



Responsive Public Management

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Finland leads the way in e-government initiatives

Finland is already a world leader in terms of e-government, but the country wants to go further still. At the end of December 2012, the government unveiled an ambitious strategic plan for 2013-2020.

Not only was Finland one of the first countries to implement e-government, it also carried out periodic assessments of this policy and its results starting very early on. Beginning in 1975, the Ministry of Finance (which is also responsible for public services and e-government) introduced annual studies¹, initially of the resources allocated (budget, staff), technical rollouts and security. Over time, the studies assessed results in terms of service provided and the progress of various reforms and strategic plans.

Getting organisations involved and helping them change

in 2012, a study² carried out prior to the launch of the new 2013-2020 strategic plan³ (which supersedes the 2007-2015 plan) revealed a very specific finding – despite the remarkable progress made in Finnish e-government⁴, the strategic direction "was still too technical and not focused enough on users, with respect to whom it did not provide sufficiently equal treatment." Many services have yet to be put online. The expansion of open data (distribution of administrative data between the government departments and with the outside world) is hampered by mutually incompatible data formats. Cooperation between the various entities (between ministries, but also between central government departments and local administrations, which have very broad powers in Finland) has not yielded the hoped-for results. Above all, the Finnish government is planning to use e-government to structure its wide-ranging government streamlining reforms (reducing the number of municipalities and simplifying the organisation of Finland's regions) and to introduce more centralised management of ICTs.

1

http://www.vm.fi/vm/en/04_publications_and_documents/03_documents/ICA_Country_Report_FINLAND_2012.pdf

2

<http://www.quora.com/What-can-be-done-to-advance-open-government-in-Finland>

3

http://www.vm.fi/vm/en/03_press_releases_and_speeches/01_press_releases/20121019Firstc/julkictstrategy_EN_20121031.pdf

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Since 2002, Finland has had web portals providing information and online services for all government departments, whether central or local, for citizens (suomi.fi) and businesses (yrittysuomi.fi). Since 2006, authenticated, online payments have been possible using the "Vetuma" (for citizens) and "Katso" (for businesses) websites, by means of banking details or the national identity number, including – for 123 government departments – by smartphone. Since May 2012, Finland's land registry has been online.

Beginning in 2011, an Act⁵ gave the Ministry of Finance authority over all interoperability initiatives (in the largest sense, including technical aspects and inter-departmental cooperation), including for local authorities, which had heretofore been outside any central government oversight. The authorities stated that its objectives were to create economies of scale, to harmonise the various levels of services to users and to make Finland a world leader in e-government. The final objective was to affirm and strengthen that which made the Finnish "Nordic model" unique, i.e. consensus, which combine rigidity with flexibility, "authoritarianism" with pluralism, and centralisation (ministerial level) with decentralisation (municipal level), along with a stable method of governance (coalition government) and a strong social safety net for the Finnish population.

Redefining priorities through transition

The wide-ranging SADe programme⁶, which was launched in April 2009 for the period 2009-2012⁷, had already introduced the idea of refocusing efforts on the user, and strengthened cooperation between central government and the local authorities, and included efforts with respect to businesses and the third sector. The programme was comprised of eight projects, "which were chosen based on significance and cost-efficiency as well as cross-sector collaboration, customer focus, quality and innovativeness."

- Finnish eParticipation Environment, under the aegis of the Ministry of Justice, to provide online interactive services
- Learners' Online Services, under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Culture, to promote lifelong learning
- eServices for Housing and Building, under the aegis of the Ministry of the Environment
- Services for Enterprises, under the aegis of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy
- Services for new entrepreneurs, also under the aegis of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, aimed at those wishing to set up a business
- Health and social care services, under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
- Citizen Advice Service, under the aegis of the Ministry of Finance, for all government information, alerts concerning problems, etc.
- Remote services, under the aegis of the Ministry of Finance (video conferencing services for citizens and businesses to dialogue with government departments)

Increase e-government by boosting participation

According to the 2012 report, although real progress has been made, "it is still largely inadequate." The new strategic plan calls for accelerated availability of online services, centralised project management, increased use of open data and interoperability and an increased level of expertise. By 2020, all services and all government information should be accessible online and via all available means (Internet, smartphones, etc.). Users (including citizens, businesses, local authorities, the third sector, etc.) will be increasingly called upon to give their opinion: the project speaks of "ecosystems", i.e. wide-ranging networks allowing those providing services and those using them to interact.

Early in 2013, the Finnish government distributed a more detailed operational plan; each year, after they are launched, initiatives will be assessed by an interministerial working group that includes local authorities. Over and beyond improved project leadership, Finland intends to combat the disparity between its various regions (in terms of population and economic activity) and cope with its ageing population – nearly 19% of Finns are over 65 years old, and those between 55 and 74 years old represent a hefty percentage of the working population⁸. Given that it will be unable to attract as much foreign labour as its Swedish and German neighbours, for reasons having to do with both language and climate, Finland is now, more than ever before, pinning its hopes on online procedures.

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Act on Information Management Governance in Public Administration, 1 January 2011

6

Programme on e-service and democracy,
http://www.vm.fi/vm/en/04_publications_and_documents/03_documents/vm_SADe_engl_low.pdf

7

See footnote 1.

8

62.3% of those 55 to 64 years old are working, and 9.6% of those 65 to 74 years old.
http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/tyti/2011/15/tyti_2011_15_2012-11-06_tau_003_en.html (2012 figures). The percentage of those between 65 and 74 years old who are working increases by more than 1% annually.

