Transparency and Openness in Local Governance: A Case of Croatian Cities

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Transparency and openness are a key concern in contemporary democracies, at both the national and subnational level. Dissemination of public information is a prerequisite for citizens to exercise their individual and political rights. Transparency is also a prerequisite for accountability. The openness of public authorities to a dialogue with the citizenry has become a key ingredient of the democratic process. Citizens are able to take part in a shared responsibility

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for the decisions of public authorities. The paper presents an evaluation of the websites of 16 Croatian cities. The Transparency and Openness Index, composed of four dimensions, and further developed through 13 components, has shown that cities still do not comply with transparency standards, even when those standards are legally prescribed. They are inclined to disclose 'light' information, which is not politically loaded and has no direct connection to the accountability mechanism. It is possible, however, to detect innovative leaders, who promote transparency and employ their websites accordingly.

Key words: transparency, openness, local governance, city websites, Croatia

1. Introduction

Transparency and openness are promoted as the core ingredients of good governance by many international and supranational organisations to the level of determining a certain degree of transparency as a prerequisite for economic cooperation, financial aid or membership in certain organisations (see Kim et al., 2005).[1] For example, included in the first conceptualisation of good governance[2] are the nine principles defined in 1997 by the UNDP: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability and strategic vision (Kettani, Moulin, 2008). Consequently, the level of transparency and openness has been measured by international organisations and NGOs so as to indicate the quality of government, trust in government, and regulatory quality or governance capacity.[3]

[1] The first version of this paper was presented at the IPSA 2014 World Congress *Challenges of Contemporary Governance*, 19–24 July 2014, Montréal, Canada. The authors are grateful to the participants of the RC05 Comparative Studies on Local Government and Politics and two anonymous reviewers for their recommendations and remarks.

[2] The concept of good governance was used by the World Bank in the context of a requirement at the national level, which would enable and facilitate the success of economic development reforms (Haldenwang, 2004: 419, cited by Kettani, Moulin, 2008: 5).

[3] There are various indices, such as the Governance Index, Regulatory Index, Doing Business Index, Quality of Life Index, etc.

The idea of transparency is supported by several key societal developments (Brown, 2005). First, globalisation has expanded the area for information gathering and dissemination, and augmented the number of communication channels and density of networks, but it has also increased the pressure of economic actors to receive reliable governmental information. Secondly, the development of information and communication technology (ICT) has reduced the timeframes for processing and dispersing information and lessened the formalised procedures. Thirdly, general democratisation worldwide has increased citizens' expectations and their awareness of their rights, as well as the role of government as a service for the citizens. In addition, the idea of transparency has become not only a condition for effective public governance, but also a part of the corporate governance agenda in the private sector.

It has been argued that without transparency a government's capacity to reach economic, political and societal goals would be seriously undermined, and in this way it holds strong instrumental value (Heald, 2006a; Brikinshaw, 2006; Piotrowski, 2010). In other words, without transparency many political, economic and societal problems of contemporary societies would be impossible to solve. Government transparency allows citizens to monitor its activities and decisions and to hold the government accountable. It helps to develop a more effective government by infusing information to government activities and thus rendering it more responsive, limiting corruption and other negative practices in public administration and promoting integrity and ethics in government. In other words, transparency cures information asymmetries and gives greater (informational) power to citizens, leading to equality and building the legitimacy of government decisions. Trust in the government is possible only if it acts openly and without secrets *vis-á-vis* the citizens. At the individual level, without a transparent and open government it would be impossible for citizens to protect their individual interests – clear, accurate and easily accessible information is necessary to exercise rights and to consume public services. However, transparency is rarely understood as a maximum and complete disclosure of information – there are legally grounded reasons to restrict the dissemination of information for the purpose of protecting personal data, national security or other important social purposes (see Birkinshaw, 2006).

However, there are claims that transparency is overrated and that it loses its value when the enormous costs of the implementation of transparency initiatives and regulations are taken into account, or if it is compared to other legitimate interests, such as a strong state, effectiveness, or protec-

tion of personal or secret information (Heald, 2006a; Brikinshaw, 2006; Piotrowski 2010; Piotrowski, Van Ryzin, 2007). For example, Etzioni (2010: 389) argues that, based upon current research, 'transparency cannot fulfil the functions its advocates assign to it, although it can play a limited role in their service'. In other words, the value of transparency is only instrumental to the extent it serves to achieve other important goals.[4] Aside from many other arguments, Etzioni (2010) also emphasizes the problem of processing the information provided to the public, as well as the costs of collecting and processing the information, which in many cases exceed the gains it should provide (*ibid.*, 395). He challenges the notion that 'more details means more honesty', emphasizing the problem of the quality of information, usability of information and the competence of intermediary actors which are expected to 'translate' the information for the general public (e.g. the media) but are often not regulated themselves, although there is a widespread public trust assigned to their 'translations'. In this way, despite a great value that information technology has created for the dissemination of information, it has also helped the creation of an information overload and the illusion of communication (Heald, 2006; Birkinshaw, 2006; O'Neil, 2006). In addition, as the digital divide concept describes (Norris, 2001), when it comes to disclosing public information, communicating with the government or participating in decision-making processes, there is a widespread problem of the inclusion of those less competent, less educated or skilled.

Local governments nowadays face a great challenge in providing fast and user-oriented services to their citizens and in responding to the complex demands of social and economic development of their local communities. The global trend of decentralisation as a means of achieving greater democratisation and effectiveness of the public sector has additionally strengthened that pressure. For example, a research study by OECD (Bach et al., 2009) has shown that the average expenditure share of local governments from 1995 to 2005 across OECD countries amounted to 33 per cent, with individual states varying from 70 per cent in Canada to 6 per cent in Greece, and three countries exceeding 50 per cent. In addition, in a given period there was a constant increase in local expenditure by 2 per cent. Consequently, given their scope of affairs and the importance of providing services to citizens, the role of local governments with

[4] In other words, Etzioni (2010: 392) emphasizes the instrumental value of transparency – it is 'rather weak' meaning that 'it relies on other forms of guidance and can supplement regulation but not serve as a main form of guidance'.

regard to the citizens has significantly expanded. In addition, political democratisation poses new demands towards local governments, which have to act openly, transparently and inclusively in order to meet citizen demands and to justify their decisions, thus ensuring legitimacy. The development of ICT has made this task easier, but has also exerted pressure on governments to change their traditional way of doing things and to use ICT as an effective means of communication and information.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the transparency and openness of local governments by analysing website content in Croatian cities. Besides assessing the level of transparency and openness, the analysis will serve as a first step in designing an indicator of transparency of local governments. The paper proceeds as follows: in chapter 2 the concept of transparency and selected research is discussed. In chapter 3 the Croatian case is presented, including a short overview of Croatian local governance, an overview of the current research, and a presentation of the methodology employed in this study. The final chapter summarises the findings and discusses some general observations along with policy proposals.

2. Transparency and Openness in Local Governments

2.1. Conceptualising Transparency and Openness

The literature on government transparency is becoming a distinct subfield of public administration research, but remains closely linked to e-government research, citizen engagement and participation research, and research on trust in government. Government transparency is also discussed in legal literature in the fields of administrative and constitutional law. Given the different research perspectives, there are different meanings and conceptualisations of transparency, which in the broadest sense may be defined as 'the ability to find out what is going on inside the government' (Piotrowski, Van Ryzin, 2007: 306). In addition, transparency is often used along with concepts of openness and responsiveness, usually with no clear demarcation.

There are different conceptualisations of transparency. Based on three types of criteria Heald (2006) differentiates between (a) event and process transparency, where event transparency relates to the objects – inputs, outputs or outcomes, and process transparency on procedures and

operations (rules, regulations); (b) transparency in retrospect, in the sense of *ex-post* reporting, and transparency in real time, as continuous supervision; (c) nominal and effective transparency, based upon differentiation between the content that is revealed or presented to the public, and the content that is processed and understood by the user (which relates to the problem of the illusion of transparency and information overload).

Discussing citizen engagement, the OECD (2001) differentiates, albeit not consistently,[5] between (a) information, when 'the government disseminates information on policy-making on its own initiative – or citizens access information upon their demand', where the information flow is one-directional, from government to citizens; (b) consultation, where 'the government asks for and receives citizen feedback on policymaking', where key information is that received by the government from the citizen; and (c) active participation, where 'citizens actively engage in decision-making and policy-making'.

From the political viewpoint, transparency is often used as a part of the concept of the openness of political processes and decision-making and the precondition for exercising political control. Without transparency there is neither inclusion nor participation, and also no accountability at all. In a strict sense, in order to be open and to allow and ensure the inclusion of societal actors in political processes, the government has to be transparent. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper the differentiation between transparency and openness is made based on the criteria of information direction and instruments. The conceptualisation is presented in Figure 1.

Transparency usually means that data held by the government and information about its activities are exposed to the public eye and, depending on the character of the data, can be disclosed upon request of the citizen or another entity (company, civil society organisation, etc). Citizens are presented with the results of the government activity, but their position is relatively passive (see Héritier, 2003). *Openness*, on the other hand, is closely related to the concept of responsiveness – the government is open to the information and feedback given by citizens, engages in a dialogue with them, and takes into account suggestions when designing and implementing public policies (OECD, 2001; Bannister, Connolly, 2010).

[5] The differentiation between consultation and active participation is not clear, so both can be considered openess indicators.

Consequently, while transparency relates to the output of government activities, openness relates to the consultation and participation practices and is focused on the input side of government work. Openness and communication are more closely related to policy formulation and evaluation, and in this way to political power. They are about presenting information, reaching, explaining and justifying decisions and results of the political process. On the contrary, transparency is usually legally ensured by 'the right and ability of the citizens to access government information and information about the government' (UNPAN, 1999, cited by Bannister and Connolly, 2010).

In summary, while openness is based on the political decision to open up to the citizens by communicating and presenting policy options and choices, transparency is legally defined and ensured as a necessary tool for citizens to control the government. In other words, while openness means that governments 'listen to citizens and businesses, and take their suggestions into account when designing and implementing public policies', transparency means that 'reliable, relevant and timely information about the activities of the government is available to the public' (OECD, 2002: 7). A transparent government is active and a citizen is a recipient of information, while an open government is not only transparent but also receptive to the information provided by the active citizen, based on two-way communication and interaction. In this way, transparency can be understood as a prerequisite or key element of openness – the government is only open if it is capable and willing to present public information to the citizens, being visible enough to allow the citizens to develop and introduce their own opinion.

In the legal sense, transparency is explored through the legal concept of 'the right to information which is qualified by exemptions and subject to independent adjudication by a third party' (Birkinshaw, cited by McDonald, 2006). From this perspective, transparency is considered to be achieved by means of access to information legislation, which allows citizens to access public information by request and which forces the government to proactively disclose certain information. Openness is achieved by means of regulating the obligation of the government to engage citizens in decision-making, as well as by means of public consultation and participation in decision-making processes.

Figure 1: Transparency and Openness

Type of access	Direction	Instruments	Consequences
Transparency	Government presenting information to citizens (output) *G2C*	a) *Communication* Websites, brochures, policy/ communication campaigns, public(media) relations, strategic communication, openness of meetings, public events, reports b) *Access to public information* – Disclosure upon request – right to information / freedom of information laws	Informed citizen. Protection of rights and fulfilling of obligations. Controlling the government.
Openness	Citizens influencing government by providing information (input) *C2G*	Consultation, hearings, dialogue, discussion (political bodies, policy-making bodies)	Participation. Responsiveness. Partnership.

Source: Héritier, 2003; Musa et al., 2011.

2.2. Measuring Transparency and Openness in Local Government

Transparency research is often connected to e-government research. If e-government is understood as the use of ICT to provide services to citizens and to inform the public, to communicate with citizens and to engage citizens in decision-making, than it is understandable that exploring transparency and openness is an inevitable part of e-government.

For the last 20 years measuring and benchmarking e-government has been in focus of international organisations and consultancy firms,[6] which view e-government as an instrument to achieve generally greater accountability and effectiveness of government, but also as a convenient means for comparison of countries which would stimulate investments into ICT-supported administration.[7] For these reasons, there is a vast literature deal-

[6] As Bannister (2004: 1) notes: 'Benchmarking of egovernment has become a small industry.'

[7] Offering a well-grounded differentiation between the bureaucratic model and the e-government model of public administration, Ho (2002) emphasizes that 'explosive growth

ing with the winners and losers in the e-government race, or, in other words, of the countries ranking best or worst in e-government scales. For example, the UN E-Government Survey measures the extent to which national governments use information technology to provide citizens with services in a timesaving manner (see UNPADM and UNDESA, 2014).[8] The EU and the European Commission approach e-government by applying an open method of coordination, i.e. setting standards, action plans and measuring achievement according to benchmarks. For these purposes, the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) has been developed, measuring connectivity, human capital, use of the Internet, integration of digital technology and digital public services.[9] At first seen as a means of enhancing transparency and the delivery of public services, e-government is now promoted as 'a tool to achieve better government' (OECD, 2003; West, 2000; cited by Pina et al., 2010).

The reasons why transparency (and openness) research closely relates to e-government research lies in the fact that lower levels of development of e-government (see Layne, Lee, 2001) correspond directly to the use of the Internet as a means of providing information and simple communication between public authorities and citizens (online presence, presentation of information, downloadable forms, access and small-scale interaction). For example, different conceptualisations of the scales developed by international organisations, states or corporations, can usually be reduced to four main phases: (1) the information stage, where the web only serves as a billboard for presenting government information to the public, which is predominantly passive; (2) a one-way interaction stage, where government web sites offer downloadable forms or documents, with a significant amount of presented information, including relevant data on policy processes; (3) two-way interaction, including the notion of the active citizen, who can actively engage in a relationship with the state by completing procedures online (upload forms, e-mail or forum discussions, etc.); and (4) fully interactive and comprehensive government portals with a wide range of information, one-stop transactions and 24/7 services enhancing the lives of the citizens and the economy. In short, positioning the state

in Internet usage and rapid development of e-commerce in the private sector have put growing pressure on the public sector to serve citizens electronically, which is often known as the 'e-government' initiative. The initiative is to provide public services and to empower citizens and communities through information technology, especially through the Internet'.

[8] http://www.unpan.org/egovkb/global_reports/08report.htm

[9] http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/digital-economy-and-society-index-desi

in e-government assessments should signal its dedication towards democracy, its accountability to citizens and, in consequence, provide the basis for trust in the government. Such a conceptualisation indicates that transparency and openness relate mainly to the first two phases and partially to the third phase of e-government development, whilst the fourth phase is concerned with a full-service function exercised by means of ICT.

Scientific research has also focused on different aspects of transparency and e-government – transparency in a narrow sense, e-participation, e-democracy and e-services. A vast body of scientific research examines the functionality and presence of different content on the Internet. As Kuk (2003) notes: 'Much of the research in e-government has focused on the standards for evaluating web-enabled services. Website usability and navigability remain the key factors in determining e-government readiness and maturity. Research in e-commerce and technology adoption suggests that a user-friendly website with rich, interesting, and searchable contents will ultimately win customers' approval, encouraging use and return visits.' For example, the pioneering work of Moon (1999) examines information provision (content, type) vs. communication channels at that time (e-mails, chat rooms, etc.). Another pioneering research study devising instruments with practical value to detect best practice and to tailor recommendations, often used as a starting point of next-generation research, was conducted by West (2000), the researchers of the Oxford Internet Institute,[10] and also by the Cyberspace Public Research Group. The latter group (La Porte et al., 2001) developed the WAES, Web Attribute Evaluation System, measuring two dimensions of federal websites in the United States – transparency and interactivity, with transparency corresponding to the first and second stage of e-government, while interactivity relates to the higher levels. The instrument was applied on approximately 2,000 national-level agencies in 120 countries over a four-year period. The main conclusions of their research are that 'the role of the Internet in transforming government administration – the nuts and bolts of government – is no less significant for the ultimate success of any reform' (La Porte et al., 2001: 63–64). In addition, most countries were 'not making extensive use of Web' and they are not making their best efforts to do so – the global average score in 1999 was less than half of a possible 21 for transparency and less than a quarter of a possible 18.

[10] http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/; see Dunleavy et al., 2006.

Among the literature, the focus on analysing websites of local governments is remarkable, often for the sake of comparison and the possibility to draw more argumented conclusions. Moon's (2002) research on e-government in municipalities has shown that municipal governments at the time the study was conducted were 'in the first stage simply posting and disseminating information over the web or providing online channels for two-way communication, particularly for public service requests' (*ibid.* 431). Similarly, Musso et al. (2000) examined the extent to which ICT has the potential to support local government reform, by assessing web sites of 270 local governments in 1997 on the dimension of information, interactivity and general design and emphasis. Their conclusions indicate that local governments are failing to exploit the possibilities that the Internet offers to improve communications, mostly stuck at the first stage of development, serving as billboards and phone books.

A significant amount of local government websites are concerned with e-democracy and participation. Piotrowski and van Ryzin (2007) have analysed citizen attitudes toward transparency in local government by using data from a national online survey of more than 1,800 respondents, measuring citizens' *demand for transparency* at the local level and exploring its correlates. Thomas and Streib (2003) explored to what extent citizens use websites and forms, while Scott (2006) analysed to what extent US municipal websites facilitate public involvement by measuring the presence or absence of more than 100 information or communication services provided at the sites. The results indicate that local government websites have the potential to enhance and inform local public involvement initiatives, and that this potential might be 'underappreciated and understudied.'

A large-scale assessment instrument of local government websites has been devised by a Rutgers University research group led by Holzer and Manoharan (2011–12). The Digital Governance in Municipalities Worldwide Survey is based on the indicator of digital governance in large municipalities (cities), assessing 104 measures through five dimensions.[11] Starting from 2003, the survey was continuously replicated with the last one conducted in 2011. It evaluated the websites of 92 cities worldwide on the dimension of delivery of public services and e-democracy. The instrument measures website content on five dimensions: se-

[11] For the Holzer and Manoharan study (2011–12) and earlier studies see http://spaa.newark.rutgers.edu/egov-publications

curity/privacy, usability, content, service and citizen engagement, with weighted scores included.[12] The average score for digital governance in the cities is 33.76, while the average score for municipalities in OECD countries is 45.45.

Another widely cited research group, based at the University of Zaragoza, Spain, assessed municipal websites in Europe. In one study Pina, Torres and Royo (2010) have analysed to what extent websites of public bodies enhance financial accountability, by assessing the budgetary and performance information dissemination on the websites of 75 EU cities.[13] The research showed that the websites do not promote financial accountability beyond the level that is legally required and that the Internet is an underused additional tool.[14]

In an earlier study of the same research group (Torres et al., 2005) the focus of the measurement was on Service Maturity (70 per cent) and Delivery Maturity (30 per cent), as components of Overall Website Maturity. Service Maturity was measured on two dimensions: *Service Maturity Breadth* (*SMB*), as the number of services offered via the Internet from the 67 services identified, and *Service Maturity Depth* (*SMD*), which classifies services according to the level of interactivity or the possibility of transaction (classified by three levels: publish – interact – transact). Delivery Maturity relates to website sophistication (simplicity of filling out forms, e-mail addresses, additional languages, e-democracy, etc.). Based on these indicators, cities can be grouped as Innovative Leaders, Visionary Followers and Steady Achievers (Torres et al., 2005).

[12] For each of these five components, 18 to 26 measures were applied, each coded on a scale of four points (0, 1, 2, 3), or a dichotomy of two points (0, 3 or 0, 1). The overall score was weighted to avoid skewing the research in favor of a particular category. In order to ensure reliability, each municipal website was assessed in the native language by two evaluators.

[13] The study used four internal factors –city size, city wealth, website maturity, and the presence of information audited by a private firm on the city council website. Besides these internal variables, three external variables were assessed – public administration style, Internet penetration, and level of corruption.

[14] Similarly, the financial dimension was also assessed by Zavattaro (2013) who analyses the use of budget documents as marketing and public relations (PR) tools.

Finally, an emerging area of research concerns the use of web 2.0 and especially social media[15] on local government websites.[16] Bonsóna et al. (2012) assessed 75 local government websites in the EU in order to determine whether local governments are using new technologies to increase e-participation and to open a dialogue with society, but also to identify factors which promote the use of these tools. Their Web 2.0 and social media Sophistication Index (SI)[17] measures the presence and level of activity of each local government on social media platforms. The findings indicate that approximately half the local governments have no active presence on any social network. Although in most of the cities the conversation and activity initiated by citizens on social media platforms is at a promising level, the use of Web 2.0 to promote e-participation is 'still in its infancy', at least at the local level.

3. Transparency and Openness of Local Government in Croatia

3.1. Transparency and Openness in Croatia

How to achieve the standards of a transparent and open government has been a highly discussed issue in Croatian civil society, media and academia. A transparent and open government should help prevent corrup-

[15] As indicated by Bonsóna et al. (2012) 'the term Web 2.0 was coined by Tim O'Reilly (2005) to refer to a second generation Web based on the use of novel technologies, such as RSS (Really Simple Syndication of Web contents), podcasting (syndication of audio content), mashups (combination of pre-existing applications), folksonomies (popular labeling or categorizing), widgets (Web tools embedded in other sites to perform a particular function) and sharing facilities (options for redistributing the contents of Websites to other users). Additionally, thanks to this technological base, the so-called social media have been developed. These are applications that offer services to communities of online users: blogs, social bookmarking, wikis, media sharing and social networks that promote collaboration, joint learning and the speedy exchange of information between users.'

[16] For analyis of the research on social media as a means of citizen empowerment over a period of five years see Magro, 2012.

[17] SI is based on 8 items whose presence was measured by a binary variable (0: no presence; 1: presence): 1. Podcasts from the management; 2. RSS or Atom; 3. Vodcast from the management; 4. Real time webcast of municipal events, 5. Widgets, 6. Blogs, 7. Links to official YouTube videos, 8. Social network for the users of the local government website. In the second part of the research the social media platforms were assessed (number of followers, number of conversations, groups etc.).

tion, eliminate irregularities, and enable citizens to have more and better services – the critical points of the Croatian administrative system. As in other transition countries, institution building and democratic renewal were highly dependent on embracing new political concepts and administrative practice, with transparency being one of the main prerequisites for greater accountability and more effective administration. The right to access to information, which is considered to be a legal version of the political concept of transparency, was legally regulated in 2003 but problems with the implementation of the law did not prevent obscurities and force the government to act much more transparently. In the process of EU accession transparency regulation was determined to be a prerequisite for EU membership approval by the European Commission, as it was considered to be a main tool for fighting corruption. In the meantime, the public consultation procedure was introduced in 2009 and significant steps forward have been taken in public involvement. In 2010 the right to information became a constitutional right, and in 2013 a new law[18] and a new institution for the protection of this right (the Information Commissioner post) were introduced. In addition, Croatian e-government is slowly moving forward with a greater number of e-services and greater interconnectivity of government, although there is a significant lag behind other EU member states.[19]

The Law on Access to Information (FOI law) requires all public bodies at all levels of government and types of functions (government, judiciary, legislature, public services, etc.) to (a) proactively publish information, (b) enable publicity of sessions of public bodies; (c) conduct public consultations when issuing new regulation; and (d) disclose information upon the request of citizens.

Research on transparency and openness with regard to websites or research on e-government in general in Croatia is scarce (see Bebić, Vučković, 2011). The most comprehensive research on transparency in local government was conducted in 2009 and 2011–12 by non-governmental

[18] The Law on the Right to Access to Information, OG 25/13.

[19] The e-government benchmark shows that Croatia scores low on all four measured indicators – the e-government level is mostly moderate (transparency) or, at best, fair (user centricity), but in the aspects of key enablers and cross-border mobility mostly insufficient. See http://www.capgemini.com/resources/egovernment-benchmark-country-factsheets-croatia Similarly, the DESI index for 2014 ranks Croatia as 21st among the 28 EU member states, with an overall score of 0.37 (EU score average 0.44), see http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/scoreboard/croatia

organisations (GONG[20] in cooperation with the Association of Croatian Cities), as part of the LOTUS project (Accountable and Transparent Local Government and Self-Government). The research included all Croatian local units (127 cities and 429 municipalities) and focused on five dimensions of transparency in local self-government: 1) transparency of local council meetings, 2) transparency of decisions, 3) cooperation with the civil society, 4) complying with the Law on the Access to Information, and 5) organisation of submunicipal self-government. The local units scored highest in the category 'transparency of local council meetings', while the lowest scores were in the 'complying with the FOI law' category. The second round of research conducted during 2011–2012 also covered the regional units (20 counties). Although the 2011–12 results show an increase in the level of transparency in relation to the 2009 results, 70 per cent of local and regional units were assessed as non-transparent, while only 6 per cent of them scored as remarkably transparent. The highest level of transparency was demonstrated by cities and the lowest level by municipalities, while the counties turned out to be mostly transparent.[21] The results also indicated an insufficient use of the Internet in informing and consulting citizens.[22]

3.2. Assessing the Websites of Croatian Cities: Do They Promote Transparency and Openness?

The research design. The purpose of the research was twofold: to analyse transparency and openness of Croatian local governments, and to construct a measurement tool which could be further employed not only nationally but also internationally. An analysis of city websites was chosen as the method of assessment, with the help of an instrument developed for the purpose.

[20] GONG is one of the most active Croatian NGOs engaged in promoting human and citizen rights, and active citizens' participation in decision-making processes. The third round of the project is currently being implemented.

[21] http://gong.hr/hr/dobra-vladavina/pristup-informacijama/tko-je-najtransparentniji-rezultati-istrazivanja-l/.

Among highly ranked cities are Rijeka (1st), Samobor (2nd), Pula (3rd), Slavonski Brod (7th), Osijek (10th), Čakovec (10th).

[22] For the research results see http://gong.hr/media/uploads/lotus_2011_-_istrazivacki_izvjestaj.pdf. For comparison of 2011/2012 results of research with results from 2009 see http://gong.hr/hr/dobra-vladavina/lokalne-vlasti/predstavljeni-prvi-nalazi-istrazivanja-lotus/.

The current system of Croatian local self-government was established in 1993. Based upon the constitutional provisions on the right to local self-government, the system is regulated by the Law on Local and Regional Self-Government.[23] The system is two-tiered, comprising a local (first tier) with 428 municipalities and 128 cities, and a regional (second tier) with 20 counties and the capital City of Zagreb, which has a special status and performs city and county tasks and transferred central state functions (functions in other counties performed by state administration offices). In 2005 the law introduced a special category of big cities with more than 35,000 inhabitants with a somewhat broader scope of affairs compared to 'regular' cities. Local representative bodies are municipal and city councils at the local level, and county assemblies at the regional level. In 2009 local collegial executives were replaced by directly elected municipal and city mayors and county governors. There are great differences in the size and population in the category of municipalities and cities, as well as between counties, which indicates the problem of an unbalanced structure of local units. A highly fragmented system of local self-government with too many local units brings about the problem of financial capacities and performance of local responsibilities. Therefore, the unbalanced structure of local units, together with its complex structure which points at a still rather centralistic mode of governance, as well as poor decentralisation, can be singled out as the main deficiencies in the system of local self-government (Koprić, 2010b: 372–383; see also Koprić, 2010a, 2011, 2013).

Since this is a first-stage research study, which is meant to give an insight into the different aspects of transparency and openness of local government, the decision was made to assess the websites of a smaller group of local governments. The original intention was to analyse the websites of the 20 largest cities according to the 2001 census; however, since we considered the scope of affairs to be an important variable, we also had to consider the legal category of 'big cities' – those which are legally defined as large cities (cities with a population above 35,000 and cities which are county seats). Bearing in mind population and legal status, we sorted out our list of 24 cities in a way that those two indicators overlap (more than 35,000 inhabitants and the status of a large city). From the list of 24 cities we excluded the capital, Zagreb, which legally has county status and thus a greater scope of affairs, but would also skew our data because of the

[23] OG 19/13 (includes the 2001 Law with further amendments)

budget and population size. We also excluded three cities[24] which qualify for the list of the 20 biggest cities in terms of population, but their scope of affairs is not the same as that of big cities (since they are 'regular' cities). However, since the group of 'big cities' legally encompasses not only those cities with a population of over 35,000, but also county seats, we excluded 4 cities[25] which have a population below 35,000. Finally, the list ended up with 16 cities which are legally defined as 'big cities' and have more than 35,000 inhabitants (see Table 1).

The websites were assessed by the authors in June 2014, in the way that two authors assessed each website, in order to minimise errors in assessment. The assessment was carried out using search engines and a thorough examination of the webpage (the site map and a simple search of the webpage). To determine other variables relevant for this research additional data was collected: data on city size according to population in the 2011 census,[26] data on wealth measured by the budget for 2014 as indicated on the websites of the respective cities, and the number of employees in the city administration, according to the data found on the Internet.

The 16 cities represent 12.4 per cent of all cities and less than 3 per cent of all municipalities in Croatia, but their combined population corresponds to 25 per cent of the total Croatian population (1.06 mil.). The average number of inhabitants is 66,326, the Median is 178,102, and St.dev. is 35.312. The cities are located in 14 out of a total of 20 counties (70 per cent of counties), with two counties represented by 2 cities each, and 12 counties represented by one city. According to regional division in the geographical sense, the eastern and southern region is represented by 4 cities, the central and northern region each by 3 cities, and the western region by 2 cities. The total budget of the 16 cities is slightly above 616.5 mil €,[27] ranging from 13.36 mil up to 7 times as much – 95.62 mil.; with an average budget of 38.5 mil €, Median of 28.6 mil €, and St.dev. of 25.07 mil. The total number of employees in city administrations of the 16 cities is 2,773, ranging from 68 to 465, with the average number of 173, Median of 127.5 and St.dev. of 123.59.

[24] Koprivnica, Đakovo and Vukovar.

[25] Krapina and Gospić have cca 10,000, Pazin cca 7,500, and Čakovec slightly more than 22,000 inhabitants.

[26] Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics, www.dzs.hr

[27] For the sake of comparison, and argumenting the exclusion of Zagreb from the analysis, the budget of the capital City of Zagreb is 868 mil €.

The data was then used to calculate the *financial workload capacity* measure (FWC) and *service workload capacity* (SWC) measure. The financial workload capacity (FWC) measure is calculated by dividing the amount of budget resources (in .000.000 €) by the number of employees, indicating their workload in spending the city budget. The service workload capacity (SWC) is calculated by dividing the population by the number of employees, indicating the number of citizens one employee has to serve. The table indicates that the average FWC is 227, with a minimum of 151 and maximum of 317. The average SWC is 420, ranging from 190 to 657, with the Median of 425 and St.dev. of 106. The dispersion is indicative for policy makers considering the reform of local government.

The next step was to determine the set of criteria that would be used to rank the various cities and to determine their transparency and openness. As described in previous sections, the measures of transparency and openness are differently conceptualised, based on the purpose of research. In this research the *Transparency and Openness Index* (TOI) is conceptualised based on the legal requirement for all public bodies in Croatia to proactively publish relevant information on their websites. This legal obligation is imposed on all selected local governments to the same extent and it is sufficiently clear and applicable. In this way their discretion to decide what kind of information will be published is limited, what adds additional value to the measure. In addition, the legal requirements correspond to the international, and particularly European, standards of proactive dissemination, which would make the instrument applicable in other countries, but also at other levels of government.

Table 1: Croatian Cities included in research

City	County	Web site	Region	Budget 2014 (€)	Population (2011)	City employees	FWC	SWC
Split	Splitsko-dalmatinska	www.split.hr	Southern	95,622,538	178,102	465	205.7	383.02
Rijeka	Primorsko-goranska	www.rijeka.hr	Western	92,069,474	128,624	459	200.6	280.23
Osijek	Osječko-baranjska	www.osijek.hr	Eastern	53,452,936	108,048	236	226.5	457.83
Zadar	Zadarska	www.grad-zadar.hr	Southern	45,812,560	75,062	178	257.4	421.70
Velika Gorica	Zagrebačka	www.gorica.hr	Central	38,404,424	63,517	148	259.5	429.17

Slavonski Brod	Brodsko-posavska	www.slavonski-brod.hr	Eastern	21,268,749	59,141	90	236.3	657.12
Pula	Istarska	www pula.hr	Western	42,548,071	57,460	186	228.8	308.92
Karlovac	Karlovačka	www.karlovac.hr	Central	27,346,046	55,705	137	199.6	406.61
Sisak	Sisačko-moslavačka	www.sisak.hr	Central	25,020,017	47,768	118	212.1	404.81
Varaždin	Varaždinska	www.varazdin.hr	Northern	29,962,229	46,946	103	290.9	455.79
Šibenik	Šibensko-kninska	www.sibenik.hr	Eastern	25,162,763	46,332	100	251.6	463.32
Dubrovnik	Dubrovačko-neretvanska	www.dubrovnik.hr	Southern	53,130,000	42,615	224	237.2	190.25
Bjelovar	Bjelovarsko-bilogorska	www.bjelovar.hr	Northern	15,465,822	40,276	84	184.1	479.48
Kaštela	Splitsko-dalmatinska	www.kastela.hr	Southern	16,358,684	38,667	89	183.8	434.46
Samobor	Zagrebačka	www.samobor.hr	Eastern	21,593,572	37,633	68	317.8	553.43
Vinkovci	Vukovarsko-srijemska	www.vinkovci.hr	Northern	13,361,465	35,312	88	151.8	401.27
			Total	616,579,349	1,061,208	2,773		
			Average	38,536,209	66,326	173	227.73	420
			Median	28,654,138	51,737	127.5	227.65	425.43
			St.Dev	25,076,609	39,457	123.59	42.098293	106.21931
			Min	13,361,465	35,312	68	151.8	190.25
			Max	95,622,538	178,102	465	317.8	657.12

Consequently, in order to evaluate the websites with the help of the Transparency and Openness Index (TOI), we first determined the legal requirements for publication as 13 distinctive measures. Each of these dimensions has the transparency element, but most of them also include the openness element, as it enables citizens to give feedback to the government. The distinction between these two elements was been conceptualised at this stage of the research. In addition, the service dimension was not analysed in this phase of research.

The dimensions and indicators were then grouped according to the typology developed by the authors (for similar typologies see Piotrowski, van Ryzin, 2007; Leith, Morison, 2004). The typology starts with the assumption that the information is used for various purposes. First, as transparency literature suggests, government transparency and openness are necessary for citizens to be able to control decision-making and to actively engage in decision-making in their communities (local, state, etc.).

This dimension is called *Decision-making and Participation Transparency*. Second, transparency allows the control of government spending and their financing of various activities, and enables citizens to hold their local governments to account. This dimension is called *Financial Transparency*. Third, in order to exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations, citizens should be familiar with the activities of their local governments, such as planned activities and projects, regulation which applies to their individual rights, and public calls which enable them to exercise their rights, obtain benefits or to enter into a contractual relationship with the government (to do business or to acquire some benefits). They also need to be familiar with the structure of the government to be able to exercise their rights and to hold the government accountable (e.g. they need to be familiar with the officials, heads of units, etc.). This dimension is called *Operational Transparency*. Finally, citizens have to be able to communicate with their governments and officials and to receive information they need, but also to re-use the data governments collect to create additional value. This dimension is named *Communication Transparency*. Each dimension consists of three or four components or subdimensions (see Table 2).

As the next step, 13 components (subdimensions) were analysed in detail to determine which information has to be presented on the website. Three websites (Rijeka, Pula, Varaždin) underwent a preliminary analysis to detect possible information which corresponds to the content of each dimension. In this way the *minimum content* (MC) was determined, but since the websites also held additional information, the group of *additional content* (AC) was determined for each (sub)dimension. Each type of information was given a score of 1 or 2, if it was assessed as a significant step to greater transparency. The total score related to minimum content is 66, but the number is not absolute, because it is possible that the website contains more information than is legally required. In addition, the scores are not weighted at this stage of the research. The review of indicators for each dimension is presented in Table 2.

The instrument was then applied to the websites of 16 cities. The measurement concerned only the presence of information while the content or the quality was measured only if it was envisaged in the instrument itself (e.g. official journal vs. searchable official journal, document format, etc.). The instrument generally does not take into account the accuracy of information, the quality of content, the navigability, the design or user-friendliness of the website, but it focuses on the presence of certain content.

Table 2: Transparency and Openness Index (TOI) for Croatian Cities

transparency type / total score	DECISION-MAKING AND PARTICIPATION TRANSPARENCY		16	transparency type / total score	OPERATIONAL TRANSPARENCY		15
dimension / score	REGULATION		5	dimension / score	REGULATION AND RIGHTS		6
Legal requirement (Art. 10-12 FOI)	Minimum content (MC)	Additional content (AC)		Legal requirement (Art. 10-12 FOI)	Minimum content (MC)	Additional content (AC)	
General acts and decisions affecting the interests of the citizens with the justification for adoption	Text of the statute and general acts – 1 Official journal of the local government – 2 Justification of the act – 1 some, 2 extensive	Searchable official journal of the local government + + 1 cleansed version of legal text and decisions +1		Laws and other regulations regulating their scope of affairs	Information on the laws and other regulation – 1 some, 2 – extensive Legal texts – 1-some, 2 – extensive Summary of the procedure for exercising rights or fulfilling the obligations – 1 main steps, 2 – detail		
dimension / score	DECISION-MAKING		6	dimension / score	PLANNING AND REPORTING		5
The minutes and conclusions of the official sessions of public bodies and official documents adopted at the sessions, and information on the operation of formal working bodies within their competence	council meetings – agenda – 1, with documents + 1 council meetings – official documents – 1 council meetings – minutes and conclusions – 1 council working bodies – 1 attendance - 1	councillors' questions and answers of the mayor + 1 statistical information (party structure, socio-demographic distribution) - + 1 video/audio - +2		Annual and other program documents, strategies, instructions, work reports, other documents related to the local government activities	strategy - 1 annual work plan - 1 urban planning document – 1, projects - 1 other program document – 1	interactive urban plan + 1	
dimension / score	PARTICIPATION		5	dimension / score	COMPETITIONS		5
Draft general acts and strategies with consultation procedure	draft general acts / strategies – 1 justification – 1 consultation procedure – 1 documentation of the consultation procedure (comments, opinion, feedback, justification) – 1 plan of regulatory activities - 1	analyses, graphs, opinion survey + 1 home page visible icon + 1 final regulation + 1		Information on public calls and competitions, and relevant documents	employment - 1 competition for funds – 1 housing and offices – 1 public areas – 1 culture, sports, other – 1	final decision + 1	
				dimension / score	INTERNAL ORGANISATION AND FUNCTIONING		4
				Information on internal organisation, names and contacts of the officials and heads of units	general information on the structure – 1 public services – 1 names and contact of the officials - 1 names and contact of heads of units – 1	contacts of employees – +1 some, +2 all info on public services with details and links - +2 organisational structure +1	

transparency type / total score	FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY		16
dimension / score	FISCAL		5
Legal requirement (Art. 10-12 FOI)	Minimum content (MC)	Additional content (AC)	
Information on financial resource, annual budget and execution of the budget, financial reports	financial resources - 1 annual budget – 1 annual budget for previous three years – 1 budget execution report – 1 other financial reports - 1	simplified budget explanation for citizens + 1 other financial information + 1	
dimension / score	DONATIONS		5
Information on granted financial aid, grants or donations, including a list of beneficiaries and the amounts	total amount - 1 specified amount (per type/group of user) – 1 some, 2 extensive list of beneficiaries -1 some, 2 extensive	criteria for allocation + 1	
dimension / score	PUBLIC PROCUREMENT		6
Information on public procurement procedures, tender documents, and execution of the contract;	annual public procurement plan – 1 public procurement procedure -1 simple, 2 in detail list of public procurement contracts - 1 contracts and annexes – 1 reports on the execution of the contracts – 1 conflict of interest declaration – 1	link to national public procurement portal + 2	

transparency type / total score	COMMUNICATION TRANSPARENCY		14
dimension / score	OPEN DATA		3
Legal requirement (Art. 10-12 FOI)	Minimum content (MC)	Additional content (AC)	
Registers and databases, or information on the procedure of accessing registers and databases	registers and databases – 1 some, 1 extensive information on the procedure of access to registers and databases – 1	interactive or searchable + 2	
dimension / score	ACCESS TO INFORMATION		5
information on how to exercise the right to access to information, and reuse information with the contact of information officer; fees for access to information and re-use of information, according to predefined criteria	information on right of access to information – 1 name and contact of the officer – 1 forms – 1 fees – 1 home page visible icon + 1	web form + 1 annual reports + 1 link to IC webpage + 1	
dimension / score	OTHER INFORMATION		6
Other information (FAQ, news, press releases, information on activities)	frequently asked information / questions – 1 news – 1 press releases – 1 information on activities (projects, events, etc.) – 1 news archive - 1 contacts info – 1	forms + 1, if searchable +1 search engine- 1 calendar of events - 1 multimedia– 1 social media – 1 forums – 1 online surveys – 1 bilingual web page – 1 for each language, incorporating universal design (accessible to people with disabilities) -1	

The findings. As the purpose of the research is to assess the website content of selected cities in order to determine to what extent they promote transparency and openness and to construct a measurement instrument which could be further used and developed, it is possible to present and to draw conclusions related only to summary statistics. The findings of the research are presented in Table 3 (scores), Table 4 (percentages) and Table 5 (ranks), in the Appendix.

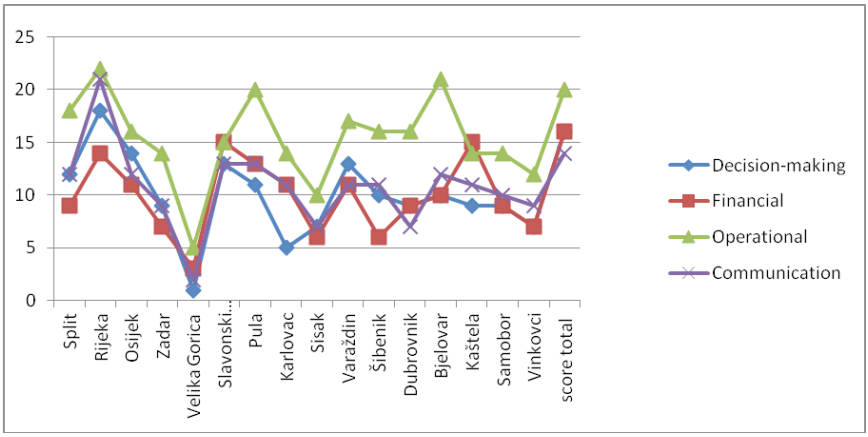
The first question is to what extent Croatian cities are transparent and open when measured by their website content, and which information are they most inclined to present to their constituencies. By looking at the TOI scores table (3) and percentages table (4) it is possible to conclude that, generally, Croatian cities present less than three quarters of the minimum content required by law (69 per cent) – out of a possible total of 66 points, together they score an average of 45.5 (Median 46, St.Dev 14.03). Given the fact that the law has been in force for more than a year and that previous regulation also required that most of the analysed content be accessible on the website, the problem seems even more significant.

When *transparency types* are analysed, there is a difference between two groups – the selected cities score lower on decision-making and participation (61 per cent, average score 9.81 out of 16) and financial transparency (60 per cent, average 9.75 out of 16), in comparison to operational transparency (76 per cent, average 15.25 out of 20) and communication (76 per cent, 10.69 out of 14). These results, although not statistically tested, indicate that the control of local governments in their decision-making and financial activities might be questioned, along with the role of citizens in the decision-making and participation in the political process and financial control.

If the TOI levels of individual cities are analysed, it is possible to detect that only one city scores higher than the minimum content score which is 66 (Rijeka, score 75, 113 per cent of the content). Data for Rijeka also show that the financial dimension score (87 per cent) is lower than for other dimensions (112-115 per cent for the other three dimensions). There is also a group of four cities which are close to the minimum score with 80 per cent and more content on their websites (Pula – 86 per cent, Slavonski Brod – 84 per cent, Osijek and Bjelovar – 80 per cent each). On the other hand, there are three cities whose score is very low: Sisak – 45 per cent, Vinkovci – 53 per cent, and in particular Velika Gorica with only 16 per cent content on the website and the decision-making transparency especially critical (only 6 per cent of the content). In addition, looking

at the ranks (Table 5), the highest number of first ranks, if we count 13 dimensions and 4 types belongs to Rijeka (13), followed by Kaštela (4), Osijek (3), Varaždin (3) and Bjelovar (3).

Figure 2: TOI Scores



Source: created by authors

When specific types of information are analysed, Table 3 indicates some interesting findings. First, 16 cities score the lowest in the participation subdimension (average score 1.5, other scores ranging from 2.625 to 5.313) – nine cities do not display any information on the consultation procedure or other types of participation in decision-making.[28] Further low scores are achieved in the following subdimensions: open data – 2.125; donations – average 2.625 or 55 per cent, and regulation and rights – 2.688 or 44 per cent). The data indicate that there is a lack of open data (registers, databases) offered by cities to their citizens, who could make use of these data by creating additional value (e.g. a smart phone application), controlling their activities or researching. There is also a problem with transparency in spending public money – the information on donations, aids and grants is not visible enough, and clear criteria are rarely displayed (none of the cities scores above the minimum content). These findings, however, are not surprising, since Croatia also scores highly on

[28] The FOI law requires that the consultation procedure is conducted on any general act or document which affects the interest of the citizens. The information on the public discussion related to urban planning was not taken into account because it is regulated by a special law which has been in force for some time.

the corruption perception index.[29] In addition, insufficient transparency when it comes to displaying information on the scope of affairs of city governments, legal documents, and summaries of procedures and rights indicate the obstacles or at least insufficient help given to citizens when they wish to exercise their rights or to obtain certain services. Fiscal data is generally not problematic, although two cities score very low on this dimension (Zadar and Sisak with 1 point).

A slightly positive outlook is provided by the operational transparency and communication transparency scores. The average is 76 per cent (15.25 out of 20); three cities scored more than 100 per cent on operational transparency (Rijeka – 110 per cent, Bjelovar – 105 per cent, Pula 100 per cent), while 12 cities scored 60 per cent and above. Only Velika Gorica, as in other dimensions, achieved a low score (25 per cent), but this is still the best result of this city when types are concerned. However, these data should not be viewed too enthusiastically – operational transparency contains two 'easy' dimensions, which do not have political weight – planning and reporting – neither yet considered too seriously by either local governments or citizens, and internal organisation – the data on the structure, officials, and administrators, with their contacts, which is the second best score in total (4,875, or 120 per cent above minimum 5 points). Similarly, communication transparency is well developed, with a total score of 10.69 out of 14 (76 per cent) and the best score on the other information dimension – 5.13 out of 6 (85.5 per cent), which includes the displaying of news, contacts, social media, search engine and similar communication tools and instruments. Rijeka again scores significantly higher than the minimum required content – 233 per cent, while 10 cities score below 6, but still above 70 per cent (except Velika Gorica, with 33 per cent). However, the use of communication tools to engage in a dialogue with citizens is still not widespread among the selected cities.

Our second concern was to try to determine a possible connection between the TOI score and other variables, such as population, budget size and capacity (FWC and SWC). However, given the size of the sample and the data, the Kendall Tau measure of association did not show significant association between the TOI total score and the budget size, population size and capacity measures, although the result of Kendall Tau for the relationship between the TOI score and population was the closest to the

[29] Croatia ranks 61 among 175 countries in the 2014 Corruption Perception Index of Transprency International (with Denmark ranking first as the least corrupt). Some positions are occupied by more than one country. See http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results

level in which the null hypotheses could have been rejected. By looking at the largest cities, with more than 100,000 inhabitants, the data shows that the second largest city ranks second, while first and third rank sixth and fourth. It is not possible to draw firm conclusions on the relation between these variables.

In sum, there is enough evidence to conclude that selected Croatian cities have still not achieved the minimum level of transparency and openness required by the law. The cities score better on the dimensions of operational transparency and communication transprency than on the decision-making and participation transparency and financial transparency dimensions, which indicates that they are more inclined to display information that does not carry political weight or might set in motion the accountability mechanism, such as information on their activities or simple tweeting or news displaying. There are examples of cities which can be considered leaders in the development of transparency and openness (Rijeka), but there also laggards which not only completely ignore their legal obligations, but also omit the chance to use their websites as information and communication tools with their citizens (Velika Gorica).

4. Conclusion

The importance of transparency for local government goes beyond pure and intrinsic value, because it has significant instrumental value. It is considered to be an essential element of good local government and accountability. It may also serve as an indicator of the quality of governance at the local level. A transparent and open local government uses different means to provide citizens with information, to help citizens understand and participate in decision-making, and to control the implementation of decisions and policies, while effectively communicating with the public on a regular basis in order to be able to respond to citizen demands.

Drawing on the current literature, the research presented in this article aims to assess transparency at the local level in local government and to devise an instrument which could be used or further developed in more comprehensive research, as well as to assess its feasibility. The websites of 16 cities in Croatia were analysed by applying the Transparency and Openness Index (TOI) comprised of 13 subdimensions, grouped in four dimensions of transparency and openness: decision-making and participation, financial transparency, operational transparency and communication.

Website analysis was chosen as convenient to assess the level of transparency, given the fact that the Internet is nowadays the most important channel of communication. The limitation of the research relates to the fact that the TOI does not reflect the differences in the quality of information (format, accuracy, and update frequency), website navigability, design or user-friendliness; it focuses instead on the presence of certain content, as a first step in e-government development. In addition, the development of an instrument to assess website content may serve as a good basis for continuing research and improvement of the instrument, thus forming a composite measure together with the indices for other elements of website quality (e.g. design, format, etc.). However, since ICT is constantly evolving, the moment the evaluation instrument has been devised it becomes partially obsolete, since new technological solutions are constantly raising the bar a bit higher. The application of the measurement instrument has additional practical value – it might be used by practitioners as a basis for improving their websites. Additionally, from a practical standpoint, but with possible significant impact on the level of transparency, website analysis opens the door to the detection of best practices and omissions, as well as to a learning process among peers - benchmarking as determining performance standards among the group of similar units, allows for detection of the best and the worst in the class, the leaders, the followers, and the reluctants. The shaming and praising might prove more effective than any formal pressure.

The research findings indicate that Croatian cities are failing to achieve transparency and openness set internationally and defined in Croatian legislation, achieving only 69 per cent of the defined standards. In addition, they are more inclined to disclose 'light' information that is not loaded with political relevancy (service information and news), and which cannot be 'used against them'. So, they score highly on presenting content which concerns their everyday operations and activities (76 per cent) and communicate with citizens via social media, often in languages other than Croatian (76 per cent). However, they still resist involving citizens in their decision-making by presenting relevant information and opening up the channels of participation, such as public consultation (61 per cent). They also show a reluctance to display information that concerns financial arrangements and spending of public resources (60 per cent). The connection between variables such as population, budget size or capacity of local government could not be established, given the small sample. The problem of the size of local units may affect their use of ICT, both in the sense of the capacity to develop and maintain websites and with regard to

the scope of affairs they perform (similar to Kaylor et al., 2001: 295). This could also indicate the importance of the capacity of local units for good governance and political accountability.

The research has also shown that the relationship between transparency (as one-way communication) and openness (as two-way communication) is not always clear. If transparency is considered to be a prerequisite for openness, than it is to be expected that transparency is achieved prior to openness, or to a greater extent. However, our research, at least at this stage, shows that openness may occur without transparency. It actually indicates that it is not so much about ways or channels of communication; they may make communication easier or more user-friendly, and they may reach more people or communicate more information. It is actually about the content that is communicated and the consequences of that communication – whether it allows for political and social engagement or is used for the purpose of pursuing individual goals, pure entertainment or political marketing.

Although the general research findings show that the websites of Croatian cities do not display a satisfactory level of information, it is in line with the conclusion (more than a decade old) that most analyses indicate that "[g]overnment websites are not making full use of available technology, and there are problems in terms of access and democratic outreach (West, cited by Kaylor et al., 2001: 295). However, 15 years later many cities worldwide use their websites as an effective tool for citizen engagement and control mechanism, as well as a source of information which allows for a creation of additional social and economic value (e.g. the reuse of public sector information, or open data). In addition, the 16 cities investigated might be considered to be among the highest achievers, since smaller cities could have more problems in regularly updating their websites and allowing access to information. Thus, even lower scores might be expected in future research which would encompass a greater number of local units. Consequently, stricter monitoring of the implementation of the law is advisable, together with raising awareness among citizens with regard to what they should expect to be displayed on their local units' websites, in order to enable them to effectively exercise their citizen powers. The local governments' full implementation of website content as defined by law could lead to a regained trust on the part of citizens.

In the second stage of the research, besides the assessment of quality of information and e-services, the inclusion of a greater number of cities and the introduction of additional variables, such as political party affiliation of local officials, regional distribution, strength of economic activity or civil

society organisations, might shed light on the incentives for greater transparency and openness, or factors that impede the development of transparency, and thus accountability and good governance at the local level.

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TRANSPARENCY AND OPENNESS IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: A CASE OF CROATIAN CITIES

Summary

Transparency and openness are a key concern in contemporary democracies, at both the national and subnational level. Dissemination of public information is a prerequisite for citizens to exercise their individual and political rights. Transparency is also a prerequisite for accountability. The openness of public authorities to a dialogue with the citizenry has become a key ingredient of the democratic process. Citizens are able to take part in a shared responsibility for the decisions of public authorities. The paper presents an evaluation of the websites of 16 Croatian cities. The Transparency and Openness index, composed of four dimensions, and further developed through 13 components, has shown that cities still do not comply with transparency standards, even when those standards are legally prescribed. They are inclined to disclose 'light' information, which is not politically loaded and has no direct connection to the accountability mechanism. It is possible, however, to detect innovative leaders, who promote transparency and employ their websites accordingly.

Key words: *transparency, openness, local governance, city websites, Croatia*

TRANSPARENTNOST I OTVORENOST LOKALNOG JAVNOG UPRAVLJANJA: SLUČAJ HRVATSKIH GRADOVA

Sažetak

Transparentnost i otvorenost je glavna briga suvremenih demokracija, podjednako na nacionalnoj i subnacionalnoj razini. Širenje javnih informacija je preduvjet da bi građani mogli ostvariti svoja pojedinačna i politička prava. Transparentnost je također preduvjet za odgovornost. Otvorenost javnih vlasti dijalogu s građanima postala je ključni sastojak demokratskog procesa. Građani postaju sposobni preuzeti dio odgovornosti za odluke javnih vlasti. U radu se evaluiraju internetske stranice 16 hrvatskih gradova. Indeks transparentnosti i otvorenosti koji se sastoji od četiri dimenzije i 13 komponenti pokazuje da gradovi još nisu dosegli standarde transparentnosti čak i kad su ovi pravno propisani. Gradovi su skloni objavljivati manje važne informacije, koje nemaju političku težinu ni direktnu vezu s mehanizmom političke odgovornosti. Ipak, moguće je pronaći inovativne lokalne vođe koje promoviraju transparentnost i koriste gradske internetske stranice u tu svrhu.

Ključne riječi: *transparentnost, otvorenost, lokalno javno upravljanje, gradske internetske stranice, Hrvatska*

Appendix

Table 3: TOI scores in Croatian cities

TRANSPARENCY TYPE	DECISION-MAKING AND PARTICIPATION				FINANCIAL				OPERATIONAL					COMMUNICATION				Σ
Score	16				16				20					14				66
	5	6	5		5	5	6		6	5	5	4		3	5	6		
City / *TOI dimension*	*Regulation*	*Decision making*	*Participation*	Σ	*Fiscal*	*Donations*	*Public procur*	Σ	*Reg & rights*	*Public calls*	*Plan & report*	*Internal org*	Σ	*Open data*	*Access to info*	*Other info*	Σ	Σ
Split	4	5	3	**12**	3	1	5	**9**	4	4	4	6	**18**	2	4	6	**12**	**51**
Rijeka	5	7	6	**18**	6	3	5	**14**	4	5	5	8	**22**	4	3	14	**21**	**75**
Osijek	5	5	4	**14**	4	5	2	**11**	4	4	4	4	**16**	2	5	5	**12**	**53**
Zadar	4	5	0	**9**	1	1	5	**7**	3	4	3	4	**14**	2	3	4	**9**	**39**
Velika Gorica	1	0	0	**1**	0	1	2	**3**	1	1	1	2	**5**	0	0	2	**2**	**11**
Slavonski Brod	3	6	4	**13**	5	5	5	**15**	2	5	3	5	**15**	3	5	5	**13**	**56**
Pula	3	6	2	**11**	5	3	5	**13**	4	5	5	6	**20**	3	2	8	**13**	**57**
Karlovac	2	3	0	**5**	3	3	5	**11**	1	4	3	6	**14**	2	4	5	**11**	**41**
Sisak	3	4	0	**7**	1	1	4	**6**	1	4	3	2	**10**	2	1	4	**7**	**30**
Varaždin	5	4	4	**13**	3	5	3	**11**	3	5	5	4	**17**	2	2	7	**11**	**52**
Šibenik	4	6	0	**10**	3	3	0	**6**	3	3	4	6	**16**	1	6	4	**11**	**43**
Dubrovnik	4	5	0	**9**	3	2	4	**9**	3	3	4	6	**16**	2	1	4	**7**	**41**
Bjelovar	5	5	0	**10**	3	4	3	**10**	3	6	5	7	**21**	3	4	5	**12**	**53**
Kaštela	4	5	0	**9**	4	5	6	**15**	4	2	4	4	**14**	3	4	4	**11**	**49**
Samobor	3	5	1	**9**	4	0	5	**9**	1	4	4	5	**14**	1	4	5	**10**	**42**
Vinkovci	4	3	0	**7**	3	0	4	**7**	2	3	4	3	**12**	2	4	3	**9**	**35**
Mean	3.688	4.625	1.5	9.813	3.188	2.625	3.938	9.75	2.688	3.875	3.813	4.875	15.25	2.125	3.25	5.313	10.69	45.5
Median	4	5	0	9.5	3	3	4,5	9.5	3	4	4	5	15.5	2	4	5	11	46
St.Dev	1.138	1.627	2.033	3.92	1.558	1.821	1.569	3.454	1.195	1.258	1.047	1.707	4.187	0.957	1.653	2.725	3.928	14.03

Table 4: TOI scores – Percentages

Level of TO	Decision-making & participation	Financial	Operational	Communication	Total
score	16	16	20	14	66
total Croatia (16 cities)	0.61	0.60	0.76	0.76	0.69
Split	0.75	0.56	0.9	0.85	0.77
Rijeka	1.12	0.87	1.1	1.5	1.13
Osijek	0.87	0.68	0.8	0.85	0.8
Zadar	0.56	0.43	0.7	0.64	0.59
Velika Gorica	0.06	0.18	0.25	0.14	0.16
Slavonski Brod	0.81	0.93	0.75	0.92	0.84
Pula	0.68	0.81	1.00	0.92	0.86
Karlovac	0.31	0.68	0.7	0.78	0.62
Sisak	0.43	0.37	0.5	0.5	0.45
Varaždin	0.81	0.68	0.85	0.78	0.78
Šibenik	0.62	0.37	0.8	0.78	0.65
Dubrovnik	0.56	0.56	0.8	0.5	0.62
Bjelovar	0.62	0.62	1.05	0.85	0.8
Kaštela	0.56	0.93	0.7	0.78	0.74
Samobor	0.56	0.56	0.7	0.71	0.63
Vinkovci	0.43	0.43	0.6	0.64	0.53
Σ	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Table 5: TOI scores – Ranks

city	Budget rank	Population rank	FWC rank	SWC rank	TOI rank	Decision-making and participation rank	Regulation	Decision-making	Participation	Financial transparency - rank	financial	donations	public proc	Operational transparency - rank	reg/rights	activities - competitions	planning and reporting	internal organisation	Communication transparency rank	open data	access to info	other info
Split	1	1	11	13	6	4	5	5	5	6	7	11	2	4	1	6	5	3	3	6	4	4
Rijeka	2	2	12	15	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	6	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	10	1
Osijek	3	3	9	5	4	2	1	5	2	4	4	1	14	6	1	6	5	10	3	6	2	5
Zadar	5	4	4	9	11	7	5	5	8	7	14	11	2	8	6	6	12	10	6	6	10	10
Velika Gorica	7	5	3	8	14	10	16	16	8	9	16	11	14	11	13	16	16	15	8	16	16	16
Slavonski Brod	13	6	7	1	3	3	11	2	2	1	2	1	2	7	11	2	12	8	2	2	2	5
Pula	6	7	8	14	2	5	11	2	6	3	2	6	2	3	1	2	1	3	2	2	12	2
Karlovac	9	8	13	10	10	9	15	14	8	4	7	6	2	8	13	6	12	3	4	6	4	5
Sisak	11	9	10	11	13	8	11	12	8	8	14	11	9	10	13	6	12	15	7	6	14	10
Varaždin	8	10	2	6	5	3	1	12	2	4	7	1	12	5	6	2	1	10	4	6	12	3
Šibenik	10	11	5	4	8	6	5	2	8	8	7	6	16	6	6	12	5	3	4	14	1	10
Dubrovnik	4	12	6	16	10	7	5	5	8	6	7	10	9	6	6	12	5	3	7	6	14	10
Bjelovar	15	13	14	3	4	6	1	5	8	5	7	5	12	2	6	1	1	2	3	2	4	5
Kaštela	14	14	15	7	7	7	5	5	8	1	4	1	1	8	1	15	5	10	4	2	4	10
Samobor	12	15	1	2	9	7	11	5	7	6	4	15	2	8	13	6	5	8	5	14	4	5
Vinkovci	16	16	16	12	12	8	5	14	8	7	7	15	9	9	11	12	5	14	6	6	4	15