

THE APPROPRIATENESS OF SWEDISH MUNICIPALITY WEB SITE DESIGNS

Emma Eliason

Örebro University, ESI
SE-701 82 Örebro, SWEDEN
emma.eliason@esi.oru.se
+4619303558

Jonas Lundberg

Linköping University, IDA
SE-581 83 Linköping, Sweden
jonlu@ida.liu.se
+4613282602

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the results of a front-page genre analysis of 290 Swedish municipality Web sites are presented, and the appropriateness of the identified design solutions are discussed. Seven municipality Web site genres are identified: notice-board, newspaper, brochure, promotion, commercial, portal, and filter. We discuss how the municipality genres are related to each other, and to other genres, as mix-genres or subgenres. We conclude that the genres differ widely in terms of form, dominating content, action possibilities, purposes, and user groups and roles. This paper provides design examples of what qualities the different genres might bring, and thereby, gives an opportunity for designers and procurers to learn from previous designs. The paper contributes both by providing an analysis of a genre central to society, and by showing how a genre analysis reveals implicit values regarding the user and the task, mediated in the genres of municipality Web sites.

Author Keywords

Genre analysis, inherited values, Web site design, municipality.

ACM Classification Keywords

H5.4. Hypertext/Hypermedia: Theory, user issues.
H5.2. User Interfaces: Graphical User Interfaces (GUI)

INTRODUCTION

Value choices are made in the design process, which have consequences that are impossible to exactly predict [20]. Web site designs often replicate existing solutions, intentionally or unintentionally, bringing previously made value choices to the fore. Genre awareness has been proposed as a notion of how users and designers reduce the complexity of the web, where users categorize sites as

belonging to genres and designers use it as a tool to target audiences, and where genre characteristics are copied and refined [7].

It is thus, important to be aware of the inherited expectations that an existing genre might bring. For example, a replication of an online newspaper mediates that it is important to have the most recent news shown in the design as having information updated on a daily basis.

Genre has been seen as a promising concept for interactive artifacts [2, 13], and has been proposed to inform, for instance, scenario-based design [3]. Genre analysis has also been used in the design of meeting ware and achieving requirements by analyzing meetings in different organizations[16].

The objective of study here is Swedish municipality Web site design. It is an interesting objective because of its potential importance to users, but also due to the fact that applications developed in e-government settings is to a higher degree exposed to critique and expectations on, e.g., transparency, accountability, and accessibility than in the private sector [22]. Furthermore, in many countries, governments are designing or maintaining Web sites to be able to interact with their citizens [17]. It is, therefore, important to choose an appropriate Website design, communicating its intended values.

The purpose of this paper is based on a front-page analysis of Swedish municipality Web sites, first of all, to present the identified genres, then to show how the genres can be seen as replicates of existing genres used on the Internet, and what expectations and experiences that may bring, and finally, to discuss the appropriateness of the different design solutions.

Designers need to be aware of what genres exist, and thus, to be aware of values that a design might bring. Available guidelines for Web design typically are concerned with the design of Web pages in general, and although they can provide general advice, they do not contain advice on genre-specific aspects of the design. Design guidelines based on genre analysis take form, content, and purpose of preceding designs into account, providing a well-known frame of reference for the user [8]. This paper presents an overview of genres-design solutions that are used by

Swedish municipalities. That could have value for designers of government Web pages. It could help them to make choices about the kind of front page they wish to design, what values they want to promote, and how to present those values. Procurers of municipality Web sites could also use the results to support their decision-making processes. The structured overview presented here shows what designs other municipalities use and what purposes and values they communicate. That could support procurer decisions about what kind of municipality site they should ask designers to provide. This paper also contributes by providing an analysis of a genre central to society, and by showing how a genre analysis reveals implicit values regarding the user and the task, mediated in the genres of municipality Web sites.

GENRE THEORY

Genre is a term that has been used in diverse areas with roots in the study of text and rhetoric [12]. Lacey [11] describes genre products as having a common repertoire of elements. In movies, the elements are, for instance, setting, characters, iconography, and style. In analyzing computer games, the repertoire could instead, be visual style, cut scenes, interface metaphor, pace, and control schemes [23]. Using the repertoire of elements of a genre will not guarantee that the experienced audience gets what they expect, but it will facilitate recognition, and increase the likelihood that the genre will match the audience purposes. In order to design an information system within a genre, the designers, therefore, have to be aware of the users' expectations [4].

Genre has also been proposed in human-computer interaction design as a way of understanding design precedents [2, 13]. Also, genre could help in understanding the role of developing interpretative conventions in design [15].

There are different views on what characterizes a genre. For example, genres can be characterized from a semantic (content), syntactic (form), and a pragmatic definition (mode of address) [10]. The focus in a pragmatic definition

is the intention governing the production of the texts. One important issue then is the way in which the text addresses its audience, the mode of address. A reason for using a pragmatic definition of genres in an analysis is that their mode of address, in addition to their form and content, anticipates particular uses of media in social contexts [10]. Thus, in what modes of address (See example in Table 1) the layout/design/text communicate.

Information on a Web site can be designed to support different user roles, where the user is seen as audience or a participator related to, e.g., information, a story, or an attraction. The user role that a design supports can, for example, be as a knowledge seeker (read the presented information) or as a knowledge creator where, the user provides information.

Communication form	User roles as audience	User roles as participator
Information	Knowledge seeking	Knowledge creator
Story	Listener	The story teller
Attraction	Spectator	Performer

Table 1. Examples of mode of address

Identification of genres

Shepherd and Watters [18] claim that a new class of genres has emerged on the Internet, which they refer to as cybergenres. This new class is characterized by the triple content, form, and functionality. For Web genres, Ihlström and Åkesson [9] have added positioning to Shepherd and Watters triad as important genre characteristics when analyzing Web design, resulting in the quadruple of genre concepts, including content, form, functionality, and positioning.

In this study, the genre concepts dominating content, form, action possibilities, communicated purpose, and user were

Dominating content	Form	Action possibilities	Communicated purpose	User
What is the dominating design element (content) on the front page, what gets the most space (e.g., pictures or information)?	In what form(s) is the content presented (visual, colors)? Where is the content positioned on the front page (layout, position)?	What main action possibilities are communicated (e.g., navigation or interaction)? For example read information or navigate?	What is the main communicative purpose (e.g., to inform or to offer navigation possibilities)?	In what modes of address does the layout/design/text communicate (e.g., participant or audience)? What groups are in focus (e.g., user as tourist or citizen)?

Table 2: Front-page analysis

used (See Table 2).

Dominating content has been analysed by studying the most dominating design element on the front page, an element that is emphasised on behalf of others, for example, pictures, navigation, or news.

To describe the identified genres with respect to form, Ryan et al [17] dimensions were used; the layout of the page, its navigation support, and its information density, where the layout concerns the structure of the elements of the page. The navigation support focus on how the user can navigate to linked pages, from menus, as opposed to the use of hyperlinks embedded in texts.

To focus on the use situations that are designed, as the genre characteristics are intended for communicating design, mediated user role and group has been added to Ihlström and Åkesson's [9] quadruple of genre concepts (See User in Table 2). Their functionality concept, which focuses on whether a content element requires interaction, was also redefined. In the current analysis, functionality has been considered in relation to what main action possibility it supports, for example, to browse information about the municipality thus with a focus on the communicated purpose and what main actions that are supported (navigation, interaction, or informing) by the Web site.

RESEARCH APPROACH

We have conducted a front-page analysis of all of Sweden's municipality Web sites (290 Web sites) in order to identify the genres and their characteristics. We have analyzed the front pages since the front page is the most complex page and the first impression communicated to the users [14]. The communication style used on the front page can be seen as setting the tone for the rest of the Web site. That is then the context in which e-services are offered to the visitor.

All 290 front pages were printed out in order to be able to go back and check a categorization during and after the analysis.

An exploratory, qualitative research approach was conducted with a bottom-up approach. The study started without any predefined categories that governed the analysis. Questions, such as 'What is this Web site a sample of?' guided the analysis. In an iterative process, we identified categories and their characteristics which were revised during the process. In the front-page analysis, each categorization was registered in a database.

The reliability of the coding was checked by five others, to be able to check the descriptions of the genres and to compare their coding with the previously made by the main author. Approximately 10% of the sample was double-coded (30 of 290). The Web sites for which the coders disagreed were re-examined by the coder and the main author. The primary purpose in re-examining the Web sites

was to refine the definitions of the genres, rather than to perfect the codes assigned.

GENRES IN SWEDISH MUNICIPALITY WEB SITE DESIGN

This section presents and exemplifies the identified digital genres and their characteristics. On the basis of the front-page analysis, the Web sites were grouped into the following genres: brochure, promotion, commercial, newspaper, notice-board, portal, and filter.

Notice-board

Notice-board sites (See Table 3) have the main purpose to inform the inhabitants. That is achieved by presenting information on the digital notice-board. The main mode of communication is one-way communication, where the municipality informs the knowledge-seeking inhabitants. The dominating element (centered on the page) usually is headings about events and/or information in the municipality (soft composite or hard composite), shallow information with links to different events and/or information. The main navigation is often to the left with, e.g., 10 navigation possibilities (See Figure 1). Dark text is used on a white background, which makes the information easy to read.

Common content elements on a notice-board are (See example in Figure 1, www.huddinge.se):

1. Graphical heading
2. Narrow navigation (menu)
3. Information concerning the municipality (headline and summary)
4. Information (headlines)

Newspaper

We define newspaper Web sites as those with contents that are dominated by the latest news in the municipality (See Table 3). The main action possibility offered to the user is to read municipality news. The user is thus, seen as a listener to stories. The purpose is to inform the inhabitant about news in the municipality, but also, in an indirect way to advertise the municipality for other user groups, to show them what is happening in the municipality.

The Websites are often divided into three sections (See Figure 1). On the left side, the user will find the main navigation, in the middle, there are soft composite contents: short information with links to information and services, and to the right, hard composite elements with date-stamped headings with the latest news. It is also common to find advertisements, banners, or graphical links to different parts of the Web site, on the right. In comparison to the notice-board the newspapers use advertisement graphics, and often support a more interactive communication (user role as a performer), with Web questions, possibilities to give your opinion, etc. The newspaper also gives a feeling of continuous updates with, e.g., weather reports and daily updated articles.

Common content elements used in the municipality newspaper front pages are (See example in Figure 1, www.orebro.se):

1. Banners
2. Graphics, pictures
3. News streams (headlines and dates)
4. Web questions
5. Advertisements
6. Information about the municipality (Headline & summary)
7. Narrow navigation (menu)

Brochure

Brochure sites have the main purpose of giving a first impression (See Table 3). This is achieved by providing an overview of what the municipality offers, often of a visual nature, with graphics and pictures. The Web site often gives a feeling of a printed edition or an entrance. The main mode of communication is one-way communication, where the user is seen as a spectator to an attraction and can, e.g., view pictures.

The brochure site is often small, with respect to the space used, with low-density information. There is a menu (often with a flat structure) and a picture from the municipality and contact information at the bottom. It can be compared to the front and the back of a paper brochure, compressed, with an index, an abstract of the content, and a picture (See Figure 1).

Common content elements used in the brochure genre are

(See example in Figure 1, www.hudiksvall.se):

1. Narrow navigation
2. Shallow information
3. Graphics, pictures
4. Contact information
5. Clickable graphics, pictures (not present in the example)

Promotion

The Web site is dominated by information about the benefits of the municipality (See Table 3). The municipality is promoted in a more direct way than in the brochure Web sites. The text is directed to potential new inhabitants and tourists, e.g., with expressions like move to our municipality. The main purpose is to attract new inhabitants and tourists through promoting the municipality (See Figure 1).

Common content elements used in the promotion genre are (See example in Figure 1, www.lessebo.se):

1. Pictures and/or graphics to create a feeling of the municipality.
2. Information about the municipality (offers, slogans)
3. Tourist links
4. New inhabitants links

Commercial

We define commercial Web sites as those that are dominated by graphics, pictures, and information about what the municipality offers (See Table 3). A main purpose

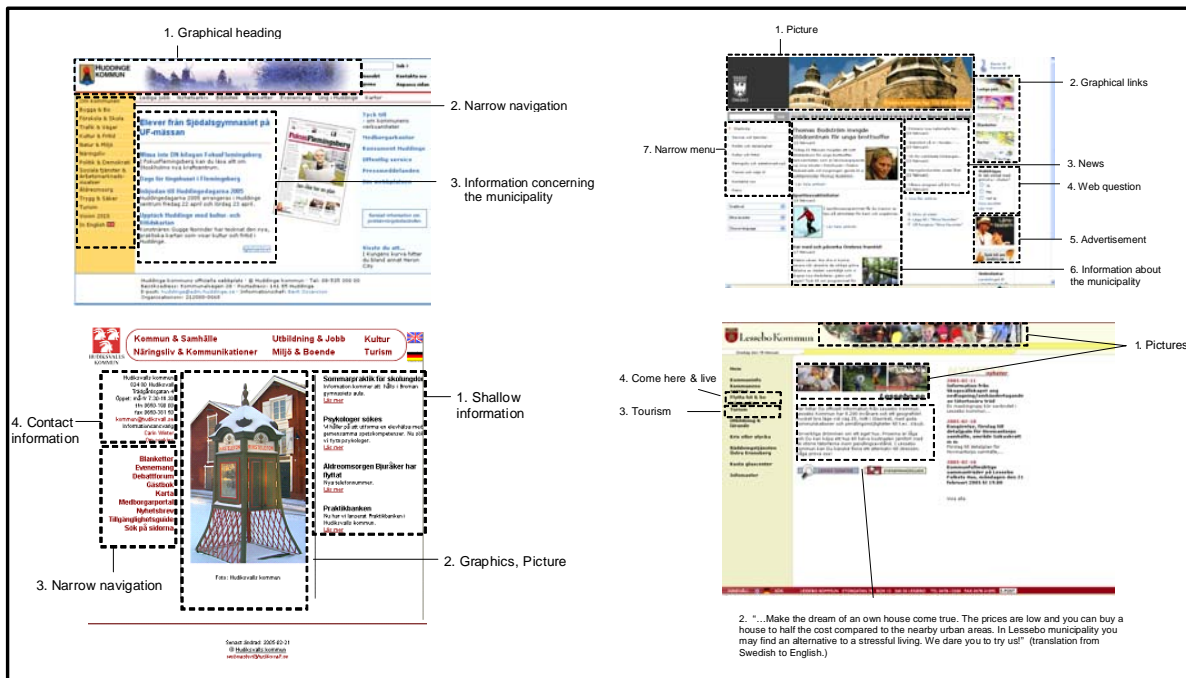


Figure 1: Common elements used in a (Upper left): Notice-Board (www.Huddinge.se), (Upper right): Newspaper (www.Orebro.se), (Down left): Brochure (www.Hudiksvall.se) and (Down right): Promotion (www.Lessebo.se)

is to advertise the municipality to spectators, e.g., banners are used that create a feeling of advertisement, a feeling that the municipality wants to sell a product. A common layout is a mix of elements from the newspaper and brochure, with the menu on the left, information in the middle, advertisement on the right and/or in the middle (See Figure 2). One-way communication is focused on e.g., browse through information.

Common content elements used in the commercial genre are (see examples in Figure 2, www.vaxjo.se)

1. News (headline, summary, date)
2. Graphics, pictures
3. Animations, banners
4. Contact information

Portal

The Web site offers a smorgasbord of navigation possibilities, with links in different forms, where every visitor should find what they are looking for (See Table 3). The user of the site is seen as information seeking, with a goal to full fill. The communicated purpose is to present navigation possibilities. The navigation possibilities and/or a picture of the municipality are the dominating elements. The most common layout is to have the broad navigation on the left (e.g., 18 possibilities), a picture of the municipality in the centre and links to information about news/events in the municipality on the right. The information on the front side is either shallow or only in the form of headings (hyperlinks to information). The front page, though, gives

the impression of a high density information site. The main actions supported are navigation actions (See Figure 2).

Common content elements used in the portal genre are (See example in Figure2, www.linkoping.se)

1. Broad navigation (menu)
2. Contact information
3. Headings (hyperlinks to information, news, services)
4. Picture of the municipality
5. Shallow information

Filter

We define filter Web sites as sites with the purpose of presenting the municipalities main categories (See Table 3). The Web sites present the options that are offered and attempts to guide the user to the desired information and/or service. The main action potential that a filter site provides is to choose a main category (See Figure 2). The categories are the dominating content, often with a visual form, e.g., pictures, with brief information about the different options on a compressed page. The categories can, for example, be based on a target group (tourist, inhabitant, business, etc.).

Common content elements used in the filter genre are (See example in Figure2, www.falun.se)

1. Categories (hyperlinks)
2. Welcome (headline)
3. Contact information
4. Information about category (headline, summary)

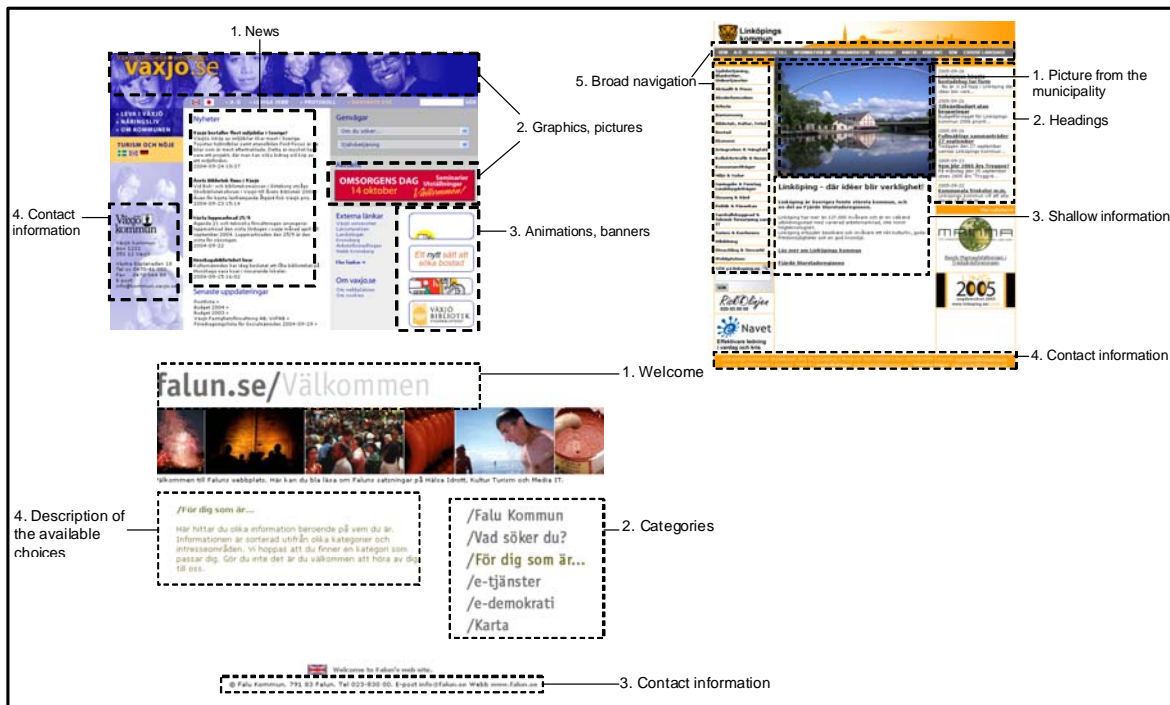


Figure 2: Common elements used in a (Upper left): Commercial (www.Vaxjo.se), (Upper right): Portal (www.Linkoping.se), (Down left): Filter (www.Falun.se)

Digital genre	Dominating content	Form	Action possibilities	Communicated purpose (Sender)	User
Notice-board 118 (41%)	Information about events in the municipality on the front page.	Layout: Information with links to e.g. different events centered on the page. Left navigation e.g., 10 possibilities.	Mainly one-way communication. Browse information.	A main purpose that is communicated is to inform.	Knowledge seeking inhabitants.
Newspaper 30 (10%)	Date-stamped information about the latest/actual/central news in the municipality and advertisements.	Layout: short information with links to information and services (positioned centered on the page). Latest news, often to the right. Graphics in the form of advertisements (bottom or right).	Interactivity in the form of Web questions and possibilities for visitors to give their opinion.	A main purpose that is communicated is to inform about news in the municipality.	The inhabitant as listener to stories and performer (e.g., giving opinions).
Brochure 49 (17%)	Information/pictures about what the municipality offers.	Layout: short, compressed page, low density information with a flat structure.	One-way communication is focused. View pictures and/or information.	A main purpose is to give a first impression.	The user as spectator to an attraction (e.g., tourists).
Promotion 11 (4%)	Promotion information about the benefits with the municipality.	Layout: short, compressed page, low density information with a flat structure.	One-way communication is focused. Browse the promotions the municipality presents.	A main purpose is to attract new inhabitants and tourists through promoting the municipality.	New inhabitants and tourists/ as spectators to an attraction.
Commercial 11 (4%)	Information, latest news/events pictures, banners and graphics with a selling approach.	A mix of newspaper elements and brochure.	One-way communication is focused. Browse through presented information.	A main purpose is to advertise the municipality, in a more or less direct way.	The user as spectator to an attraction.
Portal 53 (18%)	Wide presentation of navigation possibilities.	Advertisement on the right and/or in the middle of the page with low density information.	One-way communication is focused. Navigate through offered action possibilities.	A main purpose that is communicated is to present navigation possibilities.	The user of the site is seen as information seeking.
Filter 18 (6%)	Presentation of different views for different user groups. In some cases with service/product descriptions.	Graphics formed as advertisements.	One-way communication is focused, filter the offered information	A main purpose that is communicated is to present the main categories	Information seeking user (e.g., tourists, inhabitants, and business).

Table 3: Summary of the identified genres

GENRE INHERITANCE: SUBGENRES AND MIX-GENRES

In accordance with what Shepherd and Watters [21] found, the boundaries between the genres found in this study are fuzzy. Some Web sites are on the border between different genres. On the one hand, the genre can have a more specific purpose than another genre. It is then considered to be a subgenre. On the other hand, it can have the same or different purposes than other genres, while mixing elements from two or more genres. It is then considered to be a mix-genre. For example, a Web site might be dominated by both descriptions of the offered services (filter) and at the same time have elements from the newspaper genre. Not all, but enough distinctive genre rules in a genre must be followed by a Web site to be recognizable [9]. In the classification used in this study, the most dominating genre characteristic has governed the categorization.

Digital genre	Number found	Inheritance
Notice-board	119 (41%)	Home page
Newspaper	30 (10%)	Notice board subgenre, online newspaper
Brochure	49 (17 %)	Notice-board and portal subgenre, Advertisement
Promotion	11 (4%)	Brochure subgenre
Commercial	10 (3 %)	Brochure and newspaper mix-genre
Portal	53 (18%)	Internet vortal
Filter	17 (6%)	Portal subgenre

Table 4: Number of each digital genre found (290 Web sites)

Seven different genres were identified (See Table 3), of which two main genres were the notice-board and the portal. The notice-board and its subgenres focus on presenting information in different ways. The portal genre instead, focuses on activity, on navigation actions.

A subgenre has a more specific purpose than the genre. For example the filter genre is a subgenre to the portal genre, with the more specific purpose to present the main categories that the user can choose between. The notice-board is a genre with the subgenres, brochure and newspaper. Brochure can also be seen as a subgenre to portal through the entrance metaphor. In turn, the brochure genre has the subgenre promotion. The subgenre promotion has the more specific purpose to persuade visitors of the benefits with the municipality.

Mix-genre

A common mix-genre that has been identified is the commercial genre. The commercial genre is a mix of elements from the brochure and the newspaper. Although it mixes form elements from brochure and newspaper sites, its purposes are similar to the brochure, but in contrast to the promotion genre, it is not clear that they are more specific than the purposes of the brochure genre.

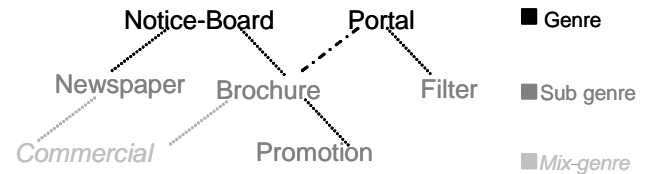


Figure 3: Genres and subgenres

In the analysis, we identified several mix-genres, which were unique in the sense that we found fewer than three examples of them in the sample. Although they could still be categorized as belonging mainly to one genre, these were borderline cases which might have been described here as mix-genres, had there been more examples of them in the sample. The borderline cases are the seeds for new subgenres or genre change, since they violate genre rules. If the violations are replicated by others, then they might in time form a new branch in the municipality Web site genre tree (See Figure 3).

Inheritance from Internet genres

In this section, the identified genres (See Table 3 and Table 4) are related to other genres.

The notice-board – a municipality homepage

A genre termed home-page has been identified on the Internet by several researchers. Shepherd and Watters [18] differentiates between cooperate and personal homepages. They found that personal homepages present information about the author and cooperate homepages consist of information and advertisements about company products or services. The notice-board can be seen as another variant of the homepage, where the contents mostly consist of information concerning the municipality and its services, which makes it a municipality homepage. Thus, the notice-board genre can be seen as a subgenre to the homepage genre.

The brochure and promotion –advertising the municipality

The brochure genre sites that Shepherd and Watters [18] identified were defined “as those with content of a largely visual nature and with the main purpose being advertisement.[...] The content and form are very similar to the single-page, 3-folded paper brochure; a brief, snazzy view of services or products. The form is largely visual and the structure is fairly flat.” The municipality brochure can be seen as a subgenre to this more general genre.

Advertisements have, according to Singh and Dalal [19], two basic functions: to inform and to persuade. Informing is

to make the consumer aware of the product/service and to persuade is to create positive attitudes towards it. They also claim that all advertisements can be placed along a continuum from predominately informational (rational) to emotional ads. Emotional ads typically use fewer words and contain more visual elements. The brochure genre can be seen as a more emotional ad than a rational one. The tourist is persuaded by the visual elements, e.g., pictures from the municipality. The subgenre to the brochure, the promotion, is a more rational ad. The Web site uses information about the municipality to persuade the potential new inhabitants and tourists. While the brochure and the promotion focus to advertise the municipality by information and pictures, the mix-genre commercial uses banners and presents services and information as graphical advertisements, which creates a feeling of a seller and customer relationship. The graphical ads used can be seen as having resemblance to a paper advertisement.

The municipality newspaper

The identified newspaper genre can be seen as an instance of the online newspaper genre. In resemblance to online newspapers, municipality newspapers often rely on the broadsheet metaphor. The metaphor regards both form, and what kind of reading experience that form supports. Regarding form, a broadsheet has a multicolumn format, multiple stories on a page, and juxtaposition of text and photographs. Regarding reader experience, the use of the metaphor provides a familiar frame of reference, the contents becomes easy to skim and browse, and it is not as boring as a plain list of headings [21]. The broadsheet metaphor is also used in many online newspapers, using newspaper-like headings and puffs, with headlines high on the page, and with contents divided into columns [8].

One common content element used in online newspapers is advertisements. Nielsen and Tahir [14] differentiate between external and internal advertisements that are used in Web sites. Internal advertising is defined as “specific advertising-shaped or advertising-looking areas that promoted the site’s own products or services” (p. 50). External advertisements are promotions for other companies and their products, as a part of the site’s income.

The portal and filter- a municipality vortal

Portals can be seen as an initial starting point on the Internet, offering a broad array of resources and services [6]. A portal can be seen as an organized gateway or doorway to the Web, addressing specific topics [5]. Generally, portals are not intended to be a destination, but rather, a starting point that leads users to useful resources [6]. Users log into a portal and from there, navigate to other pages of interest on the Internet [5]. The portal scans the World Wide Web for relevant information, screens and prioritizes the links, and provides a consistent interface to the ever-changing Web [5]. A portal may just concentrate on one particular subject, for example technology. Such portals are called vertical portals (vortals). Vortals offer

deep content, products, and services in vertical industries (e.g., travel); a place to conduct business, learn, play, and shop[1]. A municipality portal can be seen as a vortal, because it provides links and resources concerning the municipality. The municipality portal, however does not scan the Web for resources, it just provides the opportunity to navigate and search in the municipality information domain. The subgenre to municipality portals, the filter genre, focuses on inviting the visitors by the “door” and presents the main categories that the visitor can choose between. The main categories are focused; the purpose is to offer different entries, depending on the desired information.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WEB SITE DESIGN: APPROPRIATENESS

It is vital that designers and procurers of municipality web sites make informed decisions about what kind of front page to design, since the analysis has revealed that purposes between the different municipality genres vary widely. This overview of the genres that have been used by Swedish municipalities could serve as an inspiration source in a decision process for designers and procurers. Central questions to decide upon are firstly what set of purposes should be communicated and what user roles should be supported. Also, the analysis has shown that the front page either can be an entry or a destination, which is an important decision to make. Based on that, form elements can be selected, matching the desired action possibilities.

Set of purposes

As seen in Table 3, the purposes vary, from attracting new inhabitants, to informing the current inhabitants. A primary decision to make is what should be prioritized on the front page and also to reflect upon what expectations and demands different design elements can bring.

Purpose to inform (static vs. updated information)

If the main purpose is to inform, then an important question is how often the municipality has the opportunity to update the information? When designing a replication of an online newspaper in a municipal setting, certain expectations might follow. For example, that the information will be updated on a daily basis: an expectation which may be excessively demanding for a municipality. While other genres do not create the same expectation, they carry other expectations. A “notice-board” for example, may give a more static, informing impression. On a regular notice-board, there are no expectations that the information will be updated on a daily basis.

Purpose to provide navigation possibilities

If the main purpose is to provide the user with navigation possibilities (to support an activity), then what kind of entry to the municipality information domain would be appropriate? The portal’s action space offers a variety of navigation possibilities, while the filter layout offers a concentrated navigation, with few options. The narrow

action space guides the user to specific information that has been grouped and filtered in advance.

In genres where the navigation possibilities are not dominating the front page, for example, the newspaper genre, the information filtering is not in focus in the design. It is, however, relevant to consider the question as to whether the main menu should be narrow or broad?

Purpose to advertise

If the purpose is to advertise the municipality, then one question is whether the marketing of the municipality should be emotional or rational? The information can, thus be either selling or more neutral.

If graphics are used as advertisements, the user might experience it as external advertisements that the municipality can profit by. That experience could conflict with the appropriateness expected of the municipality. For example, by using the newspaper layout, with advertisement graphics to the right resembling the online newspapers' placement of mainly external advertisements, the visitor might not expect that the municipality newspaper uses it for internal advertisements (e.g., the library) or internal links (although, to some extent, online newspapers do that as well).

What user roles should be communicated?

The main question regarding user roles is whether the user should be a passive audience or an active participant?

Users as audience members

Some municipality genres use (See Table 3) the front page to present things to the users, not to make it possible for the users to participate. The user role is as audience to the content presented on the front page (e.g., information, story, and attraction). For example, to navigate through the offered information, view pictures of the municipality, or to read the information posted by the municipality on the notice-board.

Users as participants

The user, as a participant, is given an opportunity to contribute with information, to give their opinion, to vote on a subject, to chat with a politician, etc. That does, however, place demands on the municipality to prepare and moderate discussions, votes, and chat sessions.

Entry or destination?

A question that should be reflected upon is whether the front page should be experienced as an entry or as a destination?

The brochure, promotion, portal, and filter give the impression of an entry, rather than a destination. For instance, the front side of a brochure or a filter acts as an entry to the municipality information. The notice-board and the newspaper, can on the contrary, be seen as a destination.

In the brochure genre (including promotion), the compressed page and the low density of information makes the impression of an entry, rather than a destination. The brochure, promotion, and commercial genres also often offer a narrow navigation on the front page that contributes to the entrance metaphor. The portal and the filter primarily give the user the possibility to navigate. The notice-board and the newspaper genre make it possible for the user to read different kinds of information on the front page. You are already in the book, so to speak, without having to go through an entrance or a table of contents.

CONCLUSIONS

It is insufficient to only know that a municipality Web site is to be designed. It is equally important to know what subgenre, or genre mix, to use as the dominating frame for the design.

We have identified seven municipality Web site genres. The genres differ not only in form and content, but also regarding how demanding they are to maintain and what set of purposes they satisfy. The results show that it would not be advisable for a procurer to just order a municipality Web site, since the resulting design can vary widely, communicating different values.

We conclude that it is vital that designers and procurers of municipality Web sites make informed decisions about what kind of site to build. In the different genres, the communicated purpose varies. It is, therefore important to discuss what should be prioritized on the front page. What first impression do we want to give the user? It is important to reflect upon the question of set of purposes, user roles, and what inherited expectations that might follow a resemblance of an existing genre. Procurers of municipality Web sites could use the overview of the identified genres to support their decision-making process as a source of inspiration for what kind of design would be appropriate for their municipality. It could support their decisions about what kind of municipality site they should ask designers to provide, based on the needs that they identify.

Although further research is needed for generalization, our research indicates that genre analysis is a promising approach to addressing user expectations and values in the design of interactive services, in general.

Future Research

The overarching aim of this research has been to explain why and how organisations choose – or arrive at – a certain design solution and communicate certain values, and what effects this has in use for different user groups, as measured by expected and experienced values. Future research will be needed to complement the identification of genres provided here, with experienced and expected values of designers, procurers of municipality websites, and citizens. Moreover, this research has focused on the front-page, which is an important part of the context in which e-services are delivered. Future research could focus on specific e-

services, and how the values promoted by the context of delivery interact with the design solutions of specific e-services and the values needed to make users comfortable with them.

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