The History of the Future: Changes in Danish E-Government strategies 1994-2010

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Abstract
This article presents an historical account of the governing principles of e-government in Denmark from 1994 to present day. With a point of some policy analytical themes and with empirical data retrieved from elite interviews and official documents, we are presenting the history of the governing of e-government. Based on notions such as e.g. centralising-decentralising; bureaucracy-networks we are able to find patterns of continuity and change. From being a small part of a national Information Society strategy in the early 1990s, in which the actors were supposed to be guided by visions based on certain ‘Danish values’, the policy domain has in the 00s increasingly become subject to traditional hierarchical control, which has resulted in a more coercive integration of government information systems.
1. Introduction

Have the aims, organisation, management and tools of e-government policies in industrialised democracies changed since we seriously started to discuss e-government in the 1990s? Most of the literature on the overall development of e-government usually delineates the historical development in terms of the strategic aims, objectives and aims unfolded in discrete governmental commission reports, organised interests, the industry’s position papers, and implementing agencies’ internal documents, etc. These official publications have sometimes evolved from distinct national public administration reforms, where information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been seen as instruments for a more efficient public administration; sometimes they have been the result of more all-encompassing “information society strategies” (cf. Strejcek & Theil, 2002). The basic argument in the latter category is that we are all living in an information society, and e-government is simply the public sector extension of this.

While this body of literature presents a fairly good description of various governments’ initiatives and rhetoric, it does suffer from certain interrelated biases. First, few of the historical accounts of e-government go beyond a rather superficial reporting level, let alone adopt a critical stance to the observed accounts of the policy. The literature tends to take on the policy-makers’ cognitive and normative positions as factual propositions, where these positions are treated as explicit and objective realities.

Second, most of the research on electronic government has until recently been focussed on either outputs or outcomes of e-government policy, rather than the processes (Yildiz, 2007). Unless one includes the centrality of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for policy making processes in general (Margetts, 1998), there is a tendency towards ‘policy issues’ in the literature becoming synonymous with formal and regulatory constraints such as e.g. legal issues regarding privacy, security, and authenticity rather than the actual policy processes of e.g. agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation processes, evaluation exercises etc.

Finally, and also most important for this article, the history of e-government is seldom analysed through any form of qualitative research methods. One policy strategy is followed by another, and the only thing that really changes is the rhetoric (or the ‘clichés’).
Consequently, we cannot identify patterns of neither change, nor continuity, in national e-government policies.

In this article, we present a policy framework for studying the history of e-government. In addition, we apply this framework on the Danish e-government policy from 1994 and onwards. Our aim is to demonstrate that under an otherwise rather stable regime on how to employ new ICTs in public administration for the benefit of efficiency, there has been some subtle, but yet important, changes in the overall policy. Moreover, with our empirical case of Denmark we like to demonstrate that some of the earlier voices that the Danish strategy was more ‘democratic and inclusive’ (Friis, 1997), represented the retreat of government and a shift towards other forms of governance (Bekkers & Korteland, 2006), and entailed important voluntary commitment (Andersen et al., 2007) is not the direction we have identified.

In section two, we present our overall theoretical and methodological framework of our historical policy analysis. We have structured our analysis in accordance with some of the overall theoretical discussions within both policy studies and e-government research. Hence, we are studying the historical development in terms of a) identified chief actors b) explicit policy problems, c) centralised/decentralised policy solutions, c) hierarchical versus market and network governance, e) recommended and applied policy instruments. Furthermore, we will in this article present our empirical data. In section three and four, we present the empirical analysis of two different periods of time; first, the period 1994-2000, and second, the period 2001-2009. We present and discuss our conclusions in section five where we all also discuss our findings in terms of international comparisons.

2. Studying the history of e-government policy

2.1 Methodology

Although the policy of e-government usually is conceived as a subfield to either general public administration policies, or information society policies, we can conclude that it is a proper policy field in the sense that it is populated by a narrow group of policy actors (and subsequent policy communities), carries its own distinct policy discourse, and finally, reflects the employment of an exclusive ensemble of policy instruments. Although
the development of e-governments, or the ‘informatisation of public administration’ (cf. Frissen & Snellen, 1990; Bellamy & Taylor, 1998 etc.), can be traced back to the 1960s in most Western industrialised democracies, there is reason to believe that the expansion of information and service delivery through user-friendly interfaces (since the advent of the Internet in the 1990s) has been the departure for the current situation. Consequently, our analysis sets off in the mid-1990s.

Methodologically, this is a case-study in which we have analysed both a number of documentary sources, as well as conducted elite interviews with a number of centrally located actors within different ministries and government agencies. The latter has in particular been important to understand the bureaucratic conflicts between various parts of the government. Among the documentary sources, we have studied commission reports on the information society, internal reports on public management and modernisation of the public sector, and to a lesser extent non-governmental reports (from the Industry etc). Our elite interviews are with some of the key persons in the current e-government development, mainly senior public managers on a central government level. The paper is centred on the following theoretical discussions in e-government:

a. Leading actors
b. Problems E-government is supposed to solve
c. De-centralising versus centralising
d. Management and organisation: Hierarchy, market or network
e. Instruments of governing

2.2. Leading actors
An initial and important question is to analyse who the actual involved actors are? Who is actually included in the commissions, boards, working groups etc? Furthermore, it is important to see how power relations and chains of accountability are articulated. Who is supposed to be responsible for the implementation of the e-government strategies? Is the responsibility shared, or are certain actors more accountable?

From other national studies of the governance of e-government (cf. Fountain, 2001; Eifert & Püschel (eds.), 2004, Pratchett, 2004; Jensen & Kähler, 2006; Löfgren, 2007), we can learn that there are some recurrent groups of actors that seem to be active in the policy
field, and which constitute the ‘policy community’. First, it is the group of senior civil servants from the ministry/agency which holds e-government issues within their remit. Second, it is managers from the plethora of those public institutions which are supposed to implement the policies, or mediating central organisations working in the interests of certain public organisations. Thirdly, we find a mixed group of technical/legal experts, academics, consultants and representatives from the Industry or certain trade interests. This group are often included as ‘experts’ to the specially designated ‘commissions’ or ‘cross-ministerial advisory boards’. One can naturally discuss the balance of powers between these groups, and in particular as some have pointed out, the role of the IT-industry (Dunleavy, et al. 2006) and ‘consultants’ (Horrocks, 2009). However, for the purpose of this this article we will just descriptively analyse the changes in the composition of actors.

2.3 Problems and solutions that e-government are supposed to solve
In line with Kingdon (1984/2003), we assert that there are first problem streams in which different indicators, pushed by certain events, crises and symbols, draw the attention of the decision-makers to the fact that there exists a problem that needs to be appreciated and resolved. Second, there are policies streams in which ideas, visions and proposals are formulated, subjected to criticism and revision, and reformulation, by those actors who are constantly engaged within the policy. While the solutions of e-government, that is the strife for a fully integrated e-government easily available for all citizens and the industry, has been relatively stable since the 1990s, we want to see if the identified problems and solutions have altered over time.

2.4. Decentralising versus centralising
One important factor in all e-government policies is whether the overall policy is in favour of centralism or decentralism. Should decisions regarding issues such as e.g. planning, e-government organisation, management, system development etc, be taken at a senior or central level, or should the responsibility be put on a decentralised level close to the operative functions? As demonstrated in Heeks (2006), we are probably more likely to encounter hybrids between these two dichotomies, rather than pure examples of these
two strands. What is clear though is that the development is simultaneously encompassing elements of both centralisation and decentralisation as e-government management is multi-dimensional (cf. Barrett & Greene, 2001). That is, we can for example envisage an e-government development in which, at the same time, the technical aspects are centralised whereas the managerial aspects are decentralised. We will in our study analyse the swings between these.

2.5 Management and organisation: Hierarchy, market or network

Another vital aspect of e-government policy is how we chose to govern the implementation processes. As in other policy fields in modern societies, current e-government policies are based around a keystone idea that there has been a dislocation of the traditional hierarchical (‘silo’ or ‘bunker style’) concept of governing in which a strong and unitary state is at the centre of the polity. Direct commands and legal provisions from a central governmental actor have been replaced by either market mechanisms in the shape of New Public Management (NPM), or by institutionalised negotiations between otherwise autonomous actors organised in self-governing networks (cf. Bekkers & Korteland, 2006). Within the field of e-government, the market approach includes both internal and external issues. In terms of management, we are talking about new roles for managers, results orientation, and an overall depolitisiation of the policy (Jæger, 2005). Regarding the external focus, we can just mention outsourcing of certain IT-functions, the widespread use of private IT-consultants, and the transfer of operative public IT-agencies to more or less privatised companies.

However, the e-government field has also witnessed a different trajectory where the formations of networks, bringing together the ‘stakeholders’, have become an increasingly widespread mechanism in electronic government strategies across industrialised democracies. These networks of stakeholders in the field of e-government usually include representatives of those various governmental agents who are supposed to integrate their electronic information and service delivery, but can sometimes also include private, and voluntary actors, or organised interests. By integrating all concerned actors, the idea is to make the policy process more inclusive, coordinated, and transparent, avoid duplication, and pool resources. The role of the government becomes to meta-govern the otherwise
self-governing networks at a distance (Löfgren & Sørensen, 2009). For the purposes of our article, we study how the policies over time have articulated the managerial and organisational aspects.

2.6 Instruments of governing
Our final point of analytical focus is to study changes in the choice of policy instruments. The employment of e-government strategies involves, like in all other policy domains, the exercise of certain policy ‘tools’ or ‘instruments’ (cf. Hood, 1983; Vedung, 1998), where the ‘trinity’ of authority/regulation (‘sticks’), economic means/treasure (‘carrots’), and information/nodality (‘sermons’) seem to recur in all policy literature. In the case of e-government the exercise of certain instruments mainly refers to how the (central) government seeks to wield their power in their attempts of seeking successful implementation by other, and often subordinate, actors. Even though most e-government implementation processes usually involve a mix of different instruments, we will still see that the balance between regulation, economic means and information is constantly in flux.

3. The Historical background of Danish E-Government
As mentioned above we have decided to split the historical analysis of the Danish ICT-policy into two periods: an early stage from 1994 to 2000 and a later stage from 2001 until 2010. While the first period is characterised by a centre-left government, Denmark has since 2001 had a stable coalition conservative-liberal government. However, before we present the ICT-policy of the first period we will make a short glance beyond the period and briefly describe the stage for the first Danish ICT-policy and hereby the development of e-government.

First, the development of Danish e-government should be perceived as an integrated part of the overall process of reforming the public sector (Jæger, 2003). Already in one of the first governmental policy schemes for reforming the public sector (1982), new information technology was announced as a vital vehicle for enhancing the efficiency of the public sector (Ejersbo & Greve, 2008). This vision maintained in official governmental reports throughout the 1980s. In 1992 the MoF published a report about the use of IT in the
state, which is sometimes being referred to as the beginning of e-government (Johansson, 2004). This association between public sector reforms and e-government is something which has remained stable throughout the whole history of Danish e-government, which is also emphasised by the OECD (OECD, 2005).

Second, the technical development of computer technology opened for new possibilities of using technology in the public sector. In the 1960s and 1970s big central databases were created based on major mainframe computers. The databases predominantly contained administrative data from policy fields where the regulation was clear and there was a large amount of data to process (Jæger, 2003). In addition, this is the period where internal governmental information systems (e.g. pay-roolls, taxes and pensions) are developed. As a part of the public sector reforms in the 1980s many tasks were decentralised from the central government to sub-national authorities and from them further on to the single service-delivery institutions (schools, day-care institutions etc.) (Bogason, 2001).

At the same time many public sector organisations started to communicate electronically through internal networks (Jæger, 2003). When the internet became the common standard for communication in the mid-90s, electronic communication was extended to include citizens and enterprises and in this way the digitalization of the public sector reached the ‘front-office’.


During the early stage the specific domain of e-government is to a large extent subordinated to the government’s overall information society strategies. Following the recommendations of the EU Bangemann high-level group in 1994 (EU, 1994), the Danish government decided to instigate their own special committee with the purpose to produce an overall governmental ICT-policy related to ‘the Information Society’. The report from the committee: ‘The Info-Society 2000’ (MRIT, 1994) had the aptitude to put the notion of ‘the Information Society’ on the political agenda. Subsequent to the publication of the report, it was sent out for a remit to a number of concerned actors (including all the ministries, public agencies, representatives of the Industry and organised interests). The report itself became a public best-seller and was published in three editions. Moreover, the themes of the report became a subject of debate in the media, and generated some activity
(including a number of public conferences) (MRIT, 1995: 13). It also created an atmosphere of optimism and fuelled lot of different ICT-projects all over the public sector. Afterwards, the report was followed up by annual IT and Telecommunications Policy Reports to the Parliament.

By the end of the 1990s the government set up a new committee which published the report: ‘Digital Denmark – Transformation to the Network Society’ (MRIT, 1999). The chair was the same as in the first committee (MEP Lone Dybkjær) which makes it less surprising that several of the policy themes are the same as in the first report. But there are also some differences which will be described below. The annual policy report in December 2000 came to be the last from the centre-left government as the government lost the office in November 2001.

4.1 Leading actors

Even though a range of different actors were involved in the formulation of the ICT-policy (more below) the Danish government was absolutely taking a leading role during the early years. Prior to the first committee, the MoF was in charge of the use of ICT in the government due to policy issue’s close links to the public sector reform programme. However, following the establishment of a separate Ministry of Research and Information Technology (MRIT) in 1993 the new ministry was given the responsibility for electronic government.

The Danish government was inspired of initiatives in other countries. In the annex to the first report initiatives from Norway, Sweden, Singapore and USA is presented. In particular the American so-called NII-initiative (the National Information Infrastructure) from 1992, and the report (the European Information Society, EU 1994) published in 1994 by the European Union and chaired by the German commissioner Martin Bangemann, had an impact on the Danish development.

Given this description of the early Danish ICT-policy it is clear that the government, and especially the Minister of Research, plays the role as the leading actors in the development. They act on behalf of an international policy agenda which they transform into a Danish context. In this process the Danish government acts as a meta-governor. By taking the initiative and formulating the policy in this way they create an institutional
framework for public agencies at all levels, as well as for private enterprises, trade unions, and ordinary citizens to act for the implementation of the information society.

4.2 Societal problems and solutions in e-government

4.2.1 Information Society

As mentioned above, the domain of e-government is sub-ordinated to the overall strategy of the information society at this early stage. The Danish government do not try to solve a specific societal problem with their information society strategy, but they assess that if the Danish welfare state is going to endure the country has to adjust to the new conditions in an emerging global information society. The argument is that ICT creates a lot of opportunities, which is important to realise if the Danish Industry is going to survive the international competition.

“It is not only a question of jobs. It is also a question of the basis on which our entire welfare society is based” (MRIT, 1995: 9).

Albeit inspired of the international initiatives on the information society the first Danish committee did not just copy these initiatives. Instead the committee argues that due to certain ‘Danish values’ the country needs to develop a special Danish model of the information society. Consequently, the Danish policy strategy differs from equivalent strategies with regard to at least two objectives (Friis, 1997; Jæger, 2003). First, the development of the information society is not going to be led ‘solely by the market forces’ (EU, 1994), instead it should be developed through a co-operation between private companies and public agencies.

The principal political aim is for the public sector to play actively together with the private sector on a proactive strategy for Denmark’s development towards the information society; the public sector should be leading in efficient use of information technology” (MRIT, 1995: 21).
This strategy of letting the public sector play an active role in the development of the information society is also recognised as a special Danish strategy by the OECD (2005).

Second, the certain ‘Danish values’ concerning democracy and social inclusion should be at the centre of the strategy. In this way the public sector is expected to make sure that:

- IT should support free access to information and exchange of information.
- IT should support democracy and give the individual the opportunity to exercise his influence.
- IT should support personal development, one of the means being to support the individual in his working situation and in his leisure time.
- IT should support openness in the public sector, making it more transparent, contributing to the promotion of efficiency and rationalisation in public institutions and enabling them to provide better services.
- IT should be used to sustain the disadvantaged of society” (MRIT, 1995: 12-13)

The goal of including all Danes in the process of developing a Danish information society, regardless of their age, economic status, abilities or health status is, by OECD, described as: ‘An overarching feature of Danish government ICT policies and strategies’ (OECD, 2005: 173).

4.2.2 E-government
At the time of the first ICT-policy report the term e-government was not used. Instead the strategy includes a vague description of a ‘public electronic network for service delivery’. The overall objective of this is described as creating a better and more efficient public sector, which makes it easier for both the Industry and citizens to communicate with public authorities.

The term e-government was introduced in 1997 in a special policy report on how to implement e-government (MRIT, 1997c). In this report e-government is mainly defined as ‘back-office systems’ for processing documents (e.g. electronically archives) and workflow. Even though efficiency is mentioned as the overall objective, the report emphasises the possibilities for organisational changes through a revision of the work-flow. E-
government is simply not a question of ‘putting electricity’ to the existing work processes, but also demands new ways of organising the work-flow: ’80 per cent organisation and 20 per cent technology’ (MRIT, 1997c). According to the report, e-government holds the ‘revolutionary’ potential to create a new public ‘network-organisation’ in which the point of departure is the citizens (and their problems), and where a ‘virtual public agency’ represents the entry to the public sector.

A couple of years later this revolutionary prospect of e-government has lost some pace. In the second commission’s report (1999) the overall political objective is a better and cheaper public service through e-government (MRIT, 1999). More precisely, the stated aim is that Danish public sector is to provide the best and most efficient public service in the Nordic countries with the help of e-government.

Due to the earlier mentioned focus on special ‘Danish values’ (i.e. democracy, social inclusion and transparency) in the first information society policy, it is of special interest to study how these values are carried out in the strategy for e-government. This broad concern is specified in relation to e-government in the annual policy report to the Parliament in 1997 (MRIT, 1997b). This report points out that not only the Danish democratic values will impact the implementation the information society; the information society will also impact Danish democracy. Consequently, the objectives of e-government also entail visions of employing ICTs for enhancing democratic participation and increasing transparency, thereby empowering the citizenry (MRIT, 1997b: 5-7). Accordingly, the report emphasises that every citizen holds certain ‘IT-rights’ such as: easy access to the technology; affordable prices; universal design; and privacy, etc (MRIT, 1997b: 10-11).

The second commission’s report also entails the aim of using the technology to give citizens new channels for democratic debates and participation (MRIT, 1999). However, this is not described as an objective for e-government but is coupled with concerns about digital divide, cultural content, media, and security. Consequently, the aim of digital participation in democracy is no longer regarded as a part of the e-government strategy; instead it is labelled as e-democracy and given much less attention (Jæger, 2003: 69). This separation between e-government and e-democracy has afterwards ensued, despite the recommendations from OECD to bring digital participation in democracy back as a part of the e-government strategy (OECD, 2005: 23).
4.3 Decentralisation versus centralisation
Concerning the strategy for implementation of the ICT-policy, and the responsibility for the implementation, we can identify a development between the first and the second committee. While the first committee supported every project and experiment, as long as ICT was involved, the second committee argues for coordination and regular surveys of the state. The second committee acknowledges that there are drawbacks with a strategy based on uncontrolled mushrooming of experimental ICT projects, and in particular that the different project might conflict with each other. Instead, the second committee suggests mandatory surveys of the development, and by assigning Statistics Denmark the task of producing a statistical review on the national use of ICT (MRIT, 1999: 97).

In the subsequent annual IT policy report the new strategy is further elaborated. The argument is that the development of ICTs produces some challenges which no public agency can deal with on its own, and that inter-organisational solutions are required. Among others, these challenges involve problems of interoperability and the demand for a common ICT architecture in government. Dealing with these challenges requires joint public cooperation to coordinate the many initiatives and to make general decisions on the common standards and infrastructure (MRIT, 2000: 33).

Given this description it is clear that during this first period there is a shift in the strategy for the implementation of the ICT-policy. The very first years demonstrate an uncontrolled and decentralised expansion of what best can be described as ‘bottom-up experiments’ within the public sector. Every project and experiment was desirable, as long as there were some technical component included, and the result was that ICT-projects blossomed in all corners of the public sector. During the end of the period it became clear that some sort of coordination was required if the objective of an efficient communication internally between public agencies, and externally with both the Industry and the citizens, was going to be achieved.

4.4 Management and organisation: Hierarchy, market or network
When the first committee was established in 1994 it was accompanied by a consultative group composed of representatives of various ministries, regional and local authorities, the ICT-related industry (including the national telecom operator), trade unions, and academics. In addition, a number of experts were called in to author position papers explaining different aspects of the field. Consequently, the emerging ICT-policy was the result of a process whereby a range of societal voices became included in the formulation of the new ICT-policy. Together they formed a network with a stated aim of writing up the strategy of the emerging information society. The members of this network also became regular participants in the subsequent annuals hearings of the Parliament.

The creation of this network was very much in line with the de-centralised approach of the policy. In the 1995 report to the Parliament, the Minister of Research and Information Technology expresses a joint responsibility for the implementation of the information society. The following year the Minister states that development of the information society can neither be handed over to the market forces, nor can we reach the objectives by means of statutory and legal commands. The only way to fulfil the visions is through a joint dialogue and responsible initiatives by social forces (MRIT, 1996).

This first period of strategic thinking on the information society assigns different roles to the various actors in society. Hence, the Government is given the responsibility for the formulation of an inclusive ICT-policy. The private sector is responsible for the development of the technological solutions. The trade unions are responsible for training their members in the usage of ICTs. The local authorities are responsible for implementing e-government in practice. And every citizen in the country is responsible for incorporating ICT in their everyday life (MRIT, 1996: 8-11). The overarching understanding is that the implementation of the ICT-policy is based on a network of autonomous and interdependent actors where none of them will be able to reach the objective alone.

4.5 Instruments of governing

The instruments of governing were in the early stage characterised by the deregulation and liberalisation of the telecom sector (following the EU directive), and, as mentioned
above, a bottom-up strategy where hundreds of different ICT-experiments were blooming in the public sector.

Beside this, the early ICT-policy describes the instruments to implement the information society in rather vague terms. The first report usually point soft and communicative instruments such as: the initiation of a broad societal debate to raise the awareness of the information society, hearings of the policy, and an appeal to the local authorities to put the implementation of the policy on the agenda (MRIT, 1994: 95-96). There are also a few examples that the government made use of their statutory power to issue some more binding decrees (such as e.g. that all public authorities should have web-presence). However, the government did not use any economic instruments to implement the policy. In fact, the first report does not discuss the financial side of the policy at all. In a later report to the Parliament the Minister of Research declares that the costs for e-government should be covered by the existing budget (MRIT, 1995:19-20), and this also included the abovementioned experiments. While the government encouraged local experiments with e-government, they did not provide any funding for it. Not even in a rather high profile program like the “spear-head municipalities” running in 1997-78 included funding for the activities. This lack of funding results in a lack of incentives to develop e-government solutions across different public authorities, because the benefits of the more efficient service do not always follow the costs of the development (which is what OECD labels as a ‘sow-harvest problem’ (OECD, 2005: 11)).

5. E-government becomes a distinct policy field: 2001 to 2010

Although not representing a radical change, the change of government in late 2001 (from a social democratic-social liberal Cabinet to a liberal-conservative one) does indicate a shift in how Danish e-government is perceived, and the role of ICTs in the endeavours of modernising government. Moreover, there is a significant shift in intra-governmental responsibility of e-government-related policy in 2001. Until this year, all issues regarding new ICTs, information society and e-government were formulated by the MRIT. In 2001, the political management of e-government issues is de facto transferred to the Ministry of Finance (MoF) through the creation of a Joint Board of e-Government and the so-called Digital Task Force (more below).
5.1. Leading actors

As mentioned above in the last section, the MRIT\(^1\) became during the 1990s a leading actor of the Danish overall Information Society Policy, including telecommunication regulation. Overall, the 00s present a couple of small, but still significant, changes between 2001 and 2010. First, the initial half of this period signifies an expansion of the number of included actors. Through a network-based mode of organisation called Joint Board of e-government, and the subordinate operative organisation ‘The Digital task force’ set up in 2001\(^2\), the MoF sought to embed all relevant actors through a number of joint horizontal initiatives. In terms of the organisation, the task force demonstrated an unprecedented model of bureaucracy at the time. Various parts of the government (central, local and regional) seconded staff members to an operational unit within the MoF which was based on a network-mode of governance (Jensen & Kähler, 2006). The immediate formal actors included representatives of the Central Government (primarily the MoF), Local Government Denmark (LGDK), Danish Regions, City of Copenhagen and City of Frederiksberg\(^3\). The Joint board of e-government was in 2005 substituted with the ‘Steering Committee for Cross Government Co-operation’. In terms of strategies for e-government, the period is characterised by publications of triennial government strategy plans (2002-2004, 2005-2007, 2008-2010). Hence, we are witnessing a transfer from general information society strategies to specially designated strategies for e-government.

The 00s also represented a sharper division of labour centrally within the government between the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MSTI) and the MoF in which the latter took lead in coordinating issues regarding services and access, while the former mainly dealt with the compilation of technical standards and policies within its subordinated agency: the ‘National IT and telecom agency’. Operationally, this work is exercised through various forms of coordinative initiatives in which the two ministries seek to guide, control and motivate a number of subordinated, but yet autonomous, public actors.

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1 This Ministry changes name to ‘Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MSTI) in 2001.
2 First under a specially designated programme called ‘Project eGovernment’ from 2001, but from 2005 as part of the ‘Steering Committee for Joint Cross-Government Co-operation’.
3 Following the structure reform in 2007 the two cities of Copenhagen and Frederiksberg lost their special political status in Denmark, and were deprived of their historical special privileges.
During this period we can witness how local and regional governments (and their central associations) are becoming increasingly more embedded in the coordination of electronic government. This, however, did not mean a decentralisation of the governance of e-government. The MoF still maintains a strong central position and seeks to mastermind the other actors (more below). The underlying idea is that those innovative solutions that the central government come up with will cascade down the government levels and serve as benchmarks and best practice for the local and regional governments.

In addition to these leading actors, it is naturally difficult to capture the motley policy community of e-government policy-making. However, the hearing process prior to the release of the 2007 strategy plan provides us with a tentative list of ‘concerned’ actors (both inside and outside) of the government. First, there is a strong element of individual public authorities including concerned government agencies (such as e.g. the data protection regulator) and local and regional governments. Second, there are organised interests including trade associations (including associations representing the various part of Danish IT industry), and those trade unions which represent civil servants and ICT professionals. Thirdly, there are a number of major private firms that take an interest in the Danish e-government policy processes. Among them we find producers of hard- and software (including the Danish branches of multinational enterprises such as e.g. Microsoft and IBM), as well as ICT consultancy firms (such as the abovementioned Danish ICT consultant KMD).

Finally, we should definitely not forget the role of international organisations, and here in particular the prominent role of OECD, while discussing central actors in the governance of Danish e-government. The OECD has since 2000 reviewed the Danish e-government strategy twice (OECD 2005, 2010) in close cooperation with the Danish government. These peer-reviews have to a large extent laid the pavement for the aims and objectives of the policies, as well as pointing out the barriers for further progress. At least there are clear foot-prints of the reviews in all the Danish domestic reports. Equally, the European Union has probably played an indirect role for the development of e-government in Denmark through the Lisbon strategy (and the subsequent eEurope action plans, xx), although we find few references to these documents in our material. However, the more coercive EU regulation, such as e.g. the data protection directive (Directive 95/46/EC)
and the services in the internal market directive (Directive 06/123/EC), has naturally set some legal frames for the Danish development.

5.2 Societal problems and solutions in e-government

Based on a review of the three e-government strategies (MoF, 2002, 2004, 2006), and some subsequent governmental expressed priorities, we can quite easily identify a rather consistent set of problems throughout this time period. By and large, these tag on the previous period’s optimistic perspectives on the capabilities embedded in new ICTs. In addition, the last of these strategic reports is explicitly affected by the 2005 OECD review of Danish e-government in which a number of ‘challenges’ were pointed out (see below).

Even though the priorities slightly alter between the reports, two chief problems remain dominant. First, the strive of increasing efficiency in the Danish public sector is one objective to contravene the ‘general impression’ that public sector staff is spending far too much time on handling routine cases, and less on ‘citizen-focused service’. Moreover, the problem with public expenditure is something which becomes associated as a problem which e-government is the solution to. This predicament is also spawned by both demographic changes in terms of an ageing population (and the subsequent shrinking tax revenues), as well as specific human resource problems with recruiting IT professionals to public sector jobs. We can quite easily deduce that the overall arguments why e-government is necessary have not changed from previous periods of time, let alone diverge from the international discourse on why e-government is necessary. What we here at the end of the period can see, is an (almost frustrating) acknowledgment that the public sector still has not reaped the fruits of the possibilities ‘naturally arising from an increasingly digitalised society’ (MoF, 2007).

Second, the government perceives e-government as a remedy against problems with easy and flexible access to government services. Even though the government in their strategic reports admit the need to maintain non-digital channels, the ultimate aim is to ‘digitalise’ all channels of communication between citizen/business and the public sector. As expressed in the 2007 strategy: ‘….users must be incentivised to use those channels which are cheapest for the public sector’ (MoF, 2007). The accessibility is also hampered by the lack of coordination and collaboration between different levels and domains of the
public sector. That is, the traditional Danish functionally and geographically differentiated mode of governing, in which every public authority ‘protects’ its own remits, disregards the aims of an integrated e-government.

In addition to these two chief problems, there are actually some problems and solutions identified in the early reports which gradually fade out as time goes by. For example, the first report (MoF, 2002), entails an explicit aim that e-government should not only enhance the level of public service and accessibility, but act as a central social and economic force for the country in the advent of the ‘network society’. As the report says:

*Given the size of the public sector, it [the public sector] will enhance the [public] interest for using ICTs, establish standards, create societal infrastructures and create new markets where Denmark can excel* (MoF 2002:6).

This aim, which is hardly mentioned in the second report, has completely disappeared in the last report. Here the approach is quite different – the strength of the market should be exploited in order to produce better public ICT solutions. Also this goes against the rationale of the 1994 report where the commission advocated joint public-private cooperation. Although it is difficult to assess what is missing in a governmental policy, and what could/should have been included, it still noteworthy that issues regarding individual privacy is almost completely absent in the strategies regarding electronic government in the period of 2001-2010; and this despite that this missing issue was addressed by several actors (both public and private) in the hearing process prior to the 2007 e-government strategy.

### 5.3 Decentralising versus centralising

There seems to be a general understanding that the single public authorities are ultimately responsible for fulfilling the government’s overall aims and objectives with e-government; this despite the calls for more collaboration and coordination vertically and horizontally between authorities. For example, the last government strategy from 2007 declares:
Increased collaboration and coordination do not, however, change the fact that the most essential action in relation to the on-going digitalisation still lies in the concrete digitalisation and modernisation initiatives on the part of each individual municipal, regional and government organisation. The individual authorities are responsible for ensuring the progress of such initiatives (MoF 2007:9).

Having said that, there are over the studied years a couple of factors that inevitable is pointing in the direction of a more centralised governance of e-government. First, Denmark has during the 00s experienced a number of major reforms, and in particular the amalgamation reform in 2007 in which 275 local governments were merged to 98 (and 13 counties became five regions). One of clear outcomes of this reform is that a number of public sector services and functions have become centralised to the central government. Likewise, a number of minor reforms combined with increased focus on quality assurance have resulted in stronger centralised governance in Denmark (Storm-Pedersen, 2010). One of the more clear examples of this development is the centralisation of administrative support functions within the central government. The aspiration, which is reflected in a report from the MoF in 2008 (MoF, 2008), is that administrative support functions such as accounts, pay-rolls, official journeys, and ICTs should be centralised to certain ‘service centres’. Basically, the argument is that the government wish to achieve economy of scale by centralising functions in the government and avoid duplications of otherwise standardised functions. Also the fear of not being able to recruit professional personnel in the future is also here used as an argument. Another example of centralisation is the new Danish central government policy on public procurement. Although regulated by both national and EU rules, public procurement used to be responsibility of the single authority. The authority could freely purchase whatever stationery, office equipment, ICT hardware and software they needed. Since 2007 public procurement is regulated by a number of central agreements between a special unit within the MoF and a selection of private suppliers. Although not directly connected to e-government, these tendencies have clearly affected the autonomy of the single authority.
Second, the tendency of coordinated government initiatives is clearly moving towards more centralised solutions in the overall strategies. One can just compare the language of the different reports. The 2002 strategy emphasises the decentralised responsibility of e-government. As they put it in the report:

*The individual [public] institution is responsible for the transition to e-government, and has the best prerequisites for assessing how the digital potentials [embedded in new ICTs] can be put into practice within its domain* (MoF, 2002:8).

The role of the various forms of coordinating initiatives (such as e.g. the above mentioned digital taskforce) is to secure the basic conditions, to counteract overall barriers, and to monitor the development. This decentralised policy approach is gradually challenged in the latter strategy plans. In the last strategy of 2007 there is clearly a different language:

*In order to secure cohesion and be able to prioritise digitalisation efforts better, more decisions will be made in binding collective fora. Those decisions will be based on a better overview and more thorough insight into which services and work processes it will be most valuable to digitalise, and which solutions can be reused at different levels* (MoF, 2007: 21).

This push towards more centralised solution in Danish e-government was also a central theme among many of the replies from actors during the hearing process prior to the publication of the strategy. Unsurprisingly, the comments to the draft for a new e-government strategy are divided between those who fear that local government autonomy and the sector-divided state is becoming undermined (such as e.g. the Danish Union of Librarians), and those who would like to see stronger centralisation initiatives (such as e.g. the Danish IT Society).

Third, and probably most important, a number of centralised solutions in the field of enterprise ICT architecture and interoperability have since the mid-00s been put into operation. In particular should the establishment of the joint service agency ‘Agency for Gov-
eRnment IT-services’ in 2009 clearly represents a centralisation of a number of e-government services. The objective with this new agency is to cut down the costs on generic governmental systems by relocating a number of ICT-staff from various ministries to one single agency with the mission of developing and maintaining the more general information systems. At present (2010) the new agency has ‘picked’ staff from six (central) ministries’ IT-departments and put them in the new organisation. The history of this new agency, however, reveals that the decision of centralisation has not been uncontroversial, and our interview study clearly indicate a battle between two ministries. Originally, the new agency was put under the domain of the Ministry of Taxation, which until that time had only played a subordinated role in the governance of e-government. However, following an intra-departmental conflict between this ministry and the MoF, the latter Minister ‘overtook’ the responsibility for the agency. Although not an explicit aim, the present route is (according to our sources) that the new agency will play a central role in centralising the e-government policy by standardising the public sector enterprise architectures in the future. As one of our respondents expresses it during our interviews:

Undoubtedly, there has been in shift in the way we govern e-government. [Here in the agency] we are talking about changes in the swings of the pendulum. First, you decentralise and every authority is free to make own decisions at discretion with respect to design and implementation of e-government. Then the pendulum swings towards a centralisation of tasks. Partly in order to make the processes more efficient, but also because we can see that the different concerned actors are spending lots of time on making the same decisions (Interview with the CEO, Agency for Government IT-services).

However, this centralisation process also involves a political aspect. The Danish public sector, and in particular the central government, has since the 1990s witnessed a number of major e-government failures in terms of major systems. This includes problems with stretching project times, massive exceeding of budgets, problems with project management etc which several times have threatened the position of the responsible minister (cf. the Danish board of technology assessment, 2001, 2009). Although this is nothing exclusive for Denmark, and that failures are likely to occur in all major ICT-projects, there has
been a clear drive within in particular the MoF to get e-government issues of the minister’s ‘desk’. As one of the central actors in Danish e-government puts it:

*The minister [of finance] navigates in a tensed political universe, and is always vulnerable to political attacks from the opposition. As the spin-doctor of the ministry expressed it when we decided to move the agency for government IT-services [back] to the ministry: “Well, that was the last good story in the papers we’ll hear about this. From now on we will lose [publicity] on it. [Head of Office for E-government, MoF]*

The current development of centralising e-government does thus not solely mean a tighter control, but also signals a strive for making the policy field less ‘political’ and articulate it as a pure ‘technical’ issue.

### 5.4 Management and organisation: Hierarchy, market or network

As already mentioned above, the governance of e-government in Denmark was at the beginning of the 00s very much based on a network-based approach. Although central actors sought to mastermind the otherwise independent actors at a distance, the general idea was still to engender multi-level cooperation and collaboration across functional areas. Originally, this was thought to materialise through good examples, best practice and voluntary arrangements between individual authorities. The various coordinating actors (such as e.g. the digital task-force) were allocated the role of reviewing, monitoring, present general guidelines, and finally, facilitate certain joint projects (cf. Government 2000). However, since the beginning of the 00s there have signs of a gradual shift away from this form of ‘hands-off network governance’ (or what one could call metagovernance) in favour of a more traditional hierarchical mode of governance. First, while the example par excellence of network governance – the digital taskforce – until the end of 2007 drew the majority of it staff from seconded employees from different local and central government institutions (on one- or two-year duration), the digital task force is today mainly staffed with employees from the MoF (OECD, 2010:67). Second and as already mentioned above, the languages of the strategy plans are discussing stronger collaboration, and more joint cohesive solutions. In particular is it clear that the latest devel-
opment with more uniformed back-office solutions and joint data standards and ICT architecture inevitably will lead to a more traditional chain of command in e-government.

5.5 Instruments of governing
This period actually begins with a major spearhead experiment with a massive investment in various ICT projects in one specific region (Northern Jutland) under the umbrella name of “The IT Lighthouse”. E-government was one of the main areas for experiments and the projects did in fact include direct central government funding (and co-funding from local governments etc). However, this project became the first and last of its kind, and was not followed up by new financial support from the government. Although we can conclude that there are clear indications of further centralisation and more coercive approaches to the governance of e-government in Denmark, this had not automatically lead to a restoration of traditional and hierarchical chains of command. What we can see? is rather a transition from a set of soft consensual and self-governing methods (such as e.g. dialogue, voluntary agreements etc) based on network mode of thinking, to a more subtle mode of command and control in which contracts and incentives is at the centre. As already indicated above, the establishment of a new agency (Government IT-services) with the explicit aim of creating joint standards and systems is a clear example of how the government by institutional design has come to lay certain ‘rules’ for the autonomy of subordinate public authorities.

6. Discussion and conclusion
Although we are discussing a relatively short historical period in this paper, we can conclude that the way e-government has been governed has changed significantly. Based on our five theoretical discussions we are able to identify the following patterns. First, in terms of leading actors it almost goes without saying that the government, and in particular the MoF, has played a key role throughout the latter part of the period. There have naturally been some internal bureaucratic conflicts between various government actors, but the overall picture is a development where the government is the key player. The international influence has been relatively imperative since the 1990s, while the market actors are now loosing influence.
Second in terms of policy problems and solutions, there are clear signals that the whole field of e-government has shifted from a broad democratic vision of a more open, transparent and service-minded vision, in which the problem was that the citizen lacked access to public data, to a business-like strategy in which the main problem was how to cut down on public expenditure by means of new technology. Also, while e-government for a period was considered to be part of an all-encompassing, ‘information society strategy’ with many normative connotations, it was during the 00s deprived of its visionary and glossary status as part of the overall government strategy for the future. Instead it has increasingly become an apolitical administrative field on the level of pay-rolls and public procurement.

Third, the initial years full of experiments and a trust in public agencies’ capability of designing individually citizen-oriented systems has been replaced by a belief in economy of scale and centralisation. This development has not solely been the result of subtle forms of institutional design and other means of ‘steering-at-a-distance’, but has indeed been subject to actual centralisation of government ICT functions through new institutions.

Fourth, and in continuation of what is already said, the e-government field has in terms of steering and control gone from what one could label ‘governance’ to ‘government’.

While the first period of our study identified how networks were imperative in the endeavours of both horizontal and vertical integration of government information systems, the later Danish development points in the direction of more classic hierarchical control.

Finally, all this together, is reflected in the choice of policy instruments. Communicative instruments such as e.g. campaigns, dialogue etc have gradually been replaced by authority and control.

A natural question is of course how the Danish development is reflected in the light of the international development. Much of the pressure (including both coercive and ‘soft’ instruments) from international organisations, such as the OECD and the EU, is of course something which is reflected in other countries e-government strategies (at least within the EU). However, a quick review of some the neighbouring countries’ approaches to e-government such as e.g. Sweden (Löfgren, 2007) reflects that the Danish development is different. Whether this means that Denmark is leading a new trend in e-government, or just is the odd one out, is something we still do not know.
List of policy papers:


MRIT (1994) *Info-society 2000*


MRIT (1997a) *Authorities are Falling. IT and Telecommunications Policy Report to the Parliament.*


MRIT (1997c) *Get going with e-Government*

MRIT (1999a) *The Digital Denmark – Transformation to the network society*


The Danish Board of Technology Assessment (2010) Better Control of Public Information Technology [in Danish], Report and recommendations from a work group working under the auspices of the Danish Board of Technology, Report

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