Mine's Bigger than Yours: Assessing International eGovernment Benchmarking

Davy Janssen
Department of Political Science – Public Management, University of Antwerp

Davy.Janssen@ua.ac.be

Abstract
In this paper I present a conceptualisation of eGovernment in a framework that consists of five domains. In a next step, I will confront this framework with the two most cited international eGovernment benchmarking studies in order to assess the scope of the eGovernment definitions that are used by these studies. A closer look at the studies' methodology will result in seven points of criticism. The main question to which I try to find an answer is the following: in what way does the attention (of both policy-makers and the media) for eGovernment benchmarking studies possibly influence or frustrate the future development of eGovernment?

Keywords: eGovernment, benchmarking, methodology

1. The framework

This paper's main objective is to analyse two of the most well-known eGovernment benchmarking studies in order to find out how 'good practice' eGovernment is defined and evaluated. The resulting overview of what constitutes eGovernment according to these studies will be confronted with a more theoretical, analytical framework that gives an overview of what an interpretation of eGovernment can *possibly* include. This framework will be introduced here briefly, and in the conclusion of this paper I will return to it to find out if the benchmarking studies' interpretation of eGovernment can provide a incentive to the further development of a future eGovernment. This is the framework[1]:

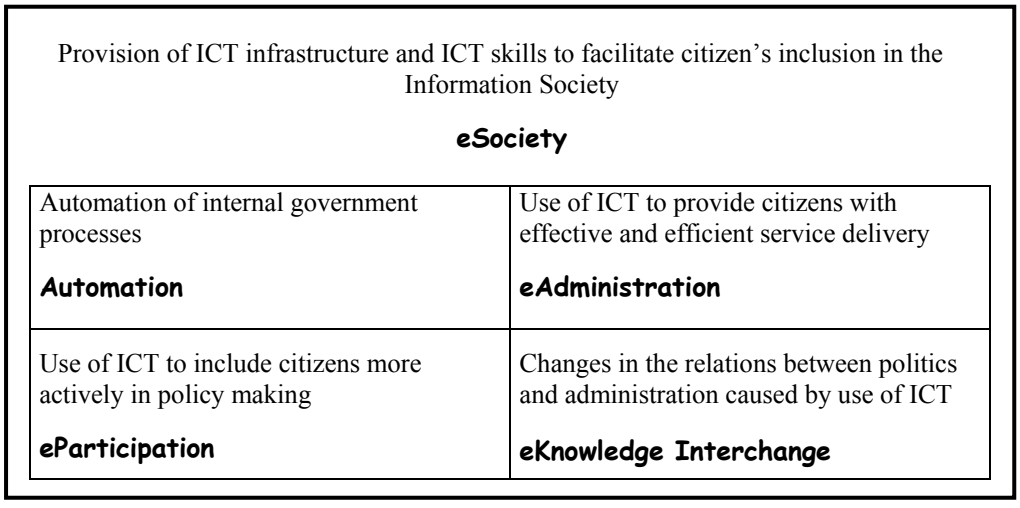

Figure 1. The five eGovernment domains

The five components of the framework can be understood as 'building blocks'. I do not argue that all building blocks have to be included in a definition of eGovernment. Rather, this

[1] Rotthier, S. & L. Lemeire (2003). *eGovernment: a blueprint for a long term vision*. Work in progress.

framework allows both for a 'narrow definition' of eGovernment that would, for example, only include the eAdminstration (=eService delivery) building block, and for a 'broad definition' that would include all building blocks. Considering that this framework is not the main subject of this paper, I will not discuss it in any further detail. Besides, I will return to it in the paper's conclusion.

2. The Benchmarking Studies

2.1. eEurope eGovernment benchmarking

2.1.1. The eEurope initiative

The objective of the European Union's eEurope initiative, a broad action program for the information society, is to make sure the EU will be 'the most dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010'. The program is monitored by the *eEurope benchmarking project*, consisting of 23 indicators divided into three sets. These indicators do not only measure eGovernment, but try to frame the member countries' economical, social and technological progress in terms of readiness for the information society. The three sets of indicators clearly indicate this broad scope. There are indicators for:

- Set 1 (indicators 1-6): Cheaper, faster, secure internet
- Set 2 (indicators 7-15): Investing in people and skills
- Set 3 (indicators 16-23): Stimulate the use of the internet

The scope of the actual EU *eGovernment benchmarking* is much more narrow and comprises of two 'set 3' indicators, viz:

- Indicator 17 (*i*17): Percentage of basic public services available on-line
- Indicator 18 (*i*18): Public use of government on-line services

These indicators complement each other since *i*17 measures the supply of online service delivery and *i*18 measures its demand. For the operationalisation of *i*18, an existing statistic of the Eurobarometer could be used, viz. the "% of internet users that visit eGovernment websites". Because no existing statistics could be used for the operationalisation of *i*17, *Cap Gemini Ernst & Young* (CGE&Y) was commissioned to develop a survey methodology to measure the online availability of public services. The resulting bi-annual *Web-based Survey on Electronic Public Services* has become the main EU instrument to compare the success of the member countries' eGovernment policy. It has also been recognised as such by the media and by top-level policy makers.

2.1.2. The methodology of the CGE&Y Web-based Survey on Electronic Public Services

In order for this survey to be able to measure the '% of basic public services available online', a consensus on which services constitute a set of *basic* public services is required. The EU member countries have indeed completed this exercise of prioritising eGovernment services and have come up with the following list of basic public services (BPS):

Basic Public Services	
Services for citizens	Services for business
• income taxes • job search • social security benefits • personal documents • car registration • building permission • declaration to the police • public libraries • certificates • enrolment in higher education • announcement of moving • health related services	• social contributions • corporate tax • value added taxes • company registration • statistical data • customs declarations • environment-related permits • public procurement

Figure 2. Basic public services according the eEurope/CGE&Y benchmarking study

For each of these 20 BPS the highest (relevant) level of implementation is determined using a classification scheme that consists of the following four 'degrees of interactivity':

- Stage 1 *Information*: online information about public services
- Stage 2 *Interaction*: downloading of forms
- Stage 3 *Two-way interaction*: processing of forms, including authentication
- Stage 4 *Transaction*: case handling, decision and delivery, including payment

CGE&Y employees took on the role of citizens and business, searched the web for the online presence of eGovernment facilities (for the 20 BSP) in member countries, and performed a web-analysis to establish the degree of interactivity of each of the services. The interactivity scores range from 1 (information) to 4 (transaction). As, for some public services, the maximum degree of interactivity is stage 3, stage 4 not being relevant, the score per public service is recalculated as a percentage of the maximum. The resulting percentage of basic public services online is calculated as follows:

- (score BPS 1/max BPS1) + (score BPS 2/max BPS2) + …. + (score BPS 20/max BPS 20)

2.2. Accenture eGovernment benchmarking

2.2.1. eGovernment Leadership – Realizing the Vision

In contrast with the CGE&Y study, ordered by the European Commission, Accenture set up its annual eGovernment study on its own initiative. The study under consideration here is the 2002 *eGovernment Leadership – Realizing the Vision* report, Accenture's third annual eGovernment benchmarking report. For this report, 23 countries were selected for qualitative and quantitative research on their eGovernment progress. The quantitative analysis is comparable to that of the eEurope study and will be analysed in the next paragraph. The qualitative part of the research can be seen as an 'extra' that increases the readability of the report and illustrates the quantitative data.

2.2.2. The methodology of the Accenture study

The main statistic of the Accenture study is the so-called *Overall eGovernment Maturity* (OEM), which measures the quality of a country's eGovernment policy. The OEM consists of two measures, the *Service Maturity* component and the *Customer Relationship* component. They are defined as follows:

- *Service Maturity* component (SM): measures the level in which a government has developed an online presence. This component gets a weighing of 0,7 in the OEM.
- *Customer Relationship Management* component (CRM): measures the degree of sophistication of service delivery. This component gets a weighing of 0,3 in the OEM
- *Overall eGovernment Maturity* = 0,7 SM + 0,3 CR

The SM and CRM components can themselves be broken down even further. The *Service Maturity* component takes into account the number of services for which national governments are responsible that are available online (SM Breadth), and the level of completeness with which each service is offered (SM Depth).

- *Service Maturity* = SM Breadth * SM Depth
- *SM Breadth* = services available online / services for which national government is responsible
- *SM Depth* = level of completeness of service delivery
    - Publication: no communication between government and user.
    - Interaction: user communicates with government.
    - Transaction: user communicates with government and government can respond electronically.

The *Customer Relationship Management* component is a measure of the sophistication of service delivery. There are five measures of CRM: Insight, Interaction, Organization Performance, Customer Offerings and Networks.

- *Customer Relationship Management* = Is * It * O * C * N
- *Insight* (Is): the degree to which websites recognise their users and use that information to offer a more tailored service.
- *Interaction* (It): the degree to which different services are accessible via a single site (or a small amount of sites).
- *Organization Performance* (O): the degree to which a website is intentions-based. The degree to which the services are organized around the citizen, as opposed to around internal government structures.
- *Customer Offerings* (C): the degree to which a website can identify services or can help or advice automatically depending upon the circumstances of the citizen.
- *Networks* (N): the degree to which government services are bundled with other non-governmental services to provide added value to the citizen.

The ***Overall eGovernment Maturity*** (OEM) measure, the main statistic that is presented in the Accenture study, is thus calculated as follows:

- **OEM** = 0,7 [SM Breadth * SM Depth] + 0,3 [Is * It * O * C * M]

With regard to the selection of countries, the approach of the Accenture study differs from that of the eEurope study. In the latter, the EU member countries constitute the obvious

country selection. The Accenture study, however, chooses to select 23 countries. Not much explanation is given for this selection, other than the fact that the majority of the countries also featured in the previous benchmark study. When looking at the types of government services under consideration, the Accenture approach clearly differs from the eEurope approach in terms of scope. Where the eEurope study selected 20 basic public services, the Accenture study selects 169 national government services. These are services national governments *may* offer, and they are categorized in 9 service sectors.

Accenture's Service Sectors
• Human Services • Justice and Public Safety • Revenue • Defence • Education • Transport and Motor Vehicles • Regulation and Democracy • Procurement • Postal

Figure 3. Accenture's nine service sectors

Finally, Accenture's approach to presenting its results needs some clarification. The presentation of the scores of the OEM for the 23 countries results in a country ranking. Accenture has chosen to cluster the country results under four headings that give a qualitative evaluation of the countries' state of eGovernment. These are the four headings:

- *Innovative Leaders*: OEM > 50%
- *Visionary Challengers*: 40% < OEM < 50%
- *Emerging Performers*: 30% < OEM < 40%
- *Platform Builders*: OEM < 30%

3. The critique

The first and most fundamental critique of both studies, is that they only measure the 'supply' of eGovernment applications as the criterion for a successful eGovernment. Both *i*17 (% public services online) and the OEM index only quantify a country's finished eGovernment applications and say nothing about the actual use or take-up rate (the 'demand' side). It seems only logical though that an indication of eGovernment take-up would be included as a criterion for a successful eGovernment. Nevertheless, the two studies under consideration fail to include such a component in their eGovernment index[2]. It has to be said however, that the eEurope eGovernment benchmarking study of *i*17 is complemented by the results of the measurement of *i*18. As has been explained above, the eEurope initiative is much broader in scope than eGovernment and comprises of 23 indicators. Indicator *i*18 measures the percentage of internet users visiting eGovernment websites and thus reveals some information on take-up rates. When presented together, *i*17 and *i*18 provide for a more balanced evaluation of a country's eGovernment success. The problem is, however, that the bi-annual CGE&Y study that measures *i*17 is much more widely known by policy-makers

[2] The consultants of Taylor Nelson Sofres provide for an alternative here, for their annual global report *Government Online – An International Perspective*, does centre on citizen take-up. They state it as follows: 'this study is unique in that it examines the uptake of Government Online from a citizen demand perspective'.

and the media. As soon as the study appears, the media pick it up and evaluate their country's eGovernment program solely based on the 'supply' oriented CGE&Y study, without mentioning *i*18 results. This often results in short articles with catchy titles like: 'Country X lags behind in eGovernment' or 'Country Y takes lead in international eGovernment race'. The problem is that these articles are about the only information the public gets on eGovernment from the mainstream media (twice a year), so they are extremely important for politicians. My guess is that politicians too often develop their eGovernment policy based on the desire for a more favourable press coverage.

A second criticism concerns the definition of eGovernment that is used. Both studies define eGovernment as 'online service delivery'. The framework presented in the first paragraph, however, clearly indicates that eGovernment can be defined with a much broader scope. The benchmark studies only focus on the 'eAdministration' component. What immediately catches the eye is that no indicator for eParticipation is included. In my view, eGovernment is the use of ICT in government with the aim of delivering better services to citizens/businesses (eAdministration/eService Delivery) and with the aim of engaging citizens more actively in policy making (eParticipation). There is, however, no consensus on this, as several scholars and practitioners choose not to include eParticipation under the heading of eGovernment. The criticism is therefore not so much that eParticipation is not included, but rather that there is a lack of explicit references to the way in which eGovernment is defined. A more fundamental critique concerns a further restriction of the scope, not to service delivery, but to *online* service delivery. There might not be a consensus on the (non-)inclusion of eParticipation criteria, but there is definitely agreement on the fact that the internet will not be the only medium for eGovernment applications. Bridging the digital divide is a main concern for a socially inclusive eGovernment policy, and most countries therefore choose a multi-channel access approach in which the internet, digital tv, the telephone, and the physical counter feature as different access channels for bringing information and services to citizens. Therefore, when assessing eGovernment, it seems only fair to take into account countries' efforts at developing such an inclusive policy. Both benchmarking studies under consideration fail to do that and give an elitist eGovernment policy the same score as a socially inclusive one. Again, assuming policy makers predominantly want to score well in these studies, a multi-channel access approach might not be their main concern.

A third criticism focuses on the twin dichotomy results/process benchmarking and front-office/back-office. The benchmarking approach of the studies under consideration is clearly that of results benchmarking. What is measured, are eGovernment applications that are 'up and running' on the internet. What this means in effect, is that countries that have a majority of their eGovernment applications still in the pipeline, will receive a poor score in year x and will make an enormous jump in the ranking in year x+1 when the applications are implemented. When policy makers feel pressure to score well in next year's study, they might therefore be inclined to push through certain realisations, thereby disregarding the quality of the process by which they are developed. When the explicit aim of a benchmarking exercise is to learn from good practices in other countries, a benchmarking of processes might be more instructive than a benchmarking of results. Certainly because in the case of a 'new' development in government, like eGovernment, the quality of processes is extremely important[3]. The results-oriented approach of both benchmarking studies clearly moves the focus of attention to the front-office, this being the 'place' where results are visible for end-

[3] The fact that the existing benchmarking studies are indeed results-oriented is not conducive to an understanding of eGovernment benchmarking as learning exercises, but instead immediately draws the attention to the element of contest: mine's bigger than yours!

users. This leads to a quite paradoxical situation: on the one hand there is a consensus among eGovernment practitioners and scholars alike that effective information flows in an integrated back-office (processes) constitute the *conditio sine qua non* for a successful eGovernment, but on the other hand it seems that the instruments for evaluating this eGovernment do not share the concern for qualitative eGovernment processes and instead only measure results. Again, because of the wide popular attention for the country results of benchmarking studies, there is a danger that policy maker's attention will shift to front-office results instead of back-office processes.

A fourth criticism concerns the methodology used to arrive at the respective eGovernment indexes. The CGE&Y/eEurope methodology seems quite straightforward and parsimonious. The index is the 'percentage of basic public services available online' and that is also what is measured. The only refinement to the 'available online' premise is a simple 1 to 4 scale measuring the degree of interactivity. The Accenture methodology for establishing their *Overall eGovernment Maturity* index is less parsimonious and seems a bit over the top. Where it took less than one page to describe the eEurope methodology (2.1.2), it took nearly two to describe the Accenture methodology (2.2.2), only to end with an impressive looking formula: OEM = 0,7 [SM Breath * SM Depth] + 0,3 [Is * It * O * C * M]. In my opinion, this is a bit far fetched and arbitrary, especially the CRM component (the second one, weighed at 0,3). The first part of the equation, the *Service Maturity* component, is actually quite comparable to the eEurope index: both measure the online presence and the degree of interactivity of an eGovernment service. The *Customer Relationship Management* component, however, seems more problematic. The 2002 *eGovernment Leadership – Realizing the Vision* report is Accenture's third annual eGovernment benchmarking study. The annual studies' objective is to chart eGovernment progress: a country's score in year x can be compared with its score in x+1 and x+2. In order for such a comparison to be statistically plausible, a comparable research methodology should be used for each measurement. This does not seem to be the case however: both the first and the second annual study did not have a CRM component. The second study did feature a 'related' component, viz. the *Delivery Maturity* component, also weighed at 0,3. A closer look at this component, however, reveals a different composition in which there is no reference to the five 'building blocks' (Is, It, O, C, M) of the CRM component in the third annual study. In addition to this problem of longitudinal comparability, there is the issue of Accenture's stakes as a consultant. An often heard criticism concerning the attitude of consultants towards government reform is that they try to introduce their own terminology and concepts that have already extensively been used in the sector of eCommerce. This is certainly the case for CRM, which is presented as an entirely new concept but in effect is only a different name for a personalised, citizen oriented, approach to service delivery that has been promoted by modern approaches to government reform for several decades. The motivation for the prominent inclusion of a CRM component, therefore, might have something to do with consultants looking for a new market for their consultation activities[4]. A final remark on the Accenture study concerns the four 'labels' under which the different countries are placed. It is not very clear why the boundaries (above 50%, between 40% and 50%, between 30% and 40%, beneath 30%) delineating the different 'quality labels' are established as they are. They are, nevertheless, crucial for a country's evaluation of its eGovernment policy: the labels

[4] This argument becomes even more convincing when one realises that Accenture performs these annual studies, not commissioned by someone, but on their own initiative. When considering the often exuberate amount of money consultants ask for commissioned research, there has to be some reason (but maybe it's only for the corporate image) why the eGovernment benchmarks are freely distributed as soon as they appear.

have a quit normative ring to them and it matters a lot in terms of appreciation if a country is an 'innovative leader' or a 'visionary challenger'.

A fifth, quite fundamental critique of both benchmarking studies, concerns the perverse side-effects of the 'degree of interactivity' component, presented as a four-points scale (information, interaction, two-way interaction, transaction) in the eEurope study and as a three-points scale (publication, interaction, transaction) in the Accenture study The desired end-state for the interactivity of eGovernment applications in both studies is some form of transaction. The problem is that this evaluation criterion of what constitutes good eGovernment applications, is actually quit 'conservative' because it takes for granted notions of successful eGovernment that are possibly quite temporary. It takes the logic of the administration as a starting point (not the 'citizen-centred' logic) when it states that the most governments can do is provide a good transaction between existing government departments and citizens. Real innovative, transformative eGovernment thinking, however, should be capable of leaving the well-known interpretation and appreciation schemes, and should be able to make an analysis of what eGovernment can mean for citizens without being hindered by the limitations of the current government organisation. For example, there is a problem with 'one-stop-shop' and 'zero-stop-shop' solutions. Suppose country A chooses to 'digitize' its procedure for requesting a copy of a birth certificate from the central register. When someone wants to get married, she would normally have to go to the city were she was born to get a copy of her birth certificate, and she would then have to present this document in the city where she wants to get married. When country A digitized this procedure, our soon-to-be-married girl would no longer have to make the trip to her city of birth but will be able to request the copy of her birth certificate online on some 'one-stop-shop' portal site that offers different kinds of transactional services. This eGovernment application would get the highest score (transaction) on the 'degree of interactivity' component of both eGovernment indexes, and is consequently branded as a good practice. The problem, however, is that more innovative eGovernment solutions, in which the effort of citizens is reduced because of an authentic integration in the back-office, are not appreciated by the benchmarking studies' methodology. Let's return to the birth certificate example. Suppose country B chooses a different approach and tries to re-engineer back-office processes. The result is that in the event of a marriage, the administration of the city where our example-girl wants to get married, will be able to retrieve the copy of her birth certificate directly from the administration of her city of birth. Since our girl doesn't have to make any effort at all, we could call the country B option a 'zero-stop-solution'. From a citizen-centred point of view, it is clear that the country B solution is to be preferred. But not according to the benchmarking studies: the country A solution gets the maximum score of interactivity, but the country B solution isn't even considered in the studies because there is no interactive application on the internet left (all activities have been moved to the back-office). This is a quite perverse effect of the benchmarking methodology. One has to ask oneself the question: do we need a transformative, citizen-centred eGovernment offering real solutions, or do we need a bunch of websites where people can interact with a government that doesn't question its own processes of service delivery? The following excerpt from the eEurope study's annex, however, doesn't seem to completely disapprove of the latter option:

> Some countries were not part of the calculation of the results for some services because those services were not relevant for them. In some cases, the reason for this was not that the service does not exist on the same level as in other countries, but rather that the active involvement of individual citizens is no longer necessary (e.g. car registration carried out by third parties using non-web-based automatic procedures, common income tax declaration sent out by the tax authorities to the individual in the form of a tax proposal). This means that a web presence for these services would be completely redundant in these countries.

Excerpt 1. Source: annex to the eEurope study

The sixth criticism, already hinted at in the excerpt above, concerns the fact that the benchmarking studies only evaluate service delivery at the national government level, ignoring eGovernment policy at regional or local levels of government. Especially in a federal country such as Belgium, this is quite problematic. Both Flanders, the Dutch speaking region, and the French speaking Walloon region, have their own eGovernment policy, next to that of the federal government. The Flemish administration, which commissioned my eGovernment research, asked me to have a look at eGovernment benchmarking precisely for this reason. They wanted to know why Flanders (as a region) didn't feature in any of the studies, if the existing studies take account of regional eGovernment, and if we could find a way to benchmark our regions' eGovernment policy (which is quite substantial because the jurisdiction of Flanders is quite far-reaching). When looking into this it became clear that neither of the two most well-known benchmarking studies take regional eGovernment into account. The excerpt from the eEurope annex above indicates that for some countries not all services were included in the calculations because 'the service does not exist on the same level as in other countries'. The Accenture study takes the same approach according to the following excerpt:

> No government surveyed offered all 169 services. In most countries, aspects of all of the services are offered at a lower tier of government – examples of which include state, regional, municipal and county. (…) In such instances, these services were removed before the analysis was undertaken and the government concerned was in no way penalized.

Excerpt 2. Source: paragraph on 'methodology and definitions' from the Accenture study

Although countries are 'in no way penalized', efforts of regional governments are nevertheless not taken into account. In a highly federalised country such as Belgium, the regional eGovernment covers a quite substantial part of citizen's needs. Efforts are made to continually improve Flanders's eGovernment capacity, but they are in no way appreciated by the benchmarking studies. Seen in this light, Belgium's position in the eGovernment rankings suddenly becomes less obvious. The reason for this restriction to the level of central government obviously has to do with comparability, but why would you want to benchmark national government policies instead of eGovernment services regardless of the level of government that provides them? As in the one-stop shop example described above, the rationale of the benchmarking approach is again counterproductive to the rationale of eGovernment. The philosophy of eGovernment service delivery is after all that services will be offered in a citizen-centred, demand-oriented manner, so that citizens don't necessarily have to know which level of government is involved. From this perspective, it would indeed make more sense to benchmark the delivery of specific eGovernment services irrespective of the level of government that offers them, instead of only benchmarking those services offered by central government.

A final critique deals with the fact that governments' efforts for a socially inclusive eGovernment are not appreciated by the benchmarking studies. For example, governments often try to involve certain audiences, such as the visually impaired, in online service delivery by including certain ergonomic features on websites. Some sites have the possibility to generate them in a very large typeset or are equipped with speech-technology features. It has been stated, however, that both benchmarking studies only measure the supply of online services, but not their accessibility or usability. Again, the studies give no scores for a socially inclusive eGovernment policy and in this way do not stimulate governments (out for a good score in next year's study) to develop such a policy. A second pernicious effect of the

benchmarking methodology, already hinted at in the second critique, is that a multi-channel approach to eGovernment is not appreciated by the studies. Because they only look at the internet, these studies ignore governments' efforts at bridging the digital divide by offering eGovernment services via different channels such as digital tv, kiosks, or telephones. There is actually a very efficient approach to realise multi-channel access, namely a 'platform-independent' approach. This means that when developing eGovernment content, the use of metadata ensures the content is stored independent of the form in which it can be presented. In this way, the same information can easily be modified to appear on different platforms. However, because the benchmarking studies are results oriented, a process feature such as the platform-independent approach is not included. If the final objective of benchmarking studies is to learn from the experiences of others, it might be useful to include such a platform-independent approach as an example of a 'good process practice' .

4. The conclusion

Existing government structures and organisational boundaries, as well as existing industry-driven ICT solutions, are –in my view– no desirable starting points for the development of an inclusive, future oriented, eGovernment policy. They are, however, currently still the main focus of the two benchmarking studies that constitute the main points of reference for the evaluation of eGovernment policies in an international context. It is this conservative interpretation of what constitutes 'good eGovernment', that can possibly curb the imagination of those policy-makers responsible for charting the eGovernment of the future. It might make it difficult for them to look beyond the current evaluation criteria. But will they still be the criteria for good eGovernment in ten years?

For this paper, it has been my objective to formulate a rather intuitive and inductive critique concerning a specific form of benchmarking, instead of relying heavily on theoretical constructs. However, since the risks and pernicious side-effects of benchmarking and indicators are regularly recurring themes in the literature on benchmarking and performance management, I will briefly present the theoretical notion of 'narrowing of vision', one of the perceived risks. A publication of the *Platform Doelmatigheid*, a Dutch foundation, discerns the following risks that can lead to 'narrowing of vision'. They are a more formalised presentation of the risks of benchmarking that I have hinted at in my critique.

- Tunnel effect: because of the measurement of only one aspect of an activity, other –possibly more important– aspects are ignored. This leads to 'gaming', in which behaviour is adjusted to score well on the indicator at hand, without an actual increase in performance.
- Risk avoidance: the exclusive focus on only one or two indicators, can lead to a behaviour in which organisations avoid experiments and innovation.

To complete the circle, the building blocks of eGovernment as they were presented in the first paragraph, will be picked up again to see if they are included in the benchmarking studies.

1. **eAutomation**. This component is not included in the benchmarking studies. Nevertheless, if countries want a benchmarking that evaluates real eGovernment progress, there is a case to be made for a 'degree of eAutomation criterion'. If one agrees that an integrated back-office and a solution to the problem of 'legacy systems' are basic requirements for an effective eGovernment, it makes a lot of sense to find

out which country takes the lead in these issues. This is, of course, a process feature, and therefore not included in the results oriented benchmarking studies. In these studies, a front-office application backed by an effective integrated back office gets the same 'score' as an 'add-on' front-office application that is not structurally embedded in the back-office processes that should support it.

2. **eAdministration**. This is the eService delivery component that is the central focus of both benchmarking studies. They do define eGovernment as *online* service delivery, however, which entails an extra restriction of scope to internet eService delivery.
3. **eParticipation**. This component is not included in the benchmarking studies. There is no consensus on this, but in my opinion an eGovernment policy includes an eServices policy as well as an eParticipation policy. These are just two different approaches to the use of ICT in government, and to get a clear picture of the eGovernment progress a country has made, some kind of eParticipation benchmarking should complement an eServices benchmarking exercise.
4. **eKnowledge Interchange**. This component is not included. It is actually a consequence of the use of ICT in government (rather than an explicit aim of eGovernment policy) and therefore doesn't have to be included in results benchmarking. It is a consequence of eGovernment that does provide quite interesting subject matter for public administration research.
5. **eSociety**. This component is not included. Most countries clearly differentiate their eGovernment policy and their eSociety policy. The latter deals with issues of ICT infrastructure (to get as many people online as possible) and ICT skills (by providing ICT and internet educational programs). Although these are clearly differentiated policies, there is a case to be made to include some ICT skills and ICT infrastructure indicators in benchmarking studies. When looking at the indicators of the United Nations eGovernment benchmarking study, *Benchmarking eGovernment – A Global Perspective*, it becomes clear that this study has indeed included these criteria. The UN eGovernment index comprises of three kinds of indicators: online presence, telecommunications infrastructure and human development. Both the Accenture and the eEurope study only cover criteria for 'online presence'. It has to be remarked that the eEurope initiative's scope is much broader than eGovernment, and that the complete set of 23 indicators does cover the eSociety domain. The problem is, as has been mentioned before, that indicator 17, around which the CGE&Y study is organised, gets much more attention than the other indicators. All in all, the eEurope approach with its 23 indicators is quite refined and its scope is much broader than the Accenture study.

In conclusion, the restriction of the definition of eGovernment to 'service delivery on the internet' results in a narrow scope on what eGovernment can possibly mean for citizens, and possibly curbs the imagination of policy-makers when thinking about a truly transformational and inclusive eGovernment. For the eEurope eGovernment benchmarking study this poses less of a problem, seeing that *i*17 (online presence of services) is embedded in a broader set of indicators that covers almost all the eGovernment domains charted in the analytical framework. The only problem is that *i*17 gets all the media attention. The Accenture eGovernment study, however, is not embedded in a complementary set of indicators with a broader scope. It has only its measurement of online service delivery to offer, and in this way certainly doesn't live up to the expectations that are implied in its subtitle: *eGovernment Leadership – Realizing the vision*. My 'vision' of the future of eGovernment is not one in which only the amount of online applications is a sign of eGovernment success.

References

Accenture. (2002) eGovernment Leadership – Realizing the Vision, [online], Accenture, http://www.accenture.com/xd/xd.asp?it=enweb&xd=industries\government\gove_thought.xml

European Commission/CGE&Y. (2002) Web-based Survey on Electronic Public Services. Results of the third measurement, [online], http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/action_plan/egov/index_en.htm

Platform Doelmatigheid. (1997) *Doelmatigheid en normen*, studierapport koninklijk NIVRA, Amsterdam

Taylor Nelson Sofres. (2002) Government Online. An international perspective. Annual global report, [online], TNS, http://www.tnsofres.com/gostudy2002/

United Nations/ASPA. (2001) Benchmarking E-government. A Global Perspective, [online], UN, http://www.unpan.org/e-government/ Benchmarking%20E-gov%202001.pdf