

Pulling through: Leaders, laggards and the Open Method of Coordination

A study of the effectiveness of the i2010 eGovernment
Action Plan and the dynamics within

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Abstract

The present study is a comparative analysis of the effects of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) through the i2010 eGovernment Action Plan on two categories of EU member states: leaders and laggards, the latter of which has been divided into two categories. It examines the development of eGovernment within the categories mentioned above based on the EU's annual eGovernment benchmark reports. Furthermore, the study utilizes concepts found within research on leader-laggards dynamics to provide a constructive analysis of the relationship between the categories. The purpose was to provide an accurate account of the effectiveness of this particular OMC-process while highlighting factors of interest from a specific analytical perspective.

The results of the investigation show that the OMC has, in this process, been effective in driving development across all the member states included in the study. However some have benefitted more from the process than others. By modifying, and subsequently applying concepts from the leaders-laggards discourse to the case at hand, it is revealed that the OMC process is indeed an institutionalisation of practices common outside of soft-law frameworks. In such conditions, member states at an advanced level of development implicitly pull lagging member states, converging towards normative goals. The results of the study imply that researchers need to be aware of, and take into account factors such as relative development differences when analysing the existence, and causes of OMC-effectiveness.

Key words: eGovernment, i2010 policy framework, the open method of coordination, effectiveness, leaders and laggards,

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1 Introduction

At the Lisbon Summit, March 2000, European leaders gathered in an informal special meeting for The European Council. The result of two days of meetings was the launch of what has become known as the Lisbon Strategy, or Lisbon Agenda depending on the source. The Strategy established several ambitious goals to be achieved by 2010 by the EU, including becoming the most competitive economy in the world and achieving full employment (Lisbon Council Presidency Conclusions 2000, par. 5).

One of the main outputs from the Lisbon Summit in 2000 was the launch and subsequent establishment of the Open method of Coordination (OMC) as a governance tool within the EU. The OMC is based on the principle of soft guidance rather than strict top-down governance. Meaning that rather than having the central EU institutions dictating concrete measures to be taken by the Member States, broad guidelines are formulated, and performance is measured against benchmarks, best practice and commonly agreed upon indicators.

One of the main issues discussed during the Lisbon Summit, was the acceleration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) uptake in the Member States. Under the headline of “*An information Society for All*”, European Leaders detailed the possibilities and requirements of accelerating the use of ICTs, and established several overarching goals and objectives (Ibid, par. 8-11). In June 2000 the Council of Ministers and The Commission presented the eEurope 2002 Action Plan to be implemented through the OMC-process.

Following disappointing results presented in the 2004 mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy, it was reformed and re-launched in order to produce more tangible results (European Council Presidency Conclusions 2005, par. 4). As part of the re-launch of the Strategy, the i2010 policy framework was established with the aim of spreading and enhancing the use of ICTs in the EU Member States. The i2010 policy framework replaced the previous eEurope initiative which had dealt with the same policy area. A series of general and specific objectives for i2010 were formulated, several of which were targeted at producing eGovernment developments in the Member States.

The i2010 policy framework and its components have been evaluated and reviewed several times since 2006. The final reviews of i2010 have concluded that the initiative has been a success in several areas, one being in the development of eGovernment policy in the Member States. Furthermore, consequences of the i2010 policy framework have been described as an example of how the “*the Open Method of Coordination works in practice*” (EU COM(2009) 390, p. 13). The recurring evaluations of the member states have been based on annually performed benchmarks, ranking the countries on scoreboard, thus establishing,

and consistently updating the European “leaders” and “laggards” in the eGovernment policy area.

The potential of the OMC as a new governance-tool has been discussed to a great extent by academics worldwide. A particular field of interest has been the supposed effectiveness of the method and thus much research has been conducted which treats this question. The results of said research have sparked debates between those who claim the OMC is a method that works, and those who claim otherwise. Meanwhile, the EU has continued to use the OMC, and will continue to do so in the future. While the research has been focused on large, high-profile OMC-processes such as the European Employment Strategy (e.g. Rhodes 2005; O’Connor 2007; Jacobsson 2004), and on the overall effectiveness of the method, little has been said about smaller, less known policy processes under the OMC. Furthermore, while the effectiveness has been evaluated on a general basis, few studies have explicitly investigated other relationships which might be of interest.

1.1 From top to bottom – impacts of the Open Method of Coordination

Assuming that OMC-processes do in fact have an effect on member states, the express purpose of this study is: to compare development between the leaders and laggards – divided into two categories – within the eGovernment policy area involved in a specific OMC-process, while applying and developing the conceptual framework of the leaders and laggards dynamic.

In essence, the study is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Open Method of Coordination on three categories of member states which are commonly the subject of academic examination. More precisely, the study aims to draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the i2010 eGovernment Action Plan on member states on the three categories: leaders, laggards - intermediate, and laggards – bottom, as well as to examine the relationship amongst them through the lens of the leaders and laggards dynamic.

The overarching questions can be formulated as:

Since 2005, how has eGovernment development progressed across member states in the three categories leaders, laggards – intermediate and laggards - bottom? By employing concepts taken from the literature concerning leaders-laggards dynamics, how can the development be perceived and explained?

Answering the overarching questions detailed above will allow me to offer conclusions regarding the effectiveness of OMC-processes on these three categories and thus contribute to existing research on OMC effectiveness while hopefully making a contribution to research on the dynamics within OMC-

processes as well. As far as relevance of the study's potential conclusions goes, my ambition is that the research I provide will allow for alternative models of analysis, highlighting the relationship between leaders and laggards involved in OMC-processes.

1.2 Disposition

The study is structured as follows: I will begin by describing the chosen methodology for the study. A short, but necessary description of some of the basic concepts which will appear several times throughout the study follows. So as to provide a degree of background to the i2010 policy framework, and the establishment of the OMC, a section is dedicated to that task. The i2010 policy framework is detailed in a greater fashion in the chapter that follows, before providing a basic overview of the main policy processes in the European Union, eventually leading in to an in-depth explanation of the OMC and the leader-laggards dynamic. The final two chapters are dedicated to the comparative analysis of member state development in eGovernment, and the conclusions which can be drawn from the study.

2 Methodology and key concepts

The following section is intended to clarify the author's perception, detail some of the basic concepts used throughout the study, and provide context for some of the methodological choices made.

2.1 Methodology

The present study's methodology can be summarized as a theory consuming and theory developing descriptive, comparative analysis based on empirical observations.

The study is descriptive and theory consuming in the sense that it utilizes theoretical assumptions made by several academics and researchers concerning the OMC as well as the leaders-laggards dynamic to describe the actual development of, and relationship between the three categories of member states presented in the introduction (Esaiasson et al 2004, p. 35-40). On the other hand, while the main focus is providing an accurate account of empirical relations, it is theory developing in that it attempts to drive theories concerning the OMC forward by focusing on the effectiveness of the method on the three categories (Ibid, p. 41).

In order to do so, comparisons of relevant empirical observations will be presented in a summarized manner. More accurately, the method fits into Marsh and Stoker's basic "*method of difference*" in which the objective is to highlight and analyse differences amongst the chosen member states (Hopkins, in Marsh & Stoker (eds) 2002, p. 252).

2.1.1 Unaccounted factors of influence

An issue that arises from a) OMC effectiveness as an object of study, and b) the use of the comparative method, is that of unaccounted external and internal factors (Kröger 2009, p. 8). Member states are not static entities isolated from the world simply because they're part of an OMC-process. Rather, they are constantly the subject of pressures and variations in real-world events, be it political decisions, economic fluctuations, or technological advancements. These or any other of a potentially infinite amount of factors on macro, meso and micro-level are ever present and are impossible to account for in their entirety (Ibid). How then is it possible to link, progress or development in one policy area directly to the OMC-process which is based on elusive tools such as soft-law, learning, peer-pressure,

and peer-reviews? This issue is discussed by Sandra Kröger in “*The Open Method of Coordination: Underconceptualisation, overdetermination, de-politicisation and beyond*” (2009). Kröger argues that although this issue presents a significant challenge to studies of OMC effectiveness, the answer is to:

“strictly limit the empirical analysis to those focus points where the OMC can be grasped, e.g. the guidelines / objectives, national as well as joint reports (including “good practices”) and the mobilisation of actors for their development, common indicators, peer reviews, opinions of committees, Council Conclusions, Communications of the Commission etc” (Kröger 2009, p. 9)

In line with Kröger’s suggestion, my analysis will therefore focus on development made according to the two basic indicators utilized by the Commission to measure progress towards the eGovernment Action Plan’s objectives in their annual benchmark reports. By limiting the analysis to these two specific indicators, it will be able to provide an accurate representation of OMC effectiveness in this case.

2.1.2 Literature

The literature used in the study is composed of both primary and secondary documentation produced by EU institutions, independent consultant agencies, and the EU member states. As regards to the academic literature, I have relied heavily on the studies amassed by the University of Madison - Wisconsin and their European Center of Excellence. In the way of acknowledgements, I’d like to thank Jonathan Zeitlin for allowing me access to the OMC Forum.

2.2 Concept clarifications

2.2.1 eGovernment

The focus of this study is, as mentioned, eGovernment development of leaders and laggards through the OMC-process, but what is eGovernment? The concept has been defined through a variety of formulations and level of detail. Despite differing formulations, there is a broad consensus concerning the general definition which states that eGovernment is: the delivery of public services on the part of public bodies to citizens and businesses through Information and Communication Technologies.

However, given that this study focuses on EU member state development, and relies on the benchmarks performed to measure their progress on assignment to the Commission, the definition of eGovernment follows the one utilized by the EU. The official EU-definition of eGovernment is in line with the one presented above, stating that: “*eGovernment is about using the tools and systems made*

possible by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to provide better public services to citizens and businesses” (<http://ec.europa.eu>, internet 1). It should be noted that in order to accurately measure progress, the concept of eGovernment was diluted and specified in order to operationalise it for the benchmark reports. In effect, the concept of eGovernment was reduced to 20 basic public services (see Annex 1) and their level of sophistication.

2.2.2 Leaders-laggards dynamic

The division of countries, in this case, EU member states in the two categories “*leaders*” and “*laggards*” when discussing development in a variety of policy areas, is not a new phenomenon.

While a historical background of events seems superfluous at this point, the following section will very briefly present the concept of leader-laggards dynamic. The concept has been introduced and utilized in a variety of policy areas. An area which intuitively comes to mind is of course economic development. Another policy area in which it recently has enjoyed significant academic interest is in the field of international environmental policy development (Lieverink & Andersen in Jordan et al 2005, chapter 4). Liefferink et al state that “*variations in the speed and level of development of environmental policies in different countries are a recurrent theme in the literature*” (Lieverink; Arts; Kamstra; & Ooijevaar 2009, p. 1).

At the basic outset, the leader-laggards dynamic implies that within a certain policy area on the international arena, important differences exist between those who constitute the “*best in class*” and those furthest from these on the development spectrum. Furthermore, it is believed that the leaders, the best in class, exert a positive influence on the laggards by acting as good examples and actively pushing for development through various means and methods, acting, basically, as teachers in an active learning process (Lieverink & Andersen in Jordan (ed) 2005, p. 49-63). As will be argued further on, the OMC-process can be perceived as an institutionalisation of the leader-laggards dynamic, and its application to an OMC-process provides us with valuable insights.

3 Background

In order to understand the issue at hand, and the questions surrounding it, it is necessary to first detail the process of events which have led to the use of the OMC and the establishment of the eGovernment initiatives per se. In the following sections I will outline the Lisbon Strategy; the creation and subsequent establishment of the OMC as a policy implementation method within the EU; and eGovernment policy initiatives under the Lisbon Strategy, that is, eEurope and i2010.

Given the lack of space, this section will only provide a general overview rather than an exhaustive explanation of each area, focused towards factors which are relevant for the study's aims and purpose.

3.1 The Lisbon Strategy, the OMC, and ICT-related initiatives

3.1.1 The Lisbon Strategy cycle

Under the title of “*Employment, Economic Reforms and Social Cohesion - towards a Europe based on innovation and knowledge*”, EU heads of state gathered in an informal special meeting at the Lisbon Summit, March 2000. The Summit took place in the context of the rise of the New Economy, that is, the dominance of knowledge-based economies on the international economic arena (Single Market News 2000, Issue 21, internet 2). It was a response to an immensely successful US economy and unprecedented growth in said region, and a way for the EU to outline the process by which it would play catch up with the US (Ibid).

During the Summit, EU-leaders set strategic goals and objectives, summarized in a sentence that has become a symbol for EU optimism in the early 21st century, namely the intention to make the EU “*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*” (Lisbon Summit Presidency Conclusions 2000, par. 5).

To attain this goal, several specific objectives were formulated on a broad spectrum. The EU Council demanded explicit and specific actions to be taken in order to accomplish their ambitions, these actions and the objectives which they strived towards made up the general framework which has become known as the Lisbon Strategy. The Strategy was subsequently boiled down to several more

detailed objectives depending on the issue-area, and a wealth of initiatives launched.

Since its inception, the Strategy's achievements in terms of both overarching as well as specific objectives have been evaluated periodically. In 2004, following elections of a new European Parliament, the establishment of the first Barroso Commission, and the prospect of the eastern enlargement, a mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy was launched. The review was requested by the Commission who established a High Level Group headed by former Dutch Prime minister Mr. Wim Kok with the objective of composing an independent evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy (High Level report: Facing the challenge 2004, p. 5). The review concluded that over-ambition, and the lack of Member State's commitment to the Strategy had led to disappointing results, arguing that

“much more urgency is needed in its implementation, and more awareness of the costs of not doing so. (...) the Lisbon Strategy has become too broad to be understood as an interconnected narrative. Lisbon is about everything and thus about nothing. Everybody is responsible and thus no one“ (Ibid, p. 16)

The results of the review eventually led to the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005, this time with a clearer focus on primarily growth and jobs, a streamlined reporting and evaluation process, and the establishment of the National Reform Programmes to guarantee Member State's commitment (European Council Presidency Conclusions, 2005). The re-launch proved to be successful, in the annual report on Lisbon Strategy progress *“Keeping up the pace of change”* (2007), the Commission concluded that Europe had come a long way and that the economy was performing much better than prior to the re-launch.

However, the financial crisis which came into full effect in 2008 halted the progress made earlier. Nearing the end of the Lisbon cycle, the Swedish Prime Minister Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt, then representing the Presidency of the EU, declared that the Lisbon Strategy had been a failure in a debate article in Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter (DN 2009/06/02). The final evaluation performed by the Commission elaborated on some of the successes of the Lisbon Strategy, but admitted that overall, the Strategy's overarching goals had not been met (EU SEC(2010) 114 final, p. 3-5).

3.1.2 The establishment of the Open method of Coordination

In the Presidency conclusions of the Lisbon Summit, it is stated that the Strategy will:

“be achieved introducing a new open method of coordination at all levels (...) a fully decentralized approach will be applied in line with the principle of subsidiarity in which the union, the Member States, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actively involved, using

variable forms of partnership” (Lisbon Council Presidency Conclusions 2000, par. 7)

The rise and subsequent establishment of the OMC was a response to a growing need for coordination amongst the Member States and the inability of the traditional Community Method to cope with the challenges of an expanding and diversifying EU (Kröger 2009, p. 3). The OMC was also a way for EU leaders to expand the influence of the EU into areas previously outside its competences, promoting “*soft convergence of national policies, without resort to new EU legislation*” (Stubb; Wallace; & Andersson in Bomberg & Stubb (eds), p. 143). Given the width of the objectives set out by the Lisbon Strategy, the OMC provided the necessary tools to cope with the challenge.

3.1.3 The Lisbon Strategy and eGovernment

At the centre of the discussion held at the Summit was the issue of new technologies and how they drive development in the New Economy. The EU’s, and Europe’s in general, inability to match US growth was perceived as a consequence of – amongst other things – to keep up in terms of technology development and use (Single Market News 2000, Issue 21, internet 2). In the Summit conclusions the arguments for boosting the digital and technological aspects of knowledge-based economies in EU were specified (Lisbon Council Presidency Conclusions 2000, par. 8-11). Furthermore, a basic policy structure, detailing the overarching aims and objectives for the EU in this particular area, was set (Ibid). The importance of technological development was argued on the basis that it was a powerful engine for growth, competitiveness and jobs; environmental benefits were to be had; it could, and would improve EU citizen’s quality of life; and it would enable EU governments to make information readily accessible, thus facilitating many aspects of citizens lives (Ibid).

Prior to the Lisbon Summit, The Commission presented to the European Council the draft document “*eEurope – An Information Society for All*” (2000) which outlined the means by which Europe would utilize the opportunities presented by the surge of ICTs. After consideration, The Lisbon Summit invited the Council of Ministers and The Commission to put forward an eEurope Action Plan. The first eEurope Action Plan was presented in June 2000, it proposed three main objectives:

- 1) *A cheaper, faster, secure internet*
- 2) *Investing in people and skills*
- 3) *Stimulate the use of the internet*

Obviously quite broad in nature, these objectives each had a set of sub targets. The sub target of “*Government on-line: electronic access to public services*” under the third main objective and the specific actions associated with it,

comprised the eEurope initiative's efforts in the field of eGovernment (eEurope 2002 Action plan 2000, p. 22-23). The eEurope 2005 Action Plan succeeded eEurope 2002 after it had "*delivered major changes*" (eEurope 2005 Action Plan 2002, p. 2). The 2005 Action Plan was primarily a way to keep up with, and adhere to, rapid technological developments and changes in the EU's Member State composition (Ibid, p. 8). For the 2005 Action Plan, a greater emphasis was laid on expanding eGovernment availability and utilization across the Member States. The increased focus on eGovernment was seen as an efficient way of attaining several objectives at once, arguing that eGovernment developments would imply not only enhanced governance and citizen/government relations, but also constitute a driver for growth in the ICT-industry due to aggregate demand (Ibid, p. 2).

In line with the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy, the eEurope initiative was laid to rest and replaced by the i2010 policy framework which is detailed in the following chapter.

4 The i2010 policy framework

As has been mentioned earlier, the i2010 policy framework replaced the eEurope initiative. The decision to rename, and refocus the EU's main ICT policy framework was a direct consequence of the Kok-review and the subsequent reform and re-launch of the Lisbon agenda. The three main objectives of i2010, according to EU COM(2005) 229, were:

- 1) the completion of a single *European Information Space* which promotes an open and competitive market for information society end media;
- 2) strengthening *Innovation and Investment* in ICT research to promote growth and better jobs;
- 3) achieving an *Inclusive European Information Society* that promotes growth and jobs in a manner consistent with sustainable development and that prioritises better public services and quality of life

For the sake of clarity and space, I will not detail the two first mentioned objectives further than this, but rather concentrate on the third objective which is the relevant one for this study.

4.1 i2010 eGovernment

In the last paragraph of the above mentioned third objective of the i2010, it is stated that the policy framework will work for better public services. The promotion and development of eGovernment as a general category is included in this concept along with inclusive eGovernment as a specific category. In order to attain the overarching goal, the Commission launched the eGovernment Action Plan in 2006, as an integral part of i2010 (COM(2006) 173 final).

The Action Plan drew heavily from the conclusions of the ministerial eGovernment Conference held in 2005 – the third out of now five conferences of this kind – comprised of representatives from the Commission as well as Ministers, CEOs, industry representatives, experts, and academics (<http://ec.europa.eu>, internet 3). The input gained from the conference was subsequently summarized and reformulated by the Commission as it established the Action Plan's main objectives and goals (Ibid):

- *No citizen left behind* - advancing inclusion through eGovernment so that by 2010 all citizens benefit from trusted, innovative services and easy access;

- *Making efficiency and effectiveness a reality* – significantly contributing, by 2010, to high user satisfaction, transparency and accountability, a lighter administrative burden and efficiency gains;
- *Implementing high-impact key services* for citizens and businesses – by 2010, 100% of public procurement will be available electronically, with 50% actual usage, with agreement on cooperation on further high-impact online citizen services;
- *Putting key enablers in place* – enabling citizens and businesses to benefit, by 2010, from convenient, secure and interoperable authenticated access across Europe to public services;
- *Strengthening participation and democratic decision-making* – demonstrating, by 2010, tool for effective public debate and participation in democratic decision-making.

In order to effectively monitor i2010 implementation and policy evolution, a High Level group composed by member state representatives was set up by the Commission in 2006 (OJEU 2006/03/15). The High Level group was in turn assisted by different subgroups, one of which was the eGovernment subgroup that had the mandate to provide advice concerning the implementation of the eGovernment Action Plan.

The objectives, although more precise than the general objectives in the i2010 communiqué above, are still quite broad, and the fulfilment of these objectives allows for a certain amount of interpretative space. For example, what exactly determines the level of “*benefit*” that citizens and businesses enjoy from secure and interoperable authenticated access to public services? What is meant by an “*effective public debate*” under the last objective? And so on. Furthermore, several objectives are instantly recognizable as failures. For example, public procurement is at the moment not even close to 100% available electronically in most member states, and security protocols for internet communication are still being developed and updated on a regular basis.

Yet, the progress report on the Action Plan prepared for the Commission by the Danish Technological Institute (2009) states that it “*has been very successful in encouraging both general and specific eGovernment policies to be put in place in European countries, coordinating these where appropriate at European level, linking them to related Information Society and public sector policies, and kick-starting or supporting policy implementation.*” (DTI Progress Study 2009, p. 100), and overall deems it successful, influential and instrumental to progress made since its launch.

A curious conclusion at first glance, it is explained by how “*success*” has been measured. In order to measure progress towards the overarching goals, a set of indicators were developed, and updated during 2000 – 2010, which permitted such a conclusion to be drawn. The indicators utilized were originally developed for the eEurope Action Plan in 2000 and were later inherited by i2010 (Benchmark Report 2006, p. 1) as they had proved to be an adequate tool. As part of the benchmarking process, the sophistication and level of availability of the *20 basic public services* for citizens and businesses were measured annually since 2001

(Ibid). Progresses towards these indicators have equalled progress towards the Action Plan's objectives. Member states were evaluated relevant to the indicators and scored on a score table depending on their ability to improve the availability and sophistication of the 20 basic public services.

As a consequence, a conclusion to be drawn is that compliance with the indicators de facto became the true objectives for member states. They provided a tangible goal for them to aspire to, the ambition to be amongst the top scorers, and guided them in the formulation of their respective national reform plans. As such, the indicators which at the start of the eEurope initiative may have seemed disconnected with the true objectives, have transformed into the actual objectives.

5 EU policy processes

5.1 Alternative policy processes, summary

The EU policy and decision-making process is characterized by its complexity and high number of procedural options available. However, scholars and practitioners dealing with the EU have identified the three most common policy processes by which the EU has operated since its inception. Stubb et al list the Community Method, Intergovernmental Method, and the Open Method of Coordination as the most common and central processes within the EU (Stubb; Wallace; & Andersson in Bomberg & Stubb, p. 139-147). In the following section I will briefly outline the first two of the three mentioned policy processes, The Community Method, and The Intergovernmental Method. Section 5.2 will provide a more in-depth look at the Open Method of Coordination.

5.1.1 The Community Method

Beginning with the Community Method, it implies the transfer of power from the national arena to the EU level. In accordance with this method the central players are the EU institutions, with The Commission acting as a privileged actor maintaining the monopoly over the right to initiate policy proposals (Ibid, p. 140-143). As such, the Community Method is a supranational legislative process, where decisions are taken by EU institutions through bargaining and consensus-building where possible. The Community Method has traditionally operated within the first pillar of the EU pillar system which dealt with single-market issues, freedom of movement, agricultural policy etc. However, as of the Lisbon Treaty and the end of the pillar system, the Community Method has expanded into areas previously exclusive to the second and third pillars, namely Security and Justice-affairs. Through this method, decisions are taken by The Council of Ministers and the European Parliament in the co-decision procedure, also known as the Ordinary Legislative Procedure (Lisbon Treaty consolidated version, article 251), using Qualified Majority Voting (QMV).

5.1.2 The Intergovernmental Method

Contrary to the Community Method, the Intergovernmental Method implies direct cooperation between national representatives and policy-makers (Stubb; Wallace; & Andersson in Bomberg & Stubb, p. 139-147). Decision-making through this method is often employed in areas and issues which are deemed sensitive to the Member States, or when deciding on overarching policy goals for the EU.

The Intergovernmental Method has up until 2009 been used in the second and third pillars of the EU pillar system; however, the abolishment of the pillar system does not imply that this method is now a thing of the past. It remains a relevant method in a variety of policy areas. The Intergovernmental Method is characterized by lack of transparency and a very limited role for the main EU institutions, except the recently formalized institution of The European Council. Though the EU now has expanded its competences to areas previously off-limits, intergovernmental negotiations and agreements continue to set the main course for EU policy. It is also clear that many issues are resolved through this method away from the scrutiny of the public eye in more informal settings.

5.2 The Open Method of Coordination

As has been mentioned, the Open Method of Coordination was launched by the Lisbon European Spring Council of 2000. Some tentative remarks have been made as to its origins; however, a deeper analysis is needed to provide an appropriate representation of the method. The following section will discuss the origins and its *raison d'être*, its core characteristics and applications, and finally effectiveness. The existing literature and research on the OMC is vast. Since launch, it has been studied vigorously by academics, journalists and practitioners. The University of Madison – Wisconsin EU Centre's Forum on the OMC has gathered extensive research on the OMC's general features, as well as case studies, and has been of great assistance to my study.

5.2.1 Convergence through soft-law

Though the OMC was officially launched by Lisbon Summit in 2000, scholars have pointed out that methods of policy implementation which are now labelled as OMC, have in reality been in use since the 1990s (Begg 2006, p. 16) (Kröger 2009, p. 2). It is argued that the OMC of today, is a "*further consolidation and institutionalisation of instruments that the EU had used since the early 1990s*" (Kröger 2009, p. 2). The Lisbon Summit can therefore be seen less as the initiator of OMC and more as a point in time where existing policy practices were consolidated under the umbrella of a single concept (Radaelli 2003, p. 17).

The reasons for this consolidation have been discussed in-depth by scholars, reaching significantly different conclusions. The official reason, laid out by the European Council at Lisbon, stated that it aimed at “*achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals*” (Lisbon Council Presidency Conclusions 2000, par. 37). Deeper analysis’ by academics have revealed that the OMC was formulated largely as a response to the shortcomings of the *méthode communautaire*, either because of politically or pragmatically unacceptable practices (Begg 2006, p 34), and its inability to meet the perceived coordination need (Kröger 2009, 3). Overall, though scholars may argue over the underlying reasons, there appears to exist a general consensus concerning the primary reason. Jonathan Zeitlin summarizes them by highlighting the two main theoretical promises of the OMC.

“First, the OMC has been hailed as a promising instrument for addressing common European concerns while respecting national diversity because it encourages convergence of objectives, performance, and broad policy approaches, but not of specific programmes, rules, or institutions. (...) Second, the OMC has been acclaimed as a promising mechanism for promoting experimental learning and deliberative problem-solving insofar as it systematically and continuously obliges Member States to pool information, compare themselves to one another, and reassess current policies against their relative performance.” (Zeitlin 2005, 2)

Given the broad nature of the Lisbon Strategy, and the fact that the main EU goals are not uniform over the Member States, the EU had to implement a method which didn’t rely on “*hard law*”, but rather achieved convergence through the use of “*soft law*” and non-binding agreements. The OMC provided the solution as it relies on tools which contrast to the traditional regulatory mode of EU governance. It provided a middle way between the EU-level and the national level (Büchs 2008, p. 1-2), while relying on Member State commitment and naming and shaming rather than binding rules.

5.2.2 Applications and effectiveness

When determining the core characteristics of the OMC, an initial clarification is required to avoid confusion with the established literature. Within the academic sphere, the OMC is perceived in two separate ways. The first category of academics considers it as a *procedure* for policy development, while the second considers it as a *policy* for European integration (Kröger 2009, p. 3). In this study, the purpose is to examine the implications of the OMC as a procedure and therefore aligns to the first category mentioned above.

Though it is labelled as single method, separate OMC-processes differ significantly in their application. As an ideal-type, according to Tholoniati, the OMC procedure usually includes: “*A dedicated committee representing the member states, chaired or assisted by the Commission, with a possible role for the*

European Parliament; The definition by the Council or the Commission of EU guidelines or common objectives combined with specific timetables to achieve them; Translation of these general EU goals into specific national policy strategies, plans, targets and measures; EU-level indicators and benchmarks to compare progress and best practices; Regular monitoring and joint evaluation to maintain peer pressure and mutual learning.” (Tholoniati 2010, p. 95)

However, this ideal-type is not the standard as OMC processes differ in their practices depending on the issue-area at hand (Zeitlin 2005b, p. 2), e.g. indicators are only used when deemed appropriate (Radaelli 2003, p. 15). Some OMC processes follow a strict set of rules regarding reporting, surveillance, sharing of good practices etc, while others only include only specific and limited elements present in the ideal-type (Zeitlin 2005b, p. 3). The variety of ways in which the OMC is utilized has earned it the recognition of being a flexible tool, revisable throughout the process (Kröger 2009) (Radaelli 2003) (Tholoniati 2010) (Begg 2006). However, the attentive reader will at this point have realised that the common characteristics of an OMC-process summarized by Tholoniati, are all present in the i2010, at the least in a superficial manner. The implication of this realization is that the study’s conclusions, which are yet to be determined will, contrary to many other studies on the OMC, refer to a relatively pure OMC-process.

Critics have observed that the ambiguous nature of the OMC leads to a lack of clarity in regards as to what expect, it can be a hit or miss kind of instrument, and rarely provides the level of transparency which is demanded by observers as member states engaged in an OMC-process seek solutions outside the box (Begg 2006, p. 35). Furthermore, the lack of hard-law entails lack of commitment and failure to meet demands. In particular, serious questions have been raised concerning its effectiveness in terms of influence over policy outcomes. Though scholars may have found evidence of positive effects of OMC-processes on national policy-making, Büchs underlines that the broadness of OMC objectives makes analysis of objective achievements nigh irrelevant (Büchs 2008, p. 4). Establishing a proper causal relationship between the OMC and policy development produce unclear results as to what the OMCs role actually is (Ibid). Moravcsik, doesn’t hold back in his analysis when he concludes that although optimism is high “*there is little evidence that any of this matters for policy outcomes*” (Moravcsik 2005, p. 26).

OMC supporters, or at the least non-critics, underline that the inherent flexibility, combined with soft-law character of the OMC, create a new mode of EU governance which is applicable to both mundane and sensitive policy areas while accounting for national differences (Zeitlin 2005b, p. 4). Continuing on a positive note, researchers have highlighted the OMCs capacity to promote “*experimental learning and deliberative problem solving*” through information exchanges, comparisons and relative performance (Zeitlin 2005b, p. 4) (Begg 2006, p. 35).

Concerning the issue of effectiveness, the challenge aimed from the critics is met. It is admitted that the influence, and subsequently the effectiveness of the OMC is a methodological and analytical challenge (Kröger 2009, p. 8). Kröger highlights several issues involving an assessment of the influence of an OMC-process:

- 1) the inherent vagueness of the OMC discourse
- 2) political games which interviewees and governments play “*For example, governments may affirm that the OMC was not influential on labour market reforms while it played a crucial role, only so as to keep the impression of sovereignty intact. Or, to the contrary, they may defend the introduction of [e.g.] labour market reforms pointing to European pressure (...) while reforms were already underway before and independently of it.*” (Ibid, p. 8)
- 3) alternative external and internal factors may be difficult to grasp and considered in an appropriate manner
- 4) the flexibility and revisability of the OMC implies an interchangeable object study which is difficult to fully comprehend

To remedy these issues, Kröger proposes three solutions (Ibid, p. 8-9). The first demands that the researcher formulates carefully considered hypotheses. The second is to limit the analysis to empirical findings focused solely on the focus points of a specific OMC process, such as the guidelines and objectives. Finally, the third solution is to focus on narrow and well defined objectives/indicators or other similar items of particular interest. As I have mentioned earlier in under section, the second solution is the method employed in my analysis.

5.3 The leaders-laggards dynamic and the OMC

The OMC process covered in this study shares several basic traits with those found in a classic leader-laggards dynamic. In the following, I will argue that this OMC-process, and others like it, shows signs of institutionalisation of several practices which are present in leader-laggards dynamics, albeit in a different way or handled by a different set of actors. To do this, I will utilize concepts introduced by environmental policy researchers as their conceptual framework is, after some alterations, instrumental to the analysis I intend to make. The ambition is to create a conceptual framework for analysing and describing OMC-processes characterised by significant differences between the top and the bottom.

In an OMC-process, there is a normative element to objectives to be achieved. This is of course a necessity given the soft-law approach of the method, and the lack of repercussions for non-compliance. This trait is shared with many situations which exhibit a leader-laggards dynamic. The leaders in e.g. environmental policy, push for development amongst others because, as they perceive it, there is a normative need for development (Liefverink & Andersen in Jordan et al 2005, p.

49-63). The reasons for this need obviously vary between policy areas; they may be moral, such as the case of Human Rights; they may be economic, such as the case of removal of trade barriers; they may be for a sustainable environment, such as the case of CO2 caps; or any other reason which is perceived as positive by, or for, the leaders. The difference between the two scenarios is that the objectives in an OMC-process are determined by a supranational institution as opposed to unilaterally set by the leaders. Nevertheless, two parallels can be drawn: 1) there are normative objectives present in both scenarios; 2) both processes, if a leaders-laggards situation may be labelled as such, aim at consolidating the practices of the leaders, and possibly surpass them.

Environmental policy researchers argue that leaders actively *push* for development on a voluntary basis, employing different strategies in their efforts (Ibid) (Liefferink; Arts; Kamstra; & Ooijevaar 2009). In an OMC-process, the responsibility for pushing has been taken from the member states and moved to the supranational level. Though the initiative has been moved, leaders nevertheless push, or more accurately expressed, *pull* development implicitly by a) setting the level of expected results; b) leading by example; and c) sharing superior practices. In effect, it can be described as *pulling by example*. The pull is passive, in contrast to leaders outside the boundaries of the OMC, their pull is neither actively pursued nor purposeful (Liefferink & Andersen in Jordan (ed) 2005, p. 49-63).

First, the level of development of the leaders at the initiation stage sets the bar for what is considered realistic and attainable goals, thus contributing to the planning and sourcing of countries lagging behind. Second, given their relatively high development, they show what can be achieved with the right strategy. This effect can reasonably be expected to be particularly important in relatively new policy areas such as eGovernment. Finally, sharing best practices exerts influence not only in a constructive manner by sharing the *how to*, but also by naming and shaming those who don't employ them.

In summary, an OMC-process characterized by the existence of leaders and laggards exhibits qualities usually associated with leaders-laggards scenarios outside of soft-law frameworks. The framework of the OMC implies that leaders implicitly and explicitly pull development in lagging member states on a restricted, yet voluntary basis towards normative goals. The pull is the result of the inherent rules of the OMC-process which situates countries differing widely within a framework dedicated to sharing and learning, with the objective of convergence towards best practices. The pull is exercised passively by leaders who affect the setting of targets and ambitions, pull-by-example, and share knowledge concerning implementation of desirable practices, thus shaming those who don't, into compliance.

6 Comparative analysis

The member states which are to be part of the analysis have been chosen on the basis of the final eEurope benchmark report which rated them on a scoreboard based on their status against the indicators in the end of 2005. The benchmark report showed that in terms of sophistication, Sweden; Austria; UK; Ireland; Finland; and Denmark were all above a score of 80%, while Estonia barely missed the 80% mark (Benchmark Report 2005, p. 26). Concerning availability, Sweden; Austria; Finland; and Estonia were the only countries above a score of 60-70% while the UK landed on 59% (ibid). The member states chosen for the study “*leader*” category will be Austria, Finland, Sweden and the UK. The exclusion of Estonia, Ireland and Denmark is due to the other top scorers’ consistency across both categories, demonstrating that they were indeed the leaders at that point in time.

The “*laggards – intermediate*” member states were chosen on the grounds of which member states were closest to the EU25 average of 40% in availability and 65% in sophistication in the 2005 benchmark report. As a result, Belgium, Malta, Portugal, and Slovenia make up the intermediate category.

Determining which countries would make up the “*laggards - bottom*” category was a much simpler task given that four member states remained steadily at the bottom of the ranking in both measurements in 2005. They were the only member states under 20% in availability and 50% in sophistication. Hungary, Latvia, Poland, and Slovakia were chosen.

For the remainder of this study laggards – intermediates will be referred to as Laggards I, while laggards – bottom will be referred to as Laggards II. The necessary data to perform the comparison was extracted from the annual benchmark reports composed by the independent observer Capgemini Consulting in 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2009. No benchmark report was conducted in 2008.

The progress of the four member states under respective category will be presented in table-form. Table 1 under each category shows an overview of their development in terms of benchmark scores during the period between 2005 and 2009 under the two categories 1) availability; and 2) sophistication. The score percentage is detailed under each year with their position on the scoreboard in parenthesis. Graphs a) and b) under each category show progress in terms of percentage on a line chart for a visual representation of the development.

6.1 eGovernment development: Leaders

Table 1 indicates that movement on the benchmarks scoreboards has not been uniform across the four member states. Austria stands out as the most effective in reaching the objectives and performing well relative to the indicators without taking a dip in the progress reports at any point. Austria reached full online availability already in 2007 and was thus the first country to do so. Since then, Austria has maintained a steady level and is today still ranked amongst the top scorers.

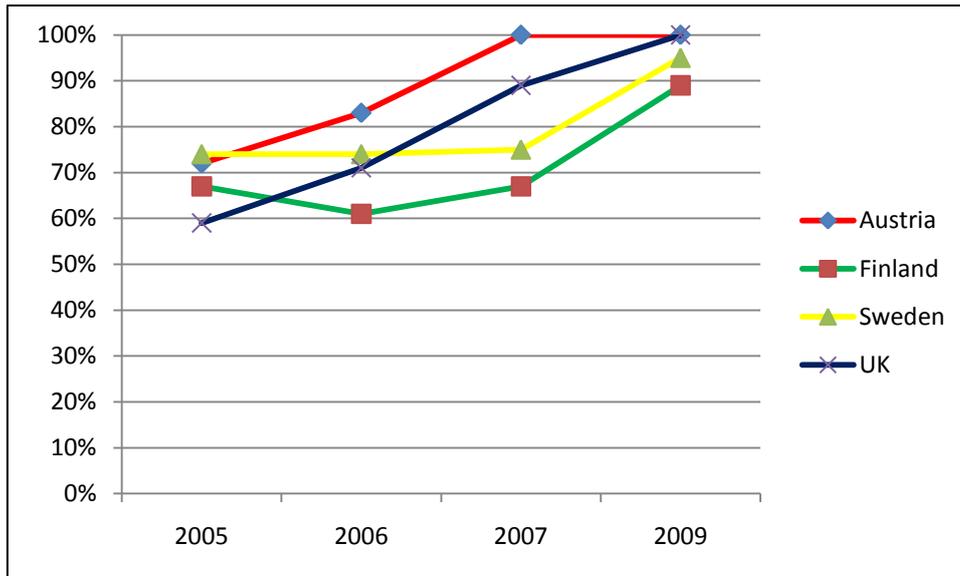
Swedish development on the other hand, has been less impressive. Starting at the top, Swedish performance against the eGov indicators has been stagnant, even taking a slight dive in terms of sophistication between 2006 - 2007. However, Sweden made a strong finish and is back amongst the top countries in the latest benchmark, showing commitment to achieving the targets once more.

The UK has exhibited a steady development in terms of availability, achieving full online availability in the 2009 benchmark. Development in the sophistication category on the other hand, has been modest at best, rising only 10% in four years. Still, like the Austria and Sweden, the UK is still amongst the top overall scorers.

Finland exhibits the most disappointing development since 2005. Starting from a very advantageous position, Finland's development was more or less inexistent between 2005 and 2007, even achieving lower scores. Much like Sweden, Finland has a steep development between 2007 and 2009, which mitigates what would otherwise have been a significant failure. Out of the four initial leaders Finland is the only member state to lose a spot amongst the leaders in both availability and sophistication.

Avail./Soph.	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Austria	72/87 (2/2)	83/95 (1/1)	100/99 (1/1)	n/a	100/99 (1/3)
Finland	67/83 (3/5)	61/85 (10/9)	67/82 (13/13)	n/a	89/94 (8/7)
Sweden	74/89 (1/1)	74/90 (4/4)	75/87 (7/7)	n/a	95/99 (5/3)
UK	59/84 (5/3)	71/89 (5/5)	89/90 (5/5)	n/a	100/94 (1/7)

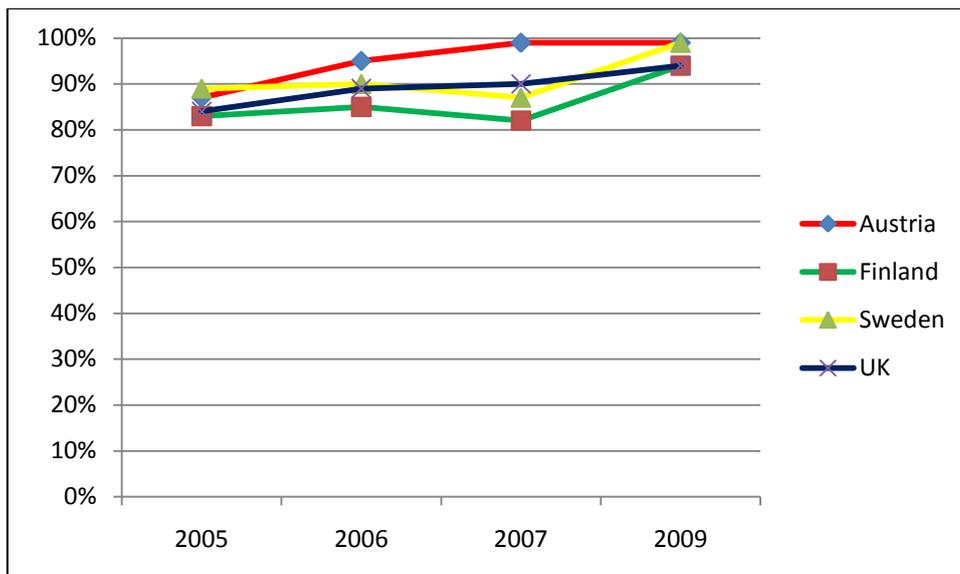
Table 1: Overview 2005-2009, leaders.



Graph 1a: Availability, leaders.

As can be seen in Graph 1a, all leaders except Finland, have shown a steady increase, though Sweden did undergo a period of little mobility between 2006 and 2007. Finland is the only country that takes a dip in the graph before returning to their initial level and later increasing dramatically in the last stage. Graph 1b illustrates how movement in the sophistication category has been quite reserved. Finland once again has a difficult period, this time between 2006 and 2007, and the same applies to Sweden, before making a strong return in the final benchmark.

The overall tendency in both categories is towards the 100% mark. While several countries have made strong progress and had steep development curves in availability, the lines are flatter when it comes to sophistication as is evident from Graph 1b. In part due to the fact that the space between the initial starting point and 100% is greater in the first measure.



Graph 1b: Sophistication, leaders.

6.2 eGovernment development: Laggards I

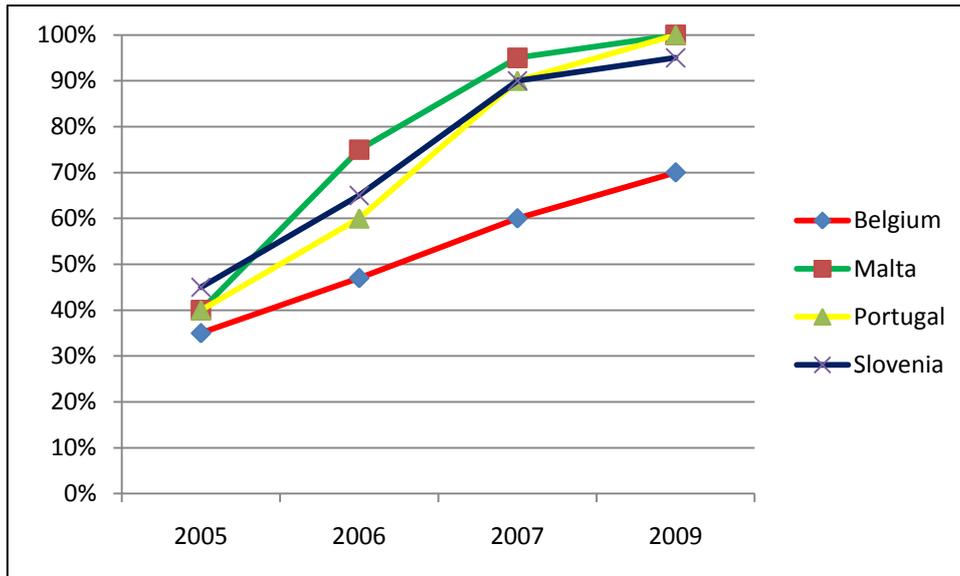
Table 2 shows development across the member states in Laggards I. The table reveals that the general trend is a drastic increase on the first benchmark indicator amongst all the member states, except Belgium who shows more modest progress, but strong progress nonetheless. Concerning sophistication, the tendency is the same, though less pronounced as a result of a higher average starting point relative to availability. Malta, Portugal and Slovenia all developed at breakneck speed, jumping 50% - 60% from the initial benchmark in 2005 to the final in 2009 in term of availability. Malta and Portugal both equalled and surpassed all of the early leaders, except for Austria in availability, in both categories, achieving a tied first place on the scoreboard. Slovenia also made radical progress and has, along with the two new leaders, leapfrogged their way up the scoreboard. Slovenia, though their progress doesn't quite match the two big winners, achieved impressive results.

Belgium is the only country amongst the Laggards I that fails to reach 90% on both indicators, and remains at the middle of the scoreboard in general.

Avail./Soph.%	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Belgium	35/67 (17/16)	47/74 (16/17)	60/80 (15/13)	n/a	70/89 (16/12)
Malta	40/67 (14/15)	75/92 (3/2)	95/96 (2/3)	n/a	100/100 (1/1)
Portugal	40/68 (15/13)	60/83 (10/11)	90/90 (3/4)	n/a	100/100 (1/1)
Slovenia	45/68 (13/14)	65/87 (7/6)	90/96 (4/2)	n/a	95/97 (5/5)

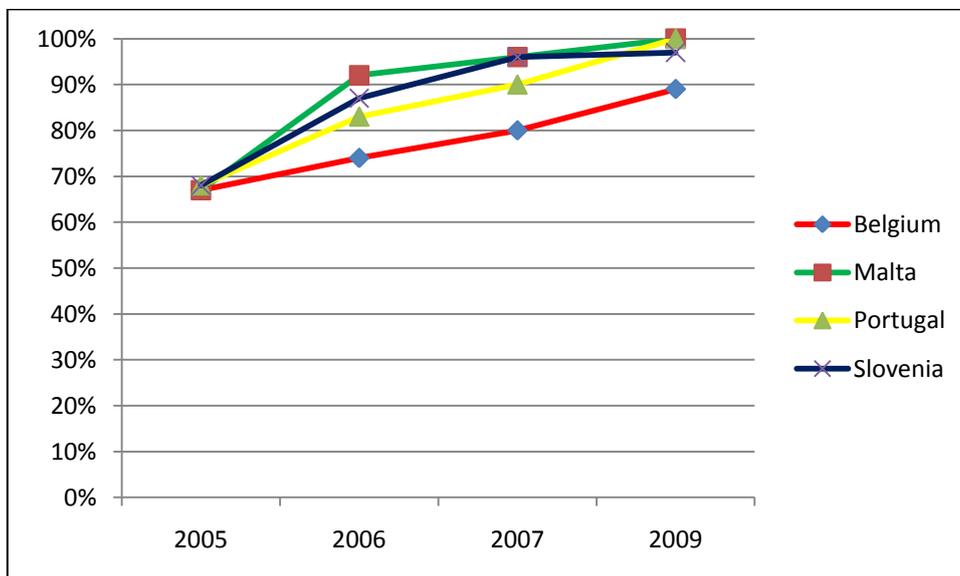
Table 2: Overview 2005-2009, Laggards I.

Summarized in Graph 2a, the results of Laggards I indicate a steep positive development in terms of achieving full online availability. Malta is exposed as the strongest one out of the gates, taking a massive leap of 35% already between 2005 and 2006 and following up with a 20% increase the following year. In the same spirit, Portugal achieved 20% and 30% between 2005 – 2006, and 2006 – 2007 respectively. Slovenia manages to match Portugal's development in the first period, but loses momentum between 2006 – 2007, while Belgium exhibits a steady, but in this context, relatively weak progress.



Graph 2a: Availability, Laggards I.

Graph 2b shows that unlike the leaders, Laggards I have progressed in a rather uniform fashion. None of them have experienced dips such as the ones portrayed by Finland and Sweden. The most salient feature expressed in the graph is the strong progress made between 2005 and 2006, after which a more levelled progression occurs when nearing 100%.



Graph 2b: Sophistication, Laggards II.

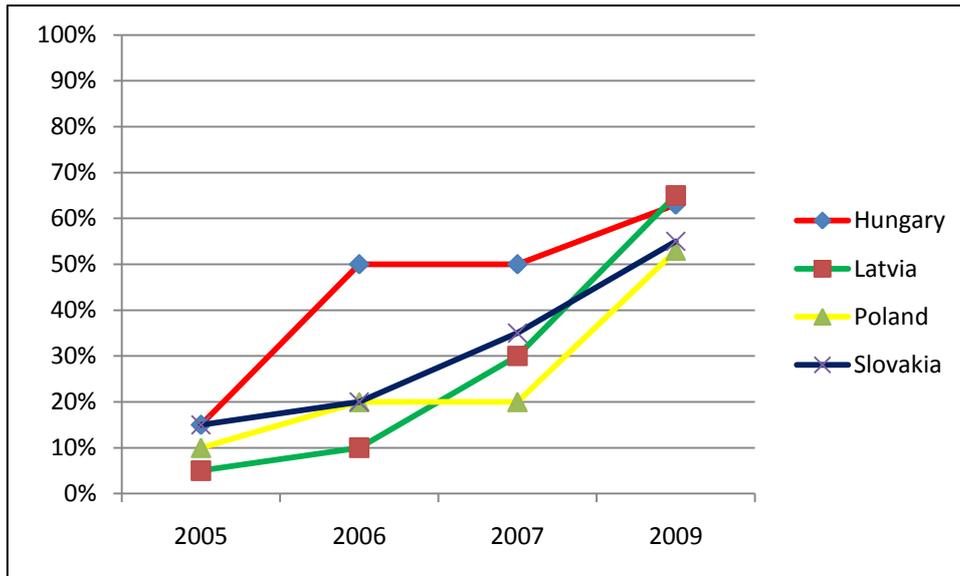
6.3 eGovernment development: Laggards II

Finally, Table 3 provides an overview of the progress made by the final four member states included in the study, Laggards II. The progress made by the bottom four in the first category is less than spectacular, with the exception of Hungary, during the period 2005 – 2007, where Latvia, Poland and Slovakia achieved increases of only 25%, 10%, and 20% over the course of two measurements. Hungary stands out in this period with a much more positive development, increasing 45% between 2005 and 2007, marking them as the only member state of the laggards to surpass the 2005 EU25 average of 40%. It can, however, be noted that the initial increase of Hungary occurred from 2005 to 2006, while development came at a stop the following year. The final two year period on the other hand, is characterized by a generous increase of the three initially stagnant member states, ranging from Slovakia's 20% to Latvia's 35% increase, while Hungary only manages to progress 13% in the same period.

In the latter category, sophistication, the same trend is observed. Hungary once more provides a drastic increase in the first period, this time of 31%, while the runner up, Poland, manages only a 17% increase. A more surprising revelation is that Hungary, who initially seemed like the top-candidate of the Laggards II, is the first country to finish in 2009 with a lower score than their historic best. The remaining member states in Laggards II eventually manage quite respectable total results, surpassing the 2005 average in sophistication. On the other hand, their progress relative to the other member states was indeed disappointing and they all remained at the lower parts of the scoreboard, with Latvia attaining the highest position of them at number 19 in both categories.

Avail./Soph.%	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Hungary	15/50 (22/22)	50/81 (14/12)	50/70 (17/17)	n/a	63/76 (20/22)
Latvia	5/33 (25/25)	10/47 (25/25)	30/54 (24/24)	n/a	65/78 (19/19)
Poland	10/36 (24/24)	20/53 (24/23)	20/53 (25/25)	n/a	53/74 (25/24)
Slovakia	15/40 (23/23)	20/51 (23/24)	35/57 (23/23)	n/a	55/72 (23/25)

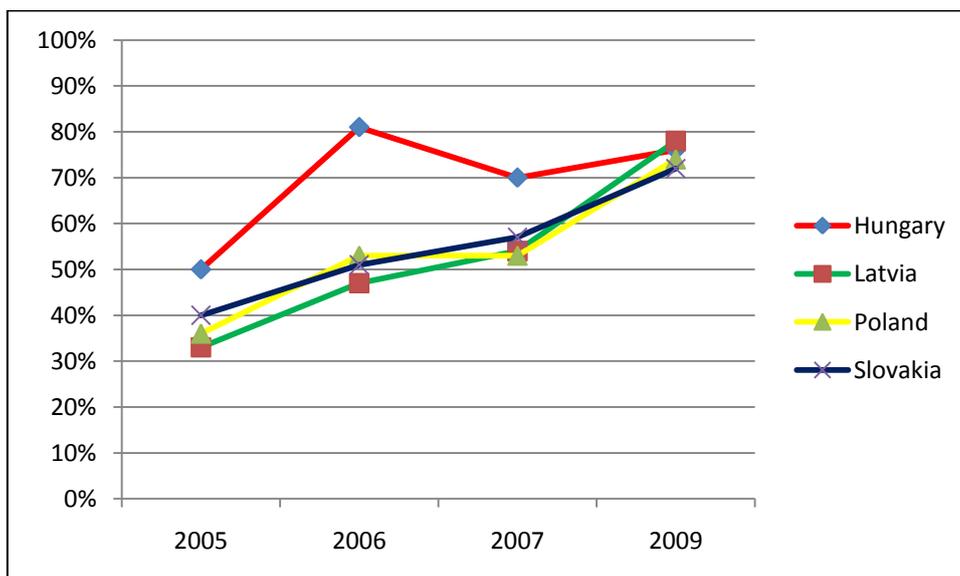
Table 3: Overview 2005-2009, Laggards II.



Graph 3a: Availability, Laggards II.

Graph 3a illustrates Hungary's initial promise as they distanced themselves from the rest, only to lose momentum and eventually be bested by Latvia who showed a quite positive trend 2006 and onwards. Poland made a significant leap in the final stretch, after barely progressing in the first two years. Slovakia, though their progress falls short of Hungary and Latvia, showed the most stable progression alongside Latvia's.

Graph 3b once more highlights the uneven career of Hungary as they quickly rise and fall significantly, only to return to a level just below their highest point. Latvia, once more showed a stable progression, with a more pronounced development between 2007 – 2009. Poland developed in a nearly identical pattern as the one presented in Graph 3a, where an initial period of progression was followed by a standstill, and subsequent leap in the final period. Slovakia mimicked the development of Latvia, but as was the case with availability, they fell short of Latvia's efforts.



Graph 3b: Sophistication, Laggards II.

7 Development patterns

The first, and most obvious conclusion which can be drawn is that the OMC, in this case, has indeed been effective in driving eGovernment development in the member states. Both of the laggards' categories have increased dramatically relative to their initial starting points based on the two specific indicators utilized within the OMC-process. Given their specificity, it should provide us with an accurate representation its effectiveness. External factors can of course not be accounted for, however, by focusing on progress made against the indicators, I believe the results are indeed proof that the OMC has been an effective tool in this policy area.

As we have seen, the leaders of eGovernment development in 2005 have, with the exception of Finland and partially UK as well, maintained their positions as leaders on both indicators. The most surprising findings concerning this category were the disappointing developments of Sweden, and in particular Finland between the initial benchmark and the one performed in 2007.

On the other hand, the first category of laggards developed dramatically since the 2005 measurement, showing significant improvements in both areas of measurements, and in the case of Portugal and Malta even overtaking the leadership. The most salient findings on their development curve is that unlike the two other categories, none of the member states in laggards I exhibited any signs of stagnation, except when finally nearing the 100% mark.

The second category of laggards showed less inspiring results. Their development showed that they've had both periods of steady progress, as well as stagnation and leapfrogging. This contrasts with the steady and reliable development of laggards I and is the main differentiating factor between the two divisions, besides the actual scores.

Overall speed of development, that is: amount of percentage increase between measurements over the entire course of the process, was highest amongst laggards I as they made formidable leaps up until the last period. At that point, three of them had surpassed two of the initial leaders and equalled a third, while only Austria prevailed. In contrast, the slowest were the leaders, who in their majority, despite a vast initial advantage, failed to reach the 100% mark. The final laggards category showed inconclusive results in this area, where different member states displayed both very slow speeds during certain periods, as well as high speeds during others. Overall, their speed was relatively high, though far from matching the speed of laggards I, they surpassed the leaders in this sense.

The amount of percentage increase however, has to be contextualised. The slow speed of the leaders can be explained by pointing out that the room for improvement available to them was indeed small and consisted of what appears to be the hardest stretch. Observing the patterns of both the leaders, and laggards I

when approaching the higher marks of 85% and onwards, it appears as though the last stretch is indeed the one in which all of the member states to reach it, have shown the slowest progress.

7.1 Final analysis, the pull of leaders

The OMC process has led to a remapping of the development landscape of eGovernment. Initiating a similar study today and following the progress in the years of come, would define previous laggards as the new leaders, and previous leaders, as the new laggards. Albeit with less differences amongst them.

Applying the conceptual framework formulated on the basis of the leaders-laggards dynamic utilized by in other areas, we can perceive the development in this particular case in the following way:

The initial leaders set the bar when determining the overall objectives towards which convergence is desirable by simply participating in the process. Since objectives below their current levels would have been redundant, the leaders pushed the ambition forward. Though we cannot exclude the possibility that the objectives would have been as high, or even higher, had they not been part of the process; it seems likely that the higher the development of those at the top exhibit, the higher the general objectives will be. Ambitions and strategies subsequently formulated are derivative of the objectives and it therefore seems plausible to conclude that this had a pulling effect on lagging member states.

The leaders have, throughout the process pulled towards their standards by providing a good example. Alternatively, it is possible to consider it a competition, rather than a friendly cooperative exercise. In this sense, the leaders pull by offering the target to beat. This factor is also tied to what I have labelled as institutionalised naming and shaming, which occurs through the reoccurring evaluations and benchmarks.

Either way, the superiority of some, versus others, has had a pulling effect on member states within this process. The fact that the leaders have changed since the start is a moot point, as the new leaders exercise the same pulling effect as those before them. To provide an example, we turn to the Swedish case: By 2007, Sweden had been surpassed by countries previously well below their own level of development. As a response to this turn of events, the Swedish government formulated a new national strategy for eGovernment in 2008. The express ambition of which, was to regain a leading position within the eGovernment area (Swedish Action Plan for eGovernment 2008). The subsequent comeback of Sweden on the scoreboards, shows just how important this pulling effect can be to the development of a member state.

Finally, the i2010 eGovernment Action Plan has aimed at converging the best practices within the Union. By offering a framework of incentives, competition and learning tools, it has succeeded. As far harmonizing specific practices goes,

this study cannot draw any conclusions. It can on the other hand, claim that there has been a definite convergence towards the desired level of development as defined by the benchmark indicators. These results imply that future research within this field needs to pay close attention to the differences in development amongst member states. As I have attempted to show, great differences amongst member states participating in an OMC can have a very positive effect on countries labelled as laggards. The future challenge for policy-makers, is to develop the policy process to fully benefit those at the initial top as well.

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8.1 Internet Sources

Internet 1:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/index_en.htm

Internet 2:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/smn/smn21/s21mn14.htm

Internet 3:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/conferences/past/2005/index_en.htm

Annex 1: The 20 basic Public Services

Citizens	Businesses
Income Taxes	Social Contribution for Employees
Job Search	Corporate Tax
Social Security Benefits	VAT
Personal Documents ⁴	Registration of a New Company
Car Registration	Submission of Data to the Statistical Office
Application for Building Permission	Custom Declaration
Declaration to the Police	Environment-related Permits
Public Libraries	Public Procurement
Birth and Marriage Certificates	
Enrolment in Higher Education	
Announcement of Moving	
Health-related Services	

Each category is broken down into a series of representative services for the overarching labels. Progress is measured by investigating the ability of member states to provide the relevant services and their level of sophistication.