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## E-administration as a mean of communication between government bodies and their environment

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## E-ADMINISTRATION AS A MEAN OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT BODIES AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

### Summary

The paper discusses the issues concerning the use of e-administration as a means of communication of government bodies, especially of local government units with their recipients. Benefits and obstacles in the implementation have been indicated. The results of secondary research have been presented on, among others, the influence of informatization onto the functioning of government agencies. The number of citizens using e-administration services in Poland is still low, most often citizens use electronic document forms. More and more projects on e-administration are realized, but most involve purchase of equipment and technology, not fulfilling the communication needs of recipients. This area still needs significant efforts.

**Keywords:** e-administration, local government, citizens, communication

### Introduction

For an information society, information as such is a significant resource or commodity, whose value is dependent on the speed of its transfer and efficiency of its management. Therefore, local government units ought to implement varied communication forms, including the internet, in order to reach the recipients more effectively. One of the displays of the development of an information society is the creation of compatible e-administration (e-government). European Union emphasizes the necessity of its development in their documents. It mainly involves reducing the distance between the administration and inhabitants or

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entrepreneurs. Local government policy built on knowledge has a crucial meaning for the development of the region and enhancement of its attractiveness. Due to the implementation and efficient functioning of e-administration, the public sector becomes more transparent, effective and citizen-friendly. Thus, it is a significant form of communication of authorities and service recipients.

It is worth emphasizing that e-administration is, above all, transformation in the way we perceive administration, management, processes, government methods, which aims at increase in effectiveness and efficiency of local government's actions. The administrative services which utilize the internet create new channels of communication of the government agency with its environment and citizens, facilitate contact and create friendly atmosphere.<sup>2</sup> The superior rule for a government body should be to satisfy the needs of citizens, and quality of their service ought to be one of top priorities in development of a given region, town, state.

### **Concept of e-administration**

One can claim that e-administration, that is electronic public administration, has growing influence over society's life quality and growth of its numerous units. Its implementation allows for, among others, the increase in efficiency and decrease in administrative costs. Local governments enter numerous interactions with their environment. These relations are, however, varied, according to the level of influence of an environment element over a given organization.<sup>3</sup> The fundamental factor which determines the creation of information society in Poland is common, quick and relatively inexpensive access to services of information society, including the internet resources. The authorities are to provide citizens with their accessibility, confidentiality, reliability and quality of service.

The development of e-administration and information society is a significant priority in the European Union. Programs on information society accepted by the European Union involve realization of the following assumptions for development of e-regions:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A. Dąbrowska, M. Janoś-Kresło, A. Wódkowski, *E-usługi a społeczeństwo informacyjne*, Difin, Warszawa 2009, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> B. Kożuch, *Zarządzanie publiczne w teorii i praktyce polskich organizacji*, Wyd. Placet, Warszawa 2004, s. 184.

<sup>4</sup> *Proponowane kierunki rozwoju społeczeństwa informacyjnego w Polsce do 2020 r.*, Ministerstwo Nauki i Informatyzacji, Warszawa 2004, p. 4.

- in-depth change in policy aiming at support of common physical and knowledge management infrastructures,
- revision of scientific research and innovation program support,
- increase in entrepreneurship and innovation,
- creation of pan-European networks and operation services based on them,
- raise in importance of education and increase in its quality,
- creation of social agenda for change forecast and management.

Development of technology, the development of the internet and modification of the need structure of the information society contributed to the transformation of “paper-based” administration into a more convenient form of electronic administration services. E-administration is a fundamental challenge on local level, where the local authorities have direct contact with their environment, including citizens, local community and investors. It uses information and communication technology combined with organizational changes and acquiring new skills for increased efficiency in management of the public administration institutions, including local governments and improved access to public services, as well as in order to engage citizens in democratic processes and support of national strategy realization.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, in most European Union states citizens contact state institutions via the internet. Public sector information may be used for creation of even a wider range of electronic public services for citizens and companies, which will be more suitable in terms of requirements of users, business entities and other organizations interested in saving time and money during the contact with authorities. In addition, electronic communication with self-government agencies has a significant educational benefit: teaching the user information and communications technologies and typical operations, analogically to eg. e-banking. The quality and content of the message are factors influencing, among others, the level of social engagement in the local government tasks, i.e. effectiveness of implemented solutions, acceptance of initiatives undertaken. The task of e-administration is to accelerate the flow of information to the environment, mainly to the citizens and facilitate procedures for administrative matters. Regardless of the actual location of the customers and their ability of face-to-face contact, it ought to provide essential information and services. The aim of e-administration is the increase of transparency and openness of public life and reasonable use of tax-

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<sup>5</sup> M. Luterek, *E-government. System informacji publicznej*, Wyd. Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2010, p. 33.

payers' money, prevention of bribery, enhanced functioning and work quality of public administration.

Dependent on the level of communication between government agencies and their customers as well as type and complexity of services offered, there are four elementary levels of development of e-government. Level 1, typically informational, is based on agencies sharing information on websites. Level 2 (interaction) involves sharing forms in the electronic version. Level 3 – double interaction that is two-way – appears when the customer completes a form on the agency website, which involves authorization of a given person. The final level encompasses all necessary actions to perform a given administrative matter by electronic means – from obtaining information, through downloading and completing appropriate forms, and next sending them by electronic means, after making the required payments and obtaining official decision, certification or other document the customer has applied for.<sup>6</sup> In 2000 the European Committee recommended 20 fundamental public administration services, which should be available online in EU states by 2005 on level 3 minimum, which is the transactional level.<sup>7</sup> However, not all of these services have reached this level in Poland.

Due to the internet, each citizen has unlimited access to information in all possible forms, i.e. text, image, sound or video at any time of the day and night. Because of that, the development of e-administration is becoming crucial. Online presence of local government units, especially via their own website, is common and unsurprising these days. The problem in communication may be the fact that numerous local governments treat their websites as if they were “a bottomless pit”, into which they can throw an endless number of document files, e.g. official letters, regulations, resolutions, ordinances, statements. Overload of this information may be interpreted as preventive actions against potential accusation of lack of transparency in actions of the local authorities. Unfortunately, the effect might be exactly opposite to the one planned, as there can appear information noise and access to specific information for the customer may become more complicated. Therefore, the appropriate selection of infor-

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<sup>6</sup> A. Smalec, *Komunikacja marketingowa jednostek samorządu terytorialnego a społeczeństwo informacyjne*, w: *Gospodarka elektroniczna. Wyzwania rozwojowe*, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego nr 703, Ekonomiczne Problemy Usług nr 88, t. II, Wyd. Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2012, p. 430.

<sup>7</sup> *Strategia rozwoju społeczeństwa informacyjnego w Polsce do roku 2013*, MSWiA, Warszawa 2008, [http://bip.msw.gov.pl/portal/bip/173/17688/Strategia\\_rozwoju\\_spoleczenstwa\\_informacyjnego\\_w\\_Polsce\\_do\\_roku\\_2013\\_\\_dokument\\_p.html](http://bip.msw.gov.pl/portal/bip/173/17688/Strategia_rozwoju_spoleczenstwa_informacyjnego_w_Polsce_do_roku_2013__dokument_p.html) (10.02.2013).

mation or publishing summaries of some documents, e.g. budget or strategy blueprints (as a rule, these documents are of significant sizes). It is worth mentioning that e-administration is not only creation of an internet portal with which the services can be provided, called an electronic inbox, but also the creation of infrastructure for the support of these activities, as a minimum.

### **Development of e-administration in Poland**

The creation of e-administration requires an appropriate legal base and platform for realization of public administration tasks – here the internet has helped. One significant document determining Poland's policy in relation to the concept of information society development is “The development strategy of the information society until 2013”, adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 2008. The first legal act which included regulations introducing the concept of the electronic administration to the Polish law was the Act of 6 September 2001 on access to public information (Journal of Laws of 2001, No. 112, item 1198), which included, among others, the duty to publish the Public Information Bulletin also in electronic form.

The Public Information Bulletin has three main functions:<sup>8</sup>

- informational – one-way transfer of information, as a minimum,
- controlling, i.e. allowing for control of information, reliability and method of handling a given case,
- interactional – allowing for two-way communication with a given customer.

Whereas the Act of 18 September 2001 on e-signature (Journal of Laws of 2001, No. 130, item 1450) created legal base for wider use of e-communication in handling administrative matters, the framework for e-administration was determined by Act of 17 February 2005 on informatization of subjects realizing public services (Journal of Laws of 2005, No. 64, item 565). The Code of Administrative Procedure allows for submitting an application via an electronic inbox. It has been determined that the Polish e-administration have reached the second level of development, which allows for sharing information and forms for download on government agencies' websites. However, submitting the form or payment often requires a personal visit to the government agency.

There have been created plans and projects which stimulate the development of the information society, as well as sector-based and multi-sector projects

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<sup>8</sup> M. Bernarczyk, M. Jabłoński, K. Wygoda, *Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2005, p. 12.

which aim at implementation of top priority e-services. The forecasts have been prepared even until the year of 2020. One crucial action in terms of e-administration development is the creation of, among others, Electronic Platform of Public Administration Services: ePUAP and ePUAP2.<sup>9</sup> It is a Polish nationwide ICT platform for communication between citizens and units of public administration in a unified and standardized way, built within ePUAP-WKP project (State Informatization Plan). Among its participants are both central administration units, as well as local governments, including community authorities. This platform offers, among others, a Verified Profile, which allows for a legally binding electronic submission of applications without the necessity to use electronic signature issued by a qualified center. It also offers a single sign-on system based on SAML, which allows for using the same ePUAP account for the login into websites of various administrative service providers.

In 2011 Poland had over 6.2 million broadband internet connections and nearly 3.5 million broadband wireless connections. Circa 2/3 households had a computer and internet access, in 80% cases it was a broadband connection. It follows that the low level of using the e-administration is not related to the internet access as such. Poland's position in the EU state ranking concerning internet access and its broadband form is gradually rising. In 2006 in terms of households' access to the internet we were on 19th place, in 2010 – 17th among 27 EU states.<sup>10</sup>

The dynamics of growth of percentage of citizens who contact public administration online in Poland in 2010 is minimally higher (27%) than EU average (20%), but the highest dynamics were noted in 2008–2010 in Bulgaria (140%), Latvia (100%), Belgium (73%) and Denmark (59%), where over 75% of society uses electronic administration. In Sweden, Finland and Luxembourg also over 2/3 inhabitants handle their administrative matters by electronic means. In Poland in 2011 citizens who preferred handling administrative matters online had higher education (65%) and were mainly entrepreneurs (53%). This approach had most appeal within the age group of 25–34 (49%). The lowest interest was among retired citizens, pensioners and farmers.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://epuap.gov.pl/wps/portal/> (20.02.2013).

<sup>10</sup> *Spółeczeństwo informacyjne w liczbach*, Ministerstwo Administracji i Cyfryzacji, Departament Spółeczeństwa Informacyjnego, Warszawa 2012, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 71.

### **Role of e-administration in communication of the government body with customers**

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration along with polling institute ARC Rynek i Opinia have conducted a survey entitled „Badanie wpływu informatyzacji na działania administracji publicznej w Polsce w 2011 r.” (“Survey on the influence of informatization over public administration functioning in Poland in 2011”).<sup>12</sup> Over 1600 central and local government agencies from all Poland participated in this survey. According to ca. 40% of respondents, thanks to the introduction of information and communications technologies, there has been noted an increase in efficiency of matters handled, in the number of innovative solutions for work organization, the effective use of agency resources as well as employee innovation. However, a similar percentage claimed that the implementation of these technologies has simultaneously increased their workload. This ambiguity in responses means that the implementation process is still in progress. Ca. 40% of agencies use the electronic system for document management: marshal and district offices with the highest rates. It allows for electronic transfer of documentation of a given case within the office, that is for example online transfer of case documentation to another organizational unit (this form is used by 71% of local government administration). However, this system has not eliminated the traditional paper document circulation within the office. In most agencies, therefore, functions a double circulation system for documents. Nearly 90% of agencies have an electronic inbox, mainly within the ePUAP platform. 80% offices have declared increase in the level of implementation of ePUAP solutions. The two obstacles which make this difficult were: lack of prevalence of e-signature, as well as limited number of ready-made solutions for implementation within the ePUAP platform. Not all government agency employees have their own professional e-mail account. Over two-thirds of employees of government agencies have access to such an account. This percentage is noticeably higher in central administration offices and marshal offices (98% and 87%, respectively), whereas it is the lowest in district and community offices (64% and 67%, respectively).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Badanie wpływu informatyzacji na działania administracji i publicznej w Polsce w 2011 r.*, raport z badania ilościowego zrealizowanego na zlecenie MSWiA, ARC Rynek i Opinia, Warszawa, sierpień 2011, <http://www.law.uj.edu.pl/pracownia/files/raport.pdf> oraz *Raport MSWiA – informatyzacja a działanie urzędów w Polsce*, [http://www.msw.gov.pl/portal/pl/2/9459/Raport\\_MSWiA\\_informatyzacja\\_a\\_dzialanie\\_urzedow\\_w\\_Polsce.html](http://www.msw.gov.pl/portal/pl/2/9459/Raport_MSWiA_informatyzacja_a_dzialanie_urzedow_w_Polsce.html) (10.03.2013).

<sup>13</sup> *Spoleczeństwo informacyjne w liczbach*, Ministerstwo Administracji i Cyfryzacji..., p. 34.



It follows from the report „Survey on influence of informatization...” that government websites usually contain information necessary for handling a case and allow for downloading forms. 17% of central and local government websites allow for monitoring the handled case status. Among all services handled by agencies by electronic means, the most popular are registration and change of details of the business activity (25%), sharing public information (21%), participation in public auctions and submitting tender documentation (13%), downloading forms and specimen application forms (12%).

The development pace of e-administration is seen, among others, in the level of accessibility of public administration services by electronic means. Unfortunately, few public administration services are offered, which has been presented in Fig.1. They mainly involve the access to information and downloading application forms from the government bodies' websites.

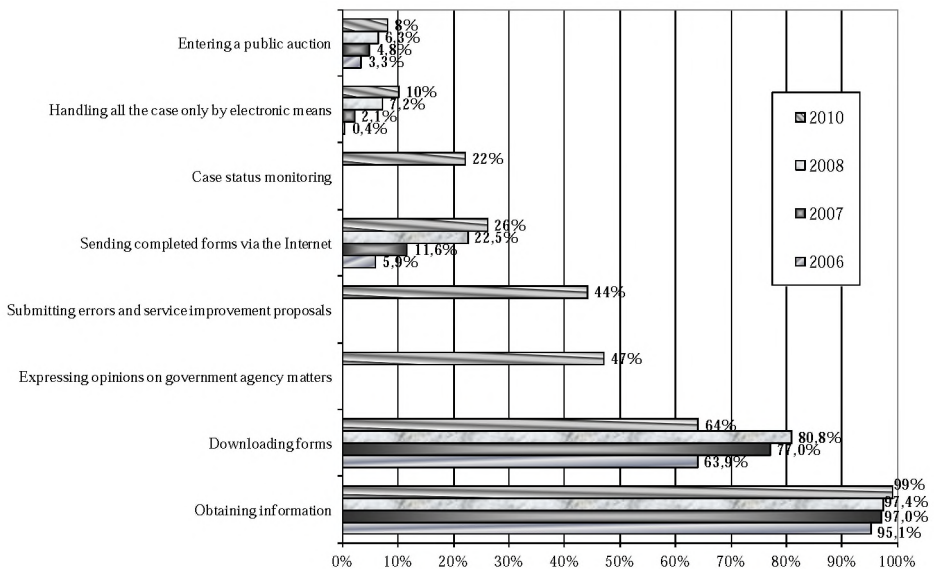


Fig. 1. Facilitation and online services available for customers

Source: prepared based on: *Status of informatization of public administration in Poland in 2008*, General report on quantitative research for Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, Warszawa, July 2009, p. 107; *Information society in numbers 2010*, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, Department of Information Society, Warszawa 2010, p. 98, [www.mswia.gov.pl](http://www.mswia.gov.pl).

The report on e-administration of 2012 presents responses of government agencies; they had to indicate the two most popular services offered by electronic means (Fig. 2). The result was the following: every fourth government agency stated registration or change of details of the business activity as the

most popular. The second place belonged to sharing public information – which is obligatory for local government units. Further places included public auctions, tenders (13%), downloading forms and application form specimens (12%) or issuing identity (ID) cards (12%).

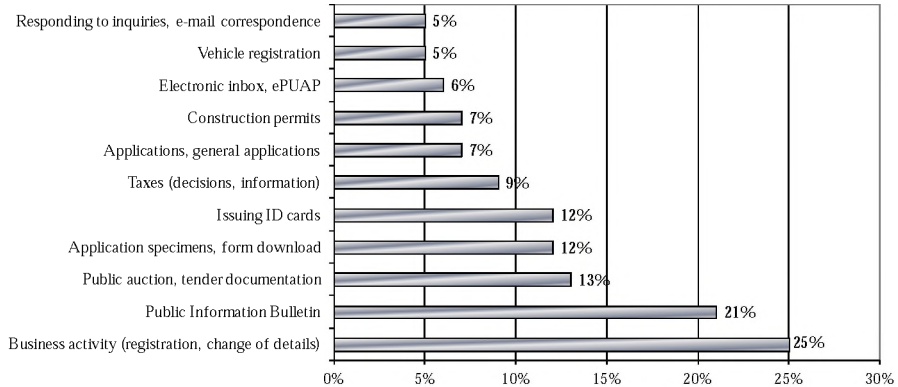


Fig. 2. Most popular e-services, according to government agencies

Source: *Information society in numbers*, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, Department of Information Society, Warszawa 2012, s. 92.

90% citizens contacting government units online in 2010 searched for information on their websites, 2/3 downloaded forms, and above 1/3 sent forms by electronic means. These rates for Poland are considerably lower than the EU average, and the discrepancy is larger with the level of the service advancement. Among the four indicated services, provided on the community level, the most advanced was application for the confirmation of registration entry at the Business Activity Register (Fig. 3).

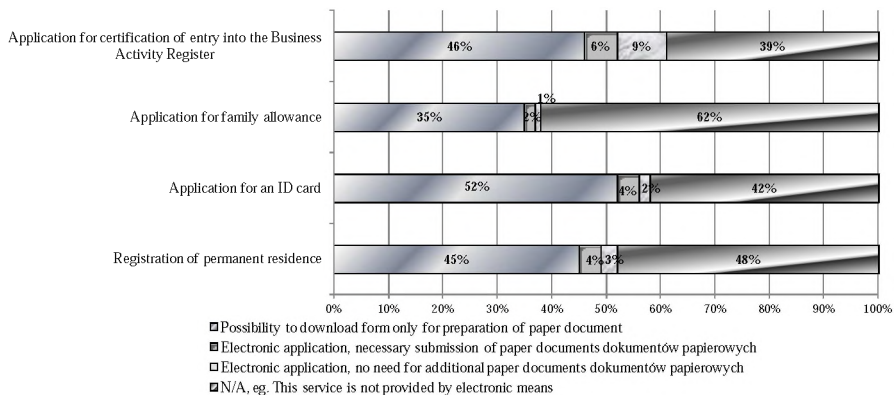


Fig. 3. Most popular e-services, according to government agencies

Source: *Information society in numbers*, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, Department of Information Society, Warszawa 2012, s. 92.

According to the quantitative research, (focus group interviews)<sup>14</sup> among persons using the electronic form of communication with government offices, the willingness to be up-to-date with novelties and technological advancements is quite noticeable. These persons consider themselves as modern and want to be perceived as advanced in latest technologies and as respecting their own time and convenience. The attitude most common among the respondents is treating the internet as a complementary form, facilitating the traditional contact with government offices. This group is mainly characterized by openness to change and facilities and by considering novelties from the angle of profit and benefit (e.g. time saved, convenience, shorter queues in government offices). According to them, the internet could be used mainly for:

- basic, schematic administrative matters, which need to be handled regularly, and which do not require direct contact with government office personnel (e.g. National Insurance statements – ZUS),
- formal procedures which require subsequent personal visit in the government office; this would eliminate one necessary visit to the office (e.g. document duplicate order, which needs to be collected in person),
- appointment booking – allowing for booking a specific time for visit at the government office,
- updating personal details connected with e.g. change of marital status, address or birth,
- monitoring case status.

The focus group believes that the traditional form of contact with government agencies cannot be replaced by electronic means, as there are administrative matters which can be handled only in person, i.e. the more complicated ones (requiring e.g. good knowledge of legal regulations) or those involving higher financial or legal risk.

However, as many as 39% communities in Poland did not informatize this procedure even in part. 46% allowed only for downloading the form for preparation of a paper document, 6% units required additional paper documents, and only 9% communities allowed for online application, without additional paper documents to be submitted. In case of other services, such as registration of permanent residence, identity card application or application for family allowance, the situation in terms of online handling of the case was even worse.

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<sup>14</sup> *Report in quantitative research on preferences in terms of online handling of administrative matters*. Centrum projektów informatycznych (Center for IT Projects), January 2013, p. 14.

The websites of marshal offices had the highest appeal in 2010 – the average number of page views was over 1.5 million, with the top average view results noted by offices from the following voivodeships: Śląskie and Pomorskie, and lowest in Świętokrzyskie and Podlaskie. Community offices share computers or workstations with internet access to citizens – it has been indicated by over 60% of respondents. Most of these communities are located in Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship – 80%, whereas the fewest – only 36% in Lubuskie. Almost 40% of community offices promotes using the internet among citizens threatened by digital divide (the fewest in Opolskie voivodeship, with only 15% of communities), and over 30% supports or organizes IT courses and training for citizens (40% in Śląskiej voivodeship and 23% in Małopolskie).

There are multiple projects realized in Poland which concern e-administration and, unfortunately, many of them do not include the strategic vision of state informatization, but concentrate on purchase of equipment and technology. It has been indicated in report „Państwo 2.0” (“State 2.0”) prepared by the Ministry of Administration and Informatization. It includes importance of emphasis on the information flow that is the implementation of integrated informatization based on the following four rules:<sup>15</sup>

1. The essence of the subject matter requires logical and efficient flow of information, due to which the administration will be able to help a citizen faster. Informatization must, therefore, be determined by the information flow, and not the opposite.
2. In order for the information flow to be logical, it ought to be defined and supervised by the one who needs this information for efficient handling the case of the citizen. The process owner should not be an IT specialist, but an office representative or the office which is responsible for the contact between the state and the citizen. It is necessary to discuss processes within the public administration and services, and not IT projects.
3. Clear and effective informatization is when each sum to spend is considered from all angles. The selected solutions must guarantee best possible expense-to-result ratio.
4. The state is technologically neutral. Within the access to services, the citizen must not be limited by their operation system or even the device they use (computer, tablet, smartphone or devices of the future). The state must

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<sup>15</sup> 2.0. *Nowy start dla e-administracji*, Ministerstwo Administracji i Cyfryzacji, Warszawa 2012, p. 10, [https://mac.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/MAC-Panstwo-2-0-Nowy-start-dla-e-administracji-i-4-2012\\_raport\\_web.pdf](https://mac.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/MAC-Panstwo-2-0-Nowy-start-dla-e-administracji-i-4-2012_raport_web.pdf) (20.03.2013).

be able to change the service provider if the cooperation does not guarantee the expected benefits for citizens.

Integrated informatization is therefore a complex approach which will bind loose initiatives into a comprehensive bundle of actions. As emphasized by the President of Society „Miasta w Internecie” (“Towns in Internet”) Krzysztof Głomb, in terms of e-administration it is a must to “change the vision of Polish administration development in order to reach massive recipients with the e-services – without that, the development of e-administration will not be successful.”<sup>16</sup> The information society development leaders, that is best local and regional governments are awarded in this respect during the conference “Miasta w Internecie” (“Towns in Internet”).<sup>17</sup> In 2013 “Złote@” (“Golden@”), that are the prestigious prizes were awarded in two categories: Leader of Digital Administration under patronage of Ministry of Administration and Informatization and Local Government Leader of Broadband Internet, under patronage of President of Office of Electronic Communications. The former was awarded to Community of Zawoja (in category of rural communities), Town and Community Council in Prusice (rural-urban communities), City Hall of Kołobrzeg (urban communities) and District Starosty in Wodzisław Śląski (districts). The title of Local Government Leader of Broadband Internet was awarded to City Hall of Koszalin for the project “Prevention of digital exclusion for inhabitants of Koszalin. Prevention of digital exclusion for students of Koszalin schools. Intelligent Koszalin – extension of infrastructure for information society e-Koszalin”. Town Hall in Wolsztyn was awarded with distinction for introduction of innovative e-services.

### **Summary**

Functioning of e-administration in Poland is unfortunately often limited to sharing information and allowing for download of information from websites. E-administration is supposed to ensure both automation of customer service process (including customer orientation, allowing for multi-way communication, possibility to submit multiple applications, use of forms, obtaining information of the case status), and back-end processes (i.e. records and identification of payers, accounting, control and tax-administrative execution). Therefore it is crucial to create integrated solutions, e.g. ePUAP, to simplify the existing legal regulations concerning informatization of administration as well as to provide as wide, easy, inexpensive and common access to broadband internet as

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<sup>16</sup> *Nowa twarz e-administracji*, <http://17.kmwi.pl/> (20.02.2013).

<sup>17</sup> *Złote@ rozdane*, <http://17.kmwi.pl/> (20.02.2013).

possible for the society. It is crucial to inform the society of benefits and opportunities following from the use of e-administration. To some extent, citizens do not use it because of lack or insufficient knowledge of it. One drawback is also the double circulation of documents – traditional and electronic. Only when these two problems are solved, we will be able to appreciate the meaning of e-administration in communication between government bodies and their customers, as it should help satisfy all parties of interest. The society expects government bodies to become more open and accessible due to e-administration. It must facilitate cooperation between citizens and authorities, as well as between citizens. The state will be then more efficient and user – that is citizen – friendly.

## **E-ADMINISTRACJA JAKO SPOSÓB KOMUNIKACJI URZĘDU Z OTOCZENIEM**

### **Streszczenie**

W artykule poruszono zagadnienia dotyczące wykorzystania e-administracji jako sposobu komunikacji urzędów, szczególnie jednostek samorządu terytorialnego ze swoimi odbiorcami. Wskazano na jej korzyści oraz bariery w stosowaniu. Przedstawiono wyniki badań wtórnych dotyczące m.in. wpływu informatyzacji na działania urzędów. Liczba korzystających z usług e-administracji w Polsce nie jest jeszcze duża, najczęściej obywatele korzystają z formularzy elektronicznych. Coraz więcej realizowanych jest projektów dotyczących e-administracji, ale większość z nich dotyczy zakupu sprzętu i technologii, nie zaś zaspokojenie potrzeb komunikacyjnych odbiorców. W tym obszarze jest zatem wiele jeszcze do zrobienia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** e-administracja, samorząd terytorialny, otoczenie, komunikacja

*Tłumaczenie: Marzena Zasińska i Agnieszka Smalec*