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HOW TO HELP KOUVOLA CITIZENS TO FIND COMMUNAL SERVICES VIA WEB?

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Kuinka auttaa kouvolalaisia löytämään kunnallisia palveluja verkossa.	76 sivua 2 liitesivua

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Tiivistelmä
Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli auttaa Kouvolan asukkaita löytämään paremmin verkosta kaupungin tarjoamia hyvinvointipalveluja sekä pohtia kuinka sähköinen sovellus tukisi kuntalaisten pääsyä palvelujen pariin. Palveluja tarkasteltiin löydettävyyden ja käytettävyyden näkökulmasta web-ympäristössä.

Tutkimus on laadullinen tutkimus- ja kehittämistyö Kouvolan kaupungin hyvinvointipalvelujen toimialalle. Siinä käytetyt aineistonhankkimismenetelmät olivat web-kysely ja haastattelut, joiden avulla selvitettiin online-sovelluksen hyödyntämistä palvelujen löydettävyydessä sekä asiakasohjauksessa sekä benchmarking-vertailu, jossa tarkasteltiin, kuinka palvelut ovat löydettävissä ja käytettävissä julkisilla, hyvinvointipalveluja tarjoavilla web-sivustoilla ja -alustoilla.

Kuntien resurssien vähetessä yhä enemmän huomiota on kiinnitettävä asiakkaiden ohjaamiseen palvelujen pariin web-ympäristössä. Digitaalisten palvelujen ja erilaisten sovellusten ja alustojen nopea lisääntyminen johtaa helposti palveluviidakkoon, jossa kuntalainen on ymmällään. Palveluntarjoajia on monella suunnalla, eri palveluihin tulee kirjautua, mutta alustoilla palveluja voi olla vain muutamia. On vaara, että digitaaliset palvelut kääntyvät itseään vastaan eivätkä tarjoa asiakkaille tarpeeksi lisäarvoa tai niistä tulee niin hankalia käyttää, että ne karkottavat asiakkaat. Tulevaisuudessa ei-kaupallisten palveluntarjoajien tulee tehdä tiiviimmin yhteistyötä ja luoda web-ekosysteemejä, joissa eri toimijoiden palvelut tukevat toisiaan ja tarjoavat asiakkaalle palvelua ennaltaehkäisystä korjaaviin palveluihin. Näin toteutuisivat myös valtionhallinnon julkisille organisaatiolle asettamat tavoitteet kokonaisvaltaisen asiakkuuden osalta.

Kuntalaisten digitaaliset valmiudet ovat korkealla tasolla yhä yleistyvien mobiililaitteiden ansiosta. Kouvolan kaupungin tulisi modernisoida nykyisiä sähköisiä palvelujaan, parantaa palvelujensa löydettävyyttä web-sivuillaan sekä ottaa käyttöönsä joustavia digitaalisia sovelluksia, jotka ohjaavat kuntalaisia palvelujen pariin. Kaupungin tulisi luoda digitaalinen strategia, jossa huomioidaan henkilöstön osaaminen, järjestelmien integrointi, modernit alustat ja sovellukset sekä asiakkaiden tarpeet. Asiakkaan ohjausta palvelujen pariin web-ympäristössä on parannettava ja asiakkaan polkua on tarkasteltava jo ennen palvelun käytön aloittamista. Tutkimuksessa esitellään näkemys kaupungin digitaalisesta tulevaisuudesta sekä ehdotus Kouvolan web-ekosysteemiksi, jossa kuntalainen voi itse kerätä haluamiaan palveluja eri palveluntuottajilta.

Asiasanat
kunnalliset palvelut, digitaaliset palvelut, web-ympäristö, web-ekosysteemi, Kouvolan kaupunki, hyvinvointipalvelut

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Abstract

The object of this research work is to help the Kouvola citizens to find communal welfare services easier via web and to consider how an online application could support customer counselling. The focus of the study is in accessibility and usability of the services offered via web.

This research is a qualitative research-based development work for Kouvola City Welfare Services. The data acquisition methods were online survey and interviews to improve customer counselling, and benchmarking to obtain information of the existing web services and best practices in the field.

As the resources in the public sector are decreasing, more attention should be paid to customer counselling in the web environment. The rapid development and increasing of the digital services, platforms and applications may lead to a digital jungle, where the citizen gets easily lost. In the worst case the digital services will not offer enough value to the customer – if it is too difficult to use the digital service, the citizens will choose another way to get the service they need.

In the future, the municipalities, the third sector and non-commercial organizations need to co-operate closely and create web ecosystems, which will provide the citizens comprehensive services from prevention to actual cure. This would also implement the governmental guidelines on producing better and customer oriented services.

The digital skills of the citizens are at a high level due to an expanding use of mobile devices. Kouvola City should provide modern digital services, improve the accessibility of the services via web and introduce flexible digital applications which would help customer counselling. A digital strategy should be created for the City. Attention should be paid to the level of the skills of the personnel, integration of the information system, modern platforms and applications and the customer needs.

The customer counselling in the web environment needs improvement and the customer journey should be considered before using the actual service. This research presents a vision for the digital future and the web ecosystem of Kouvola City, where a customer can create his/her own selection of the services regardless of the provider of the service.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Case company

Kouvola City is a town with some 86 000 inhabitants located in the Southeast of Finland. A municipal merger was carried out in 2009, combining the municipalities of Anjalankoski, Elimäki, Jaala, Kuusankoski, Valkeala and Kouvola as a new City of Kouvola.

Since the merger, the Kouvola City's organization has been renewed three times. The latest organisation structure took place as of 1st January 2015. It consists of three division: Technical and environmental services, Wellfare services and Group services (Figure 1).
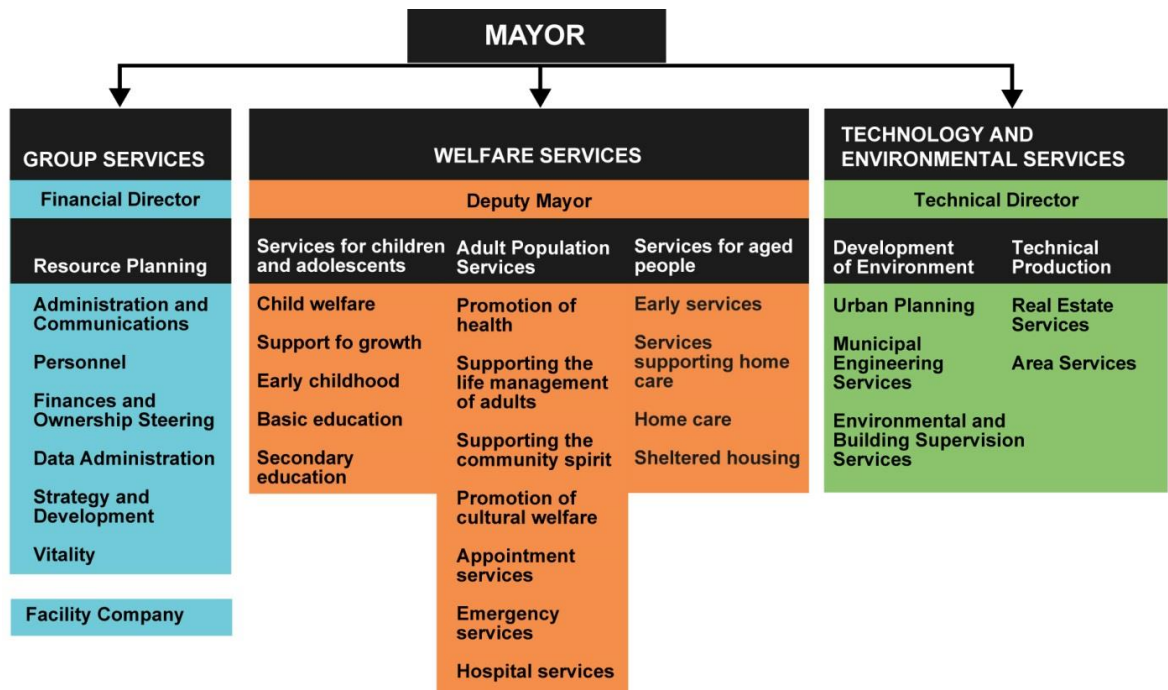

Figure 1. The Kouvola City organisation consists of three division: Technical and environmental services, Welfare services and Group services. (Kouvola City, 2015)

Kouvola Welfare services division was established in 2013 by merging former Social services and Health Care and Education and Culture divisions to a one,

big division. At the same time new process organization based on the lifecycle of the people took place. The organisation was formed into three chains: Children and Youth, Adults and Elderly people. It was a big change from traditional sector based organisation to a process organization. The vision for the new division was to develop communality, emphasize the customer and to move on to a new culture: customer oriented way of working and developing services accordingly. The two main goals for Kouvola Welfare Services are to serve customer better and to increase communality within the new city. The customer should get services "under one roof" i.e. customer should get the service at once.

For example, in the social and health care sector the future trend is towards integrated welfare. The forthcoming Ratamo Wellfare Centre is the biggest development project in the Kouvola City aiming to integrate social and health care functions under one roof. It will be more than a hospital, a centre providing basic health care, special health care and social services to the Kouvola citizens.

The structural change into process organization and establishing a new division, were the first steps in a long development process for the Kouvola Welfare Services. Right after the change, the interruption came on the way: the poor economic situation led to the employee co-operation negotiations within the Kouvola City aiming to reduce the number of personnel. This this demanded many resources of the managerial level, and took power from the development work aiming to customer oriented working culture and change management.

Despite of the delay, the first two and a half years have made a big change by breaking old borders of different sectors and units. New services and concepts have been developed across the old sector borders, and the development continues. But there is still much to do in order to have a cultural change in the working environment towards customer friendly and dialogical, life learning organisation.

That is why, a project ASKEL (Asiakas keskiöön laadukkaasti meaning focus on the customer and quality) has started in January 2015. The aim of the project is to gain efficiency and produce services with lower costs by understanding customer needs better, segmenting the customers and creating a new dialogical working culture. The customer need leads the production of services, rather than the existing resources. One big aim is to unite the working culture and improve the impact of the services. (ASKEL presentation, 2015.)

Figure 2. The project ASKEL concentrates on customer and building a customer oriented working culture. (Kouvola Welfare Services, 2015)

The four main goals of the ASKEL-projects are to focus on the customer, provide flexible services in right the time, unite the working culture, and to improve the efficiency and impact of the services (Figure 2).

Even though it is some five years since the municipal merger took place in Kouvola, the atmosphere and the identity of the new Kouvola is not united. The old borders of the old municipalities are very much alive – at least in people's minds and especially in the local politics. There is a strong

confrontation between the different areas in town. After five years of "village politics" the atmosphere is bit by bit mature for a chance. Editorials and opinion writings in the local newspapers as well as political speeches have started to call for more positive attitude towards the Kouvola City.

I work in Kouvola City Communications Department. My responsibility is the communications for the Welfare Division. I'm also a member of our communications team, web communications team, Ratamo project's communications team, ASKEL project team and the divisional strategic management team.

My responsibilities include internal and external communications, service marketing, web communications and publications. During the past decade digitalization has had a strong effect on the communications field. For example the importance of the websites has increased, social media has brought new communications channels, intranet is today one of the most important channels for internal communications and a variety of digital applications offer new ways for marketing. Somehow it feels that the possibilities of web and digitalization has not fully understood in Kouvola City's organization. For example the web pages of the city are considered to be "communications department's business". Therefore I wanted to study the possibilities of digitalization from the service point of view.

At first, I wanted somehow increase communality and improve the image of Kouvola Welfare services according to our divisional goal. I found it very annoying, that there were several new services under development, but those never gained any publicity. At the same time the tone in the local media and public discussion going on both in printed paper and the digital web site of the main newspaper, was negative and diminishing towards the Kouvola City. I started to wonder about solutions to create City's own channel or blog to broadcast our news, our side of the story.

1.1.1 Challenging environment

All municipalities have been facing enormous economic challenges during the past decade. The need for social and health care services is increasing as the

population is ageing. Fulfilling the customer needs with good quality and increasing the effectiveness and impact of the welfare services, is crucial in order to solve the problem of sustainability in local government finances as well as general government finances (The Ministry of Finance, 2015).

Many legislation renewals have increased the municipalities' responsibilities despite the opposite efforts. There is a lot of pressure in the future: quality as well as effectiveness and cost awareness demands increases, public services should be produced efficiently and more client friendly and those should have better impact on the well-being. Private companies and the third sector offer more and more services alongside with the municipalities. In Kouvola, the population structure is even more elderly emphasized than on average in Finland.

The ageing of the population will increase the need of public services. Due to the renewal of local government legislation and changes in municipal and service structures, the administration of the local government is facing a big change, too. There is a need for new competences which will support the new group structures, organisational frameworks and new solutions for service production in the future. (Sivonen & Pouru, 2014, 8.)

One of the biggest renewals in the history in Finland is the reform of social welfare and health care services. The reform will totally change the way those services will be arranged and produced in the future. The aim of the social welfare and health care service reform is to ensure equal access to social welfare and health care services in all parts of the country, and to manage costs of it. The focus is on effective service chains and improving the functioning of basic services (The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2015).

If the renewal is implemented as planned, it means, that some 200 000 of the personnel working in the sector in Finland, will be transferred to work in new, autonomous areas that are larger than a municipality. And it is not only the employees, but also about facilities, real estates, equipment etc. The change is enormous in the national level.

1.2 Research and Development Problem

The origin of my research idea was to find ways how to achieve divisional goals by improving the communications via web within the Welfare Services and thus help the Kouvola citizens to find the service they need easier.

At the same time the communications team continuously heard that people do not find the information they are searching for on the Kouvola web pages. Also the results of the customer satisfaction surveys showed, that the citizens do not find the services they need. I got interested in improving our web pages from the service point of view. Further on, while studying the subject, I got interested in how web environment could support the customer counselling (or case management i.e. how customers are guided and consulted in order to get the service they need) and how customers could find the services they need easier via web.

I approached the issue from the communications point of view. I got an idea of citizens own channel, which would be more than a normal web page. There would be one's personal preferences and choices as well as the e-services the city offers. In the future, the channel could provide even more: personal applications of the health care sector, for example appointment bookings, laboratory results etc. Even still, I was wondering whether that was enough for the citizens to use the channel. What would make them use the site, especially if the advanced, future applications for health care, are not yet available.

Case management i.e. service counselling and how customers will find the services they need, will become extremely important in the future. The municipalities cannot afford to offer over scaled services or services that will not full fill the customer need. The focus is already in "one-stop-shop" and low-threshold services, in order to allocate resources better and to decrease the use of the most expensive special treatment. In the public sector, a regular customer means a high cost – the less encountering the more beneficial it is for a municipality.

In our innovative workshop of the development project ASKEL (16 February 2015), I presented an idea of developing a chat service connected to Kouvola City web pages. The aim was to find simple ideas, which would lead to quick results and quick benefits. Some of the presented ideas in the workshop were chosen as development projects. I was elected to lead the online project. As a result I carried out a development project regarding how a chat application could help the visitors of Kouvola web site. While investigating the subject and discussing with our customer managers, I developed the idea further. I started to think, that maybe a low-threshold service counselling would be a better solution in order to avoid chat service to become a general help desk for web page navigation. That would also implement the divisional strategy of "one-stop-shop" i.e. the customer is not directed from one point to another.

During the research process I had an opportunity to attend two brainstorming meetings Ratamo-perhekeskus workshop (15 April 2015) and brainstorming with The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and parents (30 September) 2014, where also customers were present. The discussions and the feedback from these meetings were fruitful and opened up the needs of the parents with small children. For them it seemed to be essential to find information easily at one place on the web.

That gave me the idea of a channel that provides much more information than Kouvola City web pages alone offers. It could include services of the third sector, national services and citizens' own applications and choices as well. It should attract people to visit the site. There should be items interesting enough in order to create the City's own media: it would give the citizens a wider picture of their city and relevant information they need or are interested.

After I apprehended the subject deeper and learned about the current development projects and guidance from the government, I started to consider a larger perspective: the whole digital environment, web pages and e-services should be understood as a larger context. In the future, the municipality is not necessarily the provider if all the services. The citizen often just wants to have the needed service – less important is who actually produces it.

The customers should find the service they need easily and quickly. For this, new solutions and services need to be developed. The internet is an obvious environment as the digital and mobile services increases.

1.2.1 Governmental frame for digital development

The Ministry of Finance in Finland gives guidelines to the ICT-development in both governmental and municipal field. The ministry is funding several programmes aiming to improve the ICT -development in the public sector.

Concentrated supervision aims to savings, better service and the development of the key operations via centralized ICT-services: increasing the public digital services and the opportunities to use the services regardless of time or place. The goal during the ongoing government term, is to develop public digital one-stop-shop applications in order to improve efficiency and productivity in the public sector. (The Ministry of Finance, 2015.)

JulkICT is in charge of the development and coordination of the ICT -services, digital services and the utilization of the information in the public administration. It collaborates the co-operation between the state and the municipalities and helps developing new solutions and applications and ICT security. The municipalities are able to increase the digital services, strengthen their service processes and ICT management. (The Ministry of Finance, 2015.)

In developing the ICT and the digital structure of the municipalities, there are several projects ongoing in Finland. The biggest programmes are the Action Programme on eServices and eDemocracy (SADe) and the National ICT Service Architecture (KaPA), which was created based on the ICT 2015 Committee report "21 polkua Kitkattomaan Suomeen". KaPA is coordinated by the Ministry of Economy and it is aiming to create a functioning digital infrastructure in Finland and increase information transfer between organizations and services. The programme aims to help and support the development of new digital services and their efficiency. (The Ministry of Finance, 2015.)

SADe programme aims at excellent service and efficient administration with the help of digitalization in order to provide convenient services in the public sector with lower costs and more efficiently. The SADe programme consists of seven sub projects: eParticipation Environment, Remote services, Citizen Advice Service, Health and Social Services, Services for enterprises, Services for Housing and Building, and Learners' Online Services (Figure 3). (The Ministry of Finance, 2015.)
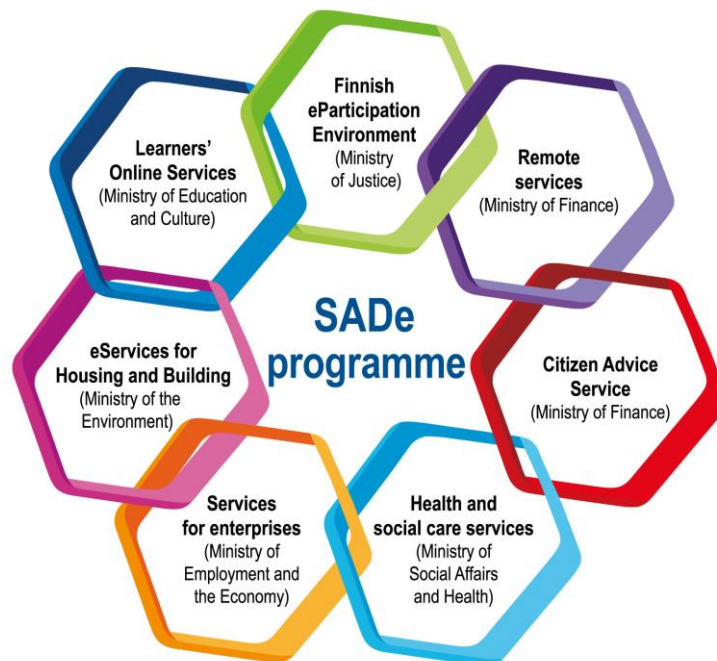
Figure 3. The seven sub projects the SADe programme (The Ministry of Finance, 2015)

1.2.2   Digital services in Kouvola City

According to the online survey regarding the web pages of municipalities, the citizens do not find the information they need on Kouvola web pages, and the contents of the pages is confusing and bureaucratic. The respondents gave score 3,98 (on scale 1-5) for the usefulness of the pages, but only 2,77 for finding information on the pages or 2,96 for the clear structure of the site (OnlineTutkimus Oy 2013).

In Kouvola, like any other municipality in Finland, the reality is a jungle of ICT-solutions. There are dozens and dozens of different digital services offered by

subcontractors. In order to use the service, a registration is needed as many of the services are located in an outside server. So far, this has been an internal problem, i.e. hundreds or thousands of signings per day. It is inevitable that the need for digital services increases in the future where portable computers, tablets and smartphones are available to everyone. As the resources in the public sector decrease while the citizens are more and more able to use e-services, a demand for simple, easy to use digital applications is increasing in the future.

The number of citizens' digital equipment increases as well as the abilities. Different surveys show their willingness to use digital services, if there were any. According to the survey of the usage of web-services within the public sector (Solita Oy 2014) the Finns want to use digital public services in the future. 73% of the respondents between 15-74 years are willing to use public digital services via computer, e-mail, smart phone or tablet.
Kouvola citizens were asked their willingness to use digital services in the health care sector in two surveys via Otakantaa.fi web service in 2014 and 2015. Both surveys show the ability and willingness to use digital services for booking appointments or getting laboratory results via web, for example.

Slow and bureaucratic way of working often prevents new solutions to enter in the public field. Many of the services are restricted by law and they need highly secured registration systems, so it takes time before any new digital services are fully tested and ready to be utilized. Many of the existing information systems were developed years ago and are based on old technology. Those are huge investments and it is not always possible to replace them with the latest technology. There may also be a lack of skills or understanding the possibilities the web offers as well as fear for change in the organization.

New digital services have been taken into use in the education field, library sector and in the health care in Kouvola. All e-services can be found in the platform ekouvola.fi, which can be accessed either directly or via Kouvola City's web pages. At the moment there are approximately dozen of digital services on the platform. New solutions will be taken into use for sure in the

future. For example, the forthcoming Ratamo Wellfare Centre, that combines social and health care services under one roof, will function based on modern and effective ICT-solutions. The pressure also in the health care sector is to provide the services with lower costs and more efficiently. That will mean changes in the service structure, and big expectations in developing digital services.

1.2.3   Usability of the public digital services

According to the survey of usability of the public digital services (Solita Oy, 2014) it is not very common for the Finns to use web services of the public organizations. The Finns are not very familiar with the services available via web, and the need for such services is not daily. Anyhow 73 % of the respondents would like to use public digital services. Even though the respondents think they get enough information on the existing digital services, they most probably cannot figure out the possibilities web could offer also in providing the public services. As the Finns are not able to demand full range of services via web, the public sector itself should develop services towards digitalization and guarantee them to all age groups. As the population is ageing, the systems and digital services need to develop suitable for elderly, too.

1.3   Research Objective and Limitations

The aim of my thesis work is that the citizens/customers are satisfied to the services Kouvola City offers. The objective of the work is to help the citizens/customers to find welfare services easier via web.

The focus of the study is in accessibility and usability of the services offered via web. I will concentrate on the logical level of national digital services and I will leave out the technical solutions for implementation. The main goal of this study is to find solutions and ideas and combine the variety of the alternatives to serve the customers better. I will not study or analyze the contents of the services nor how services are found with the help of marketing activities, even

though some references for marketing appear in the literature review.

1.4 Research and Development Question

My research question is how to help the Kouvola citizens to find services via web? The context of this study is the public sector and the field of municipalities from the Kouvola City point of view. The customer in this study means the citizens of Kouvola City that uses internet and digital services via web. The services and digital services in the study refer to public welfare services. Service accessibility is considered as how easy the service can be found in a public website and the usability is considered to mean how easy it seems to be to the customer to actually use the service.

2   SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

The aim of the service development is to harness the capabilities (know-how and resources) to increase growth and profitability. The key questions are what kind of customers and customer relationships the company is aiming for, what is the product variety and production process and what is the level of specialisation. For the strategic decision, proper information regarding the customer needs, operational environment, trends and competitors is needed. The focus of the service development is to create added value to the customer. Often it is useful to involve customers into the development process to ensure it (Jaakkola, Orava, Varjonen 2009, 3.)

Due to the growing need of services combined with the enormous financial pressure, the Finnish municipalities have to find new solutions for producing services more efficiently. As the resources will not increase in the future, the existing service structure will not be able to fulfill the growing need.

Grönroos (2009, 297) emphasises that all actions aiming to improve effectivity should include understanding the customer experience of good quality as well as how company acts when it provides good quality.

The demand of efficiency combined with the increasing need of services calls for new attitude and new thinking in the public sector. Customer needs will come to centre in the culture, where even considering citizens as a customer is not self-evident. This requires totally new working culture and management. New services need to be developed and differentiated based on the customer needs. A special attention will be paid on customer segmentation and the efficiency of processes. The customers will be more and more involved in developing the services together with the municipalities. The tools for that can be service design and customer panels and workshops or methods aiming to improve the efficiency, for example.

For instance, the Lean method has become a valuable tool to increase efficiency also in the public sector. The main idea of Lean is to maximize customer value while minimizing waste thus create better value to the customer with fewer resources. (Lean Enterprise Institute, 2015.)

Traditionally in the industry, the development is based on resources and the efficiency is a result of repetition and large quantities. With Lean the companies can utilize the resources better and increase the value adding flow which in production means how efficient the flow of the unit is through production. In the service sector the value adding flow is the customer flow through the service. The flow efficiency is the time during which the customer gains value for the time spent at the service. Waiting for service does not add value. (Modig & Åhlström 2013, 9-14.)

In the future, knowing the customer and what they need is becoming more and more important also in the public sector. So far, the services have been produced based on existing resources rather than based on a customer need. The governmental vision in the public sector, is towards customer involvement and developing the services together with the customers. Service design, where customers are involved in the designing new services, has been used in the health care sector, for example.

2.1   Customer and services in focus

The changes in the markets and customer behaviour is faster than companies internal development, because current organisational models, measuring models and management models were developed in the era before internet. (Keskinen & Lipiäinen 2013, 12.)

According to Rintamäki (2014, 13) services are today the driving force of the development, not the last piece of the chain. On the national level the service renewal has been in focus in 2000th century. Both private and public sector will move from production based logic to service dominant logic.

In the service dominant logic, the significance of immaterial resources like knowledge and know-how rises. The competitive edge lies in utilizing these for the clients' advantage. The focus is in customer friendly use-value – a value customer experiences when using the product or service. In service dominant logic the added value is created together with the customer. The customer role changes from passive to active. (Rintamäki 2014, 13-15.)

Vargo and Lusch presented the idea of service dominant logic already ten years ago (2004, 2, 6). They stated that "the marketing had moved from a goods-dominant view to a service-dominant view" where service, relationships and transaction are in focus. In service-centered dominant logic the value is created together with the customer.

According to Grönroos (2009, 297-300) the quality and productivity of service can be increased by improving the employees' skills, attitude, behaviour and inner values, utilizing internet and information technology or by involving customers in two ways: to expand self-service or customers' knowledge. Customers' have to gain value by taking part of the process otherwise experienced quality suffers.

Korkeamäki et al. (2002, 165) also point out the value customer gains in encountering. The value should not lessen when the encountering evolves or decreases. Worth considering is, whether the same value can be provided

with less encountering and actions or producing them more economically. If a customer has a feeling of doing all the work but still paying for the service, it will not have a positive impact on customer satisfaction. Despite of a renewal of the customer process, it has to give customer value.

In the public sector too, the customer will be more in focus than ever before. For example the latest law renewals strongly underline the importance of the customer. This calls for new thinking and new attitude.

In the future, the service is produced for the customer, not for the organisation or supervisor. The customers will be participating in the service planning, and more emphases is on engaging the customer in the service production. Also the importance of the online services will grow. The future competence needs in the public sector are service attitude and service quality, understanding the service system as a whole and one's own role within it, customer participation and engagement in service planning and implementation and utilisation of technology. (Sivonen & Pouru 2014, 52-53.)

Keskinen and Lipiäinen (2013, 20-22) bring customer journey and customer journey management into the discussion. Customer journey means understanding the customer deeper than only the encountering seen from the company viewpoint. The journey consists of several environments, motives, personality, acts and knowledge what each customer are making for their own needs. Customer journey management is aiming to help the customer choose the right and create experiences and benefit and make the journey easier to the client. That gives the customer a reason to choose this company as their partner. The key issues are the understanding the customer and the value the customer gains. A customer viewpoint is essential part of each step of the customer process.

2.2   Ecosystems and symbiosis

Earlier the partnership and networks were seen crucial for beneficial companies (Grönroos, 2009, 58). Later, the potential development areas presented especially for the service sector are partnership and ecosystems.

Service dominant logic does not rely on deliveries or tender the suppliers but partnership networks and ecosystems that enable creating value. (Rintamäki & Tienhaara 2014, 16.)

Keskinen and Lipiäinen (2013, 12, 215, 219) also discusses about the ecosystems which combine the customer need and the companies willingness to serve customers as profitable as possible. They also present the idea of symbiosis and symbiosis strategy. They claim that the most successful organizations build a symbiosis with their clients. That creates an overwhelming competitive edge as the company actions integrate holistically with customer's needs and both benefits. In symbiosis both parties succeed together and create benefits to each other which could not be obtained otherwise. The power of symbiosis strategy is competitiveness that can be reached together with the client by creating the client value that could not be created otherwise.

Many successful examples of symbiosis can be found in the digital field. In internet the power of platforms creating value to customers has been a success story for many operators like Google and Facebook. It is in everyone's interest that these giants succeed except the traditional media. To become as an important platform is not obvious as the field is not new anymore. Creating value together with the users is crucial to these operators. The clients actively take part into producing the contents of the media. (Keskinen & Lipiäinen 2013, 227.)

In the public sector, private companies and the third sector offer more and more services alongside with the municipalities. When the resources decrease the municipalities produce those services that are restricted by law while voluntarily operating organisations concentrate on prevention. Together these would form an ecosystem. A symbiosis could be created with customers but also between the city and the third sector, public organizations or another municipalities or affiliates.

2.3 Service innovations

A service innovation is a new or significantly renewed service which is beneficial to its developers and can be copied to several customers. The added value can be in the benefit the customer gains or the production process. (Jaakkola, Orava, Varjonen, 2009, 4).

Apilo, Taskinen and Vainio (2007, 41) define service innovations as common processes that are systematic and carried out in the company networks. The most successful service innovations are developed together with customers and interest groups. As the service innovations change the structures, procedures and processes, the innovation process should involve and commit as many levels of the organisation as possible.

Apilo, Taskinen and Vainio (2007, 131-34) describes the innovation process as a time zone from idea to innovation. It covers larger entity than traditional product development process and emphases on the front end of innovation process, the stage where the vision of the future development regarding technology, customer needs and the market is created.

In the service business and the service innovations the core thing is creating value to the customers from the viewpoint of using the service; how to utilize the information and knowledge for a customer benefit or how to create value together with the customer. The key is in supporting the customer processes in order to create value to the customer but the company, too. In service innovations a critical factor is the customer. (Mitronen, 2014, 47-48.)

2.4 Conceptualization of services

One stage of the process is conceptualization of the ideas (Apilo, Taskinen and Vainio, 2007, 151). In the public sector conceptualization of services is not very common, though it would help citizens to find services easier. Perttula and Sääskilahti (cited in Apilo, Taskinen and Vainio 2007, 152) divide the product conceptualization in visioning, emerging, defining and solving, but it

can be adapted also to other concepts.

Cross-functional conceptualization means exploiting the cross-functional abilities within the organizations. Conceptualization should be a continuous process utilizing ICT solutions and evolving many parties. Customers should be involved in the process in order to develop concepts based on customer needs. (Apilo, Taskinen and Vainio, 2007, 156-157.)

Productisation, conceptualization or systematization of services increases company's competitiveness trough balancing the demand and quality fluctuations or increasing efficiency and growth. It is aiming to renew and develop service business, increase the value and benefit customer gains and thus increase the profitability. Productisation can help to manage, follow up and sell the service better as the customer realizes the whole service and cost better. It also helps to gather the quiet information from the different levels of organization and increases lifelong learning within it. (Jaakkola, Orava, Varjonen 2009, 5.)

Figure 4. Examples of the service innovations (Jaakkola, Orava, Varjonen 2009).

Figure 4 presents examples of the service innovations: 1) Technology and product innovations (new service processes and structures and utilization of ICT) 2) Customer surface and distribution services (logistic solutions and interaction models like self-service) 3) Networks and value chains 4) Organization based innovations (management and financial structures). (Jaakkola, Orava, Varjonen 2009, 5.)

2.5 Skills and capabilities

The innovation and service development should take place at all the levels of the organization. It is not only a matter of the management. There is also a lot of quiet information within the organization that should be taken into use.

One of the key competence needs of the future is technology competence especially in the sense of solving the customer's problems rather than to find a use for technology. The intellectual assets, innovativeness and management insight should utilize new technology. Also service competence and development and productisation calls for understanding the clients and the use of services in different markets and customer segments. The number of online services is increasing which requires linking. (Sivonen & Pouru 2014, 22-23.)

The working environment also plays an important role in the service development process. Edvardsson et al. (2003, 148) point out the influence of the working environment in the new service design process (NSD). According to them, previous studies have mainly concentrated on the design process itself, the resources or the customer need. The emphasis has been on the customer experience and satisfaction and how the customers experience the quality rather than the work satisfaction of the employees or the circumstances at the working place.

This is quite surprising, because commitment and satisfaction at work have a strong impact on efficiency. Investing in the personnel and the functionality of the working community increases the innovativeness and efficiency. Motivated people are more eager to devote themselves to the company. (Aura et al. 2014, 5.)

Edvardsson et al. (2004, 149) argue, that "the work environment requirements should be integrated in the different phases of NSD" and they suggest a model for the integration management. They simplify their own four-phase-model into three phases: 1) the idea and project formation 2) design 3) implementation and integration.

3   WEB ENVIRONMENT

The development of digital age has been enormously rapid during the past decades. The evolution of technology effects people's everyday life, and the evolution is continuous. Greenberg and Kates (2014, 283-284) point out the challenges the digital world has created for the managers of the traditional companies. Digital technology needs to be linked with company operations and integrated in to the organization. They categorize digital technologies in internal and external technologies: "Internal technologies include analytics, search engine optimization, competitive intelligence and social media monitoring. External technologies consist of the platforms used to reach customers and deliver content – website, ads, landing pages, e-mail campaigns and applications of all kinds".

Grönroos (2009, 299) mentions that internet and information technology offer many possibilities to design simplified service processes using fewer resources but still offering the customer better quality. Examples of such services are online-shops and bank services on the web.

3.1   Advantages of the web

There are a number of advantages in web. A broad customer base can be reached via internet and the site is always open. The customer can have service when appropriate. (Keränen et al. 2003, 177-178). Greenberg and Kates (2014, 177) emphasizes the importance of websites for the companies. Great content in web will allow clients to find the company regardless of the time of the day and provide a possibility to find what they need through the search engines. In the modern digital society, the websites should provide personal, customized and user-friendly experiences for the visitors. The site should integrate modern technologies, apps, social media and the pages should allow the use of modern devices such as a tablet or a smartphone.

Digital services can be used anywhere, anytime and quickly, which makes life easier to the consumers even though the service is not interactive or individual. Need for face to face contacts decreases. (Solita Oy 2014)
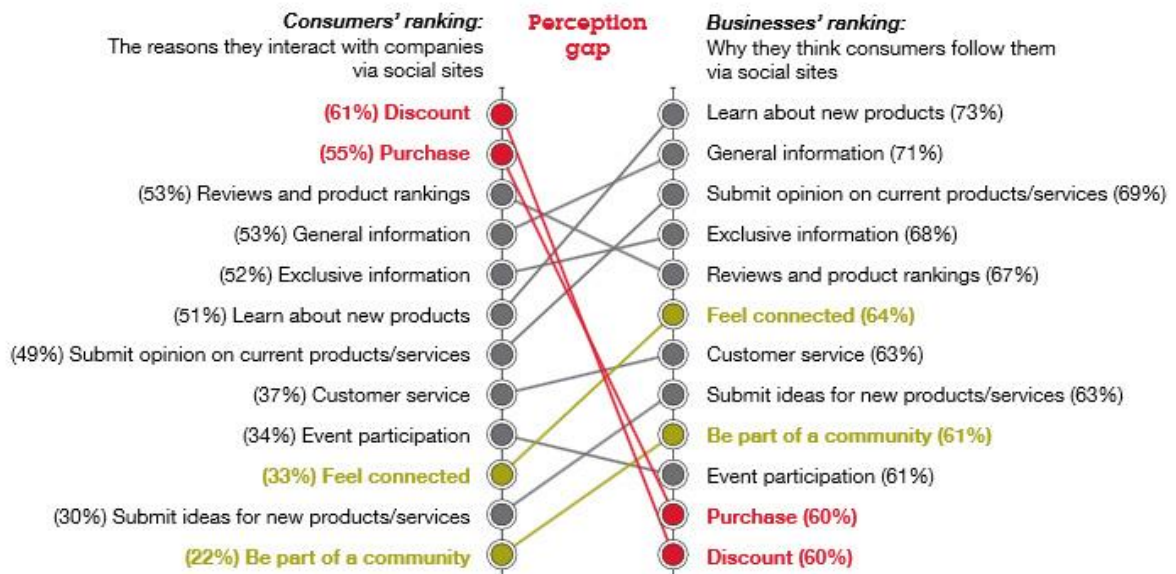
Internet differentiates from other media with the interactive quality. It is the only media that enables users to get involved actively and create contents to it. The clue is to find a right level of interaction that will support the business. (Westlund, 2008, 106.)

3.2   A good website or interface

Burghart, (66-67) claims that only user friendly webpages are able to succeed commercially and usability is important throughout the visit. The navigation on the site needs to be easy as well as the structure logical and clear in order to find the relevant information, products or services. The online market is very hectic and a website needs a constant updating to meet the customer expectations. The lack of personnel providing service to the client in web needs to be compensated by easy usability and proper information and help. It should be obvious to navigate on the site at once and nothing should prevent the transaction. Integration of good design and technique guarantee smooth functioning and quick and reliable service.

There is a huge amount of information on web pages, often too much. Especially in the public sector where selling is not the main purpose of the web pages or digital services, the focus of the pages is not clear. Cities and public organizations want to present all they do or produce and more likely they do it from the organizational viewpoint rather than considering what information customers need for their daily living.

The IBM Institute for Business Value carried out a survey to find out, what customers are looking for when they visit a social website and what the decision makers think they are after. Over 1,000 consumers and 350 executives worldwide were interviewed for the survey. The main result was (figure 5), that the customers are far more interested to make a good bargain, get offers and discount than getting information on new products or exclusive information or product rankings neither general information. (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011, 2.)

Consumers' ranking:
The reasons they interact with companies
via social sites

Perception gap

Businesses' ranking:
Why they think consumers follow them
via social sites

(61%) Discount
(55%) Purchase
(53%) Reviews and product rankings
(53%) General information
(52%) Exclusive information
(51%) Learn about new products
(49%) Submit opinion on current products/services
(37%) Customer service
(34%) Event participation
(33%) Feel connected
(30%) Submit ideas for new products/services
(22%) Be part of a community

Learn about new products (73%)
General information (71%)
Submit opinion on current products/services (69%)
Exclusive information (68%)
Reviews and product rankings (67%)
Feel connected (64%)
Customer service (63%)
Submit ideas for new products/services (63%)
Be part of a community (61%)
Event participation (61%)
Purchase (60%)
Discount (60%)

Note: Consumer: N=1066; Business: Learn N=333, General Info N=336, Submit opinion N=334, Exclusive Info N=333, Reviews/rankings N=333, Feel connected N=331, Customer service N=331, Submit Ideas N=332, Community N=329, Event N=332, Purchase N=334, Discounts N=331.
Source: IBM Institute for Business Value analysis. CRM Study 2011.

Figure 4: Companies have some misperceptions regarding why consumers interact with them via social sites.

Figure 5. The survey of the IBM Institute for Business shows a big gap in between the expectations of the customers and understanding of the decision makers (IBM Institute for Business Value survey, 2011, 9)

Greenberg and Kates (2014, 177-179) emphasize the importance of the effective website. They see it as a critical issue for the success in online actions. The social media has not displaced websites as the central hub for online activities: the website can be the first touchpoint for the potential clients to build trust and credibility. Measuring the customers' actions a company can gain an interesting insight of them. A website should have a clear purpose instead of being electronic brochures with irrelevant information. A web page should have a very precise purpose and straight objectives for example inform, generate leads or sales or provide customer service.

Rayport and Jaworski (2001, 114-116) indicate seven design elements for virtual customer-interface design in their 7Cs Framework: context (aesthetic and functional look-and-feel), content, community (interaction between the site users), customization, communication, connection (linkages between the site and other sites) and commerce (sale of goods or services). An effective website should provide answers to the user's questions quickly, attract target customers, communicate the values of the company and engage the user for

visiting or buying.

3.3   Function and performance

Function and performance are key elements for an efficient website. Usually many websites contain so much information, that it needs to be divided into many sub-pages. The information needs to be easily accessed and the visitor should be able to navigate from interest to interest within the page. Section breakdown, linking structure and navigation tools are essential to client to find proper information or service. Also the speed and reliability of the site, platform independence, accessibility and usability are in a key role. Poor usability makes the website unattractive. (Rayport & Jaworski, 2001, 119-120.)

Important factors for creating a value adding experience to a client in web are quick and easy website with and effective search. The product or services should be divided into clear categories with clear product names. An outside opinion should be asked when creating the site. (Hurst, cited in Rayport & Jaworski, 2001, 121.)

The technology of the web environment develops continuously and opens up new opportunities for the companies. Functionality of web page is one of the most crucial factors in order to bind your clients to your brand, reflect the core processes and adds value to them. (Cocoran, 2007, 165.)

The service environment is a crucial factor in many sectors. As the digital services will increase, more attention should be paid to the digital service environment. Bergström and Leppänen (2005, 160) points out the significance of the usability of e-service: attention should be paid to how the customer navigates on site and how easily the products can be found.

Greenberg and Kates (2014, 53-55) mention the importance of search function. The importance of the search marketing is understood, but many companies still do not know how to gain results through it. Almost everyone searches. No other marketing channel provides the power search does. The customers are interested in the products already and through search

marketing companies provide personalized services to the searcher. Even if companies argue they cannot benefit from forms of digital marketing, they cannot argue with search.

3.4   Digital future

As the digitalization expands, Finland cannot afford to establish or maintain digital services, which are not known or used. Increasing the rate of use of the existing services should be a priority in the service development in the public sector. (Solita Oy 2014)

The report of the Ministry of employment and the economy (ICT 2015 Committee, 2013, 9, 14), states that ICT technology will change the world even more than the invention of electricity. So far, the ICT revolution has been seen on the increasing number of ICT equipment and their efficiency not in the services. In order to increase welfare and growth, the digital elements should be brought into all sectors including the public sector. It is essential to increase the service capability and the impact of the services in Finland with the help of digital solutions. In addition to technological know-how, understanding of the customer needs, service development and commercialization of the new ideas are needed. Utilization of technology is crucial in developing competitiveness and added value.

The governmental goal is to make the digital services tempting option to the citizens. The focus is on usability, renewal of service processes, co-ordination and information security. (The Ministry of Finance, 2015)

McKinsey (2012, 11-12) introduces an idea of digital service ecosystem that has been built up in the most successful internet-states. The companies that gain most benefits of digitalization are not internet companies. The successors have created new service models utilizing digital solutions.

In the digital economy the ways of creating value to customer have changed (ICT 2015 Committee, 2013, 16). The products and services are tight together and the competitive edge is more often the service, which was previously considered as a support function. The focus in the digital markets has moved

from web technology, equipment and web operators to application platforms and services. Also the manufacturers and the operators concentrate nowadays more in producing contents and services than before. The devices are just tools to exploit the global applications.

The international competition today is taking place in the ecosystems (ICT 2015 Committee, 2013, 20). Ecosystem is a whole, where many parties complete each other's businesses. In the public sector different municipalities, 3rd sector and national organizations could create ecosystems to provide services to the citizens.

Emotionally intelligent web site means that it is possible to influence the emotions of the users via web. Cocoran (2007, 224, 245) claims that the companies creating websites that generates the users' emotions are more successful. In that way the desired outcomes are easier to gain. He also stresses that in the future it becomes more common to create emotionally responsive and customized web pages.

When you know your customer and their needs, you can create experiences offering customized products or services in an entertaining way. You can create emotional connection with your client. (LaCivita, 2008, 286.)

3.5   Skills and capabilities

As the public resources are decreasing but the need for services is increasing, the digital environment should be harnessed to serve both customers and organization better. The customer should find the service or information needs quickly and easily. On the other hand the organization should benefit digital environment better in customer counselling and utilizing the resources. The majority of the routine work should be digitalized and the customers should have a variety of service channels to choose from.

None of the channels or encountering spots should be isolated or separate any more. A big problem for the companies in the past decades has been narrow silos for different sectors of the organization that are responsible for

their own channels only. That easily narrows also understanding of the customer behavior in total. Many successful companies have built on excellent and comprehensive service and centered encountering. The concept is still working, but it should not prevent realizing the possibilities of other channels. (Keskinen & Lipiäinen 2014, 110-111.)

The digital capabilities of the organization needs to be increased. Greenberg and Kates (2014, 284, 312-317) argue, that there is a lack of digital knowledge in the companies due to a failure to integrate structural, cultural and logistical pieces to cope in the digital world. A successful company sees the technology as enabler of opportunity, relies on collected and mined data, focuses on customers, understanding the importance of networks, human capital and investing in the future.

Technical knowledge and understanding of the domain marketing is easier to find than persons who understand deeply the possibilities of the web, how different channels and digital applications work together, how to create strategies to optimize the benefit (Greenberg & Kates, 2014, 284.)

Greenberg and Kates (2014, 320-329) provide guidelines how the companies can become digitally inclined organizations. That includes three phases: Digital Planning, Implementation and Digital Culture (Figure 6).

The first step towards a digitally intelligent company is that the whole organization accepts that the world is changing rapidly and it will affect the working culture. A desire to change is a foundation for a digital transformation for the companies. In addition strong leaders and key agents for the change are needed as well as a vision for a digital organization. Digital education is in a key role in achieving the digital milestones.

Figure 6. Greenberg and Kates present a three steps to develop towards a digital culture: Digital planning, Implementation and Digital culture. (Greenberg and Kates, 2014)

4 SERVICE DEVELOPMENT IN WEB

As the resources are decreasing, the municipalities cannot provide the same level of the services in the future as today. The development of new services will be more and more important. Therefore service development is one theoretical framework for this study. As the purpose of the study is to find out how to help Kouvola citizens to find services easier via web, the other theoretical framework for the study is web environment (Figure 7).

The main focus of this research is on accessibility and usability of welfare services and digital services. In the study new solutions and applications are considered. Governmental guidelines and national strategies give the direction to the municipalities.
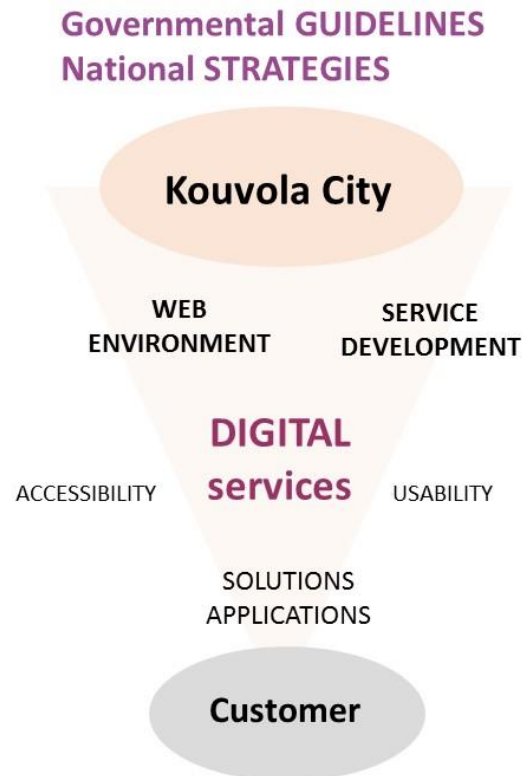
Governmental GUIDELINES
National STRATEGIES

Kouvola City

WEB
ENVIRONMENT

SERVICE
DEVELOPMENT

DIGITAL
services

ACCESSIBILITY

USABILITY

SOLUTIONS
APPLICATIONS

Customer

Figure 7. The theoretical framework of the study is service development and web environment.

5   METHODOLOGY

In this thesis work, the method of research-based development is applied. It aims to solve problems arisen from practice or develop new ways of working. In research based development the researcher systematically and critically evaluates knowledge gathered from both practice and theories and uses a variety of methods. It also includes active co-operation with others. (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti, 2014, 18.)

The method of action research aims' is to generate a change in the organization. Typical to an action research is that the researcher is part of the organization and is aiming to involve others in the development work. The action research targets to solutions for technical, social, ethical or professional problems in the organization. At the same time it creates new information or understanding of the phenomenon. (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti 2014, 37,58.)

Action research aims at change or improvement in the organization's practice or any team's performance. The process is cyclical or spiral and includes stages like planning, action reflection and evaluation. In development research, participatory action research is often used. In this methodology either quantitative or qualitative data acquisition or their mixture can be used. (Quinlan 2011,183.)

Typical for an action research is continuous improvement. The first stage of the process should be a beginning to a constant progress of developing better working processes. The action research does not necessarily proceed in a specific order. The different stages and processes overlap with each other. The process is open and reactive. It proceeds as a spiral of planning, action, observation and reflection. Questioning the existing habits and ways of working is essential for the professional development. (Heikkinen, Huttunen, Moilanen 1999, 63-68.)

5.1   Data acquisition methods

Typical for action research is the variety of many different methods, especially methods that enable an active participation and dialogue of parties involved. (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti 2014, 37,58.)

In this study, the data acquisition methods used are online survey, interviews and benchmarking. The online survey is carried out to find out how online applications could support customer counselling and thus help the Kouvola citizens to find the right service easier. The purpose of the interviews is to gather information how chat services in Finnish cities were implemented and what kind of experiences was gained. The goal of the benchmarking is to obtain information of the existing web services and best practices in the field.

5.1.1   Online questionnaire

Online surveys are administered online and generally sent to the respondents via email as a link to the survey and invited to answer it (Quinlan 2011, 224.)

A questionnaire is a very general data collection method with many advantages: a large data can be obtained efficiently and quickly and it produces easily numeral data that can be statistically analyzed and reported. There are also disadvantages due to the non-controllable attitude and honesty of the respondents. A survey is suitable especially when there is already much information on the current subject, but it needs confirmation. In development project a survey is convenient for mapping out the current situation or evaluating the results reached. (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti, 2014, 40,120.)

In this study an online survey is carried out to clarify the current situation, attitudes and ideas of the personnel how to utilize online solutions in the customer counselling. The aim of the questionnaire was also to prepare and commit personnel for the possible new services and solutions.

The respondents of the survey are top management, customer managers and service managers (some 30 people) and supervisors and personnel working with customer counselling/case management. The managerial level is chosen to answer the questionnaire due to their overall responsibility of the services and the service development. The other group of respondents work in the customer surface and are aware of the existing channels of counselling/advising customers and they have the overall view of the duties related to customer counselling.

The survey consists of both open and closed questions. The first four questions are targeted to all respondents. The aim of these questions is to find out the overall attitude towards the possible online solutions, how beneficial these could be, what kind of solution would be best for the Kouvola City and which services could benefit most of the online application. The remaining six questions are set for those persons who currently work in customer counselling. The questions clarify the current situation in customer counselling and which parts of the job could be digitalized. (Appendix 1)

5.1.2   Interviews

The interviews on this study are telephone interviews and in-depth interviews.

Telephone interviews are often carried out on one-to-one basis over the phone. It is resource efficient, inexpensive, quick and easy way to collect data though the interviewee cannot see the reactions and responses of the person answering the questions. One-to-one interviews are a common method to collect data with many advantages. (Quinlan 2011, 221-222.)

Interviews are one of the mainly used data collection methods in development projects. It is suitable method to gather rather deep information on the subject in a short time. The meaning of the interviews can be clarifying or deepening the subject, for example. It is a good choice, when the focus is on individuals. In a development project, interviews should be supported with other methods. (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti 2014, 106).

As some cities in Finland have already used chat service on their web site, it is worth interviewing the responsible people in each city to find out the best practices and experiences gained. The cities chosen were Hämeenlinna, Mikkeli and Oulu as those cities are mid-size cities as Kouvola City. The persons answering the questions are either responsible for the implementation of the chat service or the persons actually answering the citizens' questions online.

The questions will cover the following subjects:
-   What kind of experience was gained?
-   Was the chat utilized in customer counselling?
-   Who were the persons answering the questions and were there many of them?
-   How did the personnel find the chat service?
-   How did the chat work in practice?
-   For how many hours the chat service was open to the citizens?
-   What was the feedback from the customers?

5.1.3 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is comparing your own development area to another object which is usually the best practice in the field. A good comparison can also be found in totally different field. The basic idea in benchmarking is to learn from others and critically evaluate your own activities. When the best practices are searched for from other organizations, creativity is needed in adapting those manners to your own practices. That creates new solutions. Benchmarking also helps to find out the weaknesses in your own actions and helps to form aims and ideas to develop them (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti 2014, 43.)

Benchmarking will be used to find solutions or development ideas in digital services and web applications and their accessibility especially in the health care sector. It will include two presentations (Duodecim presentation on e-module used in Hämeenlinna City web page and a presentation of Hyvis Welfare platform) and evaluation of nine public sector websites in Finland and abroad.

The benchmarking will be carried out from the service access point of view i.e. how the services and e-services are found on the site, if the links to services and e-services are on the front page, and if the customer can access the services easily. Also how the services are categorized and communicated to the visitor will be examined. Attention will be paid to the usability of the services.

The websites chosen for benchmarking are:

1. Hämeenlinna City and 2. Oulu City website

Both Oulu and Hämeenlinna Cities have successfully taken into use modern digital services and they are also advanced in developing new services in Finland and they have tested chat service in their websites.

3. Eksote.fi (Etelä-Karjalan sairaanhoitopiiri i.e. South Karelia Social and Health Care District) and 4. HUS.fi (Helsinki-Uudenmaan sairaanhoitopiiri i.e. the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa)

In the public discussion Eksote and HUS are considered to be the most efficient service provides in the Health Care Sector in Finland.

5. Carea.fi (Kymenlaakson sairaanhoito- ja sosiaalipalvelujen kuntayhtymä i.e. Kymenlaakso Social and Health Services)

Carea provides special health care and psychiatric services to Kouvola City and the citizens of the Kymenlaakso.

6. Hyvis Health Care platform

A Health Care platform providing services for the citizens of the South-East of Finland. Both Eksote and Carea offers services on that platform.

7. www.kaiserpermanente.org

Kaiser Permanente is an integrated managed care consortiumin the United States providing Health Care services for several states in the USA.

8. www.1177.se (Vårdguiden)

Vårdguiden is a web service in Sweden. It guides to visitor to find help and health care and use digital services in the health care sector. The site also offers information and provides tips for self-care.

9. NHS.uk

NHS is the publicly funded National Health Care system in the United Kingdom. It provides a comprehensive range of health services, the vast majority of which are free for people legally resident in the United Kingdom.

The results of the benchmarking process will be analyzed in comparison to Kouvola City web pages and eKouvola digital services platform.

5.2 Data analyzing methods

In this study, documentary analyses and content analyses methods were used for analyzing the concepts and ideas appearing in text and the data.

Documentary analysis is a methodology where conclusions are drawn from literature data, for example interviews, web pages, articles, annual reports, memos of creative meetings, discussions, reports and other written material (Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti 2014,136). Content analysis can be used in analyzing the content of any text that are documents, interview transcripts, websites and web pages (Quinlan 2011, 185).

Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti (2014, 137, 139) divides the documentary analysis into two main analyzing methods: Content analysis where the contents of the documents are described verbally and finding meanings to them, and content separation where the data is described numerally, for example. These two methods can be used simultaneously. The data analyzing relies on logical conclusions and interpretation. Before analyzing, it needs to be decided whether manifest content or also latent content are taken into consideration. The three stages of the content analyses are to summarize, categorize and abstract the data.

In this study these methods are used from the perspective of manifest contents. The results of the on-line survey and interviews will be systematically and objectively classified and categorized in themes in order to find relevant ideas. Classification will help to structure the data and form bigger groups with similarities. Categorizing will help to sort the data into themes that will lighten the research problem. It will also help to separate the topics that are relevant from the aspect of the research problem. The researcher will also draw conclusions based on her strong experience in communications and being a part of various teams within the Kouvola City organization.

6   RESULTS

6.1   Online survey

The questionnaire was administered by the Webropol-system. The link to the Webropol survey regarding the usefulness of Online-services to Kouvola City, was sent to 143 respondents. The group consisted of the top management of the Welfare services as well as supervisors and personnel working in customer counselling. The total of 49 persons (34%) answered to the online questionnaire. 91% of the respondents felt that an online application in web would be useful to Kouvola City. 48% of the respondents voted for a combination of a chat service and customer counselling module.

An online application was seen as a new channel for customer interaction, which would support existing channels and thus provide better service for the customers. It would make it easier for them to get in touch and find the right person. An online application would be useful especially in routine, non-urgent matters. It would also help to even the workload and it would give the customers an equal channel to get service despite the distances.

At the moment, customer counselling is made mainly by phone or the customer pays a visit. Some 60% of the respondents get non-urgent contacts.

An online application was found beneficial in:

1) Advising and counselling
The online service could provide the first contact when the customer is not sure where to call. It would help in guiding the client to the right service. With an online channel the customer could get advice and counselling, instructions, non-urgent evaluation of the need of the cure and after care.

2) Contact and accessibility
Online module would help the customer to get contact with the right person easier and non-urgent matters could be taken care when there is time.
A possibility to leave a message/contact information would help to serve the customer better. The service could decrease the number of phone calls and

workload of the personnel.

3) In routine jobs

Routine jobs like applications, contributions, instructions, non-urgent health care and seasonal problems could be taken care via online service. Booking, changing and checking the appointments could be done virtually by the customer. The professionals could handle questions, after care and follow-up via web and support the patient self-care.

6.2 Interviews

The interviews of the study were carried out by phone in April and September 2015.

A telephone interview with the service manager of the City of Hämeenlinna regarding the chat service took place on 3rd June 2015. Hämeenlinna City carried out two chat service experiments: Chat for youngsters for three months (February 24th to April 4th 2014) and chat for a larger target group for six months.

In both chats the answerers were professionals of health care, social service or other substances. In Hämeenlinna there is a centered customer advising service located in the centre of the city, so there are resources for telephone or face-to-face service available. From time to time there was a lack of resources as all the channels were in use at the same time.

The chat was aiming to give general level information and preventing advice to the customers. There were also a lot of questions regarding the procedure of the applications.

The chat for a larger target group was more successful and especially the personnel of the social services and tourism services found it very useful. Also families with small children were a very active target group. Especially in the social services the chat was found useful due to a possibility for anonymous service. The youngsters did not find the service and the city felt that there is

no need for such service as the youngsters were very active in Facebook. The elderly people did not fancy the service.

Technically it was a testing project for free, as the company providing the service wanted to test it in practice.

In the City of Oulu, questions regarding the chat service were sent on June 8th by e-mail to the service manager and later on another interview by phone on 28th September 2015.

In Oulu the chat has been in use for a year and is part of the centered customer service. The chat is open every day in the afternoon from 1 pm to 4 pm. When the service is available, a banner appears on the Oulu web site. The persons answering the customers' questions are the service advisors who have a wide knowledge on Oulu City and its services. In the autumn the service hours expanded from 8 am to 6 pm (Monday-Thursday) and 8 am to 4 pm (Friday) and the chat banner is permanently on the web.

The personnel's response towards the new service channel was good despite of the limited resources answering questions via phone at the same time. There were plans to reorganize the work so that the persons answering to chat would not answer to the phone calls anymore.

The customers were asking various questions, mainly general inquiries how to find information on Oulu web site or how to find a certain service. The customers were directed to the right service if any need for deeper discussions occurred. Confidential matters were not handled via chat. In Oulu, the chat was easy to use and user friendly.

A telephone interview regarding the chat service was made with the service adviser of the City of Mikkeli on 4th June, 2015.

The City of Mikkeli carried out a chat experience for one week (18th to 22th May 2015). The chat was open daily from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Due to a short test period the number of questions was quite low and further conclusions could not be drawn of its significance.

There was one service advisor at a time answering to the questions who redirected the questions further if needed or advised whom to contact for further information.

The feedback from the customers and the personnel was good, so the chat service could become as an additional service channel for Mikkeli town in the future.

6.2.1   General findings regarding the interviews:

When the chat service is open only for a limited time a day, the marketing and information has to be very clear, in order to get the customers to remember the opening hours.

In all three cities, the personnel answering the customer's questions also took phone calls or customer visits at the same time, and that caused lack of resources. The chat needs to have enough resources, the knowledge of the persons answering the questions needs to cover all the services and the chat should be in use daily - otherwise it may cause bad-will to the city.

In Oulu the chat banner appeared only when the service was in use. That may cause misunderstanding, as the contents of the web pages include marketing of the service, which can only be found when in use. In Hämeenlinna, there were a lot of questions regarding the application handling, so an application to follow that process would be useful. Also there was a need for a possibility to leave a message or contact through secured e-mail.

There could also be theme chats which would give deeper information on a certain subject at a time. The customer would benefit also, when there appears a need for deeper help, that there would be a possibility to sign in and continue confidentially.

In all three cities the chat was easy to use and the service was mainly an advising channel, not a way to direct/guide customer flows.
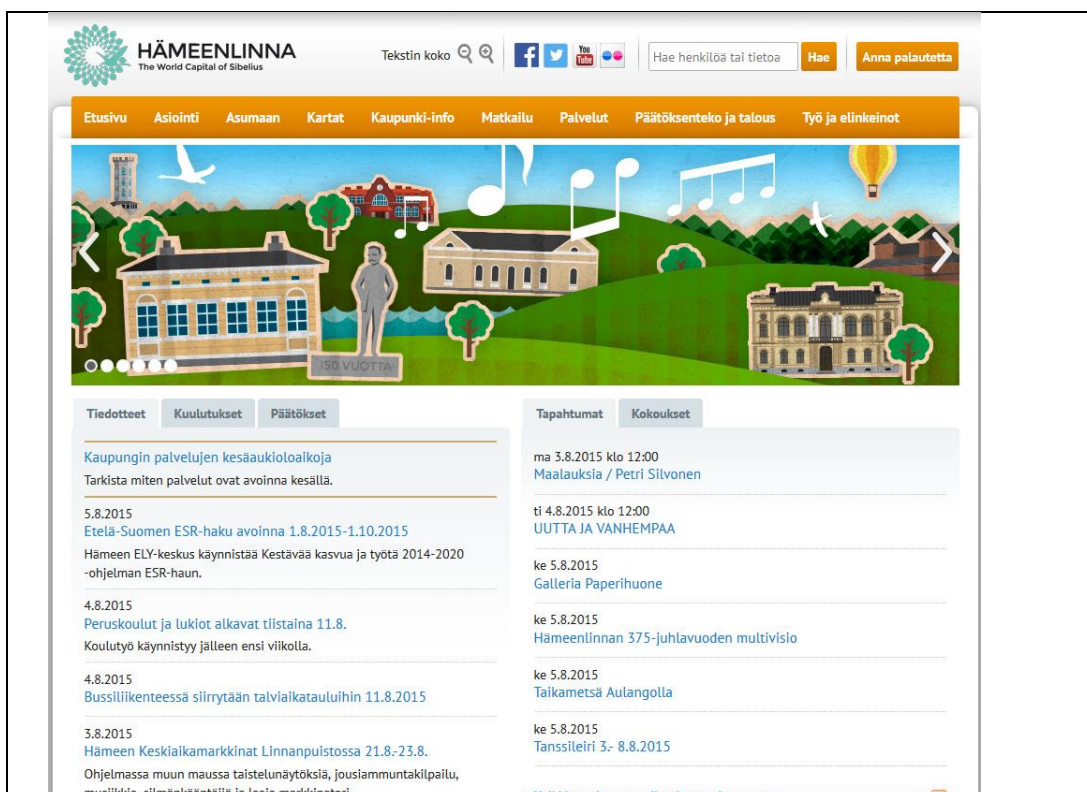
6.3   Benchmarking

The following websites or services were chosen for the benchmarking:
Hämeenlinna City website, Oulu City website, Eksote.fi (Etelä-Karjalan
sairaanhoitopiiri i.e. South Karelia Social and Health Care District), HUS.fi
(Helsinki-Uudenmaan sairaanhoitopiiri i.e. the Hospital District of Helsinki and
Uusimaa), Carea.fi (Kymenlaakson sairaanhoito- ja sosiaalipalvelujen
kuntayhtymä i.e. Kymenlaakso Social and Health Services), Hyvis Health
Care platform, www.kaiserpermanente.org, www.1177.se (Vårdguiden) and
NHS.uk.

The benchmarking was carried out from the point of viewof accessibility i.e.
how the services and e-services are found on the site, if the links to services
and e-services are on the front page, and if the customer can access the
services easily. Attention was also paid in how the services are categorized
and communicated to the visitor.

The main results of the benchmarking of the websites are presented with
notifications of the service together with a figure of the service in question in
order to help to understand the visual appearance of the service. The symbols
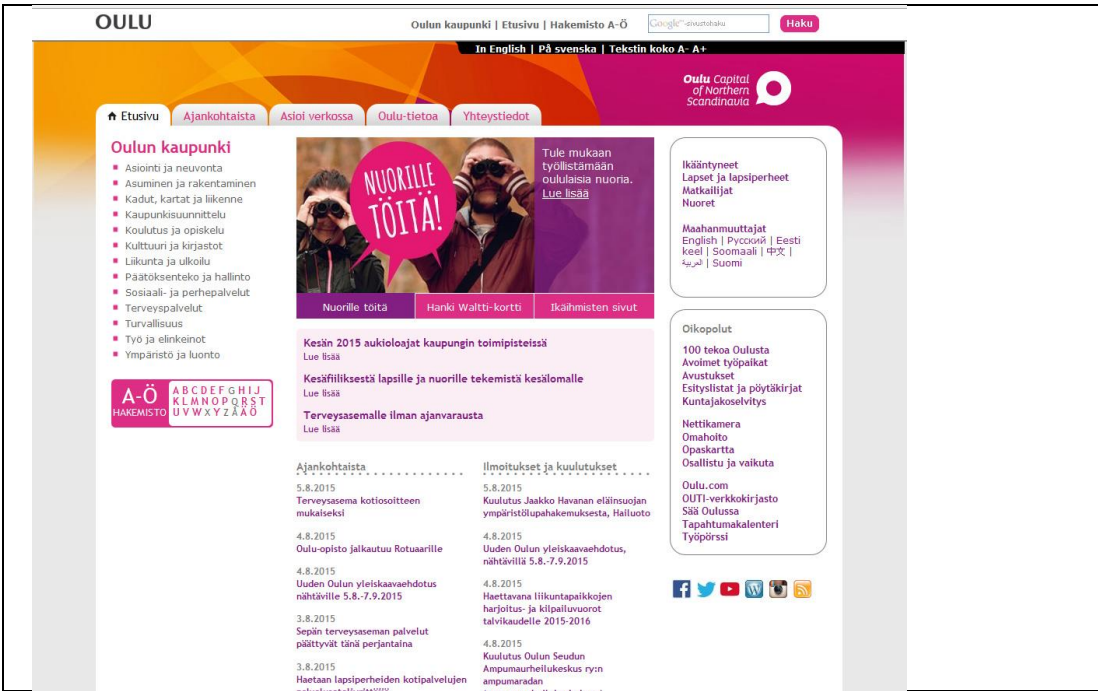of plus and minus (+ or -) represent the tone of the remarks.
The results of the benchmarking process will be analyzed in comparison with
Kouvola City web pages and eKouvola digital services platform.

1) **Hameenlinna.fi, Hämeenlinna City website**

+	-
Wellfare services can be easily found in the front page.	Digital services are not found on the front page, nor are they gathered in one page or platform.
The city has a service centre Kastelli, where customers can ask for help. The centre can be found on the web under each service.	Some of the pages are lists of links, not visually attractive venues
Hämeenlinna provides digital physical and a survey for the need of health care (minunterveyteni.fi) on their web pages.	Each individual services requires vetuma-recognition.
The customer can find the welfare services easily without need to know the organization/structure of the services of the City	
The services are presented clearly and the pages do not contain too	

much general information which might hinder finding the service in question.	

2) **Ouka.fi (Oulu City)**

+	-
The first category on the front page is Asiointi ja Neuvonta i.e. how to get service or advice	The menu of the Asiointi ja Neuvonta page is quite large and confusing.
Chat service available for the citizens.	The banner appears only when the service available, and this is not clearly indicated on the page.
Other advising services like Aino, pieces of advice for elderly which are also easily found on this page.	Some links lead to pages with a lot of information, not directly to the service in question (booking of an appointment, for example.)
In the Health Care sector services and also digital services are easily found.	Depart from the clear centered service page the front page does not direct the visitor to the services neither the digital services.

Secured mail available and easily found, link leads to the recognition page.	The visual image of the site is not very clear and there are many elements, boxes, different font types etc. used.

3) **Eksote.fi**

+	-
The main purpose of the website is clear: it directs visitor to get the service.	Visual layout is a bit confusing and many pages consist of list of links.
Services are divided by target groups, but the choices further not completely logical.	The front page consists of big banners i.e. there is quite a little of information or services available.
Emergency instructions and digital services are easily found on the front page.	Many of the links lead to another platform which causes many clicks

	for the user.
Direction to digital service platform Hyvis.	The site also includes many additional/extra pages with only links (obviously for technical reasons) which is not very convenient for the visitor.
Services like a possibility to leave message clearly indicated.	

4) **Hus.fi**

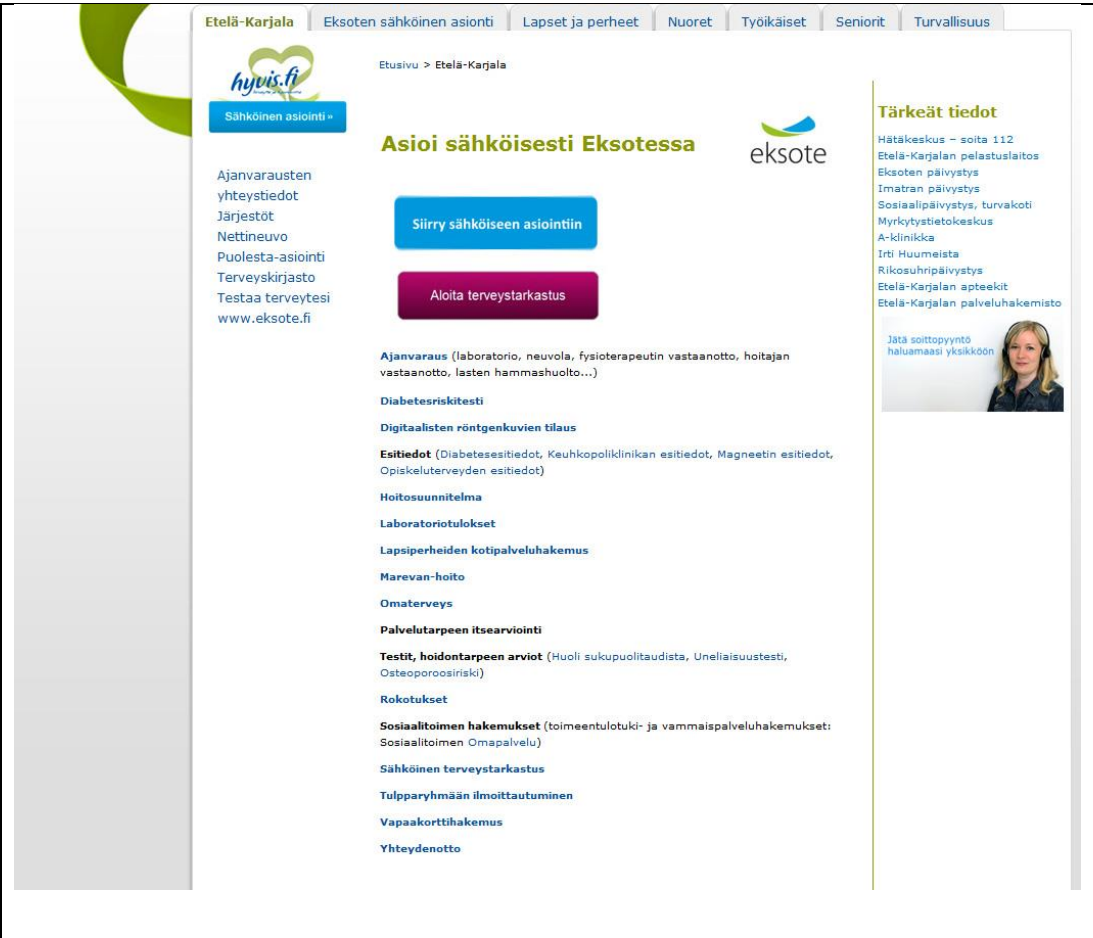| +	-
The main purpose of the website is clear: it directs visitors to get the service. The services are clearly categorized in the front page both by services and by target groups.	Digital services not found in the front page

The patient finds easily instructions what to do to get the service.	
A help/advice centre Olka and a help phone can be easily found on the pages.	
Visually very clear and informative site with photos and symbols.	

5) Carea.fi

| +	-
The services are easily found at the top of the front page.	Visually calm, not much colours used.
A floating window will open on each service providing more facts or	

pieces of advice on the subject and offering additional services as well.	
Digital services can be easily found	
Services clearly categorized for different target groups	

6) Hyvis.fi

+	-
The different areas the service is meant for, are clearly indicated on the front page.	Even though there is a video clip how to use advising service Nettineuvo, it is not clearly stated how to place a question to the system. The main focus of the

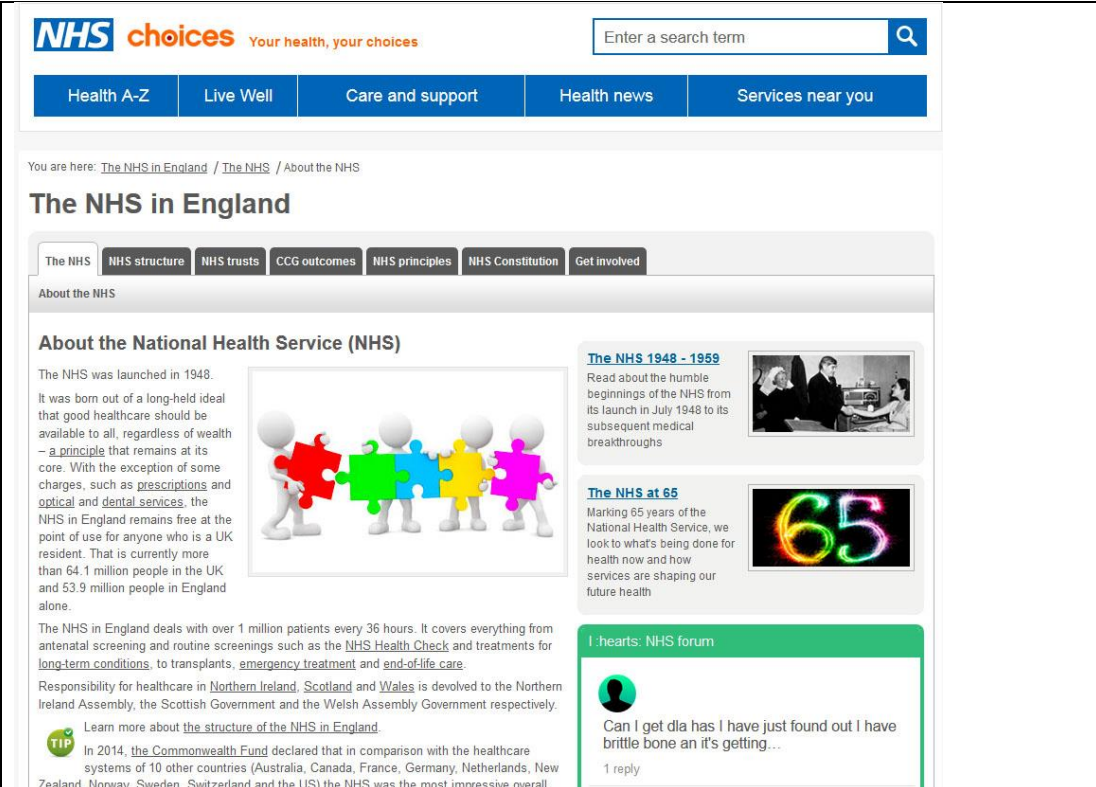|	
	service is on the questions and answers the customers have asked before.
Personal service OmaHyvis and OmaTerveys as well as an advising service Nettineuvo are easily found.	Most of the services require registration. Link after link opens a window with signing in/vetuma-recognition page.
The site presents a large variety of services.	
Appointment booking in certain services available.	There is very much information on the site which is mainly presented in a very traditional way: the customer is in a key role in finding it.
Secured e-mail possibility, even though it is not possible for the customer to send the first message.	The site gives quite still or unmodern image.
	Some of the municipalities of the site offer only few digital services – it does not give much value for a customer to visit the site only for one service or form.
	Vetuma registration with all details of the customer (postal code etc.) does not personalize the service. The patient can see all the existing services in the system, even if they are not available to him/her.

7) Kaiser permanent
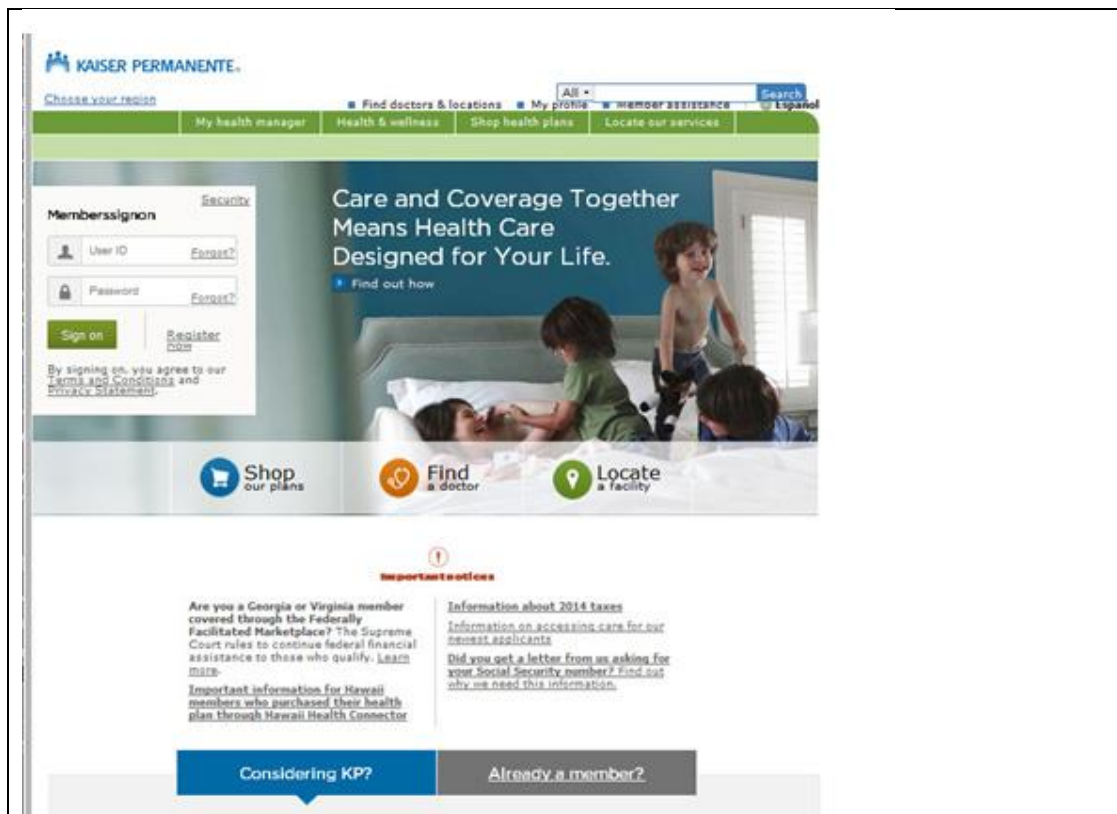
+	-
The site is an online-shop and the customer can easily find different categories/services	
The access seems to be easy and with signing in the customer can assumably use the services right away (no other regocnition is needed on individual service).	
The services appear in the window by moving the cursor.	
In addition to actual services, the customer finds plenty of prevention and self-cure information on the site.	
The several find/search functions make it easy for the customer to find the right service.	

8) 1177.se (Vårdguiden)

+	-
All the information and the services are in the front page, easily found and easily accessed.	Facts, advices and information comes first, the services are the last on the list.
Visually very clear structure and the variety of the services well presented.	
e-services and a phone service can be found easily also in a hurry.	
A possibility to ask questions anonymous.	
Pieces of advice for self-care.	
The search of services presents the results on a map with clear contact information.	

9) NHS.com

+	-
"The services near you" part really helps finding the nearest service. It gives detailed information on dentists, hospitals or GP practices as well as how to obtain urgent care.	The first impression of this site is confusing and visually not attractive: the front page includes a huge amount of information, info boxes and different elements.
The services are rated by the users, so the user can compare the services.	The big banners take most of the space from the actual services.
	The whole site offers so much information, that it is difficult to find anything from there.
	The services are the last on the list.

6.3.1   General findings regarding the benchmarking

The digital services and access to them should be easily found in the front page of the site. Gathering the digital services on one page or platform helps

the customer to find the service and also to see at one sight the services available. If the service requires registration with detailed information, it should have impact on the appearance i.e. it should personalize the view and offer only the services that are available for a certain customer. That is not the case at Hyvis platform, for example.

The public services at web often look like a list of links, which is not very attractive or visually rewarding to the customer. The link often leads to another page full of information not directly to the service. That means, that the customer has to seek the service again from another page and that causes extra work and frustration for the customer and he/she may get lost and stop using the service. Most probably that would not work with commercial services – the customer would choose a competitor, offering easy access and better service.

Most of the services require vetuma recognition before the customer is able to use the service. The customer has to sign in on each service at a time, which is not very convenient for the customer. A better option would be signing in to the service environment, where the services available to a customer in question would appear.

In Hämeenlinna City website the citizens can use a digital physical and a survey for the need of health care (minunterveyteni.fi) provided by Duodecim. The application guides the customer on the way, and a risk analysis is integrated in to the system with alarm points to contact professionals when needed. The service is well integrated as part of existing services of Hämeenlinna. Integration of the services is very important and it makes the service easy to access and easy to use. The customer should not suffer or see if the service is provided by subcontractor.

Secured e-mail possibility is not very common in the public sector even though there is a huge need for it. It would help in routine jobs and help to keep contact and communicate with a customer. Most probably it would help to even the work load as non-urgent matters would not load the rush hours.

There is a secured mail in Hyvis platform, but the customer cannot send the first message – the first contact is always taken by the officer.

It is extremely essential to pay attention to the resources of the service. It seems, that there is no doubt about the benefits of the chat service, but often there is a lack of resources in the organization.

6.4   Comparison

Below the Kouvola City website and eKouvola.fi platform for digital services are compared to the benchmarked websites.

6.4.1   kouvola.fi
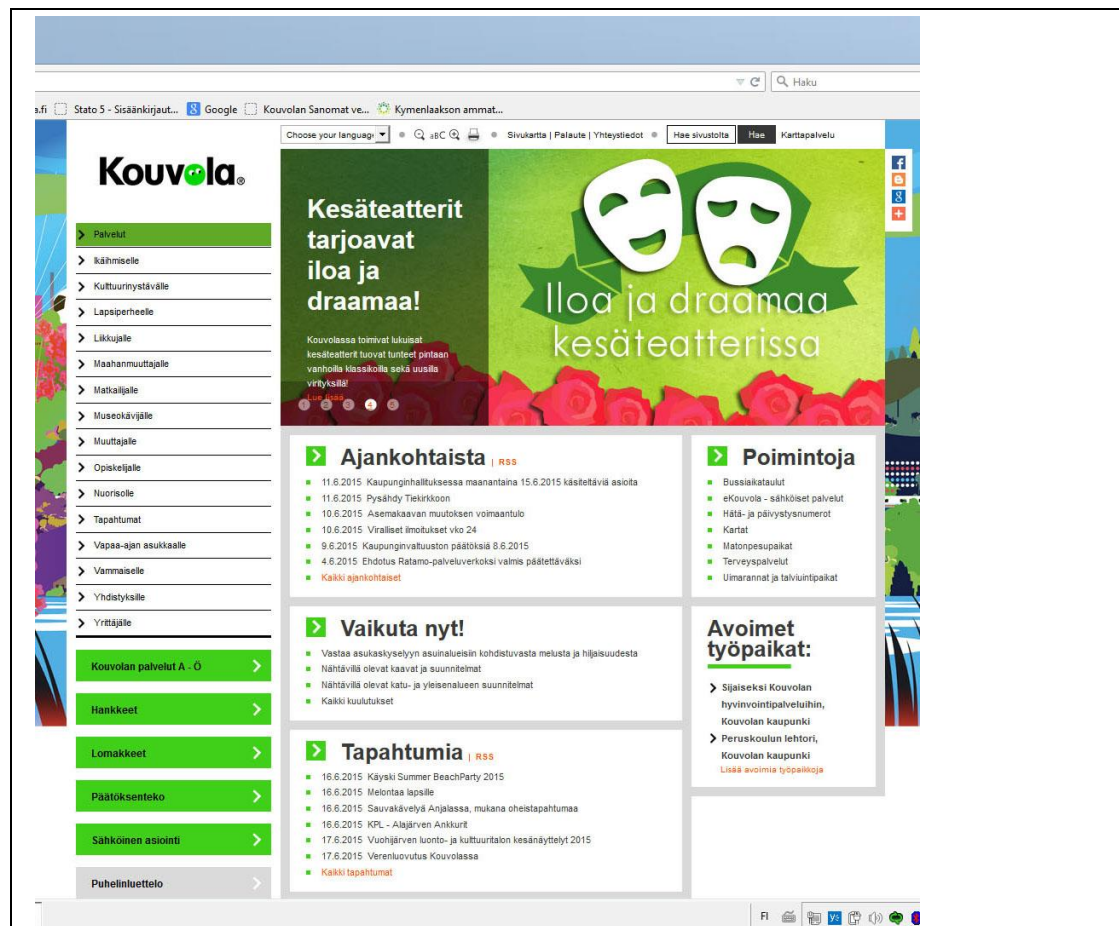
Before, the structure of the Kouvola City web pages was built on target groups. During the summer 2015 the structure of the pages is renewed by the communications web team.

+	-
The most popular services are brought onto the front page. That was done due to the customer feedback and the results of the internet survey in 2013.	During the study the services were not easily found on the front page as they were divided by the target groups. The contents of the following pages are very large and full of information. There are large quantities of information and various material and services which are not necessarily comparable to each other. There is also repetition as the same service can be related to many target groups simultaneously.
The focus of the site is to provide information of Kouvola City and the services it offers.	The site did not clearly direct customers to the services. It provides much news and information on happenings and leisure time activities. A possibility for the citizens' involvement is easily found on the front page.
Digital services were found on the front page, but quite down on the page.	The term "sähköinen asiointi", is not necessarily familiar to the citizens as the word service does not appear in the term. The application forms can be easily found on the front page.

6.4.2   eKouvola.fi

+	-
All the digital services of the Kouvola City can be found on the eKouvola platform.	The current digital service platform needs both visual and functional development.
The access is through domain eKouvola.fi or via the City's website. That is very convenient and also the name of the platform supports the brand of Kouvola City.	The services are not easy to use and the structure of providing the services is not clearly communicated.
	The services on the platform are categorized by the organization of the city, not by a customer need.
	The front page consists of headlines implicating how many services are found behind the link. Customer has no idea what the services are without checking the link. Visually the page is not attractive or tempting. Some of the services are

	not digital services but links to blogs or other web pages.
	Vetuma-recognition needed for most of the services.

Majority of the services on the eKouvola platform needs a registration service by service as all the Finnish benchmarked services. Only the health care platforms in the United Kingdom and the United States were more like online shops rather than a list of individual links with registration.

6.5 Discussion and analysis

The public sector is facing enormous changes in the future. The financial pressure is strong and the governmental guidelines call for effectiveness and better customer service. The planned social and health care reform will revolutionize the service structure in Finland. The role of the remaining municipalities will change drastically. Also the role of the third sector will become more and more important in providing preventive services. The municipalities should start to consider the service production and the accessibility to the services more from the customer viewpoint in the web environment, too.

The customer sees the company as a whole. He/she does not care about the organization or the functions of the company. Important is that all is functioning well and the customer gets the service or product needed. The management of the customer path involves every level of the company and the whole personnel has an impact on the company's competitiveness. (Keskinen and Lipiäinen 2013, 35).

Digitalization puts the service providers also in the public sector into a totally new situation. So far, the customers have mainly accessed the services via old fashioned ways; by phone or paying a visit and there has not been many digital services available, yet. But that is going to change in the future. The customer counselling needs new channels and should be supported with modern and easy to use online applications.

The rapid development and increasing of the digital services, platforms and applications may lead to a digital jungle, where the citizen gets easily lost. There is a huge variety of services which all require registration. Often the platforms offer only a few services i.e. customer gets easily frustrated as the access to the service is too complicated. In the worst case the digital services will not offer enough value to the customer – if it is too difficult to use the digital service, the citizens will choose another way to get the service they need. In the future, the municipalities, the third sector and non-commercial organizations need to co-operate closely and create symbiosis also in the digital field. That can lead to web ecosystems which will benefit the citizens providing comprehensive services from prevention to actual cure, and the customer can be involved in the development of the contents of the ecosystem. This would also implement the governmental guidelines on producing better and customer oriented services.

The digital services have to be easy to use and truly help the everyday life of the citizens. The development work has to be flexible and the citizens should get involved in it. It is not enough to develop the service. The customer's journey should be considered from the beginning – where the service can be found and how the service can be accessed.

The development processes cannot be long lasting or too complicated. Special attention should be paid in quick reaction for the changing environment and the integration of different services. In this work, the modern platforms and applications are in a key role, and the work needs to be done together with flexible companions. The role of the social media, especially in marketing of the services, should not be forgotten.

Even though the number of digital service applications is increasing rapidly, the time of websites is not over. But the website should have a clear role and it should add value to the visitors –not to be a mute brochure in web, neither be a collection of links or a landfill of information.

The website is still playing an important role in branding the company and offering a first touchpoint for the potential clients. A successful website is a

central hub for digital services and offer the customers a door further to the services. But the companies should define clear purpose of their website. As this is done, the focus and energy that are loaded into digitalization will have a clear goal. (Greenberg and Kates 2014, 177-178).

Often there is too much information on the web pages. Especially in the public sector where selling is not the main purpose of the web pages or digital services the focus of the pages is not clear. Cities and public organizations want to present all they do or produce. Often this is done from the organizational viewpoint rather than considering what information customers need for their daily living. The survey regarding the social websites shows a big gap in between the expectations of the customers and understanding of the decision makers. (IBM Institute for Business Value survey 2011, 9). As the public resources are decreasing but the need for services is increasing, the digital environment should be harnessed to serve both customers and organization better. The public organizations' web sites will offer more and more digital services online in the future. Therefore a special attention should be paid to the performance, usability and functionality of the sites: how the customer navigates on the service, if the services are clearly communicated and how customer can find the service easily. As important as an easy access, is the functionality of the service itself. Poor usability makes the website unattractive (Rayport and Jaworski 2001, 120). Cocoran (2007, 165) sees the functionality as one of the most crucial factor to bind the customer to the company. Also Bergström and Leppänen point out the significance of the usability of the e-service (2005, 160).

For the public sector the customer loyalty is not the key as a regular customer means more cost and work. The value of digital services lie in transforming part of the workload into web. The organization should utilize digital environment better in customer counselling. In order to succeed, the customer should find the service or information needs as quickly and as easy as possible. A majority of the routine work should be digitalized and the customers should have a variety of service channels to choose from. The trend in the future could be also in the public sector towards offering the

services via online-shops and visual venues and thus creating the customers emotional experiences. Digital actions have to be attractive enough and add value to the customer in a shape of quick or distant service, for example.

The services should be categorized clearly and the service should be easy to use. They should be offered as packages or concepts not separate services. Apilo, Taskinen and Salkari (2007, 151) point out the benefits of conceptualization. Jaakkola, Orava, Varjonen (2009, 5) emphasize the benefits of productisation, conceptualization and systematization in balancing the demand and quality fluctuations. Multiplied service concepts improve the quality and effectiveness thus the sales and marketing improve and uncertainty decreases.

Basically, when searching a public service, the customer needs to know what service is available, who is entitled to it and how to gain the service. As the trend in the public sector and especially in the health care is towards patients' own responsibility and self-care, the services should be concepts according to the same structure. 1) How to find preventive material or instructions for self-care, 2) how to obtain non-urgent service 3) how to obtain urgent help/cure.

In many cases, it seems, that the main focus in digital services or web pages in the technical aspects and how the service functions. Less attention has been payed to the usability, how the service is presented and communicated and how the customer is guided to find the service or through the service. There should always be a marketing or communications person in the development teams, who would pay attention to these matters. Often the specialists are so deep in their professional expertise, that they forget the end-user level.

No matter how well services are conceptualized and visualized, digital era requires new skills and attitude in the organization. The rapidly developing digital era creates pressure also to the management and personnel. The level of digital skills in municipalities is not necessary very high and new ways of working are not easily adapted. The personnel should understand that the

web is a rapid environment and calls for rapid actions and active reaction and updating. Greenberg and Kates (2014, 284) discuss about the lack of digital knowledge in the companies and how challenging it is to find personnel that understand possibilities the web offers.

Bad service or poorly functioning website is badwill to the company which is easy to spread, for example in the social media. And vice versa. Good and well- functioning services are easily discovered, used and told to a friend. Transparency can be a positive force when it is understood correctly (Keskinen and Lipiäinen 2013, 35).

7 CONCLUSIONS AND DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTIONS

7.1 Summary of the Main Findings

There are several ways to help Kouvola citizens to find services via web easier. Low budget implementations would be improving the existing web services Kouvola.fi and eKouvola.fi. Attention should be paid to easy access, usability, service categories and how to direct customer flows via web. The services should be conceptualized and create service packages and self-care instructions on web. This should be done in multi-professional teams, as it involves IT-department, communications and experts in different services.

A combination of chat service and customer counselling module would help the customers to find the right service and right persons, especially when contacting the city for the first time. It would also help to even the workload by transferring routine jobs to web.

New communities and ecosystems should be created together with the third sector in order to help the citizens to find the services they need. The understanding of the customer is essential. The web-ecosystems should be built on customer need and target groups – institutions and organisations should not be in focus. The client should find easy access services no matter who is the service provider.

As discussed earlier the digital change is extremely rapid and it will change the development more than the invention of the electricity. Somehow it feels that in the public sector this is not totally realized. Kouvola City should create a digital strategy in order to visualize a digital Kouvola in the future. The strategy should include three aspects: the equipment and the systems, capabilities and know-how of the personnel and the customer demand in the future.

7.2 Implications for the Commissioner

Even though the web pages of the Kouvola City were renewed during the summer 2015, the focus of the pages could be even more strongly in directing the customers to find the service. The purpose of the site should be defined to be providing service instead of providing information. As the resources are decreasing, the web should be better utilized for this purpose. That means understanding the possibilities web and digitalization offers. The knowledge should be increased both on managerial and operational level. The web skills and the attitudes towards the digital services need updating. This is a managerial and HR issue and a digitalization plan is needed. Digital skills improvement should be included in the personnel education development plans.

7.2.1 Improvements on Kouvola.fi website

A customer counselling page on the Kouvola website would help the citizens to find the right service and contact easier. The page would give gathered information for the customers where to contact in order to get service. For example Oulu City has this kind of a page in the very front of their website (Asiointi ja neuvonta). This work can be done in the web team of the city.

Service packages on different subjects (how to prepare to a treatment, home care, cure after treatment etc.) would also provide help for the citizens. These packages would include care instructions in order to decrease the workload in

the units. In the web pages should be clearly stated the service in question, who is entitled to it and how the service can be obtained. To meet Kouvola welfare services' strategic goals in prevention, the contents should also provide three-step-help to the citizens: 1) self-care and prevention, 2) non-urgent help and 3) urgent help. There should be clear instructions how to act and whom to contact in order to get the service. This improvement needs expertise from the service professionals and the web team for the implementation and communication.

The search function of the pages has not been working properly. That is crucial for the success of the pages. If the search is not working the citizens will not find what they are looking for that easily. The search finds only identical words and it does not search from the news at all. If this cannot be corrected, the Google search would be a better option. Non-functioning search causes a lot of bad will to the City. This is a matter of the provider of the content management system.

One big issue is the current content management system. It is unmodern and complicated to use when compared to the latest application. It is not flexible or easy to use nor does it offer variety of any kind. It is not efficient to work with the system as it takes much time to update the pages. As the Kouvola City organization has been changed couple of times during the past years, the archive in the system is massive: there is a huge amount of old files and old material in there. The content management system should be changed for a modern, easy to use application. The current application is not flexible and it is too complicated to use. That will limit the willingness to produce the contents and update the pages and thus prevent broadening the digital skills and readiness to adapt modern ways of working. People are used easy to use social media applications – the same easiness should be on web page updating with limited views and updating rights. The decision of the infrastructure should be made in the management group based on the presentation by the IT and Communications departments.

One big problem is also the outdated appendices the Google search finds. That is due to the outdated material in the content management system which is not deleted. Even though the material is not linked to the web pages, the Google search can find the attachments. This material should be deleted from the system immediately, as an outdated material also causes bad will to the City. This should be done automatically and the system provider is in a key role.

7.2.2 Improvements on eKouvola module

eKouvola page needs a visual renewal to help customers find what services are available digitally. As there are only few services on each category, some of the services could be categorized in a new way for example parenthood, leisure time, job/entrepreneurship etc.

In many services a registration/recognition is needed. When entering the service a separate "vetuma" recognition page appears. This page is not very customer friendly. Even there is one phrase telling the user which service he/she is about to enter, it is not very inviting page. There could be a page with eKouvola visual image, and the "vetuma" sign in is dropped on the page as a frame. eKouvola should be developed towards online-shop, where one signing in is enough.

The services should be found in a dropdown list when moving the cursor. Also a proper search function would help the customers to find the service needed.

The eKouvola module is a joint platform with other municipalities in Finland. The development decisions should be made in the steering group.

7.2.3 Chat/customer counselling module

As the goal for the Kouvola Welfare services is towards the "one-stop-shop" and case management/customer counselling is centered in many services,

this should be seen also in the web environment. The digital solutions should support the trend and bring new options in ways of working.

Kouvola should start using a combination of a chat service and low-threshold customer counselling module including safe e-mail possibility.

Online customer counselling module will bring several benefits:

- The customer will gain early stage consultancy quicker and easier, can get in contact with the service without several phone calls and will be directed to the right service by one-step-principle.
- The workload of the personnel should decrease while routine, not urgent tasks can be handled via web.
- Kouvola city will get positive publicity for offering modern services and can achieve effectiveness and is able to allocate resources better.
- The third sector services could be included in the application in the future. Also the possibilities to include cultural welfare and health prevention to support overall welfare should be investigated.

The new module could be implemented and developed step by step in various services through pilot units. The module will support existing customer counselling models (face-to-face contacts, phone service).

The possible pilots could be OVI-team (social services) and services for families with children. There seems to be a huge need for digital services in the health care sector, but there is not yet any centered customer counselling. In this sector it could start from reserving the appointment. The application could support the centered phone service to the elderly, but the target group is not the best possible for the digital services – in this case the service could be targeted to the relatives.

A separate project team is needed in order to bring the module in use. The team should consist of experts from the service provider, IT-department, pilot service and communications. Attention should be paid in the resources of the service.

7.2.4 Web ecosystem for the Kouvola City

As mentioned before, in the future the City of Kouvola may not be the only provider of the public services for the citizens. The role of the third sector is increasing and the renewal of the social and health care services will change the whole structure and the role of the current city. A municipality cannot be an isolated operator any more. Kouvola City should create a web ecosystem with its interest groups and co-operating parties.

Here I present my future vision of the Kouvola City's digital services. Kouvola should create a web ecosystem. It would consist of 1) Kouvola.fi web pages, which acts as a hub for the digital services of Kouvola City, 2) Online service channel which is a combination of chat and customer counselling module, 3) eKouvola digital services online-shop, 4) OmaKouvola channel, where citizens can create their own personal view and 5) Theme pages of OmaKouvola Channel for defined target groups (Figure 8).

Future vision of the Digital Services of the Kouvola City
Kouvola web-ecosystem

How the citizens find the services via web in the future. Kouvola web-ecosystem provides services in a customer friendly way. It consists of different elements: 1) Kouvola.fi-website 2) Online-service channel 3) eKouvola Digital Services 4) OmaKouvola channel (which acts as a tray where customer can pick his own favourites) and 5) Theme pages of OmaKouvola.

Figure 8. Future vision of the Digital Services of the Kouvola City.

Description of the components of the Kouvola web-ecosystem:

1. Kouvola.fi

   Kouvola website is a hub for all the digital services of the city. It is well known and can be the first contact, strengthen the brand and give overall information of the city. The site is a door further to the digital services. In the site the Services and customer counselling are in focus.

2. Combined Chat and Customer counselling application

   The online application would offer an early stage consultancy and easy and quicker and easier access to the services.

3. eKouvola.fi

   In the future, eKouvola could be an online shop providing all the digital services City offers in one place. The shop needs registration which would personalize the services for each customer.

4. OmaKouvola channel

   A new platform "Oma Kouvola", would bring solutions how the citizens find the services easier. Oma Kouvola would gather the services on one plate. The idea is in line with the divisional goals and would implement the idea of ecosystems in web. All the services provided by the Kouvola city, third sector and also national services could be linked in to Oma Kouvola. And the services could be selected based on customer's own interests. Oma Kouvola would be a collection of one's own services and interest areas. It could be a platform which combines official services as well personal pleasure and even social media on one place. It could be a citizens' personal "intranet". The selections would be based on personal choices as well as registered profiles. Oma Kouvola channel is a new concept of providing service as a total package and it could also increase the communality of the citizens and improve the image of Kouvola City.

5. Theme pages of OmaKouvola Channel

   Theme pages providing information to defined target groups. These pages are trays, where majority of the contents is linked or feeds from other websites. The main idea is to gather the information target group wants to have on one page.

   Both OmaKouvola and the theme pages implement the same idea as the smart phones, where the user can add the services he/she wants on his/her personal view.

7.3   Suggestions for Further Research and Development

Overall, the level of commitment (especially managerial level) in web/digital services needs to be increased throughout the organization. Also the level of digital skills needs to be increased throughout the organization. In addition a special attention should be paid to marketing and communications skills; how the services are communicated and marketed to the customers. One issue for further studies is the level of the organizational digital skills and how to improve them.

The development of digital services should not be run by IT-department alone – commitment from the management and service units is essential. More dialogue and co-operation between communications/IT-department/strategy department and service units is needed, in order to utilize the possibilities of the digital environment in the future. Also the other parties and customers should participate in the development of the digital environment and ecosystem of Kouvola citizens in the future. Customer panels should be established, where the client's voice can be heard and the new services and applications can be tested. The second suggestion for further studies would relate to customer involvement, and how to provide emotionally intelligent, value creating services in web.

This study concentrates on the accessibility and usability of the services. The future studies should go deeper on the service substance, and find the best solutions and applications that would benefit Kouvola City especially in the social and health care sector, where the need of services is increasing rapidly

but the resources are decreasing. The existing applications and the experience gained in other cities in Finland should be evaluated and the best practices should be taken in to use. The development projects should be effective, flexible and rapid. Even though joint projects with other municipalities are good, they often are rigid and time consuming projects. As Kouvola is in frontline in developing services/structures in processes, also that same innovativeness and open mind is needed in developing digital environment as well. The customers should be involved in this work via dialogical techniques like service design, future workshops etc. The third suggestion for future research is benchmarking of an existing social and health care online applications in Finland and abroad in order to find the best practices that could benefit Kouvola.

Very important development area is also the integration of different services, as using the services should be easy and simple to the customer as possible.

7.4   Evaluation of the study

The topic of this research is very relevant, and it reflects the current circumstances in the digital field and the changes in the public sector. The study is very practical and the method of action research was the right choice. Cyclical development and reflecting stages of the processes were present in the study process. The method aided to realize the existing problems and the context. In this research work, experience received in working as a communications responsible for the division, and knowledge obtained in over 20 years in the communications field were of great advantage and offered basis for comparison.

Through the thesis I got better understanding of the web environment and I started to see the possibilities web could offer to the City of Kouvola. The study challenges the previous viewpoints for public websites: From offering information to adding value to the customer. It also reflects the change in the field and the need for co-operation across old boundaries. The thesis presents two innovative ideas of public online shop and a web ecosystem and also opens up new views in directing customers via web.

This research work strengthened my interest in the digital field and the possibilities it could have on directing the customers and thus lessen the workload in the organization. It also made me understand how important it is to see the whole journey of the customer and to understand different viewpoints.

There is some room for improvement in the data acquisition and analyzing methods in this study. The online project had a strict deadline, so the survey and the interviews had to be carried out in a very tight schedule. In the theory part some more peer review articles should have been valuable.

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Telephone interviews

3 June 2015, Customer Service Manager, Hämeenlinna City
4 June 205, Service counsellor, Mikkeli City
28 September Service Manager, Oulu City

Workshops

Virtual Companionship with MLL 30. September 2015
ASKEL Profit Management Workshop 16. February 2015
ASKEL Development Project Workshop 24. March 2015
Ratamo perhekeskustyöpaja 15. April 2015
SADe roadshow 7 May 2015
Duodecim presentation 18 May 2015
Hyvis presentation 1 June 2015

Appendix 1. The questionnaire of the online survey

Online-palvelujen hyödyntäminen asiakasohjauksessa

Osana ASKEL-projektia toteutetaan kehittämisprojekteja, joista yksi on kartoitus, kuinka Online-palvelujen avulla voitaisiin tukea asiakkaan ohjausta palvelujen pariin.

Online-palvelut voivat olla esimerkiksi chat-palvelu tai laajempi asiakasohjausmoduuli, jossa yksinkertaisten kysymysten kautta kartoitetaan mitä palvelua asiakas tarvitsee ja minkä ketjun/palvelun asiakkaaksi hänet ohjataan jatkoselvittelyyn.

Online-palvelussa asiakasta ohjataan omatoimisuuteen. Tarkoituksena on **vähentää työkuormitusta** esimerkiksi puhelimitse tapahtuvan kevyen, neuvovan tason asiakasohjauksessa. Tavoite on **myös löytää kanava kiireettömien asioiden hoitoon**. Palvelu on ohjaava **ensikontakti asiakkaalle, kun huoli esim. läheisestä herää**, eikä hänellä ole selkeää kuvaa, mihin ottaa yhteyttä.

Kartoituksen pohjaksi toivoisin teidän vastaavan seuraaviin kysymyksiin:

1. Olisiko internetissä toteutettavasta asiakasohjauksen online-sovelluksesta mielestäsi hyötyä? k/e
   Miksi: (avoin)

2. Mikä malli mielestäsi olisi toimivin:
   - Chat-palvelu (reaaliaikainen neuvonta netissä)

- Kevyen tason asiakasohjaus (kysely/kevyt kartoitus)
Molempien yhdistelmä
- Muu, mikä?

3. Millaisissa palveluissa näkisit Online-sovelluksesta olevan hyötyä? (avoin)

4. Miten Online-palvelu voisi tukea nykyistä asiakas/palveluohjausta ja –malleja? (avoin)

Jos teet työssäsi neuvontaa/asiakas- tai palveluohjausta, vastaathan myös näihin kysymyksiin:

5. Millä tavalla teet asiakas- tai palveluohjausta nykyisin?
   - puhelimitse ( )
   - asiakas tulee käymään ( )
   - menemällä asiakkaan luo ( )

6. Saatko paljon yhteydenottoja, joiden hoitaminen ei ole kiireellistä? K/E

7. Saatko paljon yhteydenottopyyntöjä? K/E

8. Millaisia asioita asiakkaat kysyvät? (avoin)

9. Millaisia asioita voitaisiin hoitaa internetin välityksellä? (avoin)

10. Millä tavalla kehittäisit neuvontaa/kevyen tason palveluohjausta/asiakasohjausta? (avoin)