

DISSERTATIONES DE MEDIIS ET COMMUNICATIONIBUS
UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

6

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KRISTINA REINSALU

The implementation of Internet democracy
in Estonian local governments



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Supervisor: Professor Marju Lauristin, University of Tartu, Estonia

Opponent: Professor Seija Ridell, University of Turku, Finland

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INTRODUCTION

For decades already, Internet democracy has captured the attention of several authors both in the academic (Tsagarousianou *et al.*, 1998; Chadwick and May, 2003; Hacker and van Dijk, 2000; Mahrer and Krimmer, 2005) and the political circles. Nevertheless, the number of discussions on the topic of e-activeness and the democratic potential of the Internet in terms of local governments is not very extensive and the discussions that can be found focus rather on the services themselves and on those that offer them (Musso *et al.*, 2000), or they analyse the role of technology in enhancing democracy in local governments, but do so in a fairly general manner (Wiklund, 2005; Grönlund, 2002) without focusing on people's everyday e-practices. The latter is what the thesis at hand aims to do. In addition, the thesis seeks to balance opposing views concerning the efforts of local governments. The first view is that the local government should concentrate more on providing services and less on facilitating civic involvement (Akman *et al.*, 2005; Odendaal, 2003), whereas the second view states that the local government should focus on the initiatives that will bring interaction between the government and the citizens to new levels (Jaeger, 2003; Torres and Piña, 2005).

Internet democracy is not born out of thin air, so to say, meaning that its potential cannot be assessed without mapping the responsiveness of a society to democracy as a whole, the course of the development of the civic culture, and the traditional participatory practices.

The present thesis attempts to link the rationale for local e-participation and e-government to wider theories concerning democracy and Internet democracy. The objective is to trace the contribution of new information technologies to enhancing democracy on the local level. Due to the rapid and simultaneous occurrence of several processes such as the development of civic and political cultures, the implementation of technology in the public sector and the strong impact of the new public administration model, Estonia serves as an interesting case for empirical studies into the implementation of Internet democracy in local governments. It is assumed in the paper at hand that, as a consequence of these coinciding changes, the traditional model of democracy has also been transformed significantly. Similarly to the Estonian transitional process which rapidly developed through the first stages of reforms and has by now reached high levels of consumerism and individualism (Kalmus *et al.*, 2009), the development of Internet democracy is likewise characterized by a relatively fast progression through the first stage of technology-driven development and by reaching the second stage that has been labelled *consumer Internet democracy* here, using the terminology proposed by Bellamy and Taylor (Bellamy and Taylor, 1998).

Although next to Bellamy and Taylor, there have been others who have written about this new stage of democracy (*e.g.* Ridell, 2002), it has not been discussed in detail in terms of its evolution and nature. This new model of democracy differs from the previous ones and the main question in the thesis is

whether this consumer democracy could be the first and an inevitable stage on the way towards the classical and post-modernist ideal of democracy – participatory democracy – or are we, conversely, drifting away from this ideal through consumer democracy. The transformational aspects and nature of democracy have been most interesting and evident on the level of local governments which has sometimes been defined as the “training ground for democracy” (Hale *et al.*, 1999: 97; Criado and Ramilo, 2003, Torres and Piña, 2005).

The investigation of local Internet democracy cannot be based on a single discipline or method. The dissertation, which draws on various theories of communication management, public administration and e-government, demonstrates how the focuses in Estonian information policy and public administration as a whole have shifted. The institutional changes as well as alterations in the emphasis in the political and information-technological rhetoric have led to the need to change the focus during the planning and writing of this doctoral project. In 2003, when the writing of the thesis began, the research focused on county government web pages and on their role in shaping informed citizens. By now, the role of county governments has decreased considerably in Estonian public administration due to the changes that have occurred in that area and citizens virtually lack connections with these institutions. The role of local governments, however, has become much more important which is why all the following articles focus on local governments as the objects of empirical studies. The empirical studies conducted within the framework of the thesis at hand have both a macro and a micro level. The analysis on the macro level is essentially the analysis of Estonian information policies (Studies **I** and **VI**), of the online activity of different Internet user types on the local level (based on the results of a study that encompassed the whole of Estonia) (Study **VI**) and of the comparative aspects of Estonian and Norwegian local e-activeness (Studies **IV** and **V**). The analysis on the micro level focuses on the electronic services offered to citizens and on their participatory practices, based on a case study of the City of Tartu. This local municipality is the second largest city in Estonia which is also the regional centre of Southern Estonia. Being aware of the existing differences among Estonian local governments, the research allows the identification of some general trends and the drawing of some general conclusions concerning Estonian local governments and, also, the outlining of some future developments for other European regional centres.

In order to analyze the complex topic of local Internet democracy, the study had to have a methodologically rich empirical basis – a variety of both quantitative and qualitative methods were included in the process of analysis.

The following issues are dealt with in greater detail in the six empirical articles of the dissertation: the communication and knowledge management in Estonian regional administration (**I**), the responsiveness of local e-governments to citizens’ needs (**II**), the e-activeness on the local level (**III**), the local online participation in two different civic cultures (**IV**, **V**), and the influence of information policy on online user behaviour (**VI**). It should be mentioned that Article **V** is essentially the Estonian version of Article **IV** inspired by the need to

contemplate and discuss the problems of the given field in Estonia, targeting directly the main users of the journal *Riigikogu Toimetised*, that is, state officials.

Four articles have been written exclusively by the author of the thesis; Articles **IV** and **VI** have been co-authored. The role of the author in Article **IV** was to collect and analyze the Estonian data, as well as to participate in the development of the general design and discussion. Article **VI** is a synthesis of two different studies – the Internet users typology developed by Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt for her doctoral thesis (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2006) is combined with the questions and data that the author of the thesis designed for Study **IV** in order to compare people's participation patterns in the new and the traditional media. The author also participated in the interpretation of the results, the analysis and discussion of Article **VI**.

The aim of this introduction is to underline the overarching themes of the studies and to answer two broader questions:

- 1) If and how has the development of the Internet affected the development of democracy in Estonia? Does access to information technology increase people's political activity on the local level?
- 2) Which are people's everyday online practices on the local level? Does information technology rather enhance consumer democracy, with emphasis on services, or does it instead support democratic participation? How do these functions of democracy relate to each other?

The introductory article includes the following: the first section of the theoretical overview presents the development and characteristics of both the Estonian traditional democracy and Internet democracy as well as of its political culture. Also, shifts in the paradigms of public administration which mainly influenced the development of local governments and their democratic practices are presented in this section. The methodological issues of the Studies are described in the second section. In the third section, which is divided into two, the thesis moves to the main findings of the studies. In the fourth, the discussion section, an explanation of the Internet democratic process and phases in Estonia is presented. The conclusion summarizes the main findings of the dissertation and is followed by references and a summary in Estonian.

I. STATING THE PROBLEM

I.1. The democratic potential of the society in which the new technologies are embedded

The potential of the Internet to enhance democracy and citizens' participation has attracted a growing interest among political scientist as well as among communication and media scholars (Schalken *et al.*, 1996; Hacker and van Dijk, 2000; Musso and Weare, 2005). According to many authors, this is the means by which one could solve significant problems that have hindered the development of democracy. For instance, the Internet has been viewed as the granter of equal access to information (Nora and Minc, 1980; Toffler, 1990; Toffler, 1980), as an increaser of transparency (Bellamy and Taylor, 1989), an increaser of responsiveness to citizens' needs (Bellamy and Taylor, 1989; Bekkers and Zouridis, 1999) and, thus, as an increaser of political participation (Warren, 2002). At the same time, Schalken has contemplated whether or not to shift the question from "What is the impact of information and communication technologies on democracy?" to "What is the democratic potential of a society within which the new technologies are embedded?" (Schalken, 1998: 161), taking into account the fact that in every society new technology is implemented in a very different social, political and cultural context. Polat (Polat, 2005) likewise points out the need to investigate the role of the social and political contexts in which the use of the Internet is shaped.

The broader aim of the thesis at hand is to try to establish if and how the application of information technology shapes the democratic practices in local governments and democracy in general. In some sense, the development of democracy in Estonia has been similar to other post-communist countries. It has been characterised by rapid institutional development and a slower development of civil society. However, Estonia is exceptional due to its technological development which has been faster than in most other post-communist countries. What makes the tendencies and influences in this area more easily observable is the fact that in Estonia local governments are generally small in population and in area and, yet, they are obligated under the law to provide the citizens with a number of services and this in turn creates a close relationship between the people and the local governments.

The following is a brief overview of the democratic readiness and potential of Estonia in terms of institutional and civil society development and in terms of participation practices.

The Estonian transition into a democratic country began in the second half of the 1980s when the initiation of several movements signalled an irrevocable process of liberation from the Soviet rule. It was then that a process of liberation began which eventually involved the entire nation and became known as the Singing Revolution (see also Lauristin and Vihalemm, 1997, 2008).

However, the development of the Estonian political and citizen culture quickly experienced a phase of alienation when the feeling of the revolution, the feeling that something important was being accomplished, diminished after the establishment of democratic representative bodies. Such a phase is fairly predictable according to the Polish researchers Rychard and Wnuk-Lipinski (Rychard and Wnuk-Lipinski, 2002) who have investigated the transitional process in Eastern Europe and to whom Lauristin and Vihalemm refer to in their periodisation of the transitional process. Rychard and Wnuk-Lipinski (2002, cited in Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2008) propose a model of that transitional process which has five levels: 1) the period of forming expectations, 2) the phase between the old and the new system, 3) the period of developing the new system, 4) the post-revolutionary period and 5) the phase of consolidation. The citizens are alienated from the political process in the post-revolutionary period. The Polish researchers have emphasised the importance of the pace and results of the first three periods in reaching stability and well-being in the fourth and fifth periods. However, Estonian development could be characterised by a rapid progression through the first periods into the post-revolutionary period (Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2008), which is the focus of the present thesis, as the development of technology coincided with that period (1995 to 2005 in Estonia). Whereas the occurrence of alienation after the establishment of democratic institutions and the stabilisation of political and economic relations was visible in the whole of Eastern Europe, in Estonia this was all magnified by the rapid development through the three first periods – the institutional development was faster than elsewhere, the economic reforms were more radical and, as a result, the alienation of the people from the state even deeper. Finding the balance between participation and representative democracy was a difficult process. Institutional democracy was developed according to different models and this was measured by different institutions and with the help of different criteria (freedom of the press, corruption index *etc.*)¹, but the development of political and civic culture cannot be copied from other societies. Although Estonia had taken the lead in terms of freedom of speech among other post-communist countries according to these audits (World Democracy Audit), it is much harder to copy and apply the practices of participatory democracy as these depend greatly on the natural, regular and long-term development of the civic culture which in Western Europe developed as a result of long historical processes.

The fast occurrence of economic and institutional changes in Estonia had created substantial expectations in terms of participation, but it was soon realised that the actual opportunities of influencing the development of the country had been left in the past with the revolution. The level of optimism fell rapidly once it was realised that the citizens' role would mainly be limited to free elections and the freedom of speech. Smolar has affirmed the lack of actual

¹ See, for example, World Democracy audits and tables:
<http://www.worldaudit.org/democracy.htm>.

possibilities of participation and influence, stating that the “ideal of anti-political, united and moral civil society turned out to be illusory and unattainable and its usefulness disappeared” (Smolar, 1996: 29). When in the 1990s, following economic euphoria, Estonia experienced economic difficulties (Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2008), no public discussion of these issues occurred. People had hardly any opportunities to participate in discussions and they became even more alienated from the state. According to several authors it is namely the discussion of matters that is the foundation of a strong civil society and practices (Habermas, [1962] 1989; Dahlgren, 2003, 2005; Barber, 1984; Fuchs, 2008; Held, 1992). Dahlgren observes that even if the aim is not to reach a consensus, and even if this is entirely impossible, dialogue is still preferable to violence and good dialogue is preferable to poor dialogue (Dahlgren, 2005). Pietrzyk also argues that the lack of public debate generates a redoubtable obstacle to the development of democracy, since major political and social issues are not discussed or well understood by the citizens (Pietrzyk, 2003).

What complicated the relationship between democracy and civic culture were the fact that democracy cannot develop apart from the civic culture and the fact that the transitional process involves a period of alienation and the development of indifference towards the public sphere and discussion. The common feeling and the will to achieve something together that had been prevalent during the Singing Revolution were replaced in the post-revolutionary period with indifference and with greater focus on individual matters.

One of the reasons could be that although the experience of the Singing Revolution shows that the Estonian civic culture has the potential and ability for consolidation, it has been pointed out with other Eastern European countries that the previous civic culture experience actually inhibited the development of the civic culture necessary for democracy (Pietrzyk, 2003)².

It cannot be claimed that people’s individual practices in the private sphere would be entirely void of meaning in terms of the development of civic culture and democracy, since participation is not limited to decision-making. Rather, it also includes forming knowledge, values, images and visions, communication and self-realization (Fuchs, 2008; Dahlgren and Olsson, 2008; Beck 1986). Thus, in participatory democracy the political cannot be fully separated from the personal. It still has to be admitted that the relationship between the political and the private spheres is so complex that even Habermas could not fully encompass it in his concept of the lifeworld (see Habermas, 1987). Even though his treatment of the public sphere (Habermas, [1962] 1989) has been a very influential approach to understanding the role of communication in encouraging

² According to Pietrzyk (2003), in post-communist countries there was an image of civil societies which was actually contradictory to what modern democracy needs. In his opinion, the concept of civil society developed in Eastern and Central Europe conceived it as a sphere opposed to the illegitimate communist state – the civil society was to be rebuilt *against* the state whereas along with the democratic transformation it was the state that played a crucial role in setting up the legal boundaries of civil society activity and of the market economy (Pietrzyk 2003).

citizen engagement, it is still different. His public sphere is away from the tentacles of state control and allows public opinion to develop separately ([1962] 1989).

In addition to the inevitable post-revolutionary alienation in the transitional period there were other factors that influenced the weakening of the civic culture. For example, the development of institutional democracy was not supported by the introduction of civic education in schools (Toots, 2005). Also, the development of the civic culture and democracy has been lessened by the fact that during the period of accession to the EU much has been done simply for the sake of appearances and to meet external demands (Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2008) and this has prevented the discussion of complex issues on the national arena.

In the recent years there have been significant shifts towards the activation of civic participation in Estonia, although institutional changes supporting the development of the civil society could be seen already in 2002 when the Estonian parliament Riigikogu accepted the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept (abbreviated in Estonian as EKAK)³. This led to the Activity plan for implementing the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept for 2004–2006. The cooperation of the public sphere and citizen initiatives is also emphasised in the Development Plan for Civic Initiative Support, approved by the Estonian Government for the years 2007–2010.

In conclusion, it could be said that participatory democracy which has been the model for the development of the Western European democracies suggests that citizens are engaged on the local and national levels in a variety of political activities and debates for reaching common understandings. This means that citizens are able to decide matters on their own in a bottom-up grassroots process, if not in all matters and not all the time, then at least in some matters and some of the time (Barber, 1984). In Estonia the transition into democracy was much more rapid than in other post-communist countries and partly due to this a gap appeared between the development of institutional democracy and civic culture. It was fairly late when people tried to find alternatives to the unilateral top-down politics and this increased the alienation of the people from politics which in turn increased undemocratic and technocratic tendencies in the government (Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2008). On the one hand, citizens did not know what to do with the democracy they had won, but on the other, the bureaucracy that developed in Estonia was not interested in the emergence of critical citizens.

This is the situation in which Estonia began its journey in the Internet era.

³ EKAK, among other aims, also establishes the mutual roles and principles of cooperation of the public authority and of citizen initiatives. The concept expresses the basis and frameworks of citizen organisations and public authority in order to energize citizen initiatives and strengthen democracy in Estonia (Eesti Kodanikuühiskonna Arengu kontseptsioon – RT I 2002, 103, 606)

I.2 . The Estonian Progression into Internet Democracy

When the international race to develop information society⁴ began in the 1990s, the Estonian political circles were among the first to take off, so to say. Whereas the institutional democracy in Estonia was developed with the aim of reaching the Western level, the technological advances began at a much more even state and the young and progressive Estonian government was not at such a pronounced disadvantage in this regard. In the first years of the triumph of information technology there was great optimism in both the political and academic circles of the world that the Internet would decrease people's alienation from politics and increase transparency in this area (Bellamy and Taylor, 1989; Bekkers and Zouridis, 1999). This rhetoric became rather popular in Estonia where institutions saw it as a chance to address the concerns of the public. However, as Castells points out, describing this race in the European Union, most of the emphasis was placed on improving the technological infrastructure, whereas the social changes that accompanied this progress were not paid much attention to (Castells, 2006: 16).

Estonia, trying to follow Europe's lead, as is also pointed out in Study VI, adapted the Nordic model of technological development. It is also noted elsewhere (Bellamy and Taylor, 1989) that when the United States, Canadian, Australian and the Bangemann visions of information superhighway all assigned a strong role for private companies, usually for privatized telecommunications operators, in laying down the infrastructure of the superhighway, the Nordic countries, including Estonia, assigned a more direct role for the state. It is mentioned in Study VI that today, more than 10 years after the drafting of the initial documents, Estonia can indeed be justifiably proud of its achievements concerning ICT-related developments, as the small country quickly positioned itself ahead of many Western economies. The more complex measures indicate

⁴ In 1993, the European Commission published a White Paper setting out the principles of a pan-European response to the crucial economic and employment issues raised by the information economy (European Commission, 1993), and the European Summit in Brussels mandated Martin Bangemann⁴, the Commissioner in charge of the Telecommunications Directorate, to form a special High Level Group to bring forward specific measures for carrying Europe into the information age. Bangemann's report on information societies was followed by an Action Plan which placed greater emphasis on the wider social and cultural issues next to economic and technical issues.

In those documents information society is explained as follows: Throughout the world, information and communications technologies are generating a new industrial revolution already as significant and far-reaching as those of the past. It is a revolution based on information, itself the expression of human knowledge. Technological progress now enables us to process, store, retrieve and communicate information in whatever form it may take – oral, written or visual – unconstrained by distance, time and volume (Bangemann Report, Europe and the Global Information Society 1994: <http://www.cyber-rights.org/documents/bangemann.htm#chap1>, accessed 29 July 2008).

Estonia's relative success in achieving the aims of broadening access to information but also the relative competitive edge that the ICTs give to Estonia. The Lisbon review of competitiveness in Europe ranks Estonia on the 12th place – the highest of the ten new members that joined the Union in 2004. Estonia has remained in that position since 2004.

Despite the fact that several authors have concluded that e-government and Internet democracy⁵ are not separate terms (Grönlund, 2002), the political rhetoric of the Information Society in Estonia (see the analysis of the political rhetoric in Study VI) frequently treats them as separate phenomena. Even if mentioned in some e-government strategies, the claims about the benefits of e-democracy fundamentally lack empirical evidence concerning the effects of the proposed projects (Mahrer and Krimmer, 2005; Wilhelm, 2000; Anttiroiko, 2001). Estonia gathered international praise in the academic circles for successful e-projects in addition to positive reports in terms of the indicators of information societies (Coleman, 1999; Driessen, 1999; Anttiroikko, 2001). Still, it has been claimed that while there are some successful projects in e-administration and the Estonian e-Tax office⁶ is one of them, the Internet democracy topic is often addressed as a rhetorical promise only (Coleman, 1999; Anttiroiko, 2001).

It was difficult to balance the representative and the participatory democracy with traditional democracy – the strengthening of the first caused the weakening of the second. The possibilities seemed broader with Internet democracy. Estonia seemed to need prerequisites such as flexibility and a relatively high level of education in order to make the necessary ICT-related changes (Estonian Human Development Report, 1996). As Study VI states, the Principles of Estonian Information Policy (1998) promises among other aims to provide a participatory forum where every individual could join the discussion on the shaping of the information society. The forum that would have focused on the information society was never established, but one can see the early ideas of it in the posterior portal TOM⁷. However, many of the national initiatives for

⁵ Different terms for Internet democracy are used by different authors – "e-democracy" (Mahrer and Krimmer 2005; Becker 2001; Grönlund 2001), "digital democracy" (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000), "electronic democracy" (Hacker, 1996), "teledemocracy" (Becker, 1981). The paper at hand uses the term Internet democracy to be clear that all other electronic channels for communication are not investigated by the author.

⁶ The possibility to declare taxes in an Internet portal set up by the government. The system is connected with various databases, so people have declarations there that have already been filled out for them.

⁷ TOM – (*Täna Otsustan Mina* – Today I Decide) is one of the Estonian key initiatives for fostering participatory online activities (<https://www.eesti.ee/tom/>). It is a state initiated forum website where registered users can propose legislative changes which, after the selection process, are sent to the responsible administrative unit. In Estonia, laws can be initiated by MPs, the government and the president, so this is the only possibility for individuals to initiate legislation. The site was launched in 2001.

increasing participation in democracy were in fact more related with representational democracy. For example, TOM also operated on the principle that the decision-makers would choose the ideas proposed by the citizens and apply some of them. It was not the case that citizens themselves would have a direct access to governing. Despite the revolutionary nature of TOM and high international interest towards it, the actual visiting of TOM remained rather low or decreased after a fairly active beginning. Still, if one was to compare citizens' attitudes towards traditional democratic ways of governing, then it could be said that there was great optimism. As is also stated by Lauristin (Lauristin *et al.*, 1997), technology as a modernist value and an idealist belief in progress, widespread during the socialist times, was still present, creating a favourable context for technological change (see also Study VI). Korts and her colleagues also state that Estonians are in fact more open to technology than the people of some of the Nordic countries (Korts *et al.*, 2004). There are several reasons why such a technology-favouring cultural context developed in Estonia. One of these reasons is definitely the rapid technological development in the Nordic countries. As Nordic countries have led the technological development and as Estonia has always been linked to them, as already mentioned, their influence has been significant in cultural terms. Another reason could be the renewed increase in people's self-awareness namely due to the technological success of the country being internationally recognised and valued. This could be considered a hype, as Study VI critically claims, but it is undeniable that Estonia has gathered international acclaim with two initiatives that are also, in a way, metaphors of the entire Estonian success-story. These initiatives are the Tiger Leap Programme⁸ and e-voting⁹.

Whereas the benefit from and the influence of the Tiger Leap Programme is practical, measurable and undeniable, the e-voting and its influence on the development of democracy in general has been much discussed by various authors. E-voting has been approached with the aim of establishing the criteria by which to classify the different views on Internet democracy. For instance, Macintosh views e-voting as a definite part of Internet democracy, as one form of participation (Macintosh, 2004). Pippa Norris (2001) also emphasises that

Today, TOM has almost 7000 users and more than 1000 ideas have been discussed (TOM, 2007).

⁸ The Tiger Leap Program was launched in February 1996 to adjust Estonian educational system to the needs of the information society by equipping schools with information and communication technology, linking schools to the Internet and providing ICT education to teachers. The program was called 'Tiger Leap' to signify the rapid changes and technological change as Estonia's main agenda, referring also metaphorically to the example of economic giants in Asia. In order to achieve the goal, a special foundation was created in 1997 by the Ministry of Education and private sector ICT firms.

⁹ Estonia was the first country in the world where statewide Internet-based elections took place. By now, e-voting has taken place twice in Estonia – in the 2005 local elections and in the 2007 Riigikogu elections.

although it is a form of representational democracy, it is an inevitable stage in e-participation which is the aim of Internet democracy. However, there are more radical opinions stating that such a representational democratic form as e-voting is unnecessary, that e-participation should be an alternative to representational Internet democracy not merely a complementary element (Fuchs, 2008). There has been too little research into e-voting in Estonia to draw definitive conclusions in terms of its actual influence. Nevertheless, according to Vassil's analysis (Vassil, 2007) it can be said that the availability of Internet voting has helped increase citizens' involvement. As Vassil's analysis of e-voters demonstrates, the number of people whose participation depended on e-technologies is small but present: 10 per cent of the e-voters claimed that they would not have voted if Internet voting was not an option and 95 per cent of e-voters were convinced that they would not like to vote in the traditional way if e-voting continues to be available (Vassil, 2007; see also Study VI).

It has been argued since the 1980s, that is, since the Internet was born, whether the Internet in itself will increase the amount of an attentive public. Even though many are of the opinion that the people who make extensive use of online political information tend to be the same people who are already strongly interested in politics (Norris, 2002; Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Hill and Hughes, 1998), the same authors agree that the Internet allows people to do the same things in a different manner (Hill and Hughes, 1998) or, also, that the Internet does not change people so much, it tends rather to allow them to do what they usually do, only better (Dahlgren, 2001).

Hall (Hall, 1999) classifies Internet democracy according to different views as follows: the utopian view, the dystopian view and the utilitarian view. The utopian view mainly emphasises the extension of public sphere and action as a democratizing force (Chadwick and May, 2003). The dystopians point to the limitations of the Internet such as vast discrepancies in access related to location, race, gender, and class (May, 2002; Dutton, 1999; Musso and Weare, 2005) or, also, the authoritarian purpose (Yang, 2003). Although there are also pure utopians such as Barlow (1996) and dystopians like Davies (1996), most authors could be viewed as representatives of the utilitarian view – optimistic but not utopian (Hall, 1999). They point out the possible influences of the Internet on the development of democracy such as transparency, connectedness, self-management and self-fulfilment (Bellamy and Taylor, 1989) and responsiveness to citizens' needs (Bellamy and Taylor, 1989; Bekkers and Zouridis, 1999). Still, the same authors also list some negative aspects such as state control over the citizens and technological risks.

Although the main focus of the utilitarian view is on people's interaction with their representatives, access rather than the nature of this interaction was focused on¹⁰. It is therefore even more remarkable that Bellamy and Taylor (Bellamy and Taylor, 1989) proposed the view of the citizen as a customer at a time when this

¹⁰ Ainsworth, for example, believes "that the more people participate the more democratic will be the outcomes" (Ainsworth *et al.* 2005: 124)

was not a prevalent paradigm in the public understanding of the citizen. To this date there are no equally thorough treatments of service-based democracy as such. They emphasised greatly the fact that with the help of technology the public sphere is able to better meet people's demands. "More positively, 'virtual' records could enable officials to make more appropriate decisions about their clients, just as they could help tailor services to the needs of a specific neighbourhood or client group" (Bellamy and Taylor, 1989: 66). They apply the term "whole-persons" (1989: 66) stating that clients are not just seen from one aspect or one perspective, but they are seen as whole persons: information which was collected for different purposes (taxes, social security, population registration *etc.*) is combined and integrated. At the same time, what is also pointed out is that the state, applying technologies, has control over citizens, "making clients more transparent, thus enlarging the scope for selectivity, discrimination and surveillance by the state" (Bellamy and Taylor, 1989: 66).

On the one hand, the starting point for service delivery becomes the "client's needs and preferences, instead of the bureaucratic organisation." On the other, "without deliberative discussions the state only thinks it knows the preferences and needs of its citizens." This is Bekkers and Zouridis point out (1999: 186). The importance of deliberative discussions is emphasised by other authors as well (Polat, 2005; Dahlgren, 2003, 2005). Even though there is no particular reason to expect an ontological transformation merely because discussion shifts to Internet space, the initial idea of deliberation points to the procedures of open discussion aimed at achieving a rationally motivated consensus (Dahlgren, 2003, 2005). Despite the arguments that instead of an ideally rational and critical debate, online communication in reality is often about venting one's feelings (Polat, 2005). The moment of passion and emotion is likewise important in civic culture (Dahlgren, 2003; Dahlgren and Olsson, 2008). Online political talk definitely complements the effects of offline political talk (Shah *et al.*, 2005).

Since in the context of local governments the deliberative discussion can mostly take place in local forums, Studies **IV** and **V** concentrate on their analysis. As suggested above, the current state of a country's political and democratic development is an important factor. As articles **IV** and **V** claim, differences in space, values, skills and practices, and civic identity will affect the use of online forums, and thereby the role of these forums in politics. In order to better outline the influence of civic culture, local forums in two different political and civic cultures were focused upon in countries with similar information technological basis – Estonia and Norway.

It can be concluded that the fact that Estonia simultaneously experienced processes that in the Western world occurred one after another (the development of democracy, political culture and Internet democracy) makes Estonia an interesting and unique case. The situation is made even more complex by the fact that when Estonia focused on the revolution in information technology, there were already signs of crisis in the welfare state model of Western Europe. New liberal sentiments had become prevalent and terms such as marketization, consumerism, which will be discussed below, had become popular.

I.3. Consumerism in the public sector: the concept of New Public Management

Estonian economic policy in the times of rapid change was very liberal and a certain 'liberalization' of public administration, recognized today as the 'New Public Management' (NPM) doctrine (see Hood, 1991; Vigoda-Gadot and Meiri, 2008) matched the ideology of the time. Today, the consensual perception is that NPM represents an approach in public administration that integrates interdisciplinary knowledge and experiences acquired in business management and other disciplines to improve the performance of public agencies. Despite contradictory views and criticism about the meaning and implications of this new doctrine (see Box *et al.*, 2001), there is no doubt that it has become extremely influential in public administration theory and practice (Bevir *et al.*, 2003) since it calls for a radical change in values, norms, artefacts of all stakeholders and their interactions with the public sphere (Schein, 1985). There are several central concepts identified in connection with that doctrine, such as flexibility, deregulation, participation (Peters, 2001), but the most important aspect of the doctrine is its shift in paradigms – the treatment of the citizen as a client, a consumer (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000; Moon and de Leon, 2001). What distinguishes the New Public Management from earlier forms of managerialism is a new emphasis on the management and the delivery of public services (Pollitt, 1993), and on how those services are accessed and used. In Estonia, where the introduction of that doctrine coincided with the structuring of public administration and the onslaught of technology, the e-service became the frequent synonym for an actual service.

There are many people who have criticized the new doctrine. For example, Box and his colleagues (Box *et al.*, 2001) claim that our social experience is a hyper-rationalized world in which democracy is equated with consumer choice. Nevertheless, more recent approaches to consumerism in the public sector take a broader view. For instance, John Clarke (Clarke, 2007) observes the image of the consumer in the minds of policy makers in asking more generally about the dynamics of consumerist policies and what this can tell us about the changing relationship between the state and its citizens in their local encounters over the provision of services. Whereas it was thought earlier that these are contradictory terms, the people studied by Clarke and his colleagues did not think in binary opposite categories of consumer versus citizen. As Trentmann (2007) admits, there is a gap between micro and macro levels of viewing consumers as citizens. The long and rich literature on citizenship has oriented towards the public aspect of norms and practices. What the paradigm of consumption can bring to this is attention on its private aspect, in the everyday workings of politics. Consumption is, after all, a process in which all citizens participate (Trentmann, 2007). However, when we consider consumption as politics, as a new but powerful means of political participation, we may both underestimate the role that the 'political' plays in translating ordinary practices into politically consequential ones and lose sight of the politics of consumption, ranging from

social distinction to the realization of private aesthetic experiences. Consumption can help uncover the struggles associated with citizenship and illustrate how they are encountered and experienced on a daily basis. At best, it has been used to publicize, politicize and mitigate those struggles but, even then, it represents only one dimension of complex democratic citizenship (Jubas, 2007).

Although Tõnnisson, who investigates (Tõnnisson, 2006) the application and influence of the New Public Management in Estonian local governments in her dissertation, criticizes and doubts the possibility as well as the necessity of applying these principles in the public sector, these were nevertheless followed in Estonian municipalities. It was due to the fact that Estonian public administration underwent the implementation phase when all the new trends were utilized without much critical thought. Again, since the success of the NPM and the technology implementation occurred in Estonia at the same time, these trends were much more intertwined here than in most other countries. The principles, especially marketing, had an impact on the orientation of the ICT solutions. According to Tõnnisson (2006), as much as 96 per cent of local government leaders said that there is need for some market-based approach. Efficiency was always interpreted as economic effectiveness and in the light of this dogma, ICT applications failed to adhere to the general and rhetorical principles of Internet democracy such as accountability, transparency and enhancement of online participation.

I.4. Local Internet democracy and the Estonian context

On the level of local governments the mutual impact of different processes and the links between democracy, participation and services is much more visible and people have a closer contact with this institution. The present subsection aims to give a brief account of the local e-democracy projects on the local level in the world. This will help outline the main problems and possibilities in developing Internet democracy (see also Prachett, 1998; and also Hale *et al.*, 1999; Moon, 2002; Hoff *et al.*, 2003). Prachett states that, “local government, as the institution of democracy closest to local communities, has a vital role to play not only in behaving democratically, but also in engendering and enhancing democratic practices and consciousness among all its citizens. In short there is significant social capital to be gained from engaging citizens in the governance of their own communities” (Pratchett, 1998: 208). Still, previous analysis of Internet democracy on the local level has mainly focused on physical access (Tsagarousianou *et al.*, 1998) or on the delivery side of e-services (Kaylor *et al.*, 2001; Odendaal, 2003; Reddick, 2004; Akman *et al.*, 2005). The focus of the paper at hand is somewhat broader – although all the services available and their users have been mapped, the focus has been on the ones that enable actual e-participation and on people who are e-active. It is also suggested elsewhere that future studies need to examine the progress and

effectiveness of municipal governments in delivering web-based public services and facilitating citizens' web-based political participation (Moon, 2002).

The attempts thus far to explore this topic with the help of empirical studies have not been very encouraging. Docter and Dutton, who have investigated deliberative discussion in the context of local governments, point out that the enthusiasm of the 1990s has faded and the potential of electronic services to empower citizens who are less politically active has not become clearly evident (Dokter and Dutton, 2002 [1998]). Whereas the Santa Monica Public Network they refer to was a pioneering community network and maybe was not so successful as a result, more recent examples of local e-initiatives have not been very encouraging either. Wiklund's (2005) study of Swedish local governments demonstrates that present services support the core idea in Habermas' discursive model of deliberative democracy to only an extent.

The debate whether on the local level the main potential in terms of information technology lies in economic capabilities (Akman *et al.*, 2005; Odendaal, 2003) or is there a chance to reach the next level in the communication between citizens and officials (Jaeger, 2003) is extended by Bellamy and Taylor (1998). As they contend, the responsiveness to citizens' needs is the key dimension of an information society and this will increasingly depend on the effectiveness of what we propose to call 'consumer democracy' (Bellamy and Taylor, 1998: 2). Ridell calls this services-based participation 'commercial democracy' (Ridell, 2002: 157). With such a model, the majority of local government e-services are performance-oriented or 'every-day-life-services'¹¹, but the consumption of these can be the first step in bringing citizens closer to their local government. It is also pointed out that there has often been a missing link between community participation and more formal political concerns, but the model of social capital also maintains that civic engagement starts with trust built up through 'non-political' activities (Chadwick, 2006).

The technology is expected to bring decision-makers closer to local residents and facilitate participation by making it entirely independent of time and place. However, according to Ridell (2002), the biggest disadvantage of this 'consumer model' is that it does not involve citizens in communication between themselves. Even if we consider citizens as clients, it does not mean that the local government is merely a service office in all its aspects; it is a public institution and its function has to be transparent and has to offer citizens the opportunities to participate in its administration. The main opportunity to be involved in local administration is to participate in forums. As presented in two studies conducted in the pilot City of Tartu to investigate the e-activeness of its citizens¹², there are other opportunities that Tartu offers for e-participation: city

¹¹ This is the term applied in the paper at hand to local e-services such as online application forms, online road maps for public transportation and so forth.

¹² Since e-activism refers to the use of electronic means to mobilize volunteers, raise funds, disseminate information, and otherwise pursue the various functions of interest groups, the term e-activeness was used in this paper.

government online meetings, different applications and so forth. Whereas Odenaal (2003), as mentioned above, supports the view that the use of the Internet in local government should be limited to economic considerations and cost effectiveness only and states that the services related to city planning are purely practical, Chadwick points out that many of the proponents of community networks come from a background in urban planning and that such services could have a larger impact than many of the so-called practical services on increasing e-participation. The city of Tampere in Finland has also developed two different, partly Internet-based, channels for residents to participate in the planning of services and urban areas, titled Alvari and Valma. Additionally, Tampere¹³ offers neighbourhood associations the opportunity to publish their web pages in a common environment called Mansetori¹⁴ (see also Heinonen *et al.*, 2000).

At the same time, in terms of infrastructure, many Estonian local governments and especially the City of Tartu investigated in the pilot studies are not far behind (Studies II and III).

There are 227 local municipalities in Estonia. Similarly to the local governments in Europe¹⁵ the local authorities in Estonia have relative freedom of action and broad opportunities to develop local communities, but at the same

¹³ Tampere is also worth pointing out due to the fact that it is probably the only city in Finland, Nordic countries and in the world to have established a specific Unit of Local Democracy.

¹⁴ Valma is an Internet-based application in which residents can influence the preparation and planning of community affairs. Valma is also a source of information. Residents may register themselves in Valma and define different topics and regional areas that they want to receive e-letters about.

Alvari is a two-way channel between local authorities and residents. It is based on three different participation models. First, there is a regional working group nominated by the City Board. The group will be heard before important decisions and plans are made concerning the region. The first working group is currently in an implementation phase in Western Tampere. The second part of Alvari is the so-called NettiAlvari – an Internet-based jury formed of local residents. Authorities can consult NettiAlvari and make surveys through it. Third, there is an annual regional youth summit, Nuoriso-Alvari where the youth of the region can take part and influence regional development. Mansetori is a generic platform for neighbourhood associations to publish their own Internet sites in. Mansetori also offers a Forum for dialogue and debate on local issues. Mansetori is a place for each and every one to enter into and get interested in district activities

(Source: http://www.baltic.org/mp/db/file_library/x/IMG/14968/file/City_of_Tampere_Promoted_eGovernment_Actions_.150507doc.pdf, accessed August 2008).

¹⁵ See European Charter on Local Government <http://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=24755>, and the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, Chapter XIV. Local Government. http://www.eesti.ee/est/riik/pohiseadus/xiv_kohalik_omavalitsus/, accessed 23 August 2008.

time they have the obligation to offer almost 70 per cent of the services (social assistance, education *etc.*). However, the status and role of local governments have differed and this has given rise to debates throughout history and during all the years of independence¹⁶. Even if many responsibilities have been divided among the central government and the municipalities for more than a decade already, there still is no clear understanding of the roles, functions and responsibilities of the different governmental levels. Moreover, as the central government has constantly changed its expectations of local governments, mutual understanding between them has not always been sufficient. At the same time, the municipalities themselves have not been too proactive in developing their initiatives and approaches. This in turn affects the will of the citizens to enter into a dialogue with their local municipalities.

In a legal and institutional sense there is another link between local and central governments – the county government, the role of which has changed considerably since 2003 and is now limited mainly to a supervisory role. In the case of county governments one cannot speak of the participation of citizens and its role in the development of democracy, as its activities are not connected to that. However, Study I still focuses on county government web pages, as in 2003 when the article was written, county governments had a more significant role in Estonian public administration and in the development of local democracy. Today, county governments do not fill that role and this is the reason for focusing on local governments in latter studies. The role of local governments has increased in every sense after Estonia joined the European Union and gained access to the structural means of the Union.

In addition to several laws that guide local government activities, they have various obligations to spread information, especially through web pages. However, the practice of following these laws and guidelines differs considerably. The web pages of local governments are regulated by the Public Information Act, the Local Government Act and the Digital Signatures Act. The Public Information Act states that the activities of local governments need to be transparent for the citizens. The Estonian Public Information Act and its difficulties are reviewed in Study VI. The Local Government Organisation Act requires the publication of all legal documents and protocols. In terms of

¹⁶ As Tönnesson (2006) pointed out,[0] local governments played an important role during the first period of independence in Estonia (1918–1940), but during the following 50 years of Soviet occupation, local governments lost their [0]role as “the pillar of democracy,” which is often the case in totalitarian systems (see also Drechsler, 2000). In this period, local governments were directly under the control of the Communist Party and in this environment publicly presented values, attitudes and beliefs had to reflect the views of the Communist Party (see also Veskimägi, 2005).

After Estonia regained its independence, local-level governments were the first to be transformed according to the democratic principles (Tönnesson, 2006; Kettunen and Kungla, 2005). Within a short time, Estonian local governments had to create new organizations and structures.

documents that have been digitally signed there are regulations of accessibility and ease of use.

The National Audit Office in cooperation with e-Governance Academy form the state institution that investigates and evaluates the use of information technology in local governments. Such investigations have concentrated more on technological infrastructure but have also mapped the potential for the development of Internet democracy. With regard to the use of ICTs under the current Local Government Act, and based on the Report by the National Audit Office and e-Governance Academy 2006¹⁷, 221 out of 227 local governments had a web page. One of the main findings of the audit has been that the technological basis of local governments is very different. The much talked about financial difficulties are not fully justified according to the audit. Whereas Harju County, the most successful county in an economic sense, is also successful in the application of ICT in its local governments, the lesser success of Western Estonia in the application of ICT cannot be explained with economic reasons only, as Southern Estonian local governments have managed to acquire the necessary means to upgrade their document management despite relatively lower economic success.

Within the context of the paper at hand, the most important element has been the availability of Internet-based e-participation possibilities in the form of questions-answers between citizens and officials. The Public Information Act, which has been in effect since 2000, establishes the order of replying to enquiries made by the public¹⁸. Still, in many local governments there are no means for doing this electronically on their web pages to this date. In West-Virumaa County, for example, the National Audit Office has established that such a possibility was present in only 5 out of 16 local municipalities. The most direct way of developing participation in democracy would be to do this through deliberative discussion and, yet, there are no discussion boards in most of web pages of the local governments (out of the 227 local municipalities, only 58 had a discussion board at the time of the audit in 2006). Frequently, this is replaced by other formats such as a guestbook or polls, yet these do not really allow for further discussion.

The National Audit Office has also analysed the quality of public services in Estonia, focusing mostly on local governments and their e-services¹⁹. As

¹⁷ State support to local authorities in developing the information society. The summary of the audit report is available on the website of National Audit Office: <http://www.riigikontroll.ee/?lang=en>, Accessed 23 August 2008.

¹⁸ Estonian Public Information Act, <http://wlex.lc.ee/list/AvTS.htm>, accessed 23 August 2008.

¹⁹ "Quality of Public services in the Information Society", Report of the National Audit Office to the Estonian Parliament, accessed 1 November 2007. Full text of the audit report: http://www.riigikontroll.ee/upload/failid/ka_20056_avaliku_teenuse_kvaliteet_english_20080107_final.pdf. (However, it should be kept in mind that only 25 local governments were included in the audit sample.)

mentioned before, the Public Information Act specifies the information that state and local government agencies are obligated to publish on their web sites. At the time of auditing, the web sites of 25 of the audited local governments either lacked information concerning services provided by them or the information was fragmented and not presented in an easily understandable manner. Moreover, the fill-in forms for requesting services and information concerning the completion and submission of the forms and the term of responding to the requests were often located separately from the information concerning the service itself or missing altogether. It is generally possible to submit digitally signed applications for services to local governments. However, the fill-in application forms that can be completed online are often missing or it is overly difficult to save them after completion and submit them with the digital signature. The analysis of application forms published on the web sites of local governments revealed that the application forms are often in a format that only enables the user to print out the blank form or fill it in electronically, but not to save the completed application form without using specific software. A digital signature can be attached to the application and the application can be sent electronically only on the condition that the application is saved as a separate file in the computer. However, of the 25 local governments included in the audit sample, 24 declared to be able to receive digitally signed applications and other documents. The audit reveals that the tools and opportunities of e-government are used by a remarkably smaller share of the population than could be presumed considering the preconditions created.

Thus, the focus of applying information technology on the Estonian local government level has been on technical solutions. There are few examples of e-participation and practices in Estonia and these have not been fully examined either. The thesis analyses the expectations of local government citizens in terms of different services and their actual use, using the City of Tartu as an empirical example. The thesis strives to contribute to the broader discussion about democratic potential of the Internet in enhancing democracy and to the discussion about the preconditions of the society in which such technology can be and is applied. It is also important to establish the additional factors that affect the development of e-democracy when many of the relevant preconditions have been guaranteed, the lack of which has been revealed in prior studies (good access to the Internet, space for deliberative discussions).

The particular study questions are presented below.

I.5. Study questions

Based on the previously presented theoretical approaches and institutional developments, the main goal of the thesis is to trace the contribution of new information technologies in the enhancement of democracy on the local level. Due to the rapid and simultaneous development of several significant processes such as the development of civic and political cultures, the implementation of

technology in the public sector, the significant impact of the new public administration model, Estonia serves as an interesting case for an empirical study of the implementation of Internet democracy in local governments. It has been assumed that, as a consequence, the traditional model of democracy has also been transformed significantly. This larger goal can be divided into two main questions and sub-questions which help answer the main questions.

1) If and how has the development of the Internet affected the development of democracy in Estonia? Does access to information technology increase people's political activity on the local level?

- Do the democratic practices and the higher level of civic culture that have evolved result in different uses of information technology? What are the differences in participating in local Internet forums in Norway, a country with a traditional democracy model, as opposed to Estonia, in which democracy is still in a state of transition? (Study IV, V)
- Is there a connection between the traditional political activeness and e-activeness on the local level? If yes, how does it operate? (Study IV, V)
- How could the use of local online forums by different local citizen groups be characterized? (Study IV, V, VI)
- Which individual practices can be detected in the use of local government forums? How do these differ from the use of traditional media? (Study IV, V, VI)
- Which are the factors that affect people's participation in local forums? (Study IV, V)
- How has institutional development and legislation affected these processes? (Study I, IV, V, VI)

2) Which are people's everyday online practices on the local level? Does information technology enhance consumerist democracy, with emphasis on services, or does it rather support democratic participation? How do these functions of democracy relate to each other?

- Which services does the city government offer citizens? (Study II, III)
- Which are the main services that are most expected from the local government and which are most made use of? (Study II)
- Are people merely interested in practical everyday services or do they also value services which allow them to have a dialogue with the city government and participate in the decision-making process? (Study II, III)
- What are the factors of e-activeness in citizens' interaction with local government? (Study III)

Various studies have been conducted in order to answer these main and sub-questions. Some of the studies have been case-studies based on a pilot study conducted in Tartu.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the proposed study questions, the methodological base of the dissertation has to be varied and in most studies both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used simultaneously (II–VI). In Study I only qualitative methods are used. Studies II and III are based on a pilot study conducted in Tartu.

As *quantitative methods*, Studies IV, V and VI use the research commissioned by the University of Tartu Institute of Journalism and Communication and conducted by the research company Klaster for which the data was collected in February 2007. 803 Estonians aged 18 to 74 participated in the survey. As a research method, face-to-face interviews were used. Respondents were recruited based on the source address method; in rural areas a quota based on age and gender was used. A self-completed survey with a total of 305 variables was used. An additional weight variable was used to match the data with census information.

At the same time, for the articles IV and V data was also collected from Norway for comparison purposes. The Norwegian survey was mailed to a representative sample of people aged 18 to 90 in mid-September 2005. The response rate was 36 percent, resulting in N of 1275. To assess the bias this low response rate might result in, the composition of the sample with regard to age, education and political activity was compared to the data from the official nationwide survey, attaining a more satisfying response rate (70 per cent). The results showed only marginal differences.

Quantitative methods were also used for the research conducted in the City of Tartu and the results serve as a basis for Studies II and III. These studies were completed with the help of the research company Faktum and the City Council of Tartu. As a research method, face-to-face interviews were used. Citizens of Tartu between the ages of 15 and 64 formed the sampling frame. The sample composed of 406 respondents and the results can be extended to the whole population (representative sample). In Study III the scope of the analysis has been broadened and in applying the concept of activeness to this research and in calculating activeness, the indexing method was used, which transformed the sums of different questions into activity indices. These questions were related to the use of e-services such as the use of e-applications, e-mailing to officials, the use of the forum “Official answers,” visiting the city government online meetings and so forth. The indices were then normalized to four: (i) *very passive*, (ii) *relatively passive*, (iii) *relatively active*, (iv) *active*.

In Study VI, Internet user typology²⁰ was composed based on participants’ self-evaluation in terms of how well they consider each named activity in the Internet to describe their Internet use. The value of these ratings on the scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very well) was used as the basis of a two-step cluster analysis

²⁰ The author of the typology is Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (see her thesis Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2006b).

with pre-given numbers of clusters. Several numbers of clusters were tested, but finally 6 were preferred as they held the best explanatory power (see Study **VI**).

Qualitative methods were used as an additional method for Studies **IV**, **V** and **VI**. In Studies **IV** and **V**, in addition to the National Survey described above, Estonian data on motives and assessment was gathered in two further ways. First, those who in the survey claimed that they had participated in online forums and were willing to answer further questions were contacted (89 people from the general sample of 803). The use of one qualitative method led to the use of another. Despite the mentioned willingness, only 12 people actually responded to an e-mail follow-up survey. Therefore, an additional online questioning was conducted concerning motives for participation and assessments of online discussions. An online questionnaire was uploaded to the website of the Department of Journalism and Communication of the University of Tartu, and thereafter invitations to participate were posted in all the existing online forums of Estonian local governments and local newspapers. The latter was performed between April 6th and 16th 2007 and there were 194 respondents. In **Study VI**, the informatization of the political agenda was investigated and analyzed in terms of how the expectations have (or have not) been realized. It combined both text analysis of the 1990s political and public texts about the information society in Estonia and the same database of the survey of the Institute of Journalism and Communication which was used for Studies **IV** and **V**.

As *qualitative data*, **Study I** used a combined method containing elements of both discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis. Based on the criteria formulated according to these methods, a guide for web page analysis was prepared and subsequently the web pages of 15 Estonian county governments were analysed in 2003.

A Case Study: the City of Tartu

Two of the six studies conducted, Studies **II** and **III**, use the case study method which was based on the pilot study performed in the City of Tartu, in the course of which the web page and the services of the city were analysed and local citizens interviewed. The author of the thesis accepts that such a method might raise questions as to the generalizations that could be made concerning the practices of Internet democracy in Estonia. Below the choice of method and reference city are explained.

There have been previous attempts to describe the local use of the Internet and Internet democracy on the basis of a case study of a single city, for instance, some of the projects mentioned in subsection 1.4. have been discussed by Ridell (2002), Coleman (2003), Frissen (1998). Some researchers (Scheufle and Nisbet, 2002) have underlined the lack of specific case studies and have emphasised the need for such studies. This method, which next to mapping the services also maps the practices of their users, allows for the construction of a certain model of Internet communication and services provided in a local government.

The main reason for choosing Tartu was its extensive experience with developing e-services and mobile applications for public services. With a population of 99,882 residing within a territory of 38.8 square kilometres, Tartu is the second largest city in Estonia. One of the reasons behind choosing Tartu is the fact that Tartu is also the regional centre, and because of its general characteristics it is quite similar to many of Europe's regional centres (likewise Tampere in Finland, the examples of which have been provided in the thesis). Thus, the general problems in Tartu are also related to city administration and citizen's involvement which is quite similar to other regional centres. The sense of community is difficult but not impossible to build because they are not as unmanageable as the capitals and the regions around capitals. At the same time, the institutional system is fairly complex and hierarchical and the population that uses the services is rather versatile. The city administration of Tartu is undergoing a comprehensive transformation in trying to provide modern public services and attempting to ensure ease of access and interaction for citizens. The city administration cooperates with companies in order to develop new technologies, applies the most innovative skills and supports the creation and development of spin-off companies. Characteristic to the City of Tartu is its high concentration of IT-firms and IT-specialists. It should also be mentioned that Tartu is the home to Estonia's largest university which is often cited as a distributor of progressive thinking and a developer of innovative activities.

The Tartu pilot study is in a way a model for other Estonian local governments and for broader purposes as well, describing how to develop services and explaining the difficulties and problems that arise with a certain level of technological development.

At the same time, combining the case study method with other methods described in the sub-section enables the fulfilment of the main objectives of the thesis, that is, to trace the contribution of new information technology to the enhancement of democracy on the local level. The main results of the Studies will be described next in two different sub-sections, according to the two main questions and sub-questions presented in subsection 1.5.

3. FINDINGS

The empirical findings are introduced in two chapters. The general tendencies of the contribution of new information technology to increasing political activity and enhancing democracy and the general use of local online forums and motivations for that are presented first. Following that the practices of local e-services and factors of e-activeness are described.

3.1. The general tendencies of the contribution of technology in increasing political activity and democracy on the local level

The theoretical chapter of the thesis provided an overview of the development of Estonian civic culture and political culture. This effect is best outlined through a comparison with a country with long democratic traditions. Thus, in order to evaluate how developed democratic practices and a stronger civic culture leads to different uses of information technology on the local level, Studies **IV** and **V** compare the use of local online forums in Estonia and in Norway. It was expected that due to the different political experiences of these countries their civic cultures might have given rise to different forms of political participation. Norway was chosen, as despite the differences in political, historical and civic cultural developments, Norway and Estonia have a similar institutional background, including the role and position of local governments. Also, at the time of the studies, the indicators of Internet penetration were similar, as 74 per cent of the people in Estonia use the Internet and 80 per cent use it in Norway.

The results of Studies **IV** and **V** demonstrate that both in Estonia and Norway the level of participation in online forums appears to be low compared to other traditional forms of political participation. It is apparent that the structure of communicative spaces in the two countries is different. A significantly higher number of Norwegians take part in traditional actions and demonstrations or in signing petitions (52 per cent of Norwegians have participated in a political action, whereas in Estonia that number is only 17²¹) (Study **IV**). The preliminary assumption that Estonians, whose political culture has not been so much affected by the traditional media, would welcome the use of new media was not justified – only a slightly larger number of (six per cent) Estonians participate in local government forums compared to Norwegians.

²¹ The question pertained to actions, demonstrations, petitions and so forth that are related to local politics.

To study the relationship between online and offline participation on the local level, indexes of general political activity and online political activity were constructed (Studies **IV**, **V**). The results indicate that although in both countries e-activeness rises with political offline activeness, the situation is more varied in Estonia. If in Norway people with only high offline political activeness can be considered e-active, then in Estonia this is not necessarily a precondition for e-activeness. In Estonia even people whose offline political activeness is considered average are more e-active than Norwegians whose offline political activity is high. Six per cent of the Estonians whose offline political activeness can be considered non-existent are still e-active, at least in terms of local issues.

With regard to the political activity of different citizen groups then, as Studies **IV** and **V** indicate, in Estonia young people (aged 18 to 29) are remarkably more e-active than those in the next age group. There is also a marked decrease in online activity in the age group 50 to 69. In Norway, age seems to have a lesser effect on online participation – people between the ages of 30 and 49 are just as active as younger people, and the next age group (59 to 69) is only slightly less active. The distribution is more uneven in Estonia compared to Norway in terms of connections between online political activity and education as well. There is almost no difference in online activity between different educational groups in Norway, whereas in Estonia online activity rises remarkably with education. At the same time, Studies **IV** and **V** demonstrate that income does not correlate with online participation in either country.

In Study **VI** the survey data collected in Estonia for Studies **IV** and **V** is combined with Internet user types elaborated by Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2006) in order to focus on the diversity of the local online practices and to compare the different Internet users and non-users in Estonia (for more details see Figure 2 in Study **VI**).

Based on the average results on traditional and new media participation scales, a two-dimensional matrix of scales has been drawn: active-passive in traditional participation and active-passive in new media participation on the local level. Figure 1 provides an overview of the relative placements of Internet users and non-users on these scales. The relative centre point is established by the average result on both scales.

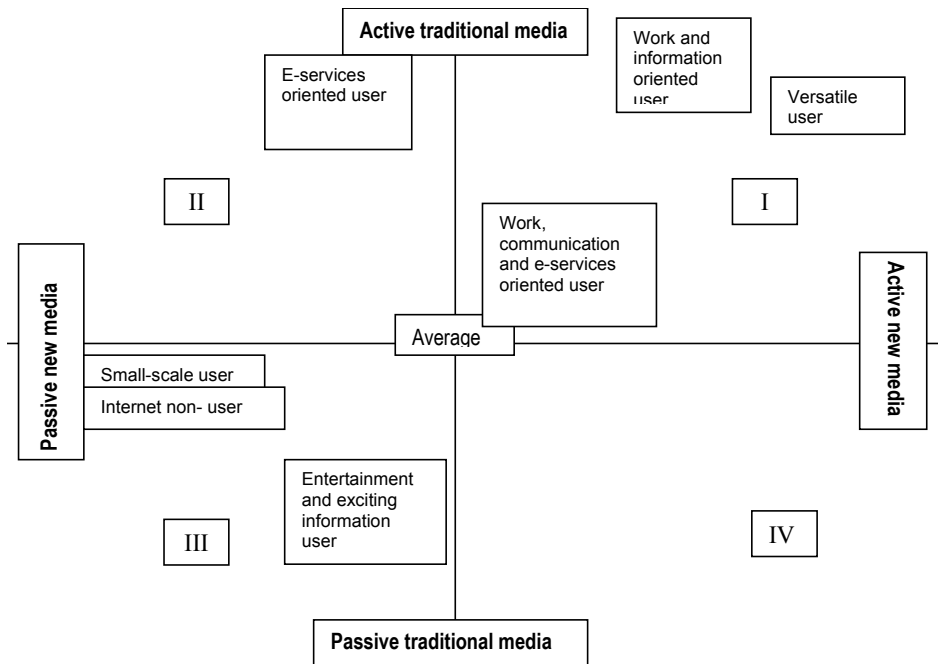


Figure 1. Internet user types and non-users on the activity-passivity scales for participation in traditional and new media. The placement is based on mean values²² and the relative position is in relation to the average for the total population.

The elaborated figure shows clearly the dynamics of Internet participation on the local level.

One can see that in the first field there are versatile Internet users, work and information oriented Internet users, and work, communication and e-services oriented users. They are more active than average on both participation scales. E-services users, who are relatively passive Internet users, are also passive in terms of e-participation, but they are active in participating through traditional means. Entertainment and exciting information users are marginally more active in e-participation but, overall, they are still in the third field with Internet non-users and small-scale users. The latter two are nearly on the average level when it comes to traditional participation. The corner of the matrix where there should be users active in the Internet and passive in the traditional participation is empty. On the one hand, this indicates that at the moment the Internet is not taken seriously as the sole participatory medium and it has not replaced other means of participation. On the other hand, it also shows that those active in the area of participation seek online complementary channels to their existing practices and online medium has not created purely online participants. How-

²² The average means: 0.39 for traditional participation and 0.29 for new media participation (the maximum was 2 for both indexes).

ever, Study **VI** indicates that the number of active and versatile users is on the increase compared to earlier studies (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2006a, 2006b). Despite the overall passivity in the fields of participation, the active and pragmatic Internet users have also developed ways to participate in online environments.

One of the preconditions for transforming citizens into active public agents is their motivation. The question of motives for online participation can be related to the identity dimension of a civic culture, more specifically to a sense of empowerment, political agency and political efficacy. If citizens feel empowered, and if they believe their voices will be heard and have an impact, influencing political decisions is more likely to be a motive for participation. The motive for participation can also be related to participatory values, such as the value of civic duty. If this value is strong in the population, more people will state some kind of obligation as a motive behind participating in political discussion.

Studies **IV** and **V** indicate that motives for participation for Norwegians and Estonians differ (for more details see Table 3, Study **IV**). Even though Estonians and Norwegians agree on the most significant motive, that is, on the desire to criticise something they have seen or experienced, they differ in what they consider to be other important motives. For Norwegians, it is important to participate in ongoing debates (the most important motive for 21 per cent) and to clarify their positions to others who participate in these debates (the most important motive for 17 per cent).

The impact that new media has had in Estonia is best illustrated by the fact that whereas Norwegians do not usually comment online on something that they read in traditional media, this is the second most important motive with Estonians (35 per cent of Estonians claim that the motive “I read/heard/saw something in the media that I wanted to comment on” has been their most important motive). One can conclude that traditional media has a significant impact on the development of online media and the level of e-participation and vice-versa – new media has created a new public space which is occupied by Estonians. Even though the participants from the two countries differ in the motives they regard most important, they do not differ in terms of the motives they regard unimportant. The most unimportant motives for both Estonians and Norwegians are motives of political agency (“Promote a political party or an organisation”). This also illustrates Estonia’s increasing similarity to traditional democracy, where participation in formal political organisations is less relevant than participation in non-formal ones.

Studies **I** and **VI** investigate policy documents which set the basic aims and define the bodies responsible for the different sectors. As is stated in Study **VI**, the regulative framework, legislation and opportunities offered by the state influence peoples’ behaviour and attitude towards the role the technology plays in their everyday and political life. The question is, how much their actual practices reflect or shape the strategic aims set in the documents. Study **VI** indicates that the policy documents in Estonia, concerning information society,

had a more or less technologically deterministic viewpoint which is not surprising as in terms of the general technological change in political and economic world, technological determinism is still a prevailing ideology in the debates concerning information society. As the theoretical sub-section indicates, many academic debates about local Internet democracy also rather concentrate on questions of access or cost reduction (Odendaal, 2003; Akman, 2005). As it is stated in Study VI, in the vein of such technologically deterministic approach Estonia adopted a very top-down approach to the implementation of ICTs as part of its information society policies, similarly to other places in the world. In the policy texts of the 1990s, people were considered important actors in the diffusion and acceptance of new technologies, but they were viewed mostly as passive recipients who were expected to adopt the created infrastructure step by step. In implementing the policies, the supporting actions for a better acquisition of the technologies were often missing. For example, providing schools with computers as the initial aim of the Tiger Leap programme (see the above explanation in footnote 8) did not encompass curriculum development in its launching stage.

The local Estonian laws that regulate the form and content of the web pages of local governments and should also aid the development of local democracy are discussed briefly in the theory chapter. The central one of these acts is the Public Information Act which should guarantee the presence of at least one precondition of local democracy – that the information concerning the activities of local governments is accessible and updated, that the decision-making process of local governments is transparent. As Study I demonstrates, the law has shortcomings, it does not stress the need for participation opportunities to a sufficient extent. The law, although it clearly lists all the information that has to be present on the web pages, does not determine a general structure for the presentation of that information. The web pages that are designed on the basis of that law are difficult to use. One of the greatest shortcomings of Estonian legislation in general is that no consequences follow if certain regulatory acts are not adhered to. This is still true in 2008 when eight years have passed since the Public Information Act was initially passed and still many of the web pages of local governments and of other state institutions do not actually follow that law.

Even though the studies conducted do not easily render a unified generalisation in terms of the central question of the thesis (to what extent has the onslaught of the Internet changed democracy in Estonia), it is still possible to describe some of the tendencies. Studies IV and V demonstrate that the introduction of the Internet has definitely affected the development of public spaces – Estonians are more passive in traditional channels than Norwegians. Likewise, the use of information technology in Estonia has changed people's political activity on the local level. There are more people in Estonia who are inactive in traditional levels but are still e-active. Although skills are evenly distributed in an old democracy, there are some tendencies that in the case of Estonia prove that information technology indeed has an accelerating effect on

political activeness. Nevertheless, Study VI, which focuses on the specific practices of Internet users in Estonia, reveals that the new media is mainly an alternative.

3.2. The practices of local e-services and factors of e-activeness

One of the main focuses in Studies II and III, which use the case study method, is the question, which services do citizens expect from their local government and, if we aim to increase people's participation on the local level, which are the factors of e-activeness in citizens' interaction with local government? It was mentioned that the City of Tartu was the basis of a pilot study.

As any use of the Internet begins with access to the Internet, this was investigated in Study II. As Study II demonstrates, the general indicators about Internet use are very high in Tartu – 82 percent of the population have access to the Internet. Whereas 99 per cent of younger people (ages 15 to 24) use the Internet, it is still noteworthy that, for example, 43 per cent of the people in the ages of 55 to 64 also use the Internet. With regard to the social status, the most active Internet users are students and officials. The use by retired people, executives and workers is equal.

As part of background information, Study II also maps general communication practices. According to the results, 43 per cent of the population of Tartu states that the Internet is the source from where they get most of their information about the city. According to the study, 26 per cent of the population of Tartu visit the official web site of the city government at least once a week. Analysing the users' search patterns, Study II indicates that 53 per cent of the citizens have never searched information concerning local power. Rather, they are interested in searching information about entertainment and so forth. Among the citizens, the web site is graded highest for its attractive appearance and lowest for its services and opportunities to participate.

Good preconditions for increasing citizens' e-participation are present – most citizens have access to the Internet and the city government also offers a number of services. As Study II (see also Study III) shows, city government offers services that could be divided into a) services that enable citizens to organize their everyday life more efficiently (*e.g.* pay their bills, fill in different forms and complete applications, search for public transportation information, make doctor's appointments) and b) services that enable citizens to participate and provide the city government with an opportunity to give feedback (of which there are only two in Tartu worth mentioning – the “official answers” discussion board and the opportunity to watch city council meetings online that could be viewed as services that affect democratic practices). Study II reveals a low use of the different services that the city government offers. Even the use of practical everyday services such as e-applications is very low, not to mention

the services attributed to participatory democracy such as the use of the discussion board and watching online meetings.

Study II also plainly demonstrates how important it is to provide citizens with an opportunity to comment in forums. If this is not provided, they cannot really be called forums. At the time when Study II was conducted, there was an open discussion board on the City of Tartu web page. There citizens could comment every question or problem directed at the city council. The use of the forum in such a form was active. All the topics were grouped and, thus, the forum was very easy to use. During the study, the city government changed the format of the forum, despite the discussions concerning the necessity of forums that had taken place prior to and during the study with the city government. It became a question-answer page between citizens and officials, a one-way communication model where other citizens could not comment on the topics that had been raised. This significantly decreased the use of the forum and although Study II shows that 15 per cent of citizens consider the forum to be important and 61 per cent consider it relatively important, only 4 per cent of actually used the discussion board to communicate with the city government (have used it sometimes, have asked something). 32 per cent have sometimes read other people's questions and the answers that officials have given, but 95 per cent have never asked anything on the board and 66 per cent have never read it themselves.

Study II reveals the same tendency with another service mentioned earlier that encourages e-participation – the opportunity to observe city government meetings online. When citizens were asked whether this was an important service, 35 per cent replied that it was very important or relatively important. However, when they were asked if they actually used this opportunity, the results showed that 91 per cent had never done so.

In fact, the same tendency can be seen with practical everyday services. For instance, whereas 85 per cent of citizens consider the opportunity to make doctor's appointments on the city web page very important or relatively important, then in reality only 10 per cent have used this service (it is important to note that the target group that could use this service is much narrower than with other services as it is mainly aimed at elderly people). The difference between the importance of a service and the actual use of it is lower with, for example, interactive maps provided by the city government – the importance of these is stated by 94 per cent of the citizens and 24 to 46 per cent use the maps regularly.

One conclusion could be that people tend to idealise technology – the actual use is lower than what they expect it might be. The same tendency is revealed in Study II in terms of mobile phone services that the city government offers in cooperation with mobile phone companies. However, as these services are, at the moment, everyday services and do not belong under the main focus of the thesis (services that enable civic practices), these results have not been thoroughly discussed in the present cover article.

Whereas Study II raises the issue that despite good technological basis and the existence of different means, the citizens' activity is not very high with everyday services, not to mention with services that enable democratic participation, Study III establishes the factors that affect e-participation. Study II only demonstrates how much one or other service is used. In Study III, the respondents were divided on the basis of their answers (see the formation of the activism index; the methodology is described in more detail in the Methodology section) on the activism scale and, as a result, it has been found that 42 out of the 406 respondents could be considered e-active in terms of their local government. However, 147 are very passive, giving a negative answer to all the questions pertaining to e-participation.

When the factors that directly influence citizens' e-activeness were analysed for Study III, a statistical link between activism and the general length of time spent online was identified. The e-activeness of the people who started to use the Internet only in that year or the year before is modest and they form the biggest part of the non-active users. At the same time, the people who have been using the Internet for 5 or more years form the biggest part of the relatively active and active users, and among them there are considerably less people who are very passive.

Study III does not indicate that socio-democratic characteristics like sex, age and ethnic origin play a significant role in e-activeness. The link between social status and e-activeness is as follows – retired people are most passive, they are not represented in the active group and are followed by workers. It is also worth mentioning that university students form the largest part of the relatively passive group and are frequently among the very passive citizens. Study III also identifies that, for example, entrepreneurs do not participate in online channels. Perhaps they are the e-service users who are not oriented to e-participation, but rather to the consumption of everyday services.

Thus, the Studies reveal that although in the pilot city the technological preconditions for involving citizens in the democratic decision-making process through the Internet are present, at the moment citizens have only the opportunity to perform mainly everyday consumerist practices. Citizens almost entirely lack opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes of the city. One can participate passively (by watching city council meetings online, by asking officials questions), but the discussion board as it exists at the present time is not a space for deliberative discussion. Such consumerist practices definitely develop citizens' technical skills, as they probably develop their belief and faith in technology, but they do not offer enough possibilities to develop democratic skills and values.

4. DISCUSSION

The doctoral thesis focuses on a topic that has merited considerable attention in the past twenty years, that is, Internet democracy. However, theoretical discussions (e.g. Bekkers, 1999) are more widespread than research articles which would be based on empirical data and could therefore confirm the existence of Internet democracy as a distinct phenomenon or which could analyze its preconditions and potential or deny its existence.

It has been stressed before by several authors (see e.g. Hoff *et al.*, 2003) that the existence and opportunities of Internet democracy are most evident on the local level. Thus, the thesis at hand focuses on the implementation of Internet democracy in Estonian local governments. By looking at the local government services that potentially increase Internet democratic participation and by looking at the users of these services and their patterns of use, the thesis aims to establish whether it is possible to talk about such a new form of democracy as consumer democracy.

Internet democracy is not born out of thin air, meaning that its potential cannot be assessed without mapping the receptiveness of the society to democracy as a whole, the course of the development of the civic culture, and the traditional participatory practices.

The development of Internet democracy in Estonia has been divided into three periods or phases that are looked at in the context of the general Estonian transitional process which includes important milestones in the development of the Estonian political and civic cultures.

The first period, *representative or institutional democracy*, matches the stages of forming expectations, making the transition from an old system to a new one and creating a new system in the periodisation of the transitional process. In the development of Internet democracy this phase is characterized by the creation of a good technological basis and preconditions for the development of Internet democracy in local governments and in Estonia as a whole (Tiger Leap Programme *etc.*). However, several important activities that would fasten the later transition to participatory democracy were overlooked at this stage. For example, the Tiger Leap Programme that has become the symbol of today's e-Estonia and is the basis for Estonia's international recognition, as well as being one of the most important projects in terms of further substantial development, was not supported at the beginning by additional actions such as, for instance, by developing and applying a specific Information Society curriculum.

The period of institutional or representative democracy in Estonia is also characterized by arbitrary local rules and the non-adherence to the most important value of that stage – transparency. Thus, for example, local governments did not follow the laws that regulated the application of new information technologies (Public Information Act). Since local governments had a relatively marginal role at that time (the infrastructure and access in the field of information technology was guaranteed through the cooperation of the central

government and private companies), their primary goal in terms of information technology should have been the distribution of thorough information with the broader goal of educating an informed group of citizens.

Although there are authors (*e.g.* Fuchs, 2008) who doubt the necessity of this phase in the development of Internet democracy entirely, it is nevertheless vital for the further development of Internet democracy. Fuchs (2008) claims that in the development of Internet democracy one can begin with the phase of participatory democracy and that e-voting which is the so-called 'killer application' of this phase of Internet democracy in Estonia has no impact on increasing e-participation. Although the thesis at hand does not fully support Macintosh's enthusiasm (Macintosh, 2004) either, it is still an important phase in participatory democracy. It is visible in Estonia that with its openness and receptiveness to information technology, representative or institutional democracy as a technical application has increased the number of people who vote, involving people whose general political activity is low and who would not have voted otherwise (see *e.g.* Vassil, 2007). However, it is important to view the matter as a process, as with every new e-voting the communicational space surrounding it has also changed. In 2005, e-voting was really just another technical opportunity in the local elections and the election process itself and the discussion surrounding it still mainly took place in traditional media channels. However, in the 2007 parliamentary elections it was already visible that most of the debating occurred on the very active blogosphere. Still, most of the communication occurred in a unilateral form, that is, it was essentially a monologue. It will be interesting to observe in which directions matters develop by 2009 when new local elections take place in Estonia.

In the described developmental phase of Internet democracy, Estonian e-development merited great external attention, relying heavily on external images as many of the initiatives that were internationally praised were actually elaborations of traditional ways of participating in politics. In reality people saw that fundamentally nothing had changed and that their part in decision-making had not increased.

The Estonian transitional process proceeded through the first three periods rather quickly and the same is true for the development of Internet democracy that likewise progresses quickly through the first phase and reaches the second phase labelled *consumer Internet democracy* in the present thesis, using the terminology proposed by Taylor and Bellamy (1998). It is the opinion of the author that this phase is likewise an inevitable and probably necessary phase in reaching *participatory Internet democracy*. The fast progression to this phase was aided by the establishment of a new model of public administration in Estonian local governments which introduced consumerist values into public administration and, thus, shaped the relationship between local governments and their citizens. Whereas local governments had had a relatively minimal role in the previous phase, in the second phase it is important to shape practices through offering services that meet people's expectations and to build trust towards technology as a whole and towards a specific local government. The

precondition for the development of this phase is the existence of services and this, in the case of Estonia, generally meant the availability of electronic services. Whereas in the first phase, people did not experience any changes in their actual life due to technology, in this phase they admit that there have been more substantial changes that are, at first, limited to facilitating only a few practical aspects of their life (for example, with the help of e-Tax Office). In this phase the space (the practical outlet of which is the web page) has remained the same, but as it is the gate through which people gain access to all the services offered, the expectations in terms of the quality of its form and content have grown considerably. There are authors who acknowledge the existence of this phase (see *e.g.* Ridell, 2002) and even its inevitability (Bellamy and Taylor, 1998), but they are outnumbered by the authors who consider the “service-before-democracy-later,” which has also been the course in Estonia, a negative phenomenon (see Clift, 2002). However, as it has become evident with several projects concerning local Internet democracy (Docter and Dutton, 1998), the opposite approach does not fully work either. Thus, one has to propose and analyze alternatives. The present thesis suggests the concept of an intermediary stage in the development of Internet democracy as one such alternative, even though the occurrence and necessity of this phase is confirmed by few authors only, as was mentioned before, and even those authors underline some critical points in the mentioned development (Bellamy and Taylor, 1998).

The main criticism that Bellamy and Taylor have levelled against this approach is that information technology could become a control mechanism. Their apprehension has become a reality in terms of the undesired marketing that reaches us daily through the Internet, whether from banks, businesses or other institutions. Still, on the local level this argument is perhaps not so important, as in Estonia one can detect an increase in the social role of the local community and on that level no significant anonymity can be hoped without technology, especially due to the smallness of Estonian local communities.

Whereas by the end of the first Internet democracy stage users have access, share a common space, have applications necessary to fulfil their elementary civic duties, then by the end of the second phase people’s trust in technology has ideally grown with the help of the services that meet people’s needs and they have accepted technology as an everyday part of their life. However, many of the technological possibilities such as, for instance, the establishment of the city planning games (an example from the city of Tampere) have remained only ideas in Estonia. The technological opportunities for involving citizens have not been really applied and most of the opportunities for people to voice their opinion are illusory. However, one has to admit that there is a contradiction here between the normative ideal that Habermas and his colleagues (*e.g.* Habermas 1962; Dahlgren, 2001, 2005) had of public spheres, and today’s reality. The possibility of Habermas’s public sphere today is challenged by the fact that corporate power and consumerism are more prevalent today than ever before. It is still important to offer forums on the local level, even if it happens in the form of the previously mentioned planning games, as sites for ‘play-ground’

democracy. In addition, it is important to moderate such forums. However, if clear boundaries were set on the forums in terms of which topics and areas require discussions and which do not, this could further decrease people's motivation. After all, the very nature of consumerism requires flattery and the demonstration of actual benefit, whereas at the same time it frequently remains a game, as it does not increase the actual desire to participate.

The consumer democracy concept proposed by Bellamy and Taylor suggests that a citizen has to be approached as a whole-person (see also Bekkers and Zouridis, 1999: 186), meaning that one has to gather all the data concerning a person. This approach has been applied with some state services (the Tax Office, parental benefit) where data from different databases has been collected. However, the application of the next phase of the whole-person concept would mean having an overview of a person's political and private preferences and, for instance, offering people personal web pages where there would only be the sub-topics that are of interest to a specific person. At the same time, one should question the extent to which control over people's preferences is justified and what such an approach would require? The presence of such questions once again demonstrates the fragile boundary between the public and private spheres, as well as between the political and the private in the Internet era. Some authors argue that understanding the political significance of online minority communities calls for an expanded concept of what we mean by "political" (Chadwick, 2006). "Online talk mirrors talk in our everyday lives; it is often banal, sometimes gossipy, periodically awkward and conflictual, and only sporadically political in the formal sense. Sadly, as in real life, we may also find that our views are simply ignored. The relatively open, unstable, and ruleless nature of virtual communities might accentuate some of these aspects" (Chadwick, 2006:108).

As mentioned before, it is considerably more difficult to explain the benefits of participation than it is to explain the benefits of consuming practical everyday services. Citizens' passiveness is a global phenomenon (Clift, 2002). Still, the main reason why a transition to the third – *participatory Internet democracy* – has not occurred is that at the time when citizens are already in the consumerist phase in their development and slowly growing through that, the officials and politicians are still in the phase of institutional Internet democracy. This means that although the latter design different services, they have not realised that in reality there is no virtuous, inherently active and rational super-citizen who would act in harmony with general values. Instead, citizens have to be motivated with different means and they have to be guided and helped. It should be realised that the civic culture in Estonia is very young and one can expect certain 'children's diseases' such as fairly personal comments on discussion boards or non-political discourse. Such reasons on behalf of officials for closing forums are not acceptable. Many authors (Fuchs 2008; Dahlgren and Olsson, 2008; Beck 1986) stress the inseparability of the private and the political spheres and the fact that participation need not nor can be limited to

decision-making. Rather, it includes forming knowledge, values, images and visions, communication and self-realization.

If one was to ask whether this intermediary stage in consumerist Internet democracy is necessary or does it instead cause or direct developments in an entirely different direction, then to a great extent the consumerist democracy is a very logical development with strong local government systems such as the Estonian system or those in the Nordic countries and in other states of the European Union. When one additionally takes into account the strong tendency to implement the model of New Public Management on the local level and the impact of consumerism that it entails, the development of consumerist democracy seems inevitable. The reason why it has not been possible to make a fast and smooth transition to participatory democracy in Estonia despite good conditions is that many of the actions that support the application of information technology (workshops, communicational activities) have been left undone in the appropriate phases. The potential of digital democracy to help shape rational, involved citizens was discovered in Estonia too late, just as the alternatives to the dominant liberal top-down politics were neglected for too long, which has led to people's further alienation from politics which in turn enhanced the tendencies of undemocratic technocracy in the government (*e.g.* Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2008).

Recent signs of the awakening of Estonian civil society both in the real and virtual life, from collecting signatures against the War of Independence Victory Monument to the song festival "Time to Notice," could be seen as an evidence of a new phase in the development of the civil society as well as Internet democracy. In many of these instances the event has been initiated by a media outlet but the Internet has been the outlet and mediator. Some of the results of the Studies, when placed within the context of these developments, demonstrate that the traditional public sphere and the Internet public sphere are rather intertwined in Estonia and, thus, one can state that the arrival of the Internet in Estonia has affected the sphere outside the Internet and the civic culture as a whole.

The question within the formed and lately fast-developing spontaneous e-democracy is whether the institutions and politicians are willing and able to keep up with these rapid changes, as well as the question of how this might be done best. However, there are encouraging developments in this kind of top-down direction, for example, the National Audit Office which is currently drafting the e-Citizen Charter and has given the public the opportunity to participate in the wording of the charter on its web page www.riigikontroll.ee. With similar motives, the State Chancellery has initiated a discussion on the web site www.osale.ee on the topic of "Everyone's Rights in an e-State" and according to the information of 23 August 2008, 7356 people had read it in a couple of days. One can conclude that people are interested in it. On the same site there is also a design contest "Simple Life – Help Make Public Services Better" which also indicates that officials have adopted a more active attitude.

In Figure 2 all the processes in Estonia concerning the formation of democracy and Internet democracy are depicted on the basis of empirical studies and are placed in the framework of the concepts presented in the first parts of this introductory article. The figure helps illustrate the most important factors that have affected the development of Internet democracy, the directions in which applications have evolved, the central values of every stage and the changes that have occurred in communicational spaces in the course of its development through different stages.

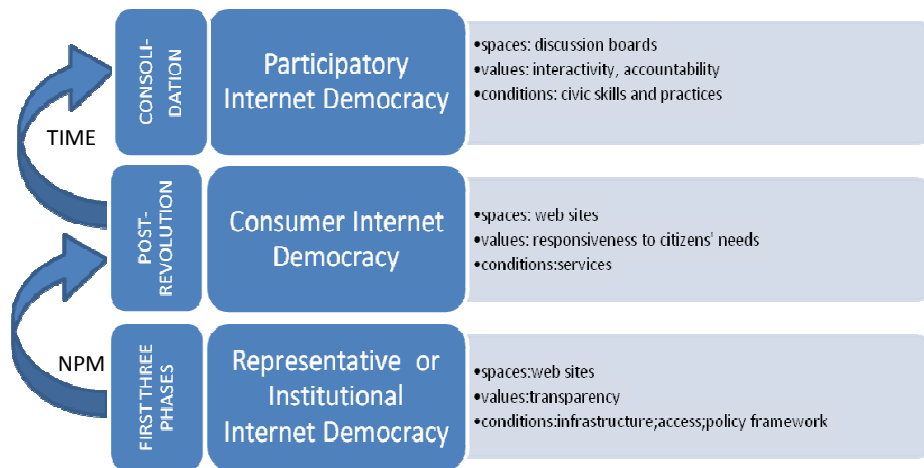


Figure 2. The three phases of Internet Democracy in Estonia

There is a possibility that the model described above does not apply to most Estonian local governments as such and this is a possible shortcoming of the chosen case study. The aim has been to design a developmental model with certain phases for others to use, as an analogy of Estonia as a whole would be impossible to write, as the level of development is very different in different local governments in a technical, social and mental sense and with both citizens and officials and politicians. It also has to be taken into account that the choice of pilot city made in the thesis might create difficulties in interpreting the collected data. The topic of the activeness of young people will need a separate consideration as the results in different studies have been slightly contradictory. Studies **IV** and **V** demonstrate that the Estonian youth is fairly e-active in forums on the local level compared to older age groups and to similar data from Norway. At the same time, this finding contradicts the results of Study **II** which establishes that the young people who live in Tartu were passive in their use of online applications. A possible explanation could be that the difference occurred due to the fact that the second study was conducted two years later. Or this could be the point at which the differences between Tartu and other local governments become visible. A considerable per cent of the young people that

are registered in Tartu have only a so to say learning relationship with Tartu and have much stronger connections with their birthplace, and are possibly much more active there. Still, the relative activity of young people found in Studies **IV** and **VI** is deceptive in some sense. When their individual practices were analyzed in Study **VI**, it was found that in terms of Internet use in general and considering the fact that this group spends considerably more time online, their activities are still more oriented to personal matters and to seeking excitement and entertainment.

5. CONCLUSIONS

I. If and how has the development of the Internet affected the development of democracy in Estonia? Does access to information technology increase people's political activity on the local level?

- Strong civic cultures and developed democratic practices do not necessarily lead to significant differences in the application of information technologies. Both in Estonia and Norway the level of participation in online forums appears to be low. Still, the difference in the communicative spaces of these countries becomes clear – Norwegians take more part in traditional media and in political actions (demonstrations, signing petitions *etc.*). In Estonia, however, where the role and impact of traditional media has not been significant in the political culture, the activity in terms of new media is likewise rather low (Studies IV and V).
- Although in both of these societies e-activeness rises with political activeness, this relationship in Estonia is more intriguing (expressive). People with low traditional political activeness seem to be considerably more e-active in local issues (Studies IV and V).
- In countries with stronger civic cultures, Internet activity is distributed more evenly among different age groups and among groups with different levels of education. In Estonia, online activity decreases significantly from the age 50 onwards and increases with education (Studies IV, V and VI).
- People who are more active Internet users in general are also more e-active in local issues, although people who are completely oriented towards using services are more likely to be active in traditional channels. Those who actively participate seek online channels as complementary means to their existing practices. The online medium has not created purely online participants. However, the number of active and versatile users is on the increase compared to earlier studies. Despite the overall passivity in participation, the active and pragmatic Internet users have also developed ways of participating in online environments (Study VI).
- The motives that affect people's participation in local forums are relatively similar in countries with different histories and developments of civic cultures – the feeling of civic duty motivates people to comment when they see something (negative) that they wish to criticize. Again the difference in communicational spaces becomes evident, as Estonians who are relatively inactive in traditional media (for example, in writing letters to newspapers) are much more active commentators than Norwegians in online forums where they comment on topics that they have read or heard about in the traditional media. The motives of political agency for online participation are unimportant in both societies (Studies IV and V).
- There is a considerable body of laws in Estonia that regulates the information society and there is long-term experience in applying various acts. At

the same time, the policy acts that deal with information society hold a rather technologically deterministic approach and the necessity of creating opportunities of participation is not stressed sufficiently. Even though there are acts which specifically regulate the management of local government web pages (for instance, the Public Information Act), there are many local governments that do not follow these guidelines and, also, the content of these acts does not guarantee that electronic communication follows elementary democratic principles – that there would be accessible and updated information available concerning the work of the local government or that the decision-making process would be transparent (Studies I, IV, V and VI).

It can be concluded that with the use of information technology there are bound to be changes in communicational *spaces* that are inseparable components of civic cultures and democracies. It can be claimed that Estonians who are considerably more passive in using traditional channels, are more active in using some of the possibilities of the new media. At the same time, the existence of a *space* does not in itself affect democratic practices, education (both formal and civic education) and traditions also have a role in this. Even though practices are more evenly distributed in the old democracy, it can be said that information technology has enhanced the spread of political activity in Estonia.

II. Which are people’s everyday online practices on the local level? Does information technology enhance consumerist democracy, with emphasis on services, or does it rather support democratic participation? How do these functions of democracy relate to each other?

- Most of the services that the city government offers its citizens are aimed at organizing the citizens’ everyday life in a more efficient manner. In Tartu, there are two services that could be classified as services that enable democratic practices. One of them is the opportunity to watch city council meetings online and the other is a discussion board named “Official Answers” (Study II).
- The use of the practical everyday services that the city government offers is relatively low and the use of services attributed to participatory democracy is very low. It is also noticeable that there is a great discrepancy between the services that are considered important and the services that are actually used (Study II).
- The difference between actually using services and considering them important becomes especially visible with services of e-participation. With practical services, the assessment of their necessity is more based on their actual use and more compatible with reality in some sense. The reasons behind the difference in assessment and actual use could be that people tend to idealize technology and to overestimate their needs, time and so forth. However, the more important reason could be that the participatory services

fail to meet people's expectations (the lack of an opportunity to establish dialogues between citizens, the officials' passivity in answering people's questions *etc.*), as was the case in the pilot city (Study **II**).

- The factor that directly affects local e-activeness is the general time of using Internet – the longer people have been using the Internet, the more e-active they are in communicating with their local government. Although different citizen groups have different levels of e-activeness (retired people were expectedly found to be more passive), other factors were not found to be as significant (Study **III**).

Everyday online practices on the local level demonstrate that the relationship between a citizen and the local government is primarily a service offerer-customer relationship. There are very few services that allow democratic participation and although citizens do display a readiness to participate in the decision-making process and the activities of the city, the current opportunities to participate obviously do not inspire meaningful e-participation. In the transition from consumer democracy to participatory democracy the temporal factor is as important as the improvement of the content and quality of the services.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Interneti-demokraatia rakendamine Eesti kohalikes omavalitsustes

Interneti-demokraatia on nüüdseks juba aastakümneid huvitanud nii akadeemilisi kui poliitilisi ringkondi. Samas on käsitlusi kohaliku tasandi Interneti-demokraatiast vähem ning tihti taanduvad need vaid teenuste ja nende pakkujate analüüsile (vt. ka Musso *et al.*, 2000), keskendumata inimeste igapäevastele Interneti-põhiste suhetele oma omavalitsusega, mis on antud väitekirja fookuseks. Lisaks otsitakse käesolevas doktoritöös tasakaalu kahe erineva lähene-mise vahel kohaliku omavalitsuse kontekstis, millest ühe järgi on oluline keskenduda vaid teenustele (Odendaal, 2003; Akman *et al.*, 2005) ja teine rõhutab kohaliku omavalitsuse ja kodaniku suhte uuele tasemele viimise olulisust (Jaeger, 2003; Torres ja Pina, 2005).

Kohaliku Interneti-demokraatia uurimisel tuleb kasuks interdistsiplinaarne lähenemine, arvesse tuleb võtta kogu ühiskonna vastuvõtlikkust demokraatiale, kodanikukultuuri arengut ja demokraatlikke praktikaid, millega tegeleb peamiselt politoloogia. Samuti tugineb väitekirj erinevatele kommunikatsioon, avaliku halduse ja e-valitsuse teoreetilistele käsitlustele, demonstreerides ilmekalt, kuidas on fookused nii infopoliitikates kui ka avalikus halduses Eesti-suguses uues demokraatias aastate lõikes muutunud.

Eesti muudab huvitavaks uurimisobjektiks just erinevatesse paradigmadesse kuuluvate protsesside üheaegsus, mis kõik mõjutavad üksteist. Empiirilisel on Eesti puhul huvitav uurida, kuidas on poliitilise ja kodanikukultuuri üheaegne arenemine infotehnoloogia jõulise arenguga ja rakendamisega avalikus sektoris mõjutanud inimeste igapäevaseid Interneti kasutamise praktikaid. Kasutuspraktikatele avaldas mõju veel üks paralleelselt toimunud protsess – uue avaliku halduse mudeli juurutamine, mis mõjutas eriti kohalikke omavalitsusi ja nende suhtlust kodanikega. Seetõttu, et protsessid, mis lääneriikides toimusid üksteisele järgnedes, langesid Eestis ajaliselt kokku, on ka Eesti Interneti-demokraatia arengus täheldatavad eripärad. Sarnaselt transitsiooniprotsessile läbiti Eestis kiiresti *institutsionaalse Interneti-demokraatia* faas ja jõuti järgmisse faasi, mille olen väitekirjas, tuginedes mõnede teiste autoritele (Bellamy ja Taylor, 1998; Ridell, 2002), nimetanud *Interneti kliendidemokraatiaks*. Mainitud autorid siiski peamiselt vaid mainivad selle uue demokraatialiigi võimalikkust, analüüsimate seda süvitsi. Minu hinnangul on see tekkinud uus Interneti-demokraatia liik Eestis unikaalne ja minu töö üks peamisi **eesmärke on vastata küsimusele, kas sellised arengud Interneti-demokraatias on loomulikud ja kas kliendidemokraatia on üheks vajalikuks ja vältimatuks faasiks teel klassikalise post-modernistliku demokraatia ideaali – osalusdemokraatia – poole, või pigem viib kliendidemokraatia sellest kaugenemisele**. Väitekirj keskendub Interneti-demokraatia arengutele kohalikul tasandil, sest muutusteprotsess ja demokraatia olemus on kõige hõlpsamini

jälgitav ja huvitavam kohalikul tasandil, mida on erinevate autorite poolt nimetatud ka “demokraatia mänguväljakuks” (Hale *et al.*, 1999: 97; vt. ka Criado ja Ramilo, 2003; Torres ja Pina, 2005). Sõnastatud üldine eesmärk jaotub omakorda konkreetseteks alaküsimusteks: Kas ja kuidas on Interneti areng mõjutanud demokraatia arengut Eestis? Kas Interneti kasutuselevõtmine suurendab inimeste poliitilist aktiivsust kohalikul tasandil? Millised on inimeste igapäevased Interneti kasutamise praktikad kohalikul tasandil? Kas nende suhe kohaliku omavalitsusega on pigem tarbija ja teenuse pakkuja suhe või demokraatlik osalus? Kuidas need kaks Interneti-demokraatia funktsiooni omavahel suhestuvad?

Käesoleva uurimuse sissejuhatava artikli teoreetilises osas jõuan järeldusele, et Eesti demokraatliku arengu eripäraks, ka võrreldes enamuse teiste postkommunistlike riikidega, oli kiire areng esimestes faasides, institutsionaalses demokraatia arengus, ja kiire jõudmine võõrandumise faasi. Osaliselt oli see põhjustatud sellest, et institutsionaalse demokraatia arenguga selgus teatud mõttes paratamatu tõde, et ka tavapärase lääneliku demokraatia tingimustes jääb iga indiviidi osalusvõimalus siiski piiratuks (vt. ka Rychard ja Wnuk-Lipinski, 2002; Lauristin ja Vihalemm, 2008). Tasakaalu leidmine ka riiklikul tasandil osalus- ja institutsionaalse demokraatia vahel oli keerukas. Kui institutsionaalse demokraatia juurutamisel oli eeskujuks teiste riikide kogemus ja seda mõõdeti paljude rahvusvaheliste organisatsioonide poolt erinevate kriteeriumide alusel, siis kodaniku- ja poliitilise kultuuri arengut ei saa teistelt riikidelt üle võtta. Poliitilise kultuuri arengu mitteparalleelsus institutsionaalse arenguga põhjustas tugeva pettumustunde, kui selgus, et tegelik demokraatia tähendas vaid institutsionaalset demokraatiat, sisuliselt ainult vabu valimisi ja sõnavabadust, kuid reaalseid osalusvõimalusi tegelikkuses juurde ei tulnud ning puudusid oskused ja ka koht diskussiooniks selle üle, millist ühiskonda tegelikkuses soovitakse. Diskussioon on aga paljude autorite hinnangul tugeva kodanikuühiskonna ja -praktikate aluseks (vt. ka Habermas, [1962] 1989; Barber, 1984; Held, 1992; Dahlgren 2003; 2005; Pietrzyk, 2003; Fuchs, 2008). Võõrandumisprotsess avaldus inimeste kapseldumises erasfääri, samas, osalusdemokraatias ei saa poliitilist ja eraelulist täielikult teineteisest eraldada. Kodanikukultuuri arengu suhtelist aeglust Eestis, võrreldes institutsionaalse demokraatia arenguga, võib põhjendada ka toetavate tegevuste puudumisega – puuduliku kodanikuhariduse andmisega, rahvusvahelise maine tagaajamisega. Ühest küljest ei osanud inimesed ise oma kättevõidetud demokraatlike õigustega midagi peale hakata, teisalt ei näidanud ka riik üles väga suurt huvi kriitilise ja aktiivse kodaniku esilekerkimise vastu.

Nii nagu traditsionaalses demokraatias, iseloomustab ka Eesti Interneti-demokraatiat kiire institutsionaalne areng – Eesti jõudis kiiresti infotehnoloogia rakendamise võidujooksus esimeste hulka ja pälvis rahvusvahelist kiitust erinevates infoühiskonna arengu kiirust kajastavates edetabelites. Samas, algatused Interneti-demokraatia valdkonnas ei ole olnud silmapaistvad. Osalusportaal TOM (Täna Otsustan Mina), mis oma algusfaasis leidis rahvusvahelise tähelepanu kõrval ka üsna aktiivset osavõttu, on nüüdseks väga tagasihoidliku

kasutajaskonnaga. Osalt võib selle põhjuseks pidada kindlasti ka seda, et rohkem kui tõelist *osalusdemokraatiat*, esindas TOM sisult siiski Interneti *esindusdemokraatiat*, kus lõplik otsustamine ei jäänud mitte kodanikele, vaid ideede lõpliku pädevuse üle otsustasid vastavad ministriumid ja ametnikud.

Samas võib välja tuua eestlaste tugeva idealistliku usu tehnoloogiasse, mis jätkus teatud nõukogudeaegse traditsioonina (vt. ka Lauristin *et al.*, 1997, Korts *et al.*, 2004). Seda usku ja avatud suhtumist tehnoloogiasse peegeldavad kaks ülejäänud enim rahvusvahelist tähelepanu pälvinud Interneti-alast algatust Eestis – Tiigrihüpe ja e-valimised. Ehkki mõlema seos Interneti-demokraatiaga on siinkirjutaja hinnangul pigem kaudne kui otsene, on need siiski olulised projektid Interneti-demokraatiale eelduste loomiseks.

Üldistes Interneti-demokraatia käsitlustes on valdavaim praktilis-pragmaatiline lähenemine, mille esindajad (vt. Bellamy ja Taylor, 1989; Bekkers ja Zouridis, 1999) vaagivad nii Interneti-demokraatia võimalusi (läbipaistvus, kaasatus) kui ka ohte (tehnoloogilised riskid ja riigi liigne kontroll). Bellamy ja Taylor (1989: 66) võtavad kasutusele mõiste *tervik-kodanik (whole-person)*, mille peamine sisu on koguda võimalikult palju infot igaühe kohta, et pakkuda vastu sobivaid teenuseid. Eesti riigi poolsed algatused olid küll tehnilises vastavuses mainitud lähenemisele (e-Maksuamet), kuid nagu toovad välja Bekkers ja Zouridis (1999: 186), siis ilma tegeliku diskussioonita riik vaid arvab, et ta teab, mida kodanikud soovivad. See iseloomustas ka Eesti infoühiskonna arengut – kodanikud ei olnud kaasatud aruteludesse, neid käsitleti kui kliente, mitte kui aktiivseid osalejaid ja kaasaraajajaid. Nimetatud suhtumise üheks põhjuseks oli tehnoloogia arengu kokkulangemine uute avaliku halduse printsiipide rakendamisega, mille üheks peamiseks lähenemiseks oligi *konsumerism* – rõhk teenustel ja kodanike käsitlusel nende teenuste tarbijatena.

Nii nagu muudes protsessides sellel ajastul, iseloomustas Eesti haldussüsteemi “kiiresti-Läänele-järele”-põhimõte, sestap järgiti ka uue avaliku halduse põhimõtteid siin usinamalt kui paljudes teistes riikides.

Kohaliku omavalitsuse tasandil on kõigi nende loetletud protsesside ja lähenemiste mõju ning seosed demokraatia, osaluse ja teenuste vahel selgemini vaadeldavamad ja mina analüüsin neid suhteid oma väitekirjas kuue empiirilise artikli kaudu. Nende artiklite fookus on erinev. Kui **I** ja **VI** artikkel on üldisemad – internetipõhisest kommunikatsioonijuhtimisest Eesti regionaalse tasandi halduses ja infopoliitikate mõjust Interneti-kasutajate praktikatele, siis **II** ja **III** uurimus on *case-study* meetodil põhinevad analüüsid Tartu linna e-teenustest ja nende vastavusest kodanike ootustele ning e-aktiivsust mõjutavates tegurites Tartus. Artiklis **IV** on võrreldud kohalikku Interneti-põhist osalust kahes erineva poliitilise kultuuri ja kodanikukultuuri arenguga riigis – Norras ja Eestis ning artikkel **V** on neljanda artikli eestindus, mille eesmärgiks on suunata ka Eesti riigiametnikke, kes on valdavalt ajakirja *Riigikogu Toimetised* lugejad, e-osaluse teemadel kaasa mõtlema.

Nende uuringute teostamisel kasutan nii kvantitatiivset kui kvalitatiivset metodoloogiat. Kolmes uurimuses – **IV**, **V**, ja **VI** – põhinevad kvantitatiivsed andmed Eesti kohta Tartu Ülikooli ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni insti-

tuudi ja uuringufirma Klaster poolt läbiviidud küsitlusele 2007. a. Neljandas uurimuses olen saanud andmeid võrrelnud Norra Oslo ülikooli meediauurijate poolt läbiviidud analoogse küsitluse andmetega.

II ja **III** uurimuse teostamiseks vajalikud andmed on saadud Tartu linnavalitsuse ja uuringufirma Faktum koostöös valminud uuringust 2005. a. Töös kasutan ka kvalitatiivseid andmeid: lisaks üle-eestilisele uuringule kogusin inimeste hinnanguid ja suhtumisi kohalikku Interneti-põhisesse osalusse täiendava e-küsimustiku abil ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni instituudi veebilehel ja postitades vastavasisulise küsimuse ka kõigisse olemasolevatesse kohalike omavalitsuste foorumitesse 2007. a. Lisaks analüüsisime **VI** uurimuses teksti-analüüsi meetodil Eesti infopoliitika dokumente. Uurimuses **I** kasutasin Eesti maavalitsuste veebilehtede analüüsil elemente nii diskursuse analüüsi kui kvalitatiivse sisuanalüüsi meetoditest.

Käesoleva väitekirja peamised järeldused eespool püstitatud uurimusküsimuste gruppide lõikes on järgmised:

I. Kas ja kuidas on Interneti areng mõjutanud demokraatia arengut Eestis? Kas Interneti kasutuselevõtmine suurendab inimeste poliitilist aktiivsust kohalikul tasandil?

- Tugev kodanikukultuur ja väljaarenenud demokraatlikud praktikad ei vii tingimata oluliste erinevusteni infotehnoloogia rakendustes. Nii Eestis kui Norras on kohaliku tasandi e-osalus madal, hoolimata sellest, et Norras on oluliselt kõrgem nii osalemine traditsioonilises meedias kui ka osalemine erinevates traditsioonilise demokraatia osalusvormides (petitsioonide allkirjastamine, demonstratsioonid) (**IV** ja **V** uurimus).
- Ehkki poliitiline aktiivsus *online*-kanalites on nii Eestis kui Norras seotud üldise poliitilise aktiivsusega, on Eestis pilt oluliselt mitmekesisem. Eestis on e-aktiivseid ka nende hulgas, kelle üldine poliitiline aktiivsus on väga madal või peaaegu olematu (**IV** ja **V** uurimus).
- Tugevama kodanikukultuuriga riikides, nagu Norra, on Interneti vahendusel osalemise aktiivsus jaotatud erinevate vanuseliste ja haridustasutaga elanikkonna gruppide vahel ühtlasemalt. Eestis on väga järsk piir Interneti kasutamise aktiivsuses 50 eluaasta juures ning Eestis mängib e-aktiivsuse puhul olulisemat rolli inimese hariduslik taust (**IV**, **V** ja **VI** uurimus).
- Inimesed, kes on üldiselt aktiivsemad Interneti kasutajad, on ka e-aktiivsemad teemadel, mis puudutavad kohalikku omavalitsust. Samas inimesed, kelle Interneti kasutamise praktikad on suunatud vaid teenuste tarbimisele, kasutavad kohaliku omavalitsusega suheldes pigem traditsioonilisi kanaleid. Interneti tulek ei ole suutnud luua nii-öelda puhast või puhtakujulist Interneti kaudu osalejat. Siiski, võrreldes varasemate uuringutega, on näha teatud muutusi selles suunas, et aktiivsemaid kasutajaid on rohkem ning ka pragmaatiliste teenuste tarbijate kasutuspraktikates võib näha teatud osalusmomente (**VI** uurimus).

- Inimeste osalusmotiivid erineva poliitilise ja kodanikukultuuriga riikides on mõneti sarnased – peamiselt kommenteeritakse kohalikes Interneti-foorumites, kantuna soovist midagi kritiseerida. Samas tuleb motiivide analüüsi puhul ilmekalt esile nende riikide *kommunikatsiooniruumi* erinevus. Eestlased, kes traditsioonilise meedia vahendusel on passiivsed osalejad, kannavad teemasid, mida nad traditsioonilises meedias märkavad ja mis neile korda lähevad, üle Interneti-foorumitesse ja kommenteerivad neid seal. Poliitilised motiivid osaluseks on mõlema ühiskonna puhul vähetähtsad (IV ja V uurimus).
- Eestis on muljetavaldav infoühiskonda reguleeriv seadusandlus ja seadusliku regulatsiooni kogemus, samas on enamus vastavaid poliitika-dokumente tehnilise suunilusega, ja osaluse teema leiab neis vähe kajastamist. Osad seadusaktid, nagu näiteks Avaliku Teabe Seadus, reguleerivad küll ka omavalitsuste Interneti-kasutust (näiteks veebilehtede ülesehitust), samas kohalikud omavalitsused neid akte ei järgi ja jätkuvalt on paljude omavalitsuste otsustusprotsess mitte-läbipaistev (I, IV, V ja VI uurimus).

Kokkuvõtteks, infotehnoloogia kasutusega on toimunud kindlasti teatud muutused *kommunikatsiooniruumis*, mis on kodanikukultuuri ja ka demokraatia lahutamatu osa. Eestlaste kommunikatsiooniruum erineb teatud määral pika-aegse poliitilise ja kodanikukultuuri vaba arengu traditsiooniga riigi omast. Samas, ainult muutused ruumis üksi ei too kaasa muutunud demokraatlike osaluspraktikaid, olulist rolli mängivad ka haridus (formaalne ja kodaniku-haridus) ja traditsioonid. Kuigi endiselt on Interneti-aktiivsus traditsioonidega kodanikuühiskonnas ühtlasemalt jaotunud, võib siiski nentida, et infotehnoloogia laialdane kasutus Eestis on suurendanud ka poliitilist aktiivsust.

II. Millised on inimeste igapäevased Interneti kasutamise praktikad kohalikul tasandil? Kas nende suhe kohaliku omavalitsusega on pigem tarbija ja teenuse pakkuja suhe või demokraatlik osalus? Kuidas need kaks Interneti-demokraatia funktsiooni omavahel suhestuvad?

- Enamus teenustest, mida linnavalitsus oma kodanikele pakub, on suunatud kodanike igapäevaste toimingute hõlbustamiseks. *Case-study* aluseks oleva Tartu poolt pakutavatest teenustest vaid kaht võib liigitada demokraatlikku osalust võimaldavaks – need on võimalus jälgida linnavalitsuse istungeid Internetis ning suhelda ametnikega küsimustevastuste rubriigi “Ametnik vastab” vahendusel (II uurimus).
- Tartu linna poolt pakutavate igapäevaelu puudutavate teenuste kasutamine on üsna tagasihoidlik, väga vähe kasutatakse aga osalust võimaldavaid teenuseid. Sealjuures ilmneb oluline lahknevus inimeste hinnangutes teenuste olulisuse ja nende reaalse kasutamise vahel. Eriti ilmne on see lahknevus e-osalust võimaldavate teenuste puhul. Üheks põhjuseks arvamuste lahknevuses võib olla inimeste kalduvus tehnoloogia võimalusi reaalse probleemide lahendamisel ülehinnata, ideali-

seerida, samuti kalduvus ebareaalselt hinnata oma vajadusi ja ajaresurssi. Ilmselt on aga olulisim põhjus selles, et praegu pakutavad osalusteenused ei vasta inimeste ootustele ja arusaamadele osalusest – puudub võimalus dialoogiks kodanike vahel, ametnike vastused ei aita kodanikke reaalsete probleemide korral (II uurimus).

- Ehkki erinevate elanikegruppide Interneti-kasutus on erinev (vanemaalised on oodatult vähemaktiivsed), on üks peamisi faktoreid, mis mõjutab inimeste kohalikku e-aktiivsust *aeg* – mida pikemaajalise Interneti-kasutamise kogemusega ollakse, seda aktiivsemalt suheldakse ka oma kohaliku omavalitsusega (III uurimus).

Kokkuvõtvalt, kohalike omavalitsuste Interneti-põhiste teenuste ja Interneti kasutamise praktikate analüüs näitab, et kohaliku omavalitsuse ja kodaniku vaheline suhe on peamiselt *teenuse pakkuja – teenuse tarbija* suhe. Hetkel on vähe võimalusi, kuidas kodanik saaks olla Interneti vahendusel aktiivne osaleja, ehkki kodanikud väljendavad selleks teatud valmisolekut. Olemasolevad vähesed osalusvõimalused võimaldavad pigem passiivset osalust. Teenuste kvaliteedi ja sisu paranemise kõrval mängib siiski olulist rolli ka sõltumatu *ajafaktor*.

Minu poolt läbi viidud empiiriline analüüs annab võimaluse arutleda selle üle, kuid võrd me saame rääkida Interneti-demokraatiast kui eraldiseisvast nähtusest, selle eeldustest ja avaldumisvormidest üldse. Olen Interneti-demokraatia arengu Eestis jaotanud kolme arengufaasi ja vaadelnud neid ka Eesti transitsiooniprotsessi eri faaside kontekstis.

Esimest Interneti-demokraatia arengufaasi – *Interneti esindus- või institutsionaalset demokraatiat*, mis ajaliselt langeb kokku transitsiooniprotsessi kolme esimese arengufaasiga, iseloomustab küll piisavate eelduste loomine edasiseks kiireks Interneti-demokraatia arenguks (Tiigrihüppe projekt jne.), kuid sellele arengufaasile on iseloomulik ka tegevuste integreerituse puudumine. Nii ei kaasnenud selliste projektide rakendamisega muutusi formaalses haridussüsteemis ega algatusi kodanikuhariduse vallas. Nõustun mõnede autoritega (vt. näiteks Macintosh 2004), et esindusdemokraatia arengufaas on vältimatu ja vajalik jõudmaks ideaalina käsitletavasse *Interneti osalusdemokraatia* faasi. Samas, esindusdemokraatia faas ei saanud täiustuda, kuna see asendus kiirelt ja paljuski avalikus halduses toimivate protsesside tulemusena *Interneti kliendidemokraatia* arengufaasiga. Ehkki kliendidemokraatiat on kritiseeritud (vt. Clift, 2002), ühtin mina oma arvamuses pigem Bellamy ja Tayloriga (1998), kelle hinnangul on ka see arengufaas pigem vältimatu. Kui peamine kriitika kliendidemokraatia aadressil keskendub sellele, et tehnoloogiast võib teenuste pakkumisel saada kontrollimehhanism, siis ideaalis on selle arengufaasi lõpuks pakutavate, rahva ootuste ja nõudmistega kooskõlas olevate teenuste kaudu pälvitud siiski inimeste suurenenud usaldus nii tehnoloogia kui ka teenuseid pakkuva riigi ja omavalitsuse vastu.

Nagu eespool öeldud, on kliendidemokraatia faas, eriti arvesse võttes arenguid avalikus halduses ja üldist tarbijalikkuse diskursuse tugevnemist, vältimatu. Samas on küsitav, miks see faas on veninud nii pikaks ja millal jõutakse

reaalselt järgmisesse, *Interneti osalusdemokraatia* arengufaasi. Üheks põhjuseks on see, et samal ajal, kui inimesed on hakanud erinevates foorumites julgemalt oma arvamust avaldama, on ametnikud ja poliitikud siiski veel institutsionaalse demokraatia faasis, hinnates üle kodanike võimeid ja motivatsiooni keerukas otsustusprotsessis ise osaleda, ja pakkumata abi ja juhendamist osaluseks. Samas on Eesti kodanikukultuuris toimunud teatud kiiremaid arenguid. Nii traditsioonilises kui ka virtuaalses sfääris on viimastel aegadel korraldatud näiteks allkirjakogumisaktsioone Vabadussamba rajamise vastu, on toimunud osalt spontaanne rahva laulupidu “Märkamise aeg”, mille üle on diskussioon kandunud kiiresti üle Interneti ja olnud seal väga aktiivne. Mõned neist aktsioonidest on ka alguse saanud Interneti-sfääris, mistõttu on alust väita, et Eestis on need kaks sfääri väga tihedalt omavahel põimunud. Siiski on oluline eristada spontaanse demokraatia ilminguid institutsionaalsest osalusdemokraatiast. Ent teatavad arengud on ka siin täheldatavad.

Näitena võiks tuua Riigikantselei algatatud Interneti-keskkonna osale.ee, mis on osalusportaali TOM edasiarendus ja kus vähemalt 2008 aasta augusti seisuga leidis palju aktiivseid lugejaid näiteks teemablokis “Igaühe õigused e-riigis”.

Võimalik, et minu väljajoonistatud Interneti-demokraatia mudel ei pea paika kõigi Eesti kohalike omavalitsuste puhul, kuna tehniliste võimaluste ja ka sotsiaalse keskkonna areng on paiguti väga erinev. Siiski võimaldab see, et uurimuse aluseks on võetud Tartu – ühte aegu väga arenenud tehnilise baasiga ja innovaatilisi teenuseid pakkuv, aga samas, nagu uuringutest selgub, veel poolikute ning puudulike kodanikke kaasavate e-lahendustega omavalitsus, kaardistada ka üldisi tendentse Euroopa omavalitsuste kohta tervikuna.

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Knowledge Management in Estonian Regional Administration: Background, Outputs, and Unused Resources

Kristina Reinsalu

Department of Journalism and Communication, University of Tartu, Ülikooli 18, Tartu, Estonia. E-mail: kristina.reinsalu@ut.ee

ABSTRACT

Little research links knowledge management to government institutions. Knowledge management is viewed primarily as value-added for managing business organizations. The information and communication technology (ICT) use in government institutions is often limited to composing a Web page and posting information. The content of these Web pages is regulated; however, it is not judged in terms of communication effectiveness. In this article, the author provides an overview of the regulatory environment of ICT usage affecting Web pages of public sector organizations in Estonia. It also discusses some principles of ICT regulation in a European context. The author evaluates the outcome of the regulatory mechanism through analysis of Web sites of Estonian county governments. Specifically, the author examines whether the Web pages conform to regulatory acts, whether they are user-friendly, and whether they are concise. The content, structure, visual form, and other evaluation categories are analyzed by discourse and content analysis. After analysis, it is concluded that decision makers both on a regulatory level and on county government level have to consider the importance of the generation of contextually appropriate content through Web pages. © 2006 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Keywords: information society; knowledge-based region; public sector; Estonia; county governments; Web pages

1. INTRODUCTION

Public sector organizations are under pressure to become more performance-oriented, which includes adopting a more customer-oriented approach. This requires a different mindset, skills-set, and a way of working with and implementing technology.

The focus on Web design and structure within local government in a developing democracy such as Estonia is a valuable research focus. There has been little research in this area in Central and Eastern European countries. All European and Estonian reports concentrate on usability indices and computer owners. The purpose of this article is to focus on content and to evaluate the outcome of the regulatory mechanism. As Evans (2003) points out in *Managing for Knowledge*, most authors and speakers on knowledge management focus on the computer systems that assist with the collection of knowledge or more accurately,

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information. The author concentrates on content and context of information available on the Internet.

Despite the pervasiveness of the Internet, its logic, its language, and its constraints are not well understood beyond the realm of strictly technological matters. The speed of transformation has made it difficult for scholarly research to follow the pace of change with an adequate supply of empirical studies on the whys and wherefores of the Internet-based economy and society (Castells, 2001).

Criado and Ramilo (2003) point out that reports by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1998 and the European Commission in 1994 and 2002 have recommended the use, promotion, and delivery of information and communication technologies within public organizations, addressing their relations with other actors, especially citizens and businesses. Despite this, studies about the social and political impact of the Internet and ICTs on management are usually focused on private sector organizations, with major contributors to the literature being consultants.

In a broader survey of communication and knowledge management in county governments, I argue that for lower-level government institutions the knowledge management and use of information and communication technology (ICT) for development is limited to composing Web sites and posting information they possess to these Web sites. Because local government is a very important link in the communication chain between the government and civil society, the present study goes to the "grassroots" and scrutinizes the practice of the Estonian county government's Web pages.

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is important to clarify some terms used in this article. Terms such as *knowledge* and *knowledge management* are used here in a broader-than-usual sense. Usually (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2002; Quintas, 2002), knowledge is treated as a valuable resource for one organization, and knowledge management is more often treated as part of the internal communication, as a management of knowledge of and for that one organization. The working definition of *knowledge management* employed here refers to the use of resources by every organization for building a knowledge-based society, the notion we often find in the rhetoric of European and Estonian politics. The research tries to explain what role local government institutions are playing in the network of institutions in a community to build a knowledge-based region, knowledge-based state, and ultimately a knowledge-based Europe. This is a goal often mentioned as a strategic imperative in Europe. In the context of county government, the main goal has to be not only to deploy information, but to deploy it in a form that motivates citizens and other organizations to use it in proper context.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As stated earlier, most research on knowledge management focusses on private sector organizations and their ability to adopt innovative computer systems. However, in assessing the condition of a democratic information society at the national or regional level, one must recognize the integral role of the government. Governments have created accessibility to large amount of legislative acts, but are citizens motivated to use them? As Castells (2001) points out:

Who are the actors in charge of managing our transition to the Information Age? In democracy, it used to be governments, acting on behalf of the public interest. I still think they are the ones.

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But I say this with great difficulty because I am fully aware of the crisis of legitimacy and efficiency that characterizes governments in our world. Not that they were great before our time. But we knew less about them, and they could do more—for or against us. (281)

Having too much information or not enough organizational capacity can make it impossible to use information effectively. There can be simply too much information to absorb, or information can be so poorly organized that finding any particular piece of information becomes impossible (Jordan, 1999).

There are new demands on information presentation in the Information Society. Interactivity is crucial, as is consistency and the importance of visual form. Significant aspects of the virtual experience are that not everybody watches the same thing at the same time and that each culture and social group has a specific relationship to the media system. These factors make a fundamental difference vis-à-vis the old system of standardized mass media. In addition, the widespread practice of “surfing” allows the audience to create its own virtual mosaics (Castells, 2000a). Lauristin (2001) also indicates the potential danger when the user can easily create connections the organization or authority does not want. “While media have become indeed globally interconnected and programs and messages circulate in the global network, we are not living in a global village, but in customized cottages globally produced and locally distributed” (Castells, 2000a, p. 370). Other channels of communication often do not satisfy the interests of ordinary citizens in today’s context—only a very small number of citizens can be included in direct communication and mass media conveys information selectively and in a one-way direction. Therefore, the key for state authorities is residing in new media.

As Lauristin (2001) argues, the realization of opportunities provided by the Internet depends on the availability of technical means, on the quality of providing information (exhaustiveness, promptness, level of analysis), and on the ability and desire of receivers to use the information, as well as the conditions in which they are applied. The interactivity discourse is important in the government context to provide for citizen feedback. However, if people are not motivated to use ICT benefits, there is no need for interactivity. The communication process only has value in building social identity, shared meaning, and common knowledge if everybody is involved in the communication process (Fawkes & Gregory, 2000). Even public sector organizations have to admit the importance of visual form and visual aesthetics, which has become very important in the development of new ICT tools.

Researchers have shown great interest in techniques for combining new ICT tools and collective memory, universal knowledge, and community culture to combat the problems of isolation, loss of identity, and encapsulation. According to Castells (2000b), the core economic, social, political, and cultural activities throughout the planet are being structured by and around the Internet and other computer networks. In fact, exclusion from these networks is one of the most damaging forms of exclusion in our economy and in our culture.

It is almost impossible to overestimate the role of the state in promoting ICT. The state, by stalling, unleashing, or leading technological innovation, is a decisive factor in the overall process, as it expresses and organizes the social and cultural forces that dominate in a given space and time (Castells, 2000a). Regulation of ICT processes is also an important aspect of the state’s role. A vicious circle may occur when ignorance of current regulations leads to inefficient or ineffective development of ICT projects and to the waste of resources resulting in more regulation. Information and communications technology projects should be value-driven and not technology-driven. The promised benefits of ICT tools do not take

place simply by digitizing information and placing it online. Instead, the challenge is to understand how the use of new ICT tools can leverage a transformation in the culture and structure of government to provide better services to citizens (Law, 2004).

The Internet was expected to be an ideal instrument to further democracy—and still is. Political information can be easily accessed—so citizens can be almost as well informed as their representatives. However, if political leaders are lacking strategic vision, mission orientation, or responsibility for their actions, people lose their interest and motivation to use the advantages of ICT. Castells (2001) states that governments at all levels use the Internet as an electronic billboard to post their information; there is not much effort at real interaction with the public. Representatives of government authorities do not pay excessive attention to them, either in their design or in their response to citizens' requests. In general, their staff members process their answers with little difference from what they were doing earlier in responding to written letters. Citizens do not see much point in spending their energy on political queries, except when an event arouses their indignation or touches their personal interests (Castells, 2001).

Walsham (2004) summarizes findings from an analysis of 25 U.S. federal government Web sites. The authors evaluated each Web site based on 47 criteria. The criteria were grouped under four major categories including branding, navigation, content, and feedback. Results relevant for the present study indicated that while most sites scored well on key criteria such as the existence of navigation schemes and specific and appropriate navigation links; they scored poorly in areas relating to consistency and context. The study found that 60% of the Web sites evaluated did not organize content by user needs. The main result was that the users with information needs that span multiple divisions are required to know the organization chart and purpose of each subgroup to find the information they need.

The main hypothesis drawn from the theoretical framework is that legal regulation does not ensure that the Web site of a public sector organization will be developed on behalf of the user, consider the citizen as a client, or help to transform the process of governance processes to be more transparent. The ICT tools have value only if people are motivated to use the information available via those tools. To motivate the people to use Internet resources, the information has to be supported by law, and at the same time it has to be user-friendly and concise.

To develop the context for the analysis, the I will now give a short overview of the legislative bases for information society regulation both in Europe and in Estonia.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 European Context

Servaes (2003) states:

The European plans to build an information society emerged as a reaction to Japanese and American initiatives. As in many other previous technological projects, European policies on information and communication technologies were lagging behind the policies of its main global competitors. (11)

This might explain why, when the idea of an “information highway” was officially “launched” by the Clinton–Gore administration, Europe almost immediately integrated

it into its own discourse. What resulted is the EU way to build the information society: pushing politically the wiring of Europe and the building of its highways, but leaving it up to the private sector to implement (Servaes, 2003, pp. 11–12).

In general, the European Union (EU) Commission realizes that it still has a long way to go in the development of effective ICTs. Though the Lisbon summit official texts of the European Commission teem with new terms coined with reference to the information society, such as “New Information and Communication Technologies” and “online world,” there is still a lack of socially centered visions and imaginations, or a more confined user-driven and user-specific policy framework. For example, the eEurope (2005) document does not say a word about concretization of the role of public sector organizations in building this information and knowledge-based society.

3.2 Estonian Context

According to *The Networked Readiness Index 2003–2004 (NRI; 2003–2004)* Estonia is the leader of e-issues among the Eastern European countries with a rank of 25. This ranking captures key factors relating to the environment, the readiness, and the usage of the three stakeholders in the *NRI* (individuals, businesses, and governments), and can be used to understand the performance of a nation or a region concerning ICT readiness and usage. The component index and subindex rankings serve to identify key areas where a nation is under- or overperforming.

The priorities of a nation are reflected in its policies and laws that, in turn, influence its rate of growth and direction of development. Government readiness is reflected in the policymaking machinery and internal processes of the government and in the availability of government service online. Estonia is one of the leaders from the political–regulatory perspective according to the *NRI*, ranking 15th. This reflects the perception that its central government is taking active steps to implement ICT.

Surveys carried out in Estonia show that while the government is taking active steps to implement ICT, inhabitants’ readiness to use online services offered by government agencies is going down. According to Emor Ltd. (2004) in July 2001 48% of the population had acquired information from public sector organizations’ Web pages, by October 2003 this figure had decreased to 43%.

In Estonia, the information society and e-Estonia have been the main topics of discussion in political circles since 1998. The goals and priorities stated in the Principles of Estonian IT Policy, approved by the Estonian Parliament in 1998, detail political decisions made by the government and Parliament as well as EU information society documents (eEurope, 2005). These goals and priorities are used in formulating the state information policy.

One of the government priorities since 1999 has been the promotion of the use of information and communication technology in public administration with the objective to make communication between a citizen and the state, as well as between state institutions themselves, easier and more cost-effective.

The information society development priorities for 2004–2006, stated in the document amending the Principles of Estonian Information Policy (2003) are:

- Development of e-services for citizens, business sector, and public administration
- Analysis and provision of IT-solutions promoting the development of eDemocracy
- Increase of effectiveness of the public sector
- Increasing opportunities for the society to use IT and digital solutions

In the policy sphere, the e-government issue in Estonia is supported by the following legislative acts:

- Public Information Act (2000)
- National Strategic Plan on Electronic Government Support, and many other central and local government laws and statutes such as
- Databases Act (1997)
- Official Statistics Act (1997)
- Archives Act (1998)
- Public Procurement Act (2000)

A key document in the formulation of Estonia's IT policy is the Public Information Act (PIA) planned by its creators to be the first step to establish Estonia as part of the information society. In its opening, the PIA (2002) states: "The goal of this statement is to guarantee everybody's access and possibility to use of public information proceeding from the principles of democratic and social rule of law and open society, and to create possibilities to have a control over fulfillment of public targets."

The act establishes a goal that every citizen should be able to turn to every public organization online and the organization has to guarantee the necessary tools for that. The main issue, from the point of view of the present study, is that this policy statement obligates the institutions to have their own Web page and sets very strict regulations on them. The Web pages should contain forms, applications, drafts of local regulations, information about services, and a register of documents. The PIA also enumerates the documents that must be available online for every organization. Under the PIA, county governments are obliged to publish:

- Statistics on the economy of the region
- Projects (drafts) of development programs (concepts before coming into reality)
- Data about public opinion polls ordered by county governments
- Register of documents, etc.

Overall, it appears that the Estonian central government has developed a comprehensive vision for ICT development in governments, but the tone of the statutes is prescriptive. For example, there is little explanation of why lower-level government institutions are required to place online all registers and other documents. The Public Information Act, which obligates and establishes very strict criteria and specifications for public sector organizations, does not evaluate or prescribe any criteria for the efficient and effective design of public Web pages.

4. THE OBJECT, METHODOLOGY, OBJECTIVES, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The motivation for this research was a broader study of the general communication management and practices of county government. The goal of the larger study was to evaluate county government communication systems for their efficiency and effectiveness. One of the primary findings of that study was that the Estonian county governments focus their

communication strategy on Web pages. This finding suggests the need for a more extensive analysis of the county Web pages.

Background information about the establishment of communication and knowledge management structure was gathered through personal experience (public relations position in Ida-Viru County government, Estonia during the period of 2000–2001), personal observation, and a formal questionnaire sent to communication specialists. The heads of county governments were also interviewed.

Estonia regional government structure includes 15 counties with administrations supporting the county governors. They are appointed by the central government and represent the central government in their respective regions but are subordinate to the Minister of Regional Affairs. County governors exercise supervisory function over local government legislation but more than that their role is to promote balanced regional development. County governments also participate in business development as founders of the regional enterprise development centers.

Within this study, all 15 Estonian county governments' Web pages are analyzed. Data were gathered during January 2003 through direct observation of the Web pages of all 15 Estonian county governments (Estonian county governments, 2003). For the present analysis a combined method is used containing elements both of discourse analysis (as prescribed by Fairlough, 1992) and qualitative content analysis.

The research starts from the assumption that a Web page behaves as a text. The main categories of analysis of Fairlough for the text were *attention* (What is presented and what is not?), *accentuation* (What is important?), *structure* (What is linked to what? What is said? How? When?), and *target groups* (What themes are treated? What messages are communicated?).

The main criteria for the evaluation of the Web pages were:

1. Conformity to the Public Information Act
2. User friendliness
3. Contextually appropriate content

The reason for choosing these three categories for analysis is that they are necessary conditions for the development of an effective communication and knowledge-transfer channel. The PIA, the key document in the formulation of Estonia's IT policy, establishes a goal that every citizen should be able turn to every public organization online and that governments have to guarantee necessary tools for that.

To ensure conformity to PIA, the I addressed the question of whether it was possible to fill and send an online version of an information requirement as mandated by PIA.

Concerning the Web site's structure, the following were addressed:

- Can a person easily navigate from the Web site to Web pages of suborganizations of county governments?
- Is the information up-to-date?

The user friendliness of the Web site is more of a theoretical concept; it incorporates characteristics that make Internet communication unique in comparison to traditional communications channels. As stated earlier in the section on theoretical framework, the communication process only has value in building social identity, shared meaning, and

common knowledge if everybody is motivated to be involved in the communication process (Lauristin, 2001). The main characteristic of a user-friendly Web page is its easy and logic navigations system that motivates citizens to use it. Another important component for motivating people is interactivity.

User friendliness is defined in terms of structure, visual form, and clarity. The issues addressed in relation to this aspect of the Web site were:

- What is important—What is in the main page?
- What is linked to what?
- Does the visual form support the main concept?
- Are target groups differentiated?
- Is there an Estonian orientation or is the site oriented to the larger world?
- Is the text clearly expressed and easily understandable or is it “bureaucratic”?
- Is it possible to do a records search?
- Does it offer possibilities for interactive communications with citizens?

It is clear that the strict legislative regulation or attractiveness of a Web site cannot motivate people to use the tools of ICT if there is no contextually appropriate content in the Web pages of the site. If political leaders are lacking strategic vision, mission orientation, and responsibility for their actions, people lose their interest and motivation in ICT.

By contextually appropriate content, I refer to categories showing the targets for development of a knowledge-based region and society:

- Is there standardization in the names of links?
- Is the role of county government and the whole system explained?
- Are the missions and values of the organization and the region expressed?
- Is the prime source of information available?
- Are there analyses and research reports about the region?

Based on these criteria and the contextual information about Estonia, the observation plan was prepared and implemented.

5. REPORT OF RESULTS

5.1 A Regulatory Tool: The Public Information Act

There was no single Web page among the 15 accessed that harmonized with Public Information Act. Only 60% of the Web sites were able to fulfill an electronic information request form and forward it electronically, as a printout, or in some other way.

Sixty percent of the Web pages did not have a direct connection to Web pages of their suborganizations. In cases where there was a connection, they were found through hyperlinks with names as different as *County*, *General information*, or *Administrative area*.

During the observation period, there were only five Web pages (33%) that did not contain out-of-date information.

5.2 User Friendliness

There was no standardization of main pages. Web pages frequently lacked tables of contents to aid navigation. Among the 15 Web pages, there were 10 different main topics of main pages. A citizen interested in comparing their county to another would have difficulty finding the information when moving from one county's site to the other.

Common elements presented on the Web pages included:

- The structure or hierarchy of the organization
- A photo of the building of county government or some historical building/place in county
- News and press releases
- Officer contacts
- A list of partners
- The functions of county government
- An event calendar (2); the story of development
- An index of contents
- An annual report

At the same time, several links dominated the main pages. In addition, the visual content of the Web pages varied considerably. The Web pages of governments do not necessarily have to present multicolored images like those of business enterprises; however, form has to be considered when providing an abundance of information. A government page's simplicity and user friendliness is essential. The Web pages of Estonian county governments ranged from the very ornate Web site of Rapla County government to ones that failed to present the official coat of arms of the county.

County governments also had problems determining whether they have to present the news and information for the whole county on their main page. The Web page of Jõgeva County government provided a good example of presenting news, where the press releases on the opening page had attractive headlines and content of general interest. In addition, there was thorough coverage of general European government information (clearly expressed purpose of activities in the EU framework, project management textbooks, and other informative acts). This Web page also offered one other positive example—the information was detailed in a functional manner. For example, health promotion projects were a “product” of the health department and support programs for entrepreneurs served as information on economic development. As for presenting the European information, the best of the Web pages observed was that of the Viljandi County government. It included contact data, purpose of activities, program of events, county networks, references, and facts of general interest.

The links to Web pages of other organizations in the region were often unreasonably complicated. For instance, the institutions administered by county government were found under the link simply named *County*. A more easily understood link would perhaps be *County Organizations*. The Ida-Viru County government Web page had a well-arranged framework. On the opening page, the county government gave a link to the county's general site, which featured the county's insignia and many other pieces of information.

Web pages should contain references (substantive as well as formal) to the target groups of the message. Only in some Web pages was there a more specific definition of the target group. For example, development plans were given in Russian and English on the Ida-Viru

Web Web site; this was probably done to appeal to potential investors from the West and Russia. Ida-Viru County borders the Russian Federation; hence, Russia would be a target group. The Web page of Jõgeva County government was a positive example of the definition of the target group; practical training places and vacant jobs were directed to the young. A questions–answers section on the Web page of the Hiiu County government was geared to the needs of ordinary citizens. The section with the heading, “Where to Get Money from” on the Web page of Viljandi County government was set up for small entrepreneurs and project proposal writers.

To promote economic development within the county, county governments need to inform local small and large enterprises as well as potential foreign investors of the county’s entrepreneurial environment. Therefore, it is also important to present the Web page in several languages. As most foreign direct investment into Estonia comes from Scandinavian countries and Germany, one would expect county government economic information to be accessible in the languages of those countries (Fairlough, 1992). However, most Web pages were only in Estonian.

Six Web pages lacked the possibility for feedback. The most widespread feedback facilities of the Web pages were a guest book or a forum. Three Web pages arranged for questions, but their aim in doing so was unclear. For instance, Harju County expressed interest about what the Web page reader expected from the year 2003. The choices were: “Results of elections of the Riigikogu,” “Results of the Referendum of EU Accession and Amending the Constitution,” “Eurovision Song Contest in Latvia,” “Sustainable Economic Growth,” “Work Results of New Local Government Leaders,” “Personal or Family Event,” “Do Not Expect Anything Good,” and “Do Not Expect Anything Good Or Bad.” During the observation period, there was no indication of government feedback to citizen feedback on any of the Web pages.

5.3 Contextually Appropriate Content

In general, users were not given a broader overview of the role of county government and the process of governance in general. However, in five Web pages there were greetings from heads of governments in which they attempted to explain the main goals and tasks of the organization. Development strategies or regional plans were found in only three sites. On the Web pages of county governments, local governments inside the county and institutions administered by the county government as partners were predominant. Presumably, the partners of county governments should also be enterprise support centers and other support structures located in the county.

In several cases, abbreviations were used, i.e., B7, Eurohaus, and CPMR without an explanation of the meaning, essence, aims and activities of these organizations. Everyday topics influencing local life directly (e.g., drug addiction prevention) were often not included or were difficult to find on the Web site. They should be more prominent as they show the practical and operational side of the organization. Overall, there was a preponderance of legal and technical language, especially in relation to county development plans. An example from the Järva county government Web pages reads: “The purpose of designing the development strategy of Järva County is, on the bases of agreed principles, to plan the strategic directions of activity, which direct the development of the county and set frames for further activities.”

The text of Web pages is anonymous in most cases. It is understandable in the case of an introduction of functions, but disturbing if development plans or research work containing

subjective opinions and attitudes are presented. For example, the author of some interesting work presented on the Rapla County government Web site was unknown as well as the methods employed, thus casting doubt on the veracity of the content (although the work which was entitled “What is Rapla County Government Seen Like” contained interesting and vivid materials about the organization).

The choice of what content to present creates many questions. A county government Web page should include strategic information such as population data along with interesting and strategic facts about the county. The statistics on fires in the county from 1999–2001 is of little interest except to specialists in the respective area.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

To fully utilize ICT as a knowledge management tool, county governments in Estonia must improve their Web pages as follows:

1. Under the link *Public Information* the county government should publish documents such as:
 - Strategic development plans of the organization and region (and also create access to these from the main page)
 - Blank forms and fulfillment instructions and a document register with the ability to search for certain documents (including the ability to fulfill an end-user online request for public information)
 - A calendar of public events

2. Regarding standardization of structure, county governments should add:
 - An *Index of Contents* to aid orientation and navigation
 - News on the main page, possibly with a search engine to a news archive
 - Under the link *Partners*, a direct connection to all public institutions of the region
 - Direct links to suborganizations
 - Under the contacts of officers a brief description of their tasks
 - Links to practical questions and answers such as how to register the birth of a child, or how to register a building
 - Feedback possibilities and obligations to comment and answer questions raised in a public forum

3. County governments also must address content issues:
 - Data (such as in development plans) has to be “client-oriented,” including tabs and graphs for specialists along with concise summaries for ordinary citizens
 - All data presented on the Web page must have an author and source (with contact information)

There are great impediments to democratic participation and knowledge management in Estonian regional administration. The ICT regulations are technical but not content-oriented; Web pages are composer but not user-oriented. Political leaders lack strategic

vision, mission orientation, and responsibility for their actions. All of these factors create and reinforce the citizen's lack of interest and motivation to use the advantages of ICT.

Estonia has developed an extensive framework for ICT technical deployment in government agencies. Technology inevitably has an enormous role to play but only to the extent that it responds to the social context. A good deal of new technology attends primarily to individuals and the explicit information that passes between them. To support the flow of knowledge within and among communities and organizations, this focus must expand to encompass communities and the full richness of communication (Brown & Duguid, 2002; Fayard, 2003; Walsham, 2002). Estonia must actively try to develop the social role of information in their next round of ICT strategy planning.

One of the main conclusions of the study is that the content of Web pages is poor and obsolete. The weakness of the PIA is that it does not prescribe contextual information, nor does it specify a reasonable presentation of the activities of an organization. It prescribes access to large amounts of data but does not give any clues about the organization of content. Estonian ICT policies, in general, are weak in contextual competence and coordination. There is also a noticeable lack of requirements for a document register. There are adequate technological solutions but some requirements are poor in relation to content. In other words, Estonian county governments seem very concerned with the production of information rather than in knowledge creation. As Brown and Duguid (2002) point out, technology cannot deliver knowledge repositories independent of human knowledge ability. What these databases contain are the sense-giving efforts of the contributors, which is not the same as the deep tacit knowledge of the giver (i. e., the officials responsible for presenting the information on the Web). Database entries are only valuable if they connect effectively to the sense-reading processes of their users. The home pages of Estonian government institutions provide access to the final decisions of county government and its subinstitutions. However, integrating proposals and ideas into the community is possible only if the draft acts in the legislative proceedings of the local government, the work procedures of local government, and terms and necessary schedules are shared with the community. The activities of the representatives of the county government should also be on record as this allows one to find an appropriate partner in the local government for defending interests and expressing ideas.

Certainly, detailed regulation of ICT implementation does not alone guarantee the standardized use of ICT, at least in a knowledge management sense. It is important to be consistent in implementing ICTs because they are more than just the computer and the Internet, but tools of knowledge delivery. Content is a priority as we try to use the new technologies for community development. Local, government, nongovernment, and international organizations planning ICT projects in the field should thoroughly assess the information needs of a community before launching ICT projects (Cecchini & Scott, 2003; Roman & Colle, 2003).

There is a need for standardized structure and content evaluation of Estonian county governments' Web pages. As stated by Johansson (2004), when it became obvious to everyone that it was easy to create a Web page, most government institutions rushed out and created "a jungle" of Web pages. Most of them are more or less incompatible with available information and function. This general lack of consistency is a problem for end-users who cannot find the same information in the same place when searching pages belonging to different authorities. Without content standards, the Internet cannot be effective in meeting the needs of users. Standardization makes it easier for citizens to access information and motivates them to use ICT. An interactivity discourse is also important in the government

context to provide for citizen feedback. However, if people are not motivated to use ICT, there is no need for interactivity. The communication process only has value in building social identity, shared meaning, and common knowledge if everybody is involved in the communication process (Fawkes & Gregory, 2000).

As mentioned by other researchers, one of the peculiarities of Internet communication is the fact that the user can very easily navigate and compose their own personal “packet of information.” Therefore, the use of strategically planned information and managed cohesion with other authorities’ Web pages is vital. It allows a communication specialist to create useful associations for users. For example, in the context of county government it is necessary to draw together all indispensable information about creating a small business. It is not a statutory duty of county government, but strategically it is important. Also, the Web page of a county government has to be designed to provide people with basic services (such as birth or death recording) without going to another Web page.

County government Web pages generally are not fully using their electronic communication capabilities for facilitating deliberative communication. This makes it difficult for political leaders to communicate their shared vision and mission. For example, a substantial number of sites did not provide development strategies or regional plans, and information about county governments partners like enterprise support centers was hard to find. As stated by Castells (2001), representatives of government authorities do not pay excessive attention to the Web pages, either in their design or in their response to citizens’ requests. Therefore, citizens do not see much point in spending their energy and time on them.

It is doubtful that the high vision of eEurope will be fulfilled if there are such fundamental problems at the grassroots level in the use of the Internet for communication. There are also no great movements towards solving the problems. Of the Web pages first studied in 2003, only a small number appeared substantially different in a review in 2005.

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Kristina Reinsalu is a Ph.D. student, lecturer, and project leader in the Department of Journalism and Communication at University of Tartu. Her research focuses on the application of communication and knowledge management strategies for the development of democratic governance at the regional level.

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Is Estonian local e-government responsive to citizens' needs? The case study of Tartu

Kristina Reinsalu*

*Master of Public Relations, Lecturer of communication management in public sector organizations,
PhD student in media and communications, University of Tartu, Estonia*

Abstract. This paper examines citizens' interaction with local government. The main concern of the paper is how the citizens of Estonia use the Internet for local services. It presents an empirical study supported by direct observation of websites with an accompanying description of e- and m-services being implemented or planned, and provides data from a survey conducted among citizens of a major city. My findings show that the indicators of access to the Internet, use of the Internet and mobile phones are very high in all age groups. Also, the evaluation given by the people to the website of the city council is high in different categories. The e- and m-services the city government has implemented or is planning to implement are innovative. However, the citizens' readiness to use them is low. If there is any interest, it is mainly limited to every-day-life services like m-parking etc. Forums or other services implemented to provoke citizens' involvement are not attractive. Finally, my paper discusses the impact of these results, referring to the theoretical framework, and states that the key factor for interactive communication is motivation. Should interactive communication – even if only “consumerism” of entertainment services – become a routine, it might provide a solution to problems stemming from the perceived disconnection of political and administrative institutions from citizens' everyday concerns.

Keywords: Local government, Internet, local government's internet based services, mobile phone based services, users of different services, customer-oriented services, participant-oriented services, commercial democracy

1. Introduction

High-quality online services delivered in the most effective and secure way to citizens are a key factor for improving efficiency, transparency and accountability of local governance in Europe. Development of local eGovernment systems provides city administrators with a powerful tool for stimulating citizen involvement and participation in democratic decision-making and community empowerment.

One of the main focuses of my study is: what kind of interactive services do citizens expect from their local government? Are they just interested in services, which make their every-day life more comfortable, saving their time and money, or do they also value services which enable them to be in dialogue with the city government and participate in the administration of the city?

Many studies pay attention to the delivery side of local e-government [7–9], but the focus of this paper is more on the demand side of e- and m-services provided by a local government. My paper aims to provide an overview of problems, possibilities and challenges concerning the interface between local governance and ICT through exploring current trends in a local government and by giving a description

*Address for correspondence: Kristina Reinsalu, Department of Journalism and Communications, University of Tartu, Ulikooli 18, 50090 Tartu, Estonia. Tel.: +372 7375 188; +372 5281391 (mobile phone); Fax: +372 7376 355; E-mail: kristina.reinsalu@ut.ee.

of particular ICT initiatives and describing the users of ICT-enabled services. The paper also outlines the existing theories on Internet communication [5] and e-government development [4,9,14].

The emphasis lies in a local government as it is at the local level that citizens most directly experience service provision and act as direct participants. Although several studies have found that larger cities tend to be more innovative because they face a more diverse environment that always demands innovative solutions or because they have more organizational freedom to try new ideas [11], this study demonstrates that a small city can also be an innovator of several e- and m-services.

In the context of this paper I cannot ignore the position Estonia has as an e-state. E-government provision in Estonia is remarkably high. According to the latest Eurostats tables Estonia is placed first among new member states both in Internet access and Internet use. The fact is more powerful if we take into account that Estonian information society has been fully built in the past 15 years. This gives Estonia's case a development perspective that makes it interesting for less advanced countries. As stated by Castells and Himanen [2] societies and economies can reach very similar levels of techno-organizational informationalism starting from different histories and cultures, using a variety of institutions, and reaching distinct forms of social organization. Nevertheless, the development of innovative services and image of e-state is not a value by itself. The question is whether the innovation of the state which is visible to citizens is delivered through services that satisfy citizen needs. The most successful ones in Estonia have most probably been the e-tax office and e-banking developments. Their success resides in saving time and creating freedom for citizens.

The paper is constructed as follows:

After the first, theoretical part of the paper, I will provide an overview of the e- and m-services implemented in a small city in Estonia in the last few years. The empirical part of the paper focuses on feedback given by citizens concerning the city's e-and m-services. The data presented are based on a large-scale survey conducted in 2005. In the last section, we consider the usability, need and reliability of the e- and m-services being analyzed.

2. The user of local e-services: customer or participant?

The concept of e-government is a key concept in the rhetoric of public administration in Estonian, European, and international discussions. However, the discussion is often limited to very general terms. According to conventional wisdom, e-government radically changes public administration. Nevertheless, there are many unanswered questions with reference to the concept of e-government. First, there are many different concepts of e-government and before studying the effects or activities of e-government we should ask which definition or concept we should follow. The second question is whether e-government really changes public administration in a radical way.

To answer the first question we refer to Kaylor [7] who stated that e-government can be taken as a possibility for anyone visiting the city website to communicate and/or interact with the city via the Internet in any way more sophisticated than a simple e-mail letter to the generic city email address provided at the site [7]. However, we can extend the definition by adding interaction via mobile phone, which enables the local government to reach its citizens in another way. Does it really revolutionise the public sector? Though the development of the information society as such has been prioritized in Europe with Lisbon strategy, it is hard to see and hard to evaluate how radical, if any, these changes have been. Also, the EU commission realizes that it still has a long way to go in the development of effective ICTs [10]. However, the institution where everybody can see and feel more changes towards information

society is the local government. Many theorists [3,13] of e-government have also recognized the key role the local government plays in the EU not only because of its closeness to citizens, but also due to the ability of some of its managers and politicians to adapt organizations to new managerial contexts and social demands. As a matter of fact, the developmental level and practices of delivering e-services varies a lot among local governments.

As stated by Servaes [12], the EU way to build the information society is pushing politically the wiring of Europe and the building of its highways, but leaving it up to the private sector to implement specific solutions. Public sector organizations are also under pressure to become more performance-oriented, which includes adopting a more customer-oriented approach. This requires a local government to have a different mindset, skills-set, and a way of working with technology and implementing it [10]. The local government needs to use some methods of e-commerce in its e-communication. There are also two theoretical streams in literature that can be used to describe the interaction between citizens and the local government in the Information Society. For some authors, e-government is application of the tools and techniques of e-commerce to the work of the government. This perspective concentrates on the practical efficiencies and cost reductions created by the use of e-government. To others, e-government has the potential to improve democratic participation. This perspective focuses on the initiatives that will bring interaction between the government and citizens to new levels [6]. Akman [1] prefers the view that local government websites might focus more on providing services and less on facilitating civic involvement. Also Odendaal [8] sets up the question: how well can ICTs enable local governments to do what they are supposed to do – deliver services and manage urban places?

These two approaches can obviously be combined. The majority of local e-government services are performance-oriented or “every-day-life-services”, but the consumption of these can be a first step to bring citizens closer to their local government. As pointed out by Ridell [11] the most optimistic commentators believe that the Internet’s interactivity might even provide a solution to problems stemming from the alienation of political and administrative institutions from citizens’ everyday concerns. The technology is expected to bring decision-makers closer to local residents and facilitate participation by making it entirely independent of time and place.

Ridell also admits that online local government services are being developed in a context where municipalities have become a profit unit in an increasingly market-oriented environment. This environment assigns local residents to the role of the client and elected officials to the role of the municipal administrator. And while the official rhetoric emphasizes the need to involve citizens, the trend is toward viewing citizens as clients who use online services that have to be reachable 24/7. Ridell calls the participation based on services “commercial democracy” [11, p. 157]. The biggest disadvantage of this “consumer model” is that it does not involve citizens in communication between themselves. While the citizen may be a client, the local government is not merely a service office in all its aspects; it is a public institution and its function has to be transparent and has to offer the citizens the opportunities to participate in the administration of their city. According to Ridell [11] a major challenge that is presented to the development of the Internet at the local level is to find ways to use it so that people are offered not only the constrained role of the client or consumer, but are recognized as active public agents.

Clearly, the first precondition to transform citizens to active agents in addition to transforming them to clients is to guarantee them access to the services. Although access is not the focus of my paper, many authors [6,12,14] have pointed out that a considerable portion of population has been excluded from the mainstream since the triumph of Internet communication. They have pointed the differences in Internet use based on differences in age, education, or social status. On the positive side, however, most authors admit that these discrepancies have diminished over time.

The second important precondition for transforming citizens into active public agents is their motivation. It is simple to motivate people with certain services because their benefit – saving time and even money – is obvious. However, it may be more complex to motivate people to engage in services that enable participatory democracy. One motivation factor can be the belief or knowledge that their opinion matters – that they really become co-deciders. It can be done via open forums and discussions. Citizens' proposals provide citizens with an opportunity to raise new issues for discussion. Discussion forums allow a large number of actors to raise issues, express opinions and exchange arguments. One more precondition to motivate people is the quality of the information provided to them. By the quality of information it is important to pay attention to its exhaustiveness, promptness and level of analysis. In the situation of information overload we have, even the visual form and attractiveness of the website has become important.

In sum, we can conclude that the local government's interactive service provision is in a vicious circle – if there are not enough people participating, there is no reason for innovative services. But if the services are not attractive, there is little motivation for participation. However, there are not enough attractive solutions to transform citizen at first into consumers of services and later into active agents.. The most crucial factor is undoubtedly their conviction that they need these local e-government services. My study is an attempt to discover the expectations, needs and reception of different e- and m-services as a local government delivers them. For this particular local government, in spite of its innovativeness, it is the first attempt to ask its citizens what kind of services they really expect and are ready to use.

3. Research design

In order to discover these items, I conducted a case study of the city of Tartu, Estonia. Tartu, with its population of 99 882 and the territory of 38.8 square kilometers, is the second largest city of Estonia. It is located 185 kilometers south of Tallinn, and is the center of Southern Estonia. The University of Tartu is located in the city. The University is often referred to as a distributor of progressive thinking and developer of innovation activities. The city administration works with companies in order to develop new technologies and applies the most innovative skills, and supports the creation and development of spin-off companies. Characteristic of the city of Tartu is its high concentration of IT-firms and IT-specialists. The main reason for choosing Tartu was its extensive experience in developing e-services and mobile applications for public services. The city administration is undergoing a comprehensive transformation to provide modern public services ensuring easy access and interaction for citizens.

My study was completed with the help of the research company Faktum and the City Council of Tartu. As a research method, face-to-face interviews were used. Citizens of Tartu aged between 15–64 form the sampling frame. The sample is 406 respondents and the results can be extended to the whole sample (representative sample). The maximum error is $\pm 4.9\%$. A multistage probability record selection was used for completing the sample. My constant observation and familiarization with the services and possibilities being introduced in this paper can be considered as another research method.

The distribution of socio-demographic variables is given in Table 1. As seen in Table 1, the gender split is 45% male. A predominant respondent possesses sub-professional education. 81% of respondents consider Estonian as their mother language. The majority of the remaining – 19% – are Russian speaking. The sample is a good cross-section of the society: entrepreneurs and top-specialists constitute 16% of the respondents, proficient specialists 29%, workers 16%, students 28%, and pensioners 11%. The majority of respondents indicated a monthly income less than 4000 kroons (~256 EUR).

Table 1
Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

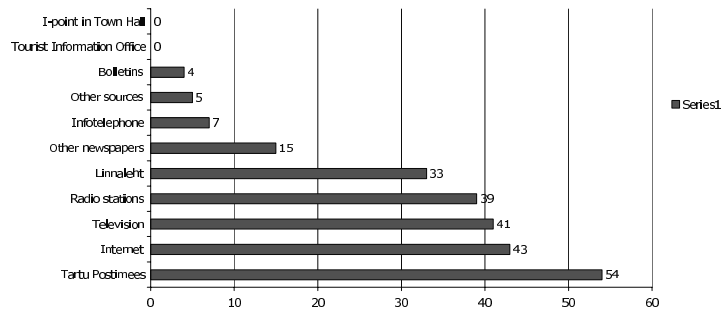
			All	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	56–64
All	ALL	<i>n</i> =	406	99	106	76	67	56
Age	15–24	%	25	100				
	25–34	%	26		100			
	35–44	%	19			100		
	45–54	%	17				100	
	55–64	%	14					10
Sex	man	%	45	47	46	47	44	41
	woman	%	55	53	54	53	56	59
Education	unanswered	%	0	2				
	primary	%	15	28	10	3	15	16
	subprofessi	%	57	67	50	51	55	62
	college-bred	%	28	5	40	45	29	21
Language	Estonian	%	81	84	75	83	79	88
	other	%	19	16	25	17	21	12
Social status	entrepreneu	%	16	2	15	36	20	17
	proficient	%	29	8	51	33	39	15
	craftsman,	%	16	6	17	28	23	15
	student	%	28	84	17	2		
Income	pensioner	%	11			2	18	53
	up to 1000	%	5	5	8	6	1	2
	1001–2000	%	16	12	12	12	30	20
	2001–3000	%	21	17	14	26	24	32
	3001–4000	%	19	21	19	18	20	13
	more than	4%	27	23	42	18	17	30
	unanswered	%	12	21	5	19	8	3

3.1. Research questions

The following section introduces the main questions asked with the questionnaire. It is important to note that although there were 169 questions in the questionnaire, many of them, mostly those related to the general communication management of the city government, are outside the focus of this paper. There were also some open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The answers to these are presented where necessary.

Based on the competing theories about local e-government (customer-oriented and participant-oriented), the main focus of my study is to determine how people view their interactions with governments: what kind of e-services do they expect from their local government? However, before analyzing concrete services, it is important to determine their general communication practices and patterns. The following groups of questions were asked:

1. Questions related to the general communication practices of Tartu, including questions related to citizens' trust of the city government, such as: *Were do the citizens mostly get their information about the city and city government? How often do they visit the city website? What is the most valued in the website? Does the city government take citizens' opinions into account?*
2. Questions related to access and use: *Are there any differences in the Internet use based on age or social status? What is the length of practice using the Internet?*
3. Questions asked about citizens' awareness, readiness and attitude to all, including very recently implemented e- and m-services: *Which e- and m-services (already put into practice or planned) are used and considered useful and important?*



Legend: *I-point in Town Hall*: Information centre to give general information about the city; *bolletins*: promotion material in paper published regularly by the city government; *Linnaleht*: local newspaper published once a week;

Fig. 1. Information channels most often used by the citizens.

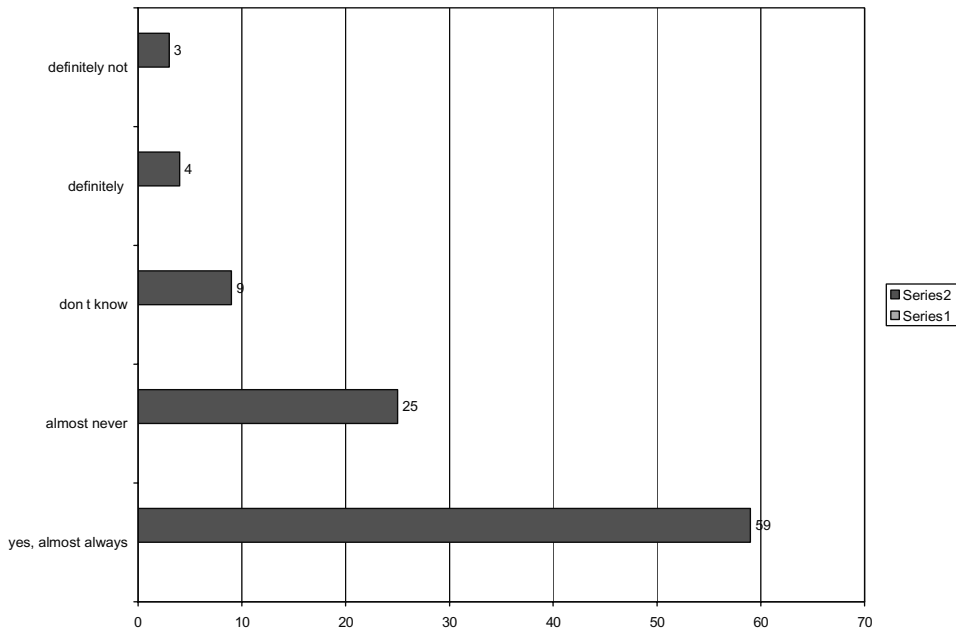


Fig. 2. Does the city government consider the citizens' opinions?.

4. Findings

4.1. Communication practices of Tartu City Government

Although the most used communication channel is the local newspaper “Tartu Postimees”, the Internet has occupied the second place among 11 possibilities. 43 percent of the population of the city states that

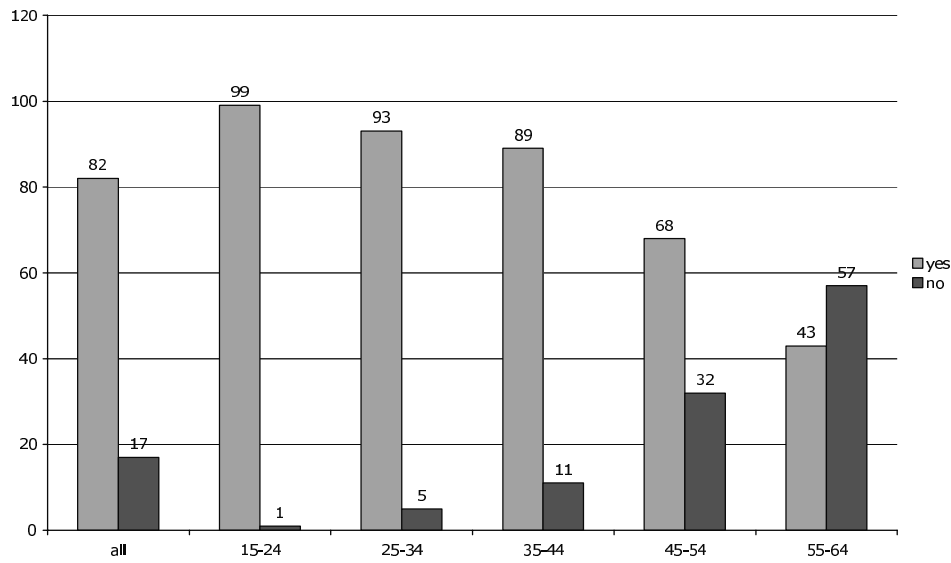


Fig. 3. Internet use in different age groups.

they often use the Internet to get information about the city (Fig. 1). (It is important to mention that I analyzed here only the respondents who had answered “often”). However, to some extent it is surprising that the “information telephone”, which is a quick and simple source of information, is only used by 7 percent of the citizens.

As referred to in the theoretical section, an important factor to motivate people to participate in communication with the city government is to realize that their opinion is useful and taken into consideration by the city government. Based on this assumption I asked citizens about their belief in this issue. Surprisingly big numbers of citizens were sure that their opinion is considered useful and taken into account in administering the city. Even 59 percent of the respondents were quite sure and 4 percent were absolutely sure of it (Fig. 2).

4.2. Use of the Internet

As seen in Fig. 3, the general indicators about Internet use are very high in Tartu – 82 percent of the population. Younger citizens use the Internet significantly more frequently than older citizens. However, it is somewhat more surprising that 43 percent of citizens aged between 55–64 are involved in Internet communication than the fact that 99 percent of people aged 15–24 are “connected”. In addition to age, I also considered the relationship between the social status and Internet use. With regard to the social status, the most active Internet users are students and officials (Fig. 4). Surprisingly, the use of pensioners, executives and workers is equal.

The findings suggest that the phenomenon of “digital divide” is much less acute in Tartu than in other local governments in other countries (for a study in Sweden see Wiklund [14]).

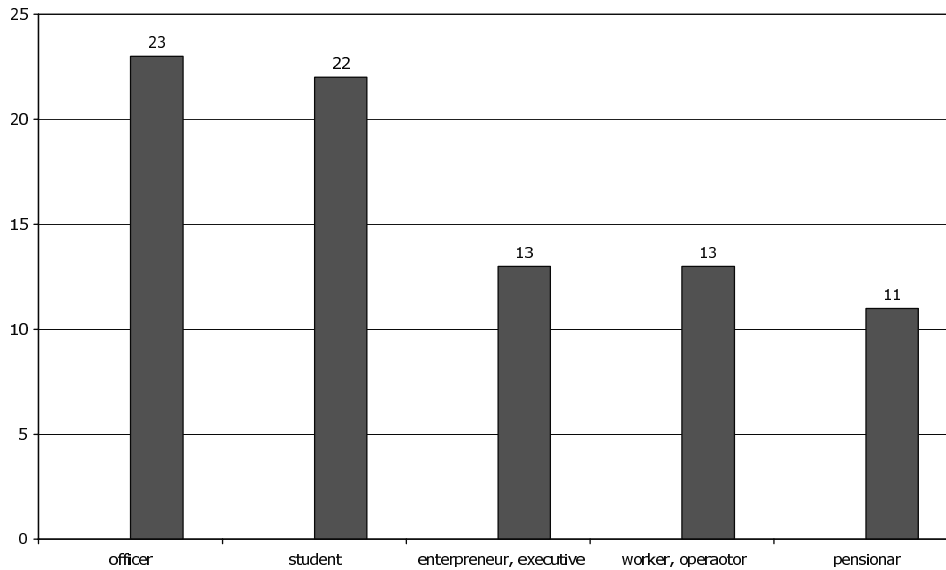


Fig. 4. Internet use and social status.

4.3. Website

The website of Tartu (available on <http://www.tartu.ee/>) is very sizeable – it is composed of more than 2400 pages and with pages of several databases connected to the main page, the total content exceeds 300,000 pages.

Analyzing the website we can say that the structure of the website is logical and user-friendly because the information is presented from the perspective of different user groups. The site is also connected with the most important databases of state institutions. For instance, under the linkage “Social aid“ one can find a direct connection to health insurance fund, social ministry, also to the portal of dental treatment. There is also a separate section “Local government“ where one can find the structure and activities of the city government, foundations and companies in which the city is a partner. There is also a document register where one can find all city documents since 1990 (currently numbering 190,000). A drawback resulting from the extensiveness of the databases is the site’s relatively slow response time. The website also offers general information about the city and information services like statistics, timetables and agendas. The site also contains several online applications, which can be divided into:

- Services which enable citizen to organize their everyday life more efficiently (e.g., pay their bills, fill in different forms, and complete applications)
- Civic services such as citizen feedback forms, questionnaires, and opinion polls which are more common.
- Additionally, the website of Tartu offers services which are being developed in a situation where municipalities have become a profit unit in an increasingly market-oriented environment. Some of these services are not new in their nature but the way to “consume” them is innovative (such as

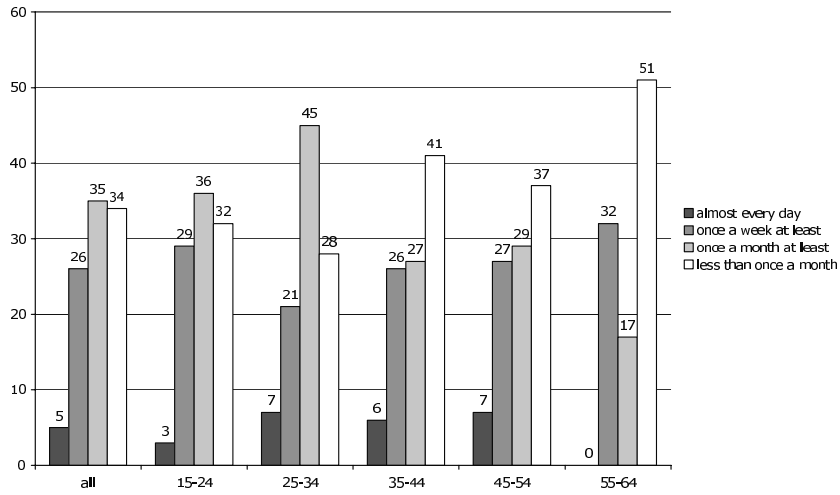


Fig. 5. How often do you visit the website of Tartu?

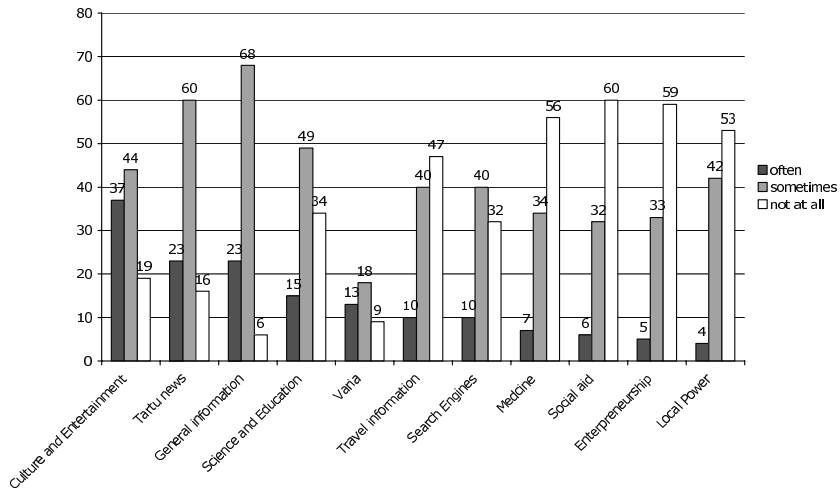


Fig. 6. Use of different sections of the website.

Internet registration to a doctor). But some of them are only possible via Internet and there is no alternative traditional way to use them (e.g., interactive maps where a citizen can chart their current position).

As seen in Fig. 5, 26 percent of the population of Tartu visits the official website of Tartu at least once

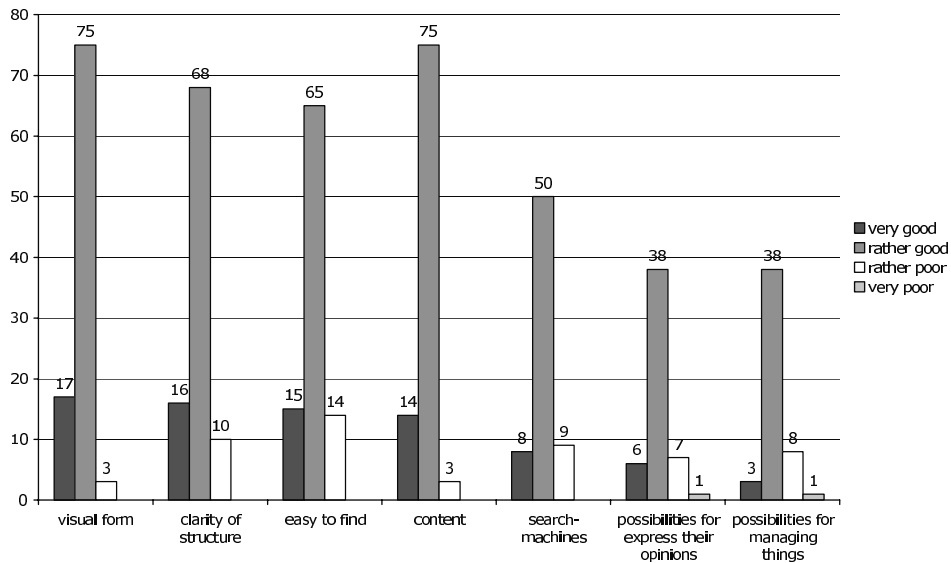


Fig. 7. Evaluation of the website by categories.

a week. However, the number of people who use the website almost every day is not notably high. The most striking finding is that 32 percent of the people between 55–64 years of age visit the website of Tartu at least once a week.

The search patterns of the users of the website are also interesting. As presented in Fig. 6, people most frequently search the culture and entertainment sections (37 percent of the respondents answering “often”). A striking finding concerning the communication management of the city government is that 53 percent of the citizens state that they have never searched anything from the subcategory “Local government” (“Local Power” in the figure). It is also interesting that regardless of being relatively active Internet users as demonstrated in previous sections, they do not often search information related to social aid, medical aid, and local power.

Concerning the quality of the website in different evaluation categories (see Fig. 7), the highest score was given to its visual appearance – 17 percent of the respondents find it very good. As mentioned earlier, visual attractiveness has become very important in the environment of information overload. Also the structure and clarity of the website and its logic (easy to find) got a relatively high evaluation. The most interesting finding, especially in the context of the present study, is the fact that the categories describing e-services (possibilities for expressing their opinions and possibilities for managing things) got the lowest evaluation of all categories. In the next section I will give an overview about these services.

4.4. E-services available via website

Since there is a great amount of different services, but most of them are quite traditional e-applications (including the possibility to sign them digitally and address them to various institutions), I describe

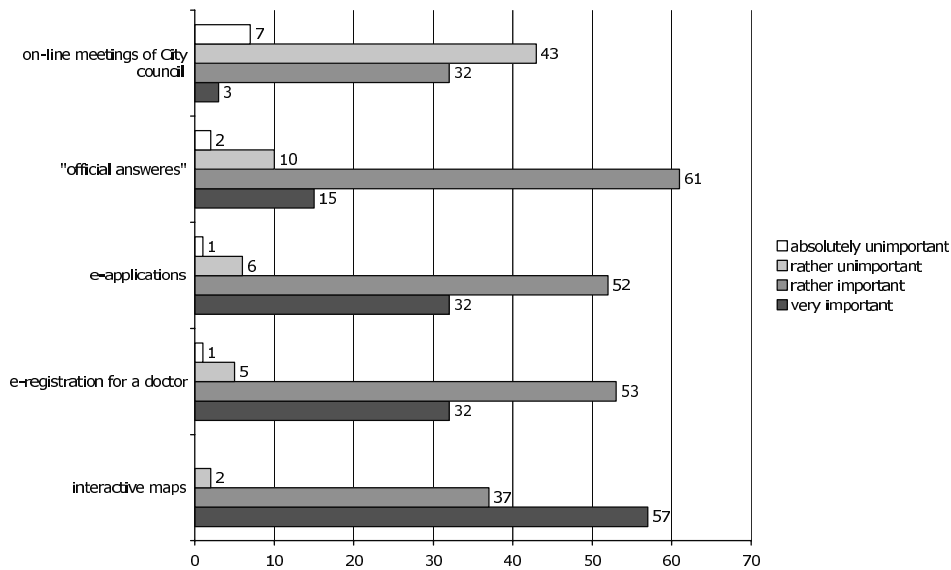


Fig. 8. Importance of different interactive services on the website.

in more detail the most peculiar service of them – the forum “Official answers”. It is the most likely place where we can see how many people are ready and interested to get engaged in dialogue with city government officials. It is also important to observe how officials react to controversial questions. The archive of questions and answers is found at http://www.tartu.ee/?lang_id=1&menu_id=&page_id=1533. The archive is complete in its themes and all themes are grouped which makes it very easy to use it. However, the usage of the forum has dramatically decreased recently because it has undergone some radical changes on the initiative of the city government. The latter closed the possibility of commenting on others' questions with an explanation that there was too much slandering. Forums concentrate on discussions, so one can understand why citizens are not so enthusiastic about it any more. Answers from officials are formal and impersonal, questions are forwarded from one official to other, remaining unanswered for the citizen. Getting an answer may take more than two months. As the number of anonymous questions is not significant, anonymity cannot presumably be the issue restricting participation.

As a good initiative, the city government has onsite instructions how to use new e- and m-services. Video clips introducing these services are also available at http://www.tartu.ee/?lang_id=1&menu_id=6&page_id=2827.

As mentioned, there are numerous services available in the website of Tartu. Figure 8 presents the most extended of them and gives an overview of citizens' opinions of the necessity of these. As seen in Fig. 8 the opportunity to follow meetings of the city government online is regarded as the most unimportant. The surprising finding is that interactive maps are considered more important as e-applications that enable to save time and are comfortable to use. The nature of the interactive maps is to allow citizens to position themselves on a map of the city or to indicate to a problem relating to some area of the city.

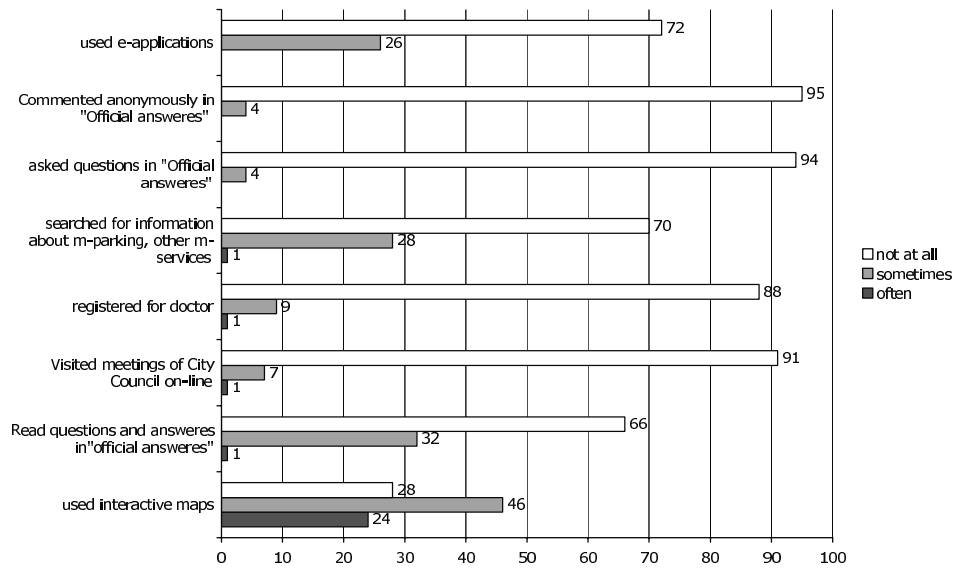


Fig. 9. Use of interactive services of the website.

However, for many citizens two opportunities – to register on-line for a doctor and fill in e-applications are considered as quite important (correspondingly 53 and 52 percent). Another important finding is that many citizens consider the forum introduced in the previous section important (15% very important and 61% quite important).

Website users' opinions on the necessity of various services become curious if we analyze parallel data about real use of the same services (Fig. 9). The interactive maps are as used as they were considered important – 24 percent of respondents used them often. Although many citizens regarded the possibility to fill in and apply e-applications important, 72 percent had never used that possibility. The most pessimistic finding concerning the participation in the administration of the city is that while the forum "official answers" was considered important, in reality 94 percent of the respondents had never asked anything there, 95 percent had never commented even anonymously (at present, the opportunity no longer exists, as mentioned before). Moreover, 66 had never even read the forum.

4.5. Mobile phone, m-services

Many local governments perceive that there is a need to extend the concept of e-government beyond the Internet and integrate a new channel – mobile phone – into it for interaction purposes between citizens and the city government. According to my survey results, 92 percent of citizens use a mobile phone. Therefore, the development of m-services should enable even more people to interact with the city government.

Before analyzing the findings of the survey, it is necessary to give a short description of m-services being offered already site years in Tartu:

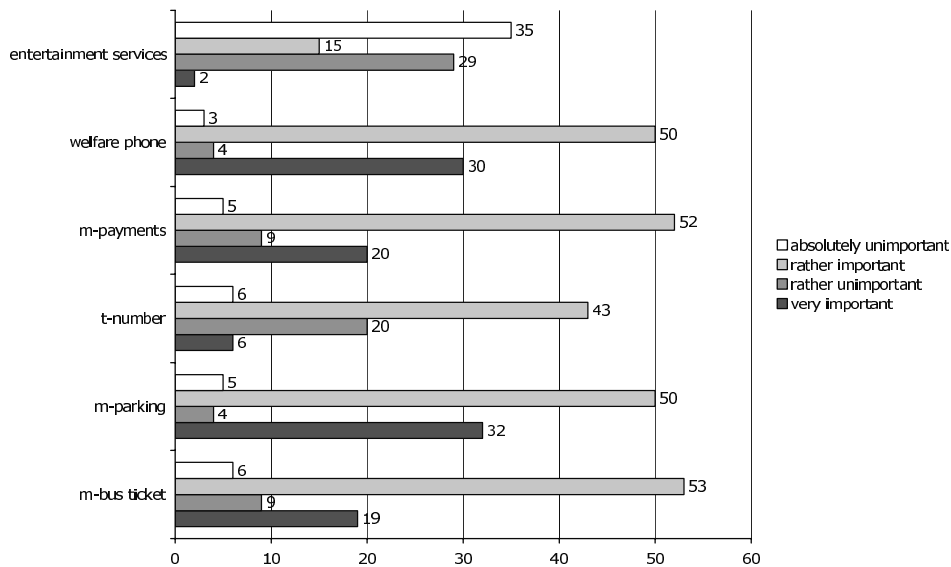


Fig. 10. Importance of m-services.

- *Entertainment services* are logos, signatures of Tartu, everybody can download these to their mobile phone
- *The welfare phone* is a number by the city council open 24/7 where everybody can announce a problem related to the upkeep of the city
- *T-number* is a service that enables to ask information about 90 objects by mobile phone. The codes are listed on the city website or in maps available in information kiosks.
- Other more conventional services such as:
 - * *m-parking* and
 - * *m-payments*

If we look at how important the various services are to individuals (Fig. 10), it is evident that people are interested not only in services which enable them to save time or which make daily living more comfortable. The welfare phone and m-parking are considered equally important (50 percent considers them very important and 30 percent important). The finding that the welfare phone is important demonstrates the social interaction component. Surprisingly, only 20 percent of respondents consider m-payments very important. This phenomenon is probably explained by the fact that e-payments are very common – Estonians have had access to them for several years. Entertainment services are considered relatively unimportant (35 percent considers them absolutely unimportant).

As done in the previous section with e-services, it is also interesting to compare the data about importance and use of m-services. Although 92 percent of people use mobile phones, and many mobile-based services are considered important as well. We can see in Fig. 11 that there are very few users of mobile-based services. For example, only 3 percent of citizens park their car via mobile phone at least

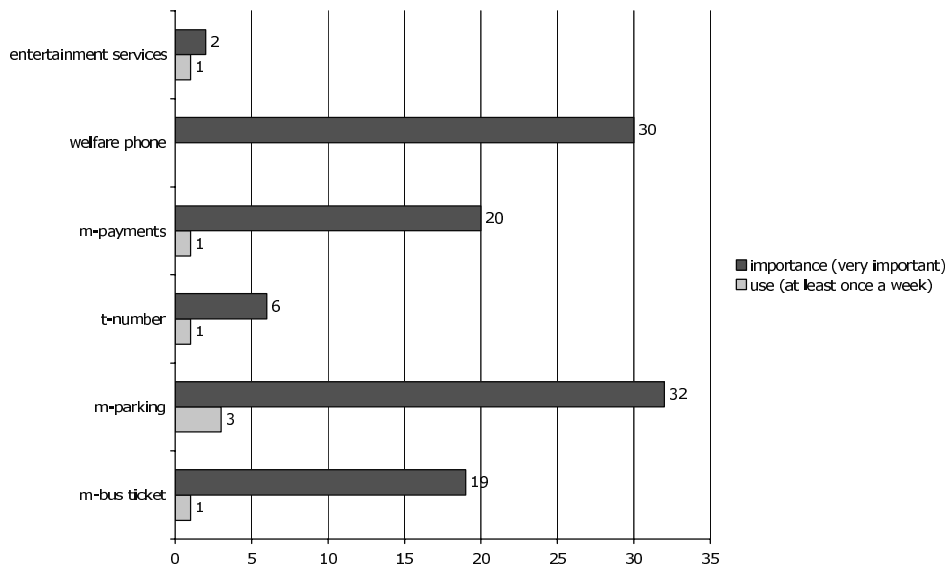


Fig. 11. Importance versus use of m-services.

once a week. Other m-services are also infrequently used. The striking finding here is that services like m-parking and m-bus ticket which are supposed to meet the needs of all groups of people are used so little. In the responses to a corresponding open-ended question, citizens argued that they lack the need for the service (dominant answer), or the motivation.

4.6. Services in developmental phase

M-services which are not in general use but in a developmental phase or just implemented as pilot projects were also of interest. These services are not available to all citizens. However, the city government has promoted them in different communication channels.

Before proceeding I will give a short description of these services:

- *M-teacher* is the web-based interface created for class teachers, which enables a teacher to communicate most operatively with the parents of their students (for instance, to let them know about their child being absent, about the coming parents' meeting etc). A teacher can also send a note about their child's progress and marks at school.
- *M-neighborhood watch* (m-security service) enables the police to send people who have joined this project information about stolen cars or missing persons. And on the contrary, people can give feedback to police about their observation.
- The aim of *m-clinic* is to inform people about their doctors' official hours, to ask for people's help in case of urgency, such as an urgent need for a big amount of blood.
- The use of *m-library* enables a registered reader waiting in a hold line for some book, cd, or video to receive a notice when this item is back in the library.

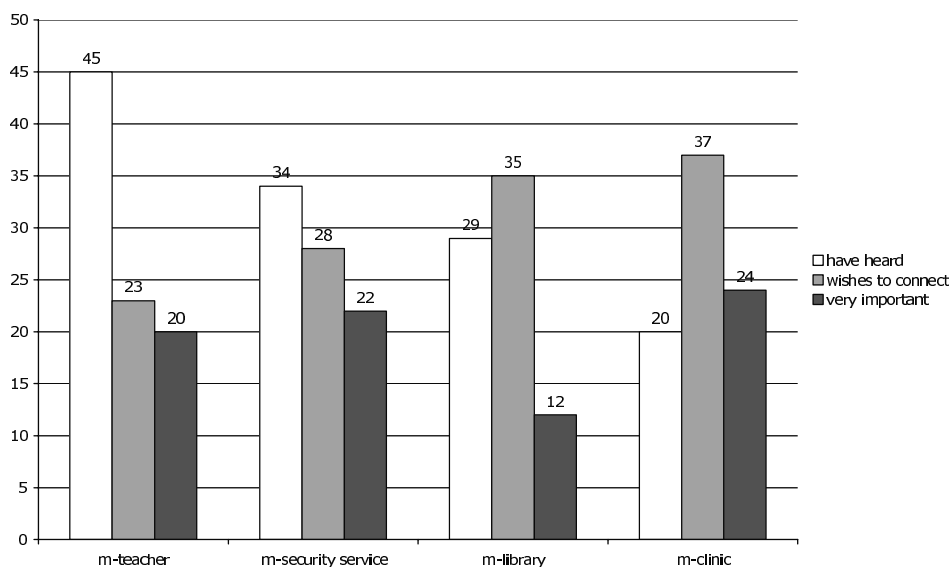


Fig. 12. Information, importance and readiness to use.

Figure 12 presents the data corresponding to the three criteria – awareness, importance and readiness. Examining the data, one can argue that even if almost all services are evaluated with a similar rate of importance, readiness to use is negatively related to awareness. Readiness is higher if awareness is lower. For example, 37 percent are interested in joining the m-clinic project, at the same time only 20 percent have heard about it. Likewise, 35 percent of respondents are interested in using the m-library, but only 29 percent of respondents have heard about it. There is one more an interesting nuance with m-library. Even if 35 percent of citizens are interested in joining this service, only 12 percent consider it useful.

Awareness about the m-teacher service is the highest – 45 percent, but only 23 percent of respondents are interested in joining this service. This can be explained with a relatively high number of students who are not interested in this service while their parents are very interested. Analysis of the data selected by age groups confirms the argument (Fig. 13). Again, the m-teacher service had the most variability of the evaluation. While 33 percent of the respondents between ages 35–44 consider it the most important service, the age group representing students does not consider it useful. This is another demonstration that every target group has its particular expectations regarding e- and m-services. Moreover, there are two sides of every service – one of them represents the performer-side and the other the receiver-side. For the performer side, implementation of e-services can add many accessory obligations beside the performance of everyday duties, like every teacher has them when the school is connected to the m-teacher service of the city government. However, this assumption should be tested by asking teachers.

The same danger can be associated with the service most uniformly and highly evaluated – m-clinic. Fulfillment of the accessory obligations related to the implementation of the m-service can disturb the fulfillment of the basic work of doctors. However, the data presented in Fig. 13 suggests that health services and personal safety services are the most valued among the most extensive citizen groups.

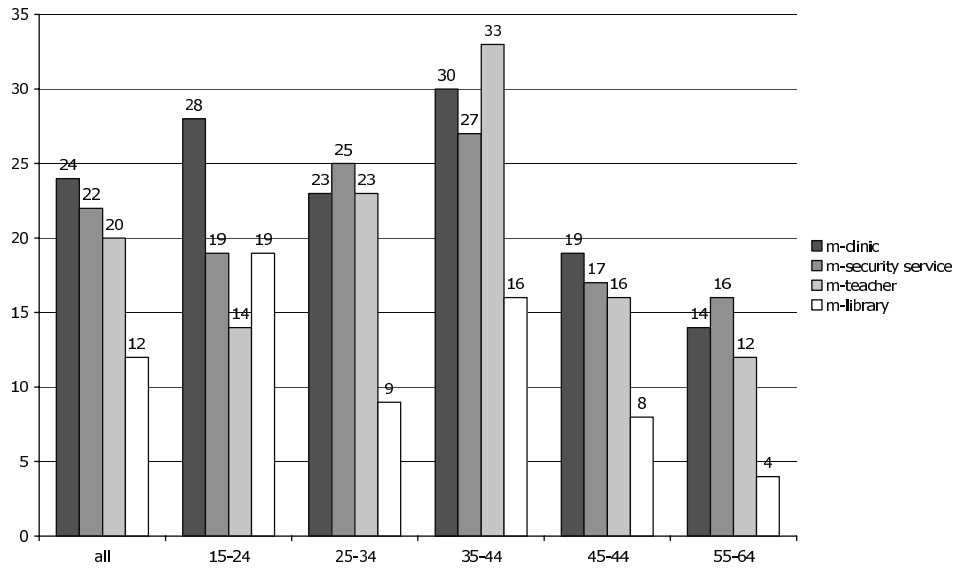


Fig. 13. Services noted as "very important" in different age groups.

My data, especially the presented tendencies about negative relationships between awareness and readiness, suggest that citizens have not reasoned out the essence and importance of different e- and m-services. They idealize the services they do not know and become more critical after gaining more information about them. A different assumption is that they simply do not need interactive services invented and implemented by the city government. However, in the open-ended questions we asked what other services the city government can offer them. There was an abundance of ideas. They dream of getting m-services to get weather reports; pay taxis with their mobile phone; in restaurants get m-wine information and order food; and get m-notices from university teachers when a lecture is cancelled.

5. Discussion and conclusion

My paper originated from the question: is local e-government of Tartu responsive to citizens' needs? Hence, the focus of my study was on the demand side of the e- and m-services provided by the present local government. It also deserves recognition that this was Tartu City Government's first attempt to ask service users what kind of services they would expect.

The study resulted in some fairly positive findings. First, the Internet has clearly become an increasingly important communication channel among citizens to get information about local government. Nearly a half of the sample often used this channel for the mentioned purpose and about one-quarter visited the official website at least once a week. A relatively pessimistic finding, though, concerning the image and importance of the city government among its citizens, showed that 53 percent of respondents had never searched the website for local government resources. On the other hand, it was encouraging to find no

evidence of the so-called “digital divide” which is based on age or social status and which has been noted in other studies.

Some of the findings were more troubling. First, regarding two-way communication and interactivity, an obvious tendency could be noticed. Many citizens, surprisingly, were sure that members of the city government consider their opinions useful and take them into account in administering the city. Nevertheless, their interest in participation in the forum was remarkably low. When analyzing the discussions of this forum, one can understand why citizens are not so enthusiastic about it. Answers given by officials are formal and impersonal, questions are forwarded from one official to another, citizens waiting for an excessive amount of time to get answers to their questions. Moreover, usage has decreased dramatically even since the beginning of my study, because during the period the forum was radically changed by the city government who closed the possibility to comment on other citizens' questions and comments. Second, the city government offers a great variety of interactive m-services. Most of them are innovative, either in the method of consumption or in the nature of the service. Although citizens consider them important, they do not really use them.

As discussed in the theory section, interactive service provision by local governments runs in a vicious circle – if there are not enough people participating, there is no reason to provide innovative services. And if services are not attractive, nobody will use them. This circle is evident in the sample city. Although citizens do not seem very interested in using interactive services of the local government, they are very critical of the possibility to interact electronically with city government. However, there are not enough attractive solutions to transform citizens into interactive participants in governance. The most important factor in capturing citizens as active participants is undoubtedly their conviction that they need the services that are offered by their local e-government. One cannot require usage of e-services, but if interactive communication – even if only “consumerism” of entertainment services – becomes a routine, it might provide a solution to problems stemming from the perceived disconnection of political and administrative institutions from citizens' everyday concerns.

As discussed in previous works, the biggest disadvantage of the phenomenon called “commercial democracy” by Ridell [11, p. 157] is that it does not involve citizens in communication between themselves. My study demonstrates clearly that people do expect the possibility to read and comment on the opinions of citizens beyond the answers of officials. The popularity of the forum “Official answers” decreased remarkably after the city government's decision to cut that option.

There are a few limitations that must be discussed with regard to my study. Strictly speaking, the data only permits me to generalize the use of e- and m-services in Tartu. As a first step future studies should attempt to replicate the results in other parts of Estonia, and then move outward to different countries. Additionally, a focus on mapping of potential user groups of every service may enable a more valid analysis of actual use. And if the data suggest that the potential user group is demonstrably larger than the number of real users, further analysis should map the barriers between citizens and innovative services oriented to them. Within the constraints of these limitations however, my study has shown many interesting results regarding the attitudes toward and use of e- and m-services by the public.

In sum, my article has identified that in our reference city the website design and technical possibilities do respond to citizens' needs, but there is still a gap between the readiness and real usage of m- and e-services of Tartu. Part of the gap can possibly be explained by the low quality content of some studied services like the forum, which is not open for comments. The citizens, however, do not appear to have much motivation to be in an interactive relation with their local government. My data suggest that citizens have not reasoned out what the essence and importance of different e- and m-services is, and therefore are not motivated to use them. It is also important to consider that every target group has their

particular expectations to e- and m-services. Furthermore, every service has two sides – one of them represents the performer-side and the other the receiver-side. For the performer-side, implementation of e-services can add many accessory obligations beside the performance of everyday duties.

In terms of radical change in public administration, I suggest one key factor is also the change of the attitudes of officials which relate to implementation of IT in administration of the local government and governmental institutions in general. As also pointed out by Jaeger [6], e-government can create ways for government officials to avoid taking responsibility for their duties through the use of technology. If government officials become less responsive because they do not physically see or speak to the citizens they serve, then e-government would be serving to make government administration less transparent and responsive. Thus, beside the question how to motivate people to use e- and m-services, there remains the other question how to make the new communications technology help to change the institutionalized democracy qualitatively. In other words, the question remains, how to motivate citizens to give more and detailed feedback about e- and m-services, and how to motivate officials to give citizens more feedback than “Thanks for your comments”.

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What are the factors of e-activeness in citizens' interaction with local government?

Kristina REINSALU

Institute of Journalism and Communications, University of Tartu
Ulikooli 18, Tartu, 5009, Estonia
tel: +372 5281392

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on e-activeness which is formed by the use of different e-services of local government. It presents data from a survey conducted among citizens of Tartu, city of Estonia where Internet use has developed under a relatively short period of time and reached impressive levels. However, even city government offers a great variety of interactive services, the majority of citizens do not really use them. Accordingly, this paper seek to answer what are the most important factors in forming e-activeness. The author has to admit that e-activeness seems to have become a magnifying glass which enables seeing the entire passiveness that governs the real relationships with the local government.

Keywords: local government, Internet, web page of local government's internet based services, users of different services, e-activeness

I. INTRODUCTION

Even though the Internet may seem to be an exhausted issue by being widely discussed in both the academic (Livingstone et al 2005, Carpentier 2003, Dahlberg 2001, Hague and Loadre 1999, Tsagaraousianou 1998, to name only some of the authors) as well as political circles from the 1990s on, literature on local e-government is not very extensive. And even if the existing one provides discussions where local e-government is considered as a tool for democracy (Jaeger 2003) or in the opposite rather as tools and techniques of e-commerce to the work of government (Akman et al, 2005), there is a lack of thorough discussions on the topic of e-activeness in local governments.

This paper focuses on e-activeness which is formed by the use of different e-services of local government. The discussion of e-service quality in the public sector has been very limited. Kaylor et al (2001) point out that the considerable literature that exists to date in the area of e-gov service delivery tends to focus on the ideal standard rather than actually examining the realities of delivery. My study and paper about the formation of e-activeness tries to fill that gap.

Supported by a particular case study, this paper addresses citizens' use of e-services provided by the local government in Tartu, Estonia, a country where Internet use has developed under a relatively short period of time and reached impressive levels. The results are derived through face-to-face interviews (n=406) with Internet users in Tartu and the paper seek to answer the main question: What are the most important factors in the formation of e-activeness?

My focus is on local government as it is at the local level where citizens most directly experience the presence of the governance and act as active public agents.

In the context of this paper, I should not ignore Estonia's position as an e-state. The country is regarded as an e-tiger by both foreigners and Estonians. E-government provision in Estonia is remarkably high. The latest Eurostats tables place Estonia first among new member states both in the Internet access and Internet use categories.

Statistical data are encouraging: according to the latest research (Emor 2006, e-monitoring research in the period of March-May 2006) 60% of the Estonian population aged 6–74 use the Internet. It is an especially pronounced fact that only within the last year 65,000 new Internet users have joined. In the context of this research, the following indicators are even more important. An e-state orientated research (Emor 2006), which studied the usage of public sector e-services in 32 states, found that Estonia is one of the most developed users of public sector e-services among Central and East European countries. 36% of Estonian citizens aged 16–74 have used the Internet for interaction purposes with the public sector either to search for information in the websites of state agencies, print out forms, deliver information about them, or participate in public discussions. Conclusively all conditions exist to ensure active use of public online services by Estonians. While it is happened in some areas, for example more than 90% of Estonians do banking and about 82% do their taxes online, their interaction with government and local government, a focus of my research, still does not indicate activeness.

2. MAPPING CONSUMERIST AND DEMOCRATIC ELEMENTS OF ONLINE INTERACTION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Local governments and information technology have been mostly written about from the perspective of access (Norris 2000; van Dijk 2000.) Only a few studies and articles have directly addressed the services of a local government. One such author is Wiklund who indicates that if correctly designed, ICT-enabled services have a deliberative democratic potential (2005), and found in his study conducted in the Swedish local governments that the services existing today support only to a very limited extent the processes of social learning through

rational argumentation, the core idea in Habermas' discursive model of deliberative democracy.

Also Docter and Dutton, who describe in their study the Public Electronic Network of city of Santa Monica, California point out, that the enthusiasm of 1990s has faded (Docter and Dutton 1998). The electronic service delivery was expected to empower citizens who are less politically active, encourage collective political action through the formation of subject-specific discussion groups, and remove intermediaries, whether political parties or the mass media, in favour of a more direct form, but this has not happened.“ (Docter and Dutton 1998).

Many authors have discussed whether cyber optimism is still warranted or perhaps cyber skeptics are right by feeling that ICTs have not fulfilled their potential lead to participatory democracy which would probably never come about. I am of the opinion that such discussion is fruitless as feels Bryan (1998:164)

Historically, the majority of writing on the subject of the development of ICTs and their democratic potential has fallen into a binary division between optimism and dystopia, with the optimistic strand of thought giving rise to the current political infatuation with technological development as a panacea for a range of social and economic ills. A debate constructed upon these fault-lines does little to foster an environment in which the implications of choosing to invest in a particular technology are fully explored. The hype which has been stirred up is muddying the waters of discussion and fuelling unreal expectations from the development of ICTs, rather than bringing them into the public sphere for considered debate.

I think discussion should be geared towards issues such as whether we have consumer democracy instead of participatory democracy as Taylor and Bellamy (2000) contend and if it is so why is it bad, also could consumer democracy be just a phase before participatory democracy or on the contrary perhaps development toward consumer democracy excludes the possibility of ever achieving participatory democracy.

I feel that consumer democracy is in a sense the first phase of participatory democracy. Taylor and Bellamy (1998) have expressed a similar idea by contending that responsiveness to citizens' needs is the key dimension of an information society, and that this will increasingly depend on the effectiveness of what we propose to call 'consumer democracy' (Taylor and Bellamy 1998: 92). As Ridell (2002) has explained, local governments operate nowadays in the conditions very similar to the business environment. It rings true in Estonia where local governments offer 70% of services, offering companies a competition in regards of service quality. By offering and using services, local government is also in a very good position obtaining information on public preferences and attitudes. This in turn increases public trust toward local government and

technology; it also creates premises for e-activeness and involvement in participatory democracy, for example participating in online forums, etc.

Before further discussion, I find it necessary to define some terms used in the given text. Since e-activism refers to the use of electronic means to mobilize volunteers, raise funds, disseminate information, and otherwise pursue the various functions of interest groups, I would use in my text the notion of e-activeness. This term denotes activeness of people using their local government e-services. Based on the literature concerning e-government, these services are categorized as e-government services and e-democracy services (Buckley 2003). As I already mentioned, I myself do not support distinguishing between services in regards of e-activeness since one would lead to another.

For me, time is one of the most important factors with e-activeness as also proclaimed by Dahlgren (2003). As Dahlgren stresses time is a determining factor in the formation of involvement and activeness. He points out, that we are however in the first stage of a new media era and people are just getting accustomed to it. Dahlgren also points out that with the time factor is closely related the other important factor of e-activeness – practices. Practices can be interpreted as practice of practical services which facilitate our everyday life, but also practice of consuming such services which increase our democratic participation. Again, the longer the usage of practical services, the more likely it is to reach a recognition that there are services out there which enable us to actively participate in the work of the local government.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to find the answer to what are the most important factors in the formation of e-activeness, I conducted a case study of the city of Tartu, Estonia. The main reason for choosing Tartu was its extensive experience with developing e-services and mobile applications for public services. In spite of its small size (with its population of 99,882 residing within the territory of 38.8 square kilometres, it is the second largest city of Estonia) the city administration is undergoing a comprehensive transformation to provide modern public services ensuring ease of access and interaction for citizens. The city administration cooperates with companies in order to develop new technologies, applies the most innovative skills and supports the creation and development of spin-off companies. Characteristic to the city of Tartu is its high concentration of IT-firms and IT-specialists. It should be also mentioned that Tartu is home to Estonia's largest university which is often cited as a distributor of progressive thinking and developer of innovation activities.

My study was completed with the help of the research company Faktum and the City Council of Tartu. The research method of face-to-face interviews was used. The sampling frame was made up of citizens of Tartu aged from 15 to 64. The sample consisted of 406 respondents and the results can be extended to the

whole sample (representative sample). The maximum error is $\pm 4.9\%$. A multi-stage probability record selection was used for completing the sample. I can also consider my constant observation and familiarization with services and possibilities introduced in this paper as a method.

The distribution of social-demographic variables has been following: The gender split is 45% male. A predominant respondent has sub-professional education. 81% of respondents consider Estonian as their mother language. The majority of the remaining 19% are native speakers of Russian. The sample is a good cross-section of the society: entrepreneurs and top-specialists constitute 16% of the respondents, proficient specialists 29%, workers 16%, students 28%, and pensioners 11%. The majority of respondents indicated a monthly income of less than 4000 kroons (~256 EUR).

In applying the concept of activeness to this research and in calculating activeness, I used the indexing method, which transformed the sums of different questions into activity indices. These questions were related to the use of e-services the use of which I associate with being an e-citizen (use of e-applications, e-mailing to officials, use of the forum "Official answers", visiting the city government's on-line meetings, etc. The indices were then normalized to four: (i) *very passive*; (ii) *relatively passive*; (iii) *relatively active*; (iv) *active*. Statistical results were only reported if statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

4. FINDINGS

I regard it necessary to mention some facts about Internet use by the people of Tartu which are based on my earlier research (Reinsalu 2006). I will also add some important facts about the website of Tartu.

The general indicators of the Internet use in Tartu are very high - 82 percent of the population. Younger citizens use the Internet significantly more frequently than the older ones. However, surprisingly 43 percent of the citizens aged 55-64 are involved in Internet communication. So the encouraging finding was that we did not find evidence of the "digital divide" based on age or social status that was noted in other studies.

The website of Tartu (available on <http://www.tartu.ee/>) is very sizeable – it is composed of more than 2,400 pages and together with the pages of several databases connected to the main page, the total content exceeds 300,000 pages. However, one relatively pessimistic finding concerning the image and importance of city government among its citizens was that 53 percent of respondents have never searched local government resources from the website (Reinsalu 2006).

The site contains several online applications, which can be divided into:

- Services which enable citizen to organize their everyday life more efficiently (e.g., pay their bills, fill in different forms, and complete applications)

- Civic services such as citizen feedback forms, questionnaires, and opinion polls which are more common.
- Additionally, the website of Tartu offers services which are being developed in a situation where municipalities have become a profit unit in an increasingly market-oriented environment. Some of these services are not new in their nature but the way to „consume” them is innovative (such as Internet registration to a doctor). But some of them are only possible via Internet and there is no alternative traditional way to use them (e.g., interactive maps where a citizen can chart their current position).

However, I identified that the use of different services city government offers, is very low. Even the use of practical everyday services like e-applications is very low, let alone the services attributed to participatory democracy, such as the use of online forum. In reality 94 percent of the respondents have never asked anything there, 95 percent have never commented even anonymously. Moreover, 66% have never read this forum (Reinsalu 2006).

To summarize what has been said above – the city government offers a great variety of interactive services. Most of them are innovative, either with regard to the method of consumption or the nature of a service. But even if considered important, the majority of citizens do not really use the services. My further research concentrates on the question, who are the relatively small group of active people, what are the most important (affective) factors in forming e-activeness?

4.1 Citizen activism and socio-demographic characteristics

In order to answer that question, I decided to create an activism index, which was developed in compliance with the methodology described below. The questions from the questionnaire which describe e-activeness of citizens were chosen to serve as a basis for the index. The cumulative activism index included a question, the number of positive answers to which determined the placement of a citizen in the activism scale. On the basis of the initial activism index, I created a simplified activism index with the aim of creating groups of respondents that are better comparable with respect to their size, decreasing the number of groups and facilitating further analysis. Distribution of citizens in the activism scale has been presented in Figure 1.

As seen in Figure 1, a very large amount of urban citizens qualifies in the scale of activism as very passive. 42 individuals out of the 406 questioned citizens can be considered active.

Before moving on with the analysis and describing such socio-demographic features as age, social status, sex, based on the created index, I will observe if the assumption developed in the theoretical part that people’s e-activeness is related to the time or to be more precise, to the fact how long-term Internet users they are finds confirmation. I identified a statistical link between activism

and the general length of time of Internet use. Although the link is statistically important, as mentioned above, we cannot maintain when we look at Figure 2 that citizen activism would significantly increase in accordance with the fact that they have been using the Internet for a long time, i.e. over 5 years. At the same time the figure allows us to see clearly that e-activeness of the people who started to use the Internet only this year or last year is modest.

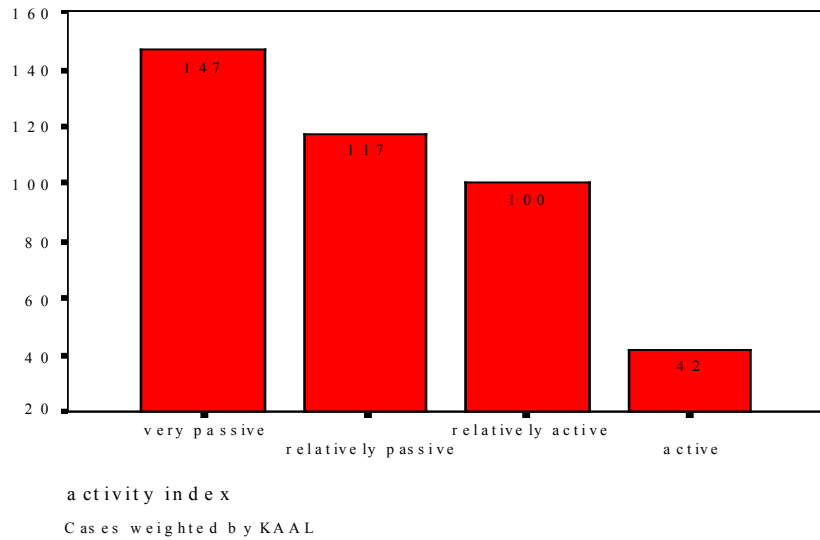


Figure 1. Distribution of citizens according to their activism

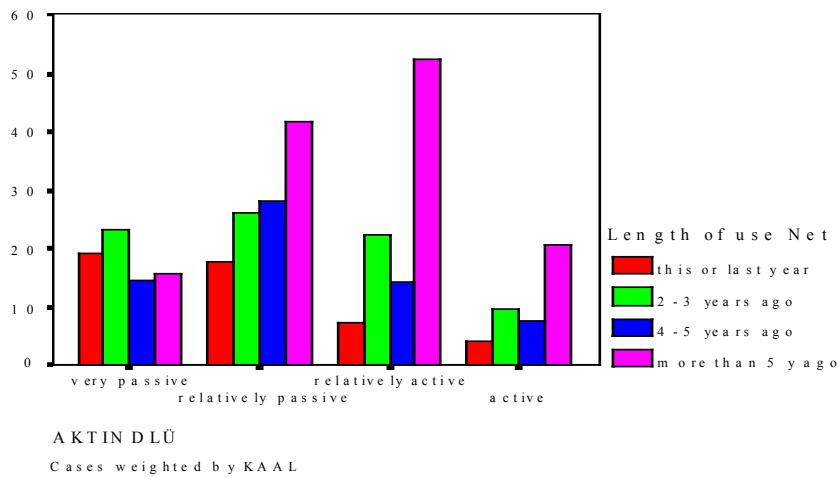


Figure 2. Composition of activism groups by when an individual started using Internet; comparison of means, $p < 0.01$

I was also interested if e-activeness relates to the social status (see Figure 3).

Again, there is a statistical link. The relationship between the social status and activism is the following: there is no separately outstanding group of citizens who are more active than others; very similar in terms of activism are entrepreneurs, managers, top specialists and the group comprising medium-level specialists and officials, and the group of students of secondary schools and higher educational institutions. As expected, the most active people are officials, medium-level specialists, but representatives of this group are also the most fluctuating ones. The very passive group also contains ample numbers of them. It was also expected that the elderly were very passive. But what can be considered the most interesting is that top specialists and key figures in the life of the city are not active in communication with their city.

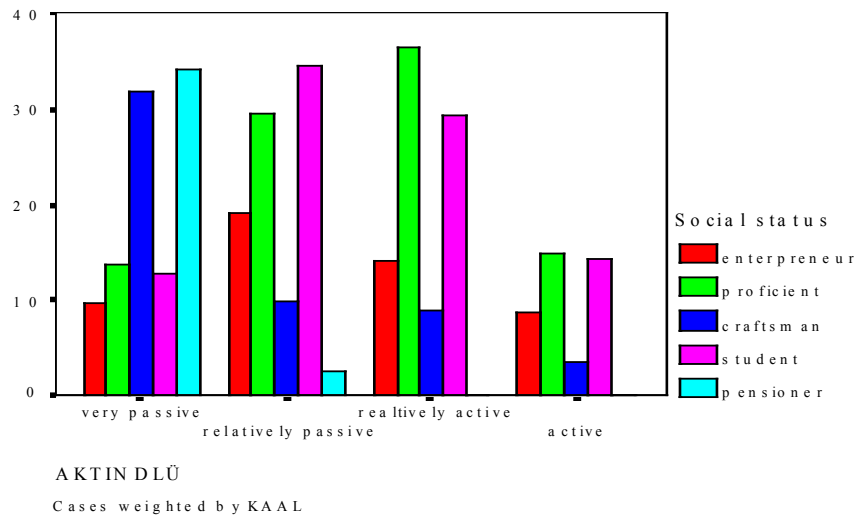


Figure 3. Composition of activism by social status, $p < 0.01$

When mapping the more active groups interacting with the city, I also observed the relationships between sex, age and ethnic origin. Although single features indicated differences in the activism of women and men, Estonians and non-Estonians, the relation is not statistically worthwhile. The principal borderline that could be also called a gap runs in line with age. In the age of 25–64 there is a link between the social status and activism, but in the case of young people there is nothing to do with anything but their age.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This case provides a unique opportunity to examine key legal and design issues concerning local governments' implementation of electronic democracy within the European context. Even by being a small city in any context, Tartu serves as an excellent example how local government is able to offer a broad variety of services. The case of Tartu also makes it evident that much harder than ensuring access and services is to motivate people using e-democracy services, e.g. participating forums.

Based on my own research as well as other authors, some important components of e-activeness should be noted. First participatory democracy and consumer democracy should not be kept apart. The last one should not be seen as a derogative term. As explicitly declared in the theoretical chapter, I do not support the need to make a distinction between consumer and participatory democracy, but share the view with Taylor and Bellamy (1998) that information technology is, among other things, a means of collecting information about the preferences of citizens as well as the choices of public services made by citizens. This would result, at least ideally, in a situation where the design and implementation of services conforms better with public interests which in turn would increase people's motivation to take part in participatory democracy services.

Second, my study proves that the length of time is an important factor in the course of which the relationship between a local government and its citizen develops from a consumer relationship into a partnership. The majority of local e-government services are performance-oriented or "every-day-life-services", but the consumption of these can be a first step to bring citizens closer to their local government. The greatest concern however is that based on this as well as previous researches, the public does not use even practical services as much as infrastructure and accessibility would enable. This leads us to the issue of motivation. Also Santa Monica's project demonstrated as pointed out by Docter and Dutton (1998), that the Internet and the Multimedia revolution will not short-circuit such major dilemmas of democratic participation as public apathy.

Besides time and the factors accompanying time, motivation is a very important element. Even people with long-term Internet experience may lose interest if they are not offered anything new or feedback from officials is insufficient. It would be vain to expect high motivation when forum participants receive "Thank you very much for your interesting comment!" as a reply to their concerns as it happened in the above-mentioned Tartu forum.

With motivation, the important point is the passiveness the officials display by following developments in e-government. It was also established by the 2006 research consigned by Estonian E-governance Academy. The audit (E-governance Academy, 2006), which investigated, among other things, the desire and possibilities of citizens to consume the benefits of an information society, identified the following: Estonia is technically ready to provide extremely good

servicing, but it gets entangled into passiveness and the wrong mentality of officials.

The problem of passiveness may be explained from multiple viewpoints. One would relate it to the lack of experience. This is the factor Dahlgren (2003) refers to while discussing time dimension. In a given context however it relates more to the lack of overall participation practices.

In sum, e-activeness seems to have become a magnifying glass which enables seeing the entire passiveness that governs the real relationships with the local government and also the state. In order not to conclude the article with this hopeless statement, my research gives some reason for optimism. Although the Internet is not a quick fix to democracy, it can be a fix to democracy. The dimension of time is an important factor here. My statement that a consumerist relationship with the Internet may develop into something more profound is also supported by Livingstone (Livingstone et al 2005: 289):

“The Internet can facilitate participation precisely because of its interactivity, encouraging its users to ‘sit forward’, click on the options, find the opportunities that exist, begin to contribute content, come to feel part of community and so, perhaps by gradual steps, shift from acting as a consumer to increasingly (or in addition) acting as a citizens.”

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Does Civic Culture Influence the Use of Online Forums? A Comparative Study of Local Online Participation in Estonia and Norway

Kristina Reinsalu¹ and Marte Winsvold²

Abstract

In this article we study the relationship between civic culture and the use of local online forums in Estonia and Norway. We expect that due to the countries' different political experiences their civic cultures give rise to different forms of political participation, and that each of their motives for participating differ. By comparing survey data on the use of online forums, we find that the level of online participation is slightly higher in Estonia. This may be due to a lack of other outlets of public expression and moreover due to the fact that Estonian democracy and the Internet came about at approximately the same time. In Estonia, the development of civic culture and ICT has been interwoven – the former strongly influenced the latter, leaving an impression on democracy in Estonia. In Norway, on the contrary, democratic institutions were long established; therefore, online participation became just another means of public expression and consequently achieved less attention.

1. Introduction

With the introduction of Internet discussion forums, citizens worldwide have acquired new outlets of expression. Unlike participation in traditional arenas of public communication, participation in online forums is in principle, unrestricted, which means a wider array of voices can be heard in the public political debate. The potential of the Internet to enlarge the public sphere of political discussion has led to high expectations of democratic gains, and therefore a more inclusive, pluralist and

1 Researcher and doctoral student, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia.

2 Researcher, Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research and doctoral student, University of Oslo, Norway.

comprehensive public sphere has been envisioned. Although this optimistic view has crumbled, online debate has nevertheless influenced politics, locally, nationally and globally (Torpe 2005, di Gennaro and Dutton 2006, Dugdale et al. 2005, Winsvold 2007). The political role and function of online discussions, however, will depend on the context in which the discussions take place. In this article, we look at the political role of local online forums in Estonia and Norway. The two countries represent typical examples of new and old democracies: Estonia, which gained full independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, has comparatively new democratic institutions. Norway, on the other hand, has a long-established democratic tradition; Norwegian citizens have taken an active part in politics since the early 19th century. Because the citizens of the two countries have different political experiences, their attitudes and orientation towards the political system, that is, the respective civic cultures of the two countries have developed differently. Several studies have found that civic culture influences the forms and levels of political participation (Ingelhart 2002, Letki 2004). In line with these findings we hypothesize that the civic culture will also affect the political role and function of this new participation arena: the way online forums are used, and the citizens' motivation to use them.

Estonia and Norway differ with regard to civic culture (Ingelhart 2002), whereas they are similar concerning Internet access, which is equally high in both countries. The high access level means that online forums have the potential of being politically important, whereas the different civic cultures of the two countries may give different impetus to the use of online forums for political purposes and may also give the political online communication different functions and status in the general political discourse. A comparison of the two countries may therefore provide insight into the relationship between civic culture and the use of online forums.

Our main research question is: How do civic culture and political experience influence the use of online political discussion at the local level?

This question will be answered by comparing the use of local online discussion forums in Estonia and Norway. Population surveys of Internet use have been conducted in both countries. To account for the differences in civic culture, we refer to existing literature in the field.

2. The notion of civic culture

The main idea of the concept of civic culture is that citizenship not only consists of formal rights and obligations, but also has a subjective dimension to it (Dahlgren 2007). Even if legal and political factors are absent or insufficient, the civic culture may be strong enough to support political action, which we saw in several countries when the Communist system began to collapse (Dahlgren 2003:154). A simple way to picture civic culture is as the political psychology of a nation or com-

munity, which guides the way citizens of that particular nation or community relate to politics and political participation. Civic culture thereby denotes “the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations toward politics among the members of a political system” (Almond and Verba 1989). Civic culture may support or not support democratic or participatory forms of governance, and will hence influence the way participatory possibilities such as online discussion forums are received, used and integrated into politics.

Peter Dahlgren (2007) divides civic culture into several interrelated dimensions of which four are especially useful for analysing political participation: The first is the dimension of *spaces*, which refers to the spaces available for public political participation. The second dimension, *values*, refers to the participatory values that exist in a specific culture, such as the sense of civic duty. The third dimension, *practices and skills*, concerns the skills of the population necessary to participate in the democratic process and the routine practising of these skills. The fourth is the dimension of *identity*. Important features of a civic identity which may affect the citizens’ aptness to take part in politics are their self-image as political agents and their sense of political efficacy and empowerment.

As for the connection of civic culture to online participation, Dahlgren’s dimensions of civic culture give us a realm within which we can interpret online activity. We assume that differences in spaces, values, skills and practices and civic identity will affect the use of online forums, and thereby the role of these forums in politics. The differences in civic culture between the two countries hence help us develop a hypothesis on the use of online forums. The questions we seek to answer in the following are: How do the civic cultures of Estonia and Norway differ, and how does this affect the use of online discussion in local government?

2.1 How do the civic cultures of Estonia and Norway differ?

As for the dimensions of civic culture proposed by Peter Dahlgren, Norway and Estonia differ markedly on several points. Concerning the first dimension, *spaces* available for public communication and debate, the infrastructure of the public communication space differs due to the different historical regimes. The existence of public arenas of political information and discussion is vital to democracy and for civic culture to develop (Dahlgren 2007). Such communication spaces include physical spaces of face-to-face communication, along with different media. Online forums represent one among several publicly visible spaces where political communication can take place.

Due to their different political histories, Estonia and Norway differ with regard to the dissemination of available spaces of political communication. The Norwegians have been relying on and are accustomed to expressing themselves through the printed press (Elvestad 2001). In Estonia, on the contrary, because the free press is a relatively new phenomenon, Estonians are not as accustomed to using the press

to take part in the public debate. These differences might lead one to think that the online space of communication would be more important and gain greater volume in Estonia than in Norway. One could hypothesise that the Estonians will make great use of the new spaces available, whereas the Norwegians will stick to the traditional ones to which they are accustomed. The question we pose is therefore:

- Does the level of political online activity differ between the two countries, compared to the level of participation in the traditional media?

The second dimension of civic culture, participatory *values*, has also been shown to be different in the two countries. Exactly what shared values are necessary for a democracy to function can be discussed (Dahlgren 2007:6). Yet, the duty to *participate* in political processes in one way or another is fundamental to democracy and an important part of a democratic citizenship, irrespective of how democracy is structured and what institutions it relies on. The extent to which citizens expect themselves and others to participate will affect the level of participation and the motivation for participating. In Norway, the right to participate is long established and taken for granted. The sense of civic duty and the inclination to vote is relatively high, although there has been a certain fatigue in the population for the last decades and a corresponding decline in voter turnout (Rose 2005). People tend to participate less in traditional party politics (party membership, voting) and more in alternative forms of political participation (demonstrations, action groups). These alternative forms of political participation are often less demanding (when it comes to time and resources) and more single-issue focused. In Estonia, the situation is the opposite. People generally tend to participate more in traditional forms of political action and less in alternative forms. Still, there is reason to believe that the sense of civic duty is lower in Estonia than in Norway, as Estonians are not equally socialised into a culture of participation, because they were only recently freed from a long-lasting totalitarian regime. We therefore assume that the motivation for participating in online discussions differs between the two countries, and that the motive of civic duty is more pronounced in Norway than in Estonia.

The *value* dimension is closely connected to the dimension of *identity*. People must see themselves as members of and participants in a democracy in order to act as citizens. According to Dahlgren, “a robust civic identity implies an empowered political agent and achieved citizenship” (Dahlgren 2007:7 – 8). Empowered citizens feel that they, acting in concert with others, can make a difference and that they have some kind of impact on politics. Political efficacy and political agency are aspects of political empowerment. People should feel that their say can influence the decisions about local issues. We assume that Estonians, because they experienced a repressive regime, feel less politically empowered and that they have a weaker sense of political agency. This would also affect their motives of participation in online discussions. We assume that Norwegians believe more in the impact of their

participation than Estonians believe in the impact of theirs. Our research question concerning values and identities is therefore:

- How do the motives of online participants differ in the two countries?

The fourth dimension of civic culture concerns participatory *skills and practices*. To be able to exercise one's citizenship requires certain skills. Furthermore, concrete practices of participation must be generalised and regularly performed, to be part of the civic culture; that is, they must have an element of routine about them, if they are to be part of the civic culture (Dahlgren 2007:7). To be able to read, write, and operate a computer can all be seen as competencies important to participating in online forums, but lack of civic practices, skills, and traditions may be an obstacle for many citizens in new democracies. Both Estonians and Norwegians obviously have the skills and practices to navigate on political pages on the Internet. They differ, however, regarding their skills and the practice of voicing their concerns publicly on social issues. Whereas Norwegians have a long tradition of doing so through the printed press, Estonians have experienced this possibility only during the past decade. They are hence less practised in having their say in public matters. We assume that the different levels in skills and practices will show in the composition of participants. More specifically we expect the skills and practices of participation to be more evenly distributed in Norway than in Estonia, and therefore that the Estonian online participants, to a larger extent, come from the highly educated elite, whereas the Norwegian participants come from all educational groups. Hence our research question concerning skills and practices is:

- Who amongst the citizens participate in online discussions?

2.2 Local government context and e-governance

In Estonia, the status and role of local government have differed throughout history. As Tönnisson pointed out (Tönnisson 2006) local government played an important role during Estonia's first period of independence (1918 – 1940), but during the following 50 years of Soviet occupation, local government lost its role as “the pillar of democracy”, as often happens in totalitarian systems (see also Drechsler 2000). During this period, the local governments were directly under the control of the Communist Party, and in this environment, publicly presented values, attitudes and beliefs had to reflect the views of the Communist Party (Veskimägi 2005, Fleron 1996). The period was characterised by a lack of tolerance for opposing ideas and values (Lauristin and Vihalemm 1997).

After Estonia regained its independence, local-level government was the first to be transformed according to democratic principles (Kettunen and Kungla, 2005). Within a short time, Estonian local governments had to create new organisations and structures (Tönnisson 2006:10). Today, Estonia's 227 municipalities provide a rather large range of services, such as secondary education, social care, housing

and municipal public transport. The municipalities are also responsible for the maintenance of public infrastructure. Even if many responsibilities have been divided among central government and municipalities for more than a decade already, a clear understanding of the roles, functions and responsibilities of the different governmental levels is still lacking. Moreover, because central government has constantly changed its expectations of local government, mutual understanding between them has been lacking. At the same time, the municipalities themselves have not been too proactive in developing their own initiatives and approaches (Tõnnisson, 2006). This, in turn, affects the will of the citizens to be in dialogue with their local municipality.

In Norway, democratically elected local governments have been in place since 1837. The municipal council is elected by the residents of the municipality every four years. However, the role of the municipal level is not mentioned in the constitution, and it is the central government that delegates responsibilities to the municipalities. Consequently, the municipalities' field of responsibility varies with irregular intervals. However, the core tasks pretty much resemble those of the Estonian municipalities: primary education, primary health care, social services, and local transport and infrastructure are among the most important. Several areas directly affecting people's daily lives are hence under the control of the municipalities, and one would expect this to motivate citizens to take part in local decision-making. During the last decades, however, the voter turnout has decreased from nearly 80 to 60 percent. The municipalities have complained about losing their independence in relation to the central government, because an increasing number of citizens' rights, such as the right to a certain level of social services, are established by law. This diminishes the municipalities' scope of action, which has been used as an explanation for the decreasing voter turnout at local elections.

Regarding general ICT use in Estonia and Norway, Internet access and e-government provision in both countries are at a high level. In Estonia, 74% of citizens use the Internet¹. In Norway, about 80% of the population use the Internet regularly. For young people in both countries, the Internet is a natural part of their daily lives. The basis for ICT to become important also as a political tool therefore exists. In both countries there exist several national plans for ICT development, which specify the goals and priorities for the local government level. Likewise, in both countries, municipalities are requested to provide for broadband connection to their population. Apart from that, the municipalities of both countries have a high degree of autonomy regarding what e-services to offer.

In Estonia, e-government has been high on the political agenda since 1998. The first e-government build-up and development documents such as *Principles of Estonian IT Policy*, approved by the Estonian Parliament in 1998, focused on issues such as Internet accessibility and transparency of governance. In subsequent e-government documents, the technological dimension dominated. The *Information So-*

ciety Development Priorities for 2004 – 2006 set up the implementation of e-services by the public sector as the main goal (Reinsalu 2006).

The most recent e-government document, *Estonian Information Society Strategy 2013*, formulates the following action plan: “Widening opportunities for participation in decision-making processes (e-Democracy), by developing Internet-based environments for participation while continuing to use e-Voting”. However, as the plan focuses on the security and functionality of IT solutions, the technical dimension clearly has a higher priority than the social dimension.

According to international studies such as “Online availability of Public Services: How is Europe Progressing?” (Capgemini, July, 2006), Estonia holds a very high position – second after Austria – in implementation of e-services. However, the services referred to are simple everyday services such as submitting applications online. Their aim is not to enhance discussion and thereby to increase citizens’ involvement in the decision-making process, but rather to provide effective services.

Still, there exist some e-participation solutions in Estonia, but most of them are at the national level. One of them is the portal TOM (“Today I decide” in Estonian). The main idea is to enhance public participation in political decision-making by allowing citizens to submit proposals and discuss new legislative initiatives via the Internet. The site opened in June 2001, and there are now more than 6000 registered users; more than 1150 presented ideas and more than 6400 provided comments. However, its popularity has declined. One reason is perhaps a lack of publicity and hence a lack of awareness of the opportunity.

At the local level, the only existing possibility for online participation is online forums hosted by local newspapers and by the municipal websites.

In Norwegian municipalities, e-democracy applications have been regarded as one way of enhancing the participation of citizens in the democratic process. National guidelines for how to develop this area have been developed, but the municipalities have, in principle, been free to implement the applications they find appropriate. As in Estonia, most Norwegian municipalities have prioritised e-services over e-democracy. The bulk of the content on their websites is assigned to the services the municipalities provide. However, the municipalities also provide information about the dates and agendas of council meetings, they publish minutes from the meetings, and most municipalities publish articles about political issues. A number of municipalities also offer participation opportunities on their websites such as e-hearings, e-debate, e-chat with the politicians and so on (Winsvold 2007). However, these applications are not very much used by the citizens. There are many reasons for this lack of use. The most important is probably that neither the politicians nor the administrative staffs of the municipality pay attention to suggestions or arguments occurring in such arenas. Besides, the local newspapers have already established online forums which attract many users (Skogerbr̃ and Winsvold 2008). As Norwegians are accustomed to turn to the press when wishing to express them-

selves, most of the e-dialogue in Norwegian municipalities now takes place in the newspapers' forums.

3. Methods

The questions concerning the use and political role of online forums will be answered through a comparative study of data from population surveys in Norway and Estonia. Our focus is on local government because it is at the local level that citizens most directly experience the presence of the government and can influence government decisions. In both countries, the local level provides a large part of the public services, and local politics thus closely affect people's lives.

The Norwegian survey was conducted in four municipalities: Tromsø in the north, Stavanger and Fjrdre in the west and Drammen in the east of Norway. They are all, except Fjrdre, considered as large municipalities on a Norwegian scale, with populations of sixty thousand to a little over a hundred thousand inhabitants. Fjrdre is the only middle-sized municipality in the sample, with about ten thousand inhabitants. The municipalities have been selected because each is located in a major region of Norway. None of them differs significantly from the national average with regard to socio-demographic data of the population, media situation and Internet access.

The Norwegian survey was mailed to a representative sample of persons aged from 18 to 90 in mid-September 2005. The response rate was 36 per cent, resulting in N of 1275. To assess the bias this low response rate might result in, the composition of the sample with regard to age, education and political activity was compared to data from the official nationwide survey, attaining a more satisfying response rate (70 per cent). The results showed only marginal differences, but the results should be interpreted with caution. The Estonian survey was conducted between February 10th and 21st 2007. As a research method, face-to-face interviews were used. Citizens of Estonia aged from 18 to 74 formed the sampling frame. The sample contained 803 respondents.

The Estonian data about motives and assessment was gathered in two ways. First, those who in the survey claimed that they had participated in online forums and were willing to answer further questions were contacted (89 persons from the general sample of 803). Despite the mentioned willingness, only 12 persons actually responded to an e-mail follow-up survey. We therefore carried out additional online questioning about motives for participation and assessments of online discussions. An online questionnaire was uploaded to the website of the Department of Journalism and Communication of University of Tartu, and thereafter invitations to participate were posted in all existing online forums of Estonian local governments and local newspapers. The latter was carried out between April 6th and 16th 2007, and there were 194 respondents.

4. Findings

4.1 Level of participation

In both Estonia and Norway the level of participation in online forums appears to be low, compared to other forms of political participation (see Table 1).

Table 1
Level of traditional and online participation
Percentage of sample who claim to have participated in different political activities

	Estonia	Norway
Voted in municipal election	68	60*
Contacted a local politician	20	18
Partook in action or demonstration, signed petition	17	52
Contacted/appeared in local media	4	14
Read Internet debate on local politics	13	17
Participated in Internet debates on local politics	8	2
Participated in Internet debates in the local newspaper	6	6

* This number is the official level of voter turnout in the four concerned municipalities.

As for the non-digital forms of participation, approximately the same number in each country state that they have voted in an election or contacted local politicians, whereas a far higher number of Norwegians have taken part in actions, demonstrations or signed petitions. Nearly half the Norwegians interviewed stated that they have done so during the last few years, whereas these forms of participation are not as frequent in Estonia. A more interesting difference in this context, however, concerns the proportion stating they have contacted or appeared in local media. The number of citizens having done so is significantly higher in Norway than in Estonia. This may reflect the different structure of communicative spaces in the two countries. It may also mean that Estonians are afraid of or disappointed with traditional media or they are not accustomed to having access to traditional media. This shows, as we assumed, that the space available is an important determinant of e-activity. The fact that the Estonians do not turn to the traditional media should lead us to assume that they would instead use the possibilities that the new media offer. Our data only partly confirm this hypothesis. The proportion of citizens stating they have participated in online debates on local politics is significantly higher in Estonia than in Norway. However, the proportion stating they have participated in online debates hosted by the local newspaper is equal in the two countries. The participation pattern is hence unclear. It may be that the skills and practices, to a larger extent than available spaces, determine the use of the forums.

In both countries, online participation varies significantly with age and political activity. In Estonia, online activity also varies with education, as we can see from Table 2.

Table 2
Percentage of people having participated in online forums

	Estonia	Norway
Gender		
Men	13	5
Women	10	9
Age*		
18 – 29	19	8
30 – 49	10	8
50 – 69	6	6
70+	2	3
Education		
Elementary	6	8
Secondary	11	7
University	14	7
Offline political activity*		
Non-existent	6	2
Low	7	3
Medium	17	4
High	33	16
	N= 801	N=1275

* P<0,01

As we can see from Table 2, Estonians are slightly more e-active regardless of social-demographic characteristics. In Estonia, young people (18 – 29) are remarkably more active than those in the next age group. There is also a marked decrease in online activity in the age group 50 to 69. In Norway, age seem to have less effect on online participation – people between 30 and 49 are just as active as the youngest, and the next age group (50 to 69) is only slightly less active.

There is almost no difference in online activity between educational groups in Norway, whereas in Estonia online activity rises remarkably with education. This strengthens our hypothesis that skills and practices influence political participation. Democratic skills are more widely distributed in Norway, due to Norwegians' long experience with democracy, and the skills are also more evenly distributed in the population. In Estonia, on the contrary, democratic skills and practices are not yet widely distributed, nor are they evenly distributed either – only those with the most

resources participate in politics. Income does not, however, correlate with online-participation, in either country.

As found in other studies (Norris 2005), e-activity and general political activity were related. To study the relationship between online and offline participation, indexes of general political activity and online political activity, were constructed². In both countries, e-activity rises with political offline activity, but the rise is more pronounced in Estonia.

4.2 Motives for online participation

The question of motives for online participation can be related to the identity dimension of civic culture, more specifically to a sense of empowerment, political agency and political efficacy. If citizens feel empowered, and if they believe their voices will be heard and make an impact, *influencing political decisions* is more likely to be a motive for participation. The motive for participation can also be related to participatory values, such as the value of civic duty. If this value is strong in the population, more people will state some kind of *obligation* as a motive to participate in political discussion. We offered our respondents the following list of motives, and asked them to assess whether they felt the motives were very important, rather important, little important or not important at all. In Table 3 the ranking of the motives in the two countries is displayed. The basis for the ranking is the proportion of participants who rated the different motives as “very important”. This proportion varies between 24 per cent and 1 per cent in Norway and between 47 per cent and 2 per cent in Estonia. For many reasons, most respondents have given the response “rather important”. It is however, interesting to note that the Estonians give more answers in the upper levels of the scales than the Norwegians. The high-ranked motives are ranked high by more Estonians than Norwegians, who are more moderate in their answers.

Table 3
Ranking of the motives of online participation
(in brackets the proportion assessing the motives as “very important”)

	Estonia	Norway
Experienced something worthy of critic (*civic duty)	1 (47%)	1 (24%)
I read/heard/saw something in the media that I wanted to comment on (*civic duty)	2 (35%)	5 (14%)
Wanted to tell/influence the responsible (e.g. the politicians) (*empowerment, efficacy)	3 (34%)	4 (15%)
Participate in an ongoing debate (*civic duty)	4 (30%)	2 (21%)
Wanted to convince them of my view in a case (*empowerment)	5 (27%)	3 (17%)
Like to discuss (*participatory value)	6 (14%)	6 (6%)
Promote a political party or an organisation (*political agency)	7 (2%)	7 (5%)

Contrary to what we expected, the most important motive for Estonians is a motive that can be associated with or indicate a sense of civic duty ('I experienced something worthy of critic'). As we expected, this is also an important motive for the Norwegian participants.

The second most important motive for the Estonians is a motive that can also indicate a sense of civic duty ('I read/heard/saw something in the media that I wanted to comment on'). This signifies that a number of the Estonian participants wish to take part in public debate about issues that concern them, and regard it as their role to comment on these issues publicly. Even although the sense of civic duty might be higher in Norway than in Estonia, this is not so among the online participants.

The third most important motive for Estonians indicates that they see themselves as politically influential, and thereby have a sense of empowerment ('Wanted to tell/influence those responsible'). The second most important motive for the Norwegian participants can also be related to civic duty ('I wanted to participate in an ongoing debate'), whereas the third most important motive indicates a sense of political empowerment; ("I wanted to convince them of my view"). Even though the participants from the two countries differ in the motives they hold as most important, they do not differ concerning what motives they find unimportant. The most unimportant motives for both Estonians and Norwegians are motives of political agency ('Promote a political party or an organisation').

The most striking discovery is, however, that so many Estonians consider it very important to comment in online forums on the topics and issues they find in traditional media channels. This finding is not paralleled in Norway, where, as we saw earlier, people prefer to use traditional media channels.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of participation in local online forums in Estonia and Norway has shown us that civic culture might be related to online activity, although not always in the direction we assumed. The two countries differ on the civic culture-dimensions of space, values, identities and practices and skills. We hypothesised that the larger number of traditional public arenas and the population's habit of using traditional media to voice their concern would make the online arenas less used in Norway than in Estonia, as the Norwegians already were accustomed to turning to the traditional media and would not have the same need for new arenas as the Estonians. We further assumed that both Estonians and Norwegians would have the skills and practices to navigate on political pages on the Internet, but that they would differ, regarding the skills and practice of voicing their concerns publicly. Therefore, online participation was expected to be more of an elite phenomenon in Estonia than in Norway, as participatory skills are more evenly distributed in the Norwegian population due to long experience with democratic institutions.

Both assumptions were partly confirmed. Even though Estonians cannot be characterised as particularly e-active, their online-participation is still higher than that of Norwegians. Norwegians stick more to traditional media channels, although the technical infrastructure, the indicators of access and use of the Internet and also the quality of online forums are at the same level or even better than in Estonia. Regarding socio-economic characteristics, the differences between different educational groups were significantly larger in Estonia than in Norway. Education was a more important condition for online participation in Estonia, and it could hence to a larger extent be characterised as an elite activity. Income, however, was not correlated with online participation. Regarding age, in Estonia the young people are remarkably more active than the next age group, which can be explained by the political experience of the various age groups: Older generations being raised in a totalitarian regime are not accustomed to having their say in social or political issues. The difference between age groups was much smaller in Norway.

Contrary to what we expected, however, Estonian online participants were highly motivated to participate by a sense of civic duty. The same holds true for Norwegians, but this was expected. In Norway, the right and obligation to participate is long established and taken for granted. The sense of civic duty and the obligation to vote is relatively high, although, as mentioned earlier, there has been a certain fatigue in the population over the last decades and a corresponding decline in the commitment to the institution of election. People tend to participate less in traditional party politics (party membership, voting) and more in alternative forms of political participation (demonstrations, action groups). In Estonia, the opposite trend is observed. Generally people tend to participate more in traditional forms of politics and less in alternative forms of political participation. For that reason, it is to some degree surprising that for both Estonians and Norwegians, the least important motive for participating in online forums is the motive of promoting a political party or organisation.

No fundamental conclusions about the role and potential of ICT for general development of democracy can be made based on the present study. However, comparing political participation in an old and a new democracy through a channel that is equally new to both populations has taught us something about the potential this new channel has to enhance political participation.

In Estonia, the connection between online and offline political activity is weaker. This may indicate that in new democracies there is a potential to be involved in political discussion via online forums, even for those who have been very passive or indifferent towards politics previously.

In the case of Estonia, we are dealing with a unique example where the civic culture started developing parallel with the development of ICT, and was being strongly influenced by that. At the same time, ICT has strongly influenced democracy in Estonia. E-participation is hence probably much more integrated in Estoni-

ans' notion of democracy and political participation. In Norway, on the other hand, the democratic systems were developed before the arrival of Internet. Online participation therefore became just an alternative among others, and has hence achieved less attention. This parallels other findings. In their study of online participation, Hill and Hughes (Hill, Hughes 1998) conclude that Internet is just an extension of old, traditional media. Those who were passive in the pre-Internet era did not become politically active by gaining access to the Internet. The media in itself does not change much. Margolis and Resnick (Margolis and Resnick 2000) have also come to the same conclusion. However, our study shows that some proportion of the politically inactive citizens participate in online discussions.

According to the present study, however, the level of political online participation at the local level is relatively low in both countries. If they wish to enhance online participation, the local municipalities have to make an effort to enhance e-activeness. In both counties, an explanation for the low level of participation is the lack of moderation in the discussion forums. Although moderating can be considered as censorship by some critics, we believe it is an absolute precondition for vital, attractive discussion. Moreover, officials should be more visible as discussants in forums. Without moderation and without active participation from municipal representatives, the discussions tend to slow down or come to a halt. Moreover, a number of municipalities lack discussion forums. In Estonia, we could during the study, identify forums in about 15 per cent of the municipalities. In Norway, 12 per cent of the municipalities had such forums.

In summary – the e-activeness of citizens depends on more than historical experience, political development and civic culture. It also largely depends on the will and skills of officials and politicians to see the potential of Internet in involving citizens in political discussions and in the decision-making process.

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Notes

- 1 According to the latest study made by Department of Journalism and Communication, University of Tartu and the poll company Klaster.
- 2 The variables in the index of political activity were based on the following yes/no- questions: Have you during the last four years ... 1) voted in the municipal election, 2) participated in a protest meeting, demonstration or signed a petition concerning local issues, 3) contacted local politicians about a local issue, 4) contacted the municipal administration about a local issue, 5) contacted the media about a local issue, 6) called a radio or television program or written a letter to the editor about a local issue. The variables in the index of online activity were based on the following yes/no questions: Have you during the last four years ... 1) participated in debate in the online version of the local newspaper, 2) participated in any debate on the Internet regarding local politics or the local community.

Reinsalu, K. (2007).
“Kohalike omavalitsuste online-foorumite kasutamisest Eestis ja Norras.”
Riigikogu Toimetised, 16, 88–95.

Kohalike omavalitsuste *online*-foorumite kasutamisest Eestis ja Norras



Kristina Reinsalu
Tartu Ülikooli ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni osakonna doktorant

Online-foorumitega on kodanikud saanud oma arvamuse väljendamiseks uue kanali.

Online-foorumites osaleb kodanik kõigist traditsioonilistest kommunikatsioonikanalitest erinevalt kitsendusteta, see loob eeldused elava avaliku poliitilise ja/või päevakajalise debati tekkeks. Avaliku sfääri laiendamises ja mitmekesistamises on nähtud Interneti suurimat demokraatlikku rolli. Mõned uurijad (Bennett, Entmann 2001) suhtuvad sellesse aga üsna skeptiliselt. Uuringud kinnitavad, et kodanikukultuur (*civic culture*) mõjutab oluliselt poliitilise osaluse taset ja vorme (Inglehart 2002; Letki 2004; Almond, Verba 1989). Üldist poliitilist osalust on uuritud ja teaduskirjanduses käsitletud palju, kuid selle avaldumist tänapäevaste kommunikatsioonitehnoloogiate kasutuses vähe.

Uuringus "E-osalus erinevates kodanikuühiskondades: võrdlev uuring kohalike omavalitsuste *online*-foorumite kasutamisest Eestis ja Norras"¹ lähtuti sellest, et iga ühiskonna üldine kodaniku- ja poliitiline kultuur mõjutab ka *online*-foorumite rolli ja funktsiooni ühiskonnas, seda, kuidas neid foorumeid kasutatakse ning kui oluliseks kasutajad neid ise peavad. Artiklis võrreldakse *online*-foorumite kasutamist riikides, mis erinevad poliitilise kultuuri ja kodanikuühiskonna arengu poolest, kuid on samal ajal infotehnoloogia kasutamise

üldistelt näitajatelt (infrastruktuur, kasutajate protsent rahvastikust) üsna sarnasel tasemel. Seega peaks Norra ja Eesti võrdlus ilmekalt esile tooma üldise poliitilise ja kodanikukultuuri olulisuse (või ebaolulisuse) e-osaluses. Uuringu peamine ajend oli leida vastus küsimusele, kas nn vanad demokraatiad, kus üldise poliitilise osaluse traditsioon on pikaajaline, integreerivad uue osalusvormi edukalt või on nende tähtsus suurem nn uutest demokraatiast nagu Eesti.

Artikkel ei keskendu foorumite teemadele, vaid sellele, mis motiivid ajendavad inimesi *online*-foorumites sõna võtma ning kes seda teevad; kas e-osalejad on need, kellel on ka üldine poliitiline aktiivsus kõrgem. Kohaliku omavalitsuse foorumid on võetud vaatluse alla seetõttu, et Norras nagu ka Eestis on just omavalitsuse ülesanne pakkuda kodanikule enamikku igapäevastest teenustest ning kohalik omavalitsus on tähtsaim lüli kodaniku ja riigi vahel. See loob omakorda eelduse, et kohalike omavalitsuste foorumite kaudu avaldab kodanik arvamust mitte ainult kohalikel teemadel, vaid ka laiemalt.

Artikli empiiriline materjal Eesti kohta pärineb minu originaaluuringust, mis tehti koostöös Tartu Ülikooli ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni osakonnaga ning uuringufirmaga Klaster. Uuringu käigus tehti 2007. aasta veebruaris 803 inimesega näost näkku intervjuu. Hinnangute ja motiivide kohta Eesti uuringu küsimustikus küsimusi polnud, seetõttu tegin selle kohta täiendavalt kaks väiksemamahulist uuringut. Kõigepealt saatsin täiendavad küsimused e-posti teel neile 89-le üleriigilises uuringus osalejale, kes kinnitasid, et on kasutanud kohaliku omavalitsuse või ajalehe *online*-foorumit. Kuigi eelnevalt olid need respondendid kinnitanud oma valmisolekut vastata täiendavatele küsimustele, laekus vas-

¹ Uuring sai võimalikuks Eesti Teadusfondi grandid nr 6526 ja sihtfinantseeringu nr 0180017 toel.

tuseid siiski ainult 12 inimeselt. Seetõttu pidasin vajalikuks ka *online*-küsitlust. Küsitlus korraldati 6.–16. aprillini 2007 Tartu Ülikooli ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni osakonna veebilehel, küsitlusele vastamisele suunavad teated postitati eelnevalt kõigisse kohalike omavalitsuste ja ajalehtede foorumitesse. Küsitlusele vastajaid oli 194.

Norra andmed pärinevad Oslo Ülikooli doktorandi Marte Winsvoldi originaaluuringust, kus küsitleti 1275 inimest Norra omavalitsustes. Eesti küsitlus oli üleriigiline, Norras küsitleti nelja suurema eri regioonidest valitud omavalitsuse kodanikke. Ehkki valimite moodustamises ja uuringu tehnikates on väikesi erinevusi, olid mõlemad valimid esinduslikud, sest ka Norra andmeid võrreldi paari varasema üleriigilise uuringuga ning tulemused olid väga sarnased.

Kodanikukultuurist ja e-osalusest

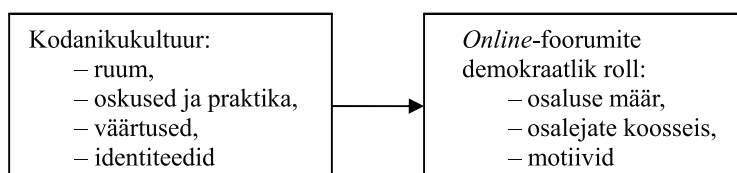
Poliitilise ja kodanikukultuuri mõiste kattuvuse üle on palju vaieldud. Diskussiooni sügavalt laskumata võib väita, et uurijad peavad nende mõistete all silmas siiski enam-vähem ühte ja sedasama – inimeste käitumiste kogumit –, kuigi mõistetel on erinev raskuskesk. Poliitiline kultuur kirjeldab suures osas poliitilise osaluse sotsiaalseid eeltingimusi, kodanikukultuur viitab laiemalt kodanikuühiskonnale, kaasa arvatud inimeste isiklikele oskustele ja kogemustele demokraatia rakendamisel.

Meie uuringus keskenduti kodanikukultuurile eeskätt seepärast, et selle komponendid on hõlpsamini haaratavad ja mõõdetavad. Peter Dahlgren, Lundi Ülikooli meedia ja kommunikatsiooni professor, on väitnud seda, mida teavad ilmselt kõik üle 30-aastased eestlased:

isegi ebapiisavate poliitiliste tegurite korral või nende puudumisel võib kodanikukultuur olla küllalt tugev toetamaks poliitilist tegevust (Dahlgren 2003). Olukord, millele Dahlgren viitab, on kommunistliku režiimi kokkukukkumine paljudes riikides. Dahlgren läheb kodanikukultuurist rääkides ja seda uurides sügavale üksikindiviidi tasandile ning jagab kollektiivse orientatsiooni ehk kodanikukultuuri hulgaks üksteisega seotud komponentideks (Dahlgren, Olsson 2007; Dahlgren 2006), millest nelja pean mina e-osaluse analüüsis kõige põhjendatumaks. Esimene komponent *ruum* viitab sellele, millised avalikud ruumid poliitiliseks osaluseks eksisteerivad. Teine komponent *väärtused* viitab sellistele sisetunnetele ja väärtussüsteemidele nagu enda määratlemine kodanikuna või erinevate vaadete aktsepteerimine. Kolmas komponent on *oskused ja praktikad*, mille all peetakse silmas oskust demokraatlikus protsessis osaleda ja rutiine neid oskusi kasutada. Dahlgrenil on veel neljas komponent *identiteet*, minu arvates on see nii tihedalt seotud väärtustega, et neid võiks koos käsitleda. Identiteedi all peetakse silmas inimese enese- ja poliitilise vastutuse tunnetust. Dahlgreni kontseptsioon kodanikukultuuri komponentidest annab hea raamistiku kodanikukultuuri ja e-osaluse seoste leidmiseks ning tõlgendamiseks.

Nimetatud kodanikukultuuri komponendid on üksteisega seotud, kohati nad kattuvad – ruum ja väärtused mõjutavad oskusi ja praktikaid, kodanikuidentiteet on seotud kogemusega jne. Seetõttu võib eeldada, et kõik kodanikukultuuri komponendid mõjutavad erinevaid e-osaluse rolli ja funktsiooni aspekte. Seoseid kodanikukultuuri ja e-osaluse vahel kajastab joonis 1.

Joonis 1. Kodanikukultuuri ja e-osaluse seosed



Eesti ja Norra erinevused

Internetile ligipääsu ja e-valitsuse arengu poolest on Norra ja Eesti mõlemad märkimisväärselt tugevad: 2007. aasta märtsis paigutas maailma majandusfoorum mõlema riigi 20 enamarenenud e-riigi hulka (Norra oli 10. ja Eesti 20. kohal). Tartu Ülikooli ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni osakonna ning uuringufirma Klaster uuringu kohaselt kasutab Eestis Interneti 74% inimestest. Norras ligineb kasutajate protsent 80-le (Winsvold 2007). Seega on mõlemas riigis olemas eeldused, et Internetist saab ka poliitikas osalemise vahend. Mõlemas riigis on üllitatud palju kohaliku tasandi arengukavasid ning info- ja kommunikatsioonitehnoloogia arenguplaane. Nii Norras kui ka Eestis on kodanik väga tihedalt seotud omavalitsusega, kus ta saab suurema osa igapäevastest teenustest. Samal ajal on mõlemas riigis suhteliselt vabad käed, milliseid e-teenuseid pakkuda.

Teisalt on uuringud viidanud sellele, et kodanikukultuuri elujõulisus ja tugevus on regiooniti erinev (Norris 2002; Putnam 1995) ning näiteks endise Nõukogude Liidu koosseisu kuulunud riikide ja Põhjamaade vahel valitsevad suured erinevused. Pippa Norris mõttis 1990. aastatel sotsiaalset kapitali 47 riigis ja sai tulemuse, et Norra ühiskonnas on inimeste sotsiaalne kapital kõrgem kui üheski teises riigis. Norra on inimeste ühiskondliku aktiivsuse poolest (kuulumine vabatahtlikesse organisatsioonidesse jms) kolmandal kohal, Eesti aga Norrise tabelites viimaste hulgas. Norris on mõõtnud ka poliitilist huvi ning jällegi on Norra kodanike huvi poliitika vastu suurim ja eestlaste huvi üks tagasihoidlikumaid. Kuigi Norrise uuringud pärinevad kümne aasta tagusest ajast, pole põhjust arvata, et see suhe oleks muutunud. Pigem on eestlaste poliitiline kaasatus sellest ajast vähenenud. Näiteks 2007. aastal Tartu Ülikooli ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni osakonna ning uuringufirma Klaster tehtud uuringu järgi ei ole 55% inimestest viimaste aastate jooksul võtnud osa ühestki poliitilisest üritusest ega demonstratsioonist. 31% vastanuist väidab, et

nende osalus jääb nn laulva revolutsiooni aega (samas kuulutas kaks kolmandikku vastanuist, et nad on kohalikest poliitikast huvitatud). Norras on huvi poliitika vastu samuti kahtlusest, kuid seal huvitatakse nüüd rohkem poliitilisest tegevusest väljaspool formaalseid poliitilisi süsteeme ehk eraldutakse traditsioonilisest poliitikast. Eestis on suunitlus vastupidine – erinevatel eesmärkidel seotakse end pigem rohkem traditsiooniliste poliitiliste ühendustega.

Ka Dahlgreni kodanikukultuuri kontseptsiooni komponentide poolest erinevad Norra ja Eesti teineteisest. Dahlgreni järgi on vaba mõttevahetust võimaldava ruumi olemasolu demokraatia arengu võtmetegureid (Dahlgren, Olsson 2007). Ruumi all peetakse silmas nii ruumi, kus toimub näost näkku kommunikatsioon, kui ka *online*-foorumeid. Praegu on need ruumid Norras ja Eestis oma olemuselt sarnased, kuid nende kestus ja seetõttu ka kasutusharjumused on olnud erinevad. Norralased on alati suhteliselt palju usaldanud trükiajakirjandust. Viimastel aastakümnetel on Norra trükiväljaannete arv olnud suurem kui teistes Euroopa riikides. Eestis on vaba press suhteliselt uus nähtus ning eestlased ei ole kindlasti harjunud samal määral avalikus debatis osalema.

Meie uuringu üks eesmärke oli üldise poliitilise aktiivsuse (kohaliku poliitilise elu suhtes) ja *online*-aktiivsuse suhe. Seetõttu püstitati küsimus: kas ja kui võrd erineb kahes riigis e-osaluse tase ning kuidas suhestub see poliitilisse aktiivsusse traditsiooniliste kanalite kaudu?

Poliitilise ja e-osaluse tase

Uuringu kohaselt on nii Norras kui ka Eestis e-osaluse tase madal. Selgema pildi, kui palju inimesi osaleb *online*-foorumites ja kui palju ilmutab muul moel poliitilist aktiivsust, annab tabel 1.

Uuringu käigus omavalitsuste kodulehti "sirvides" selgus, et Eesti omavalitsustel on vähe foorumeid, mis tõesti foorumi põhimõttel toimivad, seetõttu küsitleti ka kohalike ajalehtede foorumite kasutamise kohta.

Tabel 1. Traditsioonilise ja e-osaluse tase (protsent neist, kes kinnitavad, et nad on ühel või teisel moel osalenud)

	Eesti	Norra
Valinud kohalikel valimistel	68	60
Võtnud ühendust kohaliku poliitikuga	20	18
Osalenud mingil demonstratsioonil, allkirjastanud mingeid petitsioone	17	52
Võtnud kontakti / esinenud kohalikus meedias	4	14
Jälginud Internetis debatte kohaliku poliitika kohta	13	17
Ise osalenud Interneti-debatis kohaliku poliitika kohta	8	2
Osalenud Interneti-debatis kohalikus ajalehes	6	6

Nagu tabelist 1 näha, on norralaste ja eestlaste traditsioonilisi tegevusi vaadates kohalike valimiste valimisaktiivsus enam-vähem ühesugune, kuid tunduvalt rohkem norralasi on osalenud demonstratsioonides jms. Kõige silmatorkavam erinevus puudutab kohalikus meedias (traditsioonilised kohalikud ajalehed) esinemist. See viitabki kahe riigi n-õ ruumide erinevusele, mille põhjusi võib otsida eestlaste pettumusest traditsioonilises meedias või sellest, et eestlased tunnetavad, et neil ei ole (või ka tegelikkuses ei ole) ligipääsu kohalikele meediale. Siinkohal ei pea ma silmas mitte valla-, vaid maakonnalehti. Ehkki Interneti-debatis on eestlaste osalusprotsent veidi suurem, ei ole vahe siiski märkimisväärne. Enne uuringut eeldati, et erinevusi on ka kahe riigi kodanike väärtussüsteemides. Üks põhilisi demokraatia väärtusi ja osaluse mõjutajaid on kodanikukohuse (*civic duty*) tunnetamine. Norras võetakse õigust valimistes osaleda väga pikka aega kohustusena, ehkki ka seal on näiteks valimisaktiivsus aastatega kahanenud (Winsvold 2007). Arvati, et eestlastel on kodanikukohuse tunne ajaloolistel põhjustel nõrgem kui norralastel. Väärtustega on tihedalt seotud identiteet, enda tunnetamine kodanikuna. Kohalike *online*-foorumite kontekstis tähendab see seda, et inimesed tajuvad, et nende oeldul on kohalike otsuste tegemisel kaalu. Ainult see saab neid motiveerida foorumites osalema. Oletati, et norralased on rohkem motiveeritud.

Identiteedi ja väärtustega ning motiividega seoses uuriti, millised on *online*-foorumites osalemise motiivid ning kas kahe riigi vahel on neis motiivides erinevusi.

Motiivid

Uuringus motiivid reastati ning vastajail paluti märkida, millised neist on kõige olulisemad, üsna olulised, väheolulised ja üldse mitte olulised. Tabelis 2 on mõlema riigi tähtsamate motiivide järjestus.

Mõnes mõttes üllatuslikult oli eestlastel kõige tähtsam motiiv, mida võib seostada kodanikukohuse tundega: “Märkasid midagi sellist, mis väärts väljatoomist või kriitikat.” Seesama motiiv on tähtis ka norralastele. Teisel kohal on eestlastel samuti kodanikukohusega seostuv motiiv: “Ma nägin midagi traditsioonilises meedias, mida ma soovisin kommenteerida.” Kolmas on soov kedagi mõjutada, kellelegi kurta, mis lubab oletada, et *online*-foorumil nähakse ka mingit kohaliku taseme mõju või rolli.

Kui tähtsate motiivide puhul on eestlaste ja norralaste vahel erinevusi, siis vähem tähtsa motiivi suhtes ollakse üksmeelel – n-õ puhtalt poliitiline agenda ei ajenda foorumis sõna võtma. Kindlasti on tähelepanuväärseim see, et nii palju eestlasi soovib *online*-foorumis kommenteerida teemasid ja juhtumeid, millest ollakse lugenud traditsioonilises meedias. Norras, nagu eelmisest tabelist näha, suhel-

Tabel 2. Motiivide järjestus
(sulgudes see, mitu protsenti vastajaist pidas seda "väga oluliseks")

	Eesti	Norra
Märkasid midagi sellist, mis vääriskriitikat	1 (47%)	1 (24%)
Lugesid/nägin traditsioonilises meedias midagi sellist, mida ma soovisin kommenteerida	2 (35%)	5 (14%)
Soovisin kurta neile või mõjutada neid, kes vastutavad (kohalikud poliitikud näiteks)	3 (34%)	4 (15%)
Soovisin osaleda käimasolevas debatis	4 (30%)	2 (21%)
Tahtsin kedagi veenda oma vaadetes mingi juhtumi puhul	5 (27%)	3 (17%)
Soovisin diskuteerida	6 (14%)	6 (6%)
Soovisin reklaamida või tutvustada mingi partei või organisatsiooni vaateid	7 (2%)	7 (5%)

dakse senimaani aktiivsemalt traditsioonilise meediaga.

Neljas kodanikukultuuri komponent on oskused ja kogemused. Loomulikult kuuluvad siia ka praktilised oskused nagu arvuti ja Interneti kasutamine, eeskätt peetakse silmas aga kodanikupraktikaid (traditsioone) ja rutiine (rakendada oma kodanikuõigusi ja kohustusi). Uuringu autorite mõistetav oletus oli, et eestlastel on traditsioon avalikult oma arvamust poliitikas ja sotsiaalküsimustes välja öelda kahtlemata lühem ja hapram kui norralastel. Eeldades, et erinevus peegeldub nii *online*-foorumite kasutajate arvus kui ka motiivides, esitati küsimus: kes üldse kirjutab *online*-foorumites ning kas need on üldiselt poliitiliselt aktiivsemad inimesed?

Kes osalevad *online*-foorumites

Kõige rohkem on e-osalus mõlemas riigis seotud vanuse ja poliitilise aktiivsusega, Eestis ka haridusega. Ei üllata, et Eestis on noored järgmisest vanuserühmast palju aktiivsemad. Märgatavad on ka järgmiste vanuserühmade vahed. Norras ei ole pilt nii kirju, peaaegu sama aktiivne kui kõige nooremad küsitatud on ka järgmine vanuserühm. On tähelepanuväärne, et Norras ei ole tugevat seost haridustasust ja e-osaluse vahel, Eestis suureneb e-osalus tunduvalt hariduse kasvades.

Kõige huvitavam on kindlasti see, milline on seos üldise poliitilise aktiivsuse ja e-osaluse vahel.

Norras tõuseb *online*-aktiivsus suhteliselt tagasihoidlikult poliitilise aktiivsusega seoses kuni kõrge poliitilise aktiivsusega grupini. See grupp on teistest märgatavalt aktiivsem ka *online*-foorumite kasutamisel. Eestis on pilt teistsugune. Esiteks on isegi nende hulgas, kes üldiselt poliitiliselt aktiivsed ei ole, koguniski 6% neid, keda me võime selle uuringu kontekstis ikkagi e-aktiivseks pidada. Teiseks suureneb e-osalus erinevalt Norrast juba keskmise üldise poliitilise aktiivsuse juures. Ehkki tabelis 3 seda ei esitleta, võib välja tuua, et näiteks sissetulek ei mängi aktiivsuse puhul mingit rolli.

Uuringutulemusi kokku võttes ja neid taas Dahlgreni kodanikukultuuri raamistikku asetades võib väita, et norralaste ja eestlaste diskussiooniruumid on erinevad, sest norralased on rohkem kinni traditsioonilistes meediakanalites, eestlased eelistavad kommenteerida Internetis isegi seda, mida nad näevad traditsioonilises meedias.

Mis puutub väärtustesse ja identiteetidesse ning neist tulenevatesse motiividesse, siis on mõnevõrra üllatav, kuid samas meeldiv tõdeda, et ei saa väita, nagu avalduks *online*-foorumite kasutamises norralaste kodanikukohuse tunne tugevamini kui eestlastel.

Tabel 3. Kohalikes küsimustes online-foorumites osalenute kooslus

	Eesti	Norra
Sugu		
Mehed	13	5
Naised	10	9
Vanus*		
18–29	19	8
30–49	10	8
50–69	6	6
70+	2	3
Haridus		
alg-	6	8
kesk-, keskeri-,	11	7
kõrgem	14	7
Üldine poliitiline aktiivsus*		
olematu	6	2
madal	7	3
keskmine	17	4
kõrge	33	16
	N = 801	N = 1275

* P<0,01

Märkus: Et uurida seost üldise poliitilise aktiivsuse ja e-osaluse vahel, loodi üldise poliitilise aktiivsuse ja e-aktiivsuse indekseid. Poliitilise aktiivsuse indeksi moodustasid järgmised näitajad: kas inimene on 1) hääletanud kohalikel valimistel, 2) osalenud demonstratsioonil, miitingul, allkirjastanud mingi petitsiooni jne, 3) võtnud kohaliku poliitikaga mingis küsimuses kontakti, 4) võtnud ühendust oma kohaliku omavalitsusega, 5) võtnud kontakti kohaliku meediaga (trükimeedia), 6) helistanud raadiosse või televisiooni seoses mingi kohaliku küsimusega. *Online*-aktiivsuse indeksi moodustasid järgmised ei/ja küsimused: 1) osalenud kohaliku lehe Interneti-väljaande debattides, 2) osalenud mis tahes *online*-debatist, mis on seotud kohaliku poliitika või kogukonnaga.

Oskuste ja kogemuste kohta võib uuringu põhjal väita, et pikaajaline üldine osaluspraktika poliitilises elus ei olegi määrav e-osaluse tegur. Eestlased on norralastest e-osaluses isegi pisut aktiivsemad.

Optimismiks vähe põhjust

Pole kahtlust, et selle kohalike *online*-foorumite uuringu põhjal ei saa teha põhjapanevaid järeldusi infotehnoloogia rolli ja võimaluste kohta demokraatia arengus. Siiski lubab uuring seada kahtluse alla mõne eespool vii-

datud uurija väited ja teha mõned üldised järeldused.

Uuringu tähelepanuväärivaim tulemus on kindlasti see, et Eestis on seos *online*-aktiivsuse ja poliitilise aktiivsuse vahel nõrk, isegi poliitilise aktiivsuse puudumise puhul ollakse e-aktiivsed. Julgen väita, et uutes demokraatias osalevad *online*-foorumites suure tõenäosusega ka need, kes siiani poliitika vastu huvi ei tundnud.

Eestis arenesid demokraatia ning info- ja kommunikatsioonitehnoloogia ning tekkis kodanikukultuur ühel ajal. Info- ja kommu-

nikatsioonitehnoloogia kiire areng mõjutas kodanikukultuuri ning Eesti demokraatiat tervikuna.

Norras on demokraatlikud süsteemid ja rutiinid tugevasti välja kujunenud, *online*-kanalid on üksnes täiendav võimalus demokraatias osaleda ja seetõttu on nad jäänud ka erilise tähelepanuta. Siit edasi võib järeldada, et e-osalus ei ole nii tugevalt seotud kodanikukultuuriga, kui võis oletada või uurijaile tuginedes väita. Seega on Interneti abil võimalik dialoogi kaudu demokraatiat arendada. Selles mõttes oponenteerin kindlasti eespool põgusalt nimetatud uurijatele. Muide, eespool viidatud Hill ja Hughes (Hill, Hughes 1998) uurisid samuti e-osalust ja kirjeldasid e-aktiivseid demograafiliste näitajate kaudu nagu mina. Ka nemad tahtsid välja selgitada, kas Internetis aktiivsed kodanikud on üldiselt poliitiliselt aktiivsed, ning nad jõudsid järeldusele, et Internet on üksnes vana, traditsioonilise meedia pikendus. Kes enne oli passiivne arvutita kodanik ja ei hoolinud poliitikast, on nende hinnangul nüüd kodanik, kellel on küll arvuti ja arvutiühendus, kuid kes ikka ei hooli poliitikast. Nende arvates Internet ei muuda inimesi, vaid võimaldab teha asju teistmoodi kui enne.

Hilli ja Hughesi väidetega sarnaseid avaldusi on teinud teisedki uurijad (Margolis, Resnick 2000; Bennett, Entmann 2001). Nagu öeldud, meie uuringu tulemused on nende tulemustest erinevad: Internetis aktiivsed ei pruugi olla üldiselt kõrge poliitilise aktiivsusega koda-

nikud. Ka mõnede rahvusvaheliste indeksite järgi on Eesti e-osaluse poolest esireas (näiteks Ühinenud Rahvaste Arenguprogrammi koostatud e-osaluse indeksi järgi kuues).

Teisalt ei ole optimismiks põhjust, sest nii Norras kui ka Eestis on e-osalus tagasihoidlik, e-osaluse kasvuks peavad kohalikud omavalitsused andma suurema panuse. Olemata kursis Norra foorumite sisuga, võib Eesti näitel kodanike suhtelise passiivsuse põhjuseks pidada eeskätt foorumite kesisust ja modereerimise puudumist. Tuvastasin kõigi Eesti omavalitsuste peale kokku ligikaudu 30 foorumit, mida võib mööndustega foorumiks pidada, sest seal toimub arutelu poliitilisel või päevakajalisel teemal, nii et kodanikud saavad üksteise väiteid kommenteerida, ning teemasid ja küsimusi modereeritakse. Ehkki modereerimist võivad kriitikud pidada ka tsenseerimiseks, on see ilmselgelt vajalik kasutajate tõukumise vältimiseks foorumist seepärast, et enamik teemasid jätab nad pigem ükskõikseks. Pärast algatamist eeldab *online*-foorum reklaami teistes kanalites, foorumeis peaks ametnik olema nähtavam, julgema oma nime all vastata.

Kokkuvõtteks ei sõltsu kodanike e-osalus niipalju ühiskonna ajaloolisest arengust ning sellest tingitud poliitilisest kogemusest ja kodanikukultuuri tugevusest kui riigi ja omavalitsuste ametnike tahtest ning oskustest näha Internetis kanalit kodanike kaasamiseks poliitilisse diskussiooni ja otsustusprotsessidesse.

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“Estonian Tiger Leap from post-communism to the information society:
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The Estonian Tiger Leap from Post-Communism to the Information Society: from Policy to Practices

Pille Runnel, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Kristina Reinsalu

Institute of Journalism and Communication
University of Tartu, 18 Ülikooli St., 50090 Tartu, Estonia

Abstract

Information and communication technologies have been on Estonia's public and political agendas for more than 10 years. The focus of policy documents has been on how ICTs will help to improve Estonia's competitiveness, democracy and education system. In this article, analysis of the policy documents indicates that the focus is on infrastructure rather than on the people using it. By looking at online user behaviour and examples of online democracy-related websites, we will analyze if the ICTs have realised their potential to rebuild democracy. Internet user typologies indicate that usage practices, as well as participation practices in online democratic environments, vary widely among Internet users.

Keywords: Estonia, online democracy, participation, Internet use, information society policies

Introduction

Estonia's transition has been marked by several parallel processes: democratisation, market liberation, consumerism, etc. At the same time significant technological shifts – for example the emergence of the personal computer and the Internet – have been part of those changes. Technological change can be seen as a crucial part of the processes in Eastern Europe, and this area's rapid transition into the information society, beginning with governmental aspirations of benefit from the introduction of new technologies into various areas of life, and ending with people whose lives were fast overloaded with technological artefacts. By the time the transition processes had passed the initial phase of revolutionary euphoria and Estonian democracy witnessed alienation between state and citizens, the path of the technological 'revolution' as remedy for democracy was chosen. The latter approach to enhancing democracy had previously appeared both in academic and political literature elsewhere, both in Europe and the US. Distinguishing technological and democratic developments from each other is next to impossible, therefore analysing them in context and with reference to each other is important.

Information and communication technologies have been part of the development processes of the Estonian state since the 1990s. The Tiger Leap Program, a program officially launched in 1997 in order to provide Estonian schools with information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, and to support content creation and the acquisition of usage skills, became an influential factor in the process of seeing 'Internetisation' as one of the central symbols of Estonia's rapidly changing society (Runnel 2001). A few years after these efforts to merge ICTs with the education system, success stories in the areas of e-governance and services gained both domestic and international recognition, leading to a widely held perception of Estonia as a leading e-state.

Studies of Eastern European transition have taken shape largely within the social and economic sciences. In studying changing Eastern European societies, analysis has been generally concerned with institutional and structural change: the effects of economic and political reforms and their social environment. Analysis has focused on the 'space of possibilities' rather than on individuals as active agents within these environments. Individuals are rather dealt with as decision makers representing politics, and their administrative capacities are interpreted as one of the prerequisites of the change (Nørgaard 2000, p. 9). In the particular framework of EU application, EU models in various spheres of life have been central (Siil 1997; Kalvet 2007) and thus provide necessary context when attempting to understand the ongoing change. Transition studies has generally followed people in order to estimate the ability and readiness of the population to come along with the change, including the study of change by means of the public opinion poll, i.e. from the perspective of agreeing or not agreeing and coping or not coping with ongoing changes. The role of people as interpreters or co-producers of the meaning of change has often been underestimated in such studies. In a similar way, dealing with various stages of transformation – approaching the earlier stages of change from the “catching up” perspective (or ‘learning from the West’, describing the character of rapid changes (Lauristin, Vihalemm 1997) – and ICT related change has been interpreted as Eastern Europe catching up with West (Vogt 2005, p. 9; Lass 1999; Wormald 2005). This change has largely been discussed at the level of macro-processes. However, even now there is lack of the integration of micro-level studies of what people do on a daily basis to the macro level context of the information society (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2006b).

When we are looking at the Information Society (IS) policies developed throughout the last decade, we can see that they carry ideas visible in public discourse from the early days of IS policies, according to which providing access to ICTs is important in order to, 1) increase competitiveness, 2) reduce division within society, and 3) foster state-individual relationships (Principles of Estonian Information Policy 1998). In the case of Estonia we are dealing with a unique example in which civic participatory culture also started developing in parallel with, and was strongly influenced by, ICT development. At the same time ICTs have strongly influenced democracy and e-participation and is therefore probably much more integrated in Estonian's concept of democracy

and political participation (Reinsalu and Winsvold 2008). This concept goes side by side with general social development, which expects the growth of civic society in Estonia and puts public participation very much on the political agenda (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2007).

Departing from this context, the article will look at informatisation in the political agenda and analyse how expectations have been realised (or not). It aims to combine both textual analysis of 1990s political and public texts concerning the information society in Estonia, with quantitative survey data from nationally representative survey of the Estonian speaking population conducted in February 2007. These will be used to analyse what kind of usage practices can be identified and how much the participation in online democratic environments is part of the usage.

We will briefly outline the Estonian developments within the Baltic ICT sector and internationally. We then present the position of ICTs in the early political agenda of Estonia, which has assigned three key aims: competitiveness, reduction of social division and improvements in state-individual relationships. We will thereafter focus on the different Internet user types to identify the diversity of online practices. We then use theoretical material together with empirical examples to analyse conditions that exist for digital democracy in Estonia, and lastly we will return to our survey data to focus on actual participatory activities.

I. Estonia's position in Baltic and European comparison of ICT indicators

The rapid pace of Estonian ICT development can already be seen in late 1990s, in parallel with the information policy processes. An analysis of computer ownership in the three Baltic States during the 1990s shows that between 1997 and 1999 Estonia 'took off' and left the two other Baltic countries behind. In 1995 and 1997, home computer ownership grew equally (from around 1% in two years in all countries), but by 1999 Estonian computer ownership has grown from 5% to 14%, whereas in Latvia and Lithuania it was still only 6%. The successful dissemination of ICTs is also marked by high Internet use at recent years – a total of 64% of Estonians had used the Internet in past three months at 2004, which is 9% higher than in Latvia and 15% higher than in Lithuania (Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2004, p. 250) (see Figure 1).

Today, more than 10 years after the initial documents were launched, Estonia can indeed be proud of its achievements in ICT related development, as the country has quickly positioned itself ahead of many larger Western economies. The use of complex measures also indicates Estonia's relative success in achieving its aims of distributing access to information, while enjoying the competitive edge that ICTs has brought to Estonia. The Lisbon Review (of the competitiveness of EU member states) shows Estonia in 12th place – highest of the 10 member states that joined in 2004, a position Estonia has kept since then.

Lithuania is in 20th position, rising from 21st position while Latvia is in 22nd position having fallen from 16th position in 2004 (World Economic Forum 2006)¹.

While the Lisbon Review could be seen as showing the success of Estonian ICT policies as measured by social dissemination and by competitiveness, the Global Competitiveness Report (2007) focuses on competitiveness within a globe context, using a sample group of 131 countries. Here Estonia ranks 27th, with Lithuania 38th and Latvia 45th. In the technological readiness category Estonia is 19th, Lithuania 38th and Latvia 40th. This shows that Estonia has fairly successfully managed to integrate ICTs in terms of economic competitiveness, and also in terms of the social inclusion.

However, it is one thing to measure the prerequisites, in the form of technical infrastructure; another question is how much of this Internet usage is for participation in public life? As Eurostat data shows (see figure 1), the percentage of Estonians using the internet for communication is close to the average across the internet, while the percentages for internet banking are also equally similar. Yet when it comes to using the Internet to obtain information from public websites, or to interact with the government or other public authorities, Estonia is ahead of its Baltic neighbours, although only average among the EU27 countries.

The Internet is now well integrated into our personal lives, even Internet banking, which requires skill and trust.² Despite the idea that once people start using and trusting online banking, the rest of the Internet application will be easy to use, the data here shows otherwise. Despite being ahead in the field of Internet banking, Estonians still have a lot to learn about participatory online activities. This can also partially be explained by the fact that the government focused on investments in infrastructure, encouraging an increase in competitiveness but leaving local Internet users somewhat empty-handed – a void that was quickly filled by activities in the private sphere. The task of explaining the use and functionality of ICTs was quickly taken over by banks, which saw immediate return on their revenues, rather than the state.

¹ The Information Society sub-index measures how well ICTs are harnessed by various stakeholders through “variables such as the prioritization of ICT by the government, ICT penetration rates (Internet, PCs), Internet usage by business and the extent to which students have Internet access in school” (World Economic Forum 2006, p.2[0][0]). In this sub-index Estonia is ranked fifth among European countries, quite noticeably outperforming its Baltic neighbours (Latvia ranks 22nd and Lithuania 18th in this index).

² The success of Internet banking in Estonia has been explained by the fact that banking in general is only some five years younger than electronic banking and so there has not been enough time for customers to get used to branch services (Kerem, online).

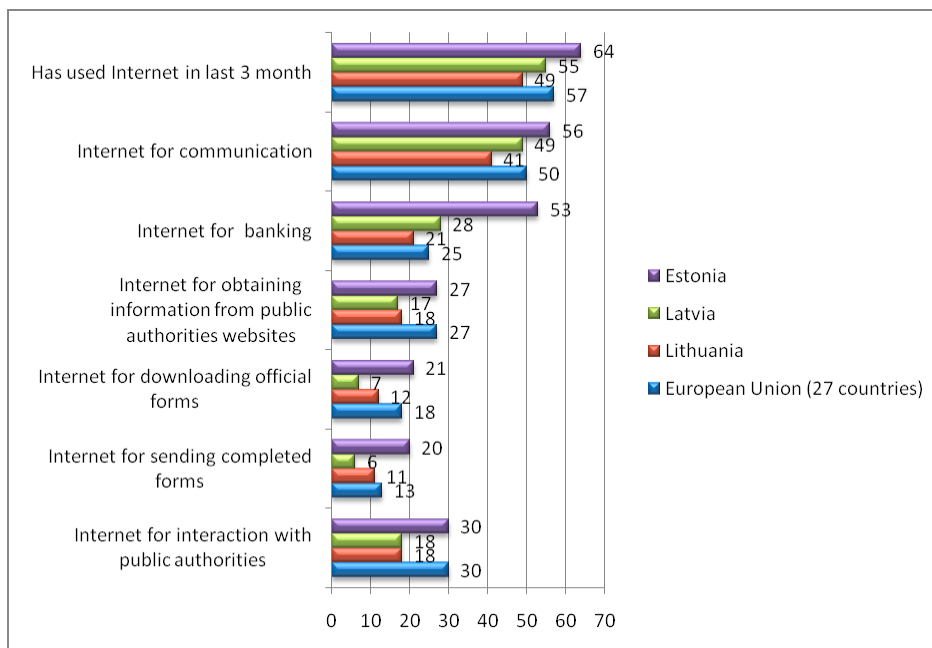


Figure 1: Percentage of the population who has used Internet in three past month and percentage of the population who has used internet for the listed activities. Source: Eurostat, 2007

One of the reasons for this situation could be that the measurement of competitiveness, as it relates to Estonia's information society, follows the internationally much criticised path (Menou and Taylor 2006, Barzilai-Nahon 2006, Servaes 2003) of quantitative and technology centred measures: number of Internet users, number of computers and number of Internet connections. This in itself proposes a normative barrier – it becomes more important to achieve target numbers than to focus on the activities individuals perform within online environments. These formal measures helped Estonia gain the international image of an advanced e-state. The successful implementation of information technologies became a spectacular characteristic that was used to sell Estonia to international audiences. Estonia also became a yardstick, a comparison that was eagerly used by the international media when describing a rapidly changing country. Estonian newspapers carefully quoted stories in the foreign media that portrayed Estonia's success, in their turn helping to bring this particular hype back to Estonia (Driessen 1999).

2. ICTs in the political agenda of Estonian transition society

The first strategic document discussing the information society in Estonia, *The Estonian Way to the information society*, was published in 1994. As Kalvet (2007) and Siil (1997) point out, the document showed an aspiration to follow similar processes then occurring in the EU, the joining of which was Estonia's main national goal at the time. The development of information technology, and its implementation into different spheres of life, was discussed extensively in general policy reports like the Human Development Reports (1996, 1997), in more focused policy plans like the Tiger Leap Program³, which aimed to bring computers and Internet connections to Estonian schools (1997), and in Estonian Information Policy (1998); similar aspiration also appeared in the speeches of the visionaries, forming ways of understanding the concept of information society.

The rationale behind the ICT related change in society was, according to these documents, its benefit to society, the ability of technology to increase Estonian competitiveness, reduce social divisions, and foster state-individual relationships. Special emphasis was placed on introducing ICTs to the education system in order to prepare future citizens and entrepreneurs.

The development of ICTs and the Internet, and their integration into everyday life in Estonia, occurred at a time when many of the most far-reaching changes had already been made, during a period of relative stability (1995–1998), and in subsequent years, characterized by euphoria of success. At that time ICTs became part of the political agenda and the policy overviews and development plans were drafted discussing the role of ICTs in general social change with the aim of incorporating technology into the changes. At that time, administrative, academic, technological and industrial groups made successful efforts to boost Estonian economic development through strong ICT policy (Lauristin and Vihalemm 1997) and conscious investment in technology and ICT infrastructure. This was to be followed by the population picking up new technological facilities.

Despite fears, including some social scientists saying that ICTs possibly add to the strong stratification of society, generally very optimistic and even uncritical statements can be found across all the documents. Estonia is seen as having the necessary prerequisites to make the necessary ICT related change, for example flexibility and a relatively high level of education (Human Development Report 1996). The Tiger Leap Program, which became the

³ The Tiger Leap Program was launched in February 1996 to adjust the Estonian education system to the needs of the information society by equipping schools with information and communication technology, linking them to the Internet and providing ICT education for teachers. The program was called 'Tiger Leap' in order to symbolise rapid changes and technological change as Estonia's main agenda, referring also metaphorically to the example of Asian economic growth. In order to achieve this goal, a special foundation was created in 1997 by the Ministry of Education and private sector ICT firms.

metaphor for the whole success story of rapid and forced reforms during pre-accession period, was notably based on rather strong ideological beliefs. For example, Enel Mägi, general manager of the Tiger Leap Foundation, stressed that the information age gives Estonia great opportunities:

“The Tiger Leap Program is a step toward ensuring our success in competing with larger nations in the 21st century, when the world is evolving into a society in which information is the main commodity. Estonia is willing to invest in the future of its people.” (Mägi 1999: 31, quoted in Runnel, 2001).

Ideologically, the notion of the ‘Tiger Leap’ embodied many aspects other than merely providing access to the Internet. The Tiger Leap Program became the metaphor for a general computerisation of society that was not limited to the field of education.

Among other aims, the Principles of Estonian Information Policy (1998), also promised to provide a forum enabling every individual to join the discussion on shaping the information society. This forum never came to be, although one can see early ideas relating to it slightly later at web portal TOM (Today I Decide⁴), established for facilitating participation. However, the document’s tone was one of providing information for citizens in order to guarantee a successful realisation of the “opportunities [that moving into the Information Society] gives them” (Siil 1997).

The policy documents certainly were inspired not only by strategic decisions, but also by the general technology-friendly culture in Estonia, including general awareness of technology and a readiness to use it. Although the importance of technology had diminished in comparison to other values during the 1990s (Lauristin and Vihalemm 1997), technology as a modernist value and an idealised view of progress, widespread during the Soviet period, still lingered, creating a favourable environment for technological change.⁵

Therefore it can be said that ICT friendliness, represented in policy documents, was as much a cultural model as it was an economical tool. Anthro-

⁴ TOM (*Täna Otsustan Mina* – Today I Decide) is a key Estonian initiatives aimed at fostering participatory online activities (<https://www.eesti.ee/tom/>). It is a state-initiated forum website where registered users can propose legislative changes, which, after the selection process, are sent to the appropriate administrative unit. In Estonia, laws can be initiated by MPs, by the government or by the president, making this the only possibility for individuals to initiate legislation. The site was launched in 2001. Today, TOM has almost 7000 users and more than 1000 ideas have been discussed (TOM, 2007).

⁵ According to a more recent study dealing with values in different population groups, technological development is still rather important, ranking more highly than, for example, ‘value’ categories like wealth, interesting life, or public recognition (Kalmus, Vihalemm, 2004). Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2006a) also shows that very favourable attitudes towards computers and the Internet can also be perceived in 2003 and 2005.

pologist Tom Wormald refers to technological change, in his study upon the Hungarian information society, as an integral part of applying EU models of statehood (Wormald 2005). Vogt (2005) also states that the technological utopia, or rather the information society, was in many ways crucial for provoking widespread change in Eastern Europe: people wanted to achieve the technological level and possibilities of the West as soon as possible. Today the feeling of the “grand narrative of ICTs” (Servaes and Heindercyckx 2002) has diminished and in many ways Estonia has “caught up and passed” “old Europe” and as there are no good examples of, or statements about, continuous improvement, there is now less ambition for citizens to participate in online environments. Here one can also see conflicting ideas about individual well-being as achievable through the use of technology. State success is proclaimed through aspirational speeches on the future. Many individuals have achieved basic well-being and use of technologies is now put towards personal goals rather than participation in public life.

3. Conditions for democratic practices – theoretical considerations and actual online participation

When, in 1998, the Principles of Estonian Information Policy was adopted by the Estonian government, the transition process within Estonia has reached the alienation phase, also called the post-revolutionary phase (see Lauristin and Vihalemm 2008). As in academic and political circles in other countries, the technological ‘revolution’ in Estonia was seen as remedy for democracy, therefore citizens’ participation was highlighted as one of the main principles in IT policy documents. Although the development of institutional democracy in Estonia had been impressively fast, the decreasing numbers of voters and increasing public discussion about the alienation of the state (Ehin 2007) showed that people had become more focused on their individual needs.

As hybrid forms of democracy, containing elements of participatory and representative democracy, would seem a reasonable expectation for digital democracy (Hague and Loader 1999) the solution to these processes was sought from ICTs. However, democratic developments of this type are often welcomed with a minimum of critical thought. As with other countries, Estonia adopted a very top-down implementation of ICTs in the politics. Rather than introducing the proposed online discussion forum dealing with what kind of information society citizens would like (Principles of Estonian Information Policy 1998), the emphasis was instead given to several state-initiated projects. Although this is highly favoured in the international political scene, it is not that appreciated by individuals. As Hague and Loader (1999, p. 10) describe:

“The underlying logic would appear to run along the following lines: ICTs are a good thing *per se*; those who can access and have the skills to utilize these ICTs will gain obvious advantages (primarily economic)

for themselves and will be more useful (primarily economically) to society (...).

What is missing here is any attempt to ground awareness raising and training regarding ICTs in the everyday experience of individuals and communities and to allow them to decide for themselves what use of ICTs may be for them”.

Estonian ICT policy documents and state initiated projects follow similar top-down logic. This leaves very little space to understand that the use of ICTs does not necessarily lead to individuals seeking ‘valuable’ information, or making ‘valuable’ deliberations, etc.; rather these functions and practices come when space is provided for them, while at the same time leaving the possibility for social shaping. For instance, the large scale public campaign to train 100 000 Estonians to use computers (Look at the World⁶) can also be considered in the majority to have been a public relations exercise, as the 4–8 hours of training available was enough to raise curiosity only rather than increase skill levels, particularly the skills required to search and participate (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Kalvet 2008). From the point of view of the social shaping of technology, there is an inherent political similarity to law and policy, although unlike the latter, technology policy is often designed without public debate (Docter and Dutton 1999).

The concept of participation plays a crucial role in theoretical models proposing that the Internet will open a new public sphere, with the possibility of a more direct and/or deliberative democracy. But this raises new questions. “Quick-fix” Internet solutions for democratic crises been both celebrated and criticised, and while Internet is seen as a mobilising tool to bring the young and underrepresented into politics, it also appears to some to be just another way to reinforce existing social divisions (Norris 2001; Scheufele and Nisbet 2002; Hibberd 2003).

In the Estonian context there is some confusion and ambiguity about the terms that express participation, within the theoretical debate. In current political rhetoric more emphasis is put on word *kaasamine* (engagement) whereas the concept of participation is more explicitly expressed with Estonian word *osalemine*. Lagerspetz (2006) explains the two key concepts *osalus* and *kaasamine*, in the context of Estonian civic society, as follows: *Kaasamine*: “engagement”: a) an inward-oriented “mobility” of a target groups or constituency; b) activities of the public or private sector aimed at giving citizens or citizen organisations the chance to participate in decisions that are related to

⁶ The Foundation Look@the World (<http://www.vaatamaailma.ee>) was initiated by 10 Estonian private companies with the aim of greatly increasing the number of Internet users and through this the quality of life of Estonians and the state’s competitiveness in Europe. Some of this foundation’s projects were training in basic computer skills for more than 100 000 people, starting the e-school environment and establishing roughly 500 Public Internet Access Points.

them, including legislative processes. *Osalus*: “participation”, or the individual’s possibility to have a say in decisions that are related to him/her.

“Engagement”, with its top-down nature, in which people are engaged or involved when it is deemed suitable by the groups in power, has become a new catchword in the wider public vocabulary. Marju Lauristin has noted the improper replacement of the word participation (*osalus*) by engagement (*kaasamine*) saying:

Engagement is a one-sided (the dominant, governing), group activity towards another (dominated, governed) group; the one who engages is a subject while the one who is being engaged is more of an object whose possibilities to influence final decisions are limited (Lauristin 2007).

Despite the criticism expressed above, the e-state as well as some well-known examples of online participation, have supported the success-story idea of the ‘Tiger Leap’ in Estonia. Three key initiatives from within the Estonian Internet sphere (Internet based voting and two e-participation/consultation websites) have become symbols of Internet participation: they are often used in public discussions about Estonian Internet initiatives and are often considered to be trademarks of Estonian online participatory democracy.

Regardless of the abovementioned idea that technology might bring new and hybrid forms of democracy, the best known Estonian application of the Internet within the democratic process is online voting. E-voting has already been used twice in Estonia, in local elections in 2005 and in the parliamentary elections of 2007. E-voting enables people to vote from anywhere using their identity card and a smart-card reader to select their favoured candidate from lists held on the relevant website. About 9000 people used this option in 2005 and more than 30 000 people (5,4% of the population) in 2007 (VVK 2007). It can be said that having the option to vote via the Internet has helped to increase citizen involvement. As Vassil’s (2007) analysis of e-voters shows, the number of people whose participation depended on e-technologies is small but present: 10% of e-voters in the analysis claimed that they would not have voted if Internet voting was not an option, while 95% of e-voters were convinced that they would not like to vote in the traditional way if e-voting continues as an option. This indicates relative techno-friendliness in some groups. However, it should be kept in mind that e-voting can be viewed as the preparation of citizens and institutions to trust and accept online activities, rather than an adequate model of e-participation.

Although internationally less well known or discussed than e-voting, we consider e-participation and consultation website initiatives to be more significant achievements from the point of view of participatory democracy, even despite the fact that one of the websites is a relatively low-traffic environment and the other is still in the stages of implementation and development. In the following passage we will give a more thorough overview of them and analyse the possible reasons of their relatively low visibility and usage.

When seeking a more participatory model of the democratic process, Estonia has found ways to support hybrid democratic forms and has tried to set up a deliberative democratic space to foster participation in policy making. *Täna Otsustan Mina* – (Today I Decide, TOM)⁷ – was set up in 2001 and received a great deal of media attention as the ideal democratic forum. It is a state-initiated forum website where registered users can propose legislative changes. According to a recent study, only 9% of the 6000 registered users have ever presented one idea, and only 1% of them presented more than two ideas (Tallo et al. 2007). TOM appears to be a good example of what the OECD (2001) calls participatory democracy, namely an initiative where people have the possibility to co-decide on the policy agendas and to influence other (political) agendas. However, in TOM, the problem of power imbalance negates any democratic potential: not only have administrations more time and flexibility in their reactions to citizens' comments, but practice also shows the hesitance of the administration to respond in a non-protective and stimulating way. In its ideal version, TOM could facilitate what the OECD (2001, p. 12) calls "active participation and [an] effort to engage citizens in policy making on a partnership basis", but the lack of dialogue and the severe power imbalances make it seem more like what Verba calls "pseudo-participation, in which the emphasis is not on creating the situation in which participation is possible, but on creating the feeling that participation is possible" (Verba 1961, pp. 220–221) quoted in Carpentier 2007, p. 215).

Arnstein (1969) defines a ladder of participation in local life, similar to the OECD's classification of participation, in order to separate activities that are inclusive to citizens (partnership, delegated power and citizen control) from those that only appear so (e.g. Informing, consulting and placating citizens), but are in fact "tokenisms". Estonia is doing well informing its citizens and excellent attempts have been made on the consultation front, but according to the model, there is still progress to be made towards using the Internet to form partnerships, and to provide tools for citizen control. Currently the available participatory models online have changed from being state originated public discussions, to relatively closed and small-scale civic society initiatives. One of the latest state initiatives aimed at using the Internet for improved consultation purposes is the newly founded participation web Osale.ee⁸, which defines itself using ideas of community engagement. There are several forms of opinion expression at Osale.ee: non-formal 'comments' and more formal 'opinions'.

⁸ The Osale.ee portal (www.osale.ee, opened in July 2007) is managed by the state chancellery in order to facilitate the wider participation of citizens, and citizen organisations, in politics, and to create legislation through discussions and consultation according to development plans. In the future it will also allow user-generated content. Currently, participation web Osale.ee brings together the legislative domains of all ministries and is an attempt to consolidate different opinion seeking environments under one roof – previously there have been similar online initiatives in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications and Ministry of Justice.

Some of the consultations also include a survey, where open-ended questions are added to the consultation process to structure the positions. By the end of summer 2008, 31 consultations had been carried out, with a few or no comments to each, which makes it a very low traffic participatory website. Although the word *osale* means to participate in Estonia, as previously explained, the page aims to offer the possibility of community engagement (*kaasamine*) but does not reach the level of participation. In order to become a tool facilitating genuine participation, it not only needs the additional functionalities of TOM (which are in fact in the process of being implemented), and also the legislative recognition of its mandate and the proposals it generates (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2007).

Another way of analysing the (dis-)engagement of the Estonian population in the online sphere is to look at user practices and see if and how those practices reflect the variety of democratic and participatory activities.

Individual practices

This paper has previously pointed out that many transition studies focus only on macro processes, taking individuals only as obedient recipients of these processes. In the next section, we analyse Estonian Internet users and their participatory practices in order to focus on the diversity of online practices and compare different Internet users and non-users. In addition to the textual analysis above and the secondary analysis of the usage of the participatory initiatives, we also use survey data to highlight some of the participatory practices undertaken by individuals. We use the data to illustrate the variety of Internet user types and their practices in various fields of online activities. In order to evaluate the fulfilment of the democratic potential of internetisation, we also compare Internet users and non-users using two participation indices – online and offline participation at the local level.

Methodology

In analysing how the democratic potential of ICTs is realised, we use two important measures: Internet user typologies, and an index for local participation. We draw this data from a nationwide survey conducted in February 2007. 803 Estonians between the ages of 18–74 participated in the survey. Respondents were recruited using the source address method, in rural areas an age and gender based quota was used. A self-completed survey with in total 305 variables was used. An additional weight variable was used to match the data with census information.

We used statistics analysis software SPSS to analyse the data both by cross-tabulation of different variables and by conducting cluster analyses in order to formulate Internet user typologies and index calculations for participatory activities. In total 70% of the people participating in this survey were Internet users. First, we will look at the Internet user types. Through illustration of these types we can see that Internet user practices differ greatly, and thus if some groups have grasped more of the variety of options available, this cannot be said

of everyone. Internet user typology is composed using participants' self-evaluation as to how well they consider themselves to be able to perform each named activity (in total 13 activities⁹) in the Internet. The value of these ratings on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very well) was used as basis for a two-step cluster analysis with a preset number of clusters – in this case six. Several numbers of clusters was tested, but finally six was preferred as it held best explanatory power. This also supports previous findings, which used similar survey data to analyse Internet user typologies (Runnel and Vengerfeldt 2004; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2006b; de Almeida Alves 2007). In addition, six clusters were best distributed composition-wise among the groups. An additional cluster was created by analysing missing values and re-defining them as Internet non-users, as non-users did not answer those questions on the survey and thus could not play a role in cluster analysis.

Internet Usage practices

Next we will give a short overview of the Internet users based on their Internet use and socio-demographic characteristics.

1) Versatile user's Internet use is characterised by versatility and above average active participation in all listed activities. This group is generally aged between 18 and 44; there are more people with higher incomes in this group.

2) Work, communication and e-services oriented users are relatively active Internet users who feel that their usage is generally characterised by communicating with friends and family, seeking information related to work, using e-services and seeking advice and help. Least characteristic of this group is online participation and seeking exciting information. This pragmatic user type is 72% women and one third of this group are aged between 25–34.

3) Entertainment and exciting information oriented users feel that their usage is first and foremost characterised by seeking entertainment and exciting information. Searching for information from state, Intranet and Internet services is least likely to characterise their use. Average ages between 18–34 make this type characteristic of the younger population.

4) The work and information oriented user is positively characterised by Intranet use, seeking information from state and work, and searching for study

⁹ On the 1–7 scale people were asked to mark how well the following activities characterised their internet use: 1) Seeking information from public institutions, courts, local governments, political parties and other official homepages; 2) Seeking practical information (weather, timetables, etc.); 3) Using Internet services (bank, tax office, forms, etc.); 4) Seeking entertainment (games, music, movies); 5) Seeking work and studies related information; 6) Seeking interesting and exiting information; 7) Seeking information and advice on relationships, family, children, health and other matters related to their personal lives; 8) Shopping and gathering information about purchases; 9) Seeking information about work, places to living, tourism, new acquaintances, etc.; 10) Participating in forums, blogs, surveys, writing commentaries; 11) Reading online newspapers and information portals; 12) Communicating with friends and acquaintances; 13) Communicating within an organisation (Intranet, mailing lists, etc.).

related information. They consider using Internet services, and using the Internet for practical information and reading online journalism also characteristic to their Internet use. At the same time seeking entertainment and participation in forums has, for them, significant negative association with their Internet use. These Internet users are generally aged between 35–64 and this group is the one with the greater proportion of higher educated people. Their income is average or above average.

5) E-services oriented users feel that their Internet use is most clearly characterised by the use of e-services like banking, the tax office and use of other form filling websites. They are fairly passive Internet users and they could be seen as single application users (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Kalvet 2008). Seeking information from the state and using job search facilities are slightly above average, but can still be considered characteristic. In comparison, participating in forums, seeking entertainment, and seeking advice and help can all be considered significantly less characteristic activities than average. One third of Internet users in this type are aged 45–54 and nearly half of this group has higher education.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profiles of whole population, Internet user types and Internet non-users based on gender, age, education and income.

	N/%	Versatile Internet users	Work, communication and e-services oriented users	Entertainment and exciting information user	Work and information oriented user	E-services oriented user	Small-scale user	Non-user
N	799	143	75	94	70	89	95	233
% of total population	100	18	9	12	9	11	12	29
Male	374 /47	50	28	62	50	45	42	46
Female	425 /53	50	72	38	50	55	58	54
18–24	125 /16	35	22	43	1	7	4	3
25–34	157 /20	36	34	31	17	17	18	3
35–44	152 /19	22	23	13	34	25	17	13
45–54	138 /17	4	15	13	20	36	24	17
55–64	122 /15	2	5	0	21	13	25	28
65–74	102 /13	1	1	1	7	2	12	35
Primary education	136 /17	8	1	31	1	3	12	35
Secondary education	423 /54	62	57	57	34	47	53	53
Higher education	235 /30	30	42	13	65	49	35	12
Income up to 1500kr	66 /9	5	8	12	3	4	13	11
1501–2500	90 /12	7	11	11	13	11	10	16
2501–4000	223 /30	26	16	21	14	31	24	44
4001–6000	184 /24	20	27	26	30	24	35	18
6001–8000	95 /12	18	16	9	17	21	11	5
over 8000 Kroons	109 /14	24	21	21	22	10	7	6

6) Small-scale users are not characterised by any of the listed activities and are the most passive group. Of the listed activities, they feel most associated with Internet services (banking, tax office and form filling), but still on a much smaller scale than other Internet users. This is the oldest user group, with nearly one quarter over 55 years of age.

The seventh type is Internet non-users – those who said that they have not used the Internet or didn't list any characteristic activities, leaving all variables blank. There are very few of them among 18–34 year olds and there are more in this group with only primary education.

The following table gives an overview of the socio-demographic background of the six Internet user types used in this analysis.

Local participation through traditional and new media

In this article we use our survey in order to identify how active our Internet users and non-users are in local life. For that we analyse two activism indices: traditional forms of activism in local life and new media forms of local participation. Participants were asked whether they had undertaken listed activities in the last 4–5 years, and based this an index was prepared in which people were placed in one of three groups: 1) those who have participated in none of the activities; 2) those who have participated in one; 3) those who have participated in two or more of the activities. Traditional participation was composed using 3 criteria: 1) those who have participated in a local community problem-oriented meeting, action or demonstration, or given their signature to a joint letter to local government; 2) those who have contacted local government or council members in relation to a local problem or issue; 3) those who have contacted a local newspaper or radio, or spoken in the local media on an issue relating to a local problem. The new media participation index consisted of four activities: 1) following a debate in the Internet relating to local life or politics; 2) Expressing an opinion about local politics or the local community in a debate or survey in the Internet; 3) Calling, or sending an e-mail or SMS to a radio or TV show dealing with local life; 4) Participating in a local newspaper's online forum, or writing commentaries on the online edition of a local newspaper. Based on the results, we compared Internet user types and non-users using their activism scale both through traditional and new media forms.

The following indices were analysed using mean results in both participation categories. Figure 2 shows the average means: 0, 39 for traditional participation and 0, 29 for new media participation (maximum 2 for both indices) as well as the differences within the Internet user and non-user groups. Versatile Internet users, and work and information oriented users, are the most active in both methods of participation, while the former group is more active in online participation and the latter more active in traditional participation. Non-users and small-scale users are equally very passive on the new media participation scale, although small-scale users at least have had some contact with the Internet. After Entertainment and exciting information users, they are the most passive in terms of traditional participation.

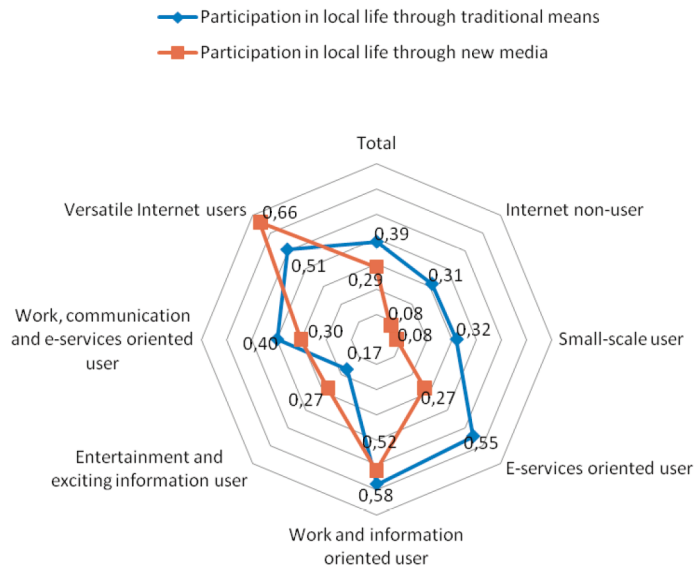


Figure 2: Participation in local life through traditional and new media is measured through indices (max value 3). Means of those indices are calculated for total population, Internet user types and Internet non-users.

We have drawn a two-dimensional matrix of scales based on average results from the traditional and new media participation scales: active-passive in traditional participation and active-passive in new media participation. Figure 3 gives an overview of the relative placements of Internet users and non-users on these scales. The relative centre point is taken from the average result on both scales.

Here one can see that in the first quartile are Versatile Internet users, Work and information oriented Internet users and Work, communication and e-services oriented users. Members of these groups are more active than average on both participation scales. E-services users, who are relatively passive Internet users, are also passive in terms of e-participation, while being active users of the traditional means of participation. Entertainment and exiting information users are marginally more active when it comes to e-participation, although overall they are still in the third quartile together with Internet non-users and small-scale users. The latter two are nearly average when it comes to traditional participation. The corner of the matrix where there should be users active in the Internet and passive in the traditional participation is empty. On the one hand, this indicates that the Internet is, at the moment, not taken seriously as sole participatory medium and also that it has not replaced other means of participation. On the other hand, it also shows that those active in the area of participation, seek online channels complementary to their existing practices – the Internet has not created purely online participants.

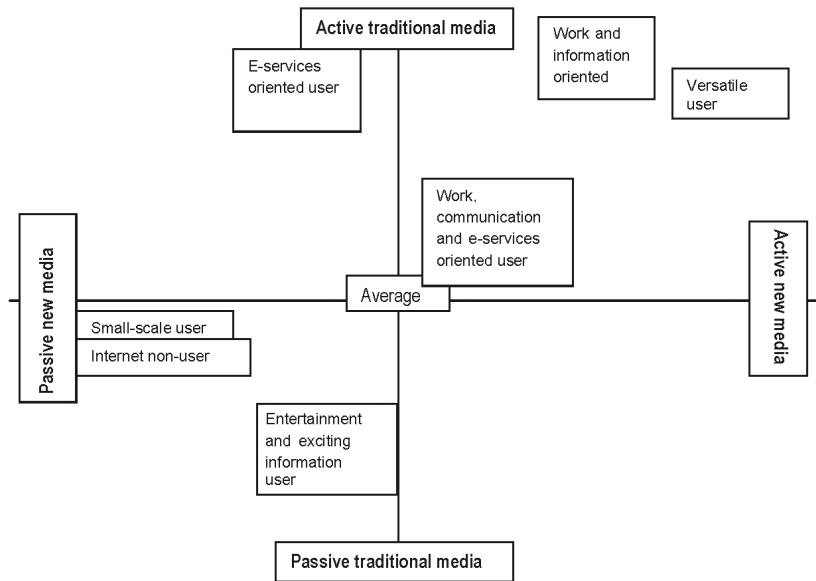


Figure 3: Internet user types and non-users on activity-passivity scales for participation in traditional and new media. The placement is based on mean values (Figure 2) and the relative position is in relation to the average for the total population.

4. Conclusions and discussion

This article aimed to look at the state wish to encourage the implementation of ICTs into society in order to advance Estonia in three major ways: competitiveness, education and democracy, with special emphasis on the latter. Of the three initial aims set out in the first policy documents – strengthen competitiveness, increase coherence in society and improve democracy – the first two are better fulfilled. However, serious restructuring of the economy to become more knowledge-based is still underway, with one of the major obstacles being the relative failure to restructure education. The third aim, that of strengthening democracy, has been relatively less successful and it might therefore be assumed that despite the infrastructure and openness to new developments, the lack of the necessary political culture and weakness in civic practices have been important barriers.

In the current study we looked at the relationship between democratic developments and IT, and how this has been reflected in policy documents, major government initiated-projects and individual usage practices. We started by identifying certain patterns and policy aims present in early IS policies in the mid-1990s, which treated ICTs as significant agents in reinforcing democracy, then went on to look at online environments, reflecting certain understandings

about democratic online participation as implemented by the government. Lastly, survey data enabled us to track the current situation from the point of view of the usage practices of the individual Internet users, including the online activities as well as their local online and offline participation.

It is important to try to view these different aspects together, as policy documents set the basic aims of, and define the bodies responsible for, different sectors, and only in this way does the entire population become subject to these policies. An individual's success very much depends on which of the state's regulative, legislative or opportunity frameworks they act within – the question is how much does, what they do reflect, or shape, the strategic aims set out in policy documents.

Developments in this field are framed by public understanding of the information society and the opportunities it offers. As Leah Lievrouw argues (2000), the whole notion of the information society is based upon an ideological belief in the positive and socially integrative power of technology alongside a prevailing ethic of instrumental rationality and strategically practised self-interest towards accruing such benefits.

Policy documents in Estonia that dealt with the information society held a more or less technologically deterministic viewpoint, which is not surprising as in the political and economic world technological determinism is still appears as a prevailing ideology in debates concerning general technological change and the information society. The dominance of this discourse probably also depends on the small number of academic analyses dealing with the questions of how various social and cultural practices influence the development and distribution of information technologies (Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2004).

In the vein of such technologically deterministic approach, the policy documents show that Estonia adopted a very top-down approach to the implementation of ICTs as part of its information society policies, and that in doing this Estonia was acting in a similar way to other countries. In the policy texts of the 1990s, people were considered important actors in the diffusion and acceptance of new technologies, but they were viewed mostly as passive recipients, who were expected to adopt infrastructure step by step.

In implementing policies, the supporting actions for better acquisition of technologies were often missing. In the field of democratic development, policy documents did emphasise the importance of the participation and Internet democracy, but in reality activities and projects were focused mainly on the development of technology.

However, state initiated projects, following the aims set out in the earlier documents and generally executed in the international political spotlight, are often not that widely used or even recognised by individuals. Providing citizens with tools with which to express their opinions has been accompanied neither by education nor willingness to listen.

Although Estonia possesses one excellent example of the service, were offer and demand balance (the Estonian electronic tax office, where about 90% of individual income declarations and 94% of value added tax declarations were

made in 2008), most e-services cater to government and are intended to make life easier for officials. For instance online forums launched by central or local governments are mainly in a question and answer format and are not aimed at facilitating discussion (Reinsalu 2006). The rhetoric accompanying the services that have been launched has been generally technical, not motivational: advancement of e-voting, digital signatures, ID cards.

The top-down approach of policy, in which technology itself was the main focus, was probably a useful tactic in the earlier phases of the transition when attention was on implementing infrastructural change and supporting the development of the private sector. The strong structural reforms that occurred in Estonia came after a series of remarkable years in the country's development – the so-called national awakening period. The 'soft', and perhaps more idealistic, values from the period immediately before and after the regaining of independence, which triggered the reforms were quickly replaced by a more pragmatic approach. The period of national awakening, based on an extraordinary mobilisation of citizen power, might have offered conditions in which further services for the facilitation of participation could have been developed. Yet, at that time the penetration and understanding of the democratic potential of ICTs was insufficient, although here again Estonia reflected the contemporary international situation. And neither did developments in ICT encourage the development of participatory internet democracy. In the first phases of Estonia's transition, during which people would have more eagerly taken advantage of came along with opportunities for participation, only a representative internet democracy was developed. By the time the more coherent ICT-related participatory democracy projects were launched, Estonian society had entered the post-revolutionary phase of alienation (Lauristin, Vihalemm, 2008). Subsequent years of radical changes diminished the potential of participatory democracy, while the rapid development of ICT infrastructure tended to answer, in the majority, the expectations of increasing general competitiveness.

The analysis of the actual user practises online indicates that the number of active and versatile users is increasing in comparison to earlier studies. Despite overall passivity in the fields of participation, active and pragmatic Internet users have also developed ways to participate in online environments. However, the majority of Internet users are still focused on activities within the private sphere. Increasing numbers of forums, semi-public social networking sites and increasing amounts of user generated content is fragmenting the public sphere, while at the same time directing online communication and discussion in different areas of private life. The youngest user groups, generally representing the Entertainment and exciting information user type, are among the most passive in both traditional and electronic participation, which perhaps refers to a lack of civic understanding among them. At the same time, this age group is very active in social networking. The most popular Estonian social networking site Rate.ee is used by about 70% of 12–17 year olds and has total of 300 000

users (one fifth of the country's population)¹⁰. It can be argued that civic participation, in terms of voting or other statutory rights or responsibilities, begins when a person comes of age, but the culture of the participation should be part of the socialisation processes.

Alienation and institutional development in the public sector, which brought along the consumerist approach of handling citizens as clients, supported the development of consumerist democracy (Bellamy and Taylor 1998, Ridell 2002). At the same time, these developments hindered the participatory democracy, based on real mutual communication.

As part of the reforms, Estonia made several efforts to promote participatory democracy and facilitate governance, among them launching TOM and Osale.ee, as mentioned above. Still it seems that particular services developed by the state to promote participation do reflect the general approach identified in policy documents, which were influenced by techno-determinist interpretations of the ICT-facilitated participatory democracy. Online participation environments do not focus on equal dialogue, and when their usage side is analysed they turn out to be fairly marginal. It can however be claimed that this form of Internet democracy also has the potential to develop into a participatory democracy, since it helps to fulfil a significant precondition – enhancing trust in technology, and also indirectly trust of the local authorities that offer services which correspond to the particular needs of the citizen.

For example, the most widely used system of e-voting can be viewed as simply one aspect of representative politics that is now in the online sphere. Or it can also be seen as a tool that holds the key to the future introduction of other aspects of direct democracy, which would complement and enrich the existing representative democratic model and make it more inclusive. Despite the fact that the step made by the election system was solely technical, it could be important in encouraging young people to move closer to participation in democratic society.

When looking at the current state of web portals such as TOM and Osale.ee, token participation currently still seems to outweigh real participation. Although those channels do not function well, there is no initiative to find new formats and no investment goes into addressing the weak points of the existing system. The most recently created, state-initiated, participatory environment Osale.ee is rather similar to TOM and attracts fairly low attention. Low user numbers means a lack of credible input, thus also the state officials involved have developed sceptical and negative attitude towards the participatory environments like TOM, which in turn discourages new users. Many potential participants move away to the private and third-sector participatory initiatives that have emerged recently, fulfilling their potential there instead.

However, in 2008, Estonia seems to be entering a new phase regarding participatory activities online. More recently, regular instances of petition

¹⁰ Data from www.rate.ee and the survey data gathered in the framework of Estonian Science Foundation Grant no 6526, autumn 2007.

signing online are attracting the attention of the traditional media, and thus wider visibility and significance is achieved for online participatory practices. In political rhetoric, these initiatives are still held in low regard. It can be said that Estonia is still searching for recognition of online participatory acts from ordinary citizens, and is in search of users for its state-provided environments. Researchers and practitioners have to analyse more closely the existing participatory environments and user practices in order to support the state in its attempts to engage citizens in the democratic process. At the same time there is a need to help the state understand how it can best take advantage of the participatory initiatives born online but outside its regulated web-space.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Kristina Reinsalu
Date of Birth: July 7, 1973, Illuka, Ida-Virumaa
Citizenship: Estonian
Marital status: common-law marriage, son (2001), daughter (2005)
Address: Institute of Journalism and Communication,
University of Tartu, 18 Ülikooli St., 50090 Tartu, Estonia
Telephone: +372 737 5355; +372 528 1392
Fax: +372 737 6355
E-mail: kristina.reinsalu@ut.ee

Education

- University of Tartu, 2009, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Communication and Journalism, *Doctor of Philosophy in Media and Communications*, abbr. *PhD*
- University of Tartu, 2003, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Communication and Journalism, Communication management, *Professional Magister in Public Relations*, *MPR*
- University of Tartu, 1999, Faculty of Philosophy, department of Roman languages, Spanish and Latin-American literature, culture, history, *Bachelor of Arts*

Language skills

- Estonian – native
- Spanish – excellent
- inglise keel – excellent
- saksa keel – good
- vene keel – basic

Professional Employment

2007–present e-Governance Academy, Program Director of Local Governments
2006–present University of Tartu, Institute of Journalism and Communication, researcher
2003–2006 University of Tartu, Institute of Journalism and Communication, project manager, lecturer
2000–2003 Ida-Viru County Government, Information and Communications Manager

1999–2000 Ida-Viru County Government, Coordinator of International
Estonian Language Training Project

Special Courses

- April 2008, *Training Course for Local Authorities Trainers on the design of the Digital Local Agenda: a strategy for building the Information Society*, Bilbao, Spain
- November 2006, *Technology and the Public Sphere*, Doctoral School, University of Bergen, Norway
- October 2004 – March 2005, *Course on Political and Economic Systems of Member States of European Union*, University of Tartu, Eurocolledge, Estonia
- March–June 2000, *International training of Project Management*, Phare CBC, Ministry of Inner Affairs and ESKO Koolitus, Estonia

Academic Activity

Main research areas:

e-state and e-democracy: the communication and interaction between local governments and local community in Information Society; the role, usage and potentiality of information technology in communication management of public sector; Internet-based participation- and decision processes; communication management of public sector organizations

Lecturing:

Master level courses: Communication Management in Public Sector; Reflection of Work Experience; e-State and e-Democracy

Publications:

Reinsalu, K. (2006). "Knowledge management in Estonian regional administration: background, outputs, and unused resources", *Information Technology for Development*, Vol. 12 (1) 63–76.

Reinsalu, K. (2006). "Is Estonian local e-government responsive to citizens' needs? The case study of Tartu, Estonia" *Information Policy: An International Journal of Government and Democracy in the Information Age*, 11(3–4), 255–272.

Reinsalu, K. (2008) "What are the factors of e-activeness in citizens' interaction with local government? A case study on online interaction in Tartu, Estonia" *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Politics and Information Systems, Technologies and Applications: PISTA 2008*, Orlando, 73–78.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Ees- ja perekonnanimi: Kristina Reinsalu
Sünniaeg ja koht: 7. juuli 1973, Illuka, Ida-Virumaa
Kodakondsus: Eesti
Perekonnaseis: vabaabielus, poeg (2001), tütar (2005)
Aadress: Ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni instituut,
Tartu Ülikool, Ülikooli 18, 50090 Tartu, Eesti

Telefon: +372 737 5355; +372 52 81392
Fax: +372 737 6355
E-post: kristina.reinsalu@ut.ee

Haridus

- Tartu Ülikool, 2009, doktoriõpe, ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni instituut, meedia ja kommunikatsiooni eriala
- Tartu Ülikool, 2003, avalikkussuhted ja teabekorraldus, kutsemagistrikraad (*Master of Public Relations*), *cum laude*
- Tartu Ülikool, 1999, hispaania keel ja kirjandus, *Baccalaureus Artium*

Keelteoskus

- eesti keel – emakeel
- hispaania keel – kõrgtase nii kõnes kui kirjas
- inglise keel – väga hea tase nii kõnes kui kirjas
- saksa keel – hea tase kõnes ja kirjas
- vene keel – kesktasemel

Erialane teenistuskäik

2007–tänapäev e-Riigi Akadeemia, kohalike omavalitsuste programmi direktor
2006–tänapäev Tartu Ülikool, ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni instituut,
sotsiaalse kommunikatsiooni teadur
2003–2006 Tartu Ülikool, ajakirjanduse ja kommunikatsiooni instituut,
sotsiaalse kommunikatsiooni õppetool, projektijuht
2000–2003 Ida-Viru Maavalitsus, avalike suhete nõunik
1999–2000 Ida-Viru Maavalitsus, Soome-Eesti koostööprogrammi
alaprojekti “Eesti keele õpe muulastest avaliku sektori
teenistujatele” koordinaator
1999–2000 lepinguline töö Kesk-Eesti Arenduskeskuse Jõhvi osakonnas,
hispaania keele lektor

Erialane enesetäiendus

- aprill 2008, *Training Course for Local Authorities Trainers on the design of the Digital Local Agenda: a strategy for building the Information Society*, Bilbao, Hispaania
- november 2006, *Technology and the Public Sphere*, doktoriõppe kursus, Bergeni Ülikool, Norra
- oktoober 2004 – märts 2005, *kursus Euroopa Liidu liikmesriikide majandus- ja poliitilistest süsteemidest*, Tartu Ülikooli Euroopa Kolledž, Eesti
- marts – juuni 2000, *rahvusvahelise projektijuhtimise koolitus*, korraldajad Phare CBC, Siseministerium ja ESKO Koolitus, Eesti

Akadeemiline tegevus

Peamised uurimisvaldkonnad:

e-riik ja e-demokraatia: kohaliku omavalitsuse ja kodaniku vaheline suhtlus infoühiskonnas; infotehnoloogia roll, kasutamine ja võimalused avaliku sektori organisatsioonide kommunikatsioonis; Interneti-põhised osalus- ja otsustusmehhanismid; avaliku sektori organisatsioonide kommunikatsioonijuhtimine

Õppetöö:

Magistriõppe kursused – avaliku sektori kommunikatsioonijuhtimine; töökogemuse reflektatsioon; e-riik ja e-demokraatia

Publikatsioonid:

- Reinsalu, K. (2006). "Knowledge management in Estonian regional administration: background, outputs, and unused resources", *Information Technology for Development*, Vol. 12 (1) 63–76.
- Reinsalu, K. (2006). "Is Estonian local e-government responsive to citizens' needs? The case study of Tartu, Estonia" *Information Policy: An International Journal of Government and Democracy in the Information Age*, 11(3–4), 255–272.
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- Reinsalu, K., Winsvold, M. 2008, "Does civic culture influence the use of online forums? A comparative study of local online participation in Estonia and Norway," *Journal of Public Administration and Public Policy*, Volume I, Number 1, 51–67.
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- Runnel, P., Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P., Reinsalu, K. (forthcoming, 2009) Estonian Tiger Leap from post-communism to the information society: from policy to practices, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol 40, Issue 1.

**DISSERTATIONES
DE MEDIIS ET COMMUNICATIONIBUS
UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS**

1. **Epp Lauk.** Historical and sociological perspectives on the development of Estonian journalism. Tartu, 1997, 184 p.
2. **Triin Vihalemm.** Formation of collective identity among Russophone population of Estonia. Tartu, 1999, 217 p.
3. **Margit Keller.** Representations of consumer culture in Post-Soviet Estonia. Tartu, 2004, 209 p.
4. **Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt.** Information technology users and uses within the different layers of the information environment in Estonia. Tartu, 2006, 213 p.
5. **Anu Masso.** Constitution of personal social space in A transition society. Tartu, 2008, 212 p.