

E-government

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Have you ever spent hours waiting in gloomy corridors, faced irritated public officials surrounded by dusty files, or found that the government agency you wanted to visit is closed by the time you finally managed to find a parking space? Johann Bäuerlein had experienced all these things many times before he moved from private industry to public administration in 1997 when he became full-time mayor of Memmelsdorf.

THE INDUSTRIAL ENGINEER had already come to appreciate the positive aspects of personal computers in his capacity as association chairman. Then, soon after taking office, he discovered i-kom, a Bamberg-based business startup. Its IT specialists did more than modernize the data processing system at Memmelsdorf's town hall: they presented the small Franconian community of 8,300 inhabitants with an offer that the self-taught computer expert found difficult to refuse. Memmelsdorf, i-kom personnel promised, could have Germany's first functioning online town hall: the town's inhabitants would then be able to apply for dog licences, seek approval to open a restaurant, and modify their income tax records from the comfort of their own homes quickly and with com-

E-government projects are not only modernizing public agencies and authorities, but also making administrative procedures more transparent for ordinary citizens

plete data security. Without hesitation, the people of Memmelsdorf took up the idea and the small town is now "Germany's model community in the field of e-government," according to a test of German towns and cities published in Chip, a popular computer magazine. "At least, we are among those at the forefront of this development in Germany," says Mayor Bäuerlein modestly. He knows that great advances have been made in the field of e-government over recent months.

"For two or three years now, the internet has been at the very top of towns' agendas," says Dr Busso Grabow of the German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu) in Berlin. Today, he explains, an attractive website is considered an important element in developing a positive image. And increasingly, too, municipal authorities are also beginning to realize that the internet can enable them to offer their customers in other words, their citizens better services, greater transparency and more convenience without the disadvantages of limited opening hours or long waiting times.

New law will boost innovation

Alongside Nuremberg and Esslingen, Bremen is one of the winners of the MEDIA@Komm multimedia competition organized by the federal government. The Hanseatic city now enables its citizens to complete the administrative formalities associated with moving house over the internet using a digital signature. House builders can also submit applications for planning approval online and have them sent simultaneously to all the offices involved in the administrative process. Bremen's city parliament authorized the use of digital signatures in a specially enacted "test statute." According to a Difu survey conducted in December 2000, 40 per cent of all German towns with more than 50,000 inhabitants now plan to set up virtual town halls. Moreover, 72 per cent of the communities surveyed intend to accept digital signatures once the legal issues have been clarified. Undoubtedly, the lack of new signature legislation -- and the poor state of public finances -- has been a major obstacle to the estab-

lishment of virtual town halls. Although being able to download official forms from the internet and then fill them out at home is a significant step forward, virtual visits to authorities only really begin to make sense when you no longer need to sign them by hand and send them back to the relevant office by post. Fortunately, the new signature legislation enacted by the Bundestag in February 2001 will soon come into effect. "When digital signatures have the same legal status as handwritten ones, we'll immediately offer all administrative procedures online," says Stefan Westner, i-kom's chief executive. Memmelsdorf's mayor is already anticipating substantial advances in the development of his online town hall. "This will become the normal way of doing things," believes Bäuerlein, even if it will not necessarily be accepted by all older people. But anyone who has had contact with PCs will immediately appreciate the advantages.

Experts estimate that approximately half of all the administrative services offered by local, state and federal authorities, tax offices and job centres could be provided on the internet. At the federal level, Federal Interior Minister Otto Schily intends to offer more than 1,200 services online by the year 2005. According to surveys, 69 per cent of the German population would like to perform administrative chores on the internet, emphasizes Schily. "In five years, today's 13 year olds will no longer understand why they can't apply for a driver's licence or a passport online." BundOnline 2005, the federal government's e-government initiative, is already supporting pilot projects in this area. Graduates can submit online applications to repay their student loans, and taxpayers can send in annual tax returns over the internet.

FEDERAL CHANCELLOR Gerhard Schröder launched BundOnline 2005 at the CeBIT computer fair in Hanover. The initiative is part of the Internet Für Alle program (Internet for All), with which the federal government aims to make the internet accessible and affordable to all sections of society. At the same time, BundOnline 2005 also builds on Moderner Staat Moderne Verwaltung, a program established by the federal government in 1999 to promote the modernization of government and public administration. Essentially, this involves a redefinition of government responsibilities. The state system of the 21st century, believe the politicians, will have to see a redistribution of duties and responsibilities between government, business and society. The guiding principle is the idea of the "empowering state," which leaves more space for society and individual commitment. The internal structures of government administration should also become part of this development process.

THE HEART OF THE program is the introduction of modern management techniques in the federal administration and ministers with quality control, budgeting and cost-benefit analyses. In the future, public authorities are meant to be results-oriented and will also face competition. "Modern management and e-government are two central means of achieving fundamental changes in public administration", says Brigitte Zypries, state secretary at the Federal Interior Ministry. The goal is "a federal administration that does more and costs less."

All the services provided by approximately 350 federal agencies are to become accessible through a federal government internet portal by 2005. The www.bund.de website, which was opened at the CeBIT fair, already offers numerous links to archives and databases and also refers visitors to advice pages of various ministries and agencies. The judiciary could also go online here at some time in the future. The federal government recently agreed on a reform of German civil law that would make it possible to institute legal proceedings online.

Greater transparency makes new demands

If they wish to clear the way for online administration for ordinary citizens, federal, state and local authorities will also have to increase the level of networking among themselves. Memmelsdorf, the e-government pioneer, always faces serious obstacles when it has to work with other authorities. The citizens of Memmelsdorf can complete official forms on the internet and return them to the municipal authorities. Following the forthcoming legal changes, they also will be able to do this in encrypted form using a digital signature. "However, when someone changes their place of residence," explains Ralf Pfister, the head of the department responsible for residents' records, "we have to send a carbon copy to the state statistical office. And they demand a handwritten signature. That's why we can't extend our online service to include this area."

It is not only administrations that have to adjust, says Mayor Bäuerlein, but also their staff. Users of his virtual town hall, for example, can always check whether an application is still in the "pending" basket

or is already being processed. In Bäuerlein's experience, "transparency also makes new demands on personnel. It doesn't only reduce work loads." In any event, the enterprising mayor doesn't need to worry about job losses yet. Nonetheless, it is absolutely clear that the modernization of Germany's financially hard-pressed public authorities will entail reductions in labour costs. If inquiries to records offices can be processed by a database management system and the relevant fees automatically debited from enquirers' smart cards, the number of staff required will inevitably fall. Only then, however, will citizens be able to move nearer to a vision that Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder described with the following words: "The data should travel, not citizens."



The way it was then: On the eve of October 3, 1990, one million eastern and western Germans celebrated the Day of German Unity at the Reichstag in Berlin.

Paths to new knowledge Corporate Universities

More and more businesses are establishing their own universities to provide tailor-made, global training courses for their personnel

DAIMLER Chrysler has one, and so do Motorola, McDonald's, Bertelsmann, Lufthansa and German software giant SAP. All these businesses have their own internal corporate universities. Institutions of this kind allow corporations to pursue the goal of developing a company-wide practice-oriented network in order to make more efficient use of the factor "knowledge." Their courses cannot be compared with the form of fundamental academic education provided at conventional universities. The form of curriculum offered at corporate universities is oriented too narrowly towards the specific needs of the enterprise concerned. As a rule, corporate universities have only limited internal infrastructure. Accordingly, e-learning plays a major role at corporate universities, and they often cooperate with prestigious international institutions of higher education. DaimlerChrysler and Bertelsmann, for example, collaborate with the Harvard Business School in the United States and with the International Institute for Management Development in Lausanne, Switzerland. While the automobile manufacturer and the media group have primarily built up centres of further education for their senior managers, the SAP university is open to all employees. This means that further education within the company is globalised and can also ensure that all areas benefit from the same pool of knowledge. The spectrum of courses on offer ranges from time management and specialist SAP knowledge to seminars for executives.

At DaimlerChrysler, the corporate university serves as a forum for discussing key topics, for conveying intercultural competence, for determining the best problem-solving strategies, and naturally for improving management expertise. The main impetus for founding the corporate university in 1998 was the idea that a business can only be successful on a lasting basis if the work of its managers is characterised by a common basic understanding of corporate goals and strategies.

Private Higher Education in Germany Rigorous instruction has a price. More and more private institutions are competing with public universities

GERMANY has no tradition of privately financed higher education. Only minimal fees are charged at public universities instruction is free. Recently, however, more and more private institutions have also begun competing for students. There are some 70 private higher education institutions. Despite the label "private," however, almost all of them receive sometimes very considerable support from public funds. Private higher education costs between 3,000 and 40,000 marks a year. For this money, students are promised good counselling, strong links with business, and international curricula above all, in business-oriented subjects.

In 1971, the European Business School (www.ebs.de) in Oestrich-Winkel,

Rheingau, became the pioneer of private higher education in Germany. At the beginning of the 1980s it was followed by the University of Witten/Herdecke (www.uni-wh.de). Newcomers on the education market include the Stuttgart Institute of Management and Technology (www.simt.de), the Northern Institute of Technology in Hamburg-Harburg (www.niit.de) and the Gerd Bucerius Law School in Hamburg as the first private law college (www.law-school.de). In 1992, Handelshochschule Leipzig (www.hhl.de) was the first private college to be founded in the new Länder.

International Study Programmes

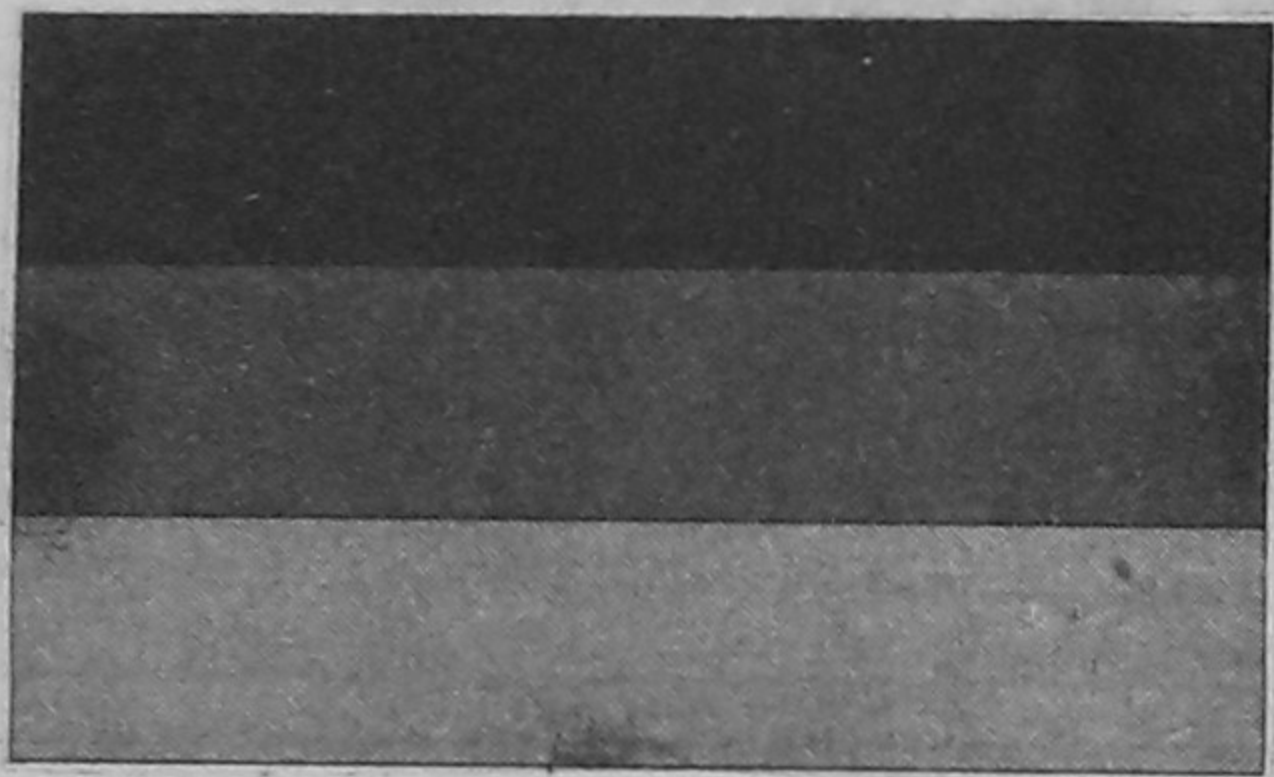
Bachelors and masters: 599 university courses in Germany now lead to internationally recognised degrees

GERMAN universities have only been allowed to award internationally recognised bachelor's and master's degrees since 1989 and they have already become rather popular. 382 courses currently lead to a bachelor's degree and 217 to a master's. How do they differ from conventional German university courses? They are internationally oriented and many programmes are conducted in English, which makes them particularly attractive for overseas students. And because the names of the new degrees are more widely recognised than a German "Diplom" or "Magister." It is easier for graduates to find a job outside Germany. A wide variety of subjects are covered, ranging from aeronautical technology at Fachhochschule Aachen to world heritage studies at the Technological University of Cottbus. Naturally, foreigners can also study in Germany for only one or two semesters, for example, through one of approximately 13,000 higher education partnerships. In addition to this, there are more than 150 European study programmes which stipulate that at least two semesters must be completed abroad. More information is available on the internet at: www.studieren-in-deutschland.de

Internet for All

THE new media form the foundation of the knowledge society, which is why they are a target of the German federal government's IT campaign. A large number of measures have already been initiated through an action programme entitled "Innovation and jobs in the Information Society of the 21st Century." Thus, for example, "Schulen ans Netz," the internet initiative for schools, was able to make a major breakthrough in the year 2000: almost 90% of schools are now "online" and the figure should be 100% by the middle of 2001. It is also planned to connect all public libraries to the internet and to promote the development of high-quality study software. More information is available on the internet at: www.bundesregierung.de/www.san-ev.de

Greetings to the People of Germany on the Occasion of Unification Day



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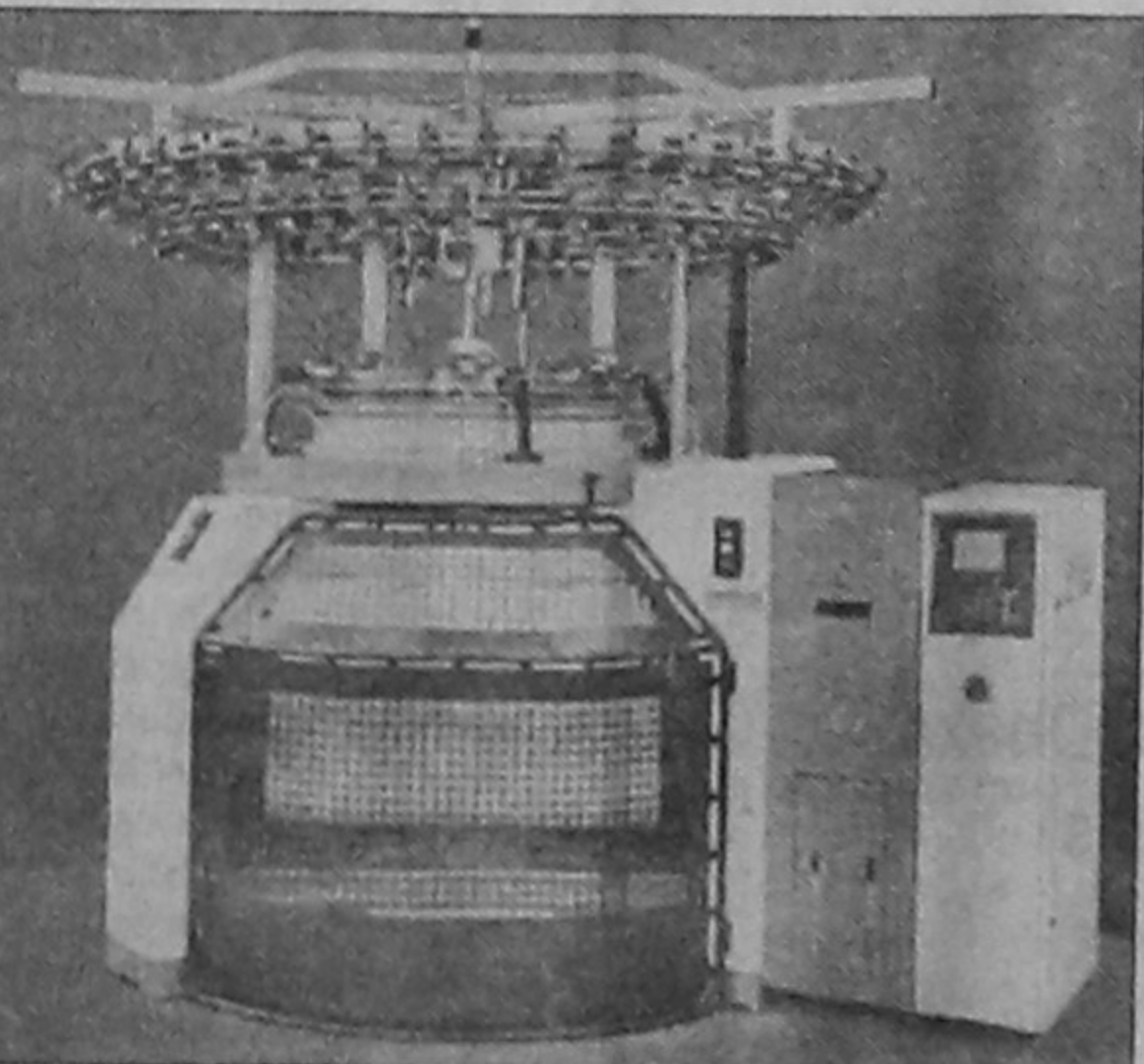


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