

PRZEGLĄD PRAWA ADMINISTRACYJNEGO

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Provision of Public Administration Services through the ePUAP Platform on the Example of Provincial Offices for the Protection of Monuments in Poland

*Świadczenie usług administracji publicznej za
pośrednictwem platformy ePUAP na przykładzie
wojewódzkich urzędów ochrony zabytków w Polsce*

Introduction

The development of digital technologies in the late 1950s initiated a new stage in the history of humanity described as the “digital revolution”. It is characterized by rapid technological progress and widespread digitization, affecting all areas of human life. The resulting changes have led to the creation of a new social formation, known as the “information society”, for which the strategic resource, instead of capital and labor, is knowledge. Social and technological changes have also determined the necessity of reforming public administration. Due to the use of information and telecommunications technologies to provide public services,

combined with changes of an organizational nature and the acquisition of new skills, there has been the creation of electronic administration (e-government).¹

One of the most important IT tools used in e-government in Poland is the Electronic Platform for Public Services (ePUAP). It is used for citizens and businesses to communicate with public administration bodies in a unified, standardized way, allowing administrative matters to be resolved online. Interest in the ePUAP platform has increased as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 and the social isolation measures implemented to counter it.² According to the Central Statistical Office (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny*, GUS), by 2023 nearly 59% of Poles were already using e-government services.³

Apart from rather general data (number of established trusted profiles, surveys on the use of e-services), there is no precise information on the use of the ePUAP platform in individual departments of public administration, by region, individual offices, or by the type of matter to be settled. Meanwhile, this type of data is essential for planning and taking steps to popularize e-government services. In addition, according to the author, such data would help show a broader view of e-government, which is much more complicated and diverse than general statistics suggest.

The purpose of this article is to analyse and identify the level of use of the ePUAP platform for the provision of public services using the example of provincial monument protection offices in Poland, and to determine the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the provision of electronic services. This choice is based on the author's interest in the system of monument protection, and at the same time it will allow to show the differences in the different provinces.⁴ According to the author, despite the increase in growth of interest in e-government services, the potential of the ePUAP platform is still not fully used, especially in sectors of secondary importance to the government, which undoubtedly includes monument protection.

The basis for the study is the available literature, reports and data received from the provincial offices for the protection of monuments under the procedure of access to public information, provided for in the Act of September 6, 2001 on access to public information.⁵

¹ M. Ganczar, A. Sytek, *Informatyzacja administracji publicznej*, Warszawa 2022, p. 11.

² P. Bednarski, *Wpływ pandemii COVID-19 na cyfryzację administracji publicznej*, [in:] *Wpływ epidemii COVID-19 na działalność administracji publicznej*, red. J. Korczak, M. Mielczarek-Mikołajów, Wrocław 2023.

³ Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Społeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce w 2023 r.*, Warszawa–Szczecin 2023, p. 24.

⁴ Provincial offices for the protection of monuments work in each province and have territorial jurisdiction limited to the territory of that province.

⁵ Journal of Laws 2001, No. 112, item 1198.

Genesis and assumptions of the ePUAP platform

The ePUAP platform was created in 2006 and, thanks to EU funding, was launched in 2008.⁶ It is an upgrade of the “Wrota Polski” project, the goal of which was to enable citizens to handle the most common administrative matters without leaving home. The term “Wrota” (gates) was designed to symbolize openness to new technologies, citizens’ needs and cooperation with other countries.⁷ Such a kind of “opening” has just become the ePUAP platform, which can be defined as “an ICT system in which public institutions make services available through a single access point on the Internet”.⁸

The ePUAP platform is intended by its creators to provide the following benefits:

- a) saving of time and money on the side of the petitioners – settling matters through ePUAP is performed using the Internet, it does not require spending time on getting to the office, standing in lines, taking vacations (traditional administration usually works during the petitioners’ working hours);
- b) flexible access – the customer can use e-services at convenient times, 24 hours a day, using a smartphone, laptop, or other devices with Internet access;
- c) automation of public services – the creation of electronic infrastructure equipped with appropriate algorithms allows organizing a number of processes in a way that does not require human intervention (e.g. generating confirmation of document submission, redirecting a case to the appropriate branch/department, assigning a case number according to the order of receipt, creating statistics, random assignment of cases, etc.);
- d) preliminary error verification – electronic platforms often have a function to automatically check the correctness of the data entered, and detected errors can block the action, so that the supplicant is able to self-correct even before the document is submitted to the office; in addition, offices also have systems that suggest the possibility of an error/defect;
- e) transparency of public services – the ePUAP platform brings together a number of services in one place, making their search and use friendly from the petitioner’s perspective;

⁶ G. Michalczyk, A. Zalewska-Bochenko, *Platforma ePUAP jako przykład elektronizacji usług administracji publicznej dla ludności*, „Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu” 2016, nr 450, p. 391.

⁷ M. Karpiuk, K. Chałubińska-Jentkiewicz, *Informacja i informatyzacja w administracji publicznej*, Warszawa 2015, p. 142.

⁸ Article 3(13) of the Act of 17 February 2005 on Informatization of Activities of Entities Performing Public Tasks, Journal of Laws 2024, item 307.

- f) ability to provide complex public services – ePUAP was created in a way that allows systematic expansion of services, expanding the number of e-service providers as technology advances and a given office’s capabilities.⁹

The principles of using the ePUAP platform are specified in the Ordinance of the Minister of Digitization of 5 October 2016 on the extent and conditions of use of the electronic platform of public administration services¹⁰ (also referred to as ePUAP Ordinance). In order to use the e-services offered by the ePUAP platform, it is necessary to create an account and provide the following data: first name, last name, PESEL number (if the user has one), e-mail address, cell phone number, user ID.¹¹ Identification and authorisation on the ePUAP platform is possible through a user-defined user ID and password; or an electronic identification means used for authorisation in the ICT system of a non-public entity, an electronic identification means issued in an electronic identification system connected to a national node of electronic identification, as referred to in Article 21a(1)(2)(a) of the Act of September 5, 2016 on Trust Services and Electronic Identification,¹² electronic identification means issued in a notified electronic identification system; data verified by a qualified electronic signature certificate (§ 4(2) of the ePUAP Ordinance).

Public bodies providing services through ePUAP can use functions such as:

- creation and handling of electronic documents by individuals and entities;
- transmission of electronic documents;
- data exchange between ePUAP and other ICT systems;
- identification of users and accountability of their actions;
- verification of electronic signature;
- creation of services of a public entity or services of several public entities interacting with each other, built on the basis of two or more services;
- handling of electronic payments;
- activities related to the trusted profile confirmation process;
- verification of compliance of an electronic document with its template specified in the central repository of electronic document templates;
- issuance of: official certification of receipt, electronic certification of payment, electronic time stamp (§ 4(2) of the ePUAP Ordinance).

Between 2008 and 2013, a project called “ePUAP 2” was implemented to increase the functionality of the existing platform (loading time, graphic design of the site, removal of errors that appear, making it easier to navigate the site)

⁹ M. Ganczar, A. Sytek, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

¹⁰ Journal of Laws 2016, item 1626.

¹¹ § 4 of the ePUAP Ordinance.

¹² Journal of Laws 2019, item 162.

and to increase the range of services provided. All of this was done to make the platform even more user-friendly and used to an increasing extent to deal with administrative matters online.¹³

As part of the ePUAP platform, exists the Central Repository of Electronic Document Templates (*Centralne Repozytorium Wzorów Dokumentów Elektronicznych*, CRD).¹⁴ It collects templates of official forms sent by public administration bodies and made available in the Public Information Bulletin (*Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej*, BIP). Thus, specimens of documents accepted by Polish offices have been collected in one place, which greatly facilitates the handling of cases, taking into account the ever-increasing number of cases and frequent changes in the formal requirements of documents.¹⁵

An important tool to improve the functioning of the ePUAP platform is the Electronic Submission Post (*Elektroniczna Skrzynka Podawcza*, ESP). It was introduced by an amendment to the Act of January 10, 2014 on Informatization of the Activities of Entities Performing Public Tasks and Certain Other Acts in 2014.¹⁶ The act made it obligatory for public entities to use ESPs and equated the form of an electronic document (with a qualified signature, or signed by a trusted profile) with the paper form.

Functioning of the ePUAP platform in practice

In the early days of the ePUAP platform, it received little trust. As of January 1, 2014, only 186,491 adult citizens (about 1.2%) had an ePUAP trusted profile or electronic signature (which is necessary to use e-services offered by ePUAP).¹⁷ According to the Supreme Audit Office (*Najwyższa Izba Kontroli*, NIK), “without the popularization of the ePUAP trusted profile and electronic signature, as well as the widespread promotion of the electronic services needed by citizens, there will be no significant increase in the number of people using these services. The use of the electronic form of handling matters in offices was also not encouraged by problems related to the unsatisfactory availability of e-services posted on the nationwide

¹³ J. Werner, *Elektroniczna Platforma Usług Administracji Publicznej w relacjach urząd-klient (e-administracji)*, „Zarządzanie Innowacyjne w Gospodarce i Biznesie” 2017, vol. 2(25), pp. 95–96.

¹⁴ Details of the CRD are set forth in the Prime Minister’s Ordinance of September 14, 2011 on drafting letters in the form of electronic documents, serving electronic documents and providing access to forms, templates and copies of electronic documents, Journal of Laws 2011, No. 206, item 1216.

¹⁵ J. Werner, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁶ Journal of Laws 2014, item 183.

¹⁷ Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Świadczenie usług publicznych w formie elektronicznej na przykładzie wybranych jednostek samorządu terytorialnego*, Warszawa 2016, p. 8.

ePUAP platform, which significantly hindered citizens from using e-services.¹⁸ The ePUAP platform was mainly used by employees of public administration bodies for electronic correspondence between offices (more than 96% of all documents sent through the ePUAP platform between 1 January 2014 and 30 June 2015).¹⁹

The acceleration of the popularity of the use of e-services offered by the ePUAP platform was catalysed by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on the functioning of the state, including restrictions on customer service in offices, caused that in many situations only in electronic form could administrative matters be handled. By March 2022, 14 million Poles already had a trusted profile, a 14-fold increase compared to 2017 and a nearly 75-fold increase compared to 2014. It should be noted that in early 2020 (before the outbreak of the pandemic), 5 million Poles had a profile, so there is no doubt that it was the situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic that contributed most to the increase in the number of trusted profiles being set up.²⁰

The growing number of trusted profiles also affects the number of e-services implemented. In 2016, 265.3 thousand e-services were realized via using the ePUAP platform, and in 2019, this number will increase to 137 392.3 thousand.²¹ Most of these were related to the e-service called “Check vehicle history” (in 2019, it accounted for 92% of all e-services).²²

Use of ePUAP platform in provincial offices for the protection of monuments in Poland

As mentioned in the introduction, a significant difficulty in assessing the degree of use of the ePUAP platform in the provision of electronic services by public administration is the lack of detailed statistical data. This is because it should be assumed that there will be differences within provinces, sectors of the administration, individual offices and also in relation to the type of case handled. Without such data, it is also impossible to monitor the difficulty of the matter being handled – whether access to electronic services consisted only of check-

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²⁰ Explanatory Memorandum to the Draft Amendment to the Act on Informatization of Activities of Entities Performing Public Tasks, Parliamentary, Print no. 1637 of August 21, 2013; Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Świadczenie usług publicznych...*, p. 8.

²¹ Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Realizacja usług publicznych dla obywateli z wykorzystaniem platformy ePUAP*, Warszawa 2021, pp. 17–18.

²² *Ibidem*.

ing information on the office's website, or whether it is a more complex matter, ending with the issuance of an administrative decision.

In addition, the information analysed above regarding the use of the ePUAP platform, even though it shows an increase in the number of trusted profiles created or e-services implemented, does not relate to the total number of cases handled in a particular office.

In an effort to find answers to some of the above questions, the author decided to conduct his own research. First, monument protection is the author's main research interest, and provincial monument protection offices are the basic organizational units with the help of which provincial monument conservators issue administrative decisions. Secondly, the Provincial Conservator of Monuments (*Wojewódzki Konserwator Zabytków*, WKZ) who realizes tasks with the help of the Provincial Office for the Protection of Monuments (*Wojewódzki Urząd Ochrony Zabytków*, WUOZ) is a composite administration body subordinated to the provincial governor. Thus, there are 16 WKZ, within the jurisdiction of a given province. By analysing the data from each provincial office, it will be possible to make a territorial comparison of the use of the ePUAP platform and possibly show differences in each province. Third, the monument protection sector in Poland after 1989 was treated secondarily by government, as a non-priority area. This implied a lack of fundamental reforms, underfunding and staff deficits in the services responsible for monument protection.

In order to find out the extent of the use of the ePUAP platform by the particular WUOZ, the author of the paper sent each WUOZ a request for information on the basis of Article 2(1) and Article 10(1) of the Act of 6 September 2001 on Access to Public Information.

The application contains the following questions:

1. How many administrative cases were received in total by the WUOZ (with delegations) in 2019 and 2023?
2. How many of these cases were received through the ePUAP platform?

The author of the article received a response to each of the submitted applications. The obtained information is summarized in Table 1.

From the information received, it can be seen that the various offices keep a register of incoming documents in different ways. Some offices keep a case register – a case number is assigned after the arrival of the application initiating the case, and then each further inflow in the case is registered under this mark. Other offices keep a register of receipts – each inflow has its own separate number. Such diversity makes it impossible to compare data directly. Therefore, Table 2 calculates the percentage proportion of incoming receipts via e-PUAP to total receipts in 2019 and in 2023, as well as the change in this proportion expressed in percentage points.

Table 1. Statistics of income to WKZ in 2019 and 2023*

Authority	Total number of cases/incomes in 2019	Total number of cases/incomes in 2023	Change in % from 2019 to 2023	Number of cases/incomes through ePUAP in 2019	Number of cases/incomes through ePUAP in 2023	Change in % from 2019 to 2023
Dolnośląski WKZ	no data	no data	–	no data	no data	–
Kujawsko-Pomorski WKZ	19,225	19,117	-0.6	1,349	3,494	+159
Lubelski WKZ	20,033	23,640	+18	340	1,328	+290
Lubuski WKZ	11,579	10,089	-12.9	57	639	+1021
Łódzki WKZ	4,824	32,755	–	no data	no data	–
Małopolski WKZ	22,189	29,786	+34.2	1,080	4,408	+308.1
Mazowiecki WKZ	35,961	42,009	+16.8	690	7,612	+1003.2
Opolski WKZ	7,550	8,666	+14.8	436	1,922	+340.8
Podkarpacki WKZ	5,884	13,151	+123.5	328	1,610	+390.9
Podlaski WKZ	5,596	7,270	+29.9	890	1,991	+123.7
Pomorski WKZ	19,879	21,942	+10.4	545	5,261	+865.3
Śląski WKZ	24,000	24,198	+0.8	1,536	6,394	+316.3
Świętokrzyski WKZ	7,480	9,179	+22.7	348	1,321	+279.6
Warmińsko-Mazurski WKZ	9,755	8,647	-11.4	576	2,136	+279.8
Wielkopolski WKZ	39,574	40,610	+2.6	1,214	6,205	+411.1
Zachodniopomorski WKZ	17,987	18,442	+2.5	no data	no data	–

* Dolnośląski WKZ refused to provide access to public information. Data provided by the Kujawsko-Pomorski WKZ, Mazowiecki WKZ, Opolski WKZ, Pomorski WKZ, Śląski WKZ include the number of all incomes. Data provided by the Lubelski WKZ, Lubuski WKZ, Małopolski WKZ, Podkarpacki WKZ, Świętokrzyski WKZ, Warmińsko-Mazurski WKZ, Wielkopolski WKZ include the number of administrative cases. The data provided by the Łódzki WKZ include the number of cases in 2019 and the number of incomes in 2023, making it impossible to compare these data. In addition, the Łódzki WKZ refused to allow access to public information to the rest of the data. The data provided by the Podlaski WKZ include in columns 2 and 3 the number of administrative cases, while in columns 5 and 6 the number of incomes (not cases) received through e-PUAP which makes it impossible to calculate the proportion. Data provided by the Zachodniopomorski WKZ include the number of administrative cases. The Zachodniopomorski WKZ does not keep a register of cases by form of delivery to the office.

Source: Author's own study.

Table 2. Data showing the proportion of income through ePUAP to all income

Authority	Proportion of income through ePUAP to total income in 2019	Proportion of income through ePUAP to total income in 2023	Change in proportion in percent points
Dolnośląski WKZ	no data	no data	–
Kujawsko-Pomorski WKZ	7%	18.3 %	+11.3
Lubelski WKZ	1.7%	5.6 %	+3.9
Lubuski WKZ	0.5%	6.3%	+5.8
Łódzki WKZ	no data	no data	–
Małopolski WKZ	4.9%	14.8%	+9.9
Mazowiecki WKZ	1.9%	18.1%	+16.2
Opolski WKZ	5.8%	22.2%	+16.4
Podkarpacki WKZ	5.6%	12.2%	+6.6
Podlaski WKZ	15.9%	27.4%	+11.5
Pomorski WKZ	2.7%	24%	+21.3
Śląski WKZ	6.4%	26.4%	+18
Świętokrzyski WKZ	4.7%	14.4%	+9.7
Warmińsko-Mazurski WKZ	5.9%	24.7%	+18.8
Wielkopolski WKZ	3.1%	15.6%	+12.5
Zachodniopomorski WKZ	no data	no data	–

Source: Author's own study.

Analysing the data in Table 2, it should be noted that in 2019 the proportion of income through ePUAP to total income was the highest in the Podlaski WKZ (15.9%), and the lowest in the Lubuski WKZ (0.5%). The difference expressed in percentage points is therefore 15.4 percentage points, while expressed comparatively the difference is nearly 32 times. Thus, it can be seen that the degree of use of the ePUAP platform in each province in 2019 varied widely.

In 2023, the Podlaski WKZ was still in first place (27.4%), and the lowest proportion of income through ePUAP was in the Lubelski WKZ (5.6%). The difference expressed in percentage points is therefore 21.8 percentage points, which is an increase over 2019. However, the comparative difference was reduced and was less than 5 times. Therefore, it can be concluded that the disproportion between provinces has reduced.

The largest increase in incomes through ePUAP was in the Pomorski WKZ (21.3%), while the smallest in the Lubelski WKZ (3.9%). Averaged across all WKZs (which provided data), the proportion of incoming through ePUAP to total incoming in 2019 was 5.1%, while in 2023 it increased to 17.7%.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it should be said that, among other things, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the social isolation solutions implemented in connection with it, there has been a significant increase in the use of e-government solutions. The research conducted indicates that over the course of 5 years (from 2019 to 2023), the proportion of income through ePUAP to all income to provincial conservation offices has more than tripled on average.

By getting data from particular provinces, the author's thesis that the use of the ePUAP platform will be varied within provinces was confirmed. Surprisingly, the first place in use of the ePUAP platform in both 2019 and 2023 was that of the Podlaski WKZ. The difference between the proportion of incoming through the ePUAP platform to all incoming between the Podlaski WKZ (the highest proportion of incoming through ePUAP) and the Lubuski WKZ (the lowest proportion of incoming through ePUAP) was nearly 32 times. In 2023, it decreased and amounted to less than 5 times. This suggests that as popularity of e-tools increases, the disproportion in the degree of their use between provinces reduces.

It should also be concluded that despite the increase in popularity of the ePUAP platform, the proportion of incoming through it still remains quite low (17.7% nationwide). In all probability, it can be assumed that this result would look even worse if we divided the incoming cases into those coming from other administrative bodies and those coming from petitioners. This is because the large majority of offices now handle cases through the ePUAP platform.

The reason for this is not the ePUAP platform itself, which has been technically developed. It is also difficult to find legislative or financial defects in this regard. The increase in the use of the ePUAP platform primarily requires promotional and educational activities, both on the part of the potential users of the services and the officials who are responsible for their realization. The process associated with acquiring digital competencies and converting from the traditional way of doing issues is of a long-term nature. However, considering the growing trend in this matter, it should be expected that over the next few years there will be continued increase in interest in handling matters online, which will result in savings on the part of citizens and public administration bodies.

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Abstract: The digital revolution, which began in the middle of the 20th century, has led to social and technological changes, and consequently to the formation of an information society. The changing reality has not been without impact on the provision of public services. Thanks to the use of information and telecommunications technologies, e-government has been created. One of the basic tools used in Polish e-government is the ePUAP platform, used for electronic communication between petitioners and public administration bodies in a standardized way. Its importance has increased especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, in connection with the social isolation measures being introduced. The purpose of this article is to analyze the use of the ePUAP platform for the provision of public services on the example of provincial offices for the protection of monuments in Poland, based on research conducted and information obtained through access to public information. According to the author, the lack of publicly available, detailed statistical data on the ePUAP platform makes it difficult to assess its functioning in practice and to plan further measures for its development.

Keywords: e-government; ePUAP platform; provincial office for the protection of monuments; informatization; protection of monuments; e-services

Abstrakt: Zapoczątkowana w połowie XX w. rewolucja cyfrowa doprowadziła do przemian społecznych i technologicznych, a w konsekwencji do ukształtowania się społeczeństwa informacyjnego. Zmieniająca się rzeczywistość nie pozostała bez wpływu na świadczenie usług publicznych. Dzięki wykorzystaniu technologii informacyjnych i telekomunikacyjnych doszło do powstania e-administracji. Jednym z podstawowych narzędzi wykorzystywanych w polskiej e-administracji jest platforma ePUAP, która służy do elektronicznej komunikacji petentów z organami administracji publicznej w ustandaryzowany sposób. Jej znaczenie wzrosło zwłaszcza w okresie pandemii COVID-19 w związku z wprowadzaniem środków izolacji społecznej. Celem artykułu jest analiza wykorzystywania platformy ePUAP do świadczenia usług publicznych na przykładzie wojewódzkich urzędów ochrony zabytków w Polsce w oparciu o przeprowadzone badania oraz informacje uzyskane w trybie dostępu do informacji publicz-

nej. Zdaniem autora brak powszechnie dostępnych, szczegółowych danych statystycznych dotyczących platformy ePUAP utrudnia ocenę jej funkcjonowania w praktyce oraz planowanie dalszych działań na rzecz jej rozwoju.

Słowa kluczowe: e-administracja; platforma ePUAP; wojewódzki urząd ochrony zabytków; informatyzacja; ochrona zabytków; e-usługi