Benchmarking eGovernment in the Web 2.0 era: what to measure, and how

This paper is the result of ongoing personal discussions in blogs, electronic forums and meetings with experts and practitioners of eGovernment and web 2.0. It argues that the current methodology for measuring eGovernment progress developed by Cap Gemini Ernst & Young for the European Commission, which centres on the availability of online services, has served its purpose well, but it is now rapidly reaching the end of its usefulness.

In view of recent developments linked to web 2.0, this article proposes that transparency of public data should be considered as a flagship eGovernment initiative, just as "making services available online" was in a previous era. In order to support this proposal, it analyzes: the case for government transparency as a flagship goal; the degree of policy priority which is increasingly given to it; the originality of the idea with respect to the traditional debate on transparency and "open government"; and the possible benefits and drawbacks of transparency as a flagship initiative for eGovernment policy. It then puts forward a new simple and cost-effective method, based on the existing methods and using the model from CGEY, for measuring transparency. It focuses on 20 basic public data (such as law proposal, planning applications, beneficiaries of government subsidies, etc.) rather than 20 basic public services. Instead of measuring the four stages of online interactivity (from no information to transaction), it assesses the four stages of transparency and reusability of public data (from no information to reusable and machine-readable data).

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eGovernment progress, benchmarking, government transparency, measuring progress, methodology, method, evaluation

> **❝** If putting services online was the "flagship goal" of eGovernment policy in the web 1.0 era, what policy priority will play a similar role in the web 2.0 era? **❝**

1   Introduction

The rationale for this paper comes for the perception, personal to the author but also expressed by many stakeholders, that the current approach to measuring progress in eGovernment implementation is rooted in an old vision of eGovernment, which is now losing its relevance. A new approach to measuring progress in eGovernment is therefore proposed, which is in accordance with the recent Internet development called web 2.0.

This paper is rooted in the work carried out within IPTS, where the author was working at the time of writing, on the impact of web 2.0 on government. It was, however, completed outside any specific research project or official work and reflects only the opinion of the author.

The method for preparing this paper has some elements of originality, as it is the result of an ongoing conversation, articulated online through the author's blog,[1] and other discussion fora such as TheConnectedRepublic.com. The initial idea came from a discussion at the eGovernment Barcamp UK, organized in London on 26 January 2008.[2]

The paper starts with an overall assessment of the role played by benchmarking in eGovernment policies in the European context over recent years, outlining the reasons for its success. It then puts forward the hypothesis that transparency could take the place of "making services available online" as a flagship goal. It assesses whether transparency could play this role by analyzing it in comparison with the reasons for the success of the previous benchmarking. Finally, the paper presents a method for measuring transparency.

2   Background

In the European context, benchmarking is an important component of the "open method of coordination". In policy fields where the European Commission has no competence, as is the case with eGovernment, common policies and objectives are set on a voluntary basis, and implementation is ensured not by regulation but by peer pressure. Benchmarking is an important element of the open method of coordination, as the resulting rankings expose both the achievers and the laggards. Depending on the acceptance and exposure they receive, these rankings can have a significant impact on policy development.

The role of benchmarking in policy-making has often been questioned. The benefits lie in simplicity, accountability and capacity to influence policy. The drawbacks lie in over-simplification and the excessive focus on indicators and rankings, rather than on actual needs and benefits. This paper does not aim to discuss benchmarking in itself, though a wider discussion on pros and cons of benchmarking can be found in Osimo and Gareis 2005 and the discussion at "The Connected Republic".[3]

In the specific field of Information Society policy, the benchmarking exercise was carried out in the framework of the eEurope action plan, launched in 1999 (COM 1999/687). With regard to eGovernment, the eEurope plan made 'making public services available online' the key priority. It also called for appropriate measurement methods to accompany the implementation of the Action Plan. The measurement, developed by Cap Gemini Ernst & Young (CGEY) for the European Commission, has provided the most important data source for eGovernment achievement and comparison between countries. The methodology defined 5 stages of service sophistication, to be assessed for 20 public services defined as "basic". The assessment of each stage was then recalculated as a percentage of stage 4 (full online service availability, including payment and delivery). Thus, for each country, the average percentage across the 20 services constituted the service availability.

This benchmarking effort proved successful, and has been consistently used since its first implementation with very few changes. The results reached large audiences through policy documents and references made by policy makers, even at the national level. For example, at the latest EU ministerial conference on eGovernment (Lisbon 2007), the Portuguese Prime Minister announced his country's success in rising to

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[1] http://egov20.wordpress.com
[2] http://www.barcamp.org/BarcampUKGovweb
[3] http://www.theconnectedrepublic.org/forums/viewtopic.php?p=171

third position in the European rankings. It was also adopted in other contexts: for example, the Emilia-Romagna region used the method to measure the availability of public services in the regional context (Regione Emilia-Romagna 2005). Partly because of the benchmarking's success, and the subsequent desire of national policy makers to see their countries to rise in the rankings, and partly because of the clarity of the policy priority, making the service available online has become the eGovernment policy "flagship project", present in every eGovernment strategy at national and local levels. As a flagship project, it has been crucial to the overall development of eGovernment, as it has proved to be a successful catalyser of large IT investment throughout government: making services available online required government to invest in identity management systems, databases, payment platforms, workflow management systems, and more.

The reasons for the success of this benchmarking method are various. It is simple and straightforward, as the analysts place themselves in the position of citizens who have, for example, to submit tax declarations. Crucially, it is also quite cheap to implement, as data is collected directly through an analysis of the websites.

There are three reasons why this method is now insufficient for measuring the development of eGovernment:

- First of all, it addressed only one aspect of eGovernment, omitting other important aspects such as back office improvement, multi-channel delivery, eParticipation, usage and impact. The authors of the benchmarking analysis have been adamant about these limitations of the methodology (Wauters 2006; Capgemini 2007). Despite this, the effectiveness of this benchmarking method led to an excessive focus on service availability in setting eGovernment policy priorities with respect to the other mentioned policy areas, which lack similar measurement methods.

- Secondly, the rankings are now approaching the 100% level, indicating that the policy goals set in 1999 have been achieved, and differences between countries are, by definition, beginning to level up. As a result, the significance of benchmarking rankings for policy will diminish.

- Third, and most importantly, the focus on service delivery appears to belong to an old vision of eGovernment, a legacy from the "dotcom" boom of the late 90s, where the greatest impact of the Internet was perceived in transactional terms, similarly to eCommerce. Accordingly, the CGEY methodology considered "information" as a basic stage, and "transaction" as the most advanced stage. However, there is little evidence, and some skepticism, about whether this approach to eGovernment led to any actual benefit for users – first and foremost because available online services have been little used (Osimo 2008).

Instead of this transaction focus, recent Internet trends, namely web 2.0, provide a new and different emphasis on the importance of the "information" and "communication" dimension of ICT (Pascu 2007). As Pang (2005) puts it, "the brilliance of social-software applications like Flickr, Delicious, and Technorati is that they recognize that computers are really good at doing certain things, like working with gigantic quantities of data, and really bad at, for example, understanding the different meanings of certain words, like 'depression.' They devote computing resources in ways that basically enhance communication, collaboration, and thinking rather than trying to substitute for them".

Therefore, the problem appears to lie not only in benchmarking, but also in the outdated vision of eGovernment itself, crystallized in the benchmarking approach. The time seems ripe for a new vision (and a new "flagship goal") for eGovernment. Several recent reports confirm this need and try to outline a new vision such as "digital era governance" (Dunleavy's and Margestt, 2006), "connected governance" (UN 2008), "connected republic" (CISCO), or "e-governance" (Millard). So far, however, the details of these possible visions remain vague: they are not spelled-out enough to define a possible flagship initiative, to be measurable and to have a direct impact on policy priorities.

This debate also reflects an underlying ideological discussion on the desired model of government modernization. The "online services model" fits into the "new public management" approach, where ICT is seen as an enabler for a more business-like and efficient public administration. Criticisms of this implicit link between eGovernment policy and the new public management model, and arguments for a new "digital governance" vision, have been recently developed (Dunleavy, Margetts et al. 2006) .

In fact, raising the issue of a new benchmarking approach points to the wider need for a new eGovernment vision which focuses on the values of communication and information – something like an eGovernment 2.0

vision. If putting services online was the "flagship goal" of eGovernment policy in the web 1.0 era, what policy priority will play a similar role in the web 2.0 era?

3 The hypothesis

Based on discussion and analysis on the impact of web 2.0 in the government context (Osimo 2008), this paper aims to discuss whether TRANSPARENCY of public data could be this "flagship goal". In mathematical terms, this statement could be represented as follows:

online services: benchmarking egov1.0 = x : benchmarking egov2.0

x = transparency

To discuss this hypothesis, we analyze the key benefits of the current approach to benchmarking, and assess whether they apply to transparency as well.

The key benefits of measuring online service availability, as analysed above, have been the following:

– "making services available online" was perceived to have important benefits for citizens, in the same way that eCommerce was perceived to benefit consumers;

– it was the flagship initiative of eGovernment policies, because it was able to drive and catalyze overall eGovernment investment;

– it was a recognized policy priority;

– the measurement method was simple and cost effective.

We now analyze whether transparency could meet the same requirements, and propose a possible simple and cost-effective measurement method.

4 Why transparency matters in the Web 2.0 context?

One of the key features of web 2.0 is the reuse and mashing-up of data. For example, RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds allow website content to be published directly in other websites. Open API (Application Programming Interface) enables the reuse of data and the geo-reference with freely available tools such as GoogleMaps. As discussed in previous research (Osimo 2008), most web 2.0 projects build on the reuse of public data. Sites like PlanningAlerts.com, Theyworkforyou.com, Maplight.com, and everyblock.com all reuse public data to enhance government transparency, stimulate public participation, and facilitate people's everyday lives. Crucially, they re-organize the information in a way that is more USABLE by citizens.

The same research shows that the main recommendation by interviewed web 2.0 experts is to make public data available for re-use, which is still the main obstacle to the implementation of such innovative projects. The problems stated by the managers of these projects are:

– data is not publicly available

– data is not freely reusable and subject to license

– data is not available in a machine-readable format. Time-consuming human effort is needed to "clean" the data and make it re-usable.

Several recent studies emphasize the importance and impact of public information available on the Internet. Fariselli (Fariselli, Bojic et al. 2004) suggests that the CGEY scale of stages should be reversed, putting "information availability" at the top. Mayo and Steinberg (2007) stress how public information can be re-used by citizens to provide better services, and how citizens themselves can be important sources of information and advice. PEW (2008) emphasizes the crucial role citizens attribute to the information available on the internet in solving everyday problems linked to government.

In short, there is growing scientific consensus that public information, if made freely available over the Internet for re-use, can be not only a business opportunity but also a source of public value.

5   Can transparency be a flagship for eGovernment policy?

Besides being important, for transparency to be the new flagship of eGovernment, it has to be able to drive and catalyze eGovernment policies, in a similar way that "making services available online" did. There are several reasons for this.

First of all, transparency exposes government behaviour to citizens' scrutiny. In doing so, and in combination with existing free tools for publishing and collaboration, it enables citizens to reduce information asymmetries, monitor government performance and expose inefficiencies, thereby stimulating innovation.

For example, the public availability of hospital ratings (citizen-generated such as PatientOpinion or government-generated such as hospital mortality rates) can expose problems and inefficiencies, and stimulate policy attention. Citizens cannot choose how public money is distributed to farmers, but the publication of these data through Farmsubsidy.org allows citizens to better understand and monitor how this money is spent.

If we adopt Hirschman´s concepts, transparency enables VOICE mechanisms, especially important in a government context where there is often no EXIT possibility (Hirschman 1970). When EXIT is available, for example, when parents can choose between different schools, the impact is ever more relevant. As information asymmetries are reduced, it can be assumed that parents will choose the best schools, and the less good schools will be pushed to improve their services. Furthermore, by exposing internal bottlenecks and resistance, transparency can support the innovative civil servants inside government.

However, there are also important OBJECTIONS to be taken into account. The first objection is that full transparency could hinder the privacy of both citizens and civil servants. There is clearly a need to keep a good balance, but there is also considerable scope for enhancing transparency without touching privacy issues, either in terms of the kind of data to be made available or in terms of the level of aggregation/ anonymity at which they are provided.
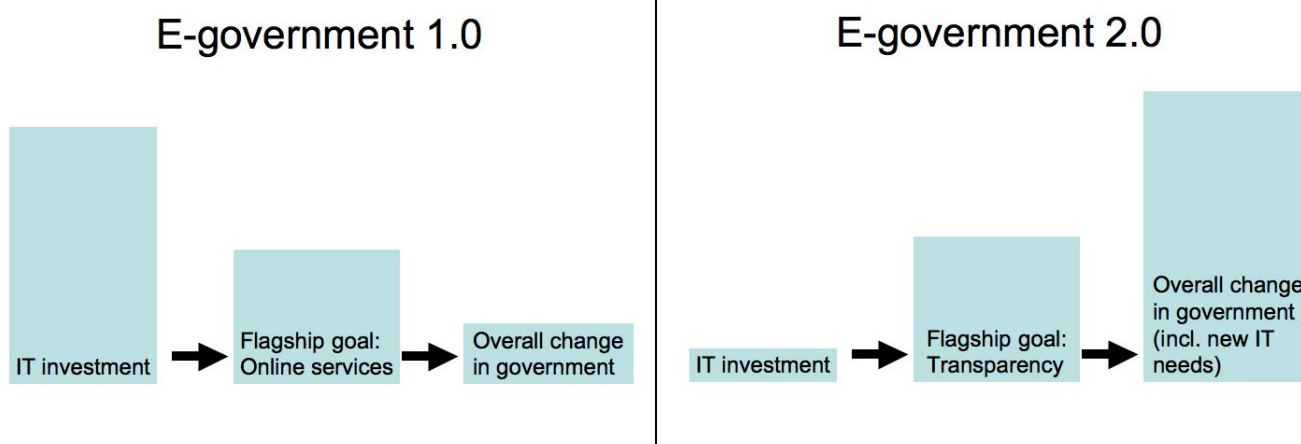
A second objection is that citizens are not as interested in public policy and in government's internal functioning as they are in receiving decent services at a fair cost. While this could be true, web 2.0 allows for leveraging different forms of user engagement, and is able to build public value for many people out of the proactive engagement of a few (Osimo 2008).

Third, as we have seen, "online public services" has constituted an effective flagship project because they have catalyzed diverse and large areas of IT investment. From a technological perspective, making services available online meant investing in databases, middle-ware, authentication, and work-flow management systems. They also required better structuring of internal processes, although there is little evidence that this has produced a significant reorganization of government internal functioning.

On the other hand, the technological requirements of transparency are much more limited: cleaning up public data, some investment in content management and maybe work-flow management systems. Therefore, transparency in itself cannot be a catalyst for IT investment in government, in the same way that online services have been. On the other hand, the emphasis on enhancing accountability and exposing inefficiencies is likely to generate a more substantial impact on government innovation and reform. It could therefore have a positive impact on overall government innovation, indirectly stimulating the necessary IT investment.

The IT investment required for making transparency happen is quite small. But the IT investment induced by increasing transparency can be much more significant. We visualize this statement in the following figure:

E-government 1.0

IT investment → Flagship goal: Online services → Overall change in government

E-government 2.0

IT investment → Flagship goal: Transparency → Overall change in government (incl. new IT needs)

To sum up, transparency, which enhances accountability and choice, can be a powerful driver, a catalyst and a flagship for "transformational government", rather than for "eGovernment" only.

6 What is new?

Government transparency is by no means a new issue. It has been the subject of policy action for three centuries, and substantial literature has been written on the topic. The first laws on access to public documents were implemented in 18th century Sweden. Over the last 20 years, most OECD countries have adopted ¨freedom of information laws¨ that allow access to public documents as a fundamental right. "Open government" has been a buzzword for many years, and on a more light-hearted note, it was already a subject of irony in the 80s. For example, the first episode of the BBC comedy "Yes, Minister" was entitled "Open Government".

However, it seems that policy attention is growing. "OECD countries are moving from a situation where government chose what it revealed, to a principle of all government information being available unless there is a defined public interest in it being withheld" (OECD 2005). In 2007-2008, the Council of Europe is debating a ¨European convention on access to official documents¨.

Why should we take transparency as key driver of government innovation today? There are some specific novelties that make transparency particularly important now.

a) the wide AVAILABILITY OF WEB TOOLS to elaborate on public data makes the impact of transparency much bigger. Just think of free publishing platforms such as blogs, mash-ups like GoogleEarth, visualization tools like ManyEyes, plus all the free and open source software used in web 2.0 projects to, for example, distribute the work of monitoring government activities between many people (crowdsourcing). These tools make public data much more relevant and understandable – and enhance the impact of transparency.

b) the concept of MANY-TO-MANY (Pascu, Osimo et al. 2007) changes the power relationship. Before, transparency was an issue of the individual citizens versus the government, and this limited the impact of the information obtained. Now, the first thing a citizen does when he obtains interesting information out of a Freedom of Information request, is to post it on the web – see, for example, what happened in Italy with the information on the cost of the Tourism portal. The refusal by the Italian government to disclose the information became a boomerang once published on IT blogs,[4] and the bureaucratic answer became a monument to inward-looking government. Indeed, even Freedom of Information requests are now monitored by non-governmental services such as whatdotheyknow.com.

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[4] http://punto-informatico.it/p.aspx?i=2124310

These two novelties imply that modern transparency requirements include the possibility to re-use the public data. Furthermore, the choice over the degree of government transparency is no longer up to government only.

It is also worth noting that this emphasis on information transparency goes back to the original values of eGovernment, just as web 2.0 goes back to the original values of the Internet. The original eEurope action plan emphasized transparency as a key area of eGovernment activity.

7   Is transparency a recognized policy priority?

For transparency to become the key topic of the benchmarking effort, it has to be recognized as a top policy priority. This concept is now starting to permeate the policy discourse at the highest levels. In recent months, in the UK, both the conservative leader, David Cameron, and the Labour ¨Transformational Government¨ Minister, Tom Watson, made speeches that fully embraced the values of data re-use:

¨*Less than a decade ago, people were just recipients of information, they got what they were given, when they were given it. Today, the most successful websites are those that bring together content created by the people who use them*¨*:* (Tom Watson)[5]

¨*We will require local authorities to publish this information - about the services they provide, council meetings and how councillors vote – online and in a standardized format*¨*:* (David Cameron)[6]

The Technology Plan of presidential candidate Barack Obama, in the US, goes in the same direction: *"Making government data available online in universally accessible formats to allow citizens to make use of that data to comment, derive value, and take action in their own communities".*[7]

This policy priority is spelled out by top politicians only in the Anglo-Saxon countries, probably because of their more mature Internet economies, and their long traditions of Freedom of Information. However, in the European context, government transparency is one of the key priorities of eGovernment policies, for example as stated in the recent 2007 Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment. And outside the eGovernment domain, transparency initiatives are in place in most national governments, and at the European level through the Transparency Initiative.[8]

8   How transparency is defined and measured: a review of existing experiences

In developing a new method for benchmarking eGovernment, we try to build as much as possible on what is already available in measuring government transparency. We here review the following initiatives:

–   the Open Budget Index[9]

–   the Transparency league table of Farmsubsidy[10]

Furthermore, we look at three non-governmental initiatives that aim to promote transparency by defining an ideal format of government data:

–   the Open Data Principles

–   the Transparency Government Act proposed by the Sunlight Foundation

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[5]
http://www.publictechnology.net/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=14681&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0
[6] http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=142659&speeches=1
[7] http://cairns.typepad.com/blog/2007/11/barack-obama-un.html
[8] http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/kallas/transparency_en.htm
[9] http://www.openbudgetindex.org/
[10] http://www.farmsubsidy.org

- the Free Our Bills Campaign launched by mySociety.org

The Open Budget Index is an initiative led by a consortium of NGOs. In 2006, they developed a system to measure the transparency of the budget in 59 countries. Based on a questionnaire survey, and on analysis of the policy documents, they rate countries according to their transparency. The measurement is organized through a set of "stages" of availability of documents:

A. Not produced, even for internal purposes
B. Produced for internal purposes, but not available to the public
C. Produced and available to the public, but only on request
D. Produced and distributed to the public (for example, in libraries, posted on the Internet.)

This methodology appears interesting, especially for developing countries, but it only relates to budget documents and it is expensive as it involves questionnaire surveys (rather than website surveys). Also, the final index is too complex, as it is a compound indicator which is always more subject to dispute.

Farmsubsidy.org, a website which publishes the information on the funding distributed by the Common Agricultural Policy, has developed a transparency scorecard to rank the country according to the transparency shown in providing information. The method is extremely relevant in this context, although arguably too complex, as it assesses transparency through 25 different criteria, including geographical breakdown, website usability, completeness of the data, timeliness and others.[11] The results are reproduced in the table.

Transparency League Table

	Country	Score	Problems
1st	Sweden	81%	Data lacks some minor details and contains errors
2nd	Slovenia	64%	Data lacks many details such as location
2nd	Denmark	64%	Data lacks some details
4th	Slovakia	54%	Data lacks many details such as location
5th	Netherlands	51%	Data lacks many details such as location
5th	Estonia	51%	Data lacks many details such as location
7th	Portugal	46%	Data lacks many details such as location
8th	Czech Republic	40%	Data lacks many details such as location
9th	United Kingdom	36%	Data lacks many details such as location and scheme information
9th	Belgium	36%	Data lacks key details such as location
11th	Latvia	34%	Data lacks many details such as location
12th	Poland	27%	Limited data released on the web
13th	Italy	25%	Data lacks many details such as location and is very poor quality
14th	Spain	22%	Data is very poor quality

Recently, a high-level group of web 2.0 practitioners met to define the key principles of open data. They spelled out 8 criteria for public administration to follow in treating public data:[12]

"1. Complete: All public data is made available. Public data is data that is not subject to valid privacy, security or privilege limitations.

2. Primary: Data is as it was when it was collected at source, with the highest possible level of granularity, not in aggregate or modified forms.

3. Timely: Data is made available as quickly as necessary to preserve the value of the data.

4. Accessible: Data is available to the widest range of users for the widest range of purposes.

5. Machine processable: Data is reasonably structured to allow automated processing.

6. Non-discriminatory: Data is available to anyone, with no requirement for registration.

7. Non-proprietary: Data is available in a format over which no entity has exclusive control.

8. License-free: Data is not subject to any copyright, patent, trademark or trade secrets regulation. Reasonable privacy, security and privilege restrictions may be allowed."

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[11] http://www.farmsubsidy.org/Data_quality%3A_the_good%2C_the_bad_and_the_ugly/280907
[12] http://public.resource.org/8_principles.html

This was followed up by specific policy initiatives to implement these principles. In the US, the Sunlight Foundation has launched a discussion and a campaign for a bill on "Transparency Government Act 2008", which is described as ¨a broad legislative effort intended to make the work of Congress and the executive branch more transparent by creating laws and regulations that would bring more information online and available to the public in a timely manner".[13]

In the UK, mySociety.org has just launched a campaign "Free our bills", which asks the Parliament to release data on bills under discussion in machine readable XML format.[14]

We here set the 8 principles as the ideal stage of eGovernment 2.0, in the same way that full online services availability was for eGovernment 1.0.

9   How to measure government transparency? A new proposal

In view of all this, the proposal tries to combine the simplicity and feasibility of the CGEY approach with the new values of web 2.0. It substitutes ¨basic public services¨ with "basic public data". It proposes 4 stages of data availability, rather than of service sophistication.

CGEY benchmarking method	Benchmarking eGovernment 2.0
Basic public services (exemplary list):[15] – income taxes – social contribution for employees – job search – corporate tax – social security benefits – VAT – personal documents	20 basic public data such as: – beneficiaries of public funding (agriculture, EU structural funds, etc); – draft legislation; – planning applications; – air pollution data – MPs votes – party donations – citizens feedback / satisfaction surveys – external consultancies
For each service, assess to what extent the data are available on the web: **Stage 0** - no information available **Stage 1** - Information: The information necessary to start the procedure to obtain this public service is available on-line. **Stage 2** - One-way Interaction: The publicly accessible website offers the possibility to download forms. **Stage 3** - Two-way Interaction: The publicly accessible website offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form **Stage 4** - Full electronic case handling: The publicly accessible website offers the possibility to deal with the public service entirely via the website, including decision and delivery.	For each type of data, assess to what extent these information are available on the web: **0** - no information available **1** - description of the procedure to obtain the information through FOI **2** - information available in non reusable, non-machine readable format **3** - information available in reusable and machine readable format such as xml or dbase **4** - information available as per stage 3 and visualizable through predefined tools (georeferencing, hystogram etc.
Generate average data availability for each country	Generate average data availability for each country

For reasons of simplicity and feasibility, we intentionally excluded from this assessment all criteria pertaining to the quality of the data, because its assessment would be extremely time-consuming, and subject to dispute and subjective qualitative assessment. Also, we added visualization features, which are useful for a better understanding of data. Of course, in many cases this re-elaboration and visualization of government data is carried out by non-governmental websites such as farmsubsidy.org, but such services are best

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[13] http://publicmarkup.org/bill/transparency-government-act-2008/
[14] http://www.theyworkforyou.com/freeourbills/techy
[15] For the full list see Capgemini (2007)

practices not always available in every country. There could be a role for government to develop such applications, so long as the needs for subsidiarity with civil society initiatives are taken into account.

Here is an example of how a benchmarking model of this type could work:

	country x	country y	country z	service average	average as %
beneficiaries of public funding (agriculture, EU structural funds, etc);	1 (information on procedure to obtain the data)	4	2	2,3	58%
draft legislation;	2 (information available in non-reusable format (e.g. pdf)	3	3	2,7	67%
planning applications;	3 (informationon available in reusable format e.g. XML)	1	2	1,3	33%
air pollution data	4 (information available and made accessible by visualization tools e.g. geo-referenced)	0	4	2,3	58%
MPs votes	1	0	4	2,7	67%
party donations	1	0	1	0,7	17%
citizens feedback / satisfaction surveys	0	2	3	1,7	42%
external consultancies	0	1	2	1,0	25%
country average	1,5	1,4	2,6	1,8	46%
average in %	38%	34%	66%	46%	

Beside the wider objective of impact on government transformation, described above, additional benefits of this benchmarking model are:

– for the civil society and citizens, it provides an incentive for governments to make information available online, by making transparency available across their countries.

– for the policy makers, it provides a new assessment framework in line with recent evolution of the Internet and societal trends, and it stimulates government innovation and reform.

10 Conclusions and next steps

This paper has assessed the hypothesis that the next phase of benchmarking eGovernment would be about benchmarking transparency and availability of public data. It reached the conclusion that transparency could be a driver and catalyst not only for eGovernment policy but also for overall government transformation. It then proposes a feasible and cost-effective methodology for measuring transparency.

This first proposal is intended to initiate reflection. The nature of the proposal is such, especially in the web 2.0 context, that it needs discussion and continuous improvement. Ideally, it would have to be discussed in three different circles. In eGovernment circles, discussion should assess whether transparency could be considered the flagship initiative of eGovernment, and which public data should be selected as "basic". Then web 2.0 practitioner circles must assess whether this approach is ¨good enough¨ to measure, and stimulate, government transparency. Last but not least, researchers should discuss (hopefully with better evidence) whether transparency will have this transformative impact on government activities.

In other words, this could be considered a ¨beta version¨ of benchmarking 2.0. Discussion is necessary, but because of the low cost of implementation, and in the true spirit of ¨beta¨, a pilot could be carried out now. Finally, this paper also addresses the use benchmarking to stimulate ¨higher¨ reflection on a new vision for eGovernment in the web 2.0 era.

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