

Building the Inclusive Information Society at the Local Level in Estonia

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Abstract

Estonia has been continuously developing different e-services in the public sector to improve citizens' access to information and decision-making process. Within recent years special attention has been directed also to the local government level. For example the Local Government Information Society Strategy was adopted in 2008. That was a step towards centrally coordinated process in terms of information society in local government. A similar document on the state level was adopted in 2006 and the main policy document (Principles of Estonian Information Policy) in 1998. Current projects in the context of local government include the websites of local governments, data protection, document management, procedural environment for electronic documents, local councils' e-decision making process, and spatial planning. The aim of the paper is to give an overview of and examine the information society framework for Estonian local government. For that purpose the main legislation will be summarized. The relevant documents, which contain the basic responsibilities and directions for municipalities regarding information (e.g. Public Information Act, Local Government Information Society Strategy, and Estonian Information Society Strategy) will also be briefly discussed. In addition, recent initiatives and developments in the field of information society at the local level will be examined in the light of the developments at the state level. In the paper is analysed also how the legislation and strategy documents have been translated into practice in local government in general and in municipalities of different size. The main focus of the analysis is on the aspect of inclusion, since it concerns using the information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve the possibilities of residents to follow and be involved in the exercising of public authority.