

PERSPECTIVES OF E-GOVERNEMENT DEVELOPMENT IN POLAND

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Keywords: ICT, e-Government, public services.

Abstract: This paper attempts to describe the phenomenon of e-Government, which has recently appeared in the modern governance as the derivative of the global information society. First part of the article explains the definition and the essence of e-Government. It also presents some main programmes that are being implemented in Poland in order to popularise e-Governance. The results of surveys held in year 2005, which show the actual condition of e-Government in Poland conclude the article.

1 INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are playing an increasingly important role in the daily lives of people, revolutionizing their working and leisure time as well as the rules of doing business. In the realm of government, ICT's applications main goal is to enhance the delivery of public goods and services to citizens by improving the process and management of government and redefining the traditional concepts of citizenship and democracy at the same time.

2 E-GOVERNEMENT IN POLAND

In many European countries the design and implementation of e-Government strategies convey a new vision for the entire public sector. However as considerable amounts of public funds are invested in e-Government projects, the outcomes of their implementation – in terms of value for money, public value and overall contribution to good governance – often remain unclear. While it appears that most governments know what are their expectations from implementing e-Government, at least in short term (e. g. cost cutting, efficiency saving and increased control over citizens and business) it appears that most users have limited awareness of both the potential benefit of e-Government and its associated risks (Baptista, 2004).

Such situation can be very well observed in Poland, which still stands in front of a number of challenges of social and technological nature, which are necessary to overcome if Poland wants to reach the level of highly developed societies. In such societies a strong tendency to move from work based capital administration to administration based on knowledge (where information and communicative technology takes the main part) is noticeable.

2.1 E-Government Initiatives in Poland

As Poland strives to reach the average European level of introducing e-Government, several national and regional action plans has been started. Polish government has implemented the “e-Poland 2002 Action Plan” in order to fulfill the demands of the “e-Europe 2005 Action Plan”, which obliges EU members to develop modern public services including e-Government services. Other programs that support the development of informatisation in Poland are:

- eTen – its main objectives are: increasing development of the information society and acting against disproportions in access to new technologies in different regions of the EU;
- eContentplus – program which strives to increase the possibilities to access and usage of digital resources among the citizens of the European Union.

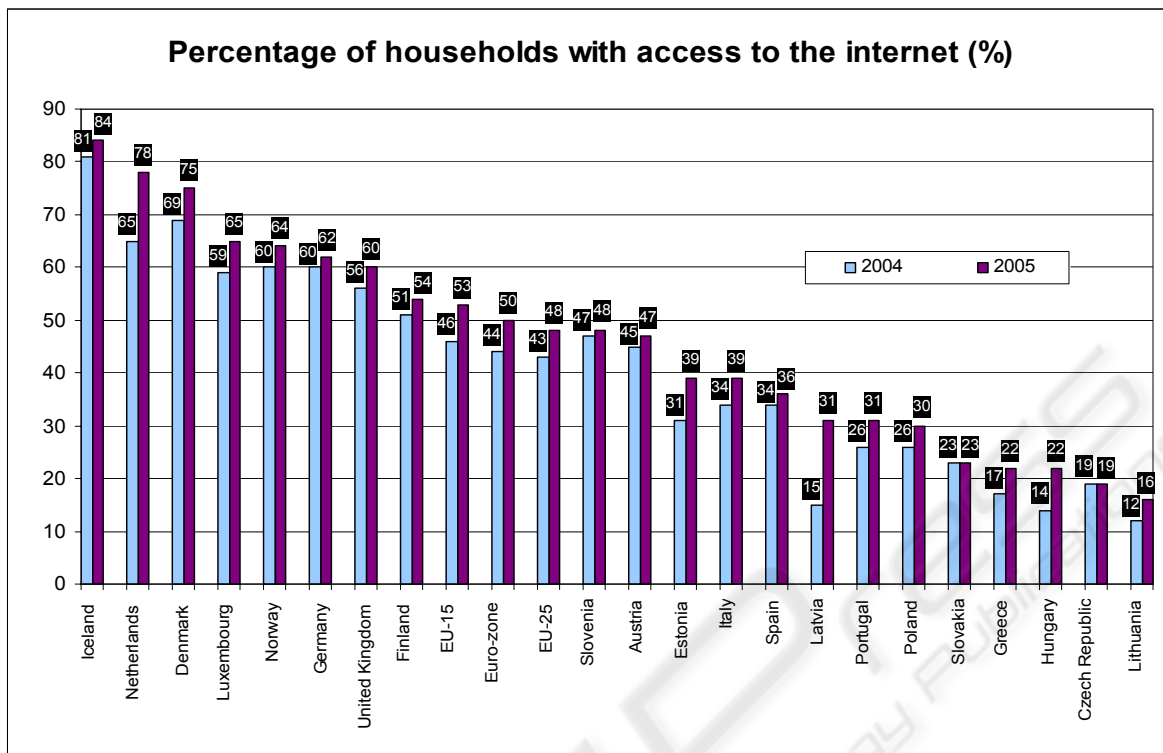


Figure 1: Percentage of households with access to the internet (%).

Both programs are carried out thanks to European Union’s financial means (Elektroniczna Gospodarka w Polsce – raport 2005). Unfortunately, even though, such initiatives as above are in the advanced stages, the latest surveys show that there is still a way to go in Poland to reach more acceptable level of really good quality of e-Government. Main reasons that contribute to this state probably are:

- poor knowledge and awareness of polish citizens about IT;
- poor knowledge and awareness of polish citizens about IT;
- insufficient access to computer technologies for average Pole (Figure 1).

2.2 Defining e-Government

Most of polish citizens confess they have never even came across the phrase “e-Government” and without their awareness, a good “e-Governance” can not be achieved. One of the definitions of e-Government is: “e-Government is usage of ICT’s in public administrations combined with organizational change and development of skills in order to improve public services and democratic process and strengthen supports to public policies”.

Foregoing definition shows that a key aspect of e-Government is bringing public administration closer not only to enterprises but also to citizens. In order to satisfy their needs, new government should be characterized by (Cattaneo, 2003):

- a user and society approach (focused on user benefits);
- access for all through multichannel and multiplatform delivery;
- “Me-Government” – personalization, mobility, active participation of the citizens;
- efficient and “lean” government.

To achieve these objectives, joint actions at all levels of government and other activities are often required. In essence, interoperability is a fundamental condition necessary for development of efficient and effective e-Government services. Interoperability is like a chain that allows information and computer systems to be joined up both within organizational boundaries and other organizations, administrations, enterprises or citizens.

The European Commission plays a strategic role in promoting interoperability and in the development of pan-European Services and infrastructure. These have a major impact on the economies of EU

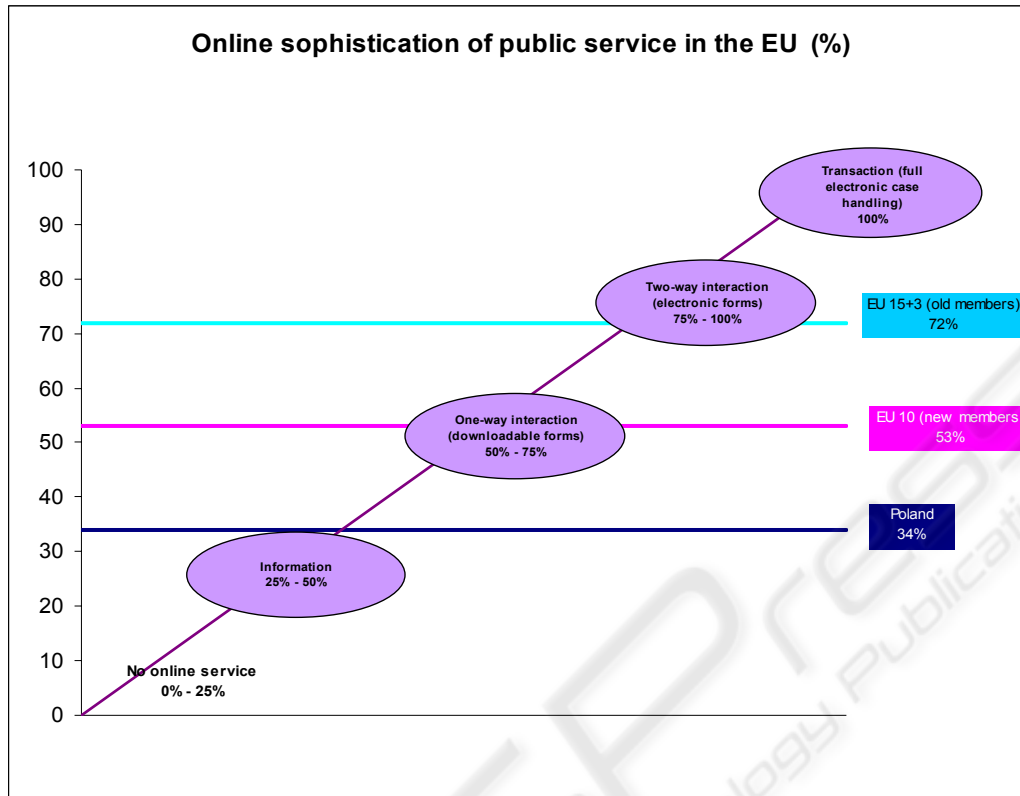


Figure 2: Online sophistication of public service in the EU member countries (%).

member states. Recently the European Commission ordered conducting a few surveys, which objectives were to carry out benchmarking of achievement in implementing of e-Government initiatives in different countries. Next part of this paper will sum up shortly the results obtained in Poland.

3 CONDITION OF POLISH E-GOVERNMENT

Despite the fact that between year 2002 and 2005 the level of online availability of polish public services increased by 15% (from 19 % in year 2004 up to 34% in 2005) – see Figure 2 - Poland is still at the beginning of the process of implementing e-Government.

Polish score remains low when compared to the last measurement of EU member states. Only 2% of the public services surveyed in Poland are fully available online compared to an average of 45% in the EU member states (Rozwój eGovernment w Polsce. Trzecia edycja badań e Europe. 2004). Polish ratio (21%) was of that value only because of the obligatory electronic way of sending the social

contributions statements in companies employing over 5 persons.

Level of the indicator which presents the development of e - administration in Poland was measured using 4-level scale. The first level (25%) means, that the information necessary for starting up the process of obtaining the public service is available through the web pages. Level 2 (50%) represents the “one-way interaction” (a possibility of downloading forms and applications online). Third level (75%) shows the “two-way interaction” (a possibility of filling in the forms and applications online and sending them back by internet to the public institution). Finally level 4 (100%) indicates that public service can be fully conducted via electronic way (this means that whole procedures including receiving the final decisions are carried out through the internet).

In year 2005 over 93,2 % of public institutions placed the most important information for their clients on their websites. Permissions and certificates, ID documents and PIT are the kind of services which are commonly available for polish citizens on web pages of public institutions. Forms and applications that can be downloaded from these

web sites usually concern ID documents (20%), PIT (10,5%) and enterprise's registration (17,9%). So as it is easy to notice formalities, that citizens can handle through the internet in Poland, usually are limited to information placed on the web pages or possibility of downloading the forms.

The surveys show, that only 55 % of municipal workers use internet in their work. They use it mainly for correspondence with other institutions (91 %) rather than with citizens. This confirms the results of researches on development of e-Government in Poland in 2004, which indicated, that most of public institutions while planning and introducing their future actions on the field of e-Government, very rarely focus on the needs of clients. Each year Internet becomes more and more popular tool for government officials, however it is used rather for simplification of their work than for getting in touch with citizens (Elektroniczna Gospodarka w Polsce – raport 2005).

As the main barriers of such a slow development of e-Government in Poland respondents of the surveys point at: organizational problems and employees resistance (40%), problems with integration of technologies (16%), still to low possibilities of technology (8%) and problems with integration of business process (5%).

Comparing to year 2004 the situation of public administrations institutions with new ICT technologies hasn't changed significantly. The only noticeable change is in the percentage of institutions using the LAN network (70% in 2004, 84 % in 2005) - see Figure 3.

In year 2005 only 18,5% of public offices used mechanisms of authentication of recipients such as electronic signature, coding or alternative solutions. On the other hand all of them admit to using the security systems. The most popular are: antivirus protection (96,4% institutions declared having them) and barrier systems (in 76% of institutions). In 2004 such solutions were introduced only in 59% of public administration offices. These could mean, that public institutions are now better prepared for protecting the data of their clients, which might result in increasing of the trust of polish citizens towards the new e-government solutions.

The surveys show that there is still a way to go in Poland to reach a more acceptable level of really good quality of e-Government. For example the percentage of public services that are at their maximum level of online development is still on a very low level. Online sophistication of public service provision for such target groups as citizens and business is growing, but public services for

business are still much more developed than public services for citizens. The most frequent public services offered for both of the target groups are shown in Table 1 (Elektroniczna Gospodarka w Polsce – raport 2005).

Table 1: Most common types of public eServices.

Target group	Kind of services
Business	Public procurement (10%), Corporation taxes (10%), Company registration (10%), Data submission (9%), Social contributions (8%), Environmental permits (7%), VAT (6%), Customs declaration (4%)
Citizens	Income taxes (8%), Education (7%), Elections (7%), Social security (6%), Disabled persons (6%), Public libraries (5%), Job search (5%), Personal documents (4%), Building permissions (4%), Car registration (3%)

4 CONCLUSIONS

It appears that some progress has been made in introducing e-Government solutions over the past few years. Poland is also offering some new online services, thereby acknowledging the growing role of technology in everyday life. Polish government is showing a steady progress on several dimensions of e-Government, but not major leaps forward. On several key indicators, e-Government performance is edging up. However movement forward has not been more extensive in some areas because of the budget, bureaucratic and institutional barriers. In order to overcome the above problems, more local initiatives supported by local communities or governments are required. The example from other European countries show, that such initiatives greatly enhance the implementation of e-Government.

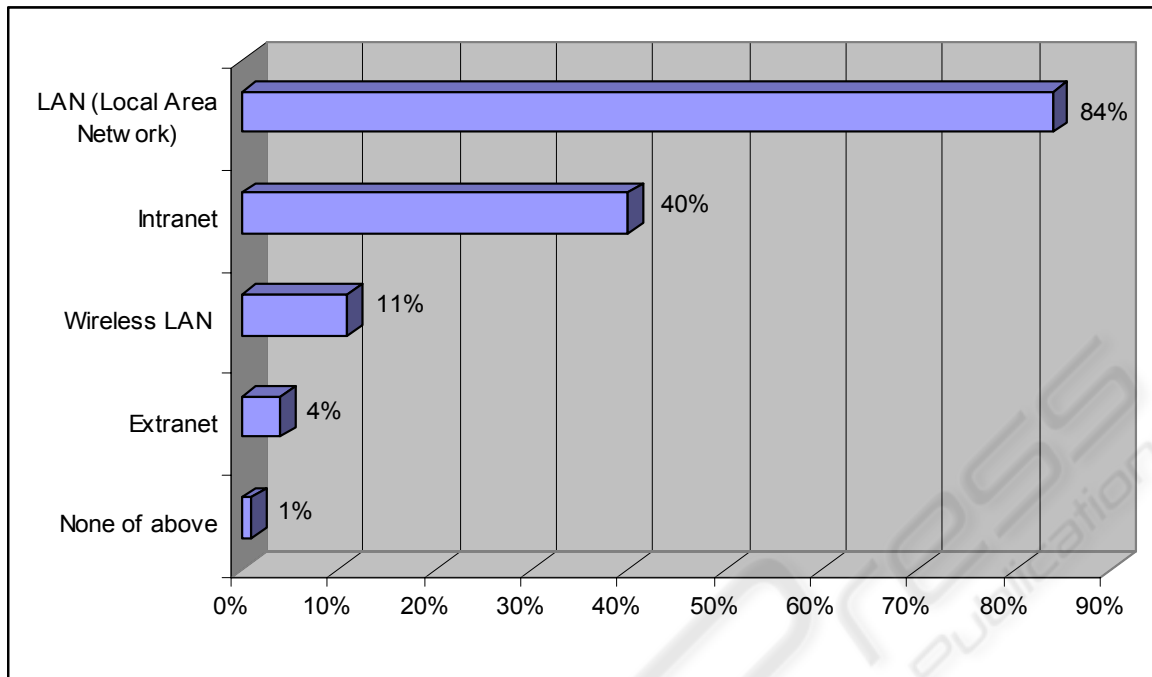


Figure 3: Application of information and communication technologies in Polish public institutions in year 2005.

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