INTRODUCTION TO BUILDING E-GOVERNMENT IN SLOVAKIA (Issue of services to citizens)

Stela LOVACKÁ

Abstract: *Today's society is being termed information society. New information communication technologies (ICTs) enhance communication by overcoming geographical distance, promoting ideological variety and opening citizens to more diverse viewpoints. In Slovakia, the need to adopt current global trends in terms of topical social requirements is manifested in plenty of applications one of which is the informatisaton of public administration (e-government). The description of e-government in terms of conceptual framework as well as the potential of Slovak inhabitants to participate in this process will be concerned in the article.*
Key words: *information society, public administration reform, e-government, Slovakia*

Introduction

Today's globalised society generating modern world can be given a number of traits that are influencing and interfering in everyday life. Among typical are the dynamics of events, the rate of changes, technological progress, integration, and informatisation processes. Each of these phenomena causes and affects the existence of others. The society is being termed *information society* and that label has penetrated into most branches of professional as well as personal lives of people. New technologies accelerate the pace of progress, modernisation and structural adjustment of our economies (Challenges for the European Information Society beyond 2005: 4), simultaneously enhance communication by overcoming geographical distance (Thompson 1999, in West 2004: 16). Nowadays, it is possible to consider the existence of cyberspace which at the same time is giving rise to worldwide digital divide.

The rapid development of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) is having far-reaching effects on all aspects of modern life, including government who are important suppliers and users of ICTs. They need to concern with quality approach of how to exploit the potential of ICTs to promote greater efficiency and transparency having on-line services tailored to the needs of citizens and businesses. The need to adopt current global trends in terms of topical social issues is manifested in myriads of applications. In the conditions of Slovakia, one of them is the development of information society in the context of public administration reform. The public administration reform in accord to actual requirements endeavours to function effectively so it calls for modernisation by implementing ICTs.

In my paper, two themes are interweaving together - public administration reform and e-government applied to the Slovak republic. Both bear the traits of spatiality and their deployment on territory, manifesting the interregional and intraregional differences is apparent. The research of such issues in geography only proves the interest in space-related and highly interdisciplinary topics. In Slovak geographical research *"the Internet Geography"* (Kellerman 2004: 64) is a brand new topic that has not been yet much explored so the challenge for us is to introduce and handle the issue in our country as well.

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In the paper, the perspective of new technology on public-sector service delivery as well as the potential of the Slovaks to participate in the process of e-government are being analysed and assessed. The paper is divided into two main parts – the first introducing e-government from the general point of view and the second part depicting Slovakia in the light of selected variables measuring e-indicators of citizens.

Information society in Europe and Slovakia

Development of information society (IS) is straight embedded into the priorities of the European Union. The EU goal to become the most competitive and most dynamic knowledge economy in the world by 2010 was proclaimed by European Council at the beginning of new millenium in Lisbon. With ICTs being a key component of the Lisbon strategy, e-Europe initiative has been divided into two time phases – one until the end of 2005 and second beyond 2005. In both, the EU firmly rejects the phenomenon of digital divide. It advocates the phenomenon of digital inclusive aiming at ensuring equal access and the availability of ICT services for all, at the affordable cost. "It should be tackled at national, regional and local level" (Challenges for the European Information Society beyond 2005: 7). But still, distinct differentiation of users structure can be observed from the geographical, social, educational, religious, national, age, sex or economic aspects.

It is demanded that all EU member countries have coherent ICT related policies. In this context the Slovak government approved the document "Stratégia informatizácie spoločnosti v podmienkach SR a akčný plán" [Strategy of Informationalisation of Society in Conditions of SR and Action Plan] in 2003. Another approved document is "Stratégia konkurencieschopnosti Slovenska do roku 2010" [Strategy of Competitiveness of Slovakia until 2010]. They both consider the informationalisation of society as the best way to achieve the transformation of Slovakia to dynamic knowledge society. The informationalisation of public administration is a legitimate part of that process.

With the aim to point at the progress of the EU within, an adequate statististical agenda is needed. In this context, the European Parliament approved „the Regulation no 808/2004 of the European parliament and of the Council concerning Community statistics on the information society" in 21 April, 2004. The statistical research is to follow the modules for citizens, businesses and public administration bodies.

E- government – conceptual framework

E-government is generally termed as provision of public services to citizens and businesses via the Internet with a primary objective to raise democracy and administrative efficiency. West (2004: 16) defines e-government as a delivery of government information and services online through the Internet or other digital means. On the one hand, e-government provides new opportunities to enhance governance which can include improved efficiency, new services, increased citizen participation and the enhanced global information infrastructure. On the other hand, "e-government also present new challenges to governance including information security, privacy, disparities in computer access, and management and funding requirements" (Bonham *et al.* 2001). E-government can enable the citizens to interact and receive services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, simply, being available around the clock. Moreover, sending and receiving the information is easy and comfortable, it speeds up the communication and people may use it at their convenience.

The four dimensions of e-government can be identified in the development of e-government services. These are „understanding the needs of the citizen, integrating policy and strategy across

all of government, pro-active streamlining of service delivery, one-stop access for the provision of the appropriate mix of services at both central and local level" (eGovernment – More Than an Automation of Government Services 2003: 17).

In other words, e-government enables the public sector to maintain and strengthen good governance in the knowledge society. This means (The Role of eGovernment for Europe´s Future 2003):

1. A public sector that is open and transparent: governments that are understandable and accountable to the citizens, open to democratic involvement and scrutiny,
2. a public sector that is at the service of all. A user-centred public sector will exclude no one from its services and respect everyone as individuals by providing personalised services,
3. a productive public sector that delivers maximun value for taxpayers´ money. It implies that less time is wasted standing in queues, errors are drastically reduced, more time is available for professional face-to-face service, and the jobs of civil servants can become more rewarding.

As to succession of e-government functions, there are generally four stages of e-government agencies on the road to transformation (f. ex. West 2004: 17, Bonham *et al.* 2001):

1. *presence* stage (or the bill-board stage) – usually in a form of web site offering basic information. It is the electronic equivalent of a paper brochure,
2. *interaction* stage (the partial-service-delivery stage) – interactions with citizens are simple, usually circle around information provision – instructions to obtain certain services, to download the forms, or to communicate via e-mail,
3. *transaction* (the portal stage, with fully executable and integrated service delivery) – the tasks can be arranged entirely electronically around the clock. The activities still involve a flow of information that is primarily one-way. The electronic responses are generally regularised and create predictable outcomes,
4. *transformation* (interactive democracy with public outreach and accountability enhancing features) – the highest level of evolution utilizing full capabilities of the technology and handling a full range of questions.

FIGURE 1: Transformation of public administration on the example of a passport issue

1st stage 0-25%	The citizen seeks the information on the Internet – f. ex. opening hours, the papers needed to obtain the service – *many visits of authority needed*
2nd stage 25-50%	The citizen has a possibility to download the form – after printing it they visit the authority – *at least two visits of authority needed*
3rd stage 50-75%	The citizen fills in the application electronically, their identity is being validated as well. Afterwards, he visits the authority - *one visit of authority needed*
4th stage 75-100%	Complete interaction arranged via the Internet – *no need to visit the authority*

Source: by author

It is clear from the above statements that a final step would be an omission of direct visit of authority and all operations will be carried out entirely electronically.

The studies analysing e-government give the indicator of „the Internet sophistication rate" in state government bodies displaying how many operations the Internet is able to provide to citizens and businesses. „Europe having 65% is somewhere between the second and third stage, the Slovak republic is heading to the second stage. It is said that the most developed electronic

government is in Sweden, followed by Austria, Great Britain, Ireland and other northern European states. Worldwide stated, the advance in electronic government is best in Canada, Singapur, and the USA" (Bella 2005). Intriguing is the fact that the overall advancement is „slowing down for most countries in the world have achieved a certain stable level of width and depth of offered services" (ibid). It is called a „saturation phase" that Kellerman (2004: 67) points out in his work [2].

In this context the European Commission and the Member States defined a portfolio of twenty basic public services – twelve are directed to citizens as target group and eight directed to businesses as target group. Company registration and one-stop citizen mobility are instances of key pan-European services that could be pursued.

Figure 2: The twenty basic public services

CITIZENS	BUSINESSES
Income Taxes	Social Contribution for Employees
Job Search	Corporate Tax
Social Security Benefits	VAT
Personal Documents	Registration of a New Company
Car Registration	Submission of Data to the Statistical Office
Application for Building Permission	Custom Declaration
Declaration to the Police	Environment-related Permits
Public Libraries	Public Procurement
Birth and Marriage Certificates	
Enrolment in Higher Education	
Announcement of Moving	
Health-related Services	

Source: Online Availability of Public Services: How is Europe Progressing? (2004)

Public administrations are expected to be prepared for future and emerging challenges. One of them is to maintain the effective communication with citizens (enterprises) via information technology, especially the Internet. The question of mutual communication quality is generally multidimensional. There are two aspects to meet – one being citizen access and second being the quality and quantity of on-line services provided by public administration bodies. These indicators are measured and submitted for the EU states according to the Regulation no 808/2004 that has been already mentioned. We will focus on ICTs – citizens relationship.

Within the field of citizen-related statistical research the following list of subjects is considered to be the most relevant (Regulation no 808/2004: 9):

- access to and use of ICT systems by individuals and/or in households,
- use of internet for different purposes by individuals and/or in households,
- ICT security,
- ICT competence,
- barriers to use of ICT and the Internet,
- perceived effects of ICT usage on individuals and/or on households.

Part and parcel of electronic communication is the involvement of people with their basic *digital literacy*. In educational context the term is viewed as "person's ability to use computer and its periferies being a work tool, the ability to understand the structure of the text and to generate simple multimedial documents, the ability to work online in the computer network,

the ability to orientate themselves in their own computer system, and finally the ability to browse and filter the information" (Mašata 2004: 22).

Basic ICT skills become important component of e-literacy and have the potential to reinforce existing social disadvantage by excluding the marginalised from participating in the information society. However, even where the technology can be accessed easily, there will still be marginal groups who cannot make use of ICTs due to a lack of literacy.

Slovakia in the process of building information society

On the turn of millenium, Slovakia as a post-communist east-European state has been struck by four main system changes: „the establishment of autonomous state, political transition to democratic regime, transformation of economic system to market economy, and the integration to transatlantic structures and to the European Union" (Digitálna gramotnosť na Slovensku 2005: 3). The results of these processes brought about greater openness of the country towards global civilisation trends and influences. The technological progress is one of them.

Until 1989 there was no real public administration in Slovakia. The state headed by communist regime was governed centralistically meaning that towns and communities as territorial administrative units had no legal subjectivity. At that time, the initiative to streamline „the public administration" was neglected and put aside. After the upheaval in November 1989 (the Velvet Revolution) all post-communist countries found themselves in suchlike social-political climate so that they encountered nearly same complex process of society transformation. The reform (or renaissance) of public administration became one of the crucial steps forward. A critical principle of public administration reform in these countries was to foster its citizen´s dimension in decentralisation process and to perceive the administration as a service meant for citizens. Slovakia was to decide which model of public administration to follow.

In general, there is no European model of public administration within the EU. No document of European Union determines the member states to set up a particular model of public administration [1]. However, there are certain general tendencies or changes the reform of public administration was aimed to follow due to specific social-political situation in the post-communist countries (Zemanovičová 2002: 58):

1. *from government to governance* – public administration is not in the hands of administration bodies but it heads towards participation model and horizontal relations. The issue resides in cultivation of democracy, confidence, government – citizen relation and effectiveness measured by citizens´ satisfaction,
2. *from closeness to openness* – meaning the openness to citizens as well as the support of transparency, information flow, communication with citizens,
3. *from rigidity to flexibility* – public sector has to be able to give flexible responses to current challenges. The tasks are becoming interim, they are being solved *ad hoc* by working teams, discussion groups, exploiting the Internet...,
4. *from concealing information to e-governance* – citizen is becoming an e-citizen meaning that the integration of various agencies, sectors and levels is possible. The interaction with public administration is then realised according to citizens´ individual preferences,
5. *from specialisation to integration* – ICTs are capable of changing traditional structures and processes in public administration so that various integrated interactions are possible,
6. *form national scale to european scale* – public administration is being viewed in the supranational level generating the European administrative space.

In Slovakia, on behalf of the above tendencies the governments (from 1990 to present) sought to conduct the complex reform involving relevant reform steps - reform of competencies, reform of public finances, reform of management and education in public administration, reform of control mechanism, and *reform of public administration informationalisation*. All of the claimed objectives have been overally or partly (debatable whether successfully) realised.

E-government in Slovakia

The Slovak government seeks to advance in the process of public administration reform via informationalisation to follow the objectives proclaimed by the EU on information society. It is expected that a most crucial impact of the informatised society would be a new quality of social, successful economic and political life, and creation of such conditions that would contribute to building up knowledge society exploiting the methods and devices of information science. In that sense, the EU politics put great emphasis to development of regions with the pivot objective to balance the discrepancies between the regions as well as between the urban and rural population.

In Slovakia, electronic government is viewed as an opportunity to reduce costs on administration, to foster the procedures and the ability to react on a particular situation. In a nutshell, basic objectives of e-government in Slovakia are to raise the efficiency, productivity and transparency in public administration in order to make the services more available and of higher quality to citizens and businesses.

According to the principle of successful economy development, each social group or locality should have access to modern communication networks, however, the saturation of information technologies is uneven at various levels in Slovakia. The given that each country displays territorial differentiation, the more and less developed regions, economical and social problems is reflected in the ICTs installations in our country as well. This situation is conditioned by a number of mutually interacting barriers:

1. financial – costs, financial demandingness for the Internet connection of households,
2. social – confidence, security of online interaction,
3. organisational – the interconnection of agendas to other authorities as well as the realisation of all related acts,
4. geographical – core versus peripheral regions, urban versus rural regions.

The technologies of the information society present new opportunities to address the traditional problems of exclusion and disadvantage. Slovakia´s pressing problems emanate mainly from social and urban-rural discrepancies. Thus, there are the regions – peripheral and geographically disadvantaged - which do not show such intensity of ICTs as it is in geographically advantageous regions. In a word, territorial differentiation univocally witnesses the asymetry in regional development reflecting social-economical particularities of Slovak settlements.

Potential of citizens - e-readiness

In the following lines the selected findings regarding the potential of the Slovaks to participate in e-government will be presented. Since the topic is relatively new in our country there are only few relevant data sources from the last five years. In census conducted by the Statistical Office of the SR in 2001 it was the first time the item on PC possession had appeared in the questionnaire. Another data sources come from the microcensus carried out in 2003 by the Statistical Office of the SR too. Further on, I was inspired by official reports on information

society submitted by government as well as non-government organisations. Namely, interesting findings can be found in the document „Občania Slovenska a elektronické služby verejnej správy 2003" [Citizens in Slovakia and electronic services of public administration 2003]. Another document worth mentioning is „Rozvoj informačnej spoločnosti na Slovensku z pohľadu regiónov s dôrazom na potreby vidieka 2004" [Development of Information Society in Slovakia from the Regions' Perspective with the Emphasis on Rural Areas Needs 2004]. A document "Digitálna gramotnosť na Slovensku 2005" [Digital literacy in Slovakia 2005] concerns mainly with e-literacy. A study on „Elektronické služby verejnej správy na Slovensku a ich využívanie internetovou populáciou 2005" [Electronic services of public adminstration in Slovakia and their exploitation by the Internet population 2005] is another valuable data source for us.

The attention will be paid to the most relevant fields of interest that determine the services for citizens: equipment with PC and e-literacy of Slovak people in selected variables.

Concerning the internal structure of Slovakia, the territorial disparities at the regional level can be observed. Having to face many serious socio-economical problems is projected into the uneven economic development generating „the rich west and the poor east" (Korec 2005: 19) or „the rich north-west and the poor south-east" (Gajdoš 2002, in Korec 2005: 17). When identifying the regions, it is advisable to use NUTS units in figure 3 and map 1.

Figure 3: Territorial division of SR

NUTS unit	Number	Territorial unit in Slovakia
NUTS I	1	Slovakia
NUTS II	4	Bratislavský kraj *[Bratislava region]* Západné Slovensko *[Western Slovakia]* Stredné Slovensko *[Central Slovakia]* Východné Slovensko *[Eastern Slovakia]*
NUTS III	8	Kraje *[regions]* ▪ Bratislava region (BA) ▪ Trnava region (TA) ▪ Trenčín region (TR) ▪ Nitra region (NT) ▪ Žilina region (ZA) ▪ Banská Bystrica region (BB) ▪ Prešov region (PO) ▪ Košice region (KE)
NUTS IV	79	Okresy *[districts]*
NUTS V	2883	Obce *[towns and communities]*

Source: by author

According to latest information, in Slovakia there was 31,6% of inhabitants over 18 daily or almost daily using the personal computer and 20,5% inhabitants over 18 using the Internet in July 2005.

Figure 4: The number of the Internet users from 1996 to half of 2005

indicator	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
number of users approx.	42 087	62 851	144 539	292 359	507 029	674 039	862 833	1 375 809	2 276 055
number of users per 100 inhab.	0,78	1,17	2,68	5,42	9,38	12,53	16,04	25,58	42,27
total number of customers	X	20 995	34 895	46 813	67 661	100 099	134 048	182 143	397 777
number of housing customers	X	X	X	13 846	26 603	40 781	63 533	96 815	135 860
number of non-housing customers	X	X	X	32 967	41 058	59 318	70 515	85 328	94 829
number of Internet mobile net customers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	167 088

X – data not available
Data source: http://www.telecom.gov.sk/externe/telekom/statistika/

Figure 4 depicts the increasing number of the Internet users and customers in view of number of Internet connections in housing and non-housing conditions from 1996 to half of 2005. In between the years 1996 – 2005 the number of the Internet users has swollen by more than sixty-eight times (from 42 087 to 2 892 250), the number of households connected to the Internet (housing customers) has swollen by more than ten times (from 13 846 in 1999 to 143 400 in I. 2005). It is assumed that all indicators are continuously (not swiftly) increasing in the forthcoming years.

Out of all regions in Slovakia and in all considered indicators, the Bratislava region (with the capital of Bratislava) is the most developed region in Slovakia. It is different from the rest of Slovak territory in all monitored indicators. Therefore, all presented findings usually place the Bratislava region (or Bratislava as its domain) on the first position.

Figure 5: Equipment of Slovak households with PC at NUTS III level in % (in 2001, 2002 and 2003)

region	% of households with PC		
	May-01	Dec-02	Jun-03
BA	18.5	29.6	42
TA	11	18.6	37.8
TR	9.5	20.4	32
NT	9.9	18.2	40.3
ZA	9.9	18.3	35.8
BB	8	18.3	30.7
PO	8.9	15.6	34.9
KE	10.5	17.24	34.2
SR	**10.95**	**19.5**	**35.9**

Data source: Plintovočová (2004), Občania Slovenska a elektronické služby verejnej správy, (2003)

The figure 5 demonstrates the equipment of households with PC by NUTS III regions. It can be seen that the highest percentage in 2003 is in Bratislava region (BA) - 42%, the lowest in the Banská Bystrica (BB) region - 30,7%. The average percentage for the Slovak republic has swollen from 10,95% in May, 2001 to 35,9% in June, 2003 while the highest rise is recorded

in the Nitra region (+30,4%). Other regions depict relatively balanced findings, however, regions in the proximity of the Bratislava region give higher rates.

Figure 6: Share of households without PC and the Internet at NUTS III level in % (2002)

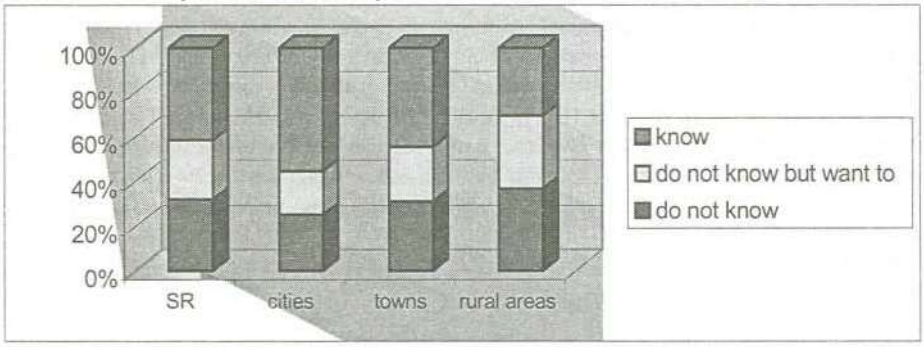
	SR	BA	TA	TR	NT	ZA	BB	PO	KE
% households without PC	80.51	70.38	81.42	79.6	81.83	81.71	81.73	84.4	82.76
% households without the Internet	94.56	88.6	95.7	93.49	95.6	95.92	95.69	96.04	95.41

Data source: Plintovičová 2004

The figure 6 points at share of households without PC and the Internet at regional level in 2002. It logically complements figure 5 in how much percentage of Slovak population does not have a computer at home. The data from 2002 slightly distort the current situation in that the present values would be different. The order of the regions, however, will stay the same. The lowest ranks have the regions located furthermost from Bratislava. Geographers call them „less developed regions" (Korec, 2005: 125).

Further findings are devoted to surveying the e-literacy of Slovak population for internalising the computer competences is an important condition of electronic services exploitation.

Graf 1: The ability to work with PC by settlement size in %



Data source: Plintovičová 2004

It can be seen from Graph 1 that the digital literacy in Slovakia is quite low. The respondents were divided according to the settlement size of their residence. Cities are termed as urban areas having more than 100 000 inhabitants (2 – Bratislava and Košice), towns are urban areas having from 2 000 to 100 000 inhabitants. Settlements with less than 2 000 inhabitants are here considered as rural areas. There is 41,5% of population claiming to be able to work with PC; 26,2% of people who do not know to work with PC but want to learn. The rest 32,3% of Slovak population cannot work with PC. The most people not capable of working with PC can be found in the rural areas. On the contrary, more than half of people living in the cities claim to be able to work with PC.

The respondents were to express their interest in a list of offered e-services (figure 7) that are commonly being exploited by the EU states. The answers are ordered according to the obtained percentage. The highest interest would be in job search services and health-related services. I assume it reflects two important aspects of life – job and health – being sensitive issues of Slovak society.

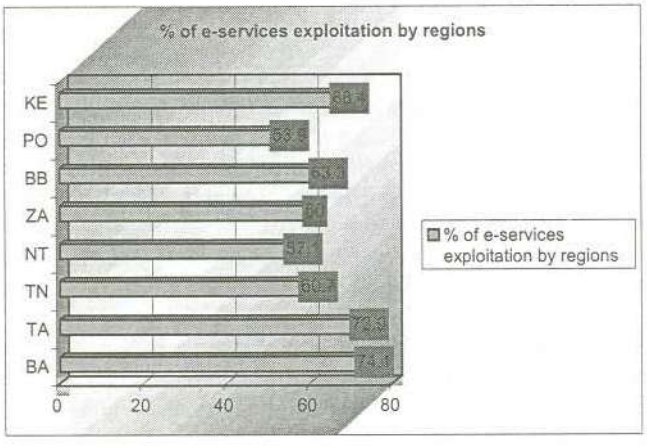
Figure 7: The interest in electronic services by citizens in 2003 in %

SERVICE	yes	no	does not know
Job Search	62	32	6
Health-related Services	61	31	8
Personal Documents	54	36	10
Local taxes	51	38	11
Social Security Benefits	45,5	44	11
Public Libraries	44	46	10
Cadaster statements	41	48	11
Enrolment in schools	40	51	9
Car Registration	37	53	10
Income Taxes	36	52	12
Announcement of Moving	35	54	11
Electronic voting and elections	34	51	15
Application for Building Permission	26,5	61	13

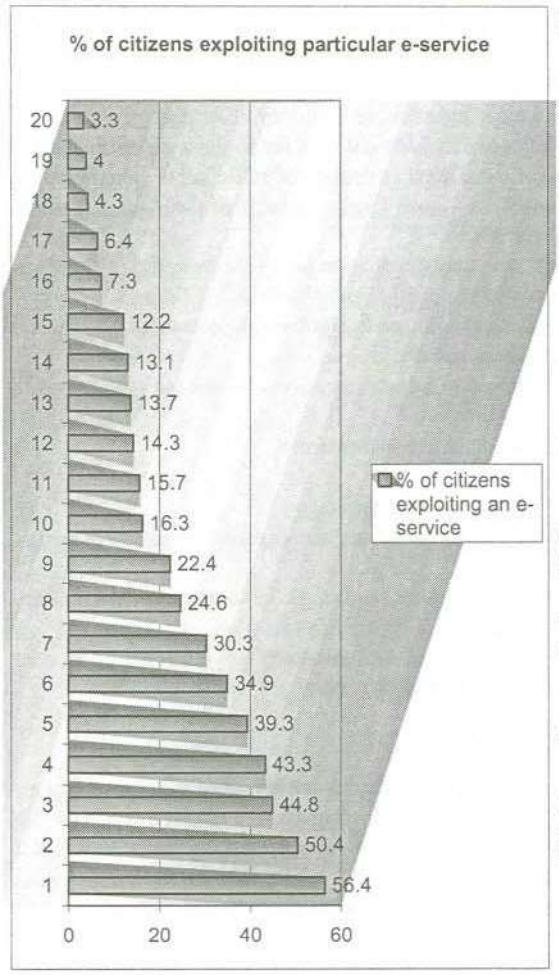
Data source: Občania Slovenska a elektronické služby verejnej správy (2003)

Based on findings regarding the interest of citizens in particular e-services and their current exploitation (graph 3) it can be said that they do not much correspond. The most common e-services in 2005 were the obtaining the information from the business register and governmental portal „www.občan.sk" [www.citizen.sk] with half of the Slovak Internet population having visited them. Further frequented e-services belong to category of obtaining the information and downloading the forms from the websites – f. ex. downloading income tax forms (45%), getting information on income tax (43%), health-care services information (39%), driving licence or car registration (35%). The least exploited services are application for building permission (7%), social security benefits (6%), birth and marriage certificates (4%) as well as the communication with Slovak members of parliament (4%) or representatives of local government bodies (3%).

The differentiation of particular e-services by regions as well as the intensity of their exploitation are demonstrated in graphs 2 and 3.



Graph 2: The percentage of e-services exploitation by regions in 2005
Data source: Elektronické služby verejnej správy na Slovensku a ich využívanie internetovou populáciou (2005)



20. communication with representatives of local government bodies
19. getting info about birth and marriage certificates
18. communication with Slovak MPs
17. getting info about social allowance
16. getting info about building permission
15. communication with tax bodies
14. getting info from the cadaster
13. seeking job provided by Labour Office
12. downloading forms for issuing passport, driving licence, car registration...
11. getting info about family allowances
10. getting info about health facilities
9. getting info from libraries
8. getting info about studies at universities
7. getting info from local authorities
6. getting info about passport, driving licence, car registration issue and the like
5. getting info from insurance companies
4. getting info about income tax
3. downloading forms for income tax
2. getting info from www.obcan.sk
1. getting info from the business register

Graph 3: The e-services and their exploitation by citizens in 2005

Data source: Elektronické služby verejnej správy na Slovensku a ich využívanie internetovou populáciou (2005), own editing

Position of the Prešov region in e-government development

According to study written by Plintovičová (2004) „Rozvoj informačnej spoločnosti na Slovensku z pohľadu regiónov s dôrazom na potreby vidieka" [*Study on Development of Information Society in Slovakia with the Emphasis on Regions in Rural Areas*] it is confirmed that the Prešov region distinctly lags behind other Slovak territorial-administrative regions.

When compared to other regions, „the Prešov region is a „backwoods" region in view of level of information society development. Despite the fact the Prešov region is the largest one (by number of inhabitants), there is the least total number of connections to the Internet – 4 % of households, 4,5 % of all connections in big enterprises and 2 % in small enterprises. Surprising is the fact that the value of 0,27 PC stands for one small enteprise with the Internet connection" (Plintovičová 2004: 38).

By and large, the Prešov region is being one of the weakest regions currently struggling with many serious economical and social issues. It belongs to the regions having highest rate of unemployment, lowest economic strength, lowest rate of direct foreign investments, low productivity of labour, inconvenient technical infrastructure and the like. It is especially the north-eastern part of the region the indicators of which indicate the highest migration of the young, the aging and dying out of population as well as demise of settlements. The potential that the region has has not been sufficiently exploited. The key factors of the Prešov region´s negative rank are (Matlovič – Matlovičová 2005):

- low attractiveness of the territory, its eccentric location being far from the capital Bratislava as well as from economically developed regions in Western Europe,
- low economic development of adjacent regions of neighbouring countries, the Prešov region is bordering on south Poland and west Ukraine,
- insufficient infrastructure, the absence of communication connection (highway) to Bratislava,
- low density of large cities, fragmented settlement structure,
- concentration of the Roma minority,
- historical lagging behind (mainly in the interwar period),
- one-way orientation on small number of large industrial companies in period of so called socialistic industrialisation,
- insufficient exploitation of primary potential of landscape for tourism and recreation,
- underdevelopment of the town of Prešov as a centre of the region,
- insufficient coordination activities of regional and local self-governments in eastern Slovakia concerning the regional development in general.

Conclusion

The implementation of new technologies into public administration services (e-government) is only one of abundant ways of their application. Long-lasting vitality of electronic services will be, on one hand, determined by financial and geographical accessibility and, on the other hand, determined by needs and efficiency of local/regional public administration. Another challenge is to develop ICT competences of society as they definitely contribute to elimination of digital divide phenomenon.

The Slovak republic is presently in the early phase of the development of these technologies. Initial forays of e-government have focused mostly on providing enhanced access to information and basic services. Bella (2005) argues that in comparison to the countries of similar economical development, „Slovakia still lags behind – the Internet penetration rate is low" and the offer of public services on the Internet is weak as well. Among most noticeable barriers that hamper the spread of the Internet in Slovakia are the cost of the Internet connection and the price of PCs. We assume that the proposals that might arouse higher interest in the Internet are following: lower cost of the Internet connection, lower prices of PCs, constructing public places to connect from – kiosks, ICTs skills trainings at schools and toll-free (or cheap) trainings on the Internet.

By and large, e-government remain largely unrealised at this time, the gradual growth in interest and resources dedicated to e-government should contribute to swifter changes. This presents enormous challenges to government as it implies ready access to computers and an adequate degree of ICT literacy. It is claimed in the official documents that a citizen-centric approach requires that every person who wants to should be able to use the Internet to access the government services that they need (eGovernment – More Than an Automation of Government Services 2003: 27).

Notes

1. ...Řehůřek (2001): „when extensively interpreted, a postulate about generally democratic system of public administration and to some extent the emphasis on the local government might be considered an exception". What can be stressed are the prevailing features of a modern public administration: to decentralise public administration, to merge the elements of state administration and local government, the principle of subsidiarity, the devolution of competencies from state organs to local ones, to promote the public participation...
2. Kellerman (2004): „It is the S-shaped logistic curve displaying incubation period of slow diffusion followed by a take-off period of fast and high-percentage growth, concluded with a saturation period, of continued slow growth and/or stabilisation". In addition, we assume the same pattern of the diffusion of innovation can be applied to most variables of recognising the digital divide provenance, f. ex. when comparing states according to their level of economic development or citizens according to their education. Generally speaking, the higher rate of the variable, the more developed e-government.

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ÚVOD DO PROBLEMATIKY E-GOVERNMENTU NA SLOVENSKU

Zhrnutie

Charakteristickými znakmi dnešného globalizovaného sveta, generujúceho modernú spoločnosť sú o. i. dynamika udalostí, nevídaná rýchlosť zmien, technologický progres, integrácia a informatizácia. Termín informačná spoločnosť v širokom zmysle slova penetroval do väčšiny oblastí profesného a osobného života ľudí vo svete. Potreba zavádzať súčasné trendy v zmysle aktuálnych spoločnských potrieb sa prejavuje v množstve aplikácií, pričom jednou z nich je informatizácia verejnej správy nazývaná aj *e-government*. V časti teoretické východiská je predstavujeme pojem e-government, jeho štádiá (resp. funkcie) na príklade vydávania pasu. Ďalšími sledovanými ukazovateľmi sú základná informačná gramotnosť občanov a dostupnosť na internet. V tomto kontexte sú stručne analyzované špecifiká Slovenskej republiky v zmysle pripravenosti obyvateľstva podieľať sa na procese elektronickej verejnej správy. Príspevok končí konštatovaním, že obyvateľstvo Slovenskej republiky (so zreteľom na Prešovský kraj) nie je nateraz dostatočne pripravené participovať a využívať elektronické služby verejnej správy.

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