**Transparency and Responsibility in**

**Public Administration: The Case of Romania**

# Introduction

This article presents a radiograph of the status of the official websites for all municipalities in Romania and showcases how they respond to the need for transparency (Baltac, 2011). The mere existence of a very well-designed web platform (from a technical point of view) does not mean that the website is or will be used by citizens or businesspeople in society (Porumbescu, 2015). Users may not rely on a web platform if it does not provide the information they need (MCISa).

Taking into consideration the legislation on transparency (Chamber of Deputiesa), we take a closer look at each of the Romanian municipalities’ official websites in order to present, in figures, how close they are to achieving the transparency threshold.

# Background

The Romanian citizens’ level of satisfaction with and requirements from the public administration can help assess both the current state of e-Governance in Romania and potential developments in the area. Romania (54.1%) ranks below the European average (73.5%) in terms of the number of Internet users.

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

[Figure 1 here]

## Figure 1. Trends in the number of Internet users in Romania (2000–2014)

*Source: Based on data collected from the World Bank’s Website*

We cannot say for certain whether market saturation or other circumstances may have slowed down the trend. However, we can certainly see that the numbers exploded between 2000 and 2014.

However, Romania is in a bad position when compared to other countries. In 2014, it had about 54 Internet users/100 people, like Serbia and Bulgaria, and Albania, which had 60 Internet users/100 people. Iceland ranked highest, with 98 users/100 people.

According to The National Institute of Statistics, only 54.3% and 17.8% of Romanian households in urban and rural areas, respectively, had Internet access. The remaining users are from the business sector (National Institute of Statistics).

The European Commission, in a study titled “User expectations of a life events approach for designing e-Government services” (Figure 2), explained why people use the Internet to relate to the public administration in the European Union. Most people used the Internet to complete and submit electronic forms (29%) and to send regular e-mails to administrative authorities (22%). However, the use of the Internet to obtain information from public administrative institutions was at 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 here]

## 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*

An index listed in the “e-Romania” report prepared by the Romanian Ministry of Communications and Information Society, showed how prepared countries are for e-Administration. Romania does not rank among the top positions, although it belongs to the group of countries with the highest percentage increase in the number of Internet users and has witnessed an increase in the number of online services designed to support citizen participation (MCISb).

# Case Study: Romanian Municipalities’ Radiography

This section verifies how Romanian municipalities, which constitute the main focus of this study, meet citizens’ demands and address complaints. We analyzed the kind of information that municipalities provide online to both citizens and the business sector. We examined the mode of dissemination of financial and management information, the data on the services provided, and their quality. This study was conducted in 2015 (Vrabie, 2015).

To determine the “responsibility” (Vrabie, 2013) of municipalities through the global network, we first investigated the presence of Romanian municipalities on the Internet. Only 96 municipalities had active websites at the time of study, accounting for 93.20% of the total. As many as 7 (6.80%) municipalities did not have websites, or their web addresses were not active. These results are shown in Figure 3.

[Figure 3 here]

## Figure 3. Romanian Municipalities’ Radiography

*Source: Based on data collected using the methodology described*

We analyzed particular aspects pertaining to the dissemination of financial information and petitions in the 96 municipalities that had active websites.

**3.1. Dissemination of Financial Information**

## Strategic planning

Among the 96 municipalities that had active websites, 89 (92.71%) did not indicate their long-term objectives and only 7 presented this information online. However, some displayed only strategic information taken from the mayor’s election program.

## Dissemination of financial accounting

As many as 38.54% (37) municipalities analyzed published such information online, whereas 61.46% did not.

## Budget information

A total of 29 municipalities (30.21%) presented their budgets from previous years, whereas 67 (69.79%) did not. Figure 3 presents these results. Updated budgetary information was available only for 21 municipalities (21.88%), whereas 75 (78.13%) did not provide this information.

## Interim financial information

None of the Romanian municipalities provided interim financial information online for particular economic periods.

## Information on financial indicators

The city of Sibiu was the only one to provide information on financial indicators on its website. It presented its budgetary indicators, savings, and financial status. Unfortunately, those indicators are not specific to the current period, but pertain to when the city was the European Capital of Culture, back in 2007.

## Information on assets

A total of 94 municipalities did not provide information on their assets (97.92%), whereas only 2 (2.08%) provided detailed information.

## Environmental information

As many as 33 websites (34.38%) provided environmental information (Figure 3), whereas 63 did not.

## Information on corporate governance

As many as 51 municipalities (53.31%) provided information on corporate governance on their websites. Some only showed who attended meetings, whereas others displayed full court procedures and meetings that took place over several years. Further, 45 municipalities (46.88%) did not display this information on their websites (Figure 3).

**3.2. Commitment to Citizens – The Institution’s Response**

Only 13 websites presented information on citizens’ complaints (Figure 3), whereas 86.46% did not.

# Conclusions

Romania is far from being among the top-ranking countries in Europe and in the world with the most developed e-government systems, although it has achieved peaks that exceed the average (Holzer, You, and Manoharan, 2009) on several fronts, and the country’s situation is promising. Romania can improve its ratings through the development of certain sections (e.g., design, navigability). However, this does not necessarily serve the citizens’ needs.

This article analyzed the level of transparency, which is an issue that connects the administration and citizens. The analysis based on the provisions of Law no. 544/2001 (MRDT) and 161/2003 (Chamber of Deputiesb) shows that municipalities seem to do well in terms of transparency, having an average score (all 103 municipalities) equal to 3.01 (Vrabie, 2015). We may say that the situation is getting better, but if we investigate more deeply, taking into account elements that show only direct interest of the city halls in publicly presenting information and the manner in which the municipalities respond to citizens, we will see that no element exceeded 50% of affirmative responses.

Citizens’ petitions can notify the administration of their dissatisfaction with some aspects of life. Although a Government Ordinance from 2002 regulates the resolution of complaints (Bucharest Autonomous Transportation), only 13.54% of the country’s municipalities have implemented it, on their websites, in the form of online mechanisms for citizens to make such petitions. We can, thus, understand that transparency is not a strong point for Romanian municipalities.

# Acknowledgments

# Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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