LATVIAN SERVICES SECTOR DEVELOPMENT MODEL: INTERNET SOLUTION

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Abstract

The paper "Latvian Services Sector Development Model: Internet Solution" addresses an issue of the quality of business environment in the Latvian services sector. In the paper, there are analyzed governmentally supported information systems, data bases and e-services aiming at simplification of B2G communication process, identified their advantages and drawbacks, as well as determined potential for their further development. As a result, a model for optimization of governmental on-line tools, fostering an access to business-related information and fulfillment of administrative procedures in the services sector, has been developed. The paper provides a diversified four-layer solution, which may be progressively realized, depending on the available financial resources.
Key words: point of single contact, e-solution, information system, data base, optimization.

Introduction

The services sector is the most considerable sector of the Latvian economy, and its successful functioning is an important precondition for welfare of the country. Nevertheless, companies admit, that the main problems they face when providing services are connected with the quality of regulatory environment. The single regulation for all the services sector in Latvia or the European Union (EU) does not exist, as services have a very specific and diverse nature. The term 'service' embraces a huge variety of commercial and non-commercial activities. Parallel to traditional services sectors, new peculiar services providers appear on regular basis. Operational forms of businesses can substantially differ according to a services sector.

In order to foster the services provision in the EU internal market, there has been adopted a directive 123/2006/EC on services in the internal market (the Services directive). One of the initiatives the Services directive envisages is a creation of Points of Single contacts (PSC). PSC should ensure an access through a single gate to exhaustive information on requirements for service provision applicable in a country. In PSC any service provider should be able to easily complete all procedures and formalities necessary for access to and exercise of his or her activities by electronic means. Despite the fact that the scope of the Services Directive is quite wide (it covers such business activities as tourism, leisure services, business consultancy, construction, gardening, services provided by engineers, accountants, etc.), it explicitly excludes a number of services from its scope (e.g. financial services, electronic communications services, transport services, healthcare services, temporary work agencies' services, private security services, audiovisual services, gambling, social services), as well as services provided by notaries and bailiffs. (European Communities, 2006; European Communities, 2007). According to the requirements of the Services Directive, the single state and municipalities' portal www.latvija.lv serves as a PSC in Latvia. Currently, the Latvian PSC portal fulfils the minimum requirements of the Directive. Nevertheless, it is up to initiative of the EU member states to apply the principle of PSC to a broader range of commercial activities, not only covered by the Services Directive.

The aim of the paper is to provide a development model of the Latvian services sector, which raises an efficiency of the existing business supporting instruments, combining them into a powerful internet solution for starting services activity.

Materials and Methods

For the data analysis official data of the twelve line ministries of the Republic of Latvia (the Ministry of Economics, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of the Environment and Regional Development, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture), the Company Register, and other governmentally supported bodies was used. Latvian and the EU level legal acts related to the commercial activity in the services sector were studied, as well as the draft concepts for electronic solutions planned in particular services sectors analysed. Good practice of the other EU member states regarding the organization of B2G communication was scrutinized as well.

To work out the paper, the author has applied analytical and graphical methods such as a comparative method, factor determination method, specifications method, qualitative analysis and others to process and investigate the available information, as well as applied economic mathematical and statistical methods, quantitative and qualitative methods for statistical data analysis.

Based on the materials published by the State register of information systems of Latvia, state and municipality portal www.latvija.lv, twelve line ministries and the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, the available information necessary for a services provision, as well as administrative procedures, which may be fulfilled electronically was

thoroughly investigated. The accessibility and transparency of the mentioned information were evaluated. As a result of the thorough investigation, a diversified solution with four possible stages of its implementation, requiring different level of financial investments, which may be implemented up to a capacity of the operational state budget was worked out.

The information on existence of similar researches and papers on e-solutions for administrative procedures in public sector in Latvia is not currently available.

Results and Discussions

The Latvian PSC portal provides information on 102 administrative procedures referable to the services activities being in the scope of the Services directive (The State and municipality portal of Latvia, 2011). However, there is still a room for making improvements in the portal. There exist various supporting tools for businesses provided by the line ministries, chambers and agencies, but companies are often not informed about them. Moreover, the single reliable web gate to up-to-date business-related information does not exist in Latvia. Some of the mentioned supporting tools even overlap. The portal www.latvija.lv may serve as PSC not only for purposes of the Services directive, but to ensure access to e-solutions for administrative requirements in other services sectors as well.

The author of the article has performed a research on e-solutions (information systems, data bases, registries, etc.) created or planned to be created inclosefuture by competent authorities in Latvia to simplify administrative procedures and facilitate B2G communication process in a particular sphere of services provision. Table 1 reflects the outcome of the investigation.

Table 1

Information systems and data basis in services sector

Competent authority	Number of services		E-solution does not exist (A+B)	E-solution exists, but is not available from PSC (A+B)	It is planned to connect e-solution with PSC (A+B)	E-solution is available from PSC (A+B)	E-solution does not exist (A+B)
	The Services directive (A)	Exemption from the Services Directive (B)					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	4
Ministry of Defence	2	6	8 (2+6)	0	0	0	8 (2+6)
Ministry of Economics	12	11	17 (6+11)	4 (3+1)	1 (1+0)	1 (1+0)	17 (6+11)
Ministry of Finance	7	21	14 (3+11)	14 (4+10)	0	0	14 (3+11)
Ministry of Interior	4	8	5 (0+5)	7 (4+3)	0	0	5 (0+5)
Ministry of Education and Science	3	2	0	0	5 (3+2)	0	0
Ministry of Culture	1	2	3 (1+2)	0	0	0	3 (1+2)
Ministry of Welfare	3	3	2 (1+1)	1 (0+1)	4 (2+2)	0	2 (1+1)
Ministry of Transport	10	7	8 (6+2)	5 (4+1)	4 (0+4)	0	8 (6+2)
Ministry of Justice	8	1	1 (0+1)	2 (2+0)	7 (7+0)	1 (1+0)	1 (0+1)
Ministry of Environment and Regional Development	9	6	12 (6+6)	3 (3+0)	3 (3+0)	0	12 (6+6)
Ministry of Healthcare	2	13	3 (2+1)	2 (0+2)	12 (0+12)	0	3 (2+1)
Ministry of Agriculture	16	6	1 (1+0)	12 (11+1)	18(12+6)	1 (1+0)	1 (1+0)
Total	77	86	74	50	54	3	74

In table 1 the data is systemised according to the ministries responsible for a certain services sphere. The second and the third column demonstrate the number of services spheres covered by the Services directive (A) or exempted from the scope of the Directive (B). Consequently, the columns 4-7 reflect the availability of e-solutions for fulfilling administrative procedures in the mentioned services sectors. The fourth column shows the number of the services sectors, where e-solutions still do not exist, the fifth – the number of spheres, where e-solutions are created, but they are currently not available from the Latvian PSC portal, the sixth column shows the spheres, where it is planned to improve an existing e-solution or create a completely new e-solution, connecting it with the PSC portal. Finally, the seventh column demonstrates those services, where access to e-solutions is already ensured from the Latvian PSC (the Ministry of Economics, 2009; The Ministry of Regional Development and Municipalities, 2010, etc.).

Table 1 demonstrates that the Ministry of Defence is the competent institution for 2 services being in the scope of the Services directive and 6 services, which are out of the scope. E-solutions for the services activities being in the competence of the ministry of Defence (the Ministry of Economics, 2009ª; The Ministry of Regional Development and Municipalities, 2010, etc.) are not created and planned in the closest future.

The Ministry of Economics is the competent institution for 12 services being in the scope of the Services directive and 11 other services spheres. An electronic supporting tool is not provided to 17 of the services (6 services of the Services directive and 11 the other services); there exist e-solutions for 4 services (including 3 services referred to the Directive), but they are not available from www.latvia.lv. It is planned to create an e-solution to one service being in the scope of the Services directive. However, currently the PSC portal ensures access to an e-solution for a single service, which is in the scope of the Services Directive (the Ministry of Economics, 2009ª; The Ministry of Regional Development and Municipalities, 2010, etc.). In the same vein, in Table 1the other line ministries of Latvia are characterised as well.

According to the survey, at the moment, 42% of all the services spheres having administrative requirements stated in the Latvian legal acts are not supported by electronic solution (the Ministry of Economics, 2009; The State register of information systems of Latvia, 2011, etc.). The Ministry of Education and Science, followed by the Ministry of Agriculture has the best track record.

The services spheres where e-solutions exist could not be accessed through the PSC portal and make 18% of all the regulated services spheres in Latvia (the Ministry of Economics, 2009; The State register of information systems of Latvia, 2011, etc.). The weakest position regarding to the accessibility of the existing e-solutions with a help of the PSC portal has the ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Interior. For those services spheres no modifications in the closest future are planned. The Ministry of Economics, the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Environment and Regional Development plan to further develop the existing solutions of the services spheres of their responsibility; however, the number of the planned improvements is considerably lower than the number of the existing e-solutions, which are not connected with the PSC. At the same time, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Healthcare and the Ministry of Agriculture are to ensure e-solutions to all (or almost all) services of their competence after the planned modernization. Currently, the services spheres waiting for an upgrade of their e-solutions make 36% of all the regulated services spheres in Latvia (the Ministry of Economics, 2009a; The State register of information systems of Latvia, 2011, etc.).

As a result of the performed investigation on the existing situation concerning the electronic supporting instruments for B2G communication, the author has concluded, that

in order to foster the development of the Latvian services sector, it is necessary to realize successfully the following tasks:

1. To elaborate new e-solutions to the services spheres, where the administrative e-support is currently not available;
2. To ensure an access to all the existing e-solutions from the PSC portal;
3. To ensure that the e-solutions, which are to be created in the closest future, are connected to the PSC;
4. To provide in the PSC portal the information on services spheres, where a specific regulation does not exist.

1. Elaboration of new e-solutions from scratch.

One of the best encouragements for business is the creation of e-solutions for the administrative procedures in all the legally regulated services spheres. According to the survey performed by the author, the costs of elaboration of one e-solution for an administrative B2G procedure are approximately 331 thousand EUR. For the creation of e-solutions in the governmental sector, financial support of 85% from the European Regional Development Fund ((The Ministry of Economics, 2009b; the Ministry of Finance, 2007) may also be attracted. The necessary financing from the Latvian national budget in that case is 15% or 50 thousand EUR for each e-solution. As it is shown in Table 1, currently, the number of the service spheres without any e-solution is 74. Consequently, the costs for ensuring the services sectors with e-support are as follows:

Total costs = 331 * 74 = 24,494 thousand EUR
Financing from the state budget = 50 * 74 = 3,700 thousand EUR

Unfortunately, in the conditions of the economic slowdown the allocation of such a considerable sum (3,700 thousand EUR) to the purposes of entrepreneurial facilitation in Latvia may be problematic. Therewith, other - lower cost solutions should also be considered. At the same time, to the services spheres, where an e-solution does not exist, an Estonian experience, when the PSC portal provides just a road map with instructions where a certain administrative procedure may be fulfilled and where to search for a more detailed information might be applied (The state portal of Estonia, 2011).

2. Accessibility of existing e-solutions through the PSC portal

To raise the effectiveness of the existing e-solutions created to simplify administrative procedures in services sectors, it is necessary to make those e-solutions easily accessible through the single state portal (PSC). As it is demonstrated in Table 1, in Latvia there are currently available 50 information systems and electronic data bases, which are not connected to the PSC. There exist two alternative approaches for making the mentioned e-solutions available from the PSC.

The first approach, which is a simpler solution, considers placing a link to a corresponding Internet resource (information system or e-data base) in the PSC, where a description of an administrative procedure is

currently provided. With a help of the link a user of the PSC is to be brought to the web page of a responsible governmental institution, where an e-solution could be activated. The approach does not require huge financial investments and may be even realized within the internal budget of the Ministry of Environment and Regional Development. However, the drawback of the approach is that the web pages of institutions are not harmonized and the corresponding information may be difficult to understand by an entrepreneur, who searches for the information. The user of the portal will be not able to fulfil all the administrative procedures in a single place.

The second approach considers ensuring an access to administrative e-solutions directly from the PSC portal without any moving to external Internet resources. In this case, the existing infrastructure of the PSC could be used. The PSC portal provides the authentication possibility with a help of e-signature and the electronic authentication tools of the Latvian commercial banks (Internet banking). After the authentication, a user directly accesses the personalized web page of a corresponding e-procedure, fulfils the procedure and gets the necessary reply in the PSC.

According to the investigation, the rough costs for adjusting of the PSC portal to the second approach solution could take about 36 thousand EUR for each e-solution (The Ministry of Economics, 2009b).

Financial support of 85% from the European Regional Development Fund (the Ministry of Finance, 2007) may also be attracted. Consequently, the necessary financing from the Latvian budget for the above described initiative is 15% or 5.4 thousand EUR for each e-solution. The total financing for all the 50 e-solutions, which are currently not available from the PSC portal is:

Total costs = 50 services * 36 = 1,800 thousand EUR
Financing from the state budget = 50 services * 5.4 = 270 thousand EUR

In regard with the economic downturn of Latvia, it is necessary to evaluate the possibility to integrate the existing e-solutions into the PSC portal when working out the operating state budget. There is also a possibility to gradually realize the described above approaches. The first implementation stage may consist of placing the links to the responsible institutions' external web resources on the PSC. However, the second stage, which could be implemented later, should ensure the direct accessibility to the e-solutions through the single PSC portal.

3. The accessibility of new e-solutions from the PSC portal

It is highly important to ensure the availability of the newly created administrative e-solutions from the PSC portal. In 2010 Latvian government adopted 65 priority projects, which aim to launch or develop e-governance solutions and information systems in different spheres of economy (The Ministry of Regional Development and Municipalities, 2010). As a result of an analysis of the priority projects, 17 projects to facilitate the development of the services sector, particularly if the created e-solutions are connected to the PSC portal (e.g., the Construction

Information System, the Client-oriented Information System of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Subordinated Institutions, the State Environment Agency Information System, etc.) were indicated.

As the decision on creation of e-solutions has been already approved, the key task of the PSC is just to ensure an access to the e-solutions requiring comparatively low costs. There will be no need to particularly adjust the e-solutions to the infrastructure of the PSC, as it could be duly done during the e-solution creation process.

The costs of adjusting an e-solution to the PSC infrastructure are 28.2 thousand EUR on average (The Ministry of Economics, 2009b). As in the previous cases, it is possible to attract the 85% financing from the European Regional Development Fund (the Ministry of Finances, 2007). Consequently, the total costs for integration of the newly created administrative e-solutions into the PSC are 338.4 thousand EUR, including the state budget financing 50.8 thousand EUR:

Total costs = 12 services * 28.2 = 338.4 thousand EUR
Financing from the state budget = 12 services * 4.23 = 50.8 thousand EUR

Despite the fact, that the European Fund requires co-financing from the state budget, even in the situation of budget deficit, the integration of the e-solutions into PSC shall be considered as priority, as there is a considerable potential for a positive feedback in the state economy.

4. Availability of information on services spheres, where a specific regulation does not exist.

Currently, the PSC portal provides information only on services, which have a particular regulation in Latvian legal acts. However, in order to provide services having no particular legal requirements (hairdresser, business consultancy, etc.), it is necessary to meet general business requirements – to register in the Company Register, in the State Revenue Service, etc. Wherewith, the PSC search function shall be expanded – in case a PSC user searches for the legal requirements in a services sphere without any specific requirements, he or she gets information just on horizontal business requirements. An access from the PSC to the respective information systems, data bases and other e-solutions should also be ensured. Based on the study of the Ministry of Justice on the most important businesses horizontal public services (the Ministry of Justice, 2010), the author concluded, that the PSC shall provide access to at least following administrative e-services:

- Information system of the Company Register;
- Single Municipality Information System;
- Public Procurement Electronic System;
- Information System of State Labour Inspection;
- Information System on Registration of Unemployed and Vacancies;
- Information System on Taxes;
- Financial Statistics Information System;
- Information System of Central Statistical Bureau.

All the horizontal e-solutions, excluding already existing Information System on Taxes, Financial Statistics Information System and Information System of Central

Statistical Bureau are to be created in the closest future.

The stated above task may be solved by the two approaches. The low-cost approach considers placing links for the external internet resources of the mentioned e-solutions to the PSC, and it may be realized within the budget of the responsible institution.

The second approach requires financial investments. As it was already mentioned, the costs for adjusting existing e-solutions to the infrastructure of the PSC are 42.3 thousand EUR per e-solution. The costs for adjusting a newly created e-service to the PSC are 28.2 thousand EUR. The necessary costs for the realization of the project are:

Total costs = 5 services * 28.2 + 3 services * 42.3 = 140.8 + 126.8 = 267.6 thousand EUR
The financing from the state budget = 5 services * 4.2 + 3 services * 6.3 = 21 + 19.0 = 40.1 thousand EUR

The total costs for the implementation of the second approach are 267.6 EUR, including 40.1 EUR financing from the state budget. Consolidating all the information on the described above tasks and the possible solutions for their implementations, the Latvian Services sector development model was created (see Fig.1).
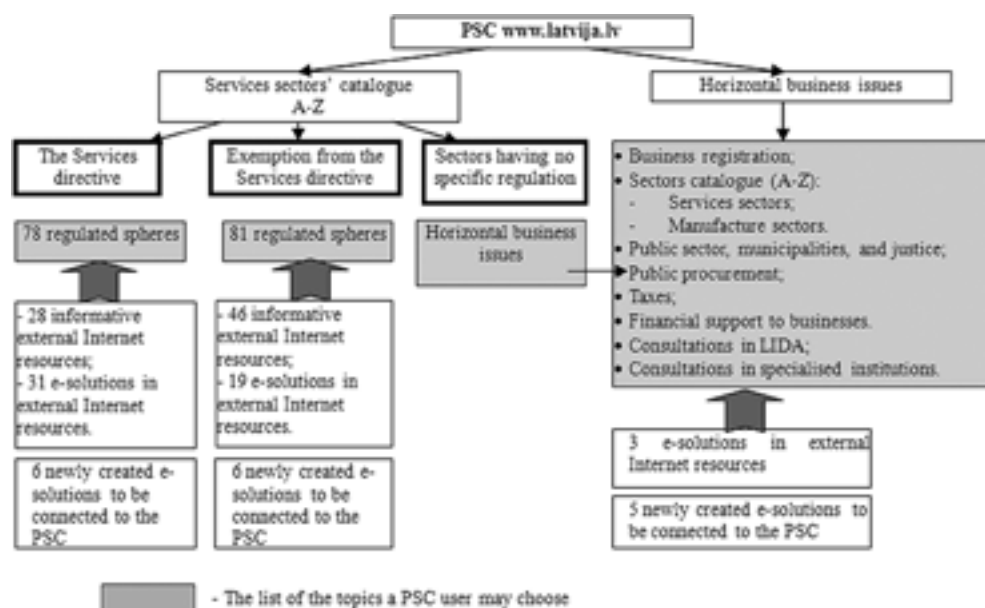

Figure 1. Latvian services sector development model.

The model proposes to modernize the PSC portal, elevating the efficiency of the B2G communication. Fig.1 demonstrates that according to the model, in the portal www.latvija.lv the PSC user can choose either to search for data referring to the services spheres (A-Z) or go on with the horizontal business-related issues. The grey background in figure 1 specifies the topics a PSC user may choose to receive the desirable information. The highlighted titles are connected with the existing e-solutions and other informative resources, which are provided by external internet channels, or integrated into the PSC infrastructure (depending on the available financial resources).

The data bases mentioned in Fig.1, information systems and other e-solutions aim to facilitate the entrepreneurial activity in Latvia. However, the integration of the e-solutions and informative resources into the single portal (PSC) will gain the synergy effect, considerably pushing the effectiveness of each particular e-resource up.

Table 2 provides the cost overview for the referred above tasks of the Latvian services sector development model. As it is demonstrated in the table 1, the minimum plan (low cost) considers ensuring the availability of e-resources from the PSC only within the internal budget of the Ministry of Environment and Regional Development. At the same time, the ideal solution, which is the high-cost solution, requires investments of 26,822.4 thousand EUR, including national financing from the state budget of 4,049.3 thousand EUR.

Table 2

Implementation costs of the Latvian services sector development model

The tasks of the Services sector development model	Minimum cost solution		Ideal solution (high-cost solution)	
	Total costs, EUR	Financing from state budget, EUR	Total costs, thousand EUR	Financing from state budget, thousand EUR
1. Elaboration of new e-solutions to the servicespheres, where the administrative e-support is currently not available	0	0	24,494	3,700
2. Ensuring an access to existing e-solutions from the PSC portal	0	0	1,800	270
3. Connecting to the PSC portal the new e-solutions, which are to be created in the closest future	0	0	338.4	50.8
4. Ensuring in the PSC portal information on service spheres, where a specific regulation does not exist	0	0	267.6 (140.8 + 126.8)	40.1 (21 + 19)
Total:	0	0	26,822.4	4,049.3

Taking into account the fact that in the closest future referring to the budget deficit the allocation of such a considerable sum (4,049.3 thousand EUR) for improvement of business environment could be hardly accepted by the government, the author also proposes a compromise solution. The compromise solution is highlighted with a grey background in table 2.

The compromise solution proposes to assign financial resources for integration of the newly created e-solutions into the PSC. The availability of all the other e-resources should be ensured by placing to the PSC the corresponding links to external internet resources. The implementation of all four tasks of the services sector development model is to be postponed and considered when working out the operating state budget.

The total costs of the compromise solution = 338.4 + 140.8 EUR = 478.8 thousand EUR
The compromise solution's financing from the state budget = 50.8 + 21= 71.8 thousand EUR

The calculations show, that the necessary for the implementation of the compromise solution financing from the national state budget is 71.8 thousand EUR.

Moreover, promoting a single web portal is a more cost effective initiative in comparison with popularization of several thematic portals. For example, it is planned that the number of users of the Company Register's Informative System will be approximately 800 per day (it is equal with the number of daily information requests in the Company Register) (the Ministry of Justice, 2010). So, the clients of the Company Register, as well as other informative systems and data bases will automatically become clients of the PSC portal. Consequently, ensuring the centralized access to all the informative e-resources and e-solutions in Latvia, as well as launching an appropriate promotion campaign, there will be considerably improved accessibility of information and, therewith, the business environment in the services sector of Latvia. At the same time, if the centralized access to all the existing governmental e-resources is not ensured, there is a risk, that the recognition of various thematic web portals will be rather low. As a result, the number of the clients of the mentioned portals will be also lower, than the number of interested persons.

Conclusions

In her research the author concluded that there is a high necessity for a centralized gate to in-depth business-related information, which ensures step-by-step instruction on all the existing administrative requirements necessary for a services activity, as well as provides a possibility to fulfil the existing formalities electronically. Currently, there are several public information systems in Latvia, which are not interconnected and have low popularity in society available. The Latvian state portal www.latvija.lv has a great possibility for becoming the best facilitator for business activity in Latvia. Based on analysis of the situation with e-governance, the author elaborated the solution on integration of existing and potential informative systems and data bases into the PSC. One of the advantages of the solution is the flexible nature – an appropriate modification of the solution may be accepted up to available financial resources.

The low-cost compromise solution proposed by the author, suggests assigning the financial resources for integration of the newly created e-solutions into the PSC. The centralized availability of all the other e-resources should be ensured by placing to the PSC the corresponding links to external internet resources. The necessary investments for the realization of the compromise solution are 478.8 thousand EUR (or 71.8 thousand EUR from the state budget).

The implementation of all the four tasks of the proposed by the author services sector development model (elaborating new e-solutions to the services spheres, where

the administrative e-support is currently not available; ensuring an access to all the existing e-solutions from the PSC portal; ensuring that the e-solutions, which are to be created in the closest future, are connected to the PSC; providing in the PSC portal the information on services spheres, where a specific regulation does not exist) requires total investments of 26,822.4 thousand EUR (or 4,049.3 thousand EUR from the state budget). Due to the financial complications in Latvia, the author considers that the full implementation of the services sector development model is to be postponed and considered when working out the operating state budget.

The implementation of the presented services sector development model will considerably improve the business environment in the services sector, fostering the development of the state economy.

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