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Households' service needs and use of services**Abstract**

This study is part of a wider project *Services in the Information Society*, which combines the experiences and views of households, entrepreneurs and municipal decision-makers regarding the current state of services and needs for their development.

The aim of this study is to investigate the use of services, problems in their use, related wishes and development needs, and capacity to use electronic services, specifically from the perspective of households. Services are examined from the standpoint of families with children and of elderly people (over 64 years old). The reference group is households of working-age adults without children. The study was carried out in three areas which differed as to their location, infrastructure, population structure and regional structure. The study data were collected by a mail questionnaire 2001.

The division by life cycle stages proved functional and revealed distinct differences in service needs, service use and satisfaction with services between the groups. Respondents in all the municipalities had felt a weakening in the supply of banking, mail and transport services in particular. Services related to grocery retailing, children's day care, training and education, and leisure had at the same time diversified somewhat, though least in the rural areas. Families with children used a larger variety of services and used them more frequently than other households. As car owners they can, and have to, move around in a wider geographical area. The adult households in the reference group were more similar in their operations to households with children than the elderly group.

The type of residential area was found to be more decisive than the type of municipality in view of everyday household operations. Households living in a municipal centre are in a totally different position as to service availability than those in the outskirts of the same municipality, which may have a more functional and natural connection to the neighbouring municipality than their own municipal centre. The supply of services should be designed to meet local needs, and natural regional co-operation could be the most efficient way of ensuring sufficient services to all.

Aged people appear to be most bound to the area and municipality they live in, and more satisfied than others with even a low service level. They were, however, concerned about the future changes in living caused by a lowering functional capacity. Service availability and related problems had a direct influence on the migration intentions of families with children and of adult households.

Families with children were best equipped to use Internet services. The elderly had poorer hardware and network connections, capabilities and motivation than other households. Motivation grows with learning. An almost unanimous view among respondents was that network services cannot replace personal service. Appointment and ordering services, educational and library services and services related to time schedules, choice of travel routes and travel planning, were generally deemed as the most useful online services. However, a citizens' electronic service society is still a long way off. It calls for willingness and financial investment from households, in return for which they must get real benefits.

Keywords

Services, public services, network services, families with children, elderly people, migration

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