



Recommendation 557 (1969)¹

Use of computers in local government

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Recognising the increasingly important part played by local communities in building a European society and the growing volume and increasing complexity of the work falling to local government ;
2. Recognising also that only a public service possessing the best techniques and most modern instruments will be able to reach the standards already attained in the private sector and cope with the needs of present-day society ;
3. Considering the difficulties generally encountered by public services in finding the skilled, and occasionally highly specialised staff they need to carry out certain of their duties ;
4. Convinced that the use of computers and electronic data processing are therefore becoming an increasingly indispensable condition for efficient public administration at local, regional, national and international level ;
5. Convinced that the introduction of computers into public services constitutes a decisive phase in the evolution of European society which, owing to the close interdependence between the various levels in the processing and application of data, can be successfully completed only through collaboration and sharing of responsibility between all levels of administration ;
6. Considering, moreover, that the concentration of information in the hands of private persons entails grave risks and that little has been done so far to determine the effects of the introduction of computers on public administration, on legal and administrative rules and, in particular, on the rights and freedoms of the individual ;
7. Convinced, moreover, of the risks of centralisation and of the dangers of the excessive reinforcement of the central authority which any monopolisation of computers by the national authorities would entail ;
8. Convinced of the need for strict public supervision of and responsibility for the use of computers at all administrative levels ;
9. Convinced, therefore, of the advisability of keeping such instruments of power in the hands of the authorities nearest to the people and most directly under their supervision ;
10. Convinced also that the gradual and rational introduction of computers into the public services in our countries should be begun at the level of the local and regional authorities, the first collectors and depositories of the data necessary for public administration ;
11. Convinced that it is not only the interest but also the duty of our governments to encourage the introduction of a local and regional data processing system, a basic element of any national data processing system ;

1. Assembly debate on 14 May 1969 (4th Sitting) (see [Doc. 2562](#), report of the Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities). Text adopted by the Assembly on 14 May 1969 (4th Sitting).



12. Considering, however, that it is in the interests of local authorities to take the first steps themselves and seek the most appropriate solutions for their particular situation ;
13. Considering that the arrangement best suited to local communities would seem to be to share a computer-scheme under a system of intermunicipal or perhaps regional co-operation ;
14. Considering that such co-operation affords advantages far transcending the purely technical field of electronic data processing by strengthening the spirit of co-operation in all sectors and providing a powerful stimulus for the general readjustment of local and regional structures to present-day needs ;
15. Convinced of the urgent need for permanent contact at national level, between all public administrative bodies and the elected representatives of the people, with a view to ensuring the rational and harmonious transition of public administration to the electronic age in a spirit of respect for democratic freedoms and for the welfare of society as a whole,
16. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :
 - a. invite member governments :
 - to recognise the irreplaceable function of local and regional authorities as the collectors and first handlers of the data to be processed and, consequently, the advisability of introducing computers first at local and regional and subsequently at national government level ;*
 - consequently, to recognise the local and regional authorities as equal partners in any effective national data processing system ;*
 - to recognise also the solid guarantee which they represent against fears of a concentration of these instruments in the hands of the central authority ;*
 - to facilitate and encourage any initiative by local or regional authorities wishing to equip themselves with a computer system of their own or to share one on a regional basis ;*
 - b. Draw the attention of member governments and local authorities to the urgent need :
 - to train skilled staff for data processing both within and outside the public services, skilled staff being a prerequisite for any data processing system ;*
 - to draw up forthwith adequate laws and regulations to safeguard individual freedoms and guarantee protection of the strictly private area in face of the computer and its immense possibilities for the exercise of pressure on the individual ;*
 - to amend the criminal law to cover possible new types of crime of which the computer might be the instrument ;*
 - c. Invite member governments to set up an advisory and co-ordinating body at national level, comprising representatives of all the nation's public institutions - parliament, the government, the civil service, local and regional authorities - with the function of :
 - discussing all problems relating to the gradual introduction of computers into the public services and in particular, the effects thereof on administration, legislation and the protection of individual rights ;*
 - agreeing on a division of work in the field of data processing, particularly between local and regional authorities on the one hand and the central government on the other, at the same time respecting the independence of each and ensuring the necessary co-operation ;*
 - preparing the way for standardising data processing systems and programmes so that these may be exchanged to the full between the various data processing centres ;*
 - d. Draw the attention of governments to the need to establish systematic co-operation at European level with a view to :
 - exchanging experiences in this new and little explored field in order to avoid waste ;*
 - co-ordinating technical solutions and programmes as far as possible to enable them to be exchanged ;*
 - investigating the possibility of devising a European system for the exchange of data between national or regional centres by means of standardised programmes ;*

exchanging experts and organising training courses for administrative staff at advanced administrative data processing centres ;

- e. Instruct the Committee on Co-operation in Municipal and Regional Matters to consider the conditions and potentialities of such a confrontation ;
- f. Instruct the Committee on Legal Co-operation to make a forecast of the effects on current legal systems, and particularly on the protection of personal freedoms, of the use of computers in the public services.