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Transparency and Responsibility in the Public Administration Institutions. The case of Romania

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Abstract: An important topic often found in the media, but ambiguously treated is “transparency”. This article will present a blueprint for Romanian municipalities’ Websites done through the transparency concept’s filter. We will see that although the law imposes to municipalities to post specific items on the Internet, they either omit or post a minimum of information just to “follow” the rules, without giving any evidence of interest. Assuming that displaying online more information requested by the law will lead to an increased users’ confidence in the system, we accessed the Website of each municipality in Romania (103) to search for the existence of financial data (budgets, financial indicators, assets etc.). In the end, we have presented a brief report on how the government responds to citizens’ concerns. The results are not very satisfactory, but we consider that such analyses will create a competition between municipalities, in which citizens are the winners.

Keywords: government, municipality, electronic, transparency, responsibility

1 Introduction

This analysis aims to present a radiograph of the official Websites’ status for all the municipalities in Romania and on how they respond to transparency needs (Baltac, 2011). It is understood that the existence of very well designed Web platform (from a technical point of view) does not imply that they’re also used by citizens or the business part of the society (Porumbescu, 2015) – the reason for this is that the Web platform does not provide the information they need (MCIS^a).

Taking into consideration the legislation regarding the concept of Transparency³ (Chamber of Deputies^a), we took a closer look on each of the Romanian municipality’s official Website in order to present, in figures, how close they are to this by putting this concept into motion.

2 Background

An aspect of interest in assessing not only the current state of the e-Government in Romania, but also possible future developments in this regard is represented by Romanian citizens’ level of satisfaction and their requirements for the public administration. From this perspective, our country holds a position below the European average, if we are to take into consideration the number of Internet users of only 54.1% compared to 73.5% which is the average of all European countries.

The World Bank reported, at the end of 2014 (World Bank), the evolution of the Internet users’ number in Romania for the period between the years 2000 and 2014 (Fig. 1).

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³ Law no. 52 of 21 January 2003 on decisional transparency in the public administration, published in the Official Monitor of Romania no. 70 of 3 February 2003.

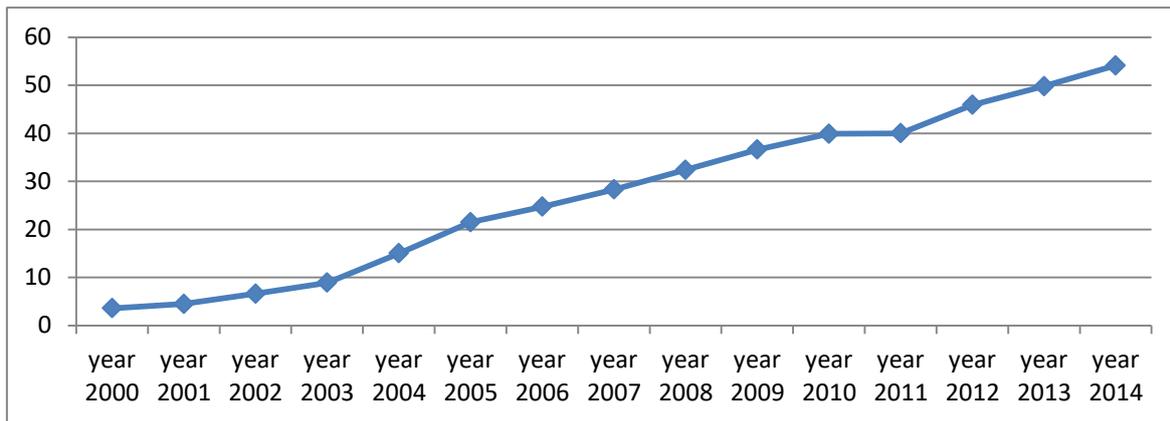


Figure 1 Evolution of the Internet users' number in Romania (2000-2014)

(Source: based on data collected from the World Bank's Website)

We cannot say whether the results of the last years are due to a possible market saturation or some other circumstances that exist and may have slowed down this trend, but we certainly can see that the numbers have exploded in the period 2000-2014.

Looking at the population, however, Romania is in a bad position compared to other countries. In 2014, the country had about 54 Internet users/100 people, similar to Serbia and Bulgaria, while in Albania the ratio was of 60 Internet users/100 people. In this context, the more highly rated was Iceland, with 98 users per 100 inhabitants.

According to The National Institute of Statistics, in the whole country the share of households with Internet access is of 54.3% in urban areas and of only 17.8% in rural areas (the difference to 100% is due to business users) (National Institute of Statistics).

In this respect, the European Commission, through the study "User expectations of a life events approach for designing e-Government services" (Fig. 2), discusses the main reasons why people use the Internet to relate to the public administration (EU). We can thus see that the biggest increase occurred in completing and submitting electronic forms (29%), followed by sending regular e-mails to public administration bodies (22%). Instead, the use of Internet only to get information from the public administration was affected by a decline of 4% and the "just clicking" method had a growth of only 2%. We can understand from these numbers that those who use the Internet at home are expected to use the network to better relate with the public administration, and not just as a means of access to information.

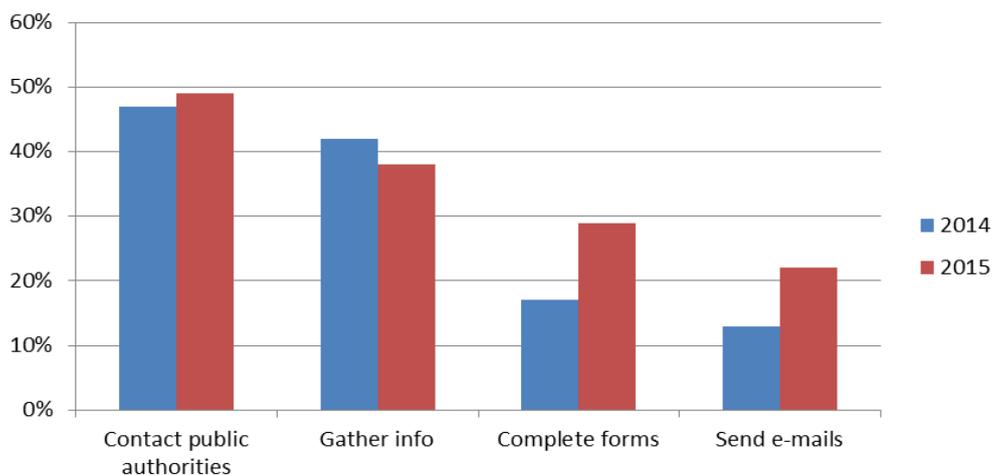


Figure 2 Percentage of individuals who use the Internet to get in touch with the public administration

(Source: personal elaboration based on data collected from the European Union's Website)

Considering the “e-Romania” report prepared by the Ministry of Communications and Information Society, in which the index showed that countries are better prepared for e-Administration, Romania is not on the top positions, although it belongs to the group of countries with the highest percentage increase of Internet users and also an increase in the number of online services designed to support citizen participation (MCIS^b).

3 Case Study: Romanian Municipalities’ Radiography

In this section, we had the objective to verify how the municipalities of Romania, which represent the main focus of this research, meet citizens’ demands and complaints. In this regard, we have analysed what kind of information the municipalities give, via the Internet, to citizens and to the business sector. Specifically, we looked for the dissemination of financial and management information, and for data on the services provided and their quality. The present study was made in 2015 (Vrabie, 2015).

To determine the “responsibility” (Vrabie, 2013) of municipalities through the global network, we firstly investigated the presence on the Internet of Romanian municipalities. Only 96 have an active Web page – representing 93.20% of the total, and 7 municipalities do not have a Web page at all or their address is not active – representing 6.80% (the results are shown in Fig. 3).

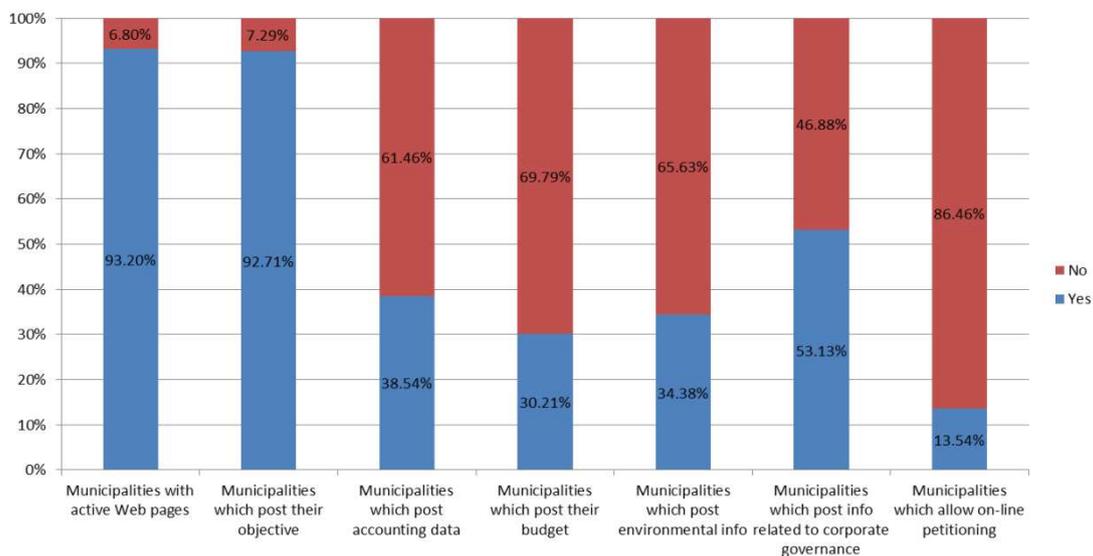


Figure 3 Romanian Municipalities’ Radiography
(Source: based on data collected using the methodology described)

Afterwards, we analyzed the aspects related to the dissemination of financial information and petitions in the 96 municipalities which have an active Web page.

3.1 Dissemination of financial information

Strategic Planning

Regarding the dissemination of strategic information (Fig. 3), from the 96 municipalities which have an active Web page, 89 municipalities (92.71%) do not expose long term objectives and only 7 municipalities show this type of information via the Internet. However, some of them display only strategic information taken from the mayor’s election program.

Dissemination of financial accounting

Regarding the dissemination of information related to financial accounting (Fig. 3), 38.54% (37) municipalities analysed publish this type of information on the Internet, while 61.46% do not.

Budget information

For information on the budgets of previous years displayed on the Internet, 29 municipalities show their budgets and 67 do not provide such information. In Fig. 3 it can be seen that, for the first category mentioned, the percentage is of 30.21, while for the latter is 69.79.

Regarding the updated budget information, it must be pointed out that municipalities which provide information on the current budget are 21 in number, which means 21.88% of the total, while municipalities which do not provide updated budget information are in number of 75, meaning 78.13%.

Interim financial information

Regarding the dissemination of financial information via the Internet on specific economic periods, none of the Romanian municipalities provide intermediate financial accounting.

Information about financial indicators

Regarding the diffusion of financial indicators, the city of Sibiu is the only one to provide that sort of information on its Web page. We have found, on this municipality's official Website, budget indicators, savings and the city's financial picture. Unfortunately, those indicators do not refer to the current period, but only to the one in which the city was the European Capital of Culture (back in 2007).

Information about assets

A total of 94 municipalities do not provide information about assets – which means 97.92%, and only 2 municipalities (2.08%) show detailed information about this aspect.

Environmental information

Details about environmental information (Fig. 3) are provided on 33 Web pages out of 96 municipalities, this meaning 34.38%. In contrast, 63 municipalities do not provide information about the environment and/or sustainability.

Information about corporate governance

Regarding this aspect, 51 municipalities (53.31%) exposed, on their Web pages, information about corporate governance. Some municipalities just show who attended the meetings, while others, in addition, display full Courts' procedures and meetings which have taken place over several years. Instead, 45 municipalities (46.88%) do not display, on their official Web page, information of this kind (the results are shown in Fig. 3).

3.2 Commitment to citizens – the institution's response

Regarding citizens' complaints (Fig. 3), from all of the municipalities' Web pages only 13 present such section. Consequently, municipalities which did not implement something on this aspect represent 86.46%.

4 Conclusions

In this paper, we have seen that our country is far from being in the top countries, in Europe or in the world, with the most developed e-government system. Romania has though reached peaks that exceed

the average (Holzer, You & Manoharan, 2009), therefore our country's situation is promising. Things can obviously improve – the country can gain rating through the overgrowth of some sections (e.g.: design, navigability), but this does not necessarily come to serve the citizens' needs.

The transparency level has been analysed for this article, which is an issue that connects administration and citizens. The analysis' content (based on the provisions of Law no. 544/2001⁴ (MRDT) and 161/2003⁵ (Chamber of Deputies^b)) shows that, in terms of transparency, municipalities seem to have a good level, having an average score (on all 103 municipalities) equal to 3.01 (Vrabie, 2015). We might say that the situation is refreshingly, but if we investigate deeper, taking into account elements showing only direct interest of the city halls to publicly present information and also the manner in which the municipalities respond to citizens, we will see that no element exceeded 50% of affirmatively responses.

After searching for the administration's response, we began to point out that citizen's petitions are tools available to notify the administration about their dissatisfaction in some aspects of life. Although there is a Government Ordinance from 2002 regulating the resolution of complaints⁶ (Bucharest Autonomous Transportation), only 13.54% of the country's municipalities have implemented, on their Websites, online methods to help citizens make such notifications. We can therefore understand that transparency is not a strength point of the Romanian municipalities.

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⁵ Law no. 161 of 19 April 2003 on some measures for ensuring transparency in exercising public dignities, public functions and in business, prevention and punishment of corruption, published in the Official Monitor of Romania no. 279 of 21 April 2003.

⁶ Ordinance no. 27 of 30 January 2002 on the procedure for resolving complaints, published in the Official Monitor of Romania no. 84 of 1 February 2002.