# SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION

# Openness to information disclosure: the case of Czech rural municipalities

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**Abstract:** Though information disclosure is an innate part of public corporate governance as well as an important help in the fight against corruption, only a limited research is done in this field. The objectives of the study therefore focus on the municipal website accessibility and the availability of municipal documents offered to the citizens. Primary data on the information disclosure were gathered through the website analysis of rural municipalities in the chosen region (*n* = 395). The study findings e.g. show that although about nine tenths (87%) of municipalities have their own website, the quality of the web accessibility (including the web existence, web uptodatedness, and web address intuitiveness) was found in less than half (46%) of them only. Concerning the documents offered by the municipality, it is most common to publish the minutes from the municipal council meeting (71%). The information on the local nonprofits is provided by six tenths of the municipalities (60%) and the electronic periodicals were present in less than one third (28%) of the cases. The openness to publishing information also significantly varies according to the population of the municipality.

**Key words:** Czech Republic, information disclosure, public administration, rural municipality, website

Since 1990s, the information disclosure has been an innate part of the public management concepts as the New Public Management or, later on, the Total Quality Management (Ovretveit 2005). Indispensability of the information disclosure is underlined by Matei and Matei's (2011: 13) assertion that "a new relation between administration and society has been developed, involving greater transparency and citizen participation". Quality information provision, on the one hand, increases the credibility and transparency of public institutions and prevents from corrupt practices; on the other hand, it develops the comfort of citizens (customers) of the municipality (i.e. Morris and Shin 2002). Today, the principles of information openness are emphasized primarily by the Good Governance Standards for Public Services (OPM and CIPFA 2004) or the New Public Governance approach (Salamon 2002; Osborne 2006; Hall and Kennedy 2008).

Public governance standards for public services, defined by the Office for Public Management (OPM) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), comprise of six following principles (OPM and CIPFA 2004). Good Governance means: (1) focusing on the organization's purpose and on the outcomes for citizens and service users; (2) performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles; (3) promoting values for the whole organization and demonstrating the values of good governance through behaviour; (4) taking informed, transparent decisions and managing risk; (5) developing the capacity and capability of the governing body to be effective; (6) engaging the stakeholders and making the accountability real. Looking at these principles, it is clear that a quality information disclosure can play a crucial role in the implementation of all principles of good governance practices, especially in principles 1, 3 and 4. Public authorities should publicly define its purpose and specify the outputs delivered to citizens and service users. The disclosure is necessary also to promote the values of the organization into practice and to ensure that the managers behave according to the values they hold and are an example of effective management. A significant effect of the disclosure can be played in dealing informed and transparent decisions, including risk management. Information disclosure is already built into the very essence of

implementing the Good Governance Standards. As the governance is considered to be rather the opposite of government (Rhodes 1996; Smutek 2009), the citizens should be involved in such governing and therefore the information should be spread out publicly.

In addition to the principles of good governance, the public sector authors increasingly speak of the so-called virtualization (i.e. Margetts 2005; Snellen 2005) which is strongly associated with information disclosure. Margetts (2005) states, that virtualization can be understood on three levels: (1) Virtual face, the government organization becomes virtual in terms of its relationships with clients (e.g.: businesses, citizens) who deal only with some kind of the virtual image of an organization, rather than the organizations themselves. (2) Internal virtuality, which represents not having really any central existence. Virtual organization lacks what it traditionally takes to be an organization (e.g.: bureaucracy is replaced by information systems, many activities are outsourced, etc.). (3) Virtual networks, whereby organizations exist only as the consortia of groups and individuals grouped together for a particular reason – the linkages are more important than the organizations and the network of individuals and organizations is the most important of all. Dunleavy and Margetts (1999) then add that the critical and breakage point in the virtual organization development was the formation of the web technologies and the web information systems. "A website follows the possibility of all kinds of transactions that would originally have been processed within an organization and are now processed by the website alone. As one official in the Australian Tax Office put it in 1999, in the future 'this organization will become its website'." The just mentioned virtualization enabled and still enables a significant shift in the government information disclosure quality. Of course – especially in focusing on a small community – the intensity of the personal face-to-face contact should be considered, however, this type of contact is only one-off, hard provable, immeasurable quality and available only to the given person. The opposite of this contact can be i.e. the municipal website. The information here is easy to find or search, with a clear responsibility of the author, long-time present and accessible to a wide auditorium in a previously defined quality and quantity.

Openness to information disclosure in the particular country is significantly influenced by the structure of the legislation that sets the mandatory disclosure requirements, and also by the amount of information that the authorities may not disclose, however, they made them public because it will significantly contribute to building a transparent local public environment.

Czech legislation sets the minimal level of information disclosure primarily by the Act No. 106/1999 on free access to information, the Directive 2003/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the re-use of public sector information, and the Act No. 101/2000 on the protection of personal data. Kužílek (2012) in the interpretation of the Act No. 106/1999 on free access to information points out that the municipality is obliged to have its own webpage to publish the required information. In the case that this obligation is not fulfilled, this obligation is transferred to the municipality carrying out the extended competence. The municipality is then obliged to publish on the web only the essential documents, the minutes of the council meetings are saved on the web only on the explicit requirement. Ten Commandments of an open municipality (Kužílek 2001) state that the law expressly directs to publish as a minimum for the entry: the number of the council members present who approved the agenda, the course and outcome of the vote and the adopted resolution (according to § 95, paragraph 1 of the Act on Municipalities). A reasonably conceived report should, however, also show who and how discussed the matters, what were the arguments presented, and how and who voted. Published should be also those who missed the resolution because of the apparent variations between the total number and that who decided. Although the law does not mandate explicitly the published documents, it can be stated that the resolution of the council, and where appropriate, the records of their meetings, might be assigned by the term "principal documents", the list of the documents the municipality is obliged to publish on its website under the § 5, paragraph 2, point b of the Act No. 106/1999 on free access to information. The minutes and resolutions of the municipal bodies are, the next to the budget and the development plan, perhaps the most important documents, expressing the events in the municipality. They show that there are problems that are solved by the community, the views that are expressed or interests of the particular groups of citizens. In terms of efficiency and savings in labour, and in terms of good practice and the quality of public administration, it is far better to resort to actively publicize these documents. The Infoliga System (2009), operated by the Otevřená společnost, o.p.s. (Open Society NFP) and containing the data of 171 public subjects, shows that 89% of the subjects published are the council resolutions, the council minutes represent 26%, and the resolution of the board 73%.

Pavel and Císařová (2008) then add: "In the area of legislation, it can be concluded that the system is essentially treated adequately and from the macro-

economic point of view, it behaves almost seamlessly. The problem is, however, the compliance with the existing laws and especially the creation of the necessary conditions for the economic decision making and the effective performance of the lay control. Here, the empirical research clearly pointed to a number of problems. In terms of transparency, it can be a serious comment on the formal fulfilment of legal conditions relating to the publication of the budget documentation. Its appearance is in most cases user uncomfortable and for an economically illiterate citizen, it is almost incomprehensible. The institute of lay control application then becomes a largely illusory issue." It can be assumed that this particular example stressing out the formalism and not the practical use of legislation is valid in general."

Czech public administration environment might be also assessed by the results of the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) (see the Transparency International 2011). The CPI ranks countries according to the perception of corruption in the public sector and the survey included the total of 178 countries worldwide. In 2010, the CPI Report the Czech Republic reached the score 4.6 pts. on the scale from 10 (very clean) to 0 (highly corrupt), which is a similar value to the other neighbour post-communist countries: Slovakia (4.3 pts.), Hungary (4.7 pts.), and Poland (5.3 pts.). On the contrary, the older EU member neighbour countries as Austria and Germany got a remarkably higher score (both countries 7.9 pts.). Based on the results, the Czech Republic was included among seven countries that showed deterioration from 2009 to 2010.

Subsequently Kameník (2008) points out on the smaller municipalities that they may face certain problems with the transparency. He states that the risks arise mainly from the inadequate extent of the independent supervision, large volumes of small orders, and regarding smaller municipalities, to a closer linkage of political and bureaucratic powers.

## OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the issues mentioned above, the paper aims to identify the current level of the information disclosure openness in small rural communities up to 2000 inhabitants. The identification of the municipality openness of information disclosure was closely examined in two major areas: (a) availability of municipality websites; and (b) information disclosure of municipal documents and the community activities. Both areas contained several research questions, which are described below.

First research area (a) *Availability of municipality websites* was formulated on the basis of the assertion of Kramár et al. (2006) and the Transparency International. They state that when the municipal office is working with citizens online (via Internet); it increases its efficiency in two ways. Depersonalization provides first the electronic communication to save time, money and, last but not least, the paper usage for both the office and on the part of citizens. Second, the electronic processing of application without personal contact, which is more transparent and eliminating corruption, in addition it also provides a unified treatment of all citizens. They also mention the example of banks, which for ten years are competing in the fact that client, visits them less often. Therefore, there is constructed the first research question as: (a1): *Does the community own a web page?* Since the first prerequisite for a citizen satisfaction is the fact the municipality has developed its own website, the second might be that the website is easy to be found. Hart et al. (2010: 291) mention that: "People should easily find your site, either using the search engine or other means. Otherwise, even if you have a great site, it will not bring so much advantage, because people cannot find it." Thus the next research is (a2*): Is the address of the municipal website intuitive?* A similar importance as the findability is the timeliness of the information published on the web. The citizen (customer) will make a web visit when all aspects are fulfilled or on the high level (see e.g. Komárková et al. 2008; Eger et al. 2010). Therefore, another question was formulated (a3): *Is the municipal website regularly updated?* While the meaning of the site existence is undisputed and required by law, the significance of the other two aspects is particularly important in terms of achieving openness in the municipal information disclosure. Both factors become more significant when the community wants to involve citizens in regular events and aims at the citizens attending the site repeatedly. The previously introduced aspects of the existence, intuitiveness and updateness might be interpreted also from the customer's view. For this reason, there is created the last question of this research area (a4): *What is the total availability of the website?*

Second research area focuses on (b) *Information disclosure of municipal documents and the community activities.* The most common form, how citizens can learn more about the work of the elected municipal officers (e.g. the development of a strategy, the planned construction, the approval of the municipal budget, projects, etc.), is through minutes or resolutions of the meetings of the municipality council. By law, these records must be provided to all citizens

for inspection. The municipality may do so only the during office hours at the municipal office. On the other hand, the publication on the Internet makes it both easier for the municipality officials and also more convenient for the citizens who are interested in the municipal affairs (see e.g. Kužílek 2001; Otevřená společnost 2011). This leads to the formulation of the research question (b1): *Are the minutes/resolutions of municipality council meetings published on the municipal website?* The local newsletter or magazines are the traditional option of the off-line communication between citizens and municipalities. If the magazine is available to citizens in the electronic form, then it can be also read by other people who did not received it in the printed form for many reasons (non-delivery of the magazine, the absence of a citizen in the place of residence, etc.). A citizen can read the magazine and knows that it is always available on the Internet, including the archives of the previous issues. Again, this not only contributes to a better image of the municipality management in the eyes of citizens, but it also encourages local residents to be more involved in the municipal affairs. (b2): *Are local municipal periodicals published in the electronic form on the website?* Rural communities, especially in specific regions, have a great tradition of social activities, resulting from the unprecedented development of civic activities in the 20th and 30th of the last century in the First Czechoslovak Republic. In many cases, although the war and later the communist totalitarianism disrupted social activities, there are still communities where social clubs and nonprofits are a major player in the social life. Cooperation with the local community nonprofits and public disclosure of their activities on the Internet is another of the activities through which the municipality can manage its relationship with citizens. Therefore, there follows the research question (b3): *Does the website provide information on local nonprofits activities?* Similarly to the overall accessibility of websites, it might be also interesting to discuss the overall availability of documents describing local activities. Despite of the possible distortion of results, here is the potential to interpret the results in an aggregate form. The issue is therefore the subject of the next question (b4): *What is the total access to documents describing municipal activities?*

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study exploits the form and the content of the analysis conducted through the Internet. In this case, Hewson (2007) talks about the so-called inter-net-mediated research and the document analysis performed in an internet research context. Such document analysis is similar to some other forms of observation, but the records are primarily placed on www with a certain purpose. In this case, the quantitative measurement is considered as too ambiguous, because the quantity of the provided data often does not match the quantity of the provided information and the websites can contain data with no or little information value (titles and headings, logos, banners, pictures, etc.). It is also obvious that the amount of the information provided on the site will grow with the number of the municipal citizens. For this reason, the quantitative approach was rejected, but there has been studied only the very presence of the website and disclosure of the previously selected basic documents. The research sample consists of 395 municipalities of the Královéhradecký region, i.e. all municipalities of the region with the population up to 2000 inhabitants reduced by the municipalities with the historical status of the city. (Municipalities were removed from the sample due to the high tourism potential of these "cities" that could affect their information disclosure.) The sample limitation on the municipalities up to 2000 inhabitants is then chosen with regard to the settlement structure typical for the Czech Republic. The Czech Statistical Office (2009) and Perlín (1999) suggest that the conventional limit of 2000 inhabitants of the village is undoubtedly set for a typical Czech settlement structure. In some European countries, this conventional viewpoint is set to a size of 5000 inhabitants. The Královéhradecký region is one of 14 regions of the Czech Republic and according to the social and economic indicators of the Czech Statistical Office (2011), it ranks among the region average.

Gathering the data was realized with the use of coders. Scherer (2004) states, that the coder is an associate of the analyst conducting the surveys and recording it. The involvement of coders in the research has a positive effect on the quality of the survey, such as reducing the risk that the results will be too influenced by the subjective view of the author. The author is forced to make a transparent reasoning, because the coders must transmit his/her intentions. For the realization of the survey, there were used 5 coders to acquire the data during October 2008 to May 2009 using the search engines Google and Live Search. The data obtained was then verified for its reliability. However, the reliability testing is the subject of other research study (Bachmann 2010). In the next step, the municipalities were divided into four population categories: (a) municipalities up to 199 people, (b) municipalities from 200 to 499 people,

(c) municipalities from 500 to 999 inhabitants and municipalities from 1000 to 2000 inhabitants. Such data distribution is commonly used by the Czech Statistical Office (2011). Therefore, it is advisable to monitor the openness to information disclosure across different population groups. Data analysis is then focused only on the descriptive statistics variables monitored within the individual research questions. The procedure for obtaining data is described in greater detail in Table 1.

Calculation of research questions (a4) and (b4) is in fact the product of the variables taken into account in the given research area. Such method is commonly used in measuring the customer service (see e.g. Grant et al. 2006) or provided by Gandía and Archidona (2009) in their study focusing on the the information disclosure of Spanish public institutions. The municipal web availability (MWA) value was calculated to answer the question (a4): *What is the total availability of website?* The MWA thus indicates the proportion of websites with the accessible website; the intuitive web address and as well as current information provided on the municipal website (see formula 1).

$$MWA = \frac{WPA \times IAA \times UIA}{N} \times 100 \tag{1}$$

where:
$MWA$ = municipality web availability
$WPA$ = web presentation availability
$IAA$ = intuitive web address availability
$UIA$ = updated information availability
$N$ = number of municipalities in the sample

Likewise the question (b4): *What is the total access to documents describing municipal activities?* is a product of variables in the given area. The resulting value therefore shows the proportion of municipalities providing on their website documents from the council meeting, the local newsletters and also informing on the local non-profit organizations. The value is applied only to municipalities with the existing webpage (see formula 2).

$$MDA = \frac{CMA \times LNA \times INA}{N_{web}} \times 100 \tag{2}$$

where:
$MDA$ = municipal documents availability
$CMA$ = council minutes/resolution availability

Table 1. Description of the data collection on the website of rural municipalities

| Research Question | Procedure for obtaining data |
| --- | --- |
| a1: *Does the community own a web page?* | To find the website, the Google and LiveSearch engines were used; the municipality must have their own website, information about the municipality on other sites (Wikipedia) and portals (national public administration portals), were not considered |
| a2: *Is the address of municipal website intuitive?* | Intuitiveness of addresses was measured on the scale: (a) excellent (the name of the municipality plus the national domain); (b) average (easy to remember address, i.e. other than the national domain, or a slightly modified name of the municipality, such as the commonly used shorter or acronym; (c) poor (other cases; use of search engine is necessary). |
| a3: *Is the municipal website regularly update*d? | Due to the technical difficulty of assessing whether or not the site is current, there was selected a very benevolent scale. As current, there were considered sites that were at least once updated in the period of the previous year. |
| a4: *What is the total availability of website?* | Calculated as a product of results of three preceding questions. Detailed description of the calculation is provided below. |
| b1: *Is the minutes/resolution of municipal council published on the web?* | Presence of a resolution or the minutes of the council meeting. |
| b2: *Are local periodicals published on the web?* | Presence of at least one municipal newsletter or magazine available on the website. |
| b3: *Does the website provide information on local nonprofits activities?* | Presence of information describing the activities of local nonprofits or a link to their websites. |
| b4: *What is the total access to documents describing municipal activities?* | Calculated as a product of the results of three preceding questions. Detailed description of the calculation is provided below. |

Source: Author

Table 2. The share of municipalities with their own web presentations

| Municipality (N = 395) | All municipalities | Population up to 199 | Population 200–499 | Population 500–999 | Population 1000–2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | 395 | 124 | 166 | 81 | 24 |
| Municipalities with website | 344 | 89 | 150 | 81 | 24 |
| In % | 87.3% | 71.8% | 90.4% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Source: Author

*LNA* = local newspapers availability
*INA* = information on nonprofits availability
$N_{web}$ = number of municipalities with the website

## RESULTS

The presented results are structured according to the above set of research questions. First part of the results consists of the questions connected to (a) availability of municipality websites and the second part is devoted to the research area (b) focusing on information disclosure of municipal documents and the community activities.

(a1): *Does the community own web page?*

Own web presentation has almost nine out of ten (87.1%) municipalities up to 2,000 people. The share of municipalities with their own presentations increases with the increasing population of the municipality. While in the smallest villages of 200 inhabitants the figure is about two-thirds (71.8%), in the municipalities from 200 to 499 people it is already about nine tenths (90.4%) and in the municipalities with population 500 and higher already every municipality owns a web page. Detailed results, including the absolute frequencies, are available in Table 2.

(a2): *Is the address of the municipal website intuitive?*

In terms of the intuitiveness of the used Web addresses and of other research questions, there are taken into consideration only municipalities with an existing Web page (N = 344). The appropriate web address, i.e., only the name of the municipality and the Czech domain (.cz), was registered in more than half of the municipalities (52.6%). A memorable web address that the citizen can possibly remember (other than .cz domain or a slightly modified title) was then found in more than one fifth of municipalities (22.7%).Using the searcher was necessary to almost one quarter of the surveyed municipalities (24.7%). The results obtained show that intuitiveness is improving with the increasing population of the municipality. While in the smallest municipalities the proportion of "inappropriate" addresses (those where to find a web site, it is necessary to use a search engine) is almost one third (30.3%), in the municipalities with more than 500 inhabitants it is up to 10% (for the municipalities with the population from 500 to 999 people it is 4.3%, respectively for bigger municipalities with the population 1000 and higher, it is 8.3%). Full results are provided in Table 3.

(a3): *Is the municipal website regularly updated?*

Websites in the monitored municipalities were current in more than two thirds (69.5%) of the cases. However, in the "benevolent" scale, it is up-to-date a surprisingly high value. When looking at the various population groups of municipalities, the results are slightly different from the previous questions. Although the worst situation was again in the smallest municipalities up to 200 residents (60.7%), in other population categories there were found different re-

Table 3. Web address intuitiveness

| Municipality (N = 344) | All municipalities | Population up to 199 | Population 200–499 | Population 500–999 | Population 1000–2,000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | 344 | 89 | 150 | 81 | 24 |
| Excellent intuitiveness | 181 | 40 | 82 | 43 | 16 |
| In % | 52.6% | 44.9% | 54.7% | 53.1% | 66.7% |
| Average intuitiveness | 78 | 22 | 29 | 21 | 6 |
| In % | 22.7% | 24.7% | 19.3% | 25.9% | 25.0% |
| Poor intuitiveness | 85 | 27 | 39 | 17 | 2 |
| In % | 24.7% | 30.3% | 26.0% | 4.3% | 8.3% |

Source: Author

Table 4. Website uptodateness

| Municipality (N = 344) | All municipalities | Population up to 199 | Population 200–499 | Population 500–999 | Population 1000–2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | 344 | 89 | 150 | 81 | 24 |
| Municipalities with updated websites | 239 | 54 | 106 | 63 | 16 |
| In % | 69.5% | 60.7% | 70.7% | 77.8% | 66.7% |

Source: Author

sults. For municipalities from 200 to 499 inhabitants, the proportion of municipalities with the current site was 70.7% of the municipalities with existing web presentation, for the municipalities from 500 to 999 inhabitants, there was found the value 77.8%. In the category of the largest municipalities from 1000 to 2000 inhabitants, the proportion was only two-thirds (66.7%). Detailed results are contained in Table 4.

(a4): *What is the total availability of municipal websites?*

The total availability of the municipal website was defined above as a product of three variables: the existence of the website itself (87.3%), its intuitiveness (appropriate or sufficient; 75.3%) and its uptodateness (69.5). The results show that totally available they are in less than half of the municipalities (45.7%). The worst situation is again in the smallest villages up to (29.5%), then in the municipalities with population from 200 to 499 inhabitants (40.9%), with a greater distance, there follow the municipalities with more than 500 inhabitants. It is interesting that in these two categories, the population does not affect the results: the municipalities with the population from 500 to 999 inhabitants have the total availability slightly higher than six tenths (61.5%) and the settlements with the population from 1000 to 2000 people have reached almost the same proportion of the available websites (61.2%).

(b1): *Is the minutes/resolutions of municipality council meetings published on the municipal website?*

The minutes of council meetings or the resolutions from these meetings are the documents containing the relevant and authentic information relating to the activities of the municipal management and the administration of the municipality itself. Minutes/resolutions were available on the Internet in more than two thirds (70.8%) of the surveyed municipalities. The share of municipalities with the published minutes/resolutions of the council meetings gradually increases with the size of the municipality (60.7% for the smallest ones with the population up to 200 inhabitants versus 89.7% for the largest ones from 1000 to 2000 inhabitants). Table 5 provides these results in a greater detail.

(b2): *Are local municipal periodicals published in electronic form on the website?*

Local periodicals are designed to provide the citizens of the municipality with information; people usually put it to the clipboard in the paper form. The advantage of the electronic access is to get the information anytime and anywhere as well as the use of the electronic archives. The availability of local communities periodicals provided in electronic form is significantly lower than the availability of the minutes of the council meetings. Local newsletter is published only in about one quarter of rural communities (28.1%). There are also greater differences

Table 5. Publishing the minutes of council meetings, local periodicals and information about local nonprofits

| Municipality (N = 344) | All municipalities | Population up to 199 | Population 200–499 | Population 500–999 | Population 1000–2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | 344 | 89 | 150 | 81 | 24 |
| Minutes/resolutions of council meeting | 247 | 54 | 105 | 62 | 26 |
| In% | 70.8% | 60.7% | 70.0% | 76.5% | 89.7% |
| Local newsletter/magazine | 98 | 11 | 37 | 29 | 21 |
| In% | 28.1% | 12,4% | 24.7% | 35.8% | 72.4% |
| Information of local nonprofits activities | 210 | 39 | 96 | 53 | 22 |
| In% | 60.2% | 43.8% | 64.0% | 65.4% | 75.9% |

Source: Author

between the population groups of the municipalities. While in the smallest municipalities the newsletter is published more than one tenth of the municipalities (12.4%) only, in the largest municipalities, it is already almost three-quarters (72.4%) of the municipalities. When interpreting the results of this question, we must take into account the fact that it is very difficult to determine how many municipalities actually publish a local periodical in the paper form. The results are therefore influencing the openness to information disclosure both outside the web as well as on the web. For more details see Table 5.

(b3): *Informs municipality of non-profit organizations operating in the spot?*

Nonprofits are in many local communities the driver of the social life. For this reason, it is important if the municipality and the organizations communicate, promote and transmit the information with each other. The research shows that the municipalities inform about the local non-profit activities on their websites or refer directly to a nonprofits' web, since more than one half of municipalities (60.2%) provides citizens with information about the activities of the nonprofits operating in the spot. The share of municipalities that provide such information, again increases with the increasing population of the municipality. The smallest municipalities' information is provided in more than four tenths of the municipalities (43.8%), while in the largest municipalities, it is in more three-quarters of the municipalities (75.9%). The minimum difference was then observed in the category of municipalities from 200 to 499 people (64.0%) and the municipalities from 500 to 999 inhabitants (65.4%). The results are, as in the previous case, in fact influenced by the number of the existing organizations engaged in the non-profit activities in the place. For more details, see Table 5.

(b4): *What is the total access to documents describing municipal activities?*

The results show the proportion of municipalities which provide on their websites all monitored variables: the minutes from the council meetings, local newsletters and the information on the local non-profit organizations. Only about one tenth of municipalities (12.0%) provided all three variables on their websites. However, there were large differences among the population categories. The lowest availability of documents was in the smallest municipalities (3.3%), followed by the municipalities from 200 to 499 people (11.1%). While in the municipalities from 500 to 999 inhabitants, there was found still less than one fifth availability (17.9%), the largest municipalities provide the monitored information in almost one half of the cases (49.3%).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The presented paper introduced the basic knowledge about the level of information disclosure in rural communities in the selected region of the Czech Republic and thus fulfilled the stated objective. The study provides information, which can be further compared among other regions within the country or outside it, but also a methodological approach to measure the openness to information disclosure.

In the overall view on the results obtained, it was found that:

(1) Nearly nine tenths of rural municipalities (87%) use their own website.

(2) Seven tenths (70%) of the municipalities provide on their websites the current information. Upto-datedness of websites does not much vary among the population groups of the municipalities. The most accurate information is provided by the websites from the municipalities with 500 to 999 people (78%).

(3) About three quarters (76%) of the municipalities dispose of a to some extent intuitive web address (including the scale excellent or average). More than one half of municipalities (52%) then dispose of the address in the form of the municipality name and the Czech national domain.cz.

(4) The total availability of the municipal website existed in less than one half (46%) of the cases. However, the availability of the web is connected with the municipality population and the results strongly vary in the individual population categories. The worst situation is in the smallest villages up to 200 people (30%), the best in the municipalities with the population from 500 to 999 inhabitants (62%) and the largest municipalities (61%).

(5) The most frequently disclosed document is the minutes from the municipal council meeting, which is available in seven tenths of the (71%). Information on the nonprofits was present in six from ten (60 %) municipalities and the electronic periodicals are published in less than one third (28%) of the researched communities.

(6) One tenth of the municipalities (12%) published all three types of the surveyed documents and information, so the total accessibility of information on the municipal activities was much lower than the total availability of the website. However, there were found large differences among the population categories. The lowest total availability of documents was found in the smallest municipalities (3%), followed by the municipalities from 200 to 499 people (11%). While the municipalities from

500 to 999 inhabitants reached still less than one fifth availability (17.9%), the largest municipalities provided all three researched aspects in almost one half of the cases (49.3%).

The study results might be compared only partially with some other researches. This is especially the research of Infoliga System (2009) containing data of 171 public subjects (local, city and region bodies) and the comparison might be made only regarding the availability of the minutes or resolutions from the municipal meetings. It shows a slightly worse situation of rural municipalities (71% of the available minutes or resolution vers. 89% in the Infoliga System research). A subject for discussion is the fact that the author of the text focuses only on the information presented on the website (although any other approach would be very difficult to conduct). However the used approach might be advantageous in terms of exactness of the results, there might be rational reasons why the information is not disclosed as the information illiteracy of municipal management or the unwillingness of citizens in rural communities to receive the information in such form. For example, we may doubt in the case of the smallest municipalities up to 200 people whether the publication of information on the Internet or even the use of the municipal web pages is necessary, but on the other hand, even such a small village usually manages property of the value higher than one million Euros. A further research then might lie in the exploration whether the openness to information disclosure on the side of municipality really leads to a greater citizen satisfaction and in turn increase their interest in the municipal affairs. Other challenging research area is also the continuing virtualization of public administration, because the number of the researched municipalities now considering the provision of the RSS subscription, sending news via e-mails, the distribution of alerts to unexpected situations via SMS messages or municipality profile on the facebook.

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