Draft Report: Functionality of the municipal web sites as tools for publishing information

Skopje, 26.10.2010.

This analysis of the functionality of the websites of local self-government units was carried out as a result of the question posed by the Member of Parliament Mr. Vasko Shutarov during the supervisory hearing on the Law on free access to public information held in the Assembly of R.M. on December 21, 2010.

Inspired by the fact that according to official records from the public database of information holders of the Commission for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information (www.komspi.mk) only 50% of the local self-government units use the web as a tool for informing the citizens, the MP requested a list of municipalities with data about their absence from the internet.

In order to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of Mr. Shutarov, additional research was conducted, as well as an analysis of the online presence (WWW) of all units of local self-government of R.M. In addition you can find the results of the analysis.

1. Methods of data collection and analysis

1.1 Prerequisites and assumptions

A basic prerequisite for the collection and processing of data is the local government unit (LGU) or the municipality to have a functional website. Given that some of the links were leading to websites that were not loading immediately, additional efforts were made to access such sites multiple times and in different days and periods of the day. Only the websites that were not working during these attempts were categorized as totally dysfunctional, and if the website has appeared on at least one occasion, it was placed in one of the other categories, respectively.

Having in mind that the database of the Commission for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information (KOMSPI) is the official register in which municipalities are legally obliged to report the ways in which they publish information, it was taken as the primary source of information.

Aside from KOMSPI's database, the website of the Ministry of Local Self-Government of RM (MLS) was also used, i.e. their interactive map of all municipalities in Macedonia (http://mls.gov.mk/map). This application also contains a link to the official website of the municipality which is referred to as a source of additional information. Information on whether municipalities have committed or developed a procedure for informing the MLS if there is a change in terms of their web presence, eg. if they change the official domain (basic web address) or take down the website, is not publicly available.

Although the initial assumption was that the competent authorities *ought to* have updated data, given that in both official applications listed above (KOMSPI and MLS) an absence of links to municipality websites was established, or outdated information (links to sites that existed but are not working anymore) were referred to as an additional source of information for comparison; in addition two privately owned services were used: the directory of links for local self-government at the Macedonian portal Macedonia Search (http://www.org.mk/dir/dir.aspx?cat=s3) and the U.S. search engine Google (http://www.google.com) by entering the name of LSU in Macedonian language using Cyrillic characters.

This research started from the assumption that a website is a *public medium* that the municipality creates and administrates within its jurisdictions. Having in mind the that 33 LGUs (Annex 1) are required by law to use other local languages "aside from the Macedonian language in official use" and/or part of them have decided to use another official language regardless of the face that it is the native language of a community which is below 20% of the population of the municipality (eg. Turkish language in Gostivar), one of the basic

Metamorphosis Foundation, ul. Apostol Guslarot 40, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia
Tel: +389 2 3109 325 | www.metamorphosis.org.mk | info@metamorphosis.org.mk

1

parameters for the research was whether the legal/statutory obligation is fulfilled during the communication with citizens through the municipal website.

1.2 Methodology

Having in mind that the formal existence of a website that does not fulfill its basic function of informing citizens is equal to, and if there are outdated and inaccurate information even worse than, the non-existence of a website, a more detailed categorization was elaborated to help interested parties recognize the current shortcomings and to provide better conditions for correction of the shortcomings.

Each link identified through any of the above mentioned sources was checked for functionality (at least 3 times a day, in different days of October 2010.) and if the link worked the answers to the following questions were included in a table:

- In which languages does the site work and to what extent?
- Are the information provided only static or is there a section for regular news?
- When was the website last updated and are the basic information obviously incorrect?
- Is there information on free access to public information and a privacy policy?

In case any of the identified links does not work, it was checked whether the web address is located in the official register of MARNet (http://dns.marnet.net.mk/registar.php) and whether the municipality is the owner of that domain. Since the information on whether those domains will be used in the future to inform the citizens are not publicly available or there is a technical problem with their servers, websites with registered addresses which are not currently working were categorized as dysfunctional.

Having in mind that the point of use of various official languages on a national and local level is to increase the opportunities for communication with all the citizens, the absence or dysfunction of mandatory language versions was taken as an important parameter in determining the level of functionality.

1.3 Limits

Only the one-way communication of LGU with the citizens was monitored during the research, i.e. the proactive disclosure of information about municipalities, their responsibilities and activities. Questions on whether municipalities provide two-way communication (opportunities to initiate contact and questions from citizens for the LGU) or multidirectional communication (public announcement of discussions through forums or social networks) were not subject of this research.

1.4 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- Many or about half of the municipalities are not using their websites to inform citizens, and about ten municipalities that have had websites have taken them down in the past few years.
- A significant part of municipalities with more than one official language do not use all the official languages for online communication, reducing the possibility for communication with all their citizens.

Recommendations

- It is necessary to establish and implement mandatory standards for the web presence of all public institutions, defining the minimum level of content and frequency of updates to proactively provide information to citizens about the work of the local government units.
- The commitment for publishing data related to access to public information, the terms of use and the privacy policy should be an obligatory part of these standards.

Metamorphosis Foundation, ul. Apostol Guslarot 40, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia
Tel: +389 2 3109 325 | www.metamorphosis.org.mk | info@metamorphosis.org.mk

2

- In order to provide public insight and to be easy to find, municipalities should establish procedures that are necessary to inform the competent state bodies about their web presence

2. Results

For greater clarity, the lists in the following table are sorted by categories in alphabetical order (as on 26.10.2010.).

Municipalities marked with an asterisk in sections 2.1.1-2.1.5 should provide information in all their official languages to a certain extent as part of their websites that are dysfunctional.

2.1 Dysfunctional LGU websites	
2.1.1 Municipalities without municipal websites Some of these municipalities used to have websites, but their domain registration in MARNet has expired.	• Arachinovo* • Vrapchishte* • Debarca • Demir Kapija • Demir Hisar • Zhelino* • Zajas* • Zelenikovo* • Karbinci • Krivogashtani • Lipkovo* • Oslomej* • Plasnica* • Centar Zhupa* • Chucher Sandevo*
2.1.2 Completely dysfunctional websites Municipalities that have registered addresses for their websites, but whose web servers were not working during the research, although they were checked several times during the month of October 2010.	• Debar* • Kumanovo* • Pehchevo • Tearce* • Cheshinovo-Obleshevo
2.1.3 Websites without content Municipal websites that "work" but have no content.	• Bogovinje • Valandovo • Vraneshtica • Lozovo
2.1.4 Websites with technical problems Municipal websites that work, but a significant part of their contents is unavailable due to technical problems.	• Studenichani*
2.1.5 Websites with outdated content Municipal websites with outdated content, with the last update before 01/01/2010. The website of Shuto Orizari municipality has been last updated long before the local elections in 2009, with information that can mislead citizens.	• Bosilovo • Zrnovci • Rosoman • Saraj* (Macedonian version, whereas the Albanian has been updated in July 2010) • Shuto Orizari*
2.1.6 Websites without official languages versions Municipalities that work with more than one official	• Butel (- albanian) • Dolneni (- alb.) • Jegunovce (- alb.) • Kichevo (- alb.)

Metamorphosis Foundation, ul. Apostol Guslarot 40, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia
Tel: +389 2 3109 325 | www.metamorphosis.org.mk | info@metamorphosis.org.mk

3

language, which is not reflected on their websites, or the versions of some of the official languages are dysfunctional. (The official language for the missing language version of the website is given next to the name of the municipality.) * Part of the municipalities covered in previous categories and marked with an asterisk are also included in this category.	• Krushevo (- alb. and vlach) • Mavrovo i Rostushe (- turkish) • Petrovec (- alb.) • Sopishte (- alb.) • Chashka (- alb.)

2.2 Partially functional websites of LGU

2.2.1 Static websites Municipal websites that offer no news, only static information.	• Drugovo • Staro Nagorichane
2.2.2 Websites that haven't been updated in the last 3 months Municipal websites that offer news, but haven't been updated in the last 3 months (August-October 2010).	• Vevchani • Gradsko • Mogila

2.3 Functional sites of LGU

2.3.1 Websites that meet the basic requirements for functionality Municipalities that regularly publish information and news online in the languages determined as official on a local level and have published news and/or information in the last 3 months.	• Berovo • Bogdanci • Brvenica • Veles • Vinica • Gazi Baba • Dojran • Kavadarci • Karposh • Kisela Voda • Konche • Kochani • Kratovo • Kriva Palanka • Makedonska Kamenica • Makedonski Brod • Negotino • Novaci • Novo Selo • Prilep • Probishtip • Radovish • Rankovce • Resen • Sveti Nikole • Struga • Strumica • Centar

Metamorphosis Foundation, ul. Apostol Guslarot 40, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia
Tel: +389 2 3109 325 | www.metamorphosis.org.mk | info@metamorphosis.org.mk

4

	• Chair
2.3.2 Functional websites with translation provided via Google Translate Municipalities that regularly publish information and news via the Internet in the official languages, and additionally make that information available in other languages by using Google Translate (automatic machine translation with an inconsistent quality).	• Delchevo (+5 languages) • Gjorche Petrov (+9 languages)
2.3.3 Functional websites with translation in other languages aside from the official ones Local government bodies that regularly publish information and news via the Internet in their official language(s) and additionally have regularly updated versions with news translated in foreign languages. Municipalities with website versions in foreign languages containing only static information or only a few articles translated more than 6 months ago were not included in this group.	• Grad Skopje (+ Eglish) • Aerodrom (+ English, German, French, Spanish, Italian) • Bitola (+ Eng.) • Vasilevo (+ Eng.) • Gevgelija (+ Eng.) • Gostivar (+ Eng.) • Ilinden (+ German) • Ohrid (+ Eng.) • Tetovo (+ Eng.) • Shtip (+ Eng.)

Metamorphosis Foundation, ul. Apostol Guslarot 40, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia

Tel: +389 2 3109 325 | www.metamorphosis.org.mk | info@metamorphosis.org.mk

5

Appendix 1: The official languages at the local level

The following table contains data on local governments that have a legal and/or statutory obligation to use other official languages besides Macedonian, provided by ZELS in 2009 and the USAID e-Government Project. In parallel, it contains data from the current research on whether those municipalities have websites (publicly available during the survey) and in which languages they publish information through them.

For greater clarity, the plus sign (+) indicates the presence and minus sign (-) indicates the absence of a given parameter. In this case, it was not taken into consideration whether the different language versions are completely aligned, so some versions were considered to be present even if some articles were not translated, but this was noticed afterwards.

All language versions of municipalities that do not have a website have been marked with the minus sign. (As from 26.10.2010).

Abbreviations

MK – Macedonian
AL – Albanian
TR – Turkish
RO – Roma
VL – Vlach
SR – Serbian
BS- Bosnian

LGU/Municipality	Official languages						Web usage						Notes
	MK	AL	TR	RO	VL	SR	MK	AL	TR	RO	VL	SR	
Grad Skopje	+	+					+	+					
Arachinovo	+	+					-	-					No website
Bogovinje	+	+					-	-					No content
Brvenica	+	+					+	+					
Butel	+	+					+	-					
Vraneshtica	+		+				-		-				No content
Vrapchishte	+	+					-	-					No website
Gostivar	+	+	+				+	+	+				
Debar	+	+					-	-					Website not working
Dolneni	+	+					+	-					
Zhelino	+	+					-	-					No website
Zajas	+	+					-	-					No website
Zelenikovo	+	+					-	-					No website
Jegunovce	+	+					+	-					
Kichevo	+	+					+	-					
Krushevo	+	+			+		+	-			-		
Kumanovo	+	+					-	-					Website not working
Lipkovo	+	+					-	-					No website
Mavrovo-Rostushe	+		+				+		-				
Oslomej	+	+					-	-					No website
Petrovec	+	+					+	-					
Plasnica	+		+				-		-				No website
Saraj	+	+					+	+					Outdated MK version
Sopishte	+	+					+	-					
Struga	+	+					+	+					
Studenichani	+	+					+	+					Partially dysfunctional

	MK	AL	TR	RO	VL	SR	MK	AL	TR	RO	VL	SR	
Tearce	+	+					-	-					
Tetovo	+	+					+	+					
Centar Zhupa	+		+				-		-				No website
Chair	+	+					+	+					
Chashka	+	+					+	-					
Chucher-Sandevo	+	+				+	-	-				-	No website
Shuto Orizari	+	+		+			+	-		-			Completely outdated website