

Social Impacts of State Service Electronization

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Abstract:

The aim of this scientific article is to analyze the current state of digitization of public administration in the social sector in Slovakia in the context of the social impacts of the digital transformation of our society. The article discusses the results of our research activities, generalizes the acquired knowledge, and proposes specific measures and requirements for improving electronic services of public administration in the social sector.

Introduction

Public authorities provide services to citizens in various areas to address different life situations. Documentation, files, and records of clients are gradually shifting from simple paper-based files to complex information systems that exchange data

through interoperability. Instead of paper files, officials and social workers now use computers and electronic files, while ordinary people access information through laptops and smartphones. Internet connectivity should practically be available everywhere in today's world. (Matel, A. 2019)

For many individuals, information technology is still shrouded in a “veil of secrecy,” and their use of it is limited or completely avoided. However, well-used technologies can be invaluable tools, saving human labor, time, and financial resources. (Samalova, K., Vojtisek, P. 2021) On the other hand, poorly implemented technologies can complicate work and become a burden for users. All institutions gradually adopting modern information and communication technologies in their processes must always define the requirements for implementing a new system to make its use efficient and straightforward for employees and citizens. (Berthotyova, E. 2014)

Digitization and progress in innovations are becoming an integral part of social welfare and public administration services. Sustainable and effective implementation of modern technologies can help save work, gather information about clients, allowing institutions to provide better and more efficient services. (Ondrusova, Z., Olah, M., Vavreckova, V. 2019) Our population is gradually aging, consuming more natural resources, but also investing more effort in developing new information and communication technologies to make life easier.

Within the EU, countries have relatively advanced social systems and healthcare, so modern nations face the question of how to maintain or enhance these standards, especially in the context of the current energy crisis, war, inflation, and the lingering pandemic. (Olah, M. 2020) Technologies are constantly penetrating into the realm of public administration and social services. The current trend of digitization not only affects the way clients communicate but also how documentation is managed and data exchanged.

„Modern communication technologies improve service and processing of various client requests while enabling customization to meet their needs. Contemporary conveniences can send information about a user’s health, determine their location, and simplify the work of emergency services.“ (Mason, D. 2019) Portal solutions for public administration services provide various reports for public and individuals, and personalized online accounts help users access crucial information needed for social or other services provided by public or private institutions.

„The growing demand for social services on one hand and the lack of public financial resources on the other increase the pressure on the cost-effectiveness of providing these services. One tool for improving cost-effectiveness is the deinstitutionalization of social services provided in institutional facilities in cases where the health of the service recipient allows it.“ (Repa, V. 2014) Providing social services in institutional care facilities is being supplemented by the activities of field care services, including monitoring and signaling the need for support and delivering crisis assistance through telecommunications technologies. Innovative concepts of social services using telecommunications technologies have the potential to significantly reduce the costs of providing social services, benefiting not only service providers and guarantors but also service recipients in terms of affordability. (Mikusova Merickova, B. 2013)

„The relevance of implementing digital communication tools into our daily lives must be perceived in various dimensions and levels of society. Informationization tools of society and public administration must be capable of responding flexibly, rapidly, and effectively to continually changing societal conditions.“ (Jaskyte, K. 2010) The bureaucratic apparatus should not hinder the provision of social services and social assistance using modern electronic communication tools but should constitute a process-driven coherent complex enabling individuals or groups to assert their social rights and ensuring the protection of the social status of all citizens of the state.

Current societal crises serve as a mirror for the functioning of state and local authorities specializing in the social sphere. Their evolution must be guided by these experiences and expertise to continually develop and improve their functioning in the context of international cooperation and coordination among European states. (Thijs, N et al. 2010)

Description of the Research Problem

The informatization and electronization of public administration services are current and important topics in the digital world, requiring the implementation of new innovations in the public sector. This process involves transforming

traditional administrative processes into digital form with the aim of simplifying and streamlining service provision to citizens and improving the public sector's agenda. (Vallova, J. 2010) These efforts are also present at the European level, where the priority is to achieve a "Digital Europe" to promote digital transformation throughout Europe and ensure that all citizens can access digital services. (Bisman, C. 2014)

In our research, we focused on investigating the issues of informatization and electronization of public administration services. The primary scientific problem was to analyze the social impacts and influences of electronization and digitalization of the information held by public authorities in fulfilling their duties and providing services to citizens. In this context, we also describe other socio-societal consequences resulting from the use of information and communication technologies. The benefits of implementing new modern elements into citizens' daily lives should always outweigh the risks and negative impacts, including the informatization and digitalization of society, which negatively affects primarily groups of citizens with lower education and social status, who do not have sufficiently developed hard and soft skills. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure the proper and adequate introduction of electronic communication means into the activities of public authorities, especially in the fields of healthcare, social services, and social care, so that they can be used and accessible to all citizens equally.

Such an approach has the potential to increase the efficiency and transparency of public administration. Informatization and electronization pose numerous challenges for public authorities to address. Some of the most important tasks include data security, accessibility of e-services, system interoperability, and ensuring the quality of services provided. In this context, it is also important to remember that not all citizens have access to the internet, so there should still be the option to provide services in traditional form, especially for disadvantaged citizens. At the same time, it is necessary to gradually teach them to use ICT tools to address life situations.

„The state must focus its efforts on creating and operating services that are accessible to citizens and user-friendly so that handling mat-

ters is simple for people.“ (Elichova, M. 2017) Slovakia has embarked on the path of building customer service centers in various areas of state administration and, in cooperation with local self-government, seeks synergistic effects in integrating services into one system and location. Through legislative and technical tools, information systems of the state are gradually integrated, administrative burdens of public administration are reduced, and efficiency is improved. However, this requires further investments in innovation and sustainability support. A significant challenge in providing state services is catching up with advanced European countries, but the processes established provide a good starting point for building modern, citizen-centric public administration in Slovakia.

The research was oriented towards a comprehensive assessment of the social aspects of electronization in public administration, with a focus on the social status of citizens. It provides insights into the perception of electronic services from the perspective of their users and defines the extent of time and cost savings when using them. The research results also include universal guidelines for the development of public administration information systems in the form of recommendations for practice to meet the needs and expectations of citizens and contribute to improving the quality of electronic public services.

We defined the research goals as follows:

To analyze the impacts of the informatization and electronization of public administration services from the perspective of citizens.

To examine the relationship between the level of digital literacy and the use of electronic public administration services from the perspective of citizens.

To investigate the factors influencing citizens' experiences and opinions on electronic services, such as age, gender, and education.

To determine the subjective perceived advantages and disadvantages of electronic services for citizens and how this affects their satisfaction with public service provision or their use in everyday life.

To evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the electronization of public services, especially

in terms of speed and efficiency in service provision and time and cost savings for citizens.

To examine the challenges and obstacles in the implementation and development of electronic services, analyze the reasons why citizens do not use them adequately.

To propose recommendations for improving electronic services that take into account the needs and expectations of citizens and contribute to the improvement of the quality of electronic public services.

The primary research tool we used for data collection was a questionnaire, which we consider as the fundamental quantitative research method used to obtain structured and measurable data about the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of respondents. When using the questionnaire, we created a set of questions that have a specific purpose and are logically organized in relation to the research objectives.

The questionnaire used for the research on the impacts of the electronization of public administration services examined various questions related to citizens' perspectives on electronic services and their use in specific areas:

- Demographic data.
- Level of digital literacy.
- Internet availability and knowledge of e-services.
- Use of electronic services in everyday life.
- Attitudes and effectiveness of the introduction of electronic services by public administration bodies.
- Assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of informatization and electronization in public administration.
- Identification of barriers and problems that hinder respondents from fully utilizing electronic services.
- Evaluation of respondents' expectations of electronic services that could be improved or expanded.
- Examination of respondents' attitudes toward privacy and security when using electronic services.

The research sample consisted of citizens who, at the time of data collection, used customer services of public administration bodies as part of the services provided by labor offices, social affairs and family offices, and branches of the Social Insurance Agency in the Bratislava

region from September to November 2022. This was the period when data collection was carried out in the field, and during this period, we came into contact with the research sample, which was selected based on specific selection criteria:

- a) Gender.
- b) Age over 18 years.
- c) Education.
- d) Experience with e-services and the ability to form an opinion on e-services provided by public administration.
- e) Use of customer services of labor offices, social affairs and family offices, and the Social Insurance Agency over the past 6 months.

(Note: The translation provided is a comprehensive summary of the original Slovak text, aiming to convey the content and key points of the scientific article. If you require a more detailed translation or have specific questions regarding certain sections, please let me know.)

Statistics

		Sex	Age	Education	Experience
N	Valid	125	125	125	125
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Std. Deviation		,501	1,245	1,014	,501
Kurtosis		-2,011	-1,023	-1,016	-2,011
Std. Error of Kurtosis		,430	,430	,430	,430
Percentiles	25	1,00	2,00	2,00	1,00
	50	1,00	3,00	2,00	2,00
	75	2,00	4,00	3,00	2,00

A total of 125 respondents were involved in the research, of which 53.6% were women and 46.4% were men.

Sex

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Women	67	53,6	53,6	53,6
Men	58	46,4	46,4	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

The age structure of the respondents was from 18 years, while the youngest group of respondents in the 18-24 years category was 19.2% of respondents. 20.8% of respondents aged 25-34 participated. The middle age category consisted of respondents aged 35-44, who represented 27.2%. The older age group included 24% of people aged 45-54, and 8.8% were involved in those aged 55 and over.

Age structure of respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-24 years	24	19,2	19,2	19,2
25-34 years	26	20,8	20,8	40,0
35-44 years	34	27,2	27,2	67,2
45-54 years	30	24,0	24,0	91,2
55 and more years	11	8,8	8,8	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

20.8% of respondents achieved primary education, 38.4% of respondents completed secondary education, and from the total sample, 22.4% of respondents stated that they had completed first-level university education. 18.4% of respondents indicated that their completed education was a second-level university education.

Education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Basic	26	20,8	20,8	20,8
High school	48	38,4	38,4	59,2
University – degree 1	28	22,4	22,4	81,6
University – degree 2	23	18,4	18,4	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

44% stated that they have some experience in using e-services of public administration bodies, and on the contrary, 56% of respondents have no experience.

Experience with the use of e-services in public administration

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No experience	70	56,0	56,0	45,4
With experience	55	44,0	44,0	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

In the research, we dealt with the social aspects of the implementation of e-Government at the level of public administration, which includes the provision of electronic services within the framework of its client workplaces of labour, social affairs and family offices, as well as branches of the Social Insurance Company, which we analysed at the following levels:

1. availability;
2. understanding and knowledge of e-services;
3. use of e-services;
4. support and quality of e-services;
5. organization and provision of e-services, including protection.

Chart 1 Dimensions of inquiry in research

E-services of public administration bodies – areas of investigation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Availability	21	16,8	16,8	16,8
Understanding and knowledge of e-systems	28	22,4	22,4	39,2
Use of e-services	33	26,4	26,4	65,6
Support and quality of e-services	23	18,4	18,4	84,0
Organization and provision of e-services, including protection	20	16,0	16,0	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

The authors pay attention to the quality of electronic services (e-services) and the search for criteria for satisfaction with these services in connection with the increasing rate of acceptance of electronic technologies by citizens compared to the previous period. The development of methods for measuring the quality of e-services and user satisfaction with e-services is at an insufficient level, as it contains a number of determining factors and influences.

16.8% of respondents identified the availability of e-services as a key element that has an impact on the low use of electronic services in public administration, while 16.8% identified the problem of internet inaccessibility, weak internet coverage or unstable internet connection as an obstacle for them to the use of e-services in general. 24.0% indicated the systemic unavailability of e-services, which are not technically well secured and are difficult to use in practical life. 25.6% of respondents perceive content accessibility as a problem, pointing to the lack of transparency of information, its complexity, and low practicality. 16.8% of respondents answered that many systems are not comprehensive. Likewise, 16.8% of respondents stated that the electronic services of public authorities are not effective, which increases their inaccessibility for most citizens in everyday life when handling the services of public administration authorities using modern means of communication.

Chart 2 Evaluation of the dimension of availability of public administration e-services

Availability				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Internet availability	21	16,8	16,8	16,8
System availability	30	24,0	24,0	40,8
Content availability – transparency of information	32	25,6	25,6	66,4
Lack of complexity	21	16,8	16,8	83,2
Effective availability	21	16,8	16,8	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

Chart 3 expresses the reasons why public administration e-services are insufficiently used by citizens based on the “**understanding**” dimension. 19.2% of respondents stated that they do not understand the entire digitalization of services, they cannot adapt to new innovations in the virtual space and they do not know them well enough. 16.8% do not use these services because they do not meet their real needs. 32.0% have low digital literacy and cannot practically use these tools. 19.2% have no information that these tools exist; they expressed that there is a low awareness of citizens. 12.8% of respondents said that the guides, instructions and procedures for using electronic services, published on the websites of public administration bodies, are not sufficient and do not solve the problems that citizens encounter when using e-services.

Chart 3 Evaluation of the dimension of understanding of public administration e-services

Understanding				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Lack of understanding of innovations and the e-services system	24	19,2	19,2	19,2
Usability for needs	21	16,8	16,8	36,0
Low literacy	40	32,0	32,0	68,0
Ignorance and low knowledge	24	19,2	19,2	87,2
Instructions, instructions and procedures	16	12,8	12,8	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

In the research, we investigated what factors influence the use of e-services provided by public administration bodies. The results of the research showed (chart 4) that the low digital thinking of the respondents increases the inability to know and use these tools in the “virtual world” for

20.0% of them. 18.4% of respondents have low digital literacy, which may be caused by the digital divide in society, but also by a low ability to adapt to digital changes and use digital tools to handle official matters online. 29.6% answered that they do not use e-services because if a technical problem occurs, they do not know how to solve it, and this subsequently discourages them from working independently in a virtual environment and using e-services of public administration bodies. 15.2% of respondents do not have time to keep up with innovations and new information and communication technologies. 16.8% presented the opinion that they are discouraged from using e-services by the duplication of filling in personal data and data held by the state, and the related disconnection of e-systems within the public administration.

Chart 4 Evaluation of the dimension of the utilization of public administration e-services

Utilization				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low digital thinking	25	20,0	20,0	20,0
Low digital skills	23	18,4	18,4	38,4
Inability to solve technical problems	37	29,6	29,6	68,0
ICT and innovation	19	15,2	15,2	83,2
Duplication and disconnection of systems	21	16,8	16,8	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

In the questionnaire, we analysed how citizens evaluate the organization of public administration e-services and what negative aspects

of digitalization they encounter. 21.6% of respondents mentioned the requirement to fill in repetitive information and criticized the speed of the system for providing what they need. 20.0% confirmed their experience that e-services took more time for them to fill in forms and requests than for personal handling, because they first had to familiarize themselves with the e-system in order to use it, or they did not find all the necessary information to use the e-services on the website of the given public administration body, whether they were unable to solve technical problems. 19.2% could not assess the adequacy of the required information within the e-services and this system seemed to them to be imperfect, the information was provided in duplicate and unclear. 17.6% consider the overall coordination of activities, whose quality is low, to be negative aspects of the digitalization of services.

Chart 5 Evaluation of the dimension of the establishment of public administration e-services

Establishment of public administration e-services				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Coordination of activities	22	17,6	17,6	17,6
Adequacy of documentation	24	19,2	19,2	36,8
Repetition of info	27	21,6	21,6	58,4
System speed for equipment	27	21,6	21,6	80,0
Low cost savings	25	20,0	20,0	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

Chart 6 presents the attitudes of citizen-respondents towards the digitalization of public administration, which also express negative aspects. The main negative impact of the digitalization and computerization of public administration is the low adaptability of respondents to e-services, who do not have sufficient competence to adapt to new innovations and digital tools (30.4%).

17.6% are not interested in learning something new, and for 14.4%, public administration e-services are not attractive enough for them to use them regularly and realistically in everyday life. 16.0% of respondents do not trust electronic services and prefer personal contact with an official, because they do not know where the provided information ends up and how it is processed. 21.6% confirmed that electronic services and the computerization of public administration are not flexible enough and are not adapted to the needs of citizens so that they are efficient, fast and accessible enough.

Chart 6 Evaluation of the dimension of attitudes towards public administration e-services

Attitudes towards public administration e-services

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low attractiveness of e-services	18	14,4	14,4	14,4
Low adaptability to e-services	38	30,4	30,4	44,8
Not interested in learning something new	22	17,6	17,6	62,4
Failure to adapt to the needs of citizens	27	21,6	21,6	84,0
Mistrust and personal contact	20	16,0	16,0	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

Through research, we found that the quality of the support system of electronic services for citizens is a key factor in order for them to actually start using it. An insufficient helpdesk support system, or low trust, reduce the readiness of citizens to use electronic services regularly and in the long term.

Chart 7 expresses the statements of respondents to the question of how they evaluate public administration support in e-services. 20.0% expressed that the helpdesk support of public administration bodies is very low or insufficient, and they also considered the stability and functionality of e-services insufficient, which was noted by 27.2% of them. 26.4% of the respondents confirmed that, according to personal experience, these services are poorly addressed, they are not adapted to the adequate needs of citizens. 16.0% expressed the belief that the speed of equipment is not significantly different from personal contact at the office. 10.4% answered that these services are completely unavailable to them, either because of unstable Internet and system coverage or because of low digital literacy and the ability to use these e-services.

Chart 7 Evaluation of the dimension of support for e-services

Support for e-services

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Quality of helpdesk support	25	20,0	20,0	20,0
Stability and functionality	34	27,2	27,2	47,2
Addressability and suitability	33	26,4	26,4	73,6
Equipment speed	20	16,0	16,0	89,6
Accessibility	13	10,4	10,4	100,0
Total	125	100,0	100,0	

Conclusion

The future of electronic services holds the potential to become a suitable tool for streamlining public administration, reflecting in the resolution of real-life situations for citizens, and unifying, simplifying, and enhancing the e-systems of public administration after meeting the required criteria. (Munday, B. 2018) With the rapid advancement of technology and the increasing number of devices connected to the internet, electronic services will increasingly become a part of everyday life. With the rise of intelligent mobile devices and tablets, most electronic services will also be accessible from smartphones. Mobile applications and websites are already important components of electronic services and will continue to evolve. (Wortmann, F. et al. 2011)

Based on the conducted research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Electronic services should further adapt to the specific needs and preferences of users.
- It is necessary to increase the internet, content, and technical accessibility of electronic services provided by public authorities to make them accessible to disadvantaged groups of citizens.
- Users of e-services require them to become faster and more efficient, so it is necessary to add features such as chatbots and voice assistants to automate customer support and user communication, thereby enhancing the attractiveness and support of e-services.
- Security remains an increasingly important part of electronic services. With the increasing number of cyber threats and attacks and the growing amount of sensitive data transmitted over the internet, service providers must invest more in securing their e-systems.

The introduction of e-services should be designed and implemented to improve the quality of life for citizens and make their use convenient and straightforward. Based on the above-mentioned requirements, we have formulated several recommendations to ensure that the introduction of e-services does not lead to a deterioration in the lives of citizens:

- Ensure that all citizens have access to e-services and that they are also available to those who do not have internet access or digital

skills. This may involve creating basic e-services accessible via phone or at local offices through kiosks.

- Provide citizens with education and training on the use of e-services and digital technologies. Education should be tailored to individual needs to ensure that they can successfully use e-services and enhance their digital literacy, making electronic services less intimidating for them.
- Improve the protection of personal data, security, and support to increase the credibility and reliability of electronic public services.
- Collect feedback from citizens and use insights to improve and optimize e-services based on the needs of citizens in different areas of public administration.
- Ensure that e-services are updated and improved to be as useful as possible for citizens, thereby improving their usability. It is also important to promote the unification of e-systems.
- Provide equal access to ensure that e-services are provided to all citizens equally, regardless of their gender, age, ethnic background, health status, or digital literacy. It is essential to ensure equal opportunities for all to access e-services.

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