

PUBLIC E-SERVICES FOR AGRICULTURE: COMPARATIVE STUDY

VEŘEJNÉ E-SLUŽBY PRO ZEMĚDĚLSTVÍ: SROVNÁVACÍ STUDIE

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Summary

The paper provides a comparative analysis of selected public services supporting the development of e-agriculture. The comparative analysis draws heavily from the project the authors have been working on recently: the Best e-European Practices (BEEP), which aims at (among other objectives):

- analyse and present socio-economic best practice
- provide a European-wide linked knowledge base of employment and skills, governance, social inclusion and regional cohesion
- initially include over 300 case studies and a large number of indicators for coding and analysis
- support Key Action and external target groups with best practice and benchmarking tools and take in their results
- prepare analytical best practice studies, and widely disseminate project results through online and traditional methods
- develop services covering socio-economic best practice, benchmarking and knowledge bases for exploitation amongst relevant target groups, including SMEs and micro enterprises.

The focus is on public services provided in 4 various levels of sophistication of the services, comparisons involve Czech and Slovak Republics, United Kingdom and Ireland.

Anotace

Příspěvek je zaměřen na srovnávací analýzu vybraných veřejných služeb podporujících rozvoj e-agriculture. Srovnávací analýza je založena na poznatcích projektu, na kterém autoři v nedávné minulosti spolupracovali: The Best e-European Practices (BEEP). Tento projekt byl mimojiné zaměřen na:

- analýzu a prezentaci příkladů nejlepší socio-ekonomické praxe (vytvoření panevropské znalostní báze o zaměstnancích, dovednostech, vládách, sociální inkluze, a regionální soudržnosti);
- zpracování 300 případových studií a velkého souboru ukazatelů pro kódování a následnou analýzu, která poskytne poznatky (best practice a benchmarking) ve strukturované podobě) dostupné v on-line i tradiční podobě;
- rozvíjet služby pokrývající socio-ekonomickou nejlepší praxi, benchmarking a znalostní bázi pro využití příslušnými skupinami uživatelů, včetně malých a středních podniků i mikropodniků.

Srovnávací analýza je zaměřena na veřejné služby poskytované na 4 různých úrovní propracovanosti elektronického přístupu k těmto službám a zahrnuje stav v České a Slovenské republice, ve Velké Británii a v Irsku.

Key words

e-agriculture, BEEP, public services

Klíčová slova

e-agriculture, BEEP, veřejné služby

Introduction

Since the publication of the Delors' White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment in 1983, the EC has considered the exploitation of ICTs and the development of the Information Society to be critical factors for the achievement of Europe's competitiveness in the global economy. Information Society projects and pilots on regional and local levels were financed by the European Research programmes (in particular Telematics and its Digital sites initiative) and structural funds (RISI I+II), as well as by national and regional funds. Despite a plethora of information society initiatives over the recent years, there is now agreement that for Europe to achieve its aim, a concerted and targeted approach is required.

In December 1999, the European Union launched a political initiative with the main purpose to manage this transformation and to accelerate the transition to the Information Society. The key objectives of the "eEurope" initiative are to:

- Bring all Europeans (citizens, homes and schools, business and administrations) into the digital age and online
- Create a digitally literate Europe, supported by an entrepreneurial culture ready to finance and develop new ideas
- Ensure that the process is socially inclusive, builds consumer trust and strengthens social cohesion.

The eEurope initiative addresses a wide range of issues including European youth into the digital age, cheaper Internet access, accelerating e-commerce, fast Internet for students and researchers, smart cards for secure electronic assess, risk capital for high tech SMEs, eParticipation for disabled, healthcare online, intelligent transport and government online.

This paper focuses on the level of on-line sophistication of public services provision to businesses. Public services are selected with the rural agri-business in focus.

Objectives and Methodology

The paper provides a comparative analysis of selected websites designated to support agricultural entrepreneurs.

The objective of the web-survey is to answer the following 3 questions:

1. Which of the common basic public services for entrepreneurs are currently online in the different Member States and NAS (Newly Associated States) regardless of by what body or at what level of government, these services are delivered?
2. What level of online sophistication do the public services have on the Internet?
3. Based on the outcome of the two points above, to what extent (in percentage) are the basic public services available online?

In order to measure the level of online sophistication of the services, the following four-stage framework will be used:

Stage 1	Information: online info about public services,
Stage 2	Interaction: downloading of forms,
Stage 3	Two-way interaction: processing of forms, incl. authentication,
Stage 4	Transaction: case handling; decision and delivery (payment).

This is the framework EC, DG Information Society proposes for the classification of e-services regarding the level of on-line sophistication.

The table 1 below lists the 20 basic public services and their maximum level of online sophistication as predefined by the European Commission.

For the purpose of the web-survey only services directed for businesses will be taken into account and specific services focused on support of agri-entrepreneurs will be assessed.

The final list of services is therefore:

- Social contribution for employees
- Corporation tax: declaration, notification
- VAT: declaration, notification
- Registration of a new company
- Submission of data to statistical offices
- Customs declarations
- Environment-related permits (incl. reporting)
- Public procurement
- Government subsidies

Operational definitions of the stages and services

The definitions of the four stages and of the basic public services need to be clarified in order to make sure that only one possible interpretation can be made of these items. This is not only an absolute necessity for the validity of the assessment, but also for a correct comprehension of the results. Otherwise the risk of vague definitions of the different stages and services may lead to different interpretations based on a different national comprehension of these aspects. Correct benchmarking requires comparable results.

In the next section of this chapter the stages will be defined first (as they are the central measurements of this web-based survey), followed by the definitions of the common public services.

Stage 0

Besides the four stages, a stage 0 will be used in this research as it implicitly also exists. Two possibilities are captured by this stage 0.

The first possibility is the total absence of any publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level at all. In this case the citizen or business cannot obtain any electronic service via the web since the service provider and the administrative responsible level are simply not present on the web with a publicly accessible website

Table 1 - List of Common Basic Public Services Online

	Public Services for Citizens	Max. stage	0	1	2	3	4
1.	Income taxes: declaration, notification of assessment	(4)					
2.	Job search services by labour offices	(3)					
3.	Social security contributions (3 out of the following 4): - Employment benefits - Child allowances - Medical costs (reimbursement or direct settlement) - Student grants	(4)					
4.	Personal documents (passport and driver's licence)	(3)					
5.	Car registration (new, used and imported cars)	(4)					
6.	Application for building permission	(4)					
7.	Declaration to the police (e.g. in case of theft)	(3)					
8.	Public libraries (availability of catalogues, search tools)	(3)					
9.	Certificates (birth and marriage): request and delivery	(3)					
10.	Enrolment in higher education / university	(4)					
11.	Announcement of moving (change of address)	(3)					
12.	Health related services (interactive advice on the availability of services in different hospitals; appointments for hospitals)	(4)					
	Public Services for Businesses						
13.	Social contribution for employees	(4)					
14.	Corporation tax: declaration, notification	(4)					
15.	VAT: declaration, notification	(4)					
16.	Registration of a new company	(4)					
17.	Submission of data to statistical offices	(3)					
18.	Customs declarations	(4)					
19.	Environment-related permits (incl. reporting)	(4)					
20.	Public procurement	(4)					

- The second possibility is the absence on the governmental website of any of the stages. This is the case where a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level exists, but does not settle to any of the criteria for one of the four stages as develop bellow. This possibility indicates that at least one publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level exists, but that it does not (or they do not if both websites exist) offer any added value at all to the citizen or business interested in obtaining the concerning service. More concrete this possibility indicates that this (or these) website(s) do(es) not offer any relevant information, interaction, two-way interaction or transaction possibilities at all.

These remarks lead to the following research definition of stage 0:

The service provider and the administrative responsible level do not have a publicly accessible website or the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider and by the administrative responsible level do not qualify for any of the criteria for the stages 1 to 4

Stage 1

The definition of stage 1 is '*information: online info about public services*'.

This definition indicates what this stage intends to measure, but it does not make clear what actually should be measured. The aim of this stage is to measure to what extent websites offer a surplus value to their users concerning the services under study. The surplus value is the fact that the website offers the information necessary to obtain the service.

These remarks lead to the following research definition of stage 1:

The information necessary to start the procedure to obtain this public service is available on a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level.

However, in order to resolve the problems concerning the status of information, this definition needs some further clarifications. Information is defined here as a combination of three questions. In order to qualify for this stage, a public service needs a positive answer to all three questions. This is necessary in order to resolve the problems stated above.

Q1: Is there a description of the organisation (this is the service provider or the administrative responsible level) available on the website? This description is necessary to understand what the organisation is supposed to do. The mentioning on a website of only the name of the organisation is insufficient.

Q2: Is there contact information about the service provider available on the website? This contact information can be an e-mail address, a physical address or a telephone number.

Q3: Is there information about the procedures, rules or necessary steps that a citizen or business has to take in order to obtain the service?

Stage 2

The definition of stage 2 is: '*interaction: downloading of forms*'.

This definition indicates the intention of what should be measured. This stage should measure one step in the evolution towards full-function electronic governments. Governments take a step to offer to the businesses a service, which makes it easier to obtain the forms necessary to start the procedure to obtain the public service they want. To do this governments offer to their applicants the possibility to obtain the necessary documents without them having to make a trip to the government office. The aim of the government is thus to save their applicants at least one trip to the government's office. This can be done on various ways of which one is to offer downloadable forms on their websites applicants can use in order to obtain official public services. However other solutions to solve this problem are possible. It is imaginable that the applicant can fill out an electronic form in order to obtain an official paper form via traditional mail at home. In this case the applicant fills in an electronic form on the website, but not in order to obtain the service itself, but in order to obtain an official form which enables him or her to start the procedure to obtain the service.

In order to translate this intention into a research instrument an answer is necessary to the following questions:

1. What is a form?
2. How will the intention of this stage be measured?

A form is defined as any official document necessary to start the procedure to obtain the service.

In this stage the web-based survey measures whether or not government websites enable businesses to eliminate this first 'walk' to the governments office in order to get the official paper form to start the procedure to obtain the service. The way in which the website enables their applicants to do this can be one out of the following three:

- 1. The presence of downloadable official forms on the website:** the website offers to the applicants the possibility to download one or more forms which the applicant after downloading can print, fill out and send to the service provider by mail or deliver at the counter of the service provider.
- 2. The presence on the website of (an) electronic form(s) without to possibility to send them electronically:** The website offers to the applicants electronic forms which the applicants can fill out on the website electronically. The applicant however still needs to print the completed form(s) and send it to the service provider in a non-electronic way.
- 3. The presence on the website of an electronic form to order (an) official non-electronic form(s):** the website offers the possibility to fill out an electronic form in order to obtain an official print form. This print form is sent to the applicant via traditional mail, filled in by the applicant and returned by the applicant to the service provider via traditional mail. In this case the applicant can order the form to start the procedure electronically, but the procedure itself is still completed in a traditional paper manner.

These remarks lead to the following research definition of stage 2:

The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to obtain in a non electronic way the paper form to start the procedure to obtain this service.

In order to qualify for this stage, the scoring of the website of the service provider or of the administrative responsible level must result a positive answer to at least one of the three following questions:

1. Is there at least one downloadable official form present on the website to start the procedure to obtain this service?
2. Is there at least one printable electronic form present on the website to start the procedure to obtain this service?
3. Is there at least one electronic form to order an official non-electronic form present on the website to start the procedure to obtain this service?

Stage 3

The definition of stage 3 is: '*two-way interaction: processing of forms, incl. authentication*'.

The definition speaks of two-way interaction and specifies the necessity of an authentication procedure in the processing of forms. The intention of this stage is to measure to what extent governments offer common public services on their websites where at least a major part of the procedure can be handled via the website.

In order to measure this intention a precise answer should be formulated to the following questions:

1. What is a form?
2. What is authentication?
3. What is processing of forms?
4. How will the intention of this stage be measured?

A form is defined as any official document necessary to start the procedure to obtain the service. However in stage 3 an essential extra element is required. In this stage, only electronic forms are taken into consideration.

The second question poses different problems. This raises the problem of the definition of authentication? Instead of measuring only one specific way of authentication, this research prefers to choose a pragmatic solution: authentication is any procedure used by the government to identify the applicant for the public service. This can be organised on the websites in four different ways:

- the use of a digital signature;
- the provision by the applicant of his official name and address;
- the provision by the applicant of an official identification number (for instance VAT-number, number of the identity-card, ...);
- a system which uses a combination of user name and password to identify applicants.

This stage wishes, as stated above, to measure to what extent governments offer the possibility to the applicants to electronically process the common public services they need. In other words: to what extent websites enable applicants to start the procedure to obtain the services on-line. In order to be able to measure this, we need to specify what will be understood by 'the electronic processing of forms'.

Essential in this stage is that the applicant has the possibility to start the procedure to obtain the service via an on-line procedure. In other words the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake. Under electronic intake we understand the fact that:

- the website offers one or more official on-line 'application' form(s) necessary to start the procedure to obtain the service;
- the website offers the possibility to fill out the forms electronically and
- the website offers the possibility to send them in electronically in order to start the procedure.

The main difference between this stage and stage 2 is then obvious. In stage 3 no other formal way of 'traditional' paperwork is necessary for the applicant to start the procedure to obtain the service, whereas in stage 2 the applicant could obtain the forms in an electronic way, but still needed traditional paperwork (fill in a paper form and send it via traditional mail to the governments' office). In this stage the applicant can start the procedure to obtain the service entirely by the use of a computer and a connection to the website of the service provider.

These remarks lead us to the following research definition of stage 3:

The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form to start the procedure to obtain this service.

In order to qualify for this stage, the scoring of the website of the service provider or of the administrative responsible level should obtain a positive answer to the two following questions:

- Is there at least one official electronic form on the website which enables the applicant to electronically start the procedure to obtain the service?
- Does this form include an authentication procedure?

Stage 4

The definition of stage 4 is: '*transaction: case handling, decision and delivery (payment)*'.

This stage intends to measure to what extent government websites operate as full-function electronic websites concerning the services that are selected. This is, from the viewpoint of the business the final stage. In this stage the applicant can fully obtain the service by his or her use of the website only. No other form of traditional paperwork is necessary. Every aspect of the service provision (from the viewpoint of the applicant) is organised via the publicly accessible website. This implies not only that the applicant can start the procedure to obtain the service via the website (as was the case in stage 3), but all the other aspects (like case handling, decision notification and service delivery) are managed via electronic means as well. This stage gives in other words an indication of full function electronic procedures where no other physical action is needed on behalf of the applicant.

These remarks lead to the following research definition of stage 4:

The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to completely treat the public service via the website. No other formal procedure is necessary for the applicant via "paperwork".

In order to qualify for this stage, the scoring of the website of the service provider or of the administrative responsible level should result in a positive answer to the two following questions:

- Is there the possibility to obtain the full service in an electronic way via the website (this is no other form of traditional paperwork is necessary and the applicant does not need to make any displacement at all in order to obtain the service)?

- Does the website promise the full electronic case handling of the procedure by the service provider (incl. decision notification, delivery and payment if necessary)?

The use of the term “*promise*” is a consequence of the fact that this survey evaluates the online accessibility of public services for businesses, not the quality of the delivery-process, nor the redesigning of administrative procedures.

Definitions of the selected public services

In this section the definitions of the different stages will be applied to each of the nine selected services. In order to do this is it necessary to first clearly define the services so that there is no room for misinterpretation. This is done in the research definition of the publicly accessible web-based service.

In these definitions of the services the standard procedure will always be evaluated. Procedures for appeal, procedures for exceptions and other non-standard procedures will not be taken into account.

Social contributions

Research definition

Standard procedure to declare social contributions for employees affected by corporations

	<i>Research definition of the stages</i>
<i>Stage 0</i>	The service provider or the administrative responsible level do not have a publicly accessible website or the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level does not qualify for any of the criteria for the stages 1 to 4.
<i>Stage 1</i>	The information necessary to start the procedure <i>to declare social contributions for employees</i> is available on a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level.
<i>Stage 2</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to obtain the paper form to start the procedure <i>to declare social contributions for employees</i> in a non-electronic way.
<i>Stage 3</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form to start the procedure <i>to declare social contributions for employees</i> .
<i>Stage 4</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to completely treat <i>the declaration of social contributions for employees</i> via the website. Case handling, decision and delivery of a standard procedure <i>to declare social contributions for employees</i> can be treated via the web. No other formal procedure is necessary for the applicant via “paperwork”

Corporate tax

Research definition

Standard procedure to declare corporate tax for income out of normal activities of a corporation

	Research definition of the stages
<i>Stage 0</i>	The service provider or the administrative responsible level do not have a publicly accessible website or the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level does not qualify for any of the criteria for the stages 1 to 4.
<i>Stage 1</i>	The information necessary to start the procedure to declare corporate tax is available on a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level.
<i>Stage 2</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to obtain the paper form to start the procedure to declare corporate tax in a non-electronic way.
<i>Stage 3</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form to start the procedure to declare corporate tax .
<i>Stage 4</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to completely treat the declaration of corporate tax via the website. Case handling, decision and delivery of a standard procedure to declare corporate tax can be treated via the web. No other formal procedure is necessary for the applicant via “paperwork”

VAT

Research definition

Standard procedure for VAT declaration and/or notification for transactions regarding normal activities of a corporation

	Research definition of the stages
<i>Stage 0</i>	The service provider or the administrative responsible level do not have a publicly accessible website or the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level does not qualify for any of the criteria for the stages 1 to 4.
<i>Stage 1</i>	The information necessary to start the procedure to declare VAT is available on a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level.
<i>Stage 2</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to obtain the paper form to start the procedure to declare VAT in a non-electronic way.

<i>Stage 3</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form to start the procedure <i>to declare VAT</i> .
<i>Stage 4</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to completely treat <i>the declaration of VAT</i> via the website. Case handling, decision and delivery of a standard procedure <i>to declare VAT</i> can be treated via the web. No other formal procedure is necessary for the applicant via “paperwork”

Company registration

Research definition

Most important registration procedure to start a new company

Research definition of the stages	
<i>Stage 0</i>	The service provider or the administrative responsible level do not have a publicly accessible website or the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level does not qualify for any of the criteria for the stages 1 to 4.
<i>Stage 1</i>	The information necessary to start the procedure <i>to register a new company</i> is available on a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level.
<i>Stage 2</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to obtain the paper form to start the procedure <i>to register a new company</i> in a non-electronic way.
<i>Stage 3</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form to start the procedure <i>to register a new company</i> .
<i>Stage 4</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to completely treat <i>the declaration of a new company</i> via the website. Case handling, decision and delivery of a standard <i>procedure to register a new company</i> can be treated via the web. No other formal procedure is necessary for the applicant via “paperwork”

Statistical data

Research definition

Standard procedure to submit at least one statistical questionnaire with data to the National Institute for Statistics of the country.

Research definition of the stages	
<i>Stage 0</i>	The service provider or the administrative responsible level do not have a publicly accessible website or the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level does not qualify for any of the criteria for the stages 1 to 3.
<i>Stage 1</i>	The information necessary to start the procedure <i>to submit at least one statistical questionnaire to the National Institute for Statistics</i> is available on a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level.
<i>Stage 2</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to obtain the paper form <i>to submit at least one statistical questionnaire to the National Institute for Statistics</i> in a non electronic way.
<i>Stage 3</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form to <i>submit at least one statistical questionnaire to the National Institute for Statistics</i> .
<i>Stage 4</i>	NOT APPLICABLE

Customs declarations

Research definition

Standard procedure for customs declarations of normal activities of a corporation.

Research definition of the stages	
<i>Stage 0</i>	The service provider or the administrative responsible level do not have a publicly accessible website or the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level does not qualify for any of the criteria for the stages 1 to 4.
<i>Stage 1</i>	The information necessary to start the procedure <i>to declare customs</i> is available on a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level.
<i>Stage 2</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to obtain the paper form to start the procedure <i>to declare customs</i> in a non electronic way.
<i>Stage 3</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form to start the procedure <i>to declare customs</i> .
<i>Stage 4</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility <i>to completely treat the declaration of customs</i> via the website. Case handling, decision and delivery of a standard procedure <i>to declare customs</i> can be treated via the web. No other formal procedure is necessary for the applicant via “paperwork”

Environment-related permits

Research definition

Standard procedure to obtain at least one environment-related permit, delivered at the lowest administrative level, concerning the start of a corporate activity (not taking into consideration contesting and appeal).

Research definition of the stages	
<i>Stage 0</i>	The service provider or the administrative responsible level do not have a publicly accessible website or the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level does not qualify for any of the criteria for the stages 1 to 4.
Stage 1	The information necessary to start the procedure <i>to obtain an environment-related permit</i> is available on a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level.
<i>Stage 2</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to obtain the paper form to start the procedure <i>to obtain an environment-related permit</i> in a non-electronic way.
<i>Stage 3</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form to start the procedure <i>to obtain an environment-related permit</i> .
<i>Stage 4</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to completely treat the <i>delivery of environment-related permit</i> via the website. Case handling, decision and delivery of a standard procedure <i>to obtain an environment-related permit</i> can be treated via the web. No other formal procedure is necessary for the applicant via “paperwork”

Public procurement

Research definition

Standard procedure for a tender of a public procurement, subject to national public announcement

Research definition of the stages	
<i>Stage 0</i>	The service provider or the administrative responsible level do not have a public accessible website or the publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level does not qualify for any of the criteria for the stages 1 to 4.
Stage 1	The information <i>about the tender</i> is available on a publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level.
<i>Stage 2</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to obtain the paper form <i>to tender</i> in a non-electronic way.
<i>Stage 3</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility of an electronic intake with an official electronic form <i>to tender</i> .
<i>Stage 4</i>	The publicly accessible website managed by the service provider or by the administrative responsible level offers the possibility to completely treat <i>the tender</i> via the website. Case handling, decision and delivery of a standard procedure <i>to tender</i> can be treated via the web. No other formal procedure is necessary for the applicant via “paperwork”

Scenario for the web-survey and the scoring

In this phase of the research methodology following steps are developed:

- The identification of the URL's of the service providers selected to participate in the web-survey.
- The content analysis and scoring of the websites of the selected service providers.
- The check and quality control of the scoring.

URL identification

This survey is focused on official websites. Therefore the homepages of the analysed website must contain an indication that it is the official website of the considered organisation.

The following search-strategies have been used:

- a search of a national official portal
- a search on national non-governmental portal sites
- a search based up on the common structure of governmental URL's in the country
- a search based on web search engines (robots)

Scoring tool

Scoring is based on the questionnaire with questions generic for all selected public service. An overview of the questionnaire is provided below

Table 2 – Research questions

Nr.	<i>Public service</i>	YES	NO
1	A description of the organisation (i.e. the service provider or the responsible administrative level) is available		
2	There is contact information about the service provider (e.g. URL, e-mail address, physical address or telephone number)		
3	There is information about the procedures, rules or necessary steps that a applicant has to take in order to obtain the service		
4	There is at least one downloadable and/or printable official form on the website to obtain this service (or to order an official non-electronic form) that the applicant can fill out and send by post to, or deliver at the office of the service provider.		
5	There is at least one official electronic form present on the website which enables the applicant to electronically start the procedure to obtain the service (the electronic intake).		
6	There is an authentication procedure to identify the applicant (not necessarily a digital signature, but also the provision of official name and address, or the provision of an official identification number, or a combination of different systems)		
7	It is possible to electronically obtain the full in an electronic way service via the website (no other form of traditional paperwork is necessary and the applicant does not need to visit the office of the service provider at all in order to obtain the service)		
8	The website promises complete electronic case handling of the procedure (incl. decision notification, delivery and payment if necessary)		

The researcher will have to answer each question with “yes” or “no”.

- The stage 1 will only be reached if the first 3 questions are answered in a positive way.
- The second stage will be reached if the first 3 questions and question 4 are answered with “yes”.
- Stage 3 is reached if the first 3 questions and the questions 5 and 6 are answered positive.
- Finally, a stage 4 will be attributed if the first 3 questions and the last two questions, 7 and 8, are answered positively.

Research Outcomes and Discussion

The four tables below summarize findings in the four selected countries representing EU member states and newly associated countries. Based on the described methodology relevant URL addresses have been located and the services provided assessed. The final assessment of each public service is also included in the tables.

Table 3 - Situation in the Czech Republic

Public service	Web address	Institution	Max. stage	Current stage
Social contribution for employees	www.cssz.cz	Česká správa sociálního zabezpečení, zřízená MPSV	4	3
Corporation tax: declaration, notification	cds.mfr.cz	Česká daňová správa, zřízená MF	4	2
VAT: declaration, notification	cds.mfr.cz	Česká daňová správa, zřízena MF	4	3
Registration of a new company	www.justice.cz	Soudy	4	0
Submission of data to statistical offices	www.czso.cz	Český statistický úřad	3	3
Customs declarations	www.cs.mfcr.cz	Celní správa ČR, zřízená MF	4	4
Environment-related permits (incl. reporting)	www.cizp.cz	Česká inspekce životního prostředí, zřízená MŽP	4	1
Public procurement	www.centralniadresa.cz, www.centralni-adresa.cz	Run by Česká pošta	4	4

Table 4 - Situation in the Slovak Republic

Public service	Web address	Institution	Max. stage	Current stage
Social contribution for employees	www.employment.gov.sk, www.socpoist.sk	MPSVR SR, sociálna poist'ovna	4	1
Corporation tax: declaration, notification	www.drsr.sk	Daňové ředitelství SR, Ministerstvo Financí	4	1
VAT: declaration, notification	www.drsr.sk	Daňové ředitelství SR, Ministerstvo Financí	4	2
Registration of a new company	www.justice.gov.sk	Ministerstvo spravedlnosti SR	4	0
Submission of data to statistical offices	www.statistics.sk	Statistický úřad SR	3	3
Customs declarations	www.colnasprava.sk	Celní správa SR, Ministerstvo Financí	4	1
Environment-related permits (incl. reporting)	www.lifeenv.gov.sk	Ministerstvo ŽP SR	4	2
Public procurement	www.e-obstaravanie.sk	Úrad pre verejné obstaravanie	4	1

Table 5 - Situation in the Ireland

Public service	Web address	Institution	Max. stage	Current stage
Social contribution for employees	www.ros.ie	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	4	4
Corporation tax: declaration, notification	www.ros.ie	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	4	4
VAT: declaration, notification	www.ros.ie	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	4	4
Registration of a new company	www.cro.ie	Companies Registration Office	4	4
Submission of data to statistical offices	www.cso.ie	Central Statistics Office Ireland	3	3
Customs declarations	www.ros.ie	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	4	4
Environment-related permits (incl. reporting)	www.epa.ie	Environmental Protection Agency	4	2
Public procurement	www.ros.ie	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	4	4

Table 6 - Situation in the Great Britain

Public service	Web address	Institution	Max. stage	Current stage
Social contribution for employees	www.thepensionservice.gov.uk	Department for Work and Pensions	4	2
Corporation tax: declaration, notification	www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk	Inland Revenue, HM Government	4	3
VAT: declaration, notification	www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk	Inland Revenue, HM Government	4	3
Registration of a new company	www.companieshouse.gov.uk	Companies House (Executive Agency of Department of Trade and Industry)	4	3
Submission of data to statistical offices	www.statistics.gov.uk	National statistics	3	1
Customs declarations	www.dti.gov.uk/export.control/	Department of Trade and Industry	4	2
Environment-related permits (incl. reporting)	www.environment-agency.gov.uk	Environmental Agency	4	1
Public procurement	www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk, www.dti.gov.uk	Inland Revenue, HM Government, Dep. of Trade and Industry	4	1

The above findings indicate the following:

- Comparison of the four selected countries reveals Ireland to be a clear leader in the field of provision of public services for businesses, as it receives the highest scores in most of public services assessed – see table below.
- It is apparent that there is not clear distinction between developed countries (EU member states) and less developed countries, as the Czech Republic is currently doing better than the United Kingdom.
- Public services, on-line provision of which is most sophisticated in researched countries are: VAT declaration and notification, customs declaration, social contribution, (only Slovak Republic is considerably lagging behind).

- Sophistication of statistical data submission is developed at about the same level in the Czech Republic, Slovak republic, but apparently underdeveloped in the United Kingdom.
- New company registration is underdeveloped in both NAS.
- The least sophisticated service provision is environment related permits – in all researched countries.
- Public procurement is most sophisticated in the Czech republic and Ireland, while very basic provision is in the Slovak Republic and the United Kingdom.

Table 7 - Level of on-line sophistication of public services in all researched countries

Public service	Czech Republic	Slovak Republic	Ireland	Un. Kingdom
Social contribution for employees	3	1	4	2
Corporation tax: declaration, notification	2	1	4	3
VAT: declaration, notification	3	2	4	3
Registration of a new company	0	0	4	3
Submission of data to statistical offices	3	3	3	1
Customs declarations	4	1	4	2
Environment-related permits (incl. reporting)	1	2	2	1
Public procurement	4	1	4	1
TOTAL SCORE	20	11	29	16

Conclusions

While the above website assessment exercise provides only limited information about public services provided on-line and thus supporting the communication between businesses and governments (both national and local), it is apparent that the drive to implement modern information and communication technologies is already on its way and developing in the two distinctive parts of Europe – EU and newly associated states.

It is also clear that the support of e-agriculture is provided in the area of general business services, of which the fast developing are: VAT declaration and notification, customs declaration, social contribution. The sophistication of provision of specific services has not been proved by the research, most of the communication among government and agribusinesses is carried on with the use of traditional communication channels and very much based on paperwork. This is the reason why the focus of this research was on to services provided to business generally, while providing for the uptake of e-agriculture at least in the area of dealing with government.

The rapid development and subsequently fast implementation of modern ICT however indicates the future development of sophistication of e-services for agri-entrepreneurs even if there are traditional obstacles to be overcome including: conservatism of rural population and thus slower uptake of new technology, lack of finance within the sector (especially in NAS), generally weaker drivers to implement e-government principles within agriculture.

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