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TRANSPARENCY OF WEB PORTALS OF RURAL GMINAS IN ŁÓDŹ METROPOLITAN AREA

Summary

In the present world information and knowledge are important elements of the local course of every stage of the civil service. Information delivered to local community contributes to achieving a high local identity level. Development of information function in *gminas* is being extorted by permanent progress in the scope of the information and communication technologies (ICT). In local society, the most important way of holding information should be Internet. It is important because more and more households in rural area have opportunities to the access to the Internet. Local society can use websites erected by local governments to disseminate information about functioning and action picked up in administrative districts to local actors. Transparent websites are becoming a source of information as well as they let achieve the competitive edge above other *gminas*.

An attempt of assessment of providing information by authorities and usefulness of this information from a socio-economic development point of view is the purpose of the paper. Building transparent and available websites for local society is the important task for local governments, because well-informed society participates in local life and in local undertaking picked up by authorities. This is important, especially in the rural *gminas* located in metropolitan areas which must achieve the competitive edge above other *gminas*. The paper shows that that the information constituting the indispensable element of social and economic processes becomes more and more universal and serves publicizing and nationalizing decision-making processes.

Key words: information and communication technologies, information society, metropolitan area, rural area, socio-economic development

INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic development is characterized by both quantitative and qualitative in ways and results of economic activity. Socio-economic activity is determined by functions which are being located in rural areas. The promotion and needs of the development of rural areas reveal a need to their divergence from monofunctionality to the simultaneous diversification. So moving business activity to these lands is becoming the condition of the multifunctional development of rural areas. It is supposed to guarantee work places of the rural population giving up typically agricultural activity. Examining potentialities of multifunctional development in rural areas, one should remember that it depends on the ability of adjusting to the principles of market economy both through new undertakings and alterations of present behaviours. It is also connected with a necessity of the development of the information function in rural *gminas* and building the information society.[Feltynowski 2009, p. 142]

Information and knowledge are becoming an important element of the local course of every stage of the civil service. Information delivered to local community contributes to achieving the high local identity level. Development of information function in *gminas* is being extorted by permanent progress in the scope of the information and communication technologies (ICT). What is also an important factor of dissemination information via Internet, is a growing access to this medium. In years 2003–2007, in the Łódź voivodeship the number of households with the access to the Internet grew over 20 per cent [1]. The characteristics of the information society are: skills of information management, the quality and the velocity of their transmission and potentiality of generating the knowledge from it. Websites erected by local governments are a way of the transmission of information, that is most valuable and most often exchanged in the today's economy. Transparent websites are becoming a source of information and let achieve the competitive edge above other *gminas*.

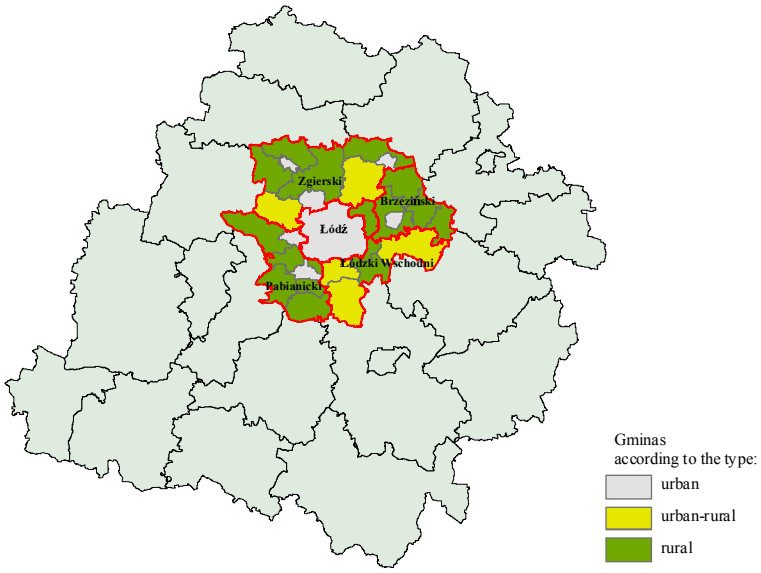
PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the paper is an attempt of assessment of providing information by authorities as well as usefulness of this information from a socio-economic development point of view. The analysis is made in rural *gminas* located in Łódź Metropolitan Area (ŁMA). Delimitation of ŁMA included in the Łódź voivodeship development plan[2] point out that, 16 rural *gminas*, 5 urban-

[1] Bank of the Regional Data: the level of the rate of computers equipped with the access to the Internet in the year 2007 in the Łódź voivodeship exceeded 32.5%.

[2] Development plan of the Łódź voivodeship, Dz. Urz. Woj. Łódzkiego Nr 249 z dnia 10 października 2002 roku, poz. 3166.

rural and 7 urban *gminas* are located here. They are located in four districts surrounding the core of the metropolitan centre: Zgierski, Pabianicki, Łódzki Wschodni and Brzeziński.



Red colour shows borders of districts in ŁMA

Figure 1. Łódź Metropolitan Area in the space of the region considering the type of administrative districts. Source: own study.

Analysis of websites of rural *gminas* of ŁMA was made on the basis of Website Attribute Evaluation System (WAES)[3] methodology. From 46 questions concerning the transparency and the availability of websites, 25 criteria were chosen. These criteria were adapted for character of local governments' web pages. Seven from them for the achievement of two points in the field of the mark for the fact that the element they judged was in a judged service centre or one point in the field of the mark for the fact that the element they judged was a link (questions: 8, 10, 11, 16, 18, 19, 20 – see Table 1). Websites where the information was available after redirecting to the other web sites, received one point. In the case of 18 remaining questions, a binary system was adopted depending on appearing or not, of a given feature.

[3] Methodology developed by the Cyberspace Policy Research Group at the University of Arizona, Tucson, (www.cyprg.arizona.edu, aceessed 17.05.2009).

Table 1. Evaluation sheet of websites of rural *gminas* in ŁMA

O.No	Question
1	Is the website being supported by the local government?
2	Is the website being updated systematically (the last update 7 days before the verification)?
3	Does the page contain the correspondence address of the office?
4	Does the page contain numbers of phones and addresses of the traditional post of workers of the office ?
5	Does the page contain e-mail addresses of the majority of workers ?
6	Does the page contain e-mail addresses of the head officers in the department?
7	Does the page contain e-mail addresses of the webmaster?
8	Does the page contain links to subpages of organizational units?
9	Is the user correctly linked to subpages of organizational units?
10	Does the page contain the information about competence of departments of office?
11	Does the page contain the structure of the office in the graphic version?
12	Does the page contain addresses of different offices connected with the given unit?
13	Does the page contain addresses of different offices not connected with the given unit?
14	Does the page contain addresses of non-governmental organizations?
15	Dose the page contain reports, regulations in formats: PDF, DOC, XLS, ODT, ODS?
16	Does the page let for searching for archived bulletins, of executive procedures?
17	Does the site let using newsletter (bulletin by e-mail)?
18	Is the side giving access to the information about meetings of the local authority (reports of the session of council of *gminas*)?
19	Does the page contain the information about ways of fulfilling duties by the local society?
20	Does the site let download forms which are placed in the office?
21	Does the site let to filling in a form on-line and closing the process of handing in a document?
22	Is the site giving the possibility of checking the stage of a given procedure?
23	Does the site require personal information (except e-mail address) for communicating with the office?
24	Is the site available in the different language than Polish?
25	Does the site provide iconographic access to site for visitors unable to speak or read the polish language?

Source: own study on the basis of WAES.

The form of marks of web sites of rural *gminas* of Łódź Metropolitan Area allowed for achieving a result of 32 points for a website served comprehensively, which delivered information about functioning and action picked up in

administrative districts to local actors. In case of analysis picked up both formal websites of individual rural *gminas*, and sites put in the domain of the Public Information Bulletin (BIP)[4], were being examined. The quality of portals was made by granting points for individual web portals of *gminas* (official website and BIP website); next step was an aggregation of marks, treating portals of each *gminas* as integrated and supplemented integrities.

During classification of web portals of administrative districts, a division into three classes was used. The highest class allowed for the identification of rural *gminas* with best transparency and the information post of websites. For determining borders of individual classes, methods of the division of the arithmetic mean leaning against the value and the standard deviation were used. In this case, characteristics of the curve of the normal distribution was applied, and classes were distinguished on the basis of the equation $\overline{x} \pm \frac{1}{2} s_x$. [Runge 2006, p. 344–348].

THE ŁMA *GMINAS* IN THE INTERNET

Rural *gminas* of Łódź Metropolitan Area show the notable activity in creating web portals. The assessment of official sites of rural *gminas* lets state that only two of sixteen *gminas* (Dłutów, Ksawerów) did not have an official website. Ozorków noted the highest score in the transparency and the availability of official web site (obtaining 23 from 32 possible points). Excluding the administrative units who did not have a website, among them of fewest points were: Brzeziny, Rogów and Lutomiersk. Each of these *gminas* noted eight points which is 25 % of possible maximum score.

On the basis of received results it was possible to distinguish three classes of *gminas*, according to accepted methodology. In the case of the mark of formal websites of rural *gminas*, borders of ranges of the availability and the transparency were computed as follows:

− class I – rural *gminas* with the highest score of the availability and the transparency of websites, whose value were rated above 15 points;

− class II – rural *gminas* with the modest score of the availability and the transparency of websites, whose value were rated < 9; 15> points;

− class III – rural *gminas* with the lowest score of the availability and the transparency of websites, whose value were rated under 9 points.

[4] Public Information Bulletin (Polish abbreviation BIP) is a unified system of websites serving universal publishing of public information. Self-government units are public units being obliged to publish information in BIP.

In 1st class four *gminas* were identified. In this group, Głowno has the lowest score (16 points). In the first three place three *gminas* have occurred: Ozorków (23 points), Zgierz (22 points) and Dobroń (19 points).

In the class of the average level of the availability and the transparency of websites, the following units were categorised: Parzęczew, Jeżów (15 points in the ranking), Pabianice, Andrespol (14 points in the ranking), Dmosin (13 points), Nowosolna (10 points) and Brójce (9 points). Five administrative districts were in the lowest class, in which two administrative units did not have an official website (Dłutów, Ksawerów). Three remaining local governments were: Rogów, Brzeziny and Lutomiersk, which received 8 points.

Table 2. Scoring of official websites of rural *gminas* of ŁMA

Gmina	**District**	**Official website**
Brzeziny	Brzeziński	8
Dmosin		13
Jeżów		15
Rogów		8
Andrespol	Łódzki Wschodni	14
Brójce		9
Nowosolna		10
Dłutów	Pabianicki	0
Dobroń		19
Ksawerów		0
Lutomiersk		8
Pabianice		14
Głowno	Zgierski	16
Ozorków		23
Parzęczew		15
Zgierz		22

Source: own study.

The analysis leads to different conclusions when comparing the transparency and the availability of *gmina's* BIP sites. It showed that all rural *gminas* of ŁMA have the BIP websites. The lowest score amounted to 8 points, while the highest as similarly as in the case of earlier analysis, was 23 points. Borders of classes looked like:

- class I – the value of the rate were above 19 points;
- class II – the value of the rate between < 16; 19> points;
- class III – the value of the rate were under 16 points.

Table 3. Scoring of BIP websites of rural *gminas* in ŁMA

Gmina	District	BIP
Brzeziny	Brzeziński	11
Dmosin		17
Jeżów		21
Rogów		17
Andrespol	Łódzki Wschodni	23
Brójce		18
Nowosolna		16
Dłutów	Pabianicki	19
Dobroń		8
Ksawerów		23
Lutomiersk		18
Pabianice		18
Głowno	Zgierski	17
Ozorków		11
Parzęczew		22
Zgierz		23

Source: own study.

The number of *gminas* in individual classes has changed. In the best group were classified such *gminas*, as: Zgierz, Andrespol, Ksawerów (23 points in the ranking), Parzęczew (22 points) and Jeżów (21 points). In the middle class of the transparency and the availability of BIP, eight *gminas* were identified. In this group, the best score was noted by Dłutów (19 points), and then Pabianice, Brójce, Lutomiersk (18 points), Głowno, Dmosin, Rogów (17 points) and Nowosolna (16 points).

In the last group three *gminas* were classified: Ozorków, Brzeziny (11 points) and Dobroń (8 points). This analysis reveals that Public Information Bulletin provides access to more information about the actions of the local government than web sites not taking part in it.

Analysis of two types of web portals led by the local government allows to draw a conclusion, that official websites and BIP websites have, in many cases, a complementary character. Table 4 presents the total scoring of *gminas*, after summing points from ranking of official and BIP websites.

The complementary character of websites of rural *gminas* is also reflected by individual classes created for needs of the examination:

- class I – the value of the rate above 22 points;
- class II – the value of the rate between < 19; 22> points;
- class III – the value of the rate under 19 points.

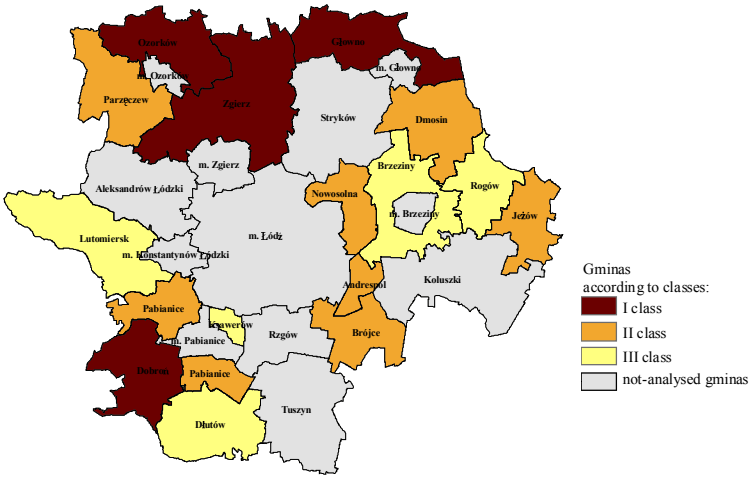
Table 4. Total scoring of web portals of rural *gminas* ŁMA

Gmina	District	Total points
Brzeziny	Brzeziński	14
Dmosin		21
Jeżów		23
Rogów		18
Andrespol	Łódzki Wschodni	23
Brójce		19
Nowosolna		16
Dłutów	Pabianicki	19
Dobroń		21
Ksawerów		23
Lutomiersk		18
Pabianice		19
Głowno	Zgierski	21
Ozorków		26
Parzęczew		23
Zgierz		27

Source: own study.

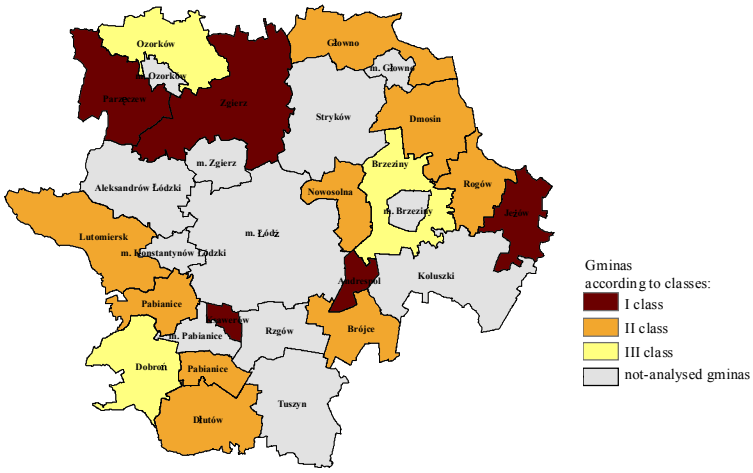
The comprehensive mark of the transparency and the availability of websites of rural *gminas* leads to conclusion, that the best information about functioning of the self-government can be obtained on the websites of Zgierz (27 points in the ranking), Ozorków (26 points) and Andrespol, Ksawerów, Parzęczew, Jeżów (23 points in the ranking). All these units were counted among the first-class in the ranking of the transparency of websites. In the middle class of the availability of the information on WWW portals, one can observe such units like: Głowno, Dmosin, Dobroń (21 points), Dłutów, Pabianice, Brójce (19 points). Finally, Rogów and Lutomiersk (8 points), Brzeziny (14 points) and Nowosolna (16 points), were assigned to the class noting the lowest information function performed by websites.

Analysis shows it is the rural gmina Brzeziny that was classified in the lowest class in all rankings of the transparency and the availability of websites. In the same time, Zgierz was an administrative district unit which was on the top of the list in all three rankings. One should point out also at well extended BIP portals of the Ksawerów gmina which, in spite of the lack of the official website, was at the lead of BIP portals and was classified in the first-class of the availability and the transparency of the comprehensive juxtaposition.



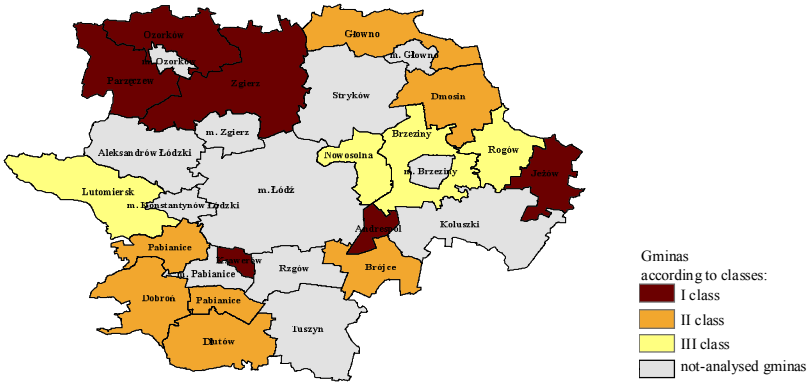
Source: own study.

Figure 2. Ranking of rural gminas of ŁMA in terms of the availability and the transparency of official websites



Source: own study.

Figure 3. Ranking of rural *gminas* of ŁMA on account of the availability and the transparency of BIP sites



Source: own study.

Figure 4. Comprehensive ranking of rural *gminas* of ŁMA in terms of the availability and the transparency of websites

CONCLUSION

Analysis of websites of rural *gminas* of ŁMA is showing, that every self-government being a subject of examination, has the information portal. The presented results are showing that the BIP portals are a better source of information about the activities of the local government; however, it is not a rule in the whole Łódź Metropolitan Area.

An important element of analysis is a fact that information constituting the indispensable element of social and economic processes becomes more and more universal. Authorities of *gminas* are trying to raise the quality of web portals as well as their interactivity. It assures the communication with the community, promotes territorial individuals, and finally serves publicizing and nationalizing decision-making processes. The information lets to improve the image of the local authorities what is an indispensable element of the politics of the development.

The examination showed also, that authorities of rural *gminas* of ŁMA, often treated formal portals and BIP sites as complementary elements. Thanks to that, a comprehensive information about the territorial individual is being erected. Analysed websites require the constant load so that raising the level of

their availability and transparencies, are possible. Information about the administrative units and its assets, the contemporary and planned actions, published Internet as a medium, should be: comprehensive, based on credible data, actually processed, and also fast and prompt. These features guarantee the good reception of data and the information, fortifying the position of the administrative unit in the local environment, as well as in the region.

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