

Opinion of the Stockholm Region on the EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020

This opinion is from the Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs (SEF)¹, which represents one of Europe's most competitive and sustainable regions, boasting high rankings in terms of digital services and infrastructure. The Stockholm region accounts for about 45% of GDP in Sweden and has a population of over 3.6 million people, representing nearly 38% of the entire population of Sweden.

Introduction

The Stockholm region welcomes the consultation of the European Commission and the opportunity now given to communicate our views on the EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 and its contribution to creating a more efficient public administration in Europe that facilitates free movement in the EU's single market.

In Sweden and in the Stockholm region extensive work is being done to achieve the goals of making full use of all the possibilities of digitalisation and to develop eGovernment with the focus of the citizen². However, there are both enabling and hindering factors for achieving these goals that the Stockholm region wants to share with the Commission. The Stockholm region also wishes to express interest in being a partner with the Commission on the ongoing work in this area.

In Sweden, the municipal sector accounts for 70 % of citizen contacts. It is therefore vital that the municipal perspective is taken into account when building the eGovernment of the future, and bring the citizen into focus.

What factors hinder the offering of better digital public services in the Stockholm region?

At the beginning of 2015³, a report was produced by the eGovernment Delegation on the development of Swedish eGovernment, in relation to that of the rest of the world. The report shows that the digitalisation of Swedish society is strong, while the digitalisation of public administration has started to lose positions in international comparisons. One explanation is that the advantages that allowed us to get off with an early start in terms of investments in digitalisation now are exhausted. The benefits of the Swedish governance model, based on decentralisation, voluntarism

¹ The City of Stockholm, the Stockholm County Association of Local Authorities and the Stockholm County Council, as well as other members, Uppsala Regional Council, Sörmland Regional Council, Västmanland Association of Local Authorities and County Council, the Council for the Stockholm-Mälars Region and Gotland Region.

² Regional digital agenda for Stockholm County: <http://www.ksl.se/oppenhet-och-digitalisering/regional-digital-agenda.html>

³ The eGovernment Delegation was a committee under the Ministry of Industry with a mandate to push forward the development of eGovernment in the public sector. That task is now completed.

and independence are not unproblematic, as more coherent digital services are requested. The continuing digitalisation requires automation, coordination and interoperability.

At this point, it is important for the Commission to know that the conditions for digital interaction with and within the municipal sector, in several important respects, differs substantially from the conditions for interaction between government authorities.

The report also concludes the importance of a common road map pointing the way forward. The infrastructure for information exchange also needs to be developed to enable interactive services. There is also a need for a greater focus on municipalities. Other identified areas are management, funding and law. Here, the Commission can play a role in evaluating progress, putting forward recommendations and improving conditions for the development of cross-border eGovernment services.

Summary of the main hindering factors:

- Lack of interoperability between different systems (technical, semantic, legal, organisational). The Stockholm region has also made this point in its reply to the consultation of the Commission on standards in the digital single market.
- Lack of regulations, frameworks and standards as the basis for information exchange.
- The infrastructure for information exchange needs to be developed to enable interactive services.
- Lack of collaboration, management.
- Lack of business models and incentives for the development of common services. Difficulties in seeing the benefits of an automated process and cohesive services, where the costs often arise in one organisation, while the benefits are collected in a different one.

How can we improve eGovernment services in the Stockholm region and in the EU?

In the Stockholm region, the county's 26 municipalities and the Stockholm County Council have agreed on 16 principles for collaboration. These principles include the following five blocks: information security, trust, federation, signing and basic infrastructure. These principles are the basis for electronic collaboration in the county.

The county's municipalities and county councils are already working on the development of e-services for greater coordination and monitoring of their own work. In line with this, a report on e-development in the county is compiled every year. In support of the report, eBlomlådán, a tool for self-evaluation of service and business development in terms of IT, is being established, backed by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. The follow-up shows that the county, in national terms, has come a long way in e-development, but that there are areas for improvement.

The actors in the county have also agreed on a regional digital agenda, and are gearing up around the next step in using the possibilities of digitisation with a focus on four areas:

- The digital infrastructure
- The digital literacy
- The digital public sector
- The digital market

Interoperability between actors

A basic requirement is interoperability between actors. The interoperability issues include approaches to automation in information management, conditions for the use of open standards and the creation of a service-based architecture, but also ensuring that the legal and judicial conditions are clarified. The guiding principle needs to be one of *agreed frameworks* that set a level playing field. Another challenge is to create a *common comprehensive view* of anything from strategic infrastructure planning to the coordination of specific measures.

Greater ambition and coordination

The Stockholm region has taken the lead in using the possibilities of digitalisation in the public sector in Sweden. The City of Stockholm and Stockholm County Council have in many respects been early and proactive in this development. There are however considerable differences within the region and many specific areas with development potential. Raising *the level of ambition* of the existing collaboration to ensure a coherent approach to e-development is an important task for the future. More *coordinated development work* creates greater customer value and reduces costs. Both horizontal and vertical coordination is called for (on a national, regional and local level) among the region's public actors. The digitalisation issues should also be an integral part of the public sector's ordinary business development.

Incentives for collaboration

The experience of the Stockholm region is that the work on the future eGovernment essentially should assume that there are two incentives for collaboration – the need to create *common e-services from the perspective of the citizen, and cost effectiveness*. The long term goal should be to improve both the quality of public services offered to citizens and businesses, and that of public administration, while at the same time cutting costs, an equation, the solution of which is seriously impeded if collaboration in eGovernment is not properly designed.

In Sweden and the Stockholm region, different municipalities have different conditions and have made different degrees of progress in the work on eGovernment. Linked to the existence and the idea of the Swedish governance model of municipal self-government, it is important to understand, and take into account, the difference between e-services supporting processes with shared ownership and e-services that do not. It is also important that collaboration is voluntary and based on solutions enabling the reuse of investments already made. The focus of the *"16 principles for collaboration"*, owned and managed by the Stockholm County Association of Local Authorities (KSL)⁴, should, as appropriate, also provide the basis and inspiration for work on collaboration at national and EU level.

"Real" e-services

The Stockholm region believes that the introduction of "real" e-services is necessary to achieve the full potential of eGovernment and pursue a long-term sustainable, cost-effective public sector. "Real" e-services both simplify matters for citizens and streamline the underlying business process. This is

⁴ The Stockholm City Executive Board decided in 2010-06-23 (DNR 002-929/2010) to adopt the 16 principles for collaboration of IT Forum, and to recommend the city's committees and company boards to work by them.

possible by integrating the e-service directly into the underlying business system, making it possible to fully rebuild and rationalise the concerned underlying business process.

Many municipalities have already established a large number of e-services, which simplify the everyday lives of citizens and other external stakeholders. In most cases, it is however simply digital forms available online, where the manual process of the municipal activities remains more or less unchanged.

Here, one of the obstacles, caused by municipal self-government in Sweden occurs, resulting in a very large number of local variations in the design of such a business process. Since a "real" e-service integrates fully into the underlying business process, municipalities cannot "share" e-services with each other, if they do not also share business process and use the same underlying business system. It is often argued that it is a waste of resources having different municipalities develop their own local e-services for business processes, such as seeking child-care and, at first glance, it might also seem that this process is, and should be, identical, regardless of municipality. But apart from what is established by legislation, there are a very large number of local variations in the design of such a business process. All these variations are of course not necessary and several of them can be combined, but many of them are variations that occur due to the *right and responsibility of the elected political majority to govern their activities*. This right is one of the cornerstones of the idea of municipal self-government. A certain municipality may, for example, beyond what the law and other regulations require, have chosen to establish an entirely different system with completely different parameters in terms of waiting times, sibling priority, income levels and similar values. Creating cost-effective common e-services across municipal borders is, in light of the above, virtually impossible, unless mandatory identical business processes also are introduced – something that is in direct conflict with the municipal self-government.

The main focus of collaboration in Swedish eGovernment should, in this context, be on two areas. Firstly, collaboration should be created in areas where it is *economically advantageous to share costs of infrastructure and other basic business independent components* needed to develop and manage digital services. This may involve authentication services, signing services, payment services, and other similar infrastructure that is completely detached from how the business processes that the infrastructure is designed to support are designed. Secondly, collaboration should be created in terms of coherent e-services, i.e., e-services related to processes flowing across administrative borders, where focus is on the perspective of the citizen.

How can the EU Commission help improve public administration at local, regional, national and EU level?

By, at a level that does not disturb the national, and ultimately the municipal self-government in Sweden, adapting legislation and pushing forward standards in the four areas of interoperability, technical, semantic, legal and organisational, as mentioned above.

How can we increase mobility and cross-border public services in the EU?

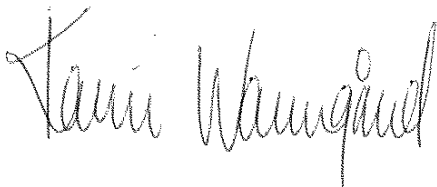
Also here, the experience of the Stockholm region is that it is important to create technical, semantic, legal and organisational interoperability.

How can we trigger citizen involvement?

By actively involving citizens and not assuming that we know what they want. It is a good idea to use focus groups, forums, open beta releases for development, etc. and to make active use of, and further develop, arenas of development and viewing environments.

Stockholm, 19th of January 2016,

On behalf of the Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Karin Wanngård". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karin Wanngård,
Chair of the Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs and
Mayor of Stockholm

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