UNU-EGOV
Memory and Project

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on the occasion of its 10th anniversary

May 2024 | Guimarães

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Prelude
to an unfinished symphony

"Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?" he asked. "Begin at the beginning," the King said gravely.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865.

May 2014, May 2024:
How to report a decade?

Shall we begin as a fairy tale: *Once upon a time…?* As a formal, terse report: *Ten years ago, on the 23rd of May 2014…?* Or, perhaps, resort to a more mediatic style: *Breaking news – UNU-EGOV celebrates its 10th anniversary with growing impact in the Global South…?*

The style is irrelevant: UNU-EGOV celebrates ten years of an unlikely journey. Of daring paths, some worries, many joys. Ten years building projects, networks, and bridges. Ten years of resilience and will. Ten years of growing recognition, a solid reputation, and rigorous work. But also ten years with many faces inside. Many languages. Many places. Many voices.

Ten years. Memory and project. Unfinished.

1.1 Theme…

Digital transformation is the driving force of fast-evolving processes that are reshaping societies, economies, and States. The last two decades witnessed significant efforts of the public sector first to introduce and later to manage the impact of ICT in their ecosystems. The aim is vast and particularly challenging: to improve the State's level of good governance and to promote the development of more effective, inclusive, transparent, and accountable institutions, which are key conditions for the sustainable development of Humanity.

In fact, governments cannot ignore the huge potential of digital technologies and their progressive integration with unsuspected social dynamics. New technologies provide innovative tools to enhance communication, coordination, and participation in social and political life. Their effective harnessing will undoubtedly shape the future of governance and democracy in the years to come.

Digital governance research centres are vital parts of this move. They act as hubs of innovation, learning, and synergy for the digital governance community while tackling grand societal challenges, as the ones defined in the United Nations 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. Goal 16, in particular, calls for effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels in the framework of peaceful and inclusive societies. Digital transformation of governance processes and procedures has a role to play in achieving such a goal. Likewise, its enormous potential in the progressive execution of the whole Agenda is broadly recognised.

That is why the decision taken by the United Nations University (UNU) a decade ago to establish a new, ambitious programme on what was then called policy-driven electronic governance came as a major step for the University and the whole United Nations system.

UNU-EGOV, the United Nations University Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance, was established in Guimarães, North of Portugal, in 2014 to turn this challenge into a collective commitment.

From the outset, as one of the 13 UNU entities located in 12 countries around the World, UNU-EGOV defined itself as a bridge between research and public policies, an innovation enhancer, a solid partner within

the UN system and its Member States with a particular focus on sustainable development, social inclusion, and active citizenship. It is instructive to revisit what, almost one year before the formal signature of the

Host Country Agreement between the UNU and the Portuguese Republic on May 23, 2014, was written in the summary of the corresponding Concept Note, reproduced below.

> *The institute is envisioned to focus on strategic application of Information and Communication Technology to transform the mechanisms of governance (including the working of government and its relationships with citizens) and to build effective governance capabilities at the global, regional and national levels (including capabilities for national policy design, adaptation to local settings, policy innovation and participatory learning) as required by the emerging post-2015 UN development agenda.*
>
> *Within its focus, the institute will carry out policy-relevant research; translate research findings into relevant policy instruments; build capacity in localizing and applying such instruments within and among relevant government, academic and UN system organizations; build and maintain international research and policy networks to share lessons learnt, foster mutual learning, and bridge research and policy worlds; and disseminate the outcomes of its activities to create impact and increase the membership in its networks.*
>
> Concept Note on the future,
> International Institute on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance,
> prepared by Tomasz Janowski, UNU-IIST, 1 July 2013.

Among all the digital governance research centres throughout the World, UNU-EGOV stands out for its broader mission. Being part of UNU, it is devoted to serving all the 193 Member States of the United Nations – a big challenge but also a perfect standpoint to conduct comparative and transnational research in a truly multidisciplinary programme. Elsa Estevez, Holder of the UNESCO Chair on Knowledge Societies and Digital Governance at Universidad Nacional del Sur and Professor at the National University of La Plata, in Argentina, who was part of the founding team of UNU-EGOV, stresses what was at stake: "So complex a domain, so multi-disciplinary, so multi-stakeholder, [that] no good solutions can be found working in isolation; most stakeholders are aware of this".

Its parent organisation, the United Nations University (UNU), is a global think tank and postgraduate teaching organisation with a mission "to contribute, through collaborative research and education, to efforts to resolve the pressing global problems of human survival, development, and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations, its Peoples, and Member States"[1]. Max Bond, who in 2014 was Vice-Director and Executive Officer of the UNU, put in perspective the mission of the new Unit as a "network hub" because it was crucial to make sure that "national governments, or even sub-regional governments, in the Global South were not left behind". And insists: "being within the United Nations University has a huge advantage in reaching out to governments" worldwide.

In May 2014, the city of Guimarães, an unlikely venue for an unlikely project, became home to UNU-EGOV. Since then, the name of this small, medieval town, inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List, has made its way as one of the key international references on digital governance. This publication summarises the crucial steps in such a journey.

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[1] Mission statement in the UNU website (unu.edu/about). The map reproduced in the text shows the 13 UNU institutes and programs, located in 12 countries, which employ more than 400 researchers worldwide.

> **It is an honour for the city of Guimarães and for Portugal to host UNU-EGOV. The city of Guimarães was always willing to invest in the digital area, which is so central to governance. [UNU-EGOV] is indeed a very relevant project for a place that is a UNESCO Heritage town.**
>
> Domingos Bragança,
> Mayor of Guimarães.

1.2 … and structure

In preparation for this document, information was collected by (1) conducting in-depth interviews asking a series of open-ended questions to the past and current UNU staff and people who contributed to or witnessed the establishment and development of the UNU-EGOV throughout the years and (2) reviewing archival documents such as communication, charters, Rector's letters, and short interviews on the UNU-EGOV website.

To this end, 26 in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviewees were the UNU-EGOV past and current directors, past and current staff, as well as notable individuals from the institutional ecosystem of UNU-EGOV, such as past and current rectors of UNU and the University of Minho, high-level UNU administrators, and other actors who witnessed the establishment and evolution of the UNU-EGOV. The average interview took about 40 minutes. Unless otherwise stated, all the extracts quoted in the text come from these interviews. The complete list of interviewees, and their institutional affiliations, is acknowledged at the end of this text.

We aimed to revisit, in a necessarily limited way, the establishment, evolution, and future prospects of UNU-EGOV. The text is, therefore, organised in four movements of an unfinished symphony.

The first movement, annotated as *vivace*, goes back to 2014, its inception year. Then, an *adagio* recounts the Unit's key milestones and significant achievements so far. It also enumerates the main challenges that the UNU-EGOV faced over the years. The symphony goes on with an overview of the present state of UNU-EGOV by examining its current organisational structure and personnel, as well as its most significant stakeholders/partners, highlighting the crucial contributions during its first decade. The mode is *andante con moto*. Finally, a fourth movement, to be played under the annotation *allegro con brio*, puts together several voices to articulate what could be a vision for UNU-EGOV in its second decade.

2

Vivace
(How an unlikely dream came true)

There is a pre-history to UNU-EGOV that goes back ten years before its official launching in Guimarães. Everything started at another UNU Institute, the former International Institute of Software Technology (UNU-IIST, now UNU Macau), whose inception in the late 1980s was also partially supported by the Portuguese Republic in partnership with the People's Republic of China. And it started with the *e-Macau* programme on electronic government.

Elsa Estevez recalls: "UNU-EGOV was a kind of a spin-off of the programme on digital governance set in 2004, under the leadership of Tomasz Janowski, between the Government of Macau and UNU-IIST. UNU-EGOV was born out of the restructuring process of the whole institute in Macau in an effort to give sustainability to the programme and institutionalise it as a pole of the UNU. Around the programme", she comments, "there was already a big research network UNU wanted to leverage". And Max Bond, who played a key role in negotiations with the Portuguese Republic to host the new Unit, adds, "[it was] a very effective programme, primarily devoted to capacity development on different elements of governance, and also very successful in mobilising external resources".

As part of a restructuring process of the Institute in Macau, the programme had to be relocated and relaunched. Tomasz Janowski, the founding Head of UNU-EGOV, currently a Professor at Gdansk University, Poland, recalls: "We had a decade of experience in Macau and suddenly faced the challenge of re-locating the EGOV programme in a very short time".

He goes on to explain the process and the choices on the table: "In launching the institutional foundations for the future, three options emerged for location: one was Guimarães, Portugal, another was Bogota, in Colombia, another still was Montreal, Canada. We were working along these three lines of development, balancing academic conditions, political support, financial support, how Portugal could offer the kind of stability necessary for a process of this magnitude".

Portugal was chosen at the end of a demanding process. The country was slowly recovering from the 2008 crisis resulting from the severe contraction of liquidity in global financial markets, a grim scenario leaving little room for adventures. On the other hand, at the time, the UNU was yet to be convinced to open a new programme in Europe. David Malone, then the Rector of UNU, recalls: "When [UNU-IIST] was closed,

Portugal expressed the wish to host some UNU programme in the country. We already had several Institutes in Europe and not enough in developing countries (…), but they were quite insistent. We started a conversation, and then we realised there was part of the former mission of UNU-IIST which would fit with what the Portuguese government wanted".

As Max Bond stresses, "there was a large receptivity and interest on the part of the University of Minho in working with this programme". Elsa Estevez makes it precise, "two other factors were at the origin of UNU-EGOV". In her own words, "the University of Minho was willing to establish a UNU Institute in Portugal and they were thinking around the theme of Critical Infrastructures". As a matter of fact, the whole idea started to be discussed during FACS 2010, an international workshop on Formal Aspects of Computer Software, held in Guimarães in 2010, between Zhiming Liu, from UNU-IIST, Luís Soares Barbosa, from the University of Minho (UM), and Sara Fernandes, by then initiating a PhD project with co-supervision in both institutions. But starting something from scratch soon proved unrealistic. Hosting the EGOV programme ended up being a much more solid alternative.

Elsa goes on to emphasise that the second factor, maybe the decisive one, "was the relevance digital governance was achieving for the whole world, but especially for developing countries. Around 2000, it was already a fast-growing scientific domain. In this context, the new Unit would provide a direct contribution to the UNU mission, clearly focused on policy-oriented research".

In practical terms, a number of factors came together. Rui Vieira de Castro, Rector of the University of Minho, who in 2014, as Vice-Rector, conducted the negotiations from the UM side, recalls: "The establishment of UNU-EGOV in Guimarães was the result of an opportunity of time and space. Time because it occurred at a moment when digital governance was gaining more and more relevance. Of space because it was possible to create very good conditions to host the unit in Guimarães in the new premises that were initially occupied by the University of Minho but, in the context of an agreement with both UNU and the Municipality were given to UNU-EGOV".

In the small team formed under a mandate of the UM Rector to discuss with UNU and the Portuguese government the conditions to host UNU-EGOV in the country, the atmosphere was one of expectation, some apprehension, and much enthusiasm.

In early 2014, in a decisive meeting with the then Prime Minister, Pedro Passos Coelho, a decision was taken to host UNU-EGOV in Guimarães and set it on the right path to grow and consolidate based on assured financial commitments and political support from the Portuguese Republic. Tomasz, Elsa, and Sara came from Macau, Rui Vieira de Castro and Luís Soares Barbosa joined from UM to meet the Prime Minister. Also present was José Viriato Soromenho-Ramos, a former UNU Senior Advisor who had served in positions of great responsibility in OECD and IMF and also as the first Chairman of the UNU-IIST Advisory Board. Soromenho-Ramos (1944-2016) was instrumental in establishing UNU-IIST, assuring the continuity of the Institute during and beyond the transition of Macau from the Portuguese to the Chinese administration in 1999. He played a similar role with respect to UNU-EGOV in 2014 [2].

The following statement by André Coelho Lima, a member of the Parliament and, back in 2014, sitting in the city council, sums up the common sentiment: "[In 2014] we saw the potential and grabbed it with both hands. Guimarães was a small town in European terms, internationalisation a main challenge. To establish in Guimarães the first branch of UNU in the Iberian Peninsula was a strategic objective. The government and the Municipality saw that opportunity".

The statute[3] of UNU-EGOV was adopted by the Council of the UNU at its 61st session on May 12, 2014. The Host Country Agreement[4] between UNU and the Portuguese Republic was signed in Lisbon on May 23, 2014. Rector David Malone signed for UNU, and the Minister of Regional Development, Miguel Poiares Maduro, signed on behalf of Portugal.

[2] "His experience, connections, and advice, all of which he offered generously and selflessly, were invaluable to the project. He combined passion and wisdom, cared about international projects like UNU-IIST and UNU-EGOV, and in general represented the best of the Portuguese tradition of international engagement and statesmanship in the management of international public affairs." (from the obituary in egov.unu.edu/news/announcements/obituary-jose-viriato-soromenho-ramos.html)

[3] egov.unu.edu/about/about-unu-egov#statute

[4] i.unu.edu/media/egov.unu.edu/attachment/5487/2014.05.23-Host-Country-Agreement-EN-23.05.2014.pdf

"
We were able to attract and engage the Municipality of Guimarães for this project, becoming really a major partner not only in terms of the political effort to bring the case of UNU-EGOV to the national level but also to support the different logistic aspects, including the fantastic facilities that UNU-EGOV now benefits from.
"

António Cunha,
President of CCDR-N,
former Rector of the University of Minho between 2009 and 2017.

According to António Cunha, the President of CCDR-N, the Coordination and Development Commission for the North of Portugal, who in 2014 was Rector of the University of Minho, internationalisation was a main motivation for this step: "From the UM side, but also for the Municipality of Guimarães, internationalisation was the key, a strategic goal (…) The North is the most industrial and exporting region in Portugal, so everything that deals with our international outlook is very, very important. (…) But internationalisation also from an academic point of view: we believe research is carried on under different types of networks, the ability to merge different types of knowledge and different experiences. (…) Networking also means to become aware and in contact with different realities".

A different motivation is shared by Hans Jochen Scholl, Professor in the Information School at the University of Washington and Founding Member of the *Smart Cities Smart Government Research-Practice Consortium*: "The United Nations had conducted for several years a survey on the evolution of the use of information technology

in governments around the world [the E-Government Development Index (EGDI) and the accompanying survey]. While this is a project-like effort, they needed to better understand that phenomenon and how it evolves over time from within. Since the United Nations had this university arm, I think it was only logical to have a Unit that focuses exactly on that".

Once the Agreement was signed, everything started immediately in the new premises at the Couros Campus, right in the historic centre of Guimarães.

The objectives were fixed: to build a think tank for the UN system and the Member States on digital governance, with a strong focus on policy-driven research, capacity building and consultancy. For Luís Soares Barbosa, a UM Computer Science Professor currently serving as Deputy Director to UNU-EGOV, "that mission was very clear from the outset". However, "in the beginning, the whole Unit was so small that it would fit in a single car: I remember Tomasz, Elsa, Sara and myself travelling this way, the whole Unit, to Lisbon, to discuss collaboration with AMA[5] and introduce this new project".

Quickly, however, things started to move. "Immediately afterwards", Luís recalls, "some colleagues [from UM Schools of Engineering and Economy and Management] joined as Adjunct Professors, and we started the Governmental Fellowships Programme receiving fellows from different countries". The importance of both programmes for

the success of those initial years must be emphasised. The first offered a sort of double affiliation to reputed academics; the second brought to Guimarães, for specific periods, high-level agents at Public Administration agencies worldwide through a highly competitive call that still runs.

> **" A year after the Unit started its regular operation, officers from Uganda to China were already working on their own digital governance projects in Guimarães under the supervision of the Unit staff. "**
>
> Tomasz Janowski,
> University of Gdansk, Poland,
> Founding Head of UNU-EGOV (2014-16).

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[5] AMA, the Portuguese Agency for Administrative Modernization.

In Tomasz Janowski's own words, the Unit experienced "two very intensive years, to literally establish everything from ground zero (…) and design programmatic research on digital government". Challenging times, as he recalls: "We got the host country agreement signed, but it was an entirely new thing for the Portuguese government to admit an outside university institution, which was not part of the Portuguese higher education system, with a new culture, a different way to accomplish the mission of a university, with a clear, main international focus. There were also not-so-simple organisational issues, e.g. defining the right institutional size and the corresponding levels of support". And lots of questions, e.g. "How to articulate our two legs, the Portuguese government and our academic host, the University of Minho? How to ensure that we were not working within a one-year horizon but endowed with the proper capacity to strategise and move forward?".

Step by step, the Unit consolidated itself. Luís recalls: "We focused mainly on research and organised ourselves into two internal projects: one on Administrative Burden Reduction, the other on Context-driven Public Service Delivery. There was also an external project with Colombia that was very important to gather experience, as well as in contributing to our financial sustainability".

Indeed, Colombia, which in 2014 was a candidate country to host UNU-EGOV, became the focus of one of the first projects of the new Operating Unit: the GCIO.EDU.CO (*Education for Government Technology Leadership in Colombia*). Maria Isabel Meija Jaramillo, then the Vice-Minister of Information and Communication Technologies in the government of Colombia, comments: "We aimed at capacitating champions for the government-online strategy, not only at the 2000 national public entities but also in all 1100 municipalities in a country that was then leading the EGDI ranking in Latin-America and Caribe. (…) UNU-EGOV defined a training programme and a strategy to build both a GCIO [Governmental Chief Information Officer] network across the country and a Network of Universities on EGOV-GCIO Education – a very impactful project. (…) Both still exist, a pillar we are very proud of."

António Tavares, UM Professor in Public Administration at the School of Economics and Management and one of the first Adjunct Professors at UNU-EGOV, shares his own experience when joining this "peculiar university": "Since the very beginning, there was a multicultural environment. Tomasz was Polish, Elsa was Argentinian, there were a lot of Portuguese academics around and other people from other countries coming for short periods". And concludes: "Now we do have a truly multicultural environment which makes UNU-EGOV a fascinating workplace".

The (unlikely) dream had come true.

3
Adagio
(How a project flourished)

3.1 And so we started...

UNU-EGOV began operating in Guimarães just a few weeks after the signature of the Host Country Agreement between the University and the Portuguese Republic.

High expectations and a great deal of enthusiasm didn't disguise the very demanding context of those early moments. The team was small, the project was still little known and the funding, although generous in the difficult context that Portugal was going through, only guaranteed support for an Operational Unit. This was an issue, indeed. Not being able to set up a fully-fledged UNU Institute right from the start had some obvious limitations. Limitations related to the funding levels, but also in terms of the strength of the institutional framework. For example, it was only ten years later that the first steps towards setting up the International Advisory Board, provided in the Statutes, could be taken.

Delfina Soares, the current Director of UNU-EGOV, in charge since the end of 2017, comments: "The Unit started like that for a number of reasons; even in financial terms, Portugal was leaving very difficult years of crisis. It started as a proof-of-concept. In a way, the idea of a UNU branch on digital governance was still gaining relevance,

gaining momentum". Ten years afterwards, she has no doubts: "A decade has passed, and the concept was proved".

When documenting the history of an institution, it is always tempting to identify different stages and singularise events and milestones. The evolution of UNU-EGOV has certainly had these, too, but perhaps more strictly speaking, it can be seen as a continuum.

In the symphony that serves us as a metaphor, this progress is an *adagio*. At a moderate pace, sometimes seeming excessively slow, but always resilient, very sure of the objectives set and the stages that had to be travelled.

The most significant achievement of UNU-EGOV during its formative years is to have proven itself to be a resilient and integral part of the UNU system that has consistently expanded and created value in digital governance and transformation. Its increasing relevance for the UN system, Member States, governments in the Global South, the government of Portugal, the Portuguese-speaking countries, and the academic and practitioner communities on digital governance is now clearly evident.

The Unit has grown from a handful of experts to an organisation with almost 40 members by continuously increasing in size and function over time. António Tavares remarks: "When I joined, in 2015, we were eight to ten people, lots of ideas, even lots of project proposals, but not a lot of capacity. This was difficult in the early days, until at least 2017".

Another interesting testimony comes from Soumaya Ben Dhaou, currently a Research Coordinator at UNU-EGOV: "I started in January 2017. It was a very small Unit concentrated on digital transformation for government. By the time it was electronic government (...), it evolved later to digital governance and digital transformation. (...) The aim was to improve and contribute to strengthening digital governance worldwide, particularly in the Global South where the digital transformation journey barely started". If the objectives were clear for a young researcher from Tunisia with a recent PhD in Canada, there was still a lot to build on: "When I joined the Unit every new engagement was celebrated. I remember the first contract signed with a government: we received the visit of a Minister, the Ambassador, we held a ceremony ... Now we are almost everywhere: In the Middle East, from Saudi Arabia to Qatar and the Emirates, from Egypt to Lebanon and Palestine. In Europe, Central Asia, also in Brazil, Argentina and Colombia in

Latin America. China, of course, and [carrying on] a very extensive work in Africa". No time for celebrations nowadays!

3.2 Landmarks

Throughout the decade, the programme's development can be traced back to various landmarks: (1) the expansion of its project portfolio; (2) the set-up of high-level international training programmes; (3) the deepening of a demanding scientific and institutional culture; (4) the construction of transversal and multilateral networks in digital governance. We'll revisit each of them below.

David Passarelli, Director of the UNU Centre for Policy Research, was Chief of Staff to Rector David Malone in Tokyo back in 2014. An attentive observer of the Unit's evolution, he puts its success down to a very focused attitude that always guided UNU-EGOV: "What is remarkable about UNU-EGOV is that it is mission-driven, it has a very clear sense of its stakeholder community and fills a very clear gap in Member States' needs. This means it could build a brand quite easily and become known for a specific set of capacities and services. And then, build on a successful delivery in one place and generate more demand in another place, and repeat the process".

❝

The team in Guimarães, under the three leaders, did a fantastic work.

David Malone,
former Rector of the United Nations University (2013 – 2023).

❞

Let us listen to two voices from the demand side.

Maria Isabel Meija Jaramillo, from Colombia, stresses the irreplaceable contribution of UNU-EGOV in articulating "knowledge transfer from academia to governments, but high-level knowledge (...) crucial to study and advice on the responsive and ethical use of technologies on governments (...) to help them to become more agile, more relevant, more active". From the other side of the World, Abdulrahman Almutairi, Vice-President of the Digital Government Authority in Saudi Arabia, goes straight to the point: "[UNU-EGOV was] the right partner to help us to connect the global best practices to the local understanding. (...) During these years, we have witnessed UNU-EGOV's work developing into a strong and coherent, professional, scientific one, and very representative of its first-class

professionalism. (...) This is shown very clearly in how fast and persistently the work of UNU-EGOV has expanded to other countries all over the world".

As a side-effect of its expanded activity, UNU-EGOV gradually acquired the ability to attract exciting levels of self-financing, which allowed it to go much further than initially anticipated. In 2023, for every euro that Portugal puts into the Unit's baseline funding, one and a half euros were organically generated.

David Passarelli believes this "ability to generate third-party funding for its work" is remarkable. "It is an achievement for a programme that has to struggle with the stability of its core funding for several years, [that it] still managed to successfully attract third-party project funding very regularly and at very important sums".

This was not anticipated from the outset. Max Bond, now observing UNU-EGOV at a distance, remarks: "well the first achievement is that UNU-EGOV has lasted at least for a decade, which, to be very honest, I was never quite sure. By the time I retired from UNU at the end of 2016, there were difficulties or delays in getting the funding and have been significant difficulties in getting the resources for continuation".

But so it was. The observation of Sabine Becker Thierry, another key person at the University, Executive Officer, and Secretary of the UNU Council, is even more explicit in singling out this dimension of the Unit in its relationship with other, much bigger UN entities: "UNU-EGOV is the only entity in the UNU system that is consistently obtaining funding from UN agencies".

So, what landmarks to list?

Projects, projects, projects

> *Since I joined [UNU-EGOV] in early 2016 there has been an increasing focus on working with external partners, not only international organisations but also national governments and legal and regulatory agencies, (...) with a special focus on the strategic advice, the strategic assessment, and the policy recommendations.*
>
> Morten Meyerhoff Nielsen,
> Research Coordinator at UNU-EGOV.

The sustained expansion of its project portfolio, as well as its diversification in terms of areas of intervention, objectives, and partners, is the first notable milestone in UNU-EGOV's evolution. This movement can be exemplified by mentioning just seven projects taken at random from the Unit's pool of completed projects:

- *Gov3.0: Scientific foundations, training, and entrepreneurship activities in the domain of ICT-enabled governance*, an EC-Erasmus+ project, 2017-20.
- *Government digital services and children: pathways to digital transformation*, for the UNICEF, 2019-21.
- *A Strategy to Enhance and Sustain the ICT Function in the Government of Uganda*, for the Government of Uganda and NITA-U, 2019-21.

- *Digital Governance Strategy for Georgia*, for the Government of Georgia, 2020-21.
- *A Media, Information and Literacy MOOC for Policymakers and Government Officials*, for UNESCO, 2020-21.
- Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection, for the Government of the People's Republic of China, 2021-22.
- *Comparative Study on the Digitalisation of Public Service Delivery in the Western Balkans*, for the Eastern Partnership, 2022-23.

According to Soumaya Ben Dhaou, the impact of this expansion is well felt in the unit's daily life. In her words, "There was tremendous progress in the Unit over the last six years. I can even feel it in my own activity. In the beginning, we had time to write papers, to participate in conferences... now it is a rush! But I feel that the Unit's contribution is becoming very concrete, and the objective is starting to be reached".

Much more could be mentioned here. Of the whole lot, three highlights are in order.

The first one – the *Local On-line Services Index* (LOSI), a close collaboration with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), is highlighted by Elsa Estevez: "I am a witness of this evolution. I left in 2016. Since then, UNU-EGOV has been influential in many issues. For example, they managed to convince them [UNDESA] to assess local EGOV capacities, which is now part of the UN E-government Survey". Over time, UNU-EGOV has supported UNDESA and intensely collaborated in producing the biannual UN e-Government Survey, a leading benchmarking reference on e-Government and a policy tool for decision-makers. Starting in 2018, UNU-EGOV steadily provides research input regarding the e-Government Development Index (EGDI) evolution, which assesses e-Government

development at the national level.

The introduction of LOSI, whose concept and methodology were originally developed at UNU-EGOV, expanded this effort by assessing e-government development at the local (municipal) level. The 2022 Survey included, for the first time, the assessment of the largest municipality website of each of the 193 Member States.

Moving forward, UNU-EGOV and UNDESA established, in 2021, the LOSI Network in order to involve different partners, from research centres and universities to public agencies, in the LOSI development and application. Systematic applications at the country level have been carried out in various countries, including Brazil, Jordan, Greece, India, Mozambique, North Macedonia, the Republic of Korea, the State of Palestine, and Uzbekistan. Canada, Italy, South Africa, Tanzania, and the United Arab Emirates expressed interest in joining a similar assessment in 2024.

The second highlight comes from another intensive collaboration, this one with the International Social Security Association (ISSA). It started in October 2020 as a joint research and advocacy initiative on improving the digital inclusion of social security customers (individuals, employers,

and authorities), comprehending the conduction of a series of workshops and ISSA's first large-scale survey of social security authorities. The report, published in late 2021, was officially presented at the 2022 ISSA biannual conference hosted by the Estonian National Social Insurance Board. The partnership fostered many contributions to ISSA's ongoing capacity development activities for its members on digital transformation issues in social security. Collaboration topics included emerging technologies, like artificial intelligence and distributed ledger technologies, and personalisation of service delivery online.

Through this partnership, UNU-EGOV is also assisting ISSA members, starting with the US Federal Social Security Administration in 2018 on the digital transformation of service production and delivery, and later, from 2021 to 2022, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and ILO office in China.

Morten Nielsen comments: "ISSA recommended us to the Chinese government to assist the Chinese Ministry for Human Resources and Social Security in developing their new digital transformation strategy and digital governance strategy and their data governance strategy". The crucial message is the following: "Every collaboration has a sort of spinoffs".

This sort of "spin-off" dynamics is revisited in the following comment by Sabine Becker Thierry: "UNU-EGOV is receiving requests because a Member State in Africa has seen at a conference what the Unit has been doing with another Member State and would like to discuss a similar project – this is the best that could happen: the client coming to you rather than you having to sell something to the client. I think this speaks not just for the leadership but also the excellent work coming out of UNU-EGOV".

The final highlight concerns the development of National Strategies for Digital Governance in Portuguese-speaking Africa. For the last three years, UNU-EGOV

has been deeply involved in designing National Strategies for Digital Governance for two Portuguese-speaking African countries: Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe. A roadmap with a similar objective was produced for Guinea-Bissau.

The relevance of such strategies as nationwide, holistic instruments to promote digital governance through a consolidated set of public policies and initiatives is undisputable for any country. But the challenge is even more significant in developing countries, for which going digital emerges as a concrete instrument for sustainable development through a more effective and rationalised Public

Administration, more transparent and accountable public institutions, and increasing voicing opportunities for citizens and civil society.

Such strategies were designed to achieve broader objectives in the long term: in Cape Verde to foster economic development and promote the country as a digital hub in the region; to promote social inclusion through user-friendly designed digital services and more robust institutions to protect citizens.

In São Tomé and Príncipe, to support different sectors of the State activity, namely Justice, Health, and Education.

Both projects lead to concrete follow-ups, sustained over time by articulated funding plans, ranging from the digitisation of the Justice system and the development of an interoperability platform in São Tomé and Príncipe to the design of a national action plan for implementing the Strategy in Cape Verde.

> **The team has done a tremendous amount of work in building the current project portfolio, strengthened partnerships, established collaboration with various UN agencies which by itself is not an easy thing to achieve, I mean, if you seek substantive work.**
>
> Tomasz Janowski,
> University of Gdansk, Poland,
> Founding Head of UNU-EGOV (2014-16).

Institutional capacity development

In his interview, Constâncio Andrade, former Chairman of the Board of Directors at INIC, the São Tomé and Príncipe Institute for Innovation and Knowledge, recalls that UNU-EGOV's work in Portuguese-speaking Africa goes back much further: "Since 2016, UNU-EGOV has been collaborating with us in the training and qualification of public administration staff in planning and management in the area of Electronic Governance. This action was carried out within the framework of the PASP PALOP-TL project financed by the European Union

and Camões IP and aimed at improving and proximity to public services in the African Lusophone countries and East Timor".

This was, indeed, the first numerically significant case of a digital governance capacity-building project in the Global South. Forty public administration officials from six countries underwent intensive training for five weeks in Guimarães, followed by extended training periods of two two-week sessions in each country.

> " *This region has always been on the world map of training education or professional education, becoming a training hub for high-level staff in the Public Administration of different countries is also very interesting for Guimarães. Hundreds of people have already passed through Guimarães to attend lectures, courses, seminars; to stay for training periods.*
>
> Antonio Cunha,
> President of CCDR-N,
> former Rector of the University of Minho between 2009 and 2017. "

UNU-EGOV's involvement in promoting institutional capacity-building and training programmes has grown steadily. More than anywhere else, in the Middle East: in Qatar, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, a country with which it maintains intense technical cooperation through numerous projects.

A flagship example is the Egypt Capacity Building Programme, established with the National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development of Egypt (NIGSD). This tailor-made capacity-building programme aimed at Egyptian executives and decision-makers with responsibilities in digital governance in public administration was designed in reply to a request for assistance from the NIGSD. For a couple

of years, several courses were in place on topics like Digital Transformation in Public Administration, *Digital Transformation for Corruption Fighting*, *Digital Governance for Egyptian Legislators*, *Digital Governance for Egyptian Judiciary*, *Smart Governance, and Smart Cities and Communities*. More than 300 Egyptian high-level public executives, including a whole cohort of judges, have already passed through Guimarães.

In addition to these training programmes, UNU-EGOV is also a meeting point for dozens of doctoral and master's students who, coming from different universities around the world, seek academic co-supervision there.

As it celebrates its 10th anniversary, the Unit is developing a joint PhD programme with its host university and another higher education institution in the Global South. And, similarly, a new Master's degree in Digital Transformation with the University of Santiago in Cape Verde and a few other Portuguese universities.

Building a specific scientific and institutional culture

Underlying every project, training programme, or consultancy mission has always been an essential research pillar, guided by the best academic practices. Its success is measured by the metrics used in academia, starting with the volume and quality of scientific publications.

For example, between 2017 and 2023, the Unit had more than 250 research papers published in recognised scientific journals and internationally indexed conferences, almost 100 policy briefs or reports bridging academic research and public policies and specific case studies, with high dissemination among the UN system and worldwide. Nearly 20 PhD thesis and a similar number of MSc dissertations were initiated with co-supervision within UNU-EGOV.

Therefore, the fears expressed by António Tavares when he joined the Unit in 2015 did not materialise. He recalls: "From the very beginning, I knew this was going to be a centre around policy-relevant research; I knew that advisory and consulting projects would be central, but I wasn't sure about the slower academic type of research, whether that would be possible to do here or not".

The way research was organised, however, matured over time. Soumaya's testimony is essential here: "At the beginning, research topics were more attached to researchers. We were around six or seven researchers, each conducting research in their own area of expertise, trying to find their way in the picture". This corresponded already to what was then called the first Core Research Programme from 2017 to 2020. Its purpose was to systematise efforts. The initial organisation into two central research projects initiated in 2014 was already surpassed. Marijn Janssen, Professor in ICT & Governance at Delft University, Holland, comments: "There is a difference between the startup phase and the [progressively achieved] corporation phase that is important to acknowledge: [scientifically] the team is less and less dependent on the director".

Then, in 2020, a new Core Research Programme was designed as a collective exercise involving the whole Unit. Soumaya recalls: "We analysed and interviewed the researchers, reached external people, collected data, looked into our clients and what they expected from us, identified competitors and potential collaborations". Three areas of intervention were first identified and then planned. Again, in Soumaya's words, "One research line devoted to digital transformation strategies, monitoring, and measurement. I have to say that is still the strongest pillar. (…) The second research line focused on emerging technologies and innovation, as well as the use and implication of emerging technologies for digital transformation and governance. In fact, we noticed that many countries were coming to us and asking, 'Oh, I'm hearing about AI, I'm hearing about blockchain, we are still very lagging behind, how can we catch up, how can we leapfrog, how can those technologies help us in our digital transformation, can we start with those technologies or should we come back and follow the same path of development of the other countries that are ahead of us?". Many projects emerged in this area, with ITU, UN-Habitat, UNC, and several governments, for example with Uzbekistan on the use of blockchain."

Finally, as Morten Nielsen puts it, the third research line addressed "the role of indirect and direct user engagement, how do we link our user complaints to continuous improvement of our services and product ecosystem. And, whenever we can no longer fix the existing solution and throw it out, how do we co-create with both end users internally, in our organisations, and externally, with citizens out there?" For Soumaya, this line concerns innovation, building on some previous work on digital democracy, civic tech, civic engagement, and participation in a broader sense. In her words, "We worked with ITU and the U4S (United for Smart, Sustainable Cities) to bring back the human centre, to put the residents and the citizens at the centre of digital transformation, exploring how to make it work for the well-being and the quality of life of the people and communities".

At the same time, the Unit created and consolidated a solid organisational culture capable of supporting research and all the multiple consultancy and training projects.

By the end of 2016, Elisabete Simões was hired as Head of Administration for a program that was still very small. Over the years, the administrative support team has grown and diversified, taking on an IT infrastructure

manager, a designer, and a communication team. Cross-cutting responsibilities in attracting projects and managing training programs were established later in 2021. The institutional website, the management of the social media presence, an internal organisational platform, and a set of communication and collaborative work tools were made available.

Elisabete recalls her experience: "When I first joined UNU-EGOV, we relied heavily on our colleagues in Malaysia and Japan for crucial support in finance, human resources,

communications, and ICT functions. Over time, we have made significant progress in developing our expertise internally, enabling us to operate autonomously and align with the other UNU Institutes. Navigating the intricacies of a United Nations organisation, with its distinct policies and procedures, alongside the challenges posed by UNU-EGOV's smaller scale and unstable funding, has been a daily test".

Central, however, has always been the effort to constantly create a stimulating working environment that welcomes and

respects everyone and develops their full potential. Many came from distant countries, sometimes with their families, to a totally new environment. Communal lunches, birthday cakes and self-organised weekend activities were important milestones along the way.

The testimony of Viktorija Jordanoska, who joined UNU-EGOV as a Human Resources Associate, together with her husband, himself a Research Fellow, both coming from North Macedonia, is particularly illustrative: "My career at UNU-EGOV started at the exact moment when we were already facing other challenges in our lives as a family. At

that time, I had to adapt to living in a new country with a different culture (because we come from Macedonia), learn a new language, start a new job, and become a mom for the first time of a baby boy! It was like starting a new life from scratch, and with the support we got from our colleagues, this process was much easier than we thought it would be. Then I realised that the heart of UNU-EGOV and its real value as an international organisation is the treatment of the employees and the support they receive in every step of their life journey to find the balance between their professional and personal lives".

> " *Reflecting on our journey, I take immense pride in our collective accomplishments in these ten years, given all the constraints. I feel particularly happy about our work environment with colleagues from so many cultures and professional backgrounds with a shared mission of creating a better world, all from the unusual setting of a small town in northern Portugal.*
>
> Elisabete Simões,
> Head of Administration at UNU-EGOV. "

Multilateral networks

If there is one keyword to explain UNU-EGOV, it's networking — the key to its success but also what characterises its way of working. António Cunha insists: "International networking in knowledge development is absolutely mandatory. But this is what UNU-EGOV does every day: developing knowledge based on a very enlarged international network which brings different sources of knowledge, but also different sources of problems, of challenges that have to be addressed".

With an international network of more than 6 700 researchers and academics in the field of EGOV, with projects developed with government agencies in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Armenia, Brazil, Cape Verde, China, Colombia, Dubai, Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, India, Indonesia, Latvia, Oman, Qatar, São Tomé and Príncipe, Uganda and Uzbekistan, and with steady collaborations with international organisations such as the World Bank, ITU, UNDESA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, UN-Habitat, OECD, GIZ and ISSA, UNU-EGOV is, more than anything else, a bridging institution.

Part of this network is nurtured by ICEGOV, the *International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance*, created

in the context of the *e-Macau* initiative and later made into the official annual event of UNU-EGOV.

Currently one of the few top scientific conferences in the area, ICEGOV has a peculiar character. Elsa Estevez writes: "ICEGOV is a unique conference that puts emphasis on bringing together academics and practitioners, as well as people from the whole developing countries which usually do not have the means to participate in international forums". With hundreds of participants every year and scientific tracks with very demanding peer review processes, which add various round tables, keynote addresses, workshops, and even a doctoral symposium for PhD students, ICEGOV is one of the Unit's flagships. Sabine Becker Thierry remarks: "It requires a lot of work to organise a conference of global relevance, and it is quite incredible how they have been doing this every year".

ICEGOV federates researchers and different sorts of EGOV communities around the Globe. The 16th edition of ICEGOV was successfully organised in 2023 in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, with over 300 participants from academia (60%), government and industry (25%), and international

organisations (15%) to share insights into the theory and practice of digital governance. The 17th edition is scheduled for October 1-4, 2024, in Pretoria, South Africa.

Indeed, along its very successful journey, ICEGOV has been hosted almost everywhere – Macau, Egypt, Colombia, China, Estonia, USA, South Korea, Portugal, Tunisia, Uruguay, India, Ireland, Australia, Greece, and Brazil. And, most importantly, always in solid articulation with local institutions and digital governance researchers in each host country.

In 2022, UNDESA selected ICEGOV as one of its core events, a very competitive process. UNDESA hosts only quite a few core events,

such as WSIS and IGF. In 2022, ICEGOV was added to this very exclusive group.

The beginning, however, was not that obvious. Hans Jochen Scholl shares, "In the beginning, I was sceptical about yet another conference. [By then] the community was smaller, much smaller. We already had three conferences, plus a few commercially oriented ones that had some traction at that time but have disappeared. So, I wasn't very keen on adding yet another international conference that was initially hosted in the Far East, in Macau. [However, the] great idea was to make ICEGOV a practitioner accessible event, not just a sheer scholarly one, and that added a tremendous value to the overall community".

A second pillar in the networking effort was the *Government Fellowships Programme,* under which UNU-EGOV hosts senior staff members from government agencies in various countries for several months. During their stay, they work on EGOV case studies of real relevance to their countries, giving UNU-EGOV, its research and methodologies high international recognition.

To date, UNU-EGOV has hosted 27 government fellows from 19 different countries (Brazil, China, Egypt, Estonia, Georgia, Ghana, Indonesia, Latvia, North Macedonia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Uganda).

Judy Backhouse, a former senior researcher at UNU-EGOV, who joined in 2019, recalls the positive impact of this programme: "The reason I ended up at UNU-EGOV was because I had a PhD student who was an employee in government in South Africa who originally got involved in one of the ICEGOV conferences and then got on to the Government Fellows Program and spent some time in Guimarães. I knew, from watching his involvement, that this experience was life-changing for him, and I think that was the case for many of the government fellows… I do think that globally has had a significant impact on the people who were involved."

The government fellowships programme had an interesting impact globally. The reason I ended up at UNU-EGOV was because I had a PhD student who was an employee in the government in South Africa. He got involved in one of the ICEGOV conferences and then got on to the government fellowships programme and spent some time in Guimaraes. I know this experience was life-changing for him and I think for many of the government fellows that was the case.

Judy Backhouse,
Former Senior Researcher at UNU-EGOV

> **UNU-EGOV developed into a very interesting, specialised ecosystem of academic service providers, and I think its reputation and impact are far greater than the actual size of the team. This is a real success story for UNU.**
>
> David Passarelli,
> Director of the UNU Center for Policy Research,
> was Chief of Staff to Rector David Malone in Tokyo back in 2014.

UNU-EGOV also hosts doctoral and master's students every year, as well as doctoral researchers and academics on sabbatical leave from various nationalities (Argentina, Brazil, Estonia, USA, Netherlands, Jordan, Poland, Switzerland, and the Republic of Korea, among others). Hans Jochen Scholl, an already mentioned Professor at the University of Washington, recalls the sabbatical months spent in Guimarães: "I expect UNU-EGOV to be still the happy ship that I have experienced myself when invited to become a fellow, spending three wonderful months in Guimarães, from July to the end of September of 2016".

The Unit has always benefited from well-kept facilities provided by the Municipality of Guimarães but shared with the University of Minho in what was, in 2014, the newly formed Campus de Couros, in an urban redevelopment zone of a previously industrial area, right in the historic centre of the city.

In August 2021, UNU-EGOV moved to a new building. The Municipality of Guimarães concluded the reconstruction of an old building that, since July, serves as the new premises of UNU-EGOV. By offering more than three times the size of the old one and better working conditions, this new space is a key asset for the expected transition of UNU-EGOV from an Operating Unit to a fully-fledged Institute, as foreseen since its establishment in Portugal.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic showed that many functions could be performed online by remote working arrangements, it was also a stark reminder that working with colleagues in person in a comfortable and beautiful environment is extremely important for organisational communication and success. The stunning new building helped UNU-EGOV tremendously strengthen its organisational culture and further motivate its dedicated team of researchers. The historical site where the UNU-EGOV's current building is located, the Couros area, was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2023.

UNU-EGOV also runs a residence for its researchers, an important part of its dynamics. In the words of Marijn Janssen, "having a residence where people can stay, and those kinds of facilities are very important for an international audience, when people come from all over the world".

The steady support of the Municipality of Guimarães, which provided both the new building and the residence, is kindly acknowledged by the entire community at UNU-EGOV. Quoting António Tavares: "Since the very beginning, there have never been any questions from the City Hall, for example, 'What are people doing here?', etc.

On the contrary, the idea was always 'we want them here, we will interact with them, we will help develop this organisation'. Such an attitude was precious".

3.3 Some challenges

In 2017, five digital governance research centre directors from different parts of the World came together in a conference panel entitled *Building and Sustaining a Digital Government Research Centre: A Director's Perspective*[6]. The panel aimed to discuss their experiences building sustainable digital governance research centres. The panel members summarised the main challenges of setting up and maintaining a digital governance research centre under five headings: "Building a fundable research agenda, building mutually beneficial partnerships, fundraising, finding and developing talent, and engaging with the university, funding, and other institutional partners". For the last ten years, UNU-EGOV has addressed similar challenges.

Perhaps the biggest challenge has been the difficulties associated with implementing the funding model from the host country and the consequent lack of financial stability.

A demanding journey has been travelled with the government to adjust such a model for the next renewal, as well as to discuss the financial implications of the much-needed conversion into a fully-fledged UNU Institute. Luís Soares Barbosa comments: "Not being an Institute means that the Host Country Agreement had to be revisited every five years. Usually, the negotiations were not very difficult, but making them operational was kind of a nightmare".

Another critical challenge was the correct language and means to promote UNU-EGOV in academic, practitioner, and international organisation circles and spheres. In other words, increasing the Unit's visibility in these circles often required a new communication strategy. A daily bid. This has improved dramatically over the last two years. Still, as António Tavares puts it with a hint of irony, "Sometimes I think we are more visible internationally than we are locally, in Portugal".

The location of the UNU-EGOV created a different challenge as well. Instead of being in the capital city of Lisbon or the regional metropolis of Porto, the Unit is located in the relatively small historical town of Guimarães. This choice, clear from the outset, was not entirely pacific. On the one hand, a more central location could have made attracting and hiring qualified human resources easier. On the other hand, as António Cunha remarks: "Some sectors in the capital looked suspiciously at this weird project. Having a centre of UNU on EGOV in Guimarães was seen with some doubts".

However, he continues, summing up the University's experience, "What we have now, the asset we have now, is evidence of what can be done, what was done, the competencies that emerged from this programme". Indeed, the support of the Municipality of Guimarães, the University of Minho, and the Regional Coordination and Development Commission for North Portugal, as trusted long-time partners, has been invaluable in making UNU-EGOV a very successful project within UNU and putting Portugal on the global map of digital governance.

Attracting and fixing highly qualified and versatile human resources is challenging for every organisation. The peculiar character of UNU-EGOV makes this process even more demanding. Theresa Pardo, Associate Vice-President for Research and Economic Development at the State University of New York, former Director of the Center Technology in Government (CTG UAlbany) at Albany, and a long-time collaborator with UNU-EGOV, remarks: "Finding the experts who want to work in this particular environment and who are a good fit with it, has always been a struggle. [We seek] scholars who are interested in a non-traditional academic appointment, who have both the deep theoretical knowledge but also the capability to work with governments, directly with government colleagues and understand what the priorities are within a particular initiative (…) This is less about academic publications and more about impact and creating knowledge for action".

Two more circumstantial factors ended up affecting UNU-EGOV's relatively short journey.

The first one was, obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic. António Tavares accurately expresses everybody's experience: "It came about the time when we started to hire more people, but they couldn't come. To create an excellent work environment and a distinctive organisational culture, you

[6] Pardo, T. A., Parycek, P., en, M., Zheng, L., & Cunha, M. A. (2017, June). Building and Sustaining a Digital Government Research Center: A Director's Perspective. In Proceedings of the 18th Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research (pp. 607-609).

need to have people in place. These were very difficult years when most of us were working remotely. I have not met some of my colleagues for many months, even those hired immediately before the pandemic". Fortunately, in 2021, "the new building combined with the end of COVID-19 made the Unit larger and more institutionally robust as it is now".

Another time of tremendous uncertainty was when Tomasz Janowski and Elsa Estevez left with a small difference between them. In António's words again, "They were the ones that set up the Unit that made it what it was in the first few years, so when the Unit lost them because their contracts within

UNU expired, there was a moment of high uncertainty, and we wondered if the Unit could survive. (…) Ultimately, the succession from one leader to the other worked out very well, but this was not evident by then".

Leadership is always an issue. Luís Soares Barbosa remarks that "in the inception, Tomasz's leadership was crucial because he was, at the same time, the academic, the director, the person with an exceptional academic record in this area and an expanding network of contacts worldwide. His leadership helped make precise what a UNU programme is, the UN values involved, the concerns that ought to be present when planning a project, etc."

After a relatively short interval, during which Luís Soares Barbosa took over on an interim basis to set the conditions for launching an international call to select a new Director, Delfina Soares was appointed in the fall of 2017. Having a Portuguese Director for a Unit in Portugal was a bit unusual. David Malone, who appointed both Luís and Delfina, explains: "Two [UNU-EGOV] leaders came from the University of Minho. Normally, we do not appoint directors of the nationality of the country where the Institute is because of the risk of conflict of interest, but in the case of Portugal, it was perfectly clear that the real champion for this Institute was going to be the University of Minho. They invested a lot

in it, have been by far the best allies of the University, and both leaders were excellent".

"With Delfina", Luís remarks, "our project portfolio extended a lot (…) Step by step, we became more independent, more able to finance ourselves. The numbers for the last five years speak for themselves: for every euro the Portuguese government put on the Unit, we generated 1.4, and this is likely to increase. (…) We defined a core research programme, which was revised in 2021 into the current three research lines. We consolidated a specific organisational culture".

But this takes us already to the next movement of this symphony.

4

Andante
(Where we stand)

4.1 Ten years later

> " *When the decision was taken ten years ago no one of those who were involved in the process would expect the result which we see now.*
>
> *UNU-EGOV became an international reference for research in digital governance, which is constantly proved by the number of projects, publications, and results that come out of its activity. And it also became a reference in capacity building in this field. (...) When it comes to see the number of countries and governments that were supported by UNU-EGOV to define proper policies in the field of the electronic governance, we can conclude how important this project has been over the time.*
> "
>
> Rui Vieira de Castro,
> Rector of the University of Minho.

In May 2024, the first decade of this UNU programme in Portugal will come to an end. As shown in the previous section, it has been a demanding but safe journey. The institution has matured and gained a level of visibility and relevance far beyond its size and context.

Institutionally, the expected path has also been taken. In 2021, it was possible to conclude the renewal of the Host Country Agreement, which received parliamentary approval at the end of the following year. Since then, the focus of the dialogue between UNU and the Portuguese Republic has been on guaranteeing to this project broader and more effective conditions for action, autonomy, and growth, seeking to accomplish, at the beginning of UNU-EGOV's second decade of operation, the original prospect of establishing a fully-fledged Institute. Continued dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government departments and with the regional authorities is ongoing, with the certainty that the proof of concept that the Unit has constituted over ten years has proved itself and proved it well.

In July 2023, the official visit to UNU-EGOV of the then President of the Parliament, Augusto Santos Silva, with a delegation of Members of the Parliament from different political parties, gave a broader context to this effort. Portugal's commitment and affection for this project was warmly expressed by the President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, in a recent audience with the Rector of UNU and the Director of UNU-EGOV.

This section briefly overviews UNU-EGOV's current reality as it celebrates its 10th anniversary, looking at its organisation, staff, partnerships, and contributions.

Andante con moto seems like the proper musical tempo to go.

4.2 Organisation

The current organisational structure of UNU-EGOV includes a Director, a Deputy Director, and the Head of Administration. In line with the Unit's Core Research Programme 2020-2024, there are three research lines devoted to (1) *Digital governance, regulations, and policies*; (2) *Digital transformation, innovation, and technologies*; and (3) *Participation, people, and communities*, respectively. Each research line focuses on the same sets of activities within their specific topic: Strategic design, planning, and analysis; Implementation; Capacity building; and Measurement, evaluation, and monitoring. A coordinator per research line manages a small team of six to ten researchers and reports to the Director. One person responsible for institutional development and another for capacity building completes the Unit's organisational framework. Administrative and communication teams support its daily life.

The current organisational structure fits the needs, allowing ample space for development. As Morten Nielsen puts it, "Besides the formal leadership, there is the informal knowledge sharing between different team members, different project leaders, the research line coordinators. It is a relatively flat organisation".

As one would expect in an organisation of around forty people, the role of the Director is crucial in articulating its various dimensions and strategic planning. The leadership style of the current Director, Delfina Soares, is admittedly part of the exceptional character and organisational culture of this Unit.

In her role as Chair of the Steering Committee for ICEGOV, the Unit's annual international conference, Elsa Estevez voices this recognition: "Delfina puts a lot of her professional experience and personal effort. Extremally dedicated and hardworking, she moves mountains to ensure she has what she needs for UNU-EGOV to bring people together and do relevant work".

"When evaluating an institution, it is rare that the focus is on the culture of a place. We frequently look at outputs, at fundraising, at policy impacts, but an Institute is only effective if there is a good culture.", says David Passarelli, now directing another UNU Institute in New York. And continues, "I want to call out how impressed I am with the culture that Delfina has created and Luís before her. They are caring leaders; they have made a success out of a very difficult project, where other people would have either given up or been very pessimistic, which could have infected the Unit's culture".

4.3 Staff

> **Optimists have run UNU-EGOV, and I think optimism has really bled through into the workforce. I've been there several times: it really is a place that seems to have a strong culture of everyone pulling together in the same direction, working towards a specific mission. (...) It is a real accomplishment.**
>
> David Passarelli,
> Director of UNU-CPR.

As of May 2024, UNU-EGOV has 31 experts, including its Director and Deputy Director. The researchers come from 17 different countries: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Denmark, France, Greece, Moldova, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Palestine, Philippines, Tanzania, Turkey, Tunisia, and Scotland, in addition to Portugal. And, of course, quite different disciplinary backgrounds, such as business administration, computer science, economics, computer engineering, environmental studies, industrial management, information science, law,

local government, political science, public administration and policy, and urban planning. Among the experts, eight adjunct professors have a double academic affiliation with the University of Minho. In addition, there are nine administrative staff, including the Head of Administration, Elisabete Simões.

Regarding the globally accepted UN strategy of gender mainstreaming for promoting gender equality, UNU-EGOV is an ardent supporter. UNU-EGOV has a female director. Out of its 31 experts, 14 (45%) are women. Out of the nine administrative staff, six (67%) are women. In addition, gender mainstreaming has been carefully observed in all the Unit's activities.

Rui Vieira de Castro, who regards UNU-EGOV from the point of view of its host University, comments: "When I look at what is being done at UNU-EGOV along these years, I think that something not likely, but very unlikely indeed, happened there. Of course, this has to do mainly with the people that were possible to gather around this project and a very clear and clever leadership".

4.4 Major stakeholders and partners

As a part of the UNU ecosystem, the prime stakeholders of the UNU-EGOV are all the different agencies of the UN system and all 193 UN Member States. The collaboration with many such agencies has already been highlighted. The UNDESA, UNICEF, UNESCO, UN-Habitat, UNDP country offices, UN ECA, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and ILO, the International Labour Organisation, are some examples of partners from inside. In addition, the World Bank, OECD, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Estonia EGOV Academy, and the International Social Security Association (ISSA), the World's leading organisation for social security institutions, government departments, and agencies, must also be counted among the numerous international partners of the UNU-EGOV over the years.

Regarding individual country stakeholders and partners, UNU-EGOV helped the digital transformation and governance efforts of more than 20 countries from the six continents with consultancy and assistance projects, capacity development training programmes, and academic and governmental fellowship support. These include Egypt, Uganda, South Africa, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique, and Cape Verde in Africa; Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Palestine and the United Arab Emirates in the Middle East; Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia in South America, Mexico in North America; China, India, East Timor, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Armenia in Asia; Portugal, Ukraine, Spain, and Latvia in Europe; and Indonesia in Oceania. The countries UNU-EGOV collaborated with over the last ten years are represented in the following map.

> **UNU-EGOV offers a trusted think tank whose services governments can use, having very high quality and being affordable.**
>
> Moustafa Kamal,
> Judge at the Egyptian Council of State.

Network of Connections:
International Organizations and Governments

Over the last ten years, the Portuguese government, government agencies such as the Agency for Administrative Modernisation (AMA), regional development agencies such as the Coordination and Development Commission for the North of Portugal (CCDR-N), and local governments such as the Municipality of Guimarães and many others have been powerful and dedicated stakeholders and trusted partners of UNU-EGOV.

As an example of a recent partnership, one can mention the Centre for Spatial Information Science (CSIS) of the University of Tokyo. This partnership facilitates UNU-EGOV's ongoing data-driven research on public policy. The two organisations will be participating in joint research and the design of collaborative tools in areas such as poverty mapping and indexing of real-time quality of life monitoring, focusing mainly on the Global South and harnessing data from heterogeneous sources such as satellite data, mobile call records data, consumption data, among others. Several papers have already been published at various international conferences focused on using machine learning and other computational tools to understand the morphological dynamics of the cities, their transport networks, and the energy consumption profiles of residents of selected cities in the developing world.

On the other hand, UNU-EGOV is uniquely placed to add value, especially to the digital transformation efforts of Portuguese-speaking countries, due to the historical, cultural, and linguistic ties of these countries with Portugal.

Another important stakeholder of UNU-EGOV is the hundreds of digital governance academics and practitioners who make up the ICEGOV community. ICEGOV, organised since 2007, created a community of researchers and practitioners that is enlarged and enriched with each successive conference.

4.5 Contributions

No institution, least of all if it is part of the United Nations, is justified by itself, but only to the extent that it contributes to the development of the peoples and the progress of the human spirit.

UNU-EGOV has made many different valuable contributions over the last ten years. This added value can be categorised into contributions to the UN systems, to Portugal as its host country at national and local levels, to the UN Member States, and to the academic and practitioner communities of digital governance and transformation. The interviews with partners from different institutional networks clearly show

"I participated to one of the first projects that we had in Portugal, with the Ministry of Justice: a short contract but a very intensive one, which opened many doors and made us visible, a trustful partner.

Soumaya Ben Dhou
Research Coordinator at UNU-EGOV

"There are many examples that show that the mission of UNU-EGOV during the first ten years has been skillfully and faithfully fulfilled. While contributing to informed policy-making processes, it impacted many institutions and governments in all countries it worked in, thus encouraging and promoting transparent, effective, and accountable institutions.

Abdulrahman Almutairi,
Vice-President of the Digital Government Authority in Saudi Arabia.

> **For Governments to have a strategic partner able to provide recommendations, build human capacity, organizational capacity, is extremely valuable.**
>
> Elsa Estevez
> Holder of the UNESCO Chair on Knowledge Society and Professor at National University of La Plata and National University of the South, in Argentina

that UNU-EGOV is perceived as a respected, trusted, and very competent partner and collaborator by the UN system, Member State governments, and the academic and practitioner communities at large.

Elsa Estevez emphasises a very basic dimension: "UNU-EGOV adds value to the UN system just by having been established in a domain which is absolutely relevant nowadays, the strategic use of digital technology". As a general-purpose technology, this constitutes "an arena where governments play a key role, enabling and regulating their use". In a similar direction, Sabine Becker Thierry said, "Digital Governance is a niche area. Until recently, aside from ITU, the UN system never really worked on it. (...) Probably, the competition is getting stronger now since AI is on the

Secretary General's map and is generally a faster-moving field. But UNU-EGOV still has an advantage because it has well-established relations, is very broadly set up, and is widely spread up geographically".

The contribution to Member States is widely recognised, particularly by those governments or public administration entities with which UNU-EGOV researchers had interacted most directly.

For the President of CCDR-N, António Cunha, "UNU-EGOV works in an area that is critical for governments not only to improve the way Public Administration interacts with citizens but also in other key aspects related to increasing transparency or fighting corruption". Rector Rui Vieira de Castro stresses the contribution to "the political

stability in various countries worldwide, [by] making public institutions stronger, more transparent and accountable". And concludes: "Maybe there is not a direct link between this and the daily operation of UNU-EGOV, advocacy work, capacity building, and knowledge transference, but emerges from all the three".

A different voice, that of Theresa Pardo, stresses the magnitude of the challenges faced by world leaders "either elected or appointed, as well as by senior executives, as they're increasingly put in a position, or asked to make significant strategic decisions about technology or digital transformation

at a national, and even global scale". She concludes this "is what makes the work of UNU-EGOV so important".

Moreover, going digital has unsuspected relationships to core areas where the great challenges of the century intersect. António Cunha exemplifies: "Environmental challenges require more digitalisation in different ways, and suitable ways to harness data, to find new approaches. This challenge has different declinations around the Tropics, or the Artic Circle, in the West or the East, but at the end of the day, the question remains: care for people and communities, doing the best with fewer resources

> **Managing risk and reputation is always important. Nobody pays you for that time, but you have to invest to maintain visibility in the international community while still trying to carry on the number of contracted projects. (...) You did this amazing piece of work but that amazing piece of work is a consequence of this amazing organisation and this amazing organisation needs to be sustained over time.**
>
> Theresa Pardo
> State University of New York,
> former Director of CTG UAlbany.

and less impact to the planet, and once again the government is crucial for that".

Moustafa Kamal explains that digital governance places very demanding challenges mainly to lower and middle-lower-income countries because "digital transformation of public services is expensive. Not only expensive, but it requires continuous maintenance and update, and the ability to attract and keep technical expertise, which is not very easy, mainly in countries where civil servants are paid lower wages when compared to the private sector".

In this spirit, UNU-EGOV launched in 2023 an initiative to reach out to the 16 countries

in West Africa, which culminated with the organisation, in partnership with UN ECA, of the *West Africa Digital Governance Forum* devoted to strategic thinking at regional level, held in Banjul, The Gambia, 13-14 September 2023, with 60 participants and several international organisations. The Forum provided a fascinating think tank centred on the role and impact of strategic digital governance policies in low-income communities. The experience and format are currently being replicated for South and East Africa and Central Asia.

This is probably why Moustafa, in Egypt, or Maria Isabel, from Colombia, or Constâncio Andrade, in São Tomé and Príncipe, all

agree with Abdulrahman Almutairi, who coordinates UNU-EGOV partner agency in Saudi Arabia, claiming the Unit to be just "our right partner".

Theresa Pardo, who chaired one of the leading research centres on digital governance in the USA, recognises that "most projects [at UNU-EGOV] are invited projects, and invited projects come as a consequence of trust relationships with all of the necessary potential competitors and collaborators". Collaboration is always based on trust. This seems to be the secret key to UNU-EGOV. As Elsa Estevez puts it, UNU-EGOV "proved to be a trustful partner in these collaborative processes. It was a

main achievement which acts as a facilitator to engage new stakeholders".

Trust is also the basis of UNU-EGOV's contribution to the academic, scientific, and practitioner communities organised around digital governance. As explained in the previous section, UNU-EGOV likes to see itself as one that aggregates, fosters synergies, and builds networks with an impact that goes far beyond the limits of its action. As a reliable partner.

UNU-EGOV contributes to these communities through the dissemination of its research results, either published as formal scientific papers or, in a more agile form, as policy briefs. But also by stimulating synergies

and connecting people and experiences in a multitude of different events. Even at the smaller scale of its host University, the Rector agrees that "UNU-EGOV played an important role in supporting some areas of research at the University of Minho (…) Putting researchers in close communication with UNU makes a huge difference".

ICEGOV and its vibrant and heterogeneous community have connected, since its inception, with more than 7,000 researchers and practitioners from almost 96 countries. All ICEGOV proceedings were published as 16 volumes by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), indexed by Scopus and Web of Science.

Again, Elsa Estevez points out what UNU-EGOV represents to the international research community. She claims that "there are just a few centres in the world with recognised competencies in this field. So, for researchers, PhD students, a connection, or just a reference to UNU-EGOV is also extremely rewarding".

Maybe it comes as a surprise, but part of UNU-EGOV's contribution is also methodological. That is, not only what it does, but how it does what it does can make a difference. For example, Luís Soares Barbosa explains that, whenever designing a strategy for a country or a service, "our approach is always to involve very actively local experts and local

> **UNU-EGOV brings cooperation and openness, promotes multiculturalism, and builds a reputation of value that indeed matters for the city and the world.**
>
> Domingos Bragança,
> Mayor of Guimarães.

stakeholders in everything we do. This has a real impact, strengthening national resources in government, public administration and even universities". To build lasting networks. He continues, "Actually, the value one can bring to a country is not just documents or strategies or ideas, but also the effort to build on local capacities, design projects, boost synergies."

Finally, UNU-EGOV directly contributes to its host country as well. Its most significant contribution to Portugal is to put the country on the world map of digital government research. And, in a complementary way, projecting Portugal internationally as a benchmark country in developing, promoting, and applying good practices in the area.

Quoting Luís Soares Barbosa, "Speaking as a Portuguese citizen, it is evidently relevant that we have something like this in Portugal, contributing to wrap up the Portuguese experience in this domain and bring it to the international arena".

In fact, the country's success in pursuing consistent public policies in this area is unmistakable, capitalising on the social and political consensus achieved over successive legislatures. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Portuguese experience is not only regularly well-positioned in the

set of parameters evaluated by international benchmarks (for example, concerning the provision of digital public services, infrastructure, and connectivity) but also recognised as a leading reference and example to follow, namely in the context of Portuguese-speaking countries. UNU-EGOV constitutes a strategic partner in Portugal's active cooperation with the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), with which the Unit has been consolidating strong professional links.

Furthermore, there is an immense potential for UNU-EGOV to collaborate with Portuguese governmental agencies to innovate and develop the best digital governance principles and accomplishments in the country. Recent projects for AMA, the Ministry of Justice, and the National Mint, witness such a journey.

5
Allegro con brio
(the next decade)

5.1 Towards a fully-fledged UNU Institute

The United Nations University was established in 1972 as a global think tank and postgraduate teaching organisation. As it entered the second half of its first century, it evolved together with the World it exists in, adapting to the changing social, economic, and environmental conditions. This adaptation process is guided by a transformation map, named UN 2.0, which "serves as an evolving guiding compass, framed around two core elements of culture and skills in five areas, known as the quintet of change: data; digital transformation; innovation; strategic foresight; and behavioural science"[7].

Within this context, as Rector Tshilidzi Marwala emphasises, there are three pillars of the UNU Strategic Plan 2025-2029 for advancing UNU's mission:

(1) Strengthening capacity for policy-relevant research and education;

(2) Expanding through collaboration, especially in the Global South; and thereby

(3) Increasing UNU's presence, brand, visibility, and impact.

A vision for UNU-EGOV in the next decade must be synchronised with these three UNU Strategic Plan pillars.

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[7] UN 2.0: Strengthening Capacities of the UN – Today and Tomorrow.
sdg.iisd.org/commentary/policy-briefs/un-2-0-strengthening-capacities-of-the-un-today-and-tomorrow/.

The University leadership and several close stakeholders have often voiced an institutional pre-condition for this to happen: that UNU-EGOV can quickly become a fully-fledged UNU Institute with expanded capacity, resources, and autonomy. Indeed, a unanimous voice:

- **Delfina Soares**, UNU-EGOV Director:
  "My main objective is to elevate the Unit to a fully-fledged Institute".

- **Rui Vieira de Castro**, Rector of the University of Minho:
  "UNU-EGOV should assume as its main goal its transformation into an Institute. It should look for and should fight for. It would be important to become more visible in the national and European higher education area".

- **Moustafa Kamal**, Judge at the Egyptian Council of State:
  "To transform into a larger Unit, maybe an Institute, securing suitable funds to bring more and more to lower-income countries. (...) International agencies and international donors often have a severe lack of honest technical and policy advice. UNU-EGOV can continue to fill this gap".

- **Elsa Estevez**, Holder of the UNESCO Chair on Knowledge Society, Argentina:
  "A fully-fledged Institute, with proper governance structures, fully supported by UNU".

- **Marijn Janssen**, Professor in ICT & Governance at Delft University, Holland:
  "An Institute to develop new knowledge, scale up and have a bigger, an even bigger impact".

- **Tim Unwin**, Emeritus Professor at Royal Holloway, University of London, and Honorary Professor at Lanzhou University, China:
  "Not being an Institute yet means you don't necessarily get in all the higher-level discussions with the UN system. Becoming an Institute will help to build credibility and establish long-term partnerships".

- **António Cunha**, President of CCDR-N:
  "To jump to a fully-fledged UNU Institute to give this programme a different status and more stable and consolidated dimension".

This objective is therefore crucial to ensuring the sustained expansion of the programme and its visibility in all relevant forums, particularly within the United Nations system, as well as consolidating and expanding the portfolio of projects and capacity-building programmes.

This shift is also central to creating the conditions for institutional and financial stability that will allow the attraction and consolidation of highly qualified human resources, carefully plan its activities, and draw up ambitious long-term strategic plans. Above all, it is crucial to ensure an effective and reliable presence in all international forums where its voice can make a difference.

"

The future mission of UNU-EGOV is to expand its reach in the Global South, in Asia, and in Latin America. Expand because the problems are large. Secondly, to ensure that we are seen and our impact is felt.

We have to be in conversations at all levels at the United Nations. We have to be in conversations in all Member States. We have to be in conversations in industry where these technologies are being shaped so that they are shaped according to the values of the United Nations. And we have to be instruments for education (...) to be a trusted space that looks at facts as they are and tries to use knowledge to create a regime that will leave no one behind.

Tshilidzi Marwala,
Rector of the United Nations University
UN Under Secretary General.

"

5.2 Contributes to a vision for the future

Several contributions to an informed vision for the coming decade popped up during the interviews to prepare this document. Without any claim to completeness, here are some of these contributions as food for thought.

Some contributions made have an institutional character. Most of them emphasise expanding the reach of UNU-EGOV, mainly, but not exclusively, to the Global South. Max Bond remarks: "Promote twinning of different institutions between the North and the Global South. Invest in value-additive capacity development. Identify and reach out to some of the best scientists and institutions in developing countries and help them to build their own capacities". As a concrete measure, Rui Vieira de Castro suggests that the current Adjunct Professorships Programme, established with the University of Minho, be extended to other Universities worldwide "to support a larger and stronger network".

João Carvalho, a Professor of Information Systems at UM and one in the initial set of UNU-EGOV Adjunct Professors, chooses to expand academic training: "I would love to see an MSc degree in e-governance with involvement of several departments from the University of Minho and UNU-EGOV". An international PhD programme in this same area is currently being prepared.

Reinforcing the research link to public policies is emphasised again by João Carvalho and Tim Unwin: "UNU-EGOV needs an extra effort to come up with short policy briefs based on research and getting them in the hands of the people who matter".

A second set of contributions focuses on the impact of disruptive technologies. For example, Abdulrahman Almutairi comments: "The next ten years of UNU-EGOV lifespan should focus on two major visions: Stepping ahead of digital transformation and impacting smart governance with new emerging technologies and, second, to assist in developing an enhanced seamless digital transformation that encourages e-society-driven development within the context of ethical, effective, and highest standards of good governance".

António Cunha insists on bridging all digital gaps: "UNU-EGOV operates in one of the areas where knowledge is developing faster and faster (e.g., in AI, edge computing, supercomputing infrastructures). The pace of development is not the same around

the world, and this gap places a huge opportunity and the need to help developing countries keep on track. Even in developed countries, it is essential that EGOV does not become a source of exclusion because we have fringes of the population with low digital literacy or limited connectivity".

Another dimension of the UN's adaptation to changing conditions and needs is the Global Digital Compact, an idea of a global multistakeholder digital cooperation proposed by the UN in 2021 as "shared principles for an open, free, and secure digital future for all"[8]. It is a call to all the stakeholders (private companies, civil society, grass-roots organisations, academia, and individuals) to align their strategies and operations with ten universal principles and work towards advancing societal goals and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

David Passarelli calls for the need for quick attention to new international agendas, such as the Global Digital Compact or the already mentioned UN 2.0 agenda of the Secretary-General, to upskill or transform capacities within the organisation to deliver

better. This means "resorting to capacities like leveraging data that are closely linked to the kind of work that UNU-EGOV does. So, its ability to think through what systems and capacities you need to improve delivery through technology is not only important for Portugal and its client countries in Africa, the Middle East, or Latin America but also for the UN system itself."

David still puts another challenge on the table: the need to "respond to emergencies and new priorities that emerge sometimes with one week's notice". And remarks, " This may not be easy if you are very dependent on project funding: if you have been successful in attracting project funding, the chances are that your priorities and your time are already allocated to a project, and that leaves you no time to be responsive to some new priority that may be emerging in the UN system where you could play a role, an early role in shaping thinking, shaping responses". And concludes: "Help to bring parts of the UN system together to deliver well in such a response, is not a capacity that we currently have in many parts of the

UN system". Such a question deserves to be addressed by an organisation like UNU-EGOV, which prioritises and needs project funding to survive.

Finally, some interviewees focus on the contents of the research to be carried out. For example, António Tavares discusses the impact of e-participation. He remarks: "Community involvement and all these

mantras that we've been repeating over time have been somehow hijacked by many governments. We risk a situation where people rank high in the e-participation indexes, but substantive and deliberative democracy is still absent. We have to be subtle, (…) but also to confront this issue because when I see international rankings, I see a lot of window dressing there".

> " AI is just one of the technologies that needs to be governed. For example, we talk about spectrum allocation, which is critical for digital inclusion; how do we make sure that countries are sufficiently capacitated so that they can do and make choices that are good for their countries, for their environments, for human rights, and other human values?
>
> How do we make sure that these technologies are equally distributed, not just the technologies of certain countries located in certain parts of the world?
>
> How do we make sure that devices and infrastructures are affordable so that no one is left behind? "
>
> Tshilidzi Marwala,
> Rector of the United Nations University
> UN Under Secretary General.

[8] UN Global Digital Compact, 2024. www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact. The Global Digital Compact is planned to be agreed upon at the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

Theresa Pardo discusses what the target in capacity building should be. According to her, the challenge for UNU-EGOV is "to bridge between who defines the policies and those senior executives who are supposed to interpret policies, to potentially inform the policy-making process but also to create the organisational capability to execute them. This is crucial, namely to hold our policy speakers more accountable to policy that's executable in a way that creates value". She exemplifies: "Every elected official says we're going to be AI-based, but every executive replies I don't know how to do that, I don't have the people to do it, I don't have the data, the technology to do it. So how do we bridge the gap between what the policymakers are saying and what government officials are actually able to deliver?"

5.3 An unfinished symphony

Of course, the range of possibilities open to UNU-EGOV is wide and varied now that, as we have been reminded along this text, the concept proposed back in 2014 has been proven. Indeed, this programme has proven effective, sustainable, and agile in tackling new issues, new realities, and new challenges.

UNU-EGOV is, therefore, heading into its next decade with enthusiasm and caution.

Aware that whatever the future may bring, what remains essential is the ability to create and maintain a massive capital of trust. Such an asset will make UNU-EGOV an increasingly credible partner for the United Nations, all Member States, the scientific communities, and the countless networks that cross the universe of governance in its many forms.

Therefore, let us bring to the celebration of this tenth anniversary a poem that conveys our daily attitude at UNU-EGOV. *Te Deum*, by Charles Reznikoff (1894 – 1976):

> *"Not because of victories*
> *I sing,*
> *having none,*
> *but for the common sunshine,*
> *the breeze,*
> *the largess of the spring.*
> *Not for victory*
> *but for the day's work done*
> *as well as I was able;*
> *not for a seat upon the dais*
> *but at the common table."*

> ❝ *Visibility means not only to be seen, but to be trusted.*
>
> Delfina Soares,
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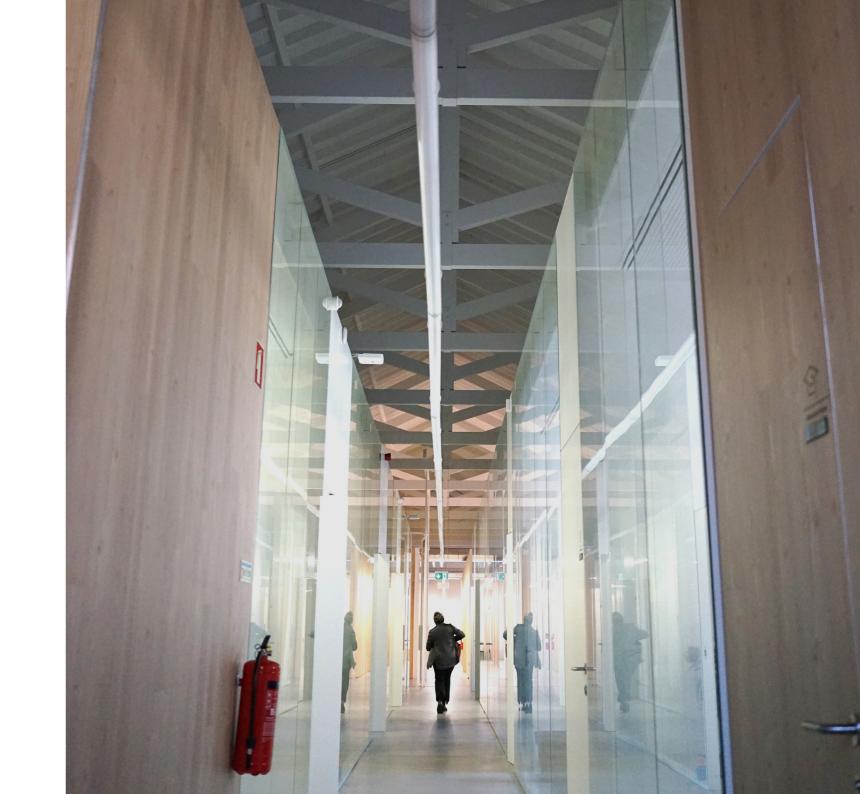
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Tshilidzi Marwala
Rector of the United Nations University.

UNU
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on the occasion of its 10th anniversary