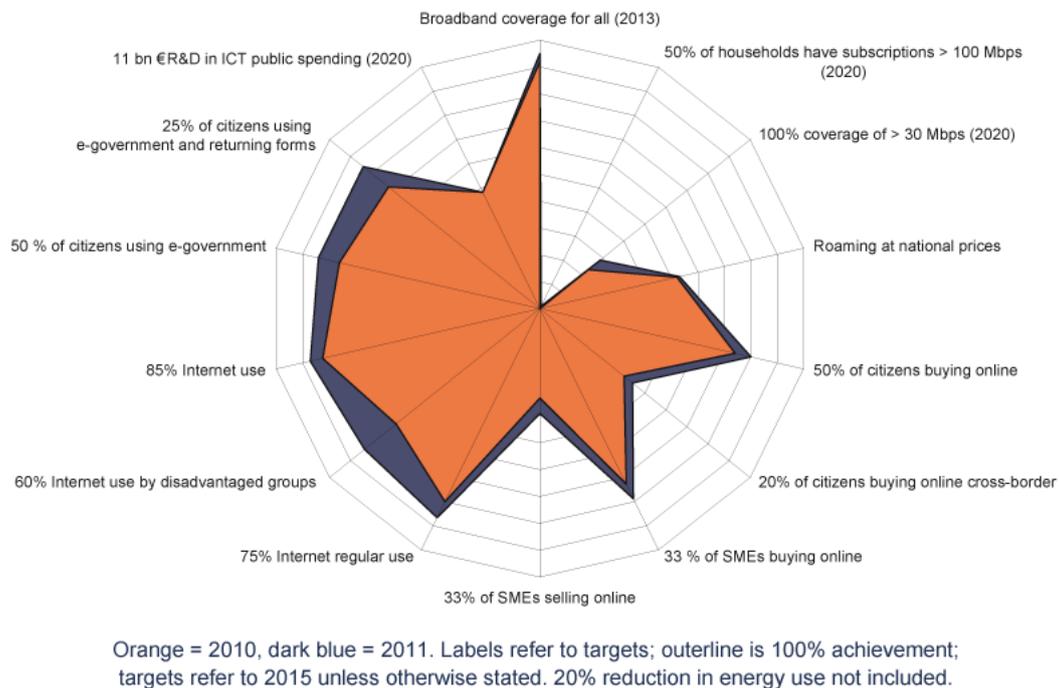
The overall aim of the Digital Agenda is to deliver sustainable economic and social benefits from a digital single market based on fast and ultra fast internet and interoperable applications, thus in order to achieve the goals set out, the European Commission will work closely with national governments, concerned organizations, stakeholders and companies.

Under the slogan: "Every European digital" [11]., the "Digital Agenda for Europe" proposes seven pillars that symbolize the issues that need to be resolved until 2020:

- Pillar 1: A vibrant digital single market;
- Pillar 2: Interoperability and standards;
- Pillar 3: Trust and security;
- Pillar 4: Fast and ultra-fast Internet access;
- Pillar 5: Research and innovation;
- Pillar 6: Enhancing digital literacy, skills and inclusion;
- Pillar 7: ICT-enabled benefits for EU society.



## How the EU scores on the Digital Agenda targets



**Figure 4.** Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/digital-agenda/scoreboard/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/digital-agenda/scoreboard/index_en.htm)

Ever since 2010, the Digital Agenda initiative has stated - and proved it – that the citizen is its most important stakeholder and feedback from citizens is extremely important and rightly valued [3].

Therefore, within the Digital Agenda website there is a dedicated section for citizens where they can express personal opinions regarding the progress of the Digital Agenda fulfillments, asking important questions with regards to expenses, timeline and resolutions and, most importantly offer feedback, suggestions and ideas for improvement.

One of the sections of the Digital Agenda website is dedicated to keeping the score of the amount of issues resolved out of the planned actions, thus keeping citizens informed.

Overall, progress on implementing the Digital Agenda actions has been quite impressive, seen as how:

- almost 10% of the actions have been completed;
- 80% are on track
- with the remaining 10% being delayed etc. [11].

### 2.2 The Digital Agenda "Debategraph" website

Also, independently from the Digital Agenda website, the citizen's right to information and knowledge is achieved through the Digital Agenda "debategraph" website ([http://debategraph.org/DAE#106828\\_5\\_\\_0](http://debategraph.org/DAE#106828_5__0)), an extremely interactive website that rises the citizen's interest and stimulates feedback.

As it can be easily inferred, the "debategraph" gets its name from the interactive online graphic that gets citizens to interact online and debate over various issues that concern them, thus creating an online environment that contributes to the constant improvement of the civil society's life.

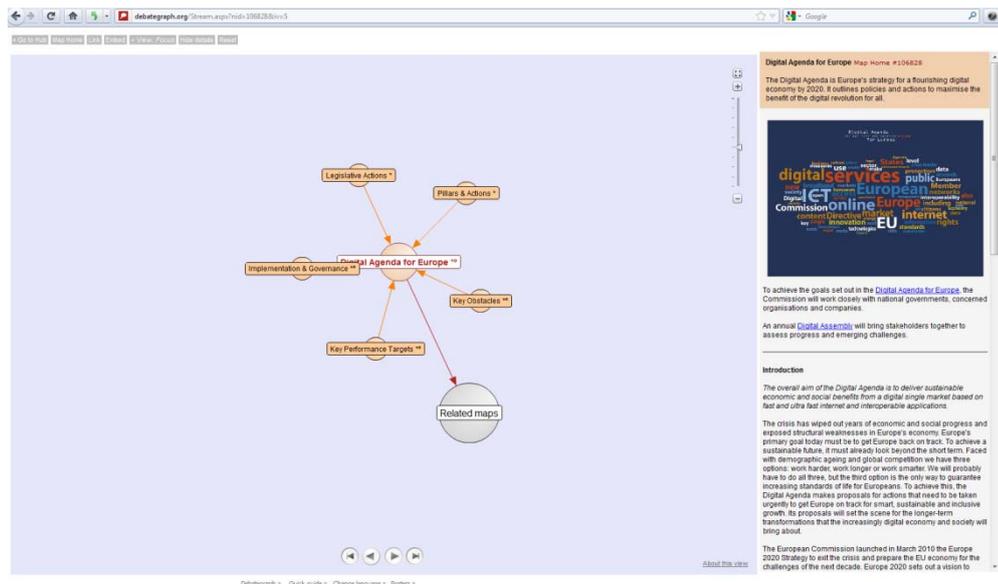


Figure 5. Source: <http://debategraph.org/Stream.aspx?nid=106828&iv=5>

### 3. Taking down digital cross - border barriers on e-services – the SPOCS Project

In the endless pursuit of taking down the digital barriers, the European Commission created special financing programmes such as the 2008 CIP ICT PSP Programme that comprises the five Large Scale Projects (LSP): epSOS, PEPPOL, STORK, e-CODEX and SPOCS. The LSP's were created in order to help member states functionalize their PSC's.

SPOCS – Simple Procedures Online for Cross-Border Services was a three-year pilot project financed by the European Commission which aimed to significantly facilitate life and increase transparency for Small and Medium sized Enterprises and citizens when they want to provide or use services in the single market [2].

The project consortium was composed of 34 partners, from 16 member states, including Romania, comprising of national public administrations, representatives thereof, local authorities, industries and universities, thus covering all walks of life. Representing Romania, the National Institute for Research and Development in Informatics - ICI Bucharest is the technical leader of Work Packages (WP) 1 and 4 (beginning July 1st 2012), thus developing the technical solutions that will eventually lead to the launch of the "Travel Agent" pilot. Also, representing Romania is the Centre for Advanced Studies on Electronic Services - e-CAESAR, an NGO funded by the Academy of Economic Studies and the Polytechnic University of Bucharest.

Building on compliancy with the Services Directive (CE/2006/123), SPOCS has been set up on the basis of the 2008 CIP ICT PSP Programme (project reference: 238935). The implementation of the Services Directive concerns a large variety of economic activities (about 70% of EU GDP and total employment) and requires important legislative changes in all Member States (MSs) and the undertaking of a number of ambitious projects, such as setting up the national "Points of Single Contact" (PSCs) - eGovernment portals for entrepreneurs active in the service sector and citizens [2]. For example, if a person wishes to open or extend a business abroad he/she has to travel to the city where he/she wants to expand the business, go to City Hall, the Trade Register, etc.. This means a waste of time and money and a lot of bureaucracy - applying for licenses, permits and completing other administrative procedures. With SPOCS, the entrepreneur can complete the formalities from his office, on-line, quickly and efficiently, only by filling-in the necessary forms and loading documents in electronic format.

In order to fulfill the administrative obligations and formalities in a uniform manner, SPOCS and its contributors, reuse key building blocks from other EU projects (such as STORK - Secure idenTityacrOssboRderslinKed and PEPPOL - Pan-European Public Procurement OnLine) and

build upon existing, interoperable standards, frameworks and national solutions to improve cross-border administrative processes. SPOCS will, therefore, be carried out in a transparent way to facilitate consensus by public administrations, their suppliers and partners, industry and standardization bodies without replacing national systems. The simplification measures foreseen by the SPOCS project should enhance the quality of completing electronic procedures for cross-border activities. The implemented project results will lead in reducing bureaucracy by electronic means, increasing transparency in the public sector, improving on-line services and generating benefits for global economic growth.

#### 4. Conclusions

In light of what has been analyzed in this paper we can appreciate that from a global perspective the situation requires new and improved strategies, due to the fact that only a staggering 23.6% "Figure 1" of the population uses Internet. From a strictly European perspective, there is a progress in the right direction seen as how a good percentage of 63.2 of the EU's population has and/or is using the Internet. Therefore, the Digital Agenda's pillars have good chances to be implemented within the foreseen timeframe, as already over half of the EU's population has access to on-line information systems.

#### 5. Acknowledgments

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