

Ph. D. Dissertation of Pál Kerekes:

Development and Current Situation of E-Governance in Hungary; Place and Role of the Library and of Digital Databases within the System of Electronic Public Services; the Databases for Information services of E-Governance

Subject of my Ph. D. thesis is firstly the evolution of the electronic versions of public services, their current situation, further the description of the library within the new e-public service system – interpreting the notion thereof most extensively – as an organization existing amongst the competition of new digital governance and local government infrastructures. More precisely: how the library, as the public institution of knowledge society, further as the establisher and operator of the knowledge-organization network can be attached to the notion of electronic governance.

The library – as the territory of electronic public services as defined by European directives – has not yet been examined from such a point of view in Hungary, and in my opinion this direction of research could have a positive effect on the acceptance of the anyhow necessarily upcoming modification of the library’s function.

The different e-governance directives of the European Union - eEuropa 2005, i2010 – define twenty different types of electronic public services. They evaluate access to electronic library databases as basic electronic public services, similarly to the most important public deeds of a person. What does this tell us? In my opinion this means at least an obligation thereto that library boxes, access paths have to appear on the major e-governance portals. I am examining whether on the two most visited two portals – the Kormányzati Portál, further the Budapest Portál – the information surfaces, on-line databases get a considerable functionality in a perceptible, visible and usable way.

Among surveys and researcher's examinations it is extremely difficult to compare the e-governance activity of different countries arising from terminological insecurities and conceptual hurdles. Therefore the EU sets up its own systems in many cases. From the point of view of the library world it is very important whereto the library activity is classified. Surprisingly, should this still be considered a surprise, not to the cultural activities, but into the sector of information society. In my opinion, this does not mean that today the library is only to be considered as a mere IT activity, but by all means it points out that the institutional character of the collection-orientated library – surely in the European future – has been overcome by the mission of a service-orientated electronic information centre.

The thesis sets forth the following statements:

1. E-governance is one of the main terrains of the social transformation arising from electronification, and is the initiator, as well as the executor of the plural changes defining citizens' lives today. The processes identified here have to be assessed for the whole public sector, which means that in this interpretation the relation of library, library system has to be examined permanently within the rapport of e-governance and e-democracy initiatives.
2. The European Union defines the guaranteed on-line accessibility of library databases, electronic catalogues as one of citizens' twelve most important public services - on the same level with the perhaps most important public law acts of a person. This approach has not yet appeared in cultural government policy, nor among national-, and local decision makers; further it may not even be detected distinctly from the side of library management.
3. The studies and reports quoted in the thesis obviously foresee the permanent conquest of the E-Kormányzat 2.0 – by the example of WEB 2.0, but we may also quote the

Könyvtár 2.0 as well. This change in paradigm, which mainly aims to put the electronic office transactions on surfaces of citizens and not onto its proper government pages, holds new opportunities for the library's electronic surfaces as well. In this new period of governance digitalization, the library may take part in the renewing of public services via knowledge-organizational, knowledge-provisional innovations.

4. One of the most striking virtual institutions of e-governance, but perhaps of the whole digital conversion is the government portal, the Magyarország point hu. Besides transactional tasks, it is the mission of the portal to document and display Hungary's history, present state structure and European status. If there is no direct access to significant national library databases, or even to electronic archives, it may be considered as informatic negligence on the operator's side, as a setback for libraries and as a loss of information for users.
5. The proportion of the use of e-government services is relatively low, and can be estimated twenty-two percent within the whole internet community. On the other hand, the usefulness is assessed rather positively; regular internet-users have rated most e- government possibilities with a 4 or higher average rating on a 5 digit scale. These data also point out that people trust electronic public services, and that the conscious usage of e-governance platforms has become part of net-intelligence. From the library's point of view it is extraordinarily interesting that the usage of the existing public databases is lower than expected, despite their incontestably high quality. The library's participation in the promotion of state and municipal databases, and their familiarization with the user would help e-casehandling to take root, which has already been awaited with great confidence.