

WeGovNow

Newsletter #2 April 2017

Towards WeGovernment: Collective and participative approaches for addressing local policy challenges

Dear Reader,

WeGovNow (<http://wegovnow.eu>) started on March 2016. It's been a year and a lot has been reached.

The project will develop, implement and evaluate an online platform for local community engagement. It supports collective and participative government approaches for addressing local policy challenges, promoting the transition from citizen as customer to citizen as partner in the delivery of public services. To this end, the partners are building upon earlier research and development for further developing existing solutions.

In this issue, let us tell you what we have achieved since December 2016 in relation to two main strands of work, technology and use cases.

Firstly, the WeGovNow platform architecture is gaining shape. The technology strand has developed a prototype of a platform architecture that enables for the first time a number of civic engagement applications to smoothly interact and provide additional functionalities. We will successively develop this prototype further until it can be piloted under everyday life conditions.

Secondly, the municipalities in the pilot sites (San Donà di Piave, Southwark and Turin) have drafted a first complete version of their local use cases. They will also develop them further, involving local actors, until they are ready for use in pilot trials.

The WeGovNow Team

Integrating functionalities in a new, unique environment

The design approach for the platform will take into account different users' perspectives – e.g. citizens, public administrators, representatives from civic society organisations, and private entrepreneurs.

Hence, the technical developers need to take into account that the platform is to be flexibly used by different local stakeholders to report local community problems and suggest improvements, discuss their relevance, and explore ways of solving problems through collective action.

They also need to consider that many users may not be too familiar with this kind of technology.

The WeGovNow technical team expectedly found that existing civic engagement software components could not smoothly inter-operate. Therefore, they had developed the Unified WeGovNow User Management (UWUM), that integrates different functionalities into a unique environment.

“ We had to address many challenges. We had to develop a platform architecture enabling the distributed operation of different WeGovNow software applications as well as existing third party applications for example for e-government, also considering possible future development. At the same time, we need to ensure that the users do indeed experience the system as one seamless service. To this end we have developed the Unified WeGovNow User Management architectural layer. It provides the backbone for a distributed system which is modular in terms of individual applications that can be integrated into the new platform and different identity providers, respectively.”

- Alessio Antonini, University of Turin

UWUM integrates established and new software components, offering the following **core mechanisms**:

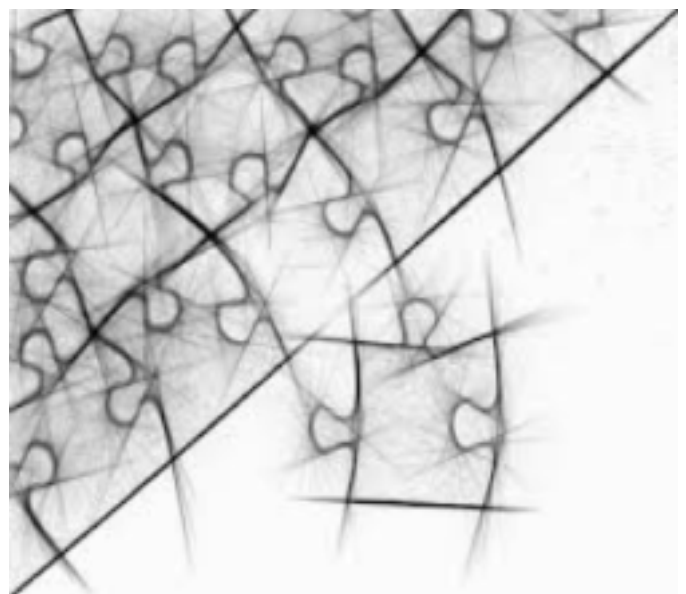
- Orchestrating user management such as registration, single sign-on authentication, profile handling and trusted accreditation.
- Keeping track of actions in a unified manner (Logger) and thus making it possible to provide personalised timelines, unified search, and the like.

This architectural component is also intended to facilitate the sustainability of project outputs beyond the immediate project duration.

Hence, the WeGovNow platform architecture includes a range of core characteristics in order to allow for different types of user interaction and simple usability:

- A Unified Authentication System for user registration.
- An Application Discovery System that lists all available components.
- A Style Service that ensures common design of the components.
- A NavigationBar with button tabs for available components and user profiles.
- A Centralised User Profile to store, retrieve and share related information.
- An AccessibilityProfile wizard to collect and edit users' profile setups.
- A Centralised Activity Logger for recording and integrating platform data.
- An InputMap to collect point-based references.
- An AreaViewer, a web map to visualise summary information.

How these architecture features enable the user to smoothly utilise the WeGovNow platform across various civic engagement applications will be explained in forthcoming newsletter issues.



Use cases require technological and organisational innovation at the same time

Beyond technology, the pilot site municipalities face challenges to allow the WeGovNow platform work at its best. WeGovNow seeks to improve efficiency, effectiveness and quality of local public services. However, the platform requires an unprecedentedly intense collaboration of public authorities with other stakeholders. This is one of the key challenges which pilot municipalities need to deal with.

“As a representative of a municipality, I believe that Public Administrations need to substantially shift their perspective to design public policies. It's a cultural change that takes time. As with any innovation, structural change is not always easy to achieve. In this respect WeGovNow represents an opportunity to accelerate this process, overcoming the current way to conceive and deliver services. But local authorities must have strong commitment to implement this change. This is a precondition to make the potentialities of this engagement platform work.”

- Giulio Antonini, San Donà di Piave
Pilot site manager

In order to prepare for a smooth collaboration with other stakeholders, the project needs realistic use scenarios. Up to now, the project refined its **use scenarios**, reflecting the particular circumstances and needs at each pilot site. In particular, the project has made progress in identifying requirements about the WeGovNow platform with regard to interfaces and collaboration models, innovative participation of stakeholders, possible service variants, and user requirements with regard to functionality. In the project's initial stakeholder interactions it became clear that the promise of information and communication technology to tailor public services to user needs requires a multi-pronged innovation approach: An approach that simultaneously pays attention to the particular work processes of different administrative units and to the technology. Technology innovation and organisational process innovation must be pursued at the same time. In the further process of finalising use cases, new roles and responsibilities may need to be defined.

A shared need for integration, transparency and accountability

It is becoming increasingly clear that the WeGovNow platform can indeed reach and involve more people by reducing the distance and changing the relationship between citizens and local authorities.

“We need a tool to simplify the process of delivering public services, improving co-designed and co-managed solutions. The Policy decision making process needs to become more inclusive and transparent. The platform integrated approach could help us to match current societal challenges with innovative solutions coming from both public and private side. But we need to build common rules to assure the right accountability to the process and to facilitate and to support the collaboration among public and private actors in local development projects.”

- Fabrizio Barbiero, City of Turin civil servant

Nevertheless the platform does not aim to substitute face-to-face engagement methods. Local governments request to utilise offline engagement practices and online engagement tools in a complementary manner, in order to reach those community members who, at least initially, lack the means or motivation or both to use online devices for becoming involved in the project.

“In the digital age it's important to have inclusive and face to face tools. We need to reduce the distance between citizens and public administration. WeGovNow could represents an alternative to reach and involve a wider range of residents, ensuring a wide range of accessibility... A space where users can better communicate and have relations. A space giving the possibility to citizens not to be just customers. The platform could help to build a wider sense of community, since citizens share the same challenges and expectations”

- Southwark Pilot site manager.





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Contact person: Patrizia Saroglia (saroglia@fondazionebrodolini.eu)

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