Story of e-Estonia

What was the basis for Estonia's success story as an information society? How big a role did the Soviet Union play in this development?

First of all, it was mutual trust. For citizens to trust the state with all their information and for the state to demonstrate that daily affairs can be conducted more securely through digital channels than on paper. e-Governance as we know it in Estonia is still impossible in many European countries for legislative reasons, while Estonians are saving time and money thanks to e-Governance.

Estonians have always been inventive by nature. We focus on solutions rather than obstacles and we find ways not only to survive as a small country, but to be successful.

Our colourful history certainly plays a role in the e-Estonia success story. After restoring our independence, we had to build the state from zero very quickly and with very limited resources. Traditional solutions were just not thinkable in Estonia. We had to manage much faster and more efficiently. We saw a solution in the digitalisation of processes and since then, we have continued to progress alongside technological advances.

Estonia's e-success story really gained momentum in 1996 with the launch of the national Tiger Leap project that aimed at providing the internet to every school. This ambitious project was such a success that Estonia's overall digital development is still referred to as a Tiger's Leap.

What were the main preconditions for building e–Estonia?

Estonia's e-Governance rests on three pillars: legislation, the ICT sector's capability to implement the government's vision, and the trust of citizens in e-solutions.

Digital Estonia is possible due to an advanced technological foundation — affordable internet connection everywhere, X-Road for the secure interconnection of national databases, and digital identity enabling digital signatures.

In Estonia great emphasis is placed on developing the digital skills of its inhabitants — programming, robotics and modern technologies are taught even in kindergartens. The unique backbone of Estonia's e-governance is X-Road, which makes secure information exchange between databases possible and allows citizens to perform various operations quickly and easily.

Success stories grow and so does the number of users. Practically all operations involving the government are available digitally — medical prescriptions are issued digitally and only a fraction of all tax returns are filed on paper. As such solutions make people's lives easier, people in Estonia are eager to use e-solutions.

What is X–Road?

X-Road is a communication protocol allowing the secure and automatic cross-use of data between information systems.

How actively are people using the various e-Governance solutions in Estonia?

- 70% of Estonians use the ID-card regularly.

- During 2019 European Parliament elections, 46.7% of Estonians voted online.

- Over 1 billion digital signatures, which are equivalent to handwritten signatures, have been given in Estonia over the past two decades.
- Over 1.3 billion inquiries are made using X-Road annually.

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Do all people in Estonia have internet access?

Most people on Estonia can have access to the internet.

- Percentage of households with computers 87%
- Percentage of people using the internet regularly 91.6%
- Broadband coverage over 30mbps 90%

Is (free) WiFi available everywhere in Estonia?

WiFi is available free in many towns and cities, but not in remote areas. However, fast internet connection is available across most of the country owing to the good coverage of 3G and 4G networks, often to the pleasant surprise of our foreign guests.

Estonia also supports the rapid development of a 5G internet connection across the European Union.

Which ratings confirm the success story of Estonia's information society?

- Estonia ranks 2nd in Internet freedom (Freedom House 2019)

- It holds 1st place in in Digital health index (Bertelsmann Foundation 2019)

- Index Venture (2018) rated Estonia as 1st in the start-up friendliness category.

- In the Global Cybersecurity Index (ITU 2018) Estonia holds 5th place.

When was Estonia's first public e-service launched and what was it?

The Tax and Customs Board was the first state agency to launch e-services in Estonia in 2000. The first e-service made it possible for legal persons to submit digital declarations on their sales, income and social taxes, mandatory funded pension contributions and unemployment insurance premiums, submit VAT refund and transfer requests and view balances.

The Tax and Customs Board implemented e-services to save costs and improve the efficiency of public services while simplifying business affairs for customers. Another goal was to meet customer expectations, as the successful development of internet banking had led to a demand for public sector e-services.