

Interest groups of communities of the Czech Republic and their Internet coverage

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Abstract

Internet can be an important factor to help accomplish good-quality performance of the public administration, particularly in rural and geographically peripheral regions. It is evident that the process of launching the Internet into public administration on a local level is much easier thanks to co-operation of the communities within the framework of the interest groups. In this way the interest groups of communities bring forth progress, both in terms of launching and using new technologies and of the overall development of whole regions. Results of analysis of the "grouping process" and its regional differences and the role of the groups of communities on the way towards an information society are presented.

Key words: public administration reform, regional development, interest groups of communities, information systems, Internet

Introduction

Two simultaneous processes, of principal importance for the positive development of whole regions, are under way in the Czech Republic. On the one hand the second stage of reform of public administration, on the other hand the introduction of information systems, the Internet in particular, into the entire structure of public administration. These two processes are very closely connected because they follow, in a way, the same goal: to improve the performance of state administration, simplify it and draw it nearer to the people. The establishment of micro-regions and associations of rural towns may be one way of a more rapid and effective solution of the people's problems and co-ordination of various intentions. The co-operation of administratively independent towns and implementation of their extremely challenging projects are desirable both on an international and EU level. The Programme of Rural Revitalisation supports the solution of common interests of the communities by means of integrated projects of rural micro-regions; EU incorporated the support of rural micro-regions of the accession countries into its SAPARD programme for the development of agriculture and rural environment. Interest groups of communities established in naturally demarcated territories indeed eliminate the consequences of highly fragmentated settlement structure in the Czech Republic.

The new structure of public administration and its bodies cannot do without modernisation, of which the use of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) is gradually becoming the corner-stone. These technologies and in the first instance the Internet, can be an important factor to help accomplish good-quality performance of the state administration, particularly in rural and geographically remote regions. Although practice as yet is short, it is evident that the process of

launching the Internet into state administration on a local level is much easier thanks to co-operation of the communities within the framework of the interest groups. Internet is not only an instrument of communication, but it also enables own presentation of the whole group and the individual communities. The relevant information is used not only by the population of the respective region, but also by visitors to the region and/or potential investors. In this way the interest groups of the communities bring forth progress, both in terms of launching and using new technologies and of the overall development of whole regions. These processes are necessary and desirable for good-quality operation of the administration apparatus of our country and are extremely important with the framework of integrating Europe.

Methods

The selected analysis of the process of grouping of communities and the role of the groups on the way towards an information society is based on information provided by Internet servers; at the same time it tested the possibilities of the Internet as a basic source of information. The Internet is the only source providing complete information, although it is not always free of errors. In this way the extent, classification and relevance of the Internet pages of the department under which the interest groups fall, i.e. the Ministry for Local Development (MLD), was tested. Investigations were conducted in summer and autumn 2001. The conclusions of the revision conducted in early 2002 have not been included in the present study. On its pages the MLD allows two classifications of the groups: a) according to the regions (NUTS III), b) according to the professional bearings of the respective groups (see www.mmr.cz). This double classification enabled to crosscheck the data. The discovered errors and shortcomings are not the object of the present study.

The number of community interest groups in the Czech Republic and the spatial distribution, with regard to differences between the "borderland" and the "inland", was based on classification according to the regional aspect (NUTS III). Analysis of the structure of the professional bearing and/or objective of the group was based on a 12-category classification specified by the Ministry. The subjects chose their own category (or categories, because each group can give more than one category), which gives a true picture of the main objectives of the interest group.

The "borderland" is the region where at least some of the districts are situated at the border; the "inland" are regions where none of the districts lie on the border. Due to the territorial arrangement of the Czech Republic most of the regions are "border territories". Only three regions are "inland" regions, i.e. the Capital Prague Region (Hlavní město Praha), the Central Bohemian Region (Středočeský) and the Uplands Region (Vysocina).

Information about the individual groups is based on a uniform structure and is specified by the Ministry: name of the group, legal form, objective of the group, category, seat + contact address, chairman, secretary, phone and fax number, e-mail, reference to home page (www-page) of member community, last updating.

The interest groups may differ in their statute (the survey of the Czech Ministry for Local Development includes e.g. euro-regions, regional developmental agencies, information centres). Among the basic legal regulations permitting the establishment and existence of interest groups in the Czech Republic is, along with the Communities Act (No. 128/2000), the Civil Code (No. 40/1964). Other documents passed by the Czech government within the framework of the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU also support the existence of the micro-regions and offer the possibility of using the EU Structural Funds.

Analysis of the **number of interest groups** was based on the total number of groups, i.e. including those groups, which have a specific status or which do not quite correspond with the studied intention (e.g. euro-regions, regional developmental agencies and/or information centres). The relatively broad classification into 2 groups (region, category of professional bearing) has a number of stumbling blocks: As of October 2001 there were 376 interest groups of communities of various legal forms based on various legal patterns in the Czech Republic. By May 2002 five more groups were established – in the Ustecky, Plzensky and Jihomoravsky (South Moravian) regions; however, these groups were not incorporated in the following analysis. Within the classification **based on categories** we might get the impression that there are 1268 groups in the Czech Republic. This discrepancy is caused by the fact that each group can state more than one category out of the 12 according to its bearing. Most of the groups indeed report a number of categories of professional bearing; the average number of these categories for one group is 3.4.

The number of member communities in the respective groups differs considerably. The MLD porter does not provide data on the number of member communities despite the fact that the individual groups offer a list of member communities. Each community may be a member of more than one group. The theoretical average number of communities in the groups in the regions, calculated as the proportion of the number of groups in the respective region in the total number of communities in this region could serve as a supporting indicator (Table 1).

A grouping coefficient was calculated for each region, i.e. the average number of communities, which group together, per one group in the region (i.e. the proportion of groups in the cumulative number of grouping communities) (Table 1).

It is difficult to trace **the “multiplicity” of the membership** in the groups of one single community in spite of the fact that some communities (which have their own Internet pages) report their membership in the individual groups; unfortunately it is not a rule. In terms of the **size of the community**, it seems that the population size of the community is not decisive; what is decisive is the territory – the natural territorial entity, within the framework of which most of the communities establish groups.

The absolutely highest number of groups was established in the Stredocesky region (54), followed by the Plzensky (42), Jihocesky (South Bohemian) (35) and Vysocina (34 groups) regions.

Table 1 Interest groups of communities in regions of the Czech Republic

Region	1*	2*	3*	4*	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Number of districts	Population	Population density/ /km ²	Number of communities	Groups of communities**					
Number					Average number in districts	Theoretical average number	Frequency of the districts in regions	Multiple of the number of districts in region	Groups crossing over the region border	
Capital Prague	1	1 178 576	2377	1	2	2.0	0.5	2	2	2
Stredocesky	12	1 129 627	103	1148	54	4.5	21.3	69	5.8	2
Jihocesky	7	630 168	63	623	35	5.0	17.8	39	5.6	8
Plzensky	7	553 741	73	506	42	6.1	12.0	44	6.3	2
Karlovarsky	3	306 799	93	132	8	2.6	16.5	8	2.7	4
Ustecky	7	826 380	155	354	29	4.3	12.2	40	5.7	7
Liberecky	4	430 769	136	216	29	7.3	7.4	36	9.0	3
Kralovehradecky	5	554 348	117	448	16	3.2	28.0	19	3.8	7
Pardubicky	4	510 079	113	453	22	5.5	20.6	27	6.8	7
Vysocina	5	521 212	75	730	34	7.0	21.5	51	10.2	9
Jihomoravsky	7	1 133 916	160	647	33	4.7	19.6	50	7.1	9
Olomoucky	5	642 465	125	394	29	5.8	13.6	32	6.4	4
Zlinsky	4	597 758	151	304	19	4.8	16.0	25	6.3	2
Moravskoslezsky	6	1 277 095	230	302	24	4.0	12.6	32	5.3	0
Czech Republic	77	10 292 933	131	6258	376	4.9	16.6	x	x	66

* Situation as of 1 January 2001

** Situation as of 31 October 2001

The lowest number of groups is in the Karlovarsky (8 groups), Kralovehradecky (16) and Zlinsky (19) regions (Table 1). In the smallest region – the Capital Prague – 2 groups were established. Out of the totals number of groups in the Czech Republic 54% are groups, which have their member communities in the border districts and 70% are groups in regions where some of the districts are located in the borderland (Table 2).

For obvious reasons these absolute figures of the registered groups are not comparable (in addition to the geographical position, different administration and different area, also the settlement structure is different, and a different number of communities bear the status of a town). In spite of these differences, however, the basic question remains – whether there is a spatial dependence in the dynamics of establishment of interest groups of communities, of any legal form, and/or whether there is any dependence in the structure of the purpose of the bearing of the group, which is expressed in the classification of the individual subjects into one of the pre-defined 12 categories.

For regional comparisons we used calculations of the **average number of groups per one district of the region**. In the 4 districts the Liberecky region boasts the highest number of groups (7.3) followed by the 5 districts of the Vysocina region (7.0) and 7 districts of the Plzensky region (6.1). However, in terms of the average number

of groups, the Stredocesky region, which has the absolutely highest number of groups in the districts occupies the 10th position out of the 13 regions (without Prague region) and with 4.5 groups per 1 district it is below the average of the Czech Republic (4.9).

The Karlovarsky region is last (2.6) and theoretically shows the least interest in establishing groups. However, we should point out that e.g. the communities in the Cheb district are grouped in the Egrensis euro-region and the bearing and opportunities of this group, particularly in the framework of cross-border co-operation, most probably cover the requirements of the communities to solve the problems jointly, although this explanation need not be the only one. For instance, in the Liberecky region, which is on top of the list in the number of groups per one district, the majority of communities of the region (136, i.e. 63%) are members of the very active and well working Nisa euro-region. Even so, in spite of the existence of the euro-region, the need to establish interest groups of communities is strong. A follow-up analysis based on the categories of the groups according to their bearing will probably reveal other differences too.

In Bohemia the average number of groups per district is rather ambivalent (including the Vysocina region the average is 7.0, from 2.6 in the Karlovarsky region to 7.3 in the Liberecky region), while the average number of groups in the districts of Moravian regions (without the Vysocina region) is substantially more balanced; ranging from 4.0 Moravskoslezsky region to 5.8 (Olomoucky region). We could further compare the individual regions of the Czech Republic either according to the same, and/or comparable number of districts or according to the same, and/or similar total number of groups. Table 1 presents such a comparison.

Besides groups whose members are communities of only one district, there are groups, which “cross” the borders of the district, either within one region or they may even cross the border of the region, i.e. the member communities administratively belong to different regions. In such a case the gathering of groups whose districts, be they over the regional border, neighbour upon each other, predominates. Ignoring the borders of administrative entities with a view to the solution of common problems regardless of the region of the members of the group seems to be an interesting parameter of endeavours, which fall exclusively within the local government frequently solving shortcomings in activities of state administration. This **“crossing-over” of groups into other districts and/or regions** means that dealing with problems, which are common to a number of communities, does not stop at the administrative border of the district or region but on the contrary – member communities are interested in co-operation even though they have to overcome many administrative difficulties associated with their different administrative organisation.

In terms of the crossing-over of district borders, the multiple of the number of districts in the regions, i.e. how many times the districts of the region appear in the total number of groups (with the same number of groups the district may be registered more than once), is an indirect indicator of this “crossing-over” (Table 1). The table also gives the frequency of the mentioned districts based on regional classification.

Based on the analysis of this indicator it was discovered that most of the groups whose communities come from several districts are in the Vysocina region; 5 districts were reported 51 times and that is more than ten times the number. This high rate of “crossing-over” of the individual groups into other districts (nine times the number) appeared in the Liberecky region and the Jihomoravsky region (here the 7 districts were mentioned 50 times in the 33 groups and that is seven times the number of the districts). The Plzensky, Zlinsky, Olomoucky and Pardubicky regions range between 6.3 and 6.8; the Moravskoslezsky, Jihocesky and Stredocesky regions range between 5.3 and 5.8.

On the opposite side, i.e. groups that are very “closed” within the respective districts, are the groups of communities of the Kralovehradecky and Karlovarsky regions (i.e. 3.8 and 2.7 times the number, respectively). The Capital Prague Region has two interest groups and was not included in the evaluations.

These conclusions lead us to the assumption that groups crossing over into a number of districts were established in regions with natural barriers, which are not in accordance with the course of the border of the administrative entity. With regard to the main objectives of the interest groups of communities, i.e. the need for joint solution of identical or similar problems, it is obvious that strict seclusion within one administrative entity in the areas of regions, which from the physical-geographic aspect have a rugged topography and a number of natural barriers, would not only be able to solve the problems but would give rise to even more.

We also explored a number of cases where communities from different regions are grouped, i.e. crossing the border of the region, where we see a highly desirable co-operation between communities regardless of the administrative border and all the difficulties associated with this issue. Investigations of the appurtenance of the registered groups to the respective regions (NUTS III) were not based on the predominant number of communities in the group of the region (Table 1, column 10).

Most of the groups crossing over the border of their region are in the Vysocina and Jihomoravsky regions (both have 9 groups crossing over the region) and in the Jihocesky region (8); this fact to a certain extent corresponds with the above mentioned dependence on the rugged topography. The significance of this aspect in terms of the establishment of interest groups is reflected in the Jihocesky region where the real number of groups crossing the border of the region (only 2 groups) is the lowest, particularly with regard to the absolutely highest number of groups in the regions of the Czech Republic (54), although in the Zlinsky and Plzensky regions we also found 2 groups, which crossed the border of the region.

Not only are the natural borders reflected in this indicator, but also a certain level of community utilities, in particular the infrastructure (for details see the analysis based on categories), how the communities are either forced under the circumstances or at least willing to co-operate, but also the geographical position of the region and its territory. While co-operation of the Zlinsky region, which lies along the border of the Czech Republic, is possible only “in the inland direction”, the Vysocina region lies in the centre of the country and can co-operate in all (geographical) directions. However, the situation in the Central Bohemian region, which seems to be wrapped up in itself despite its central position, completely controverts this argument.

On the one hand it could be due to the large territory and, at the same time, the highest number of districts (12), and that they can make do with co-operation among themselves. It could also be due to the reluctance of the communities of the region to group together. Here the requirements for grouping are closed within one region.

The Stredocesky region can be put into opposition to the border regions. However, its standing due to its position towards the capital city, and due to the total acreage and the size of its population, is exclusive to such a degree that the results of comparisons of the border regions with the Stredocesky region need not be significant. In any case this comparison is extremely interesting.

The dynamics of establishment of interest groups of the communities

The first groups were founded in mid-1998 immediately after acceptance of the above documents, and then in late 1999. However, the proportion of groups established in these "pioneer" years is relatively small (ca 12%); i.e. the Zlinsky, Jihocesky and Stredocesky regions. The boom came in 2000 (in two waves – at the beginning of the year and then in October and November) when ca 41% of the groups was established, though the majority was established in the first half of 2001. To the date of the investigations (i.e. autumn 2001) no new interest group of communities was established, with only one exception – the Kralovehradecky region.

A more detailed analysis of groups in the border districts (the investigations incorporated groups where at least one member community lies in the border district) offered comparable conclusions: Out of the total number of 204 groups established in the border districts (i.e. 73% out of the 281 groups in regions with border districts) 183 groups gave the date of their establishment. Out of these only 12 were established in 1998 and 11 in 1999; 43% of the groups were established in 2000, most of the groups (82, i.e. 45%) were established in the course of the first three months of 2001.

Category of the professional bearing of the interest groups of communities

As stated above, based on the professional bearing, each group can be classified in more than one category. It was interesting to observe whether groups that were frequently established as only temporary units for special purposes are oriented to one objective (e.g. to build the infrastructure or parts of it) or whether they pursue a number of objectives, which are then reflected in their category classification (Fig.1).

The **average number of categories** per one group was the highest in the Moravskoslezsky region (4.4) and in the Jihocesky and Kralovehradecky regions (both 4.1). On the basis of these results we can deduce a higher incidence of problems in the regions where many of them could be solved through the interest groups of communities, or when this interest group is (maybe the only) the tool for the solution of a number of problems concerning the respective territory.

On the other hand, the Ustecky and Stredocesky regions have the lowest average number of categories, i.e. 2.5, signifying that interest groups in these regions are strictly purposeful with a concrete objective.

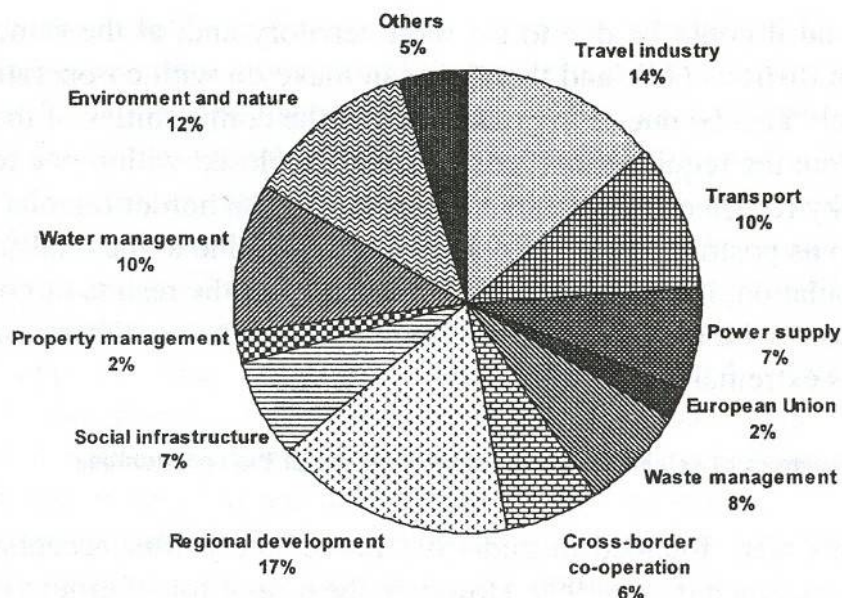


Fig. 1 The proportion of interest groups of communities in the Czech Republic

The results of comparisons of the **frequency** of reporting the respective categories of professional bearing out of the 12 pre-defined, regardless of whether they are listed as the only category or together with one or more other categories are as follows:

The absolutely most frequent (cumulatively) category is 7 = “regional development” (193, i.e. 51% of the total number of 376 interest groups of communities of the Czech Republic and 16% of the cumulative number of categories in all the groups). The groups whose objectives include a whole spectrum of problems indicated this category, very often as the only one. The next most frequent category was category 1 = “travel industry” (164, i.e. 45% of groups and 14% of all categories), followed by category 11 = “environment and nature” (135, i.e. 37%). Category 2 = “transport” (128) and category 10 = “water management” (125) are often quoted, followed by category 3 = “power supply” (90). On the other hand category 4 = “EU”, was quoted only 20 times, i.e. only 5%. Category 9 = “property management” was quoted only 28 times. Category 12 = “others” was nearly at the bottom of the list; it was specified for groups established for totally specific purposes, or for groups, which were not able to make a decision in terms of the category, or for whom a combination of the categories was not logical. We must not forget that 15 groups did not state any category.

If we **compare the regions** we see category 7 = “regional development” at the top of the list in all regions, with the exception of the Stredocesky and Zlinsky regions (here category 7 only closely occupied the 2nd position) and the Vysocina region (3rd position with only a small difference). This category was most frequently quoted in the Plzensky region (25, i.e. 19.5% of all the categories in this region) and in the Stredocesky region (20); in the Jihocesky and Jihomoravsky regions (both 19), but here it was “only” 15% of all the categories. The category “travel industry” was most frequent in groups of the Stredocesky (23 times) and Jihocesky (18 times) regions.

Category 1 = “travel industry” prevails in the Stredocesky region and is second in all the other regions with the exception of the Vysocina and Liberecky regions where it is 3rd.

Category 6 = “cross-border co-operation” is most frequently quoted in groups of the Plzensky region (in 13 groups, i.e. 31% of all the groups in the region and within the region it occupies the 3rd position); in the Jihocesky region (in 12 groups, i.e. 34% of groups in the region) and Moravskoslezsky region (11 groups, i.e. 46%).

In the other regions the category “cross-border co-operation” ranges from 1 (Prague region and Stredocesky region) to 8 (Jihomoravsky region). In the Pardubicky region it did not appear in any group.

Category 4 = “EU” was the least frequently quoted category. Although it is perhaps difficult to define the concrete content of this professional bearing, or concrete objectives of the group, this low proportion is startling, particularly in the so-called “large” regions. For instance the category “EU” was not quoted at all in 5 regions: Stredocesky, Jihomoravsky, Karlovarsky, Pardubicky and the Capital Prague region. On the other hand it was most frequently quoted (always 4 times) in the Jihocesky, Liberecky and Moravskoslezsky regions, although it always appears as the last or last but one category, which means that in the list of categories it is not considered important. The other regions quoted this category once or twice.

As the purpose of the interest groups of communities most of the regions of the Czech Republic give preference to the overall regional development and a considerable role in this development is the exploitation of the present potential for the travel industry and creating conditions for its development.

An integral part of the complex development of the region, along with the important aspect of attractiveness for the travel industry, and not only for foreign tourism, is the absolute effort to improve the environment, nature conservation, landscape formation and sustainability together with the development of the transport infrastructure.

If the group quoted only **one category**, the absolute majority was category 10 = “water management”. Taking all the interest groups in the Czech Republic it was quoted 51 times as a separate category. This means that a considerable part of interest groups are solving problems concerning the water supply, sewerage and building sewerage plants (SP) where the purpose of forming an interest group is quite evident. It could be expected that such groups would cease to exist after solving the problem. However, in practice we see that there is great chance that a well-organised group will continue. Legal bye-laws enable the continuation of the group (in the same or only slightly different structure of member communities) after the purpose has been reached. We see that the number of communities appreciating the advantages of joint solutions is increasing, both in the area of “utilities” in the territory and possibilities of using it, say for the travel industry.

As a single category “regional development” was quoted 25 times and “power supply” 22 times.

Based on the conclusions it is evident that these 3 categories, if quoted singly, are on top of the list in all the regions of the Czech Republic.

In terms of the regions the situation in the category “power supply” is interesting; as a single category it is quoted in the first place in the Moravian regions + the Vysocina region (of the total number of 22 it is quoted 15 times, i.e. 68%).

What the communities need most of all is the water supply, an efficient sewerage system and sewerage plants, power supply and in their objectives they all favour universal territorial development. The establishment of these interest groups was evidently based on a special purpose and after the accomplishment of the objective they can be (and probably will be) dissolved. However, this is an issue, in which we ought to be interested enormously due to the above given facts. The once launched co-operation of communities in solving a concrete problem should be prolonged, either with a concrete objective or as long-term universal co-operation. Information and communication technologies should facilitate, intensify, improve or launch such co-operation.

Internet in the interest groups of communities

It is a question, what is the role of the respective groups of communities in the process of launching the Internet in local administration. Over the relatively short period of the existence of interest groups setting up joint home pages for the grouped communities proved competent. The principal argument is considerable fund-saving, the opportunity to present the whole territory on the Internet, the elimination of problems associated with the lack of skilled working force and the “server” of these pages etc.

In terms of the methods the investigations of the level of the Internet coverage of the interest groups was to a considerable extent dependent on the level of the MLD portal, on the credibility and updating of the data. The total number of groups, which gave the address of the Internet home page in the structure of information, was investigated (Table 2).

A number of inaccuracies were evident from the beginning and that the presented figures may be misleading. After checking and going through all the Internet addresses (home pages) the interest groups could be divided into three parts: the first included groups, which indeed have their own home pages offering information only about the interest group (Table 2). The second includes interest groups, who do present their home pages, but very often they are pages of the local authority according to the workplace of the chairman of the group. In many cases there is no reference to the respective interest group on the home pages of these local authorities. The Internet address then seems to be useless or even misleading. Nevertheless we should not reprobate these efforts, but try to appeal to the respective authorities to give space on their pages for information about the interest groups in their administration area.

The content and structure of the information, the effectiveness of searching for necessary information, or the aesthetics of the home pages, was not evaluated because it is the subject of many competitions intended to support interest in setting up own pages, e.g. the “Zlatý erb” (Golden Coat-of-Arms) or “Zavináč” (At-sign).

Nonetheless, the number of groups, which give the **address of the electronic mail** (e-mail address), is incomparably higher. All these addresses were checked and it was

Table 2 Interest groups of communities of the Czech Republic and their Internet coverage

Region	Interest groups of communities						
	Number of groups			Groups and their Internet coverage			
	Total	In border districts		Web pages		E-mail	
		Number	%	Total	Own	Number	%
Jihocesky	35	30	86	9	3	21	70
Plzensky	42	22	52	9	1	18	82
Karlovarsky	8	8	100	1	1	4	50
Ustecky	29	21	72	4	2	11	52
Liberecky	29	29	100	8	3	23	79
Kralovehradecky	16	16	100	5	3	13	81
Pardubicky	22	6	27	1	1	6	100
Jihomoravsky	33	18	55	9	8	12	67
Olomoucky	29	15	52	5	3	9	60
Zlinsky	19	15	78	3	1	9	60
Moravskoslezsky	24	22	92	6	2	20	91
Border regions	286	202	70	60	28	146	72
Capital Prague	2	0	0	2	2	2	100
Stredocesky	54	0	0	15	10	32	59
Vysocina	34	0	0	8	6	26	76
Czech Republic	376	202	54	85	46	206	55

Situation as of 31 October 2001

discovered that most of them were addresses of the municipal and local authorities. In spite of that we can accept these data as some kind of guideline for analyses of the "Internetisation" of the interest groups of the communities or of the individual communities. If the communities are using the electronic mail (e-mail) it is only a short step to setting up their own home pages and to presentations for the benefit of all (Table 2).

Along with the progressing digitalisation of the telephone network in the Czech Republic we can expect that the number of interest groups of communities and of individual communities, which are going to exploit these technologies, will increase. It therefore seems illogical if the groups that already have the Internet do not launch their own pages when there are so many obstacles, either objective (non-existent digital telephone network and with it associated relatively costly other means of connection, e.g. through a good-quality mobile phone or satellite, problems associated with the webmaster, qualification to use the new technologies etc.) or subjective, which are unfortunately very often decisive (e.g. ignorance and aversion to launch novelties).

We checked the language versions of the home pages of the interest groups as well as the home pages of the municipal and local authorities, particularly the home pages of groups from the borderland districts, which included the category "EU" or "cross-border co-operation" in their professional bearing. Only a negligible number of pages were presented in a foreign language and these were from euro-regions, which had defined the objectives of cross-border co-operation very accurately.

It seems that particularly in the borderland regions, the chances of development through the community groups are high. If the desired co-operation “across the border” is achieved and this idea is accepted by means of communication and information technologies, the interest groups will fulfil this idea much better than the communities, in spite of the fact that the bearing of the individual interest groups will probably change in the course of time. From the building of an infrastructure, which is not interesting for the borderland (“western”) communities and/or similar groups, to the building of joint “cross-border” rescue brigades, “cross-border” networks, and also cultural co-operation etc., that means co-operation in the interest of the total development of the border territory and among the regions of integrated Europe. The answer to the question whether the borderland is a barrier against European integration, or whether on the other hand it is an integration environment, should definitely be positive, despite the fact that the introduction of modern technologies is still relatively slow. Out of the total number of 202 groups in the border districts only 60 have Internet pages, i.e. 30%; however, only 28 groups have their own home pages, i.e. less than 14%. The great majority of interest groups have their own e-mail addresses (i.e. they are connected to the Internet).

The interest group “The Chances for the South-West” is a positive example; it groups ca 150 communities of the Domazlice, Klatovy, Plzen-south and Tachov districts where 60% are connected with the Internet. One of the objectives of the interest group is the development of the Internet and public Internet stations in the economically weak areas. Every year this interest group holds a seminar about the Internet, which exceeds the framework of the territory and, in addition, it offers its members what is called the monitoring of information (regular mailing of novelties from the servers of the respective ministries and some other institutions).

Conclusion

We consider the conclusions as important – they show the future development also with regard to differences among the regions. If we should accept the idea that (a rapid and easy) access to (topical) information or, on the contrary, inaccessibility, could be a factor of growth of regional disparities, we can deduce from the results, which regions will develop dynamically and which regions might lag behind. However this is considerably simplifying the issue. Nevertheless, due to the above mentioned, it is important to know what attitude the grouped communities and/or the other bodies of state administration will take concerning the process of launching modern technologies, how the further process of “Internetisation” in rural regions will develop, how the letter of law will be fulfilled (be it free access to information or the duty of the state administration to publish information).

Within the framework of regional policy and, above all, the pre-accession strategy of the Czech Republic, all activities aimed at free integration of communities by means of their grouping should receive maximal support. The very grouping of the communities will probably determine the prosperity of the whole regions. Through the process of grouping of communities, strengthening their position and their orientation,

the regions could even be more flexible in adapting to the EU principles. The point is whether this movement “from below” should substitute the activities of the existing state administrative authorities or other institutions (in practice we see that this is often the case) or whether it should boost up the position of the local government in the following line: citizen – community – grouping of communities (micro-region) + business entity – state administration.

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ZÁJMOVÁ SDRUŽENÍ OBCÍ ČESKÉ REPUBLIKY A JEJICH INTERNETIZACE

Résumé

V České republice probíhají současně dva procesy, které mohou mít pro rozvoj oblastí zásadní význam: na jedné straně je to druhá fáze reformy veřejné správy, na druhé straně zavádění informačních systémů, a především internetu, do celé struktury veřejné správy. Oba tyto procesy spolu velice úzce souvisejí, neboť sledují svým způsobem stejný cíl: zkvalitnění výkonu veřejné správy, její zjednodušení a přiblížení občanům.

Význam zavádění a využívání internetu ve veřejné správě vzrostl zvláště po definitivním opuštění záměru vybudovat v ČR jednotný a kompatibilní státní informační systém. Ukazuje se však, že jednotlivé obce (především malé venkovské obce, resp. obce v geograficky odlehlých oblastech) nejsou samy schopny zachytit vývoj informačních technologií a využít tak všech výhod, které tyto technologie přinášejí. Stále více žádoucí spolupráce obcí v zájmu rozvoje území zasahuje také do procesu internetizace. Zájmová sdružení obcí mají pravděpodobně větší šanci zavádět nové technologie a díky jejich využívání členskými obcemi tak pozitivně ovlivňují výkon veřejné správy na mnohem větším území.

V regionálním srovnání je sledován jednak proces zakládání zájmových sdružení obcí, chápaný jako jedna z cest k rychlejšímu a efektivnějšímu řešení společných problémů a koordinaci různých záměrů jednotlivých obcí, a jednak proces internetizace těchto sdružení. Pozornost je věnována sdružením obcí v pohraničních oblastech, přesto, že pohraničí je zde vymezeno pouze účelově.