Report on the implementation of the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace

As a general preliminary remark it should be noted that the objectives of the UNESCO recommendation concerning the promotion and use of multilingualism on the internet and universal access to cyberspace are to a large extent being implemented indirectly, namely on the basis of the European normative framework. In the light of this, the emphasis lies on measures aiming to generalize and facilitate access.

1. Development of Multilingual Content and Systems:

- First and foremost in this respect the multilateral partnership of the Dutch Language Union should be mentioned. The Dutch Language Union is a policy organization in which the Netherlands, Belgium and Surinam collaborate in the field of the Dutch language, education and literature. This collaboration is laid down in the Dutch Language Union Treaty. The Dutch Language Union is financed by the Dutch, Flemish and Surinam governments. The amount of the funds is fixed in proportion to the number of inhabitants of the Netherlands, Flanders and Surinam respectively.

  In this collaboration between governments the interests of the language user are predominant in all activities. Any Dutch speaker should be able to cope with as many language situations as possible with his or her own language. The Language Union aims at ensuring that all Dutch speakers can use their language in an effective and creative manner.
  Collaboration with the field is central in anything the Language Union does. Spearheads with respect to content are: support of Dutch language education abroad, management and maintenance of digital language databases, social language policy and the use of ICT in Dutch language education, development of a more common literature policy.
  Because the language user occupies a central position, the Dutch Language Union uses several means to provide the user of the Dutch language, in the broadest sense of the word, with information. "Taaluniversum" (http://taaluniversum.org/) is the Dutch Language Union's web site. "Taalschrift" (http://taalschrift.org/) is a digital journal for a broad audience, interested in language. A whole range of publications (http://taalunieversum.org/taalunie/publicaties/) provide more information on the activities of the Language Union. For specific target groups the Language Union regularly publishes texts describing the frameworks for future policies. These brochures can be consulted on line (in pdf format). While stocks last, printed versions can be ordered as well.
  The Language Union web site offers among others:
  - "Woordenlijst Nederlandse Taal" (Dutch words list) – the norm for correct Dutch spelling, consisting of a list of about 100.000 words and an elaborate description of spelling rules; (http://woordenlijst.org/)
  - software allowing anyone to easily review an existing text on recent changes in the official spelling; (http://woordenlijst.org/omspeller/)
  - all scientific articles on Dutch language education which appeared in the last decades; (http://taalunieversum.org/onderwijs/tijdschriften/)
  - a database describing Dutch language education research;
  (http://taalunieversum.org/onderwijs/onderzoek/)
  - a service answering any questions regarding the correct use of the Dutch language;

(http://taaladvies.net/vraag/)
- a database with answers to thousands of questions put to the language advice services in the course of the years; (http://taaladvies.net/)
- a database containing education terminology from the Netherlands and Flanders; (http://taalunieversum.org/onderwijs/termen/)
- foreign geographical names in Dutch;
(http://taaladvies.net/taal/aardrijkskundige_namen/)
- information on all educational institutions throughout the world where Dutch can be studied. (http://www.taalunieversum.hum.uva.nl/adressen/)

The Language Union finances or (co-)financed:
- the Translex project, in which the Dutch-English and Dutch-French (and vice versa) modules of the automatic translation system Systran were developed; (http://taalunieversum.org/taal/technologie/multilingual_information_society/)
- translation dictionaries from and into Dutch for 17 other languages;
- a database where thousands of historical literary and linguistic books in Dutch and about the Dutch language can be consulted on line;
(http://www.huygensinstituut.knaw.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=134&Itemid=110&lang=du)
(http://www.dbnl.org/)
(http://bltvn.kb.nl/)
- tools for applying language and speech technology in Dutch;
(http://taalunieversum.org/taal/technologie/)
(http://www.tst.inl.nl/)
- scientific and historical Dutch dictionaries, of which the most important ones are available for free consultation on line;
- terminology information centre (http://taalunieversum.org/taal/technologie/)
- a contemporary history of Dutch literature;
(http://www.literatuurgeschiedenis.nl/)
(http://taalunieversum.org/taalunie/literatuurgeschiedenis/)

- Internationally several standards have already been developed, one of the most well-known being LOM (Learning Objects Metadata). LOM is an international standard consisting of about 60 fields, for example title, language, description, version, didactic method, learning source, interaction level, age category for which the learning object is meant, user's license, copyright, … LOM was specifically designed for the description of learning objects. In 2006 the Flemish Government joined a running project, Pubelo (www.pubelo.be), aimed at giving impulses to the development and recognition of (open) standards.

2. Facilitating Access to Networks and Services:

   - On a federal level: in June 2004, following the 2003 WSIS summit in Geneva, an inventory was made of existing policy initiatives to reduce the digital gap. The next step is to establish an action plan for "digital inclusion". The communities were invited to develop the following actions in a common working scheme:
     - make a diagnosis (digital gap statistics)
     - give an update on the work accomplished,
     - formulate targets for the action plan.

After its approval at the inter-ministerial conference in October 2005, the draft, titled Nationaal Actieplan "Digitale Inclusie" (national action plan for digital inclusion), was presented at the Tunis WSIS summit.

The most prominent action points are:

- an awareness campaign: "peeceefobie" (PC fobia) en "internet voor iedereen" (internet for all),

- the 'internet voor iedereen'-pakket (internet-for-all-kit): a cheap PC or laptop with broadband internet, security software and a one day training in the course of 2006.

- On a federal level: the EU's Universal Services Directive regulates the possibility of functional access to the internet, taking into account the technologies commonly in use with the majority of subscribers, as well as technological feasibility. This directive was transposed into Belgian law by the 13 June 2005 Act. Belgium, being the 'most cabled country in the world', enjoys a comparative advantage in making the internet accessible to all.
- On 22 July 2005 the Flemish Government approved the "Digitaal Actieplan Vlaanderen" (digital action plan for Flanders). With this action plan the government wishes to turn Flanders into a progressive information society and bridge the digital gap.
- The "toeweb" initiative (now called "AnySurfer"): on 11 June 2004 the Flemish Government decided that the Flemish authorities' websites and applications shall be accessible for disabled people by the end of 2007 (for the internet) and 2010 (intranet) at the latest. For this purpose, a supporting initiative is developed, namely the "toegankelijk web initiatief" (accessible web initiative) (www.vlaanderen.be/toeweb).
- An internet facilities analysis (Clarebout et al 2004) shows that the majority of educational institutions are using advanced broadband technology (through ADSL or cable). The use of ISDN-technology is in strong decline. In primary education 83.19% of schools use broadband technology, in secondary education 83.81%. This shows a progress against the previous school year. Nearly all Centres for Basic Education have broadband technology at their disposal.

  Through the federal I-line programme, educational institutions are offered a fast internet connection at a reduced tariff. All educational levels are taking advantage of this offer. The federal "Telecom law" provides that Belgacom must, among others, offer a special internet communication tariff for the benefit of schools, hospitals and libraries. Educational institutions can order an I-line from Belgacom via the department of Education. It is an ADSL broadband line, for internet communication only, and with free installation, communication and subscription. The schools only have to pay for their subscription with an internet service provider.

  In the academic year 2001-2002 all colleges of higher education received subsidies from the Science and Innovation Administration (AWI) to connect to the internet. Universities already had internet connections through Belnet for some time. Currently a new impulse is given and colleges of higher education are linked, once again through AWI and Belnet funding, to a Belnet gigabit Ethernet connection. The main purpose of this is to make maximum use of ICT as leverage for speeding up the innovation chain. The education chapter fits into a broader Flemish Government project on e-enterprise, e-government and stimulation of research and development in Flanders. In this respect the Flemish Government wishes to encourage higher education institutions to make a firm choice in favour of e-research, stimulates the development of digital infrastructure to this end and

establishes a complementary policy for maintenance and optimal use of this infrastructure.

3. Development of Public Domain Content

- Transposition of the Directive on the re-use of public sector information: on 12 January 2007 the Flemish Government approved the draft Flemish Parliament Act on the re-use of public sector information. The draft is now being submitted to the Flemish Parliament.
  It concerns the transposition of the European Directive (2003/98) of 17 November 2003 on the re-use of public sector information. The Directive stipulates certain basic principles of re-use, which the Member States – if they allow re-use – have to respect. It provides for example that – for those categories for which re-use is allowed – it should take place within a reasonable time limit, under non-discriminatory conditions and against a reasonable return on investment. The Directive builds on the principle of making the broad spectrum of information, collected by the public sector within the framework of its public mission, available under equal conditions and in a uniform manner within a unified European market. Indeed, public sector information is an important raw material for digital information products and services and has a large economic potential in the European Union.

  The draft Flemish Parliament Act transposes this Directive – as far as the Flemish public sector bodies is concerned, in the broad sense of the word – into a text which adopts the same principles and conditions. The basic principle is that public sector bodies (for instance provinces, local authorities, public centres for social welfare, external autonomous agencies, …) decide for themselves whether they allow re-use and for which documents. This basic principle is inspired by the principle that these bodies are best placed to judge whether re-use can be applied in their own specific situation. The conditions, procedures and time limits for the practical organisation of re-use, as well as the possibility to appeal a decision concerning this practical execution, are laid down in the Flemish Parliament Act, which is geared to the existing Flemish Parliament Act on open government.

  For the Flemish ministries, the Flemish Government will decide whether or not to allow re-use and on its organisation, in a Decree which has yet to be made up.
  To this end, the Flemish Government will establish further provisions in the implementing order, which will also specify the practical organisation of the means of redress requested by the EU Directive. Once this is ready, and the implications of re-use for the Flemish public sector have become clear as a result, a new communication will be issued.

- With respect to the promotion of the public's ready knowledge of handling and use of ICT applications, the new cross-curricular attainment targets and developmental objectives for ICT will be introduced in primary education and in the first stage of secondary education as of 1 September 2007. In basic education as well, ICT training will be reviewed in the light of general basic skills. Indeed, it is important to ensure sufficient coherence between the different educational levels. In other words, we wish to see every citizen, pupil, trainee or student attain these basic skills.

The cross-curricular attainment targets and developmental objectives for primary education (1-8) and the first stage of secondary education (1-10) were developed as follows:

1. Pupils have a positive attitude towards ICT and are willing to use it as a support for their learning process.
2. Pupils are using ICT in a way that is safe, responsible and efficient.
3. Pupils are able to practise independently in an ICT supported learning environment.
4. Pupils are able to learn independently in an ICT supported learning environment.
5. Pupils are able to use ICT to shape their own ideas in a creative way.
6. Pupils are able to retrieve, process and save digital information with the help of ICT.
7. Pupils are able to use ICT for presenting information to others.
8. Pupils are able to use ICT for communicating in a way that is safe, responsible and efficient.
9. Pupils are able to choose effectively from various ICT applications depending on the objective to be reached.
10. Pupils are prepared to adjust their actions as a result of reflection on their own or each other's ICT use.

- The "coördinatiecel Vlaams e-government" (coordination unit Flemish e-government) (CORVE), http://www.vlaanderen.be/e-government, has the task of devising and supporting ICT projects for an accessible, demand driven, simplified and integrated public service. CORVE is part of the Flemish Government (Ministry of the Flemish Community) and provides services to the Flemish Government, provinces and municipalities. Its tasks are:
  - Developing e-government knowledge and skills;
  - e-government programme management;
  - raising awareness, collaborating and signalling in relation to e-government;
  - monitoring progress of e-government projects.

  For example, the unit is currently involved in:
  - a project on logging on safely, namely Access Control Management (ACM), in time allowing citizens and civil servants to identify themselves univocally on the Flemish Government's website(s) and thus either submit electronic applications or gain insight into the status of one's own file.
  - the exchange of data, the "Vlaamse Service Bus" (Flemish service bus): a project which in time will allow the exchangeability of authentic data sources for all Flemish public services requiring information from those sources. In this way, companies and citizens will no longer have to send as many documents following an application, since the service itself will have access to this information in the relevant database.
  - Authentic data sources (CORVE, EWBL, WVC, OC-GIS): a project centralizing the storage of authentic data sources for the Flemish public services, in the first place being:
    - The state register;
    - The "Kruispuntbank voor Ondernemingen" (central data bank for companies):
    - CRAB: a database containing all addresses in Flanders, their exact geographical position and all cadastral information.

- MAGDA – “Maximale GegevensDeling tussen Administraties” (maximum data sharing between administrations). MAGDA is an ICT infrastructure allowing to integrate different databases of different public services. The basic idea is that data have to be collected only once, after which they can be exchanged and made maximum use of. As a result, citizens or companies should in principle no longer be requested to give information which is already available within the public services. Via this platform the different public administrations can retrieve the necessary data, without each time having to disturb citizens and companies.

4. Creating a Balance between the Interests of the Rights-holders and the Public Interest

- The IBBT, or “Interdisciplinair instituut voor BreedBand Technologie” (interdisciplinary institute for broadband technology), is a research institute, created in 2003 on the initiative of the Flemish Government, dedicated to information and communication technology in general, and to the development of broadband applications in particular. The IBBT conducts strategic basic research into the technical, social and legal aspects of broadband applications.

- In 2001 the Flemish Government granted a recognition as policy research centre to a consortium of the K.U. Leuven, Universiteit Antwerpen, Universiteit Gent and Hogeschool Gent: “Steunpunt Bestuurlijke Organisatie Vlaanderen” (centre for administrative organisation Flanders) (SBOV). In December 2006 this recognition was prolonged until 2011.

The SBOV’s mission is to improve, through scientific research, the quality of management, administration and policy of the Flemish public administrations, among others in the field of e-government.