

EVALUATION OF THE USE OF ELECTRONIC SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE POLISH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

OCENA WYKORZYSTANIA USŁUG ELEKTRONICZNYCH ŚWIADCZONYCH PRZEZ POLSKĄ ADMINISTRACJĘ PUBLICZNĄ

<https://doi.org/10.34739/zn.2023.60.01>

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JEL Classification Codes: D73, H41, H83

Abstract: This paper presents an evaluation of the use of electronic services provided by the Polish public administration. An electronic service can be understood as the provision of any service using an online channel. The aim of the paper is to assess the use of such services in Poland. This assessment is based on a survey and an analysis of the literature. The survey carried out showed that the vast majority of respondents make use of electronic services. Among the main reasons why they choose this way of communicating with the office, they indicated the possibility of saving time and the fact that this contact is possible 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

Keywords: electronic services, e-services, Internet, public administration

Streszczenie: Artykuł przedstawia problematykę wykorzystania usług elektronicznych świadczonych przez polską administrację publiczną. Przez pojęcie usługi elektronicznej można rozumieć świadczenie dowolnej usługi przy wykorzystaniu kanału internetowego. Celem artykułu była próba oceny wykorzystania tego rodzaju usług w Polsce. Ocena ta dokonana została w oparciu o przeprowadzone badanie ankietowe oraz analizę literatury przedmiotu. Wykonane badanie wykazało, że zdecydowana większość respondentów korzysta z usług elektronicznych. Jako główne powody, dla których wybierają taki sposób komunikacji z urzędem, wskazali możliwość zaoszczędzenia czasu oraz to, że kontakt ten jest możliwy 24 godziny na dobę i 7 dni w tygodniu.

Słowa kluczowe: usługi elektroniczne, e-usługi, Internet, administracja publiczna

Introduction

Public administration offices in Poland were established to provide services to the public; and to have a positive impact on the efficiency of the state's operation. Although offices are associated with stability and bureaucracy, they are increasingly meeting public expectations while taking the development of new technologies into account. The best evidence of this is the increasing provision of services by offices in Poland with the use of the Internet. Such services are referred to as electronic services.

The aim of this paper is to assess the use of electronic services provided by the public administration in Poland. Its implementation will be based on a survey and an analysis of the literature.

Literature review

Citizen in a democratic state are free to act as they wish, but on some issues it is necessary for them to interact with the state. This is carried out at an administrative level. For decades, even centuries, this interaction was conducted exclusively on paper. However, the popularisation of the internet at the end of the twentieth century brought in this respect. Gradually, individual offices have begun to open up to the possibility of providing their services remotely. Electronic administration, also known as e-administration, has the complete elimination of paper-based forms as its basis. In other words, its basis is the fact that the client can deal with any official matter without physically visiting the office. Its existence is therefore directly correlated with the existence of information

technology, with particular emphasis on the Internet, because it is through the use of the Internet that parties can communicate remotely (Czerny, 2005, pp. 56-57).

The advancement of civilisation has contributed to the fact that today society is exposed to the growing impact of digitalisation. In the context of offices, digitalisation has moved towards providing services remotely through a computer. This falls within the essence of an electronic service, which can be understood as the provision of any service using an online channel. The characteristics of such a service are very similar to those of a standardised service, where it also exists in a non-tangible form. In this case,

however, this is complemented by the fact that the parties providing the service between them have no physical contact with each other, only a virtual contact. Although the essence of an electronic service is always the same, the diversity of such services is already significant. The recipient of the service, for example, is a differentiating factor. The most common distinction is between electronic services available to citizens and those available to businesses (Ilnicki, 2009, pp. 55-56). An exemplary division of electronic services according to the criterion of their recipient is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Illustrative division of electronic services by recipient criterion

Services aimed at citizens	Services aimed at entrepreneurs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • health-related services; • registration, information on change of residence; • registration of candidates for academic institutions of higher education; • birth, marriage and death certificates; • public library catalogues and their searching; • police - report handling; • building permit; • registration of vehicles; • identification documents; • social services; • job agency; • personal property tax. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public procurement; • licences and certificates; • customs declarations; • sending statistical data; • registration of a commercial activity; • VAT; • corporate tax; • mandatory social insurance.

Source: B. Kozłowska, *Miejsce dla obywateli: e-administracja (A place for citizens: e-government)*, Fundacja Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego, Warsaw 2010, p. 7.

It is worth noting that the beneficiary of an electronic service does not necessarily have to be a citizen or a business. Likewise, an electronic service can be provided between offices or other public institutions. In such a case, the electronic service is a way of effectively exchanging information between offices. It not only results in higher operational efficiency, but also in an improved image of the offices in the eyes of the public. An electronic service can also relate to a single office, where employees need to share information as part of their responsibilities in order to efficiently deliver externally directed services (Osiński, 2008, p. 80).

The electronic services provided by offices in Poland were not introduced overnight. Their introduction required a process that is still ongoing. Various approaches to classifying the phases of e-government development can be

found in the literature. In the approach proposed by B. Kozłowska, it is assumed that the process of implementation of electronic services consists of five consecutive stages-levels (Kozłowski, 2010, p. 8):

- level one – online information – the possibility of accessing information about the office in question and the services it provides, which is published on its website;
- level two – unidirectional one-way interaction – the possibility of accessing the information on the authority's website and downloading official forms from it;
- level three – unidirectional two-way interaction – the ability to search for information, download and return completed, signed forms online;
- level four – bi-directional two-way interaction – the possibility of completing all the steps

necessary to deal with a case online, including making a payment and receiving the closing document electronically;

- level five – personalisation – organising services around users’ needs.

A different approach is presented by J. Hausner, who limits the process of implementing electronic services to only four phases (Hausner, 2007, p. 42-43):

- phase one – this phase is referred to as cataloguing – in this phase, the office’s website is created and all information that may be of interest to its clients is placed on it – information on how to deal with particular matters and forms that may be used by the clients;
- phase two – referred to as e-government transactions – it starts when forms are actually downloaded and used by the public;
- phase three – in this phase, increasingly complex services are starting to become available, for which, in theory, the implementation requires the client to go to several offices; with the introduction of office-to-office communication, however, this problem is solved, as information is transferred between offices, with the result that the client deals with the matter from his or her computer or by going to just one office;
- phase four – the most advanced stage of e-government – a phase in which horizontal links between offices are becoming more accentuated; this is particularly important for clients who, for whatever reason, change for example their place of residence.

In conclusion, there are important similarities between the two presented approaches to the implementation phases of electronic services in offices. There is considerable overlap between the models. Indeed, in each of them, the degree of sophistication of e-services is steadily increasing.

Research methodology

A survey was carried out for the purpose of this article. The survey form was prepared electronically and was shared by the authors via social media. The survey was conducted between 1 September and 30 November 2022. A total of 159 questionnaires were collected.

The substantive part of the questionnaire consisted of questions concerning the respondents’ use of electronic services provided by the Polish public administration.

The questionnaire took two different versions, depending on whether the respondent declared that they used electronic services or not. Where the respondent claimed that they used such services, the content part of the survey consisted of eight questions – six in the form of a disjunctive cafeteria and two in the form of a conjunctive cafeteria. In a situation where the respondent declared that they do not use electronic services, the questionnaire designed for them consisted of three questions in the content part - two in the form of a disjunctive cafeteria and one in the form of a conjunctive cafeteria.

The vast majority of respondents (145 respondents, 91,2%) declared that they use electronic services provided by the Polish public administration. Only 14 respondents (8.8%) held the opposite view.

Information on respondents’ gender, age, education and place of residence is presented in the charts below.

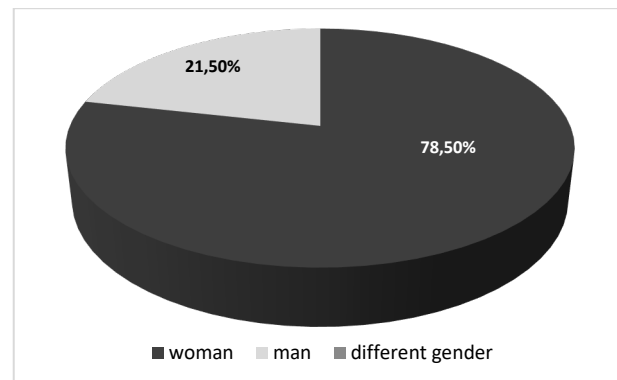


Figure 1. Structure of responses about the gender of respondents.

Source: own study.

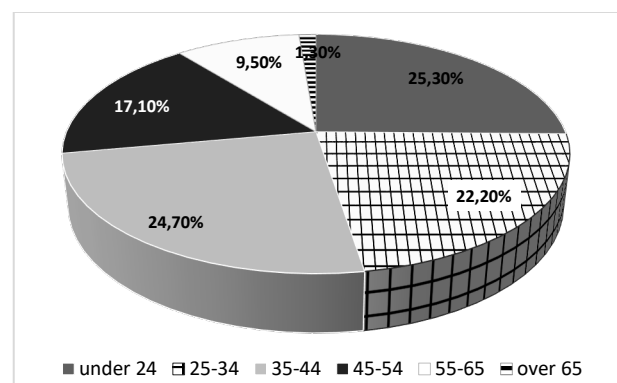


Figure 2. Structure of responses about the age of respondents

Source: own study.

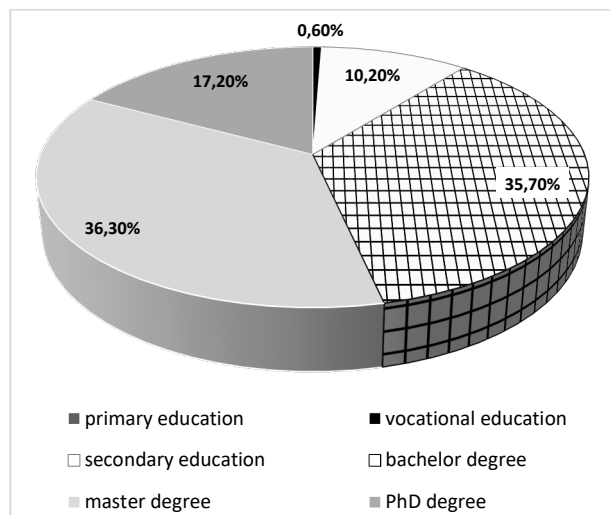


Figure 3. Structure of responses about respondents' level of education

Source: own study.

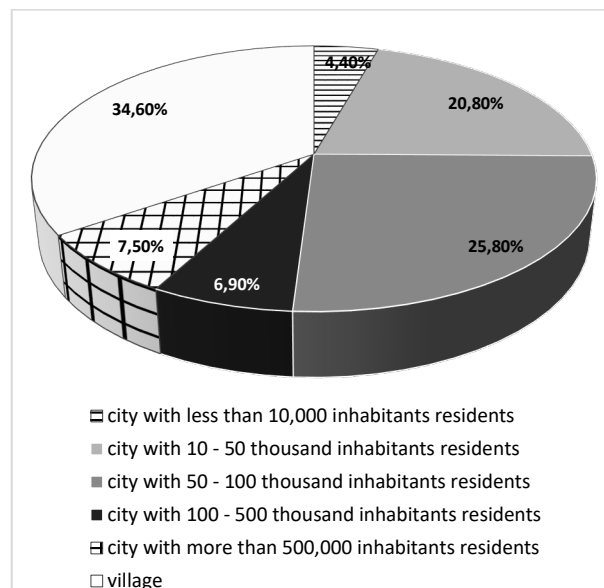


Figure 4. Structure of responses about where respondents live

Source: own study.

Results and discussion

Views on electronic services provided by the Polish public administration displayed by respondents who declared that they use them

As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of respondents declared that they use electronic services provided by the Polish public administration. The disjunctive cafeteria questions asked to these respondents and the structure of their answers are presented in Table 2.

As can be seen, respondents were very active in their use of electronic services. Unfortunately, however, only just over forty per cent of them declared that they had an electronic signature. The lack of such a signature may present some difficulties for the expansion of the range of electronic services used.

The next question asked respondents which portals providing access to public services were they using. Each respondent could tick more than one answer. The responses given are presented in the graph in Figure 5.

Table 2. Structure of answers to disjunctive cafeteria questions given by respondents who declared that they use electronic services provided by the Polish public administration

Question	Response "Yes" (in %)	Response "No" (in %)
Do you look for information on public administration websites?	97,9	2,1
Do you download official forms/applications to be filled in from the websites of public administrations?	97,9	2,1
Do you submit official forms/applications via public administration websites?	86,9	13,1
Do you have an electronic signature?	41,4	58,6
Do you have a trusted profile?	87,6	12,4

Source: own study.

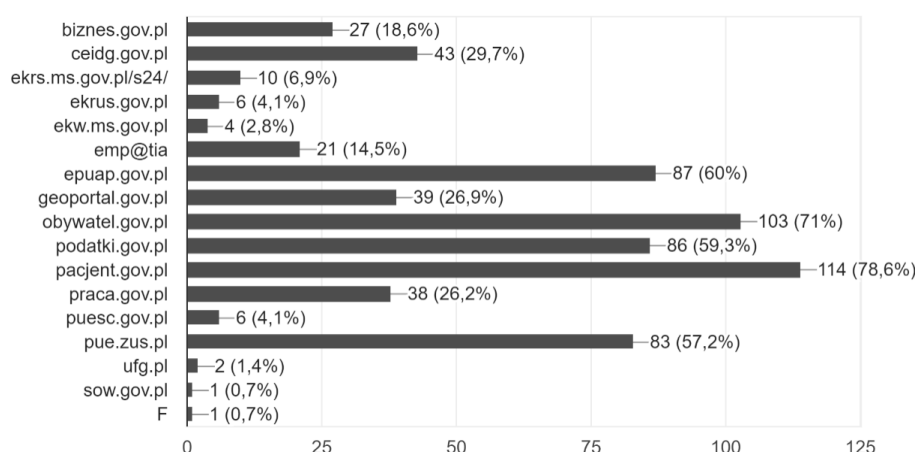


Figure 5. Responses to the question “Which portals giving access to public services do you use?”

Source: own study.

As can be seen from the chart above, the most frequently used portals providing access to public services were:

- pacjent.gov.pl – service of the Ministry of Health and the National Health Fund – a portal that makes it possible, among other things, to log in to an Internet Patient Account, receive an e-prescription or e-referral, access medical documents, apply for a European Health Insurance Card, choose a primary care doctor [pacjent.gov.pl, 2023];
- obywatel.gov.pl – a portal that offers popular e-services for citizens, such as: obtaining a copy of a civil status certificate, obtaining an identity card, checking penalty points or data in state registers, sending a letter to the office [www.gov.pl, 2023];
- epuap.gov.pl – Electronic Platform for Public Administration Services – a portal where one can arrange many things with various offices e.g. apply for an identity card, obtain copies

of certificates, register the birth of a child, settle taxes, obtain a clean criminal record or apply for a European Health Insurance Card [www.gov.pl, 2023];

- podatki.gov.pl – Ministry of Finance website – a portal, where one can find tax information and make online settlements [www.podatki.gov.pl, 2023].

In the last question, respondents were asked why they use e-services provided by public administration via the Internet. The response to this question was provided by 143 respondents. They were allowed to tick more than one answer. The answers given to this are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, the main reasons respondents used electronic services were to save time and to be able to access offices 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Not having to interact directly with an official was also regarded as an important factor in the eyes of the respondents.

Table 3. Responses to the question “Why do you use electronic services provided by public administration via the Internet?”

Response	Respondents who selected a particular answer	
	in persons	in %
Saving time	130	90,9
Saving money	29	20,3
Accessibility to offices 24 hours a day, 7 days a week	114	79,7
Ability to eliminate errors more easily by automating processes and reducing the impact of the human factor	40	28,0
Not having to interact directly with an official	55	38,5
Other reasons	2	1,4

Source: own study.

Opinions on e-services provided by the Polish public administration expressed by respondents who declared that they do not use them

Respondents who declared that they do not use electronic services made up a very small proportion of all respondents (14 people, 8.8%). They were asked why they were not using e-services and whether they would like to start using e-services provided by public administration via the Internet in the future. The answers given to the first of these questions are presented in Table 4. In this question, respondents could mark more than one answer.

As the main reasons for not using e-services provided by public administration via the Internet, the respondents named their personal preference in this regard, the excessive, in their opinion, complexity of such services and lack of sufficient knowledge in this area.

Respondents from this group were also asked whether they would like to start using e-services provided by public administration via the Internet in the future. Respondents answering this question split evenly into two groups, with seven respondents answering 'yes' and seven respondents answering 'I don't know'.

Table 4. Responses to the question "Why are you not using electronic services provided by public administration via the Internet?"

Response	Respondents who selected a particular answer	
	in persons	in %
I believe that using this type of service is too complicated (e.g. the need of having a trusted profile)	4	30,8
I prefer personal contact with the office	6	46,2
I have no knowledge of what public administration services are provided via the Internet	4	30,8
I do not have the necessary equipment to use this type of service (e.g. computer, Internet access)	0	0,0
Other reasons	0	0,0

Source: own study.

Opinions on e-services provided by the Polish public administration expressed by respondents who declared that they are persons with disabilities

Access to electronic services provided by public administration is particularly important for people with disabilities. This is because such people are often unable, due to their health problems, to go to the office in person. Among all respondents, 12 declared that they were people with disabilities. Of these, 10 people (83.3%) answered that they use electronic services and only two people (16.7%) answered negatively.

All respondents who were people with disabilities and who at the same time declared that they used electronic services, searched for information on the websites of public administration units and downloaded official forms and applications to be filled in from these websites. The vast majority of them (9 respondents) also submitted official forms and applications via the Internet and had a trusted profile. In contrast, only three of this group of respondents had an electronic signature.

Conclusion

This article focused on the issue of electronic services provided by the Polish public administration. It was possible, through a detailed analysis of the literature on the subject and a survey, to achieve the initial objective of assessing the use of electronic services provided by public administration in Poland.

Offices in Poland are beginning to provide increasingly sophisticated electronic services in which communication takes place not only between the client and the office, but also between the offices themselves. It is not only the services of downloading applications and sending them that are becoming available. Offices are also increasingly giving their clients the option of filing very complex applications and even settling their taxes remotely. It can be considered that the introduction of electronic services is a natural stage in the development of public administration. Since citizens make widespread use of the Internet, it is also worth giving them the opportunity to deal with official matters remotely.

As the survey showed, the vast majority of respondents declared that they use electronic services. The main reason why they choose this way of communicating with the office, they indicated the possibility of saving money. In their opinion, the advantage of this type of service is also the fact that it is available 24 hours a day and seven days a week, so that the client does not have to, for example, take a holiday in order to deal with an official matter.

It can be assumed that the range of public administration services that can be provided electronically and the number of interested parties choosing this channel of communication with the authorities will steadily increase.

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