



Denmark's digital strategy to foster inclusion

In terms of digital public services, Denmark ranks second in the EU, right behind Estonia. For the past two decades, Denmark has had a very proactive – even interventionist – policy with respect to e-government. In May 2016, the Danish government presented its Digital Strategy 2016–2020¹, entitled "A Stronger and More Secure Digital Denmark". The goal is to create an inclusive society in which everyone can participate.

Since the European Commission introduced the Digital Economy & Society Index (DES²) in 2014, Denmark has occupied first place, and even improved its score the second year. The index is based on five indicators: connectivity, human capital, use of Internet, integration of digital technology and digital public services. Denmark's high score is the result of widespread use of the Internet by the population, the high integration of digital technology in the workplace, and above all the advanced degree to which government services have shifted over to digital. It is also the fruit of fifteen years of active collaboration between the central, regional and local levels of government.

Right from the start, the government has opted for the use of digital technology wherever possible ("digital by default"³) for public services and in connecting citizens with their government. Since the Digital Taskforce was set up in 2001, a number of large-scale projects⁴ have been successfully completed – including several that were European and even world firsts – and have become part of the everyday lives of Danish citizens. The transition to a fully digital government cannot become a reality, however, as long as access inequalities persist.

Mandatory e-government for everyone

In 2006, Claus Juhl, director of the Digital Taskforce, stated, "You have to make it mandatory if you want to secure that not only 5% or 10% are using the new tools, but that you get a real transformation of society⁵". The eBoks⁶ online digital mailbox system was introduced in 2001 and became mandatory in 2014 for every citizen over the age of fifteen. Exceptions are made only for those who can prove to their local government authority that they have limited Internet access (99% of Denmark has access to broadband), that they have language difficulties or that "the state of their health is incompatible with the exchange of electronic messages."

The Act that came into force on 1 November 2014 made the use of electronic means (Digital Post) mandatory for all contact with government authorities. To accomplish this, citizens use a NemID⁷, a digital identity and signature scheme that was introduced in 2010. It is based on the unique number (CPR⁸) which has been assigned to every Danish citizen since 1968. It is used by every government department as well as by all Danish bank for the provision of online banking services.

1 <http://www.digst.dk/ServiceMenu/English/Policy-and-Strategy/Digital-Strategy-2016to2020/Press-Release-New-Digital-Strategy>
2 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi>
3 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/scoreboard/denmark>
4 <http://tyskland.um.dk/de/uber-uns/news/newsdisplaypage/?newsid=ab599dff-8bd8-493b-8b5e-1566d3382e37>
5 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4767852.stm>
6 <https://www.e-boks.com/danmark/en/>
7 <https://www.nemid.nu/dk-en/>
8 <https://cpr.dk/in-english/moving-to-denmark/>

New legislation that bolsters the provisions contained in the Act of June 2012 applies to the government and introduces mandatory digital self-service over a four-year period⁹. This has allowed the Danish government to achieve the objective it set itself in 2011: that 80% of exchanges take place digitally by the end of 2015. In May 2016, the Digitaliseringsstyrelsen (Danish Agency for Digitisation) published the latest statistics¹⁰: citizens completed 87 percent of their applications and registrations via online solutions, and 77 percent of all letters to citizens and businesses from the public sector were sent digitally through Digital Post.

Gains invested for the benefit of those without access

Although the main thrust of the digital changeover is to improve the quality of public services, its effectiveness is regularly assessed by the *Rigsrevisionen* (Government Audit Office), in which two units are fully dedicated to e-government¹¹. The Digital Strategy 2016–2020 carries forward the goal of saving €400 million annually, which the government has pledged to use to finance measures to benefit those in difficulty with respect to digital technology (free, customised help available in libraries, help for purchasing computer equipment and subsidised Internet access).

The new five-year plan strategy, which was the subject of public consultations and negotiations with the various stakeholders¹² involved throughout 2015, has three main goals: (1) Digital solutions must be easy-to-use, quick and ensure high quality; (2) Public sector digitisation must provide good conditions for growth; and (3) Security and confidence must be in focus at all times.

The strategy is broken down into 33 initiatives¹³, which include simplifying procedures that are still seen as too complex by users, improving the help given to users by bolstering the educational training given to civil staff, and more rational sharing of personal data between government departments. According to Claus Hjort Frederiksen, Danish Minister for Finance, who oversees the Digitaliseringsstyrelsen, "Internationally, Denmark is seen as a pioneer in public sector digitisation. The close collaboration is core in an efficient, cohesive digital public sector. This means that, as a society, we are prepared to adapt and to exploit the opportunities offered by the new technologies while still preserving the uniquely Danish sense of security and confidence in each other and in society."

A culture of transparency and heightened trust in public services

Denmark became a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in November 2011¹⁴. Three points of its second action plan (nos. 4, 5 and 6) directly have to do with e-government structures to encourage inclusion. The Danish government has committed before the international community to implement the measures contained in the new strategy and to submit the results to an independent assessment. This is indicative of the desire for transparency that is rooted in Danish culture and acknowledged by all: for the fourth consecutive year, Denmark has topped Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index¹⁵.

As a result, there is a particularly high level of trust in government, which can be seen in the absence of citizens' fears with respect to personal data protection¹⁶. In 2016, Denmark was, according to the World Happiness Report that was established in 2012 by the United Nations¹⁷, the country with the happiest citizens on the planet. The ranking is based on six indicators, including trust in institutions.

Jean-François Adrian

⁹ <http://www.digst.dk/ServiceMenu/English/Policy-and-Strategy/Mandatory-digital-self-service>
¹⁰ <http://www.digst.dk/ServiceMenu/English/Policy-and-Strategy/eGOV-strategy/The-Danish-public-sector-reaches-ambitious-digital-milestone>
¹¹ <http://uk.rigsrevisionen.dk/media/1390279/annual-report-2015.pdf>
¹² <http://www.digst.dk/ServiceMenu/English/Policy-and-Strategy/Digital-Strategy-2016to2020/The-new-Digital-Strategy-in-the-making>
¹³ http://www.digst.dk/~media/Files/English/Ny-strategi-2016-2020/DS_Singlepage_UK_web.pdf
¹⁴ <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/country/denmark>
¹⁵ <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2015/results#results-table>
¹⁶ <http://blog.economie-numerique.net/2016/02/17/leconomie-numerique-danoise/>
¹⁷ <http://unsdsn.org/news/2016/03/16/world-happiness-report-2016-update-ranks-happiest-countries/>