

E-government

B 6-2

Potential of e-government

The term e-government (electronic government) stands for processing governmental and administrative matters using information and communication technologies via electronic media. In e-government, public services and administrative matters are digitised and made available online.³⁴⁰

E-government can enhance the quality and scope of state services and increase transparency and reliability. Furthermore, the intensified use of e-government boosts the demand for IT solutions and can be used as a driver of innovation for the IT and internet industry.³⁴¹ E-government is also an important area of application for innovation-oriented public procure-

ment (cf. Chapter B 5-2). Innovative products and services that are already on the market can be used for the provision and operation of the technical infrastructure. However, products and services that are not yet on the market can also be developed and deployed for their specific purpose. Some countries, such as the Netherlands and South Korea, have been expediting the development of e-government for years as part of a demand-oriented innovation policy.³⁴²

In their 2010 national e-government strategy, the Federal Government, the Länder and the municipalities formulated the goal of making Germany's e-government the international standard for effective and efficient administration by 2015. This goal was not met.³⁴³

Quality levels of German e-government services by international comparison, 2016



Fig. B 6-2-1

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Source: UN DESA (2016).

E-government by international comparison

Germany is lagging behind in e-government and is therefore wasting important innovative and value-creation potential. The United Nations E-Government Development Index³⁴⁴ shows that the quality of government-related services in South Korea, Estonia and the USA are markedly further developed than in Germany (cf. Figure B 6-2-1). The E-Government Development Index reflects the state of development of e-government services provided by all UN member states on the basis of a four-stage measure. The first and second stages comprise unidirectional forms of interaction, such as the provision of information by authorities or links on the websites of other institutions (Stage 1), and one-way electronic communication e.g. with downloadable documents (Stage 2). Services provided at Stage 3 allow two-way communication and interaction – e.g. applying for, issuing and paying for licences and certificates. Countries at Stage 3 and above meet the requirements of full digitisation, i.e. a transaction can be executed without changing the information-carrying medium. Stage 4 services are defined as fully interlinked services comprising interactive apps for citizen surveys, discussion forums and individualised services.³⁴⁵

Although Germany's e-government has now reached the level of the leading nations – Estonia, Finland, South Korea and the USA – in simple forms of interaction such as the provision of information by authorities, Germany is a long way behind the leading nations when it comes to the more advanced Stage 4 services, such as individualised services.³⁴⁶

E-government services fragmentary and not very user-friendly

E-government services in Germany are fragmentary and often not fully digitised. This is aggravated by the fact that the existing services are not user-friendly. The aspect of user friendliness is not covered by the E-Government Development Index. In addition to full digitisation, in order to be user-friendly an e-government service needs to broadly publicise the online services that are available; it also needs to be clearly structured, easy to operate and transparent. Ideally, the electronic information and services are bundled and offered in one place: in a 'one-stop shop'. E-government is used less intensively by citizens in Germany than in other countries as a result of the fragmentary range of services and low level of user-friendliness.³⁴⁷

Lack of user-friendliness of e-government services is also a problem from the point of view of businesses. Although almost all key services for companies have been fully digitised in Germany, the level of user-friendliness is criticised. The main complaint is the lack of clear structures, the difficulty of finding online services, and the lack of a one-stop shop.³⁴⁸

Improvement of Federal/Länder coordination

Up to now, the expansion of e-government in Germany has been based on the principle of voluntariness; there are hardly any legally binding requirements. Since the interests of the federal actors in the development of e-government differ considerably, the lack of higher-tier and legally binding requirements has led to a confusing and technically heterogeneous range of e-government services.³⁴⁹ Although the IT Planning Council was set up in 2010 by Federal and Länder governments as a political control body to coordinate federal cooperation in the field of information technology, the IT Planning Council only had very limited resources and political power at its disposal.³⁵⁰

An important step towards overcoming this unsatisfactory situation was taken in October 2016 with the decision to reorganise the financial relations between the Federal Government and the Länder.³⁵¹ Following an amendment to the Basic Law adopted in December 2016 (new Article 91c, paragraph 5), this reorganisation gives the Federal Government the legislative competence to design access to the administrative services of the Federal and Länder authorities, including the municipalities. The accompanying law – the Online Access Improvement Act (Onlinezugangverbesserungsgesetz) – adopted by the Cabinet parallel to this amendment to the Basic Law, regulates the process by which the constitutional requirements are to be further developed. The law stipulates that the Federal Government, Länder and local authorities must also offer their administrative services online within five years and make them accessible via a network of Federal and Länder administrative portals.³⁵² Citizens and companies should be able to access all online-enabled administrative services from any administrative portal barrier-free and without media breaks using a single user account.³⁵³

The Commission of Experts strongly welcomes this development. These changes open up the possibility to harmonise the quality of e-government in Germany with international standards in the coming years.

In order to achieve this goal, the Federal Government – as called for by the Regulatory Control Council – should make active use of its extended regulatory powers and quickly submit workable solutions for developing e-government. This also includes providing the planned digitisation budget with sufficient financial resources.³⁵⁴

Open government data in Germany

The digitisation of public administration generates huge amounts of digitally usable data. If appropriate account is taken of data protection, such data can be made available as open government data on online portals and used by businesses and civil-society actors to develop new services and innovative business models. Furthermore, open government data are an important source of data for science.³⁵⁵

In Germany, government data are published on a wide variety of portals at the Länder and municipal levels. Furthermore, ‘GovData – The Data Portal for Germany’ began regular operations as a national data portal at the beginning of 2015 after a prototype phase lasting about two years. The G8 Open Data Charter of June 2013 forms the basis for the provision of government data. In this charter, Germany and the other G8 states agreed on basic principles on the implementation of open data. In particular, government data are to be open by default.³⁵⁶ However, the ‘open by default’ principle has not as yet been implemented across the board in Germany. In fact, as a rule, the respective authorities in Germany decide themselves which data they post on the data portal. As a result, the quality and quantity of the data posted on GovData has so far lagged behind comparable data portals in other industrialised countries.³⁵⁷

This deficit is partly caused by the inconsistent approach of the Länder: GovData is only supported by ten of the sixteen Länder.³⁵⁸ Bavaria, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Saarland, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia do not support the initiative, and their data are not published on GovData.³⁵⁹

The defensive and inconsistent approach greatly restricts the value of the data portal.³⁶⁰ In order to help the principle of open government data achieve a breakthrough and to accelerate the hitherto slow pace of cultural change in the administration, the Federal Government submitted a draft law for the implementation of open data principles in December 2016.³⁶¹ This draft law implements a project from the

coalition agreement according to which the federal administration is to pioneer the provision of open data in uniform, machine-readable formats and under free license conditions.³⁶² The federal authorities are obliged to make the data they collect – in fulfilling their public-service remit – accessible to the public, unless there are important reasons against publication. In future, therefore, the authorities will no longer decide which data they publish, but only which data may not be published. This would make data openness the rule.³⁶³

However, the commitment to open data is not limited to the federal level. In the course of the reorganisation of financial relations between the Federation and the Länder signed in October 2016, the Länder committed themselves to drawing up their own open data laws, insofar as they did not have such laws already. In order to lay down standards for data access that are comparable Germany-wide, the Länder have committed themselves to modelling their laws in orientation on the Federal Government’s draft law.³⁶⁴

Some Länder and municipalities have already set new standards when it comes to opening up their data stocks. With its transparency law, which came into force in 2012, Hamburg has shown that by-default access to government data can be provided within a short period of time when this is required by law and sufficient resources are simultaneously made available.³⁶⁵ Rhineland-Palatinate followed Hamburg’s example in 2015.³⁶⁶ Cities like Bonn, Karlsruhe, Moers and Ulm already started publishing their data several years ago.

The Commission of Experts regards such a change in standard procedure (from secrecy to publication) as an important milestone in the development towards a more intensive use of public data and an improvement in the services provided by the public sector.³⁶⁷