



MC-eGov Study on Multi-channel Delivery Strategies and Sustainable Business Models for Public Services addressing Socially Disadvantaged Groups

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CASE STUDY:

Citizen Service Centres, Greece

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document presents the key findings from a case study interview conducted during July 2008 as part of the MC-eGov study, being conducted by ECOTEC Research & Consulting on behalf of DG Information Society and Media.

The case study interview concerned Multi-channel Citizen Service Centres in Greece (CSC-KEP)¹ and was conducted with Mr Panagiotis Krommidas, Greek Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization (Ministry of Interior) and CSC Project Manager on 7 July 2008. Mr Athanasios Kountzeris of the Greek Information Society Observatory kindly provided support and interpretation.

The CSC project was selected as a case study for MC-eGov to explore how the significant changes brought about by the new network have affected Greek citizens in general and disadvantaged groups in particular. It should be read in conjunction with the Case Study report on eGovernment initiatives for disabled people in Greece, which is also available on the MC-eGov website (www.mcegov.eu).

The remainder of this report is as follows. Firstly a background and overview of the case study is provided. The document then follows the framework of fundamental principles outlined in Study Deliverable 2.1, which provides a basis for the analysis of project cases:

- Background and overview
- Identification of personal
- Shaping organisations and policies
- Delivering services effectively
- Assessing and monitoring outcomes.

Finally the report offers conclusions and key messages.

¹ www.epractice.eu/cases/1004

2.0 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The Greek Ministry of Interior (formerly MIPAD) is responsible for eGovernment, and as such has established a network of Citizen Service Centres (CSCs) throughout Greece. Since the opening of the first centre in 2003, the network has grown to more than 1,000 centres serving as one-stop-shops where citizens can access a range of government services. The centres provide three channels: face-to-face, telephone (call centre) and online access and were funded initially as a pilot project with 75% from EU Structural Funds, and the remainder coming from national government (implementation cost in the region of €5 to €10 million and ongoing costs are now met from government block grants to the municipalities). The Interior Ministry supervises the CSC network centrally and defines all the required standards for implementation, which also provides high-level supervision, operational and logistical support and strategic planning. Local administrations assume responsibility for running CSCs once they are established.

Figure 1: Homepage of the online component of the CSCs network

3.0 IDENTIFICATION OF PERSONAL NEEDS

Within the overall context of the desire to decentralise services, all CSCs are standardized in that they all must provide the same features, with limited scope for "localisation". This reflects the prevailing, centralized approach in Greece, but has the positive effect of reducing heterogeneity of practice between different parts of the country, making it easier for citizens to understand administrative process and requirements, and promoting fairness (by reducing the power of "gatekeepers"). The centralised process sets down clear national standards, backed by the authority of the state, so that there is now little scope for flexible local interpretation in terms of what certificates and other proofs are required to secure a licence or other service. The distance travelled compared with the starting point has been considerable. In the past the citizen had to prepare all the documentation themselves. The situation has therefore shifted the balance of power significantly towards the citizen – now the onus is on the civil servant to provide the documents needed (available electronically in some cases, but not all at the moment) to complete the transaction, aided by a framework which defines clearly the information requirements. This change is backed by legislation that imposes this duty on government.

Another key benefit has been for those living in remote areas². Citizens who previously may have had to travel long distances to transact their business with the government can now take advantage of the more local contact point offered by the nearest CSC. One impact of the introduction of CSCs has therefore been to stimulate re-engineering of procedures – so as each public agency joins their service to the system they are required to review and re-design it to the satisfaction of the Interior Ministry. In this sense the CSC network is not only providing new access for citizens, it is also acting as a driver for public service modernisation (including simplification and increased efficiency and effectiveness) through organisational and process change. This necessary modernisation is something that would not necessarily have happened without the impetus provided by eGovernment.

² Data seems to indicate higher adoption rate in non-urban regions: see <http://www.epractice.eu/files/upload/gpc/document/1467-1181828264.pdf>

4.0 SHAPING ORGANISATIONS AND POLICIES

In Greece, central government is very strong, regional and local government less so. Devolution is on the political agenda but progress is slow. There are 13 regions and more than 1,000 municipalities. It is these latter (Level 3) bodies that are responsible for the CSCs and given the number of centres this means that each municipality has a minimum of one CSC and some have two or three. To implement a particular service through a CSC a municipality must obtain certification as provided for by ministerial decree³, which is only provided contingent upon any necessary streamlining and re-engineering (*"Joint ministerial decisions issued by the Minister for the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization and the competent Minister in each case have specified the administrative procedures to be processed through the CSC"*).. Interestingly, the implementation of CSCs is also mentioned in the context of anti-corruption measures being taken in Greece⁴, in the sense of *"interrupting the link between citizens and public servants in vulnerable services and diminishing the possibility of corruption"*.

Of the 1,000 or so services offered through CSCs, 35 are available wholly online and some 53 transactions can be completed at least partly online. The focus is on the common transactional elements of eGovernment including services concerning taxation and licensing. Securing buy-in from municipalities was straightforward: additional funding was provided and participation was mandatory. The establishment of the centres also meant additional jobs for local areas, so this was another key factor in municipalities viewing the new arrangements positively. While organisational and attitudinal opposition was a potential challenge to implementation, most of the services being offered through the new centres are "national" services, in other words additional to those already provided locally. In a sense this gave more power to local players (such as mayors) rather than threatening their position.

Difficulties were encountered at the implementation stage, for example where certificates etc. had to be obtained from more than one government department, and there was resistance to joint-working and data sharing within government. However, the view of the interviewee was that progress has been made on this issue over the last five years and the cultural attitude has changed for the better.

³ Article 31, Law No. 3013/2002 establishing CSCs. See also <http://www.epractice.eu/cases/csckep>

⁴ Council of Europe (2005): Groups of states against corruption, Evaluation Report on Greece, [http://www.coe.int/t/dq1/greco/evaluations/round2/GrecoEval2\(2005\)6_Greece_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dq1/greco/evaluations/round2/GrecoEval2(2005)6_Greece_EN.pdf) (page 9)

5.0 DELIVERING SERVICES EFFECTIVELY

5.1 *Privacy and security issues*

The Greek State in effect guarantees the security of people's data and in general citizens appear willing to put their trust in the government to do this. So levels of trust in government, on the specific issue of data security, may be relatively high in Greece, although there is plenty of evidence that trust in government is low in other respects^{5, 6}. It would certainly appear that the introduction of the CSCs has changed people's perceptions of government efficiency and effectiveness, albeit perhaps from a low base. Politically too it was recognised at a very high level that this was one of the obvious benefits of pursuing a determined eGovernment approach and the public reaction has been positive⁷. The ePractice case study (<http://www.epractice.eu/cases/csckep>) notes that "*the CSCs have been accepted by the citizens by a very wide margin*".

5.2 *Impact on disadvantaged groups*

At the outset there was no specific policy to focus on the specific benefits that might be realised for disadvantaged groups through the CSCs. However, it can be argued that the impact of the new system on these groups has been disproportionately positive, given the low base and the fact that the CSC initiative concerned across-the-board and indeed a step-change improvement in public service provision. Many of the improvements have involved back-office deployment of ICT enabling front-office face-to-face transactions, rather than the introduction of services for online users; at the start of the initiative (2002/2003) Internet availability in Greece lagged behind other Member States, so face-to-face services were prioritised, including those concerning the homeless and the unemployed (the Social Security fund was amongst the first candidate organisations). A specific approach has been adopted to provide services for disabled people and this is discussed in the IKPA case study below.

The overall rise in the quality of public services stimulated by the implementation of the CSC network is benefiting a wide range of citizens. Particular benefits were also felt by people living in remote areas. The improvements facilitated by eGovernment developments have raised the general level of provision and established the infrastructure and framework without which any improvements resulting in more specific future impacts on disadvantaged groups will not be possible. The current situation is therefore seen by government as a transitional phase between the old ways of delivering public services in Greece and the future. The multi-channel approach helps some groups, but it has to be recognised that the state of play was relatively undeveloped when the process of implementing an eGovernment approach was started. Building on the centres (and importantly the back-office systems) now in place, there is significant potential to move towards inclusive eGovernment.

It is acknowledged that there is still some room for improvement in terms of joined-up thinking between government departments. Here, developing an electronic identity (eID) is seen as central. People wishing to access a government service need an ID card (there is a national

⁵ cc:egov Think Paper 10:

<http://www.ccegov.eu/Downloads/Paper%2010%20Trust.%20Transparency.%20Efficiency%20and%20eGovernment%20v2.3.pdf>

⁶ ECONOMIST. (2007b). *School for scandal*. (April 4) Economist, [cited April 10 2007].

http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8972460

⁷ Or at least the data shows a trend of increasing adoption, see <http://www.epractice.eu/files/upload/gpc/document/1467-1181040269.pdf>

scheme in Greece). Many welfare services (unemployment, homelessness etc.) as opposed to non-emotional and transactional services like filling in tax returns, are the responsibility of local municipalities. However, to date, the link between eGovernment systems and the more effective provision of welfare services has yet to be exploited. For example, while accessing public services may require a form of identity (and current thinking in IMPAD is that eID is essential), if a potential client does not have any ID and cannot as a result access a service, the responsibility for providing a form of ID lies with the department responsible for welfare matters. So while the same municipality that has a CSC providing transactional services is also responsible for welfare services these may lie outside of the eGovernment portfolio for now.

On the welfare side, the approach remains largely reactive and there is clearly a danger that in moving to a system of proof of entitlement via eID, new exclusions are created through lack of the kind of integration between all services that would help to tackle social disadvantage more proactively. For example the link could be made between paying out unemployment and/or disability benefits with an exit strategy for an individual, based on need (securing a job or overcoming an addiction), which might ultimately save the need to provide state support. There is therefore no embedding as yet of shared policy outcomes in the system. So for example, in every municipality there is a separate employment service office, which is not linked electronically to the CSC. All of the elements are present in terms of the different services but they are not joined up (even physically before any consideration can be given to electronic links). However, as more services are added to the CSCs this will start to happen, including those most pertinent to disadvantaged groups, although the poor quality of many of the existing services upon which the socially disadvantaged rely is a significant issue.

One of the issues emerging in terms of the use of electronic identity and personal electronic data to facilitate better service delivery is people's concerns (and legal protections) around the period of time data is retained by government. CSC staff are in effect intermediaries and are largely new, young and enthusiastic, which has helped generate positive public reaction.

5.3 *Future development*

The introduction of the CSCs has been responsible for a significant improvement in the delivery of many government services in Greece and has also brought about modernisation of particularly those transactional and routine services, which in the past were subject to inconsistency, delay and lack of transparency. To the extent that making significant inroads into improving the lives of disadvantaged groups requires a combination of services that cut across traditional organisational boundaries within government, Greece faces a challenge given the still highly centralised and vertical nature of government. Few incentives can be identified that would influence more widespread cross-departmental collaboration aimed at addressing the life-challenges of socially disadvantaged groups more effectively. At present there is no mechanism within government for debating or disseminating the benefits of a more joined-up approach.

In terms of a development trajectory, while self-access is not currently available in CSCs, this would be a powerful way to provide visitors with the opportunity to conduct transactions online themselves, boosting digital literacy and uptake of online transactions. Again, however, policy goals are typically viewed as belonging to specific government departments so the issues of digital literacy, and indeed of employability and other welfare issues, are seen as being outwith the remit of the eGovernment "sphere of influence". Another potential barrier is that extending the

remit of eGovernment (beyond the current set of core, largely transactional or non-emotional services) may be perceived as having the potential to threaten the standardised CSC delivery model. This may be the case where more local control over the nature and scope of services offered (depending on the needs in individual municipalities) sets up tension with the current, very centralised model (where the Interior Ministry regulates which processes are migrated to the online environment).

Business services are not currently heavily used and are in any case not included in the CSC portfolio. However in the light of the forthcoming EU services directive (on cross-border licensing etc. and due to come into force in 2010), current thinking is that the CSC system could be used for this as well.

6.0 ASSESSING AND MEASURING OUTCOMES

The back-office systems for the CSCs log a wealth of data which is used to monitor and assess productivity (based on numbers of cases, transactions etc.) This also provides analysis of which services are used most and which are less popular. Action is taken in cases where uptake is less than expected (either raising awareness of the benefits to boost uptake, or deleting the service and shifting resources elsewhere). Citizen surveys on levels of awareness and satisfaction have generally shown positive results but citizens only use a small proportion of the (mostly offline) services available.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The national, highly centralised Greek approach to eGovernment implementation has resulted in **transformation** of the way a number of government services are delivered, through process re-engineering, simplification and standardisation. These improvements in the citizens' experience of dealing with government are a necessary pre-requisite of working towards inclusive eGovernment. The new citizen service centres (and the back-office developments required to make them effective) maximise **channel suitability**, demonstrating that to deliver improvements not all transactions in the portfolio necessarily have to be available entirely online.

More importantly, the new centres also provide many people in remote areas with convenient access to some services for the first time, addressing a key disadvantage. CSCs are providing high quality **intermediaries**, for the first time, another building block of inclusive eGovernment. **Beneficiaries have been engaged** in the sense that a new transparency in relations between citizen and government has been effected, tackling the power of local gatekeepers and empowering people to demand a better service. The potential to build **combined services** is considerable and now that the infrastructure is in place this represents the next significant challenge on the road to maximising the potential of multi-channel eGovernment to start tackling the needs of citizens with multiple disadvantages more effectively.

Key messages for the study are:

- In common with a number of other Member States, Greece started from a relatively weak position in terms of eGovernment development but has made significant progress over the last five years. The establishment of a robust eGovernment infrastructure (the CSCs) means that an important building block is in place from which to make further progress, including in terms of inclusive eGovernment services.
- The benefits of the CSCs, together with the associated back-office, and most crucially the process re-engineering required has had a positive effect on the image of public services in Greece, providing a level of transparency, standardisation and citizen empowerment that had proved elusive until the possibilities of eGovernment were recognised at the highest political level.
- The reaction from citizens has been positive, who have been particularly welcoming of the role the eGovernment system can play in reducing the power of local gatekeepers and removing opportunities for abuse.
- This transformation still applies largely to transactional (i.e. non-emotional) public services and to customer service. However, the CSCs provide nodes to which other, combined services could be added in future.
- Although, given the starting position, size and scope of the task to introduce the CSC system in Greece, no specific priority was given to disadvantaged groups, this does not represent a drawback, since the new system provides benefits to all citizens (in particular the transformation has included a multi-channel approach, so that not only is face-to-face contact possible, but in many cases it is the first time any convenient personal contact has been available).
- In many ways, the limitations in providing a full range of completely online transactions has meant that the current multi-channel approach provides a level of sophistication appropriate to the context without any sense of an "online migration" strategy.

- Continued progress requires wider recognition of the value and potential benefits of collaboration between government departments. This is the next major challenge.
- The project reinforces the early study finding that, in looking across Europe at issues of inclusive eGovernment, national context, governance culture and the baseline starting point are extremely important. A progression path requires a step-by-step approach and solutions cannot simply be taken from one Member State and grafted onto another.