# eGovernment development at the local level. (October 2004)
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## <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

eGovernment is a topic concerning al governments, so the local ones as well. These local authorities do not always know how to handle eGovernment. How do they have to develop and implement this new trend? What do people, other governments, businesses and civil servants expect them to do? Every local authority has to develop and implement eGovernment by them self. The past few years we have seen a lot of eGovernment applications at the local level. Although a lot of the tasks are similar for the municipalities, there are lots of differences when we look at their eGovernment realisations. Because of these differences, we expect that there are some other aspects having their influence on the development and implementation of eGovernment. In future research we want to analyse which factors influence local eGovernment, and which changes are the outcome of this development.

## <u>1. TWO IN-DEPTH CASES</u>

Our study started in July of this year with in-depth cases of two municipalities. We find it very important to have a close contact with the research field from the start. We have interviewed people from the ICT-service, the information service, other civil servants, politicians; … We reconstruct the eGovernment story for each municipality, with attention for the different points of view. At this stage we already find some factors having some influence. The results of these cases will deliver the input for the further development of our research-questions and our research methodology.

The main question for our study is the following:
- How does local governments develop and implement eGovernment?

Trying to answer this question, we focused on the following sub questions in our interviews:
- How does the interviewees interpret the term eGovernment?
- What was realised so far? Which projects, at this local level, can we classify under the notion eGovernment? What are there plans for the future?
- How were these projects set up?
  - Are there devices from other governments?
  - Is there any form of collaboration between different municipalities?
  - Political drive?
  - Internal organisation, collaboration between different services? Is there one (or more) person/ service(s) taking a leading role?

We will mention some off the earliest reflections from the two in depth cases. We cannot discuss them in depth as we first need to report to the Flemish government. Having done that we can deliver more details.

**Local government and initiatives/ directives from other governments**
Local governments are based on different local actors (municipal services, OCMW, police, fireman,…). The local level itself is just an actor in a broader network of other government

layers (provinces, Flemish government, federal government). Founded on our interviews we distinguish several projects and initiatives from this other layers that influence the development and implementation of local eGovernment. Following figure represents some initiatives. Some of these initiatives are free, other compulsory. Collaboration between local authorities is uncommon. Realizations from other municipalities are only used as a source of inspiration. There are no joint eGovernment projects.



**Local government**
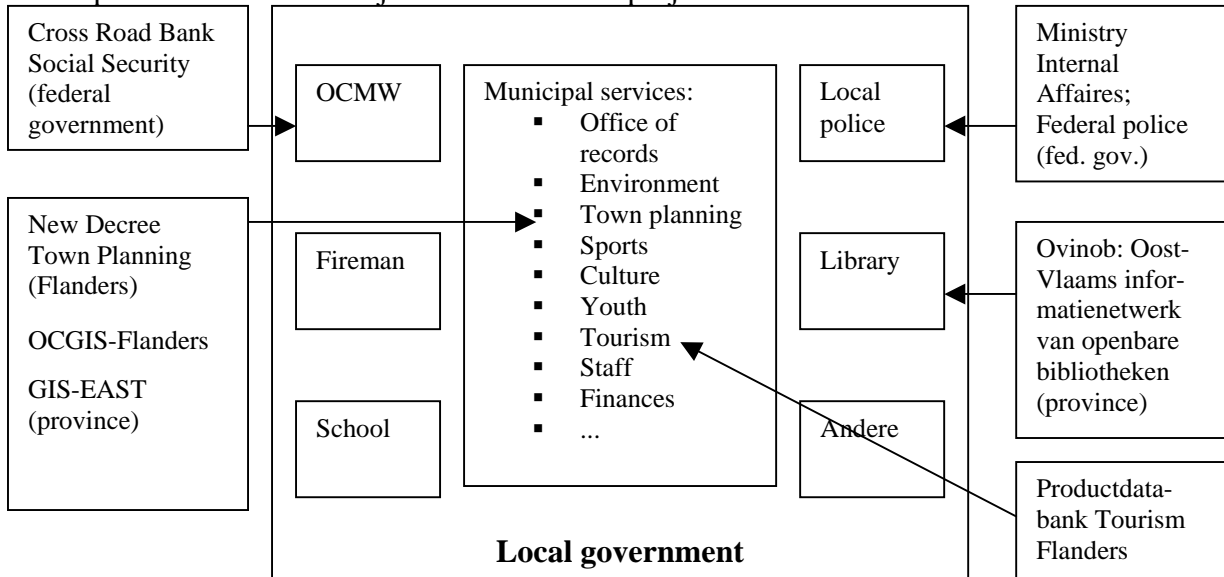
**The organizational structure**
There are a lot of differences in the organisational structures between the municipalities. Is eGovernment the main task of the information-, ICT- or another service? Who is responsible for the front office (generally spoken the website)? Who is responsible for back office realizations? How do these new tasks find their way in the existing structure? eGovernment also introduces changes in the existing organisation. One of the municipalities set up a website committee that only works with volunteers from the municipality. In the other case we saw a project-organisation for the development and implementation of GIS. Some interviewees mentioned changes in communication within the organization. A lot of information is on the intranet. Civil servants can mail each other. A disadvantage of this development seems to be the loss of direct communication. People will forget how to communicate with each other about difficult topics face tot face.

**Realisations**
The automatization and digitalization process has started in both municipalities; PC, data bank, internet, intranet, mail, website,... The real back-office realizations including data flow between different governments are the most difficult part. When we asked the interviewees what they want to realize in the future in most of the cases they mentioned these back office realizations. The website is not so important for their tasks. They do not experience to have less work since this website, on the contrary. They are responsible for delivering and updating the information on the site. This is an extra task for the civil servants.

## 2. EXISTING RESEARCH AT LOCAL EGOVERNMENT
Parallel with these in-depth cases we made an overview of existing research concerning local eGovernment. We examined fourteen studies from different countries. Most part of the studies came of the US. We looked at their research purpose, methodology and results.