LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN INTERACTION WITH ITS CITIZENS IN INFORMATION SOCIETY. CASE STUDY OF TARTU, ESTONIA

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Abstract
This paper examines citizens’ interaction with local government. The main concern of the present paper is how the internet is currently being used for local services and by citizens of city of Tartu, Estonia. It presents an empirical study supported by direct observation of web site, description of e- and m-services being implemented or planned and it provides data of survey conducted among citizens of Tartu. My findings imply that the indicators of internet access, internet use and mobile phones use are very high in all age groups in Tartu. Also, the evaluation people give to the web site of city council is high in different categories. The e- and m-services city government has implemented or is planning to implement are innovative. However, the citizens’ use or readiness to use them is not high. If any, people are interested mainly on every-day-life services like m-parking etc. Forums or other services being implemented to provoke citizens’ involvement are not attractive. Finally, my paper discusses the impact of these results addressing the theoretical framework and states the information prevalence over interaction.

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

The city of Tartu, Estonia, is also major regional centre faced with similar structural challenge. The city administration is undergoing comprehensive transformation to provide modern public services ensuring ease of access and interaction for citizens. To investigate this argument, I take examples of e-services and also even more innovative m-services of city of Tartu.

My paper aims to provide an overview of problems, possibilities and challenges concerning the interface between local governance and ICT. It does this through exploring current trends in local government and by giving a description of particular ICT initiatives and exploring the users of ICT – enabled services. The paper also outlines the existing theories on Internet communication (Fawkes and Gregory 2000), e-government development (Reddick 2004, Wiklund 2005, Dutta-Bergmann 2005).

The paper is constructed as following:
After the first, theoretical part of the paper, I will provide a short paragraph about the activities implemented in Tartu in the last few years: Tartu has piloted and fully implemented several citizens-oriented e-and m-services in different sectors of city government, including m-teacher project, m-neighborhood watch, m-library; sms-based information provision for sending quick government information to citizens and businesses; improved city WAP and Java portals for convenient access to city services and information.

The empirical part of the paper also presents feedback of citizens of Tartu concerning its e- and m-services. The data presented is based on large-scale survey conducted in Tartu in 2005 by present author and research company Faktum. 406 citizen of Tartu were surveyed with a written and oral

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questionnaire of more than 160 variables. The respondents were randomly selected and the sample is representative of whole citizenship of Tartu.

In the last, discussion section of the paper, under the focus, discussion and valuation are usability, need and reliability of the e- and m-services of mentioned local government.

**Theoretical framework**

E-government is defined for the purposes of this study as the use of the Internet to deliver services and information to citizens and enable active communication and feedback of both sides. As pointed out by Kaylor (Kaylor et al 2001), E-government is taken to be the ability 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.

The local government is under my investigation because it is the closest unit to the citizens and as Torres (Torres and Pina 2005) notes, local governments play therefore a key role in EU. Increasingly, e-government is described as a revolutionary changing the public sector across the EU and the rest of the world. Within this general trend of change, local government has been a pioneer in developing innovative experiences addressing public management, not only because of its closeness to the citizens, but also due to the ability of some of its managers and politicians in adapting organizations to new managerial atmospheres and social demands (Criado and Ramilo 2003).

There are two theoretical streams of literature that can be used to describe the interaction between citizens and local government in Information Society. For some authors, e-government is application of the tools and techniques of e-commerce to the work of government. This perspective focuses on the practical efficiencies and cost reductions of e-government. To others, e-government has the potential to improve democratic participation. This perspective focuses on initiatives that will bring interaction between government and citizen to new levels (Jaeger 2003). Akman prefers the view that local government websites might focus more on providing services, and less on facilitating civic involvement (Akm an et al, article in Press). Also Odendaal (Odendaal 2003) sets up the question rather: How well can ICTs enable local governments to do what they are supposed to do – deliver services and manage urban places?

Ridell at the same time points out that we can speak about changes in administration of local government if citizen become „public agents“ (Ridell 2002:158). A major challenge that is presented to the development of the Internet at the local level is to find ways in which it can be used so that people are offered not only the constrained role of client or consumer, but are recognized as active public agents.

As in my opinion all services of local government have to proceed the expectations and needs of its citizens, it is important to research the demand side. One of the most general questions concerning the research of demand side perspective is: do citizens prefer to consider themselves as a client whose life has been transformed very easy and who can manage all necessary actions with local authorities via Internet, or do citizen also expects to be a partner to the city government, who can express their opinion, being constantly in dialogue with city council. One approach is service-based, other is democratic approach. Musso (Musso et al 2000) indicate the connection between these two streams – active services users are active agents.

As recently mentioned, there is big difference in services. One sort of services are those who make citizens life easier, others are those which enable to be active agents. Tartu has developed both of them, but until present study the city has not applied for citizens’ feedback, which one is more valuable for them.

Though, there is no point to pay excessive attention to the orientation and quality of different services and possibilities, if it is not known how many people do have the access to the internet. This was also the starting point of my research. The demand side perspective has been relatively unexplored. However, about internet access in general, there has been highlighted several aspects. One of the conclusions, many theorists (Servaes 2003, Jaeger 2003) have reached is that really considerable part of population is repulsed since the triumph of internet communication. Even further, Akman (Akman et al, Article in Press) has noted that there are also sex-based inequalities in use of internet. It is reported that this inequality is bigger in less developed countries (we can consider Estonia one of them yet, even we do not like it). Servaes (Servaes 2003) gives an explanation to this, that complicacy deters women from using internet. Also Wiklund (Wiklund 2005) states that young citizens have access to internet to a higher degree than older, that citizens of higher socio-economic groups have higher, and that men have access to a higher degree than women. However, even mentioned authors admit that this discrepancy has decreased. Before to determine the extent of access it is important to point out the presumption that individuals who have access to new media differ from those individuals.
who do not have access to new media in the context of community involvement and community satisfaction. Dutta-Bergmann admits that the individual access to the internet are more satisfied (Dutta-Bergmann 2005).

From one point of view, this is important to pay attention in communication of local government to other alternative communication channels beside the internet. From the other, we can talk about overabundance of channels which makes choices complicated. It is the phenomenon, Servaes called „pleonastic exclusion“ (Servaes 2003:18). Additionally, a new phenomenon of „pleonastic exclusion“ is taking place, as a result of the enormous numbers of channels of communication, which forces audiences to a continuous selection-exclusion in information sources. It is hard to find local government which has not web site. However, there is lack of (academic) research of their content. I have researched web sites of county governments and presented the results in my previous article (Reinsalu, article in press). However, Criado (Criado and Ramilo 2003) and Kaylor (Kaylor et al 2001) have concluded that overall cataloguing information was mostly present, rather than possibilities for interaction with citizens. The feedback was reduced to giving e-mail addresses and was not related to e-service delivery and only a few services and functions could be completed online, such as paying taxes. Reddick states that G2C websites of american municipalities are in stage of cataloging of information online. The transition from informational e-government to transactional e-government is significant because it requires an information exchange between citizens and government (Reddick 2004).

Undoubtedly, the interactivity discourse is very important, but if people are not motivated to use ICT benefits, there is no need for interactivity. As Lauristin (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 communication process only has value in building social identity, shared meaning and common knowledge if everybody is involved in communication process (Fawkes and 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. It is not enough that citizens have access to the internet and that municipalities have a website; e-governments also must provide content that is relevant to their policies and decisions and give citizens the opportunity to put forward and challenge arguments and counter-arguments. 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. The forums are designed differently, for example, with regard to whether the activity is ongoing or annual, the agenda is fixed, narrow or open, and the link to decision-making is direct or indirect, and formal or informal (Grönlund 2003)

In information society, in my opinion, the public sector organization like local government, should offer services which are out of the scope of private sector. For instance one of the new m-services being implemented in Tartu is m-teacher. Kaylor also admits (Kaylor et al 2001) that it is no surprise that, in an effort to catch up, the public sector has in larger part mimicked that which has been done by the private, namely, adopting e-commerce as a model for transforming their functions. However, there are also some dangers and one important question one should ask is how far should different internet-based services be developed? The question is even more burning speaking about such a small municipality in European context as Tartu is. As Jaeger points out (Jaeger 2003), e-government also creates ways in which government officials could use technology to avoid taking responsibility for their duties. If government officials become less responsive because they are not physically seeing or speaking to the citizens they serve, then e-government would be serving to make government administration less transparent and responsive.

Finally, I owe the reader the explanation why I have chosen as case study of my research theme citizens and services of Tartu, Estonia.

First, according to The Networked Readiness Index 2003-2004 Estonia is the leader of e-issues amongst the eastern European countries with a rank of 25 (Reinsalu, article in Press). Estonian information’s society has been built in the past 15 years. This gives the Estonian case a development perspective that makes it interesting for less advanced countries. As also stated by Castells (Castells and Himanen 2002) 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.

Second, 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 (Ridell 2002), my study demonstrates one small and in global context even insignificant city demonstrates that it could be taken as an innovator of many e- and m-services.

Tartu, with its population of 101,246 (Population Census data from 2000) in an area of 38.8 square kilometers, is the second largest city of Estonia. Tartu, lying 185 kilometers south of Tallinn, is also the centre of Southern Estonia. The University of Tartu as a distributor of progressive thinking and developer of innovation activities works with companies in order to develop new technologies and it applies the most innovative skills, and supports the creation and development of spin-off companies.

I will demonstrate in last section of my paper, in conclusions and discussion sector if and how these services respond expectations of citizens.

Methodology, research questions, hypotheses

The present study was completed with help of research company Faktum and City Council of Tartu. The sample was formed by 15-64 years old citizens of Tartu (in all the population of Tartu is 69 417 – data of ESA, 01.01.2004. Table 1. presents the percent distribution according social-demographic qualities)

Table 1. Social-demographic characteristics of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>15-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Sex</td>
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<td>man</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>woman</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>subprofess</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>college-bre</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entrepreneur</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proficient</td>
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<td>8%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>16%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pensioner</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>up to 1000</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001-2000</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-3000</td>
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<td>14%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3001-4000</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unanswere</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As research method, face-to-face interviews were used. The sample is 406 respondents and the results can be extended to the whole sample (representative sample). The maximum error is +- 4, 9%. The multistage probability record selection was used for completing the sample. I also can consider as a method my constant observation and familiarization with services and possibilities being introduced in present paper.

As seen in Table 1, men and women divide correspondingly 45 % and 55%. Predominant respondent possess sub professional education. 81 % of respondents consider Estonian as their mother language. Concerning the social status, the respondents are giving 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%. According to the income, the biggest part of the respondents notes there income does not surmount 4000 crones.
2.1 Research questions

The following section introduces my main questions being asked with my survey. It is important to note, though, that there were 169 questions in questionnaire in total, but many of them, mostly related to general communication management of city government, will remain out of the focus of this paper. There were also some open questions in the questionnaire. The answers to these are presented were necessary.

In context of present paper, following questions complexes (groups) are set up:

First, questions related to general communications practices of Tartu. Also questions related to citizens’ trust towards city government belong here. Were do the citizen mostly get their information about the city and city government? How important is the official web site of city as an information channel? How do citizen prefer to communicate with city government? What is most valued in web site? Does city government take citizen’s opinions into account?

Second group is formed by questions related to access.

Who are involved in internet communication? Are there groups who remain aside of internet communication? How long is citizen’s practice of using internet?

Third, but at the same time one of the key questions is: do citizen consider themselves as clients who consume different services or do they (also) expect to be involved in dialogue? Do people value services which make their life easy or enable them to be in dialogue, to be co-deciders? I would add to this group also question concerning the satisfaction with web site.

Fourth, questions asked about citizens’ information, readiness and attitude to all, including very recent e- and m-services. Which e- and m-services (already put into practice or planned) are used and considered useful? Do citizen can make any difference? Do they orientate in abundance of different services?

I did not set up very concrete hypotheses, but I had presumptions on results of every group of questions. I admit, these are rather facts based on other resources (media etc), because, as stated before, the users of internet are not researched before.

First, I was sure the web page of Tartu is one of the most important and used information channels for citizens.

Second, citizens of Tartu are very well connected and have long practice of using internet.

Third, people are quite optimistic and accustomed with services which make their life easier, but quite modest using forums and other services, which assume their activity.

Fourth, citizens are well informed about new services, however, quite passive in using them.

Results

Before presenting results, I introduce the services and web site and then expound results about these issues of my survey. I will start my overview outlining the main communication practices of Tartu.

3.1 Communication practices of city government of Tartu

It is important to mention also, that I have analyzed here only respondents who have answered „often“
As seen from the figure 1, of all channels citizen get information about the city of Tartu, the internet occupies second place after local newspaper. 43% of the population of the city states that they use internet to get an information about city „often“.

Under my investigation was also if citizen opinion the city government takes their opinions into account.

As presented in figure 2, citizens are quite optimistic in question if city government takes their opinions into account. Even 59% of respondents find city government does consider their opinions important and consider them managing the city life.

In next section I will pay attention to the access.
3.2 Access

In the beginning some facts appeared by the survey, but not see in figures. 87% of citizens are connected to the internet (45% of the men and 55% of the woman) and 64% of them who are lacking access at home argue this with possibility to use internet at other places (work, at friends place etc). 62% of respondents, who have access at home, use it every day. Public access points are not particularly popular among citizen. 70% of respondents do not visit them.

As seen in figure 3, in different age groups the use of internet is different. As expected the age group less uses internet is age between 55-64 years. However, it is notable that even 43% of this age group uses internet.

![Figure 3: Internet use in different age groups](image)

[![Figure 4: Internet use and social status](image)]
Concerning the social status (Figure 4), the most active internet users are students and officers. Surprisingly the use of pensioners, executives and workers is equal. This makes it even more complicated for website composers to compose a website satisfying needs of all those target groups. I was also interested how long the practice of using internet is. As seen in figure 5, 39% of the respondents have used internet more than 5 years.

Figure 5: Citizens'practice of using internet

3.3 Web site
The web site of Tartu is available on http://www.tartu.ee/. The web site of Tartu is very sizeable – it is composed of more than 2400 pages and with pages of several data bases connected to the main page, there are all together more than 300 000 pages. There is nothing to reproach to the main page - the information is well divided, the web page is well connected to other data bases – for instance under the linkage „Social aid“ one can find direct connection to health insurance fund, social ministry, also to the portal of dental treatment. The „eyecatcher“ of the main page is „news“ section. There is also separate section „Local power“ were one can find the structure and activities of city government, foundations and companies in which the city is a partner. Here is also a document register were one can find all documents since 1990 and there are 190 000 of them. This is the reason, this data bases is relative slow.

Worth of mentioning is the existence of different and many possibilities for interactive activities. Here is for example a linkage „Officer Answers“ were everybody can ask officials questions concerning city and power. Their questions are answered on the same page. There is also „Trouble Map“ which enables everybody to refer to the place in city, the problem (related to decayed road etc) exists. There is even map where marked areas were dogs can run.

Thanks to the web camera everybody can wave over the world via web site.

As seen in figure 6, 26% of the population of Tartu visits the official web site of Tartu at least once a week. However, the number of people who use web site of Tartu almost every day is not notably high.
I also looked what and how often do people search from mentioned web site. As presented in figure 7, in the first place, people are searching culture and entertainment. 37% of the respondents search often information from sub pages under the categories „Culture and Entertainment“. „Local power“ is the less used category with 53% of the respondents answering they have never searched information from these sub pages.

Concerning the quality of web site in different evaluation categories (see figure 8), the highest score got its visual appearance - 17% of the respondents find it very good - , and also its clarity of structure.
3.4 e-services available via web site

There are more services available in the web site of Tartu, but figure 9 presents most extended of them and gives an overview about use of different services. As this figure demonstrates, citizens are quite passive to use interactive services they are offered via web site. Particularly notable is that so few people ask questions or comment anonymously in sub page „Officer Answers“. It is interesting to have a look at two figures in parallel. The Figure 10 presents the importance citizen give to corresponding services. These two figures are notably different.

Figure 9: Use of interactive services of the web site

Figure 8: Evaluation of web site in different categories
As presented in figure 10, notable number of respondents (32%) reads others’ questions and official’s answers in section “Official answers”, looks for a instruction how to use ID-card or m-parking (28%) or uses e-applications (26%).

But the fact is that even 94% of citizen never asks anything in “official answers”, 91% never watch meetings of city government on-line or inscribes for doctor’s consultation (at the same time 32% considers this service useful).

I would like to give more detailed analysis about service “officer answers”, because it is the most definite place we can see if and how many people are ready and interested to be in dialogue with city government. It is also important to observe how react officers to edgy? questions. The archive of questions and answers is found in [http://www.tartu.ee/?lang_id=1&menu_id=&page_id=1533](http://www.tartu.ee/?lang_id=1&menu_id=&page_id=1533). By the time I visited this sub page the last time (01/04/2006) there was also separate section for questions related to web site of Tartu. The mentioned web site results to be too complicated. This forum unfortunately has made through some negative changes lately. The possibility of commenting others questions was closed lately by city government with excuse there was too much slander. Concentrating in discussions in this forum one can understand why citizens are not so enthusiastic about this forum. The answers of officers are without emotion, the questions are sent from one officer to other without citizen getting answer. To get the answer their questions may take more than two month. The number of anonymous questions is not notable bigger. Therefore I can conclude, the security on anonymity is not the point.

As a good initiative, the city government has made available in internet also instructions how to use new e-and m-services. There are also video clips introducing these services available in [http://www.tartu.ee/?lang_id=1&menu_id=6&page_id=2827](http://www.tartu.ee/?lang_id=1&menu_id=6&page_id=2827).

3.5 m-services

As a beginning it is important to ask following questions: how many citizen use mobile phone?; How often do they use mobile phone?; Which m-services (already put into practice and planned) are used and considered useful?; The results are seen in figures 11 and 12.

Before analyzing the feedback, I give a short explanation of services presented in figure 12. **Entertainment services** are logos, signatures of Tartu, everybody can download to their phone. The **welfare phone** is number by city council open 24/7 were everybody can announce about problem related to upkeep of the city. **T-number** is service that enables to ask by mobile phone information about 90 objects. There codes are in web site or in maps. Other services are more conventional like m-parking and m-payments and need no detailed explanation.
As seen in presented figures, 92% of citizen use mobile phone every day. However, mobile-based services are not very expanded yet. Only 1% of citizen use every day m-parking or services connected to entertainment. More than 90% of citizens have never used m-bus ticket, T-number service. In open answers they justify it with no need (dominant answer) or no motivation. There have been mentioned also lack of experience and complicacy. However, we get the picture different from this if we look how important seem different services to people (see figure 13).
Before moving on with analyzing of feedback, I give a short description of the newest m-services being implemented by the city government of Tartu.

**M-teacher** is the web based interface has been created for class teachers, which enables teacher to communicate most operatively with parents of his students (for instance, to let them know about their child being absent, about coming parents meeting etc). A teacher can also send a note about their child’s progress and marks at the school. **M-neighborhood watch** („m-security service“ in figures) enables the police to send people who have joined to this project, information about stolen cars, missing persons. Counterpoise people can give feedback to police about their observation. One of the aims of project planners is to involve taxi and bus drivers as very informed persons to the project. The aim of **m-clinic** is to inform people about their doctors’ official hour, to ask people’s help when for example a big amount of blood is needed urgently etc. The use of **m-library** becomes actual in case the reader is registered in line for some book, cd, or video, he will be informed when this piece is back in library.

The evaluation of these services is more complicated because lots of them are not available to everybody. Therefore I asked citizens about the readiness of their use instead of the use. However, it is expressive result that the most popular are services people even have not heard about.

As seen in figure 14, 45% of citizens have heard about m-teacher and 34% about m-neighborhood watch, 29% about m-library and 20% about m-clinic.

The most useful seems people m-clinic – 37% of respondents would like to join the service in the future, 35% would like to join with m-library, 28% m-neighborhood watch and 23% with m-teacher. Most optimistic are people towards m-clinic – 24% of respondents consider it very important and 56% rather important. 22% considers very important m-neighborhood watch and 20% considers very important m-teacher service.

Concerning the importance, the m-teacher service got most pessimistic estimation - 7% of respondents consider this service absolutely unnecessary (it is important to mention that the fact that big number of students opinion so, increases the overall number).

In open answers about possible m-services people feel free to propose ideas. They dream of getting m-services to get weather-report, get paid for taxi with mobile phone, in restaurants; get m-wine information, m-food order service, m-notices from university teacher when the lecture is cancelled etc.
Concerning new services I also researched the evaluation of importance in different age groups (see figure 15). The most different evaluation get the m-teacher service. This can be explained with relative high number of students who are not interested of this service and, to the contrary, their parents are very interested. The service most uniformly and highly evaluated is m-clinic.
Conclusions and Discussion

The littleness of Tartu certainly slows down the development of new services; therefore it is extremely useful to get feedback about the frequency of use and cost of one or another service. Although my paper presents just one case study and does not pretending to be generalization, it gives an overview about obligations, challenges and chances, the local government faces in Information Society.

As stated earlier in 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 communication process (Fawkes and Gregory 2000). Concerning the indicators of the access and use of internet in Tart they are high in every aspect – there is not notable difference either in age, sex or social status. This fact makes it even harder for planners and implementers of web site and e-services of city government, because they have to correspond to the expectations and needs of very broad public.

The pivotal questions concerning planning and implementation of e-and m-services of local government is do citizens consider themselves as clients who consume different services or do they also expect to be involved in dialogue with local power?

Having analyzed the results of the survey I can state, that the number of citizens visiting the web site of Tartu is relatively high, but their interests mainly is limited to services of entertainment or very basic needs like registering for a doctor or parking a car. Citizens’ interest towards activities of local power and their will for being in dialogue with it is to the lowest notch.

It is also worth to note, that the practices of use of citizens are hard to change. For example publications published by city government with the aim to help citizen to use the web page, do not interest people. I can conclude from this that who is used to communicate with city via web site does not need help, and who does not, either does not need a help. Consequently the complicacy is not a point or reason not to use or to use.

Interactivity is definitely important component for motivating people. However, planning the services it is important to have regarded that citizens’ ability to accept is limited. Either citizen can not make any choices if there are too many several services or officials can not administer any more. Unfortunately, this the case of web site of Tartu and its interactive services as well. Here prevails “pleonastic exclusion” if using the notion of Servaes (Servaes 2003) cited in theoretical framework.

Although forums have received much attention in municipalities, their function can be questioned. In-depth studies of about 10 of the most popular discussion forums on Swedish municipal websites show that the activity on the forums is low, that few contributions include political opinions or proposals, and that many contributions are simple expressions of dissatisfaction. More positive is that many contributions were addressed to other participants, which suggests that to some extent citizens listen and respond to each other (Grönlund 2003). It is regrettably that the forum “Officer Answers” on web site of Tartu, does not offer any more the possibilities for comment the others’ comments. The city council argues the prohibition of comments with need to avoid slander in web site.

Concentrating in discussions in forum, one can find this prohibition irritates people. One can find also more reasons, why citizens are not so enthusiastic about this forum. The answers of officers are without emotion, the questions are sent from one officer to other without citizen getting answer. To get the answer their questions may take more than two month. The number of anonymous questions is not notable bigger. Therefore I can conclude, the security on anonymity is not the point.

The new m-services offered via the web site are very innovative and “fashionable”, but as my survey proves, peoples’ readiness to use them is correlated to their information, but this correlation is negative. They are more ready to use the services they know about less and on the contrary. In open answers they justify it with no need (dominant answer) or no motivation. There have been mentioned also lack of experience and complicacy.

Beside the question how to motivate people to use services, remains the question how to make the new communications technology help to change the institutionalized democracy qualitatively. In other words, remains the question, how to motivate citizen to give feedback to e and m-services, and how to motivate officials to give citizen more feedback than „Thanks for your comments“.

As Ridell admits (Ridell 2002) admits there has not been fundamental change in local administration in spite of big promises. In situation were municipalities have become a profit unit in an increasingly market-oriented environment, local resident are seen as clients. And e-services are not developed to
improve citizens’ IT skills or their participation, but to enable them the full range of online goods and services around the clock. “Citizens are increasingly becoming consumers but not participants or active agents. Maybe the most dangerous thing in this model is according to Ridell (Ridell 2002) is that the consumer model is also quite restrictive in the sense that it is extremely difficult within its confines to come up with any new ideas and proposals. As Milner (Milner 1999) observes, the ability of end-users to imagine better or alternative products is constrained by the boundaries of their past and present experiences.

As appears there is dilemma about the number of services. From one hand we need to avoid the abundance of different services, from the other hand we have to give the citizen opportunity to throw ideas about new and more needed services. My survey was the first step to collect citizens’ feedback about e- and m-services. To make more valid conclusions it is definitely important to collect more peoples open answers, to carry through focus group interviews etc. However, we can not declare that investments in such a small local government as Tartu with its population of 101,246, does not recoup. Every citizen in every smallest local government deserves the benefits of Information Society.

References


*The Networked Readiness Index 2003-2004*
http://www.weforum.org/site/homepublic.nsf/Content/Global+Competitiveness+Programme%5CGlobal+Information+Technology+Report

