STATE AUDIT OFFICE OF ESTONIA Dec 13,2001

Management of the Development of the Information Technology Infrastructure of Public Libraries

Executive summary **2**

Feedback from the Minister of Culture **5**

Position of the SAO **7**

1. Introduction **8**
1.1. Audited area in brief 10
1.2. Audit description 14
1.3. Audit implementation 14

2. Planning for availability of public information **15**

3. Availability and quality of public information **18**
3.1. Public information and procedures for its disclosure 18
3.2. Making public information available 19
3.3. Services of PIAPs and their quality 21
3.4. Management of service availability and quality 23

4. IT management in the government area of the Ministry of Culture **26**
4.1. IT planning 26
4.2. Managing the IT development projects of public libraries 27

Executive summary

On January 1, 2001 the Public Information Act entered into force, which states that by 2002 everybody must have free access to public information[1] provided via the Internet in public libraries.

By adopting the said Act the government assumed a specific obligation – to establish public Internet access points (PIAP) in all public libraries. The purpose of this SAO audit was to find out whether the government is able to meet this obligation in a timely manner. We examined IT planning and management within the government area of the Ministry of Culture and the establishment of Internet access in and the automation of public libraries. The initial motive of the audit were problems in the automation of libraries (including the introduction of software together with the necessary hardware and network connections), but since the provision of Internet access is a hot topic, the focus has shifted accordingly, as it refers to one of the preconditions for achieving the goals laid down in the Public Information Act. The audit did not concern the other information systems or development projects within the government area of the Ministry.

The connection of public libraries to the Internet has always served two goals:

- to ensure the data communication of libraries to meet their technological needs; and
- to establish access to public information in the Internet.

The creation of the integrated information system of public libraries and the opening of public Internet access point in this context is practically the only and at the same time the most important project that enables the government to offer equitable access to public information to all residents and facilitate the introduction of digital administration as regards the citizens' communication with the central and local government bodies.

The main objectives of the Estonian Information Policy include avoiding regional imbalances as regards the amount of information available and improving the information infrastructure. The same should apply to the Estonian Cultural Policy. Good instruments for this purpose are public libraries distributed evenly across the country and other cultural institutions, which have been established taking account of the size of the population in the area. For several reasons the libraries have become information centres with an ever-increasing number of visitors. In the 247 communes of Estonia there are 570 public libraries and in about 250 of these Internet services are available. More than 100 Internet access points have been created at other public institutions. The access points are of great

[1] Public information – information, which is recorded and documented in any manner and on any medium and which is obtained or created in the performance of public duties provided for by laws or legislation stemming therefrom.

interest everywhere and in some cases one has to wait for weeks to get to use a computer workplace.

The Ministry of Culture has not yet fully understood its possibilities, obligations and responsibility as regards the application of the General Principles of the Estonian Information Policy within its government area. The Ministry lacks the necessary management structures and sufficient competence in the area of IT. A further factor is inadequate co-operation with the local governments and the bodies in charge of the relevant initiatives in the private sector.

Despite of the specific nature and the relative simplicity of the set task the government has shown inappropriate incapability in performing it. As of January 1, 2002 more than 300 public libraries don't have a direct connection for data communication, which means that an Internet access point cannot be opened there.

The counties lagging far behind in terms of connecting the public libraries to the Internet are Pärnu, Valga, Lääne-Viru and Ida-Viru. In these counties only every fourth public library provides Internet access. Also in terms of the number of PIAPs per 1,000 inhabitants these counties are among the last. However, positive examples are Hiiu and Tartu Counties, where nearly all public libraries have been connected to the Internet as a result of co-operation between the local governments, the central government and the private sector. This implies that in most cases the problem is not the complexity of establishing an Internet connection, but rather the lack of ability to mobilise resources and strive jointly for a common goal.

The Ministry of Culture has failed to launch a comprehensive project concerning the information systems of public libraries or plan sufficient resources for its implementation. This has impeded both the automation of public libraries and their connection to the public data communication network. Although the Foundation Vaata Maailma[2] established by the private sector for the purpose of promoting wider Internet access has proposed a number of ways of considerably increasing the number of Internet users in Estonia, the Ministry has not considered it reasonable to join forces for the purpose of completing the network of Internet access points. The SAO thinks that co-operation with the Foundation Vaata Maailma could substantially step up the connection of the public libraries to the Internet and improve the quality of such connections.

The SAO finds that the main factors that have lead to the current situation is the negligible share in the IT budget of the expenditure on connecting the public libraries to the Internet and the conscious decisions of the Ministry of Culture as the co-ordinating body in a situation where resources are limited. The Ministry has, however, applied for funds for developing the information technology infrastructure of public libraries, but since the

[2] Foundation See the World.

approval of the state budget the Ministry has considerably cut the share of such costs in its IT expenditure established in the state budget. For instance, in 2000 the difference the amount of such expenditure was cut from 32.6 % to 18 %, in 2001 from 74.2 % to 30 % and according to the plans the cutback in 2002 will be from 75.8 % to 60.4 %. Furthermore, the IT budget has been constantly used for irrelevant expenditure: electronic magazines have been ordered, the digitalisation works of museum pieces have been contracted out, the membership fees of the Estonian Library Network Consortium and even remuneration have been paid. It follows that instead of financing the connection of libraries to the Internet the IT budget has been used for supporting other areas of culture. The SAO does not challenge the necessity of such expenditure, but rather the method where the appropriations are used for a purpose other than specified, which results in the failure to complete the task prioritised by the Government.

The backwardness in the connection of the public libraries to the Internet can be eliminated quickly, if the Ministry of Culture would ensure that the establishment of data communication of public libraries is financed in accordance with the Public Libraries Act, the local governments would provide secure premises and ensure the subsequent maintenance of PIAPs and the Foundation Vaata Maailma would help in equipping the PIAPs.

The SAO is convinced that the backwardness in the provision of access to public information by means of the data communication networks of public libraries must and can be eliminated by the end of 2002.

The SAO makes the following proposals for improving the management of the development of the information technology infrastructure of public libraries:

- the Culture Committee of the Parliament should include in its plan for the first half of 2002 a discussion concerning the relationship between the National Cultural Policy and Information Policy in the context of the information society. The discussion should serve the purpose of improved implementation of IT developments in the promotion of national culture and in the provision of easier access to cultural values and public information. Already today the libraries and the PIAPs opened there are an effective access channel to public information and the cultural values of the whole world. However, the information society can offer more;

- the said Committee should commission a study concerning the potential impact of the information society on the General Principles of the National Cultural Policy and the promotion of national culture from the Economic and Social Information Department of the Chancellery of the Parliament to serve as a basis for the discussion;

- the Government should review the working plans and priorities in order to align these with the requirements stemming from the Public Information Act so as to ensure that relevant action is backed by resources in a timely manner;

- in the first quarter of 2002 the Government should examine the report by the Minister of Culture concerning the implementation of the National Program for Connecting Public Libraries to the Internet and, where appropriate, envisage corrective action to meet the relevant obligations imposed on the central government and the local governments by the Public Information Act;

- the Minister of Culture should plan her activities so that the backwardness in the performance of tasks imposed on her by the Public Information Act would be eliminated by the end of 2002 and to this end ensure, on behalf of the government, the creation of data communication networks of public libraries in collaboration with the local governments and the opening of the related PIAPs;

- the Minister of Culture should draw up an action plan for completing the construction of data communication networks of public libraries by the end of 2002 and ensure the financing of such works jointly with the local governments. The action plan should be prepared in co-operation with the IT Managers of the counties and it should cover the territorial data communication problems on a comprehensive basis and provide for the engagement of the required resources both from the private sector and from other interested parties.

The audit conclusions and proposals are given in greater detail in the text of this Decision of the Chief Auditor.

Feedback from the Minister of Culture

In her letter no. 2-20/4426 of December 6, 2001 the Minister of Culture presented the Ministry's views with regard to the issues covered by audit report.

The Minister assures that *the Ministry of Culture has thoroughly examined the audit report concerning the development of the information technology infrastructure of public libraries prepared by the Performance Audit Department of the SAO* and *has informed the Members of the Public Libraries Council of the observations and proposals included in the said report*.

Although *in principle, the Ministry agrees with some of the deficiencies pointed out by the SAO which hinder the creation of the integrated electronic information system of public libraries and the opening of PIAPs there*, the Minister admits that *the allocated funds are insufficient to allow meeting the legal obligation in a timely manner*.

The Minister says that *the work in the Ministry of Culture is often organised in a manner different from the "good practices" described in the audit report and is in line with the organisational possibilities and principles of the Ministry*.

As regards the management of IT, the preparatory work for setting up the IT Board responsible for the Ministry's government area has commenced; this Board is to be set up in March 2002 the latest.

The Minister assures that *the Ministry has, to a large extent, applied project management methods in the implementation of IT development projects and aims to observe applicable Estonian or international standards for all projects.*

The Minister is *glad to find that in the last two years communications with the local governments have improved considerably*. However, the Minister underlines that *the PIAPs are established in co-operation with the local governments and that the responsibilities and financial obligations of the parties can be determined only by way of mutual agreement and not by a unilateral decision of the Ministry*.

The Ministry finds that *the lack of co-operation with the Foundation Vaata Maailma* is not important, *since only few libraries already connected to the Internet directly have received computers with the help of the Foundation*. However, the Minister says that the Ministry *has entered into negotiations with the Foundation Vaata Maailma in order to determine the areas of co-operation in the development of integrated information system of public libraries*.

The Minister promises that *in December a working group shall be set up at Ministry to advise on the management of the project for connecting public libraries to the Internet*.

The Minister assures that some of the SAO recommendations *have been complied with by now*:

– *the Public Libraries Council drew up the indicative statutes of public libraries, which take account of the amendments to the Public Libraries Act;*
– *the instructions of using the PIAPs have been prepared;*
– *the requirements to the integrated information systems of public libraries have been elaborated and discussed with the IT Specialists of the central libraries of counties and cities and the representatives of Urania Com and OÜ Deltmar, which are companies producing the software for libraries.*

After the described indicative documents have been introduced to the directors of central libraries these shall be used a basis for renewing the statutes of public libraries. Also, the "Guidelines on the Work Organisation of Public Libraries" are being revised.

The full text of the letter is given in an Annex to this decision of the Chief Auditor.

Position of the SAO

The SAO appreciates the Ministry's efforts to modernise the work in the libraries and extend their services in view of the availability of public information and cultural values. We hope that the Ministry sets clear goals and quality requirements in order to organise the work of the PIAPs at public libraries in a way that soon allows each citizen communicating with the central and local government bodies from a PIAP at his/her nearest library. The SAO will be auditing the availability and quality of services provided to the citizens by the government also in the future.

The SAO cannot agree with the statement of the Minister of Culture included in the letter that the observation of good management and administration practices entails increased costs. On the contrary, good management practices are a result of the need to optimise business in order to get the maximum out of the available resources. Any deviations complicate management, the co-ordination of work and co-operation and could hinder the implementation of plans in other areas, as has been the case with the opening of PIAPs.

The SAO finds it hard to see on what the estimated need of additional resources (15 million kroons) is based. The Ministry's estimates vary from application to application. This is obviously caused by an incomprehensive preliminary study of the project and the differences between the cost of possible technical solutions. If the estimates were based on the fact that the average cost of opening a PIAP in the public libraries of Tartu County this year was about 50,000 kroons, the establishment of further 300 similar PIAPs would indeed cost 15 million kroons. However, in her letter no. 4-2-13/4049 of October 30, 2001 the Minister wrote that in 2002 she intends to budget 7.553 million kroons for connecting the public libraries to the Internet. This implies that additional resources of about 7.5 million kroons are required. Since the financing need is still unclear and the situation of communication systems varies greatly from county to county, a specific feasibility study concerning the establishment of the data communication networks of public libraries should be commissioned and, as a part of this study, the precise cost of works should be calculated. The study should concern the county's data communication problems in their entirety so as to allow attracting the resources of other interested parties for the development of data communication.

The SAO welcomes the fact that the Ministry's communication with the local governments has improved, but according to the IT Managers of the counties (excluding the Tartu County) this communication has not produced the expected results. In 2001 the Ministry did not support the other counties' applications for connecting the public libraries to the Internet.

In the opinion of the SAO it is positive that already in the course of the audit the work on harmonising the statutes and guidelines with the Public Libraries Act commenced and the requirements to the integrated software system of public libraries were agreed with software companies.

Another important step is the Ministry's decision to start the preparatory work for setting up the IT Board responsible for the Ministry's government area and the formation of a working group to advise on the management of the project for connecting the public libraries to the Internet.

In this context, the SAO draws the Minister's attention to the fact that these bodies are useful only if clearly formulated and measurable goals are set, time limits and responsibility are determined and adequate decision-making powers are provided. If not, they can become a mere resource cost, as has happened in too many cases.

This Decision of the Chief Auditor on the results of the audit "Management of the Development of the Information Technology Infrastructure of Public Libraries" shall be communicated to the Culture Committee of the Parliament, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Transport and Communications, the State Secretary and the Foundation Vaata Maailma.

1. Introduction

In general, the purpose of public libraries is to ensure that the people have free access to information, knowledge, the achievements of the human mind, and culture. Traditionally, the libraries have collected and stored books and other bodies of information recorded on paper and lent these to interested parties. As the technology has developed, electronically recorded sounds, videos, pictures and texts have emerged on the libraries' shelves. At the time when a critical mass of information is created and travels electronically over the Internet, it is only natural and necessary that this information is made available in the libraries. And not only in the capital and chosen centres, but also to every person regardless of his/her location. Hopefully, this helps to avoid the division of the information society into those, who are rich in information, and those, who are poor in it.

This audit examines the availability of public services provided by the government through electronic channels and the related problems. One of these public services constitutes access to public information, which is made public in accordance with the principles and procedures laid down in the Public Information Act. § 33 of the Act provides: "Every person shall be afforded the opportunity to have free access to public information through the Internet in public libraries, pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Public Libraries Act." This means that the legislator has determined the electronic channel (the Internet) for the provision of public information and one location (public libraries).

Therefore the audit focuses primarily on the development of the information technology infrastructure of public libraries.

Another factor making the topic hot and important is the ambitious goal of becoming *the most competitive and dynamic, knowledge-based economic area in the world* set for Europe for the next decade by the Heads of State and Government of the EU. With the support of the European Commission the EU candidate countries have developed a co-operation project eEurope+, which is designed to contribute to the establishment of the European information society.[3] The purpose of the project is to give the candidate countries an opportunity to use the potential offered by the information society, and to avoid the creation of regions, which are poor in information.

The IT infrastructure and the use of Internet services in Estonia has developed rapidly. This is confirmed by the high rating given by international rating agencies.[4] As a consequence of the rapid development of data communication networks the Internet as an information channel has established itself in all population groups. However, according to the public opinion polls and monitoring data the growth of the number of Internet users stopped at the end of 2000 and a considerable share of respondents were not satisfied with the conditions of access to and use of the Internet. As from the third quarter of 2001 the number of Internet users has started to grow again.[5]

A remarkable amount of energy and resources is spent on the development of electronic services provided by the public sector and several national programs have been launched. Here are some examples:

– the Records Management Program aims to develop the methods and standards of electronic administration and the IT solutions, which serve as a basis for developing the services involving the use of electronic documents;
– the x-Road Program aims to integrate into a uniform and publicly accessible information services environment the services mainly based on departmental registers and databases;
– the e-Citizen Program aims to create an Internet service environment, which is based on the user's needs and supports personalisation;
– the project that provides technological support to various programs and the already available service packages is the creation and introduction of the electronic identity environment for the citizens in the framework of the ID-card project.

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3 http://ats.riik.ee/amphora/home/ikt/jarelevalve_byroo/Kandidaatriikide_koostoo_projekt_eEurope+.doc

4 http://www.mcconnellinternational.com/ereadiness/default.cfm

5 http://www.vaatamaailma.ee/pls/vm/docs/folder/vaata_maailma2/uudised/011024_emor_press.pdf

For the purposes of this audit the most important development works that affect the availability of public information at public libraries are as follows:

- the connection of public libraries to the Internet (creation of PIAPs at public libraries), which has been attempted within the framework of several projects since 1996;
- the automation of public libraries, which was envisaged as a long-term follow-up program and which commenced already in 1996;
- the regional data communications promotion project Village Lane I, which was used to establish data communication connections for nearly all local governments in 1999 to 2000 and to develop the data communication infrastructure in rural areas. In 2000 the project Village Lane II was launched, which was designed to provide all the public libraries in Estonia with data communication connections and PIAPs by the end of 2002 under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. For more information see http://www.kylatee.ee/raam2.htm.

The audit looked into the above development works.

1.1. Audited area in brief

The Framework Program (version: May 4, 1999), which was developed for the implementation of the General Principles of the Estonian Information Policy adopted by the Parliament on May 13, 1998, provides for “the supporting of cultural infrastructure by way of information technology development in order to connect libraries, theatres, schools in rural areas, community centres, museums, societies and other elements of the cultural infrastructure to an integrated system that provides mutual support”.

The strategic document underlying the activities of the Ministry of Culture is the “General Principles of the Estonian Cultural Policy”, which defines the main policy objectives and general positions for the purpose of policy-making and the allocation of funds. The general principle referring to libraries is that “the libraries function as an integrated national information system an aim to ensure that everyone has access to exhaustive, accurate and readily available information and the global information resources”.

This means that the main goals of the public libraries development policy include integration with other cultural and educational institutions in the development of public services and the establishment of a broader basis for the creation and distribution of information resources by means of IT facilities. However, no specific development plans for public libraries or other action plans for the implementation of the general objectives and principles have been documented.

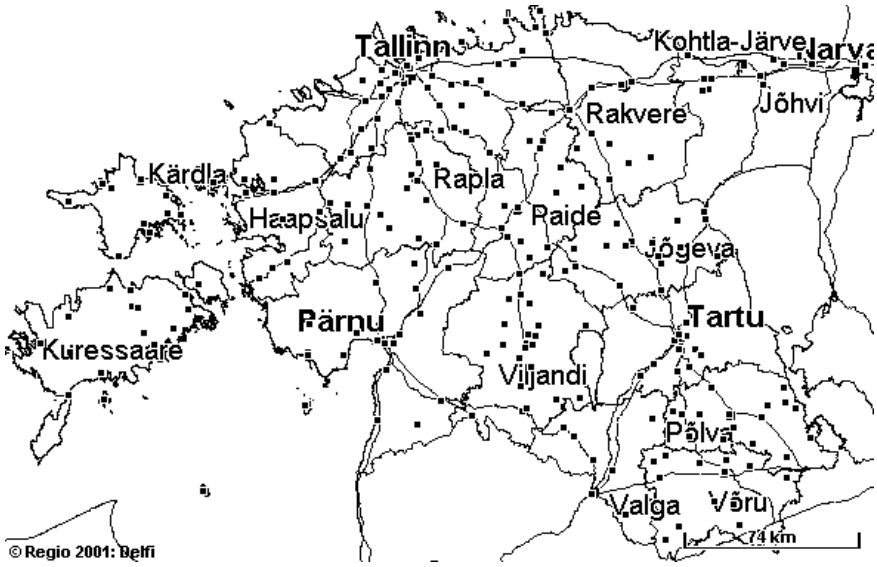
The EU action plan eEurope+ for candidate countries draws attention to the economic and social risks, which arise, when the opportunities offered by the information society are not made available.

Specific recommendations to avoid these risks include the development of the information technology infrastructure and the provision of access to the services and information in computer networks, in particular through a nationwide network of PIAPs.

Similarly to a number of other countries the Estonian legislator has chosen public libraries to be the place where the public can access the Internet. This is set out in the Public Information Act, which entered into force on January 1, 2001 and which defines the principles of disclosing public information for the whole public sector. The legislator has required the Ministry of Culture and the local governments to connect all the public libraries to the Internet and equip them with the appropriate technical facilities within just one year.

The connection of public libraries to the Internet began already in 1996 in conjunction with the establishment of information systems in the central libraries of counties and cities. By 1998 also the public departments' main network Highway had been created, which ensured Internet connection for local government bodies as well as the public libraries in county centres and the PIAPs located there. Consequently, the connection of public libraries to the Internet has served two purposes all the way: to equip the public libraries with data communication systems to meet their technological needs and to provide access to the public information on the Internet.

In 2000 the Ministry of Culture decided to join forces with the regional program for promoting data communication in order to improve the situation of data communication in public libraries located in rural areas. The project was named Village Lane II. Using the created infrastructure and the gained experience and expanding the network coverage with support from the reserve capital of the Government the project participants managed to connect 97 public libraries to the Internet within a year. In the beginning of 2001 almost a third of all public libraries had a direct Internet connection and functioning PIAPs.



Drawing 1. Distribution of PIAPs in Estonia

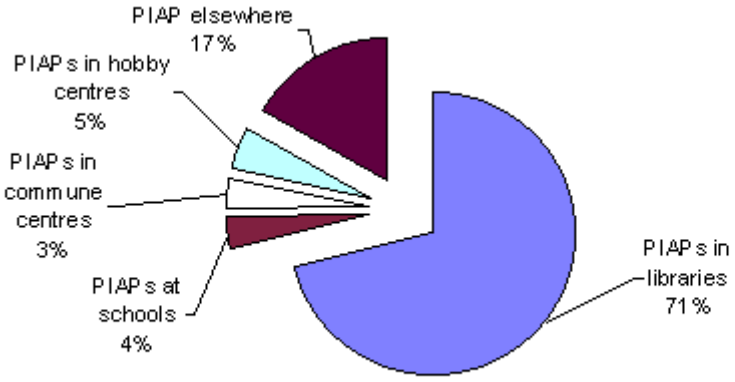
The connection of public libraries to the Internet was to be boosted by the Public Information Act, which provides that everyone must have free access to public information through the Internet in accordance with the procedure provided for in the Public Libraries Act. In principle, this provision requires providing all public libraries with a direct Internet connection and PIAPs. Furthermore, it obliges the central and local government bodies to ensure free access to public information through the data communication network in public libraries. Unfortunately, these tasks lack financial cover.

The Ministry of Culture (1.962 million kroons), the Union of Tartu County Local Governments (0.5 million kroons) and the Estonian Informatics Centre signed a contract for 2001 in a situation of limited resources. This contract provides for equipping the libraries in the Tartu County with Internet connection, software and hardware and the construction of the Tartu County wide area network.

In 2001 the connection of other counties' public libraries to the Internet under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture has come to a standstill. According to the estimates almost 300 public libraries around the country are still waiting for the direct Internet connection. As the establishment of PIAPs at 40 libraries in the Tartu County requires 2.5 million kroons in 2001, a further 20 million kroons need to be invested in the near future to achieve the goal set by the Parliament. At the moment the Ministry of Culture is planning to budget only 7.553 million kroons for connecting the public libraries to the Internet.

In addition to libraries, PIAPs have been established at other institutions and public undertakings like tourist information points, museums, hobby and cultural centres etc (see Drawing 2). The fundamental principles are free access for everyone interested and free Internet service. Since the demand exceeds the supply considerably, many PIAPs have tried

to get the queues under control by introducing a system of previous registration and service charges. As of autumn 2001 there were about 350 PIAPs in Estonia, whereof 250 were at libraries and provided about 450 computer workplaces. The PIAPs located outside libraries have nearly the same number of computer workplaces.



Drawing 2. The distribution of PIAPs

Regardless of the heavy demand people still manage to use the computer workplace at a PIAP are least one hour per week by way of previous registration. According to this calculation the current 900 computer workplaces of PIAPs can serve up to 40,000 people on a regular basis. In addition, there are about 60,000 regular Internet users in institutions and companies and about 100,000 people can access the Internet via a computer at home. Thus, the maximum number of regular Internet users is 200,000.

The latest surveys[6] show that in Estonia the number of adult Internet users (i.e. persons 15 to 74 years of age, who have used the Internet at least once in the last six months) reaches almost 400,000. But a further 800,000 would like to use the Internet.

Although according to the surveys individuals are looking for more beneficial conditions of establishing an Internet connection, the fastest and economically most effective way of ensuring access to the Internet is the creation of PIAPs, since every day several people can use such computer workplaces.

The most recent initiative was the Foundation Vaata Maailma established by private operators, which mainly serves the purpose of increasing the possibilities of using and accessing the Internet. On behalf of its partners Hansapank, Eesti Ühispank, Eesti Telefon and Eesti Mobiiltelefon the Foundation organised a competition for the construction of PIAPs. The competition does not have a fixed final date – the submitted applications will be examined and the decisions shall be made on a current basis. Up to 450 computers will be donated in the framework of the competition.

[6] http://www.vaatamaailma.ee/pls/vm/docs/folder/vaata_maailma2/uudised/011024_emor_press.pdf

The Foundation uses also other means to encourage the widespread use of the Internet. To this end eight activity areas have been given priority.[7] According to the representatives of the Foundation the central and local government bodies are expected to co-operate more actively in the implementation of specific projects, including the setting up of PIAPs and the establishment of standards concerning electronic services.

1.2. Audit description

The basis of the audit was the SAO working plan for 2001 and the audit proposals approved by the Chief Auditor of the Performance Audit Department (PAD) on September 4, 2001.

The purpose of the audit was to determine whether the development of the information technology infrastructure of public libraries has been managed so as to afford access to public information at public libraries via the Internet by the end 2001 pursuant to the procedure set out in the Public Libraries Act.

The object of the audit was the organisation of IT development work within the government area of the Ministry of Culture and the management of the process of automation of public libraries and connecting them to the Internet. The audit examined the planning of IT work, budgeting, management, co-operation within and outside the Ministry's government area and the provision of public services relying on the possibilities offered by IT.

The entity under audit was the Ministry of Culture. In addition, the audit looked into the relevant activities of institutions and companies involved in the development of the information technology infrastructure of public libraries.

The audited period was 1999 to 2001, except in the case of connecting libraries to the Internet and automating them, where the audit covered the years from 1996 onwards.

1.3. Audit implementation

Audit planning, implementation and formulation of audit results was in compliance with the requirements stemming from the SAO Act, the Directives of the Auditor General and the core audit process of the PAD and the recommendations given in the international auditing standards (INTOSAI, ISO) and manuals (CobiT). The criteria were co-ordinated with the auditee. The audit included interviews with the Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture, the Head of the State Assets Service, an Adviser of the Arts Department, the staff of libraries etc.

[7] See http://www.vaatamaailma.ee.

Rein Harjo, the Head of the Performance Audit Department and Jaanus Kasendi and Aalo Kukk, Audit Specialists of the said department carried out the audit and prepared the reports. The report of findings[8] provides a more detailed insight into the applicable methods and audit implementation.

The executive summary in the beginning of this document provides an overview of the audit object and the most important conclusions and proposals addressed to the auditee. Chapters devoted to individual areas follow the introduction. These Chapters analyse the relevant problem in the light of the report of findings and compare the effective situation with criteria based on standards and good practices. The auditors' conclusions and proposals addressed to the auditee sum up each Chapter. The questions used for the purpose of identifying findings and the assessment criteria chosen by the Audit Team were co-ordinated with the auditee and are described in greater detail in the report of findings.

The views and comments on the report of findings given in letter no. 4-2-13-/3909 of October 19, 2001 of the Minister of Culture did not challenge the essential opinions in the said report, but did give rise to certain modifications in the text of the report for the sake of better mutual understanding. Such modifications come with relevant footnotes. The Ministry's comments, which mostly referred to the IT budget and the financing of projects, have been annexed to the report of findings.

The SAO disagrees with the positions of the Ministry of Culture, where the latter justifies the use of the IT budget for financing projects, which do not constitute IT expenditure within the meaning of the relevant guidelines of the Ministry of Finance.

2. Planning for availability of public information

The Estonian Information Policy Framework Program provides that in 2001 the connection of public libraries to the Internet shall be one of the priority areas. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for connecting all the public libraries to the Internet by 2003. According to the Decision of the Government[9] the performance of tasks stemming from the Public Information Act is one of the priority areas of the Estonian Information Policy in 2001.

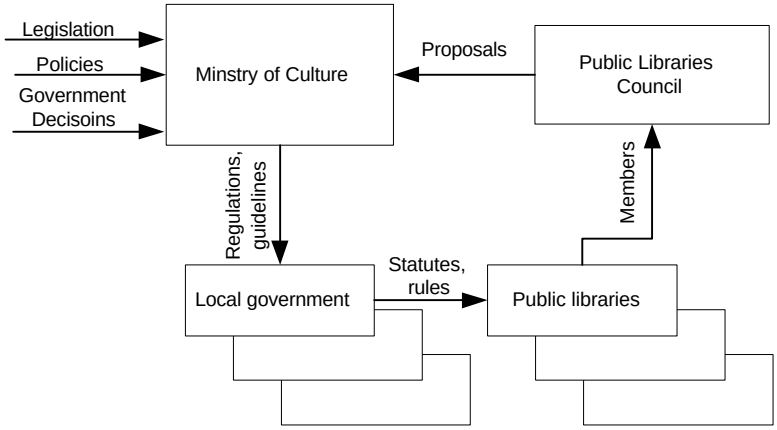
The Public Information Act lays down the objective to ensure that everyone is afforded an opportunity to access public information through a data communication network. The

[8] Present document does not contain report of findings or any annexes of it.

[9] Decision 8 of February 13, 2001 of the Government.

legislator has chosen public libraries to be the point of access and fixed the time limit – January 1, 2002. This means that the legislator allowed one year for the completion of this task.[10]

The law provides that the entities responsible for performance are central and local government bodies. Library matters are managed, co-ordinated and guided by the Ministry of Culture on behalf of the government. Public libraries constitute local government bodies. The legislation[11] defines the functions of the central and local government bodies with regard to the organisation and management of the work of public libraries (see Drawing 3).



Drawing 3. Management of public libraries

203 public libraries enjoyed an Internet connection at the end of 2000, but the number of PIAPs was only about 100. In 2001 the Ministry of Culture planned to connect 262 public libraries to the Internet and by the end of 2002 ensure that at least 95 % of public libraries enjoy access to public information through the Internet.[12] In reality, the Ministry has contributed to the establishment of only 43 PIAPs in the public libraries of the Tartu County. As of October 2001 a total of 248 public libraries (43.5 %) provide access to public information. The situation is somewhat relieved by the 116 new PIAPs created by the Foundation Vaata Maailma in 2001.

According to the Public Libraries Act the connection of libraries to the data communication network and the acquisition of the necessary technical facilities should be financed from

[10] § 33 and § 55 of the Public Information Act.

[11] Government of the Republic Act, Local Government Organisation Act, Public Libraries Act and Statutes of the Ministry of Culture.

[12] Application of the Ministry of Culture concerning the specific financing of IT development projects, drawn up on June 1, 2000.

the state budget.[13] The maintenance costs of public libraries, including the cost of providing public information, shall be covered from the local government budget.[14] Consequently, the central government has the obligation to manage and finance investments through the Ministry of Culture and the local governments have the obligation to provide premises and furnishings and ensure the organisation of work and maintenance.

The Ministry applied for 13.8 million kroons from the 2001 state budget for connecting the public libraries to the Internet (the total amount of IT expenditure applied for was 24.7 millions). As a result of budgetary procedure the Parliament allocated 8 million kroons to the Ministry for IT expenditure. The latter reserved only 2 million kroons of the said amount for connecting public libraries to the Internet in 2001, which were used to provide access to public information in only 43 public libraries in the Tartu County (in 2000 the figure for all counties was 97). At the same time more than 2 million kroons from the IT budget were used to finance costs, which do not constitute IT expenditure within the meaning of the relevant guidelines of the Ministry of Finance.

Conclusions

- The obligation to ensure access to public information at public libraries stemming from the Public Information Act will not be met in a timely manner. The SAO finds that this is mainly because of the controversies between the legal obligations and the alignment of the working plans with the means of the state budget that have arisen in the planning and budgeting process. The working plans of the Government and the Ministry of Culture show that the time limit laid down by the law is ignored. Furthermore, the Ministry has failed to find resources for the completion of the task originally planned (i.e. connecting 262 public libraries to the Internet).

- Local governments have actively supported the affording of access to public information and the development of the information technology infrastructure of rural areas and these activities have received material support from specific programs. In 2001 more than 100 PIAPs were created in rural areas on the initiative of local governments and largely with the means of the private sector.

Proposals

- The SAO proposes that the Government should review its working plans and priorities in order to align these with the obligations under the Public Information Act so as to ensure the necessary resources for the establishment of infrastructure.

[13] § 10(3)(4) of the Public Libraries Act.
[14] § 10(2) of the Public Libraries Act.

- The SAO proposes that the Ministry of Culture should draw up an action plan for completing the construction of the data communication networks of public libraries by the end of 2002 and ensure the financing of such operations.

- In view of the obligations under the Public Information Act also the local government resources should be included in the construction of PIAPs at public libraries.

- Co-operation with the Foundation Vaata Maailma should be furthered for the purpose of providing the PIAPs with additional computer workplaces.

3. Availability and quality of public information

3.1. Public information and procedures for its disclosure

Public information is information, which is recorded and documented in any manner and on any medium and which is obtained or created in the performance of public duties provided for by laws or legislation stemming therefrom.[15] Pursuant to the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia every person has the right to freely receive information disseminated for public use, i.e. public information. The Public Information Act specifies the conditions, procedures and methods of access to public information and also to obligations of central and local government bodies and other information holders.

For it to be less cumbersome and costly the Public Information Act provides for the disclosure of public information in a public data communication network. The information holders are required to publish this information on web pages.

The said Act distinguishes 31 categories of information,[16] which the holder of information[17] is required to disclose. The main categories of such information include: documents concerning the core activity; action and working plans; budgets; revenue and expenditure accounts; legislative drafts; statistical data and information stemming from studies and analyses; document registers; national registers; information concerning posts and officials; precepts; information on public procurements; information on public services provided.

Most public departments had maintained a web page for years before the Public Information Act entered into force and had used it to give information to citizens,

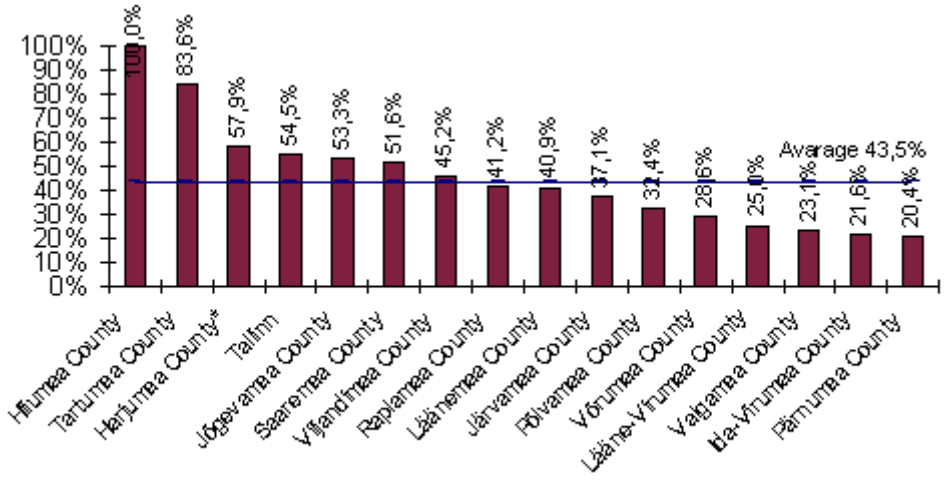
[15] § 3(1) of the Public Information Act.
[16] § 28 of the Public Information Act.
[17] A holder of information is either a central or local government body, a legal person in public law or, under the conditions laid down on the Public Information Act, a legal or natural person in private law – see § 5 of the said Act.

companies and other public institutions. The Act in question extends and harmonises the information offered by departments and allows broad access to public information.

The obligation to maintain a web page in accordance with the provisions of the Public Information Act shall become applicable to all information holders on March 1, 2002.[18]

3.2. Making public information available

Disclosure of public information on a web page allows accessing it from every computer connected to the Internet and located either at work, school, home or a PIAP. The legislator set out in the Public Information Act that a further 570 public access points must be established at public libraries.



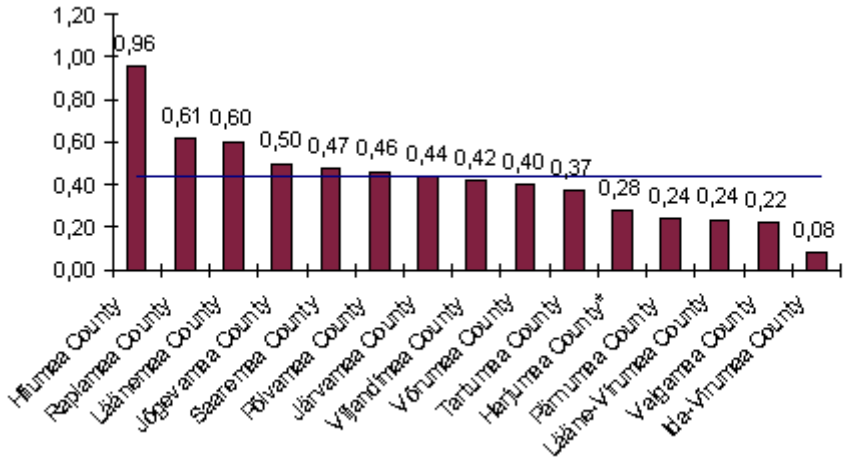
Drawing 4. PIAPs in public libraries (* Harju County without Tallinn)

In October 2001 the public libraries in Estonia accommodated 248 PIAPs, meaning that only 43.5 % of such libraries provided access to public information. The most developed region in this regard is the Hiiu County (see Drawing 4), where all public libraries have computer workplaces connected to the Internet that visitors can use. In addition, the island has 3 further PIAPs.

Owing to public investments the situation of data communication in the Tartu County has improved considerably in 2001 and by now 46 public libraries offer Internet access (there are 49 libraries altogether). Furthermore, there are 9 PIAPs outside the libraries and 4 PIAPs in the libraries of the City of Tartu. Consequently, in Hiiu and Tartu Counties have also the population in rural areas can enjoy Internet services similarly to books, magazines and other information on paper.

[18] § 31 of the Public Information Act.

In Harju, Jõgeva and Saare Counties a little more than half of public libraries provide Internet access. Internet services are available there in cities and commune centres, but only in a limited number of villages. In other regions, which have less than half of public libraries equipped with a PIAP, the Internet connection is available only in larger settlements or cities. For example, seven of the 12 PIAPs at the Ida-Viru County libraries are located in cities (Jõhvi, Kiviõli, Kohtla-Järve, Narva, Püssi and Sillamäe), three in commune centres (Aseri, Toila and Maidla), one in the small town of Voka and only one village library in Soonurme can offer its readers information through the Internet.



Drawing 5. The number of PIAPs per 1,000 inhabitants (* The figure for the Harju County and the average have been calculated without Tallinn)

Also, not all the libraries in bigger cities can provide Internet access. For instance, only 12 of the 22 public libraries in Tallinn have PIAPs, whereby the total number of computer workplaces is 26. In rural areas the level of availability of information provided through data communication networks is characterised by the ratio between the number of PIAPs[19] and the region's population (see Drawing 5), but in cities the comparative indicator is the number of workplaces at PIAPs per population. For example, in the public libraries of Tallinn there are only 0.065 computer workplaces per 1,000 inhabitants, which is three times less than the national average. In practice, the inhabitants of the capital have better opportunities, since the cafes and business centres in Tallinn double the number of public computer workplaces connected to the Internet (although for a certain fee).

The alternative PIAPs[20] in cities – cafes, computer shops, and business centres – are a result of the companies' marketing or business projects.[21] In rural areas the main purpose of establishing alternative PIAPs has been the better distribution of limited resources and these PIAPs are operated at institutions, where a data communication network has been

[19] In most village libraries there is only 1 computer for public use.
[20] For the purposes of this Decision alternative PIAPs are those located outside a public library.
[21] See http://tourism.tallinn.ee/info/side/internet.htm.

constructed under a specific regional program.[22] Such PIAPs have been set up at community centres (e.g. Halinga, Lehtse, Martna, Nõo, Toila) and schools (e.g. Albu Basic School, Kadrina Upper Secondary School, Luua Forestry School, Valingu Basic School). The PIAPs at schools are computerised classrooms, which allow several users to access simultaneously, but they are opened only for a limited period after the lessons. There are more than 100 alternative PIAPs nationwide, which provide access to public information or other Internet services under various conditions (time, charge, selection of services etc).

Young people (pupils, students) are the most active group of PIAP users. Most of them have enough knowledge and experience to be able to use the computer and find their way in the Internet. The largest potential user group is, however, the seniors, who are interested in public information and the activities of public institutions, but who lack the skills to use the computer and the Internet.

In order to facilitate access to public services an integrated portal (e-government) has been created, but currently the services are departmental, taking no account of the background of target groups and their different interests. Therefore the assistance of experienced consultants is required at PIAPs.

3.3. Services of PIAPs and their quality

The services of PIAPs at public libraries cannot be examined only in the context of the Public Information Act and in the framework of the definition of public information[23] set out therein, since also the Public Libraries Act has to be taken into account. It provides that "The purpose of public libraries is to ensure that the people have free access to information, knowledge, the achievements of the human mind, and culture and support lifelong learning and personal development".[24] Furthermore, account has to be taken of the increased integration of digital information and services (hypertext, service portals etc), which makes it impossible to distinguish 100 % public information or services in the Internet or control their dissemination and use. This means that the services of PIAPs have been given a very wide definition as regards substance, form and sources and the public libraries are yet to take advantage of all these possibilities and shape them into services. At the same time the Public Information Act requires the public libraries to afford access to public information, which, as the basic service, must be free for everyone.

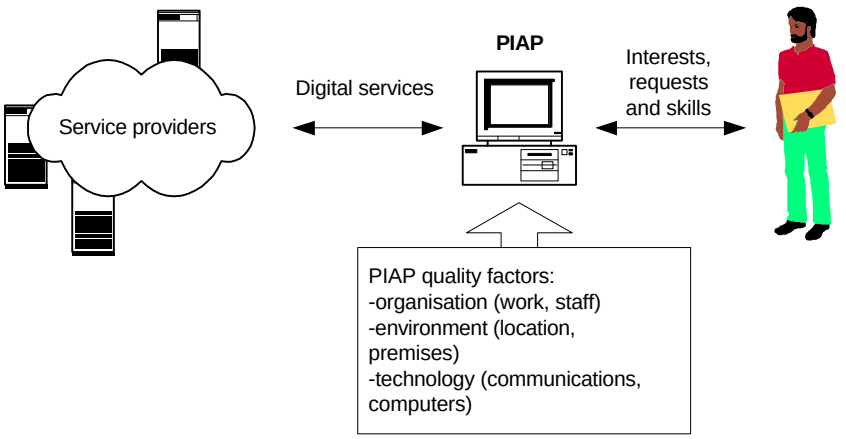
The purpose of PIAPs is to deliver information disseminated and services (hereinafter referred to as "digital services") provided in the public data communication network to the users. Consequently, the selection of PIAP services is related to what the information holders offer and the service quality to how they do it. The volume of services and their

[22] Tiger Leap, Village Lane etc.

[23] "… information, which is… obtained or created in the performance of public duties…" [§ 3(1) of the Public Information Act].

[24] § 2 of the Public Libraries Act.

effective quality depends on the work organisation, the qualifications of the staff, the working conditions, the technical facilities and the communication infrastructure of the PIAP.



Drawing 6. PIAP as the mediator of services

The digital services of public administrations and their access links have been brought together on the web page www.riik.ee as a result of the project "Joint Access Point of Estonian Public Departments in the Internet" (e-government).

Under the said project the recommendations "Public Web Pages of Estonian Public Departments"[25] were prepared in order to "establish an indicative standard for the web pages of public departments, which would help to integrate the networks of public departments and ensure easier navigation throughout the system". The requirements and conditions included in the recommendations should be taken into account in the development of the service standard of PIAPs. No general conditions or requirements for using the digital services have been established for the users and mediators (PIAPs) of such services.

Until 2001 the government did not regulate the activities of PIAPs and therefore the services to be provided were agreed between the interested parties. The first PIAPs were created in 1997 and 1998 by way of competition and with support from the Open Estonia Foundation (OEF). The competition conditions specified the principles of providing services to the visitors, which have become the de facto service standard in most PIAPs. The OEF defines the PIAP as a place where everyone interested can access a computer free of charge and use various Internet services (www, e-mail, FTP etc). According to the requirements a PIAP must have a member of the support staff present, whose task is to advise the users and provide basic technical assistance. Most of the beneficiaries of the

[25] See http://www.riik.ee/kord/wwwjuhend.html.

OEF are public libraries in rural areas. However, the work of PIAPs was not related to the core activity of the library and the provision of Internet services was an ancillary activity of the public library (or a member of its staff).

According to the Public Information Act, which entered into force on January 1, 2001, affording access to public information through a data communication network is one of the basic services of public libraries. The Act also provides for the general requirements to services:[26]

- previous registration of users in cases where the demand exceeds the supply;
- provision of assistance to users so that they could access the web pages of central and local government bodies.

The basic services of public libraries are free of charge.

The audit examined the PIAPs of 10 % of all public libraries randomly chosen. This examination showed that in most cases the computer workplaces of PIAPs are used rather for examining information available on the Internet than for computer games or the like. According to our observations the most common service package includes the use of the Internet and e-mail and printing. Service enhancements include scanning, listening to CDs, computer games, faxing and computer training. Service enhancements are justified only if the availability of public information has been ensured. Compliance with this principles has not been ensured at the moment, since the queues are long and previous registration does not always prefer those looking for public information.

The random examination showed also the following:

- almost half of the staff members of libraries have not received adequate training to be able to provide assistance at the PIAP – the more active ones have learned the skills and gained experience individually in the course of work or from users;
- Internet access could be improved remarkably by keeping the overloaded PIAPs open longer and adding computer workplaces.

3.4. Management of service availability and quality

The management of the work of public libraries is based on the "Guidelines on the Work Organisation of Public Libraries" established by Regulation 10 of March 17, 1999 of the Minister of Culture. These guidelines regulate the establishment of collections, the acquisition, registration, processing and storage of bodies of information and their use on the spot and lending. The guidelines do not govern access to public information offered on the Internet.

[26] § 25(2^1) of the Public Libraries Act.

The functions and rules of procedure of each public library are set out in the library's statutes, which are adopted by the local government council. The scope, quality and conditions of services provided by the library are fixed in and communicated to the users of libraries by the rules for using the library. The applicable legislation sets out the general requirements to local authorities as regards the provision of library services, but leaves out certain aspects of the libraries' work organisation. This permits the local governments to take account of the local situation and possibilities by introducing restrictions or offering service enhancements to this end.

The local legislation governing the services provided by public libraries contains provisions, which are in contravention of the applicable national legislation or incorrect. The statutes and rules of most public libraries have not been updated and therefore contain no provision on access to public information available on the Internet.

The Ministry of Finance has drawn up the "Public Service Standards and Guidelines for the Preparation thereof".[27] The standards determine the minimum requirements to public services, whereby they mainly serve the purpose of making the users of services or clients and the staff of the organisation providing public services aware of the requirements that a service has to meet. The service standard must specify the service in question and the target group, the volume of the service and the time of delivery, the quality requirements and for paid services the price, and the rights and obligations of the user of the service and the guarantees.

The Ministry of Culture has no methodology or mechanisms to assess and verify the service quality of PIAPs operated at public libraries. Since the local governments have established different service structure and quality and different registration procedures (or there aren't any), the gathered information is not comparable and does not allow analysis. As of the moment, the procedure for collecting information on PIAPs (national statistics, Internet-based register or the like) has not been established. The readers and the users of Internet services of public libraries have not been asked for an opinion to serve as a basis for developing the PIAPs and public services. The Public Libraries Council, which is an advisory body at the Ministry of Culture, has not submitted any proposals on the standards applicable to the provision of access to public information.

Conclusions

- The traditional basic services of public libraries have been developed well. This is an area where people are most satisfied with the management of services provided by the local government bodies. The Ministry of Culture has shown initiative in the preparation of the practical aspects of the Public Information Act, which adds another

[27] Adopted by Government Decision 43 of September 19, 2000.

basic service to public libraries – use of a PIAP for the purpose of accessing public information.

- However, the adoption of the said Act has not been followed up by purposeful measures to develop the new basic service of public libraries. The "Guidelines on the Work Organisation of Public Libraries" have not been revised, no standards or relevant recommendations applicable to the provision of access to public information through a PIAP at a public library have been drawn up and the quality requirements to data communication and to the workplaces of Internet service users have not been established.

- The Ministry of Culture does not have a full picture of the services offered by PIAPs at public libraries or the needs of the users, since no registration or control has been introduced with regard to the services, neither have user surveys been conducted for the purpose of service development.

- The staff members of public libraries are unable to adequately assist to the visitors of PIAPs in accessing the web pages of central and local government bodies.

Proposals

- The Ministry of Culture should, in liaison with the Ministry of Transport and Communications, elaborate and introduce the uniform service standard of PIAPs, which would specify the minimum requirements to public information service required by the law and the guidelines on service development.

- The local governments and other entities providing or mediating electronic services to the public must regulate and organise their work in the light of the PIAP service standard.

- The Ministry of Culture should review and supplement the "Guidelines on the Work Organisation of Public Libraries" with the general rules on the provision of access to public information, the duties of library staff, the requirements to the registration of services and users, and other conditions necessary to ensure public service. The Ministry should prepare and adopt a program of computer and Internet classes to prepare the library staff for support work at PIAPs.

- The Ministry of Culture should revise the methods of statistical monitoring in public libraries as regards the provision of public Internet services and take the monitoring results into account when reviewing the service standards and establishing the service network.

- The Ministry of Culture should regularly question the readers and the users of PIAPs at public libraries in order to examine the users' satisfaction with the services and their expectations to the selection and quality of services.

4. IT management in the government area of the Ministry of Culture

The formulation of information policy and IT planning in government agencies is based on the General Principles of the Estonian Information Policy, the Framework Program and the strategic documents concerning the activity areas of the agency. The strategic documents for the government area of the Ministry of Culture include the General Principles of the Estonian Cultural Policy and the action plan for the implementation of this policy.[28]

The strategic planning of IT results in the determination of priorities, the selection of development projects and the approval of action plans. A standing IT Board composed of the representatives of the agency's management, the activity areas and the IT unit has to be set up in order to ensure that the development measures and investment plans tally with the organisational goals and the activities within the government area.

The Ministry of Culture has not set up an IT Board to co-ordinate the IT issues of the government area or any other relevant bodies. The top management of the Ministry (Minister, Secretary General) is not involved in the IT planning process. Neither has the Ministry established the methods of long-range planning of IT concerning the objectives, responsibility, time limits, resources, explanations and justifications related to IT activities.

4.1. IT planning

The IT management functions in the Ministry of Culture are partly performed by the State Assets Service of the Budgeting and Economic Analysis Department, whose statutory functions include IT planning in the Ministry and its government area. The IT action plan for 2000 to 2002 covers only two activity areas of the Ministry and two development projects implemented within the government area. All the development projects financed from the IT budget of the Ministry, including those related to public libraries have not been reflected.

On the basis of the applications from the Ministry and the agencies within its government area the State Assets Service of the Budgeting and Economic Analysis Department draws up the general IT budget of the Ministry. The relevant department examines and approves the budget applications of agencies and project teams. Where appropriate, a committee of experts in the field shall be set up to examine the projects. The cost and priorities of

[28] Adopted by the Parliament on September 16, 1998.

projects included in the general budget are co-ordinated with the relevant Advisers, Heads of Departments and the Secretary General and approved by the Minister. Since there are no uniform methods for the planning of IT development projects, the selection and priorities of projects are substantially altered in the process of establishing the general budget. The projects linger and their goals, time limits and cost are not always clear. In principle, project-based planning and management methods are not applied.

A committee formed by the Minister examines the applications for financing IT development projects submitted to the Ministry by the agencies within its government area. The committee also draws up the plan for distributing the funds. The task of this committee is to determine the beneficiaries and the amounts in the light of the examination of applications and submit the decision to the Minister for approval. However, the examination of applications has not always taken account of the priority development areas adopted by the Government and the guidelines of the Ministry of Finance concerning the principles of planning IT expenditure in the state budget.

The Accounting Service (Administrative Department) and the Chief Specialist of the State Assets Service (Budgeting and Economic Analysis Department) keep account of IT expenditure. The applicable software allows monitoring the costs in respect of expenditure entries (invoices, payment orders), budget accounts, suppliers and projects.

4.2. Managing the IT development projects of public libraries

The main purpose of IT development projects should be supporting the core processes of the organisation and the provision of new services (products). Therefore the development of the information technology infrastructure of public libraries should increase the public's opportunities to access the information stored in public libraries and create new services by virtue of the new possibilities offered by IT and the Internet.

The creation of the IT infrastructure of public libraries and the introduction of information systems began in 1996. Management and monitoring or projects were the responsibility of the Public Libraries Automation Working Party of the Estonian Librarians Association. To ensure national co-ordination of the project the Ministry of Culture set up the Library Automation Board. The project was launched with the seed capital of 3 million kroons donated by the Open Estonia Foundation and the Open Society Institute of Hungary. The government supported the project through the Estonian Informatics Centre. By the end of 1999 twenty central libraries had local area networks and software and hardware, which make it possible to keep account of bodies of information, readers and lending as well as draw up reports and manage data exchange. The most valuable result of the project was that the orientation changed to the reorganisation and optimisation of the libraries' working processes. Also, teaching the librarians to use computers enhanced their productivity and improved service quality.

Since 2000 the co-ordinated development of the information technology infrastructure of public libraries has come to a standstill. It is mainly because the software chosen in 1996 has become morally outdated (it can be used only locally) and the user licences of this software are expensive and because of the backwardness in connecting the public libraries to the Internet. In order to ensure further development the Ministry of Culture and the Estonian Librarians Association decided to continue the automation of public libraries on the basis of the principles of a web-based integrated information system. The international competition organised for the purpose of acquiring the necessary software did not give the expected results. To solve the situation the Ministry of Culture decided to support the development of library software URRAM of an Estonian company Urania Com. This software is used in the framework of a pilot project in the Tartu and Põlva County Libraries. The project has reached the final phase and the results are positive, but no analyses or decisions have been made with regard to the general introduction of this system.

In spring 2000 the Ministry entered into negotiations with the management of the specific program for regional data communication (Village Lane) in order to improve the data communications of public libraries. The basic network established by Village Lane was extended and new networks were constructed and by the end of 2000 some 97 public libraries opened PIAPs.

This project employed the budget funds of Village Lane and the additional funds allocated to the Ministry from the reserve capital of the Government. Since in 2001 the direct financing of Village Lane from the state budget through the Estonian Informatics Centre came to an end, the connection of libraries to the Internet could only continue under a contract between the Ministry of Culture as the contracting authority and the Estonian Informatics Centre as the contractor. What comes to the preparation and implementation of IT projects, the boards and councils set up by the Ministry and the libraries have failed to perform the functions of the management and co-ordination bodies of Village Lane.

The Ministry of Culture has declared that the connection of public libraries to the Internet is one of the priorities for its government area, but has not linked it to the integrated information system of public libraries. The Ministry has failed to draw up a comprehensive project for the development of the information technology infrastructure of public libraries. Neither is the project management and monitoring mechanism in place. The Ministry has not defined or established the technical and economic indicators of the information system of public libraries or the requirements to their use.

The Foundation Vaata Maailma established by the private sector in 2001 for the purpose of promoting wider Internet use and access expects active co-operation from the central and local government bodies in the area of implementing specific projects, including the creation of PIAPs and the establishment of standards concerning electronic information services. In local governments the initiative of the Foundation has been warmly welcomed

and the first results have been achieved, but the Ministry of Culture has failed to co-operate.

Conclusions

- The development problems of libraries have been mainly the concern of the Estonian Librarians Association and the Public Libraries Council set up at the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education or other institutions managing libraries have not assumed full responsibility for the elaboration and implementation of the Program for Development of National Information System of Libraries specified in the Government's Action Plan for Implementing Cultural Policy.

- The Ministry of Culture does not have a unit responsible for the development of all information systems in the Ministry's government area. Neither has the Ministry set up an IT Board or other relevant bodies to co-ordinate this area. The lack of IT strategy and the little attention paid to the information society development problems is evident from the share of the IT development projects' budget in the total budget of the Ministry (about 0.5 %) in the last three years (1998 to 2000). This is about two times less than the public sector on the average (about 1 %).

- The Ministry of Culture has not introduced a budgeting process to ensure the establishment and approval of the IT budget in accordance with the long-range plans and priorities of the Ministry, the needs of specific areas and the IT plans. Consequently, the budget assignments have been altered during the budgeting process and the current financing operations.

- The program of action of the Ministry of Culture concerning the area of IT does not indicate the goals of development projects or the expected results. Neither does it reflect the establishment of connections with the public data communication network or the acquisition of the necessary technical equipment. Regardless of the obligations under the Public Libraries Act the Ministry treats the development of the IT infrastructure of public libraries as a secondary matter.

- By today, however, the Ministry of Culture has, in co-operation with local governments, made preparations to develop the integrated information system of public libraries and provide modern information services to the people. Unfortunately, the construction of a comprehensive system has been adversely affected by organisational and financial problems. Although most PIAPs in the public sector are created within the government area of the Ministry of Culture, the latter has not assumed full responsibility on behalf of the government for managing the construction and administration of government-supported PIAPs in the public sector.

- Last year the Ministry's co-operation with the local governments weakened. What comes to the preparation and implementation of IT projects, the boards and councils set up by the Ministry and the libraries have failed to perform the functions of the management and co-ordination bodies of Village Lane. The Ministry has not been able to enter into constructive co-operation with private sector interest groups promoting with the establishment of PIAPs.

Proposals

- The Ministry of Culture should determine the methods of long-range and operational IT planning to ensure the elaboration of IT plans pursuant to the Ministry's operational goals and priorities. The planning of IT expenditure must be linked to budgeting and the project-based implementation of all IT development works must be ensured.

- According to the recommendations of the Department of National Information Systems of the Ministry of Transport and Communications (formerly under the State Chancellery) the Ministry of Culture should set up a unit responsible for the development of information systems in its government area and the IT Board of the Ministry and define their functions.

- The Ministry of Culture should, in liaison with the local governments, examine the network of cultural, sports, educational and other public institutions operating on the territory of the latter in order to optimise the available and envisaged information technology infrastructure (including the location of PIAPs). Furthermore, the measures for ensuring the maintenance, security and consistency of the created information systems should be reviewed.

- The Ministry of Culture should clearly define the allocation of responsibilities and financial obligations between the central and local government bodies with regard to the implementation of projects for the automation of public libraries and connecting them to the Internet.

- The Ministry of Culture should apply project management methods in the implementation of projects for the automation of public libraries and connecting them to the Internet. These methods should specify the functions and responsibilities of project participants as well as the tasks, timetable and resources. Regulation of project management must include the introduction reporting and monitoring.

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