E- PARTICIPATION AND
CZECH STATUTORY CITIES

by

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Today, participation is often emphasized as an instrument for solving democratic deficit and low public trust in institutions that gained the power to regulate the life of a society. Attempts to increase the legitimacy of their purposes and goals are clearly visible. Ideas of ICT use for improving quality of government have been discussed and translated into practice intensively. Today, e-participation represents a single category in some e-government concepts. In compliance with the e-government movement, e-participation attempts to improve government by achieving better governance. The paper introduces results of web analysis focusing on e-participation instruments that can be found on websites of Czech statutory cities.

KEYWORDS
E-governance, e-participation, e-participation measurement and evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Pomahač, the main problem of the administrative state was the obvious failure of partnership and participation and not the remarkable administration growth or the unbearable economic intensity (Pomahač & Vidláková 2002, p. 63). In literature, this negative phenomenon is usually seen as a lack of citizens' trust in the institutions of public authority or as a democratic deficit in the relationships between citizens and their representatives. The concept of public administration as a public service characterized among others by a higher extent of participation and thus also of democracy in decision-making processes concerning public matters is a common point of modernizing public administration in the spirit of good governance.

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The requirements associated with good governance led to considerations of using new ICT to enhance the way the institutions of public authority work. Currently, literature of the subject mostly uses the terms e-government and e-governance. Also e-democracy is used as an individual part and in some attitudes e-participation is used within its framework (Macintosh & Whyte 2006; Scherer, Schneider & Wimmer 2008).

This paper concentrates on the area of e-participation. In correspondence with the content of the terms e-government/e-governance, also e-participation initiatives attempt to improve the governance processes (Špaček 2008c and 2008b). E-participation is considered to be a set of tools which, using ICT, aim to provide a larger space to include *stakeholders* in the entire chain of the public decision-making process (from the decision preparation stage to the check of the results achieved).

In the Czech Republic, e-participation has not been given sufficient attention in Czech academic works. It is also not sufficiently incorporated in governmental documents which prescribe national e-government/e-governance plans (e.g. strategy Efficient Public Administration And Friendly Public Services – Strategy on Realization of Smart Administration in the Period 2007 – 2015 which was approved by the government in July 2007; Strategy for Development of Services for Information Society from the spring 2008, Strategy of eGovernment Implementation in a Territory from the autumn 2008; or the related Integrated Operation Programme). However, in general, participation is often heard in governmental documents which speak about plans of public administration modernization and introduce various quality management tools like EIPA's CAF, EFQM Excellence Model, Local Agenda 21, or BSC. Such quality management tools require making public decision- and policy-making more participatory and inclusive for internal as well as external stakeholders and have been implemented by Czech self-governments. For the creation of Smart Administration in the Czech Republic also the practice of Methodology on Inclusion of Public in Preparation of Government's Document, which was approved by the government in August 2007 (by its resolution no. 879), is important. The methodology prescribes general principles of inclusion of the public like partnership, equal inclusion, information in advance enabling distant access to documents, clarity and comprehensibility, transparency and necessity to give reasons, sufficient inclusion, respecting alternative forms of inclusion, estimation of inclusion costs, annual reporting. The methodology was recommended to self-governmental units by the government. Currently it complements the document General Principles of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) which was approved by government resolution no. 877 in August 2007. Czech RIA methodology is also incorporated into the Legislative Rules of the Government and requires that consultations with public shall become one form of inclusion of public within the process of evalu-

ation of legislation proposals, submitters of regulation shall prove they consult a public before they submit a final proposal.

The paper presents results of an analysis of websites of Czech statutory cities. The web analysis focused on an area which is usually included in the current attitudes to e-participation (Blumler & Coleman 2001; Coleman & Gøtze 2001; Macintosh & Whyte 2002 and 2006; Hayward 2005; Thorleifsdottir & Wimmer 2006; Millard 2006; Soria & Thorleifsdottir 2007; Kubicek, Lippa and Westholm 2007; Westholm and Wimmer 2007; United Nations 2005) – on the existence of electronic G2C (government-2-citizen) and G2B (government-2-business) tools. The analysis follows the author's previous research concentrating on websites of Czech regions (Špaček 2008a and 2008b).

2. CZECH STATUTORY CITIES

Municipal administration is probably the place where interaction between public administration and citizens takes place most frequently. Citizens' opinions on the quality of its work can affect the public image of the entire administrative system. In a lot of administrative systems, the local level is the basic element of self-administration; in some systems, local administrative authorities are also front-line institutions of the state administration. Such a 'mixed' system also works in the Czech Republic, where the authorities of local administration – municipalities and regions – are bodies of both self-administration and delegated state administration.

Statutory cities (besides the capital of Prague) represent a specific group of municipalities in the Czech administrative system. Statutory cities can only be established by law. At the present time, the Act on Municipalities, Art. 4, specifies a group of 23 cities with the population approximately between 44,000 and 367,000. The numbers of citizens are shown in the Appendix. The specific character of the statutory cities lies in the optional decision of their council to divide the city into city districts/boroughs (possibly, after considering the results of a local referendum). Consequently, city districts have a similar position to common municipalities, the only difference being that they are not legal entities – they are always parts of the city and they only have powers derived from the powers of the city as a whole; their powers are defined by the council decision in the form of a 'statute' taking into account requirement prescribed by the act on municipalities.

A statutory city is independently governed by the *city council* – it is the most important political body of self-administration with the authority to make decisions and it is elected by citizens directly. Meetings of the council are public by law, there are rules of procedure and the statutory *city office* (an executive body of the municipality consisting of appointed officials mainly) has to provide information on the location, the time and the agenda

of each council meeting on the official notice board, which also has to be available in an electronic version, at least 7 days prior to the meeting. Minutes are taken of each meeting. The minutes should state the number of the present council members, the approved agenda, the procedure, the results of voting and the adopted resolutions. The minutes have to be drawn up within 10 days after the meeting is finished.

Another statutory city body of political character is the *city board*, which is an executive body and is accountable to the council for its activities. The Act on Municipalities provides it with some decision-making competences. The city board consists of the Lord Mayor, deputy mayors and other board members elected out of the council members by the council. The board meetings are not public; there are rules of procedure issued by the board. Again, there is the obligation to take the minutes of each board meeting. *The Lord Mayor* is a body of political character, their task is to represent the city in contact with external bodies, to call the council and the board meetings, to chair them and also to sign the decisions of these bodies together with others (in common municipalities these functions are performed by the mayor). *Other bodies* of statutory cities –the secretary of the city office or the other bodies – are not necessary to be dealt with in this paper.

3. THE CONCEPT OF
E-PARTICIPATION AND THE METHOD USED

The author analyzed the websites of all 23 Czech statutory cities in the period between October 27, 2008 and November 7, 2008. The websites of the city districts of the 7 current territorially subdivided statutory cities were not included in the analysis (see Appendix). The objective was to find out if the web pages offer any of e-participation tools. DEMO-net's definition of e-participation was utilized - e-participation is understood as a complex area of applying ICT in the context of citizen engagement in the discourse with politicians and governments (Wimmer 2007; Thorleifsdottir and Wimmer 2006; Soria and Thorleifsdottir 2007).

The chosen set of indicators takes into consideration the requirement of Macintosh and Whyte (2002) that democratic participation must involve, both, the means to be informed and the mechanisms to take part in the decision-making. The chosen approach limited the focus of the analysis particularly on tools of e-information and e-consultation as defined in the UN's E-participation framework (United Nations 2005, p.20). The website analysis used the criteria stated below.

3.1. THE ANALYSED INDICATORS OF THE PREPARATORY STAGE OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF STATUTORY CITY POLITICAL BODIES

The preparatory stage of the decision-making process was analyzed using selected aspects of e-information. The used framework of the website analysis mainly deals with the amount of information on the agenda of the following council and board meeting. The analysis focused on the question whether the web pages of the individual body offers information on agenda of the following meeting like the date of the meeting and its programme. If the meeting was to take place in more than 7 days, the analysis examined if there was an electronic invitation to the previous meeting available which contained also information on agenda of the meeting. If there was such an invitation, the information on the agenda of the following meeting was considered available.

Further, the website analysis aimed to find out whether the information on the agenda of the future meeting contains the description of the comment-making procedures, the deadline for comment submission and also contact details of a responsible person. Some of the criteria used also reflect the common practice of regions – an available downloadable form for submission of comments on the points of the agenda or an on-line form for comments submission. Another important part of the concept of e-information is the availability of supplementary materials for the following meeting. This aspect was also included in the research together with the availability of an electronic version of rules of procedure. As an auxiliary indicator, the availability of the information on the composition of the political bodies was used.

When searching for the information on the agenda of the following meeting of the council, the electronic official notice board, which is usually an independent part of the web pages, was not taken into consideration. The choice of indicators was based on the hypothesis that the information structured in the way examined in the research provides a more comfortable and seamless access which reduces the users' effort needed to find relevant information.

3.2. THE ANALYSED ELEMENTS OF E-PARTICIPATION

Two groups of e-participation tools were examined. The first group comprised *electronic tools for off-line (i.e. electronically not public) discussion*, i.e. discussion that can be led in an electronic way but which is not visible for other web users. The criteria included the tools that allow citizens to initiate the discussion (by sending an inquiry). The used criteria also reflect the requirements of the Czech law to provide an electronic registry[1] and to pub-

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[1]   "e- podatelna" in Czech language.

lish information about the e-registry in an electronic way.[2] Furthermore, it was examined whether there was a tool which allowed the users to see the status of their inquiry during the process of its being dealt with by the office. It was also explored whether there was information on the office hours, the phone directory and a searching tool on the introductory web page. In cases where the inquiries of citizens were not published on the city website, the "Contact us" tool was also included in the set of indicators.

The second group of the examined e-participation elements covers the matter of *transparent electronic space for electronic discussion between public administration and citizens.* The tools considered transparent are those that enable website users to see the procedure of the discussion – the topic submitted by the initiator of the discussion and also the reactions of citizens and city representatives. The used criteria also took into consideration the question whether the stakeholders themselves can suggest topics for discussions ("citizens-organised" as defined by Wigley 2007). Moreover, the criteria of transparent e-participation included the availability of an electronic survey or a link to such a survey on the introductory web page. The analysis also investigated if the results of past surveys were available.

3.3 TOOLS TO PROVIDE THE PROCEDURE AND THE RESULTS OF MEETINGS OF STATUTORY CITY POLITICAL BODIES

The third range of the examined practical use of e-participation tools considered the availability of the information on the procedure and the results of the meetings carried out by political bodies of the statutory city; it consisted of the availability of the information on the past meetings (in the form of a text, an audio or a video record) and also the opportunity to watch a council meeting in progress on the city website.

4. WEBSITES OF CZECH STATUTORY CITIES AND E-PARTICIPATION

4.1. THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION ON THE AGENDA OF THE FOLLOWING MEETING

The amount of the electronically available information on the agenda of the following meeting of the statutory city council or board is shown in Table 1.

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2   Electronic registry is defined in the Eletronic Signatures Act as a workplace of a public administration body destined for the reception and sending of data messages. Its organization is specified in the administrative procedure act.

The subject of the website analysis	Number of websites
1) The agenda of the following council meeting is available on the council web pages	14
- the information on the meeting agenda includes	
a) comment making procedure	1
b) deadline for comment delivery	1
c) contact details of a responsible person / responsible persons	4
d) a downloadable form for comments	2
e) an online form for comments	0
f) supplementary materials for the council meeting	5
g) the council website provides rules of procedure	12
- the information on the agenda is not available, the council website only provides the information on the planned dates of meetings	8
- information on the council composition	23
2) The agenda of the following board meeting is available on the board web pages	8
- the information on the meeting agenda includes	
a) comment making procedure	0
b) deadline for comment delivery	1
c) contact details of a responsible person / responsible persons	2
d) a downloadable form for comments	0
e) an online form for comments	0
f) supplementary materials for points on the agenda	0
g) the board website includes rules of procedure	7
- the information on the agenda is not available, the board website only provides the information on the planned dates of meetings	12
- information on the board composition	22

Table 1 - The amount of the information on the agenda of the following meeting.

The table clearly shows that the websites of the statutory cities provide more information on council meetings. The agenda of the following meeting of the council was found in 6 cases when the council meeting was to take place in the next several days, in the other cases (8) the availability of

the agenda was assumed on the basis of an existing invitation to the previous council meeting. In most of these cases, there were invitations not only to the latest meeting but also to all the council meetings that had taken place in its term of office. In the cases when the agenda of the following council meeting was available, the statutory city website users could mainly and easily find out the date, place and time of the meeting and the points on the agenda. A third of the cities only informed about the planned dates of the council meeting on their websites and there were no invitations to previous meetings.

A half of the cities also published the rules of procedure on their websites. Website users could find information about the possible comment making on the following council meeting usually in this document rather than in the invitation. The contact details of the people responsible for providing more information on the meeting were provided only rarely (in the cases of České Budějovice, Olomouc, Opava and Plzeň).

The information about the way of possible comment making and about the deadline for comment delivery was only included in short details of the council meeting on the Opava website, the link "Citizen application for the discussion at the Opava council". The provided information included the possible ways of citizens' contributions to the council meeting, the deadlines for possible written registration of citizens to the meeting, the content requirements of such registration (including a downloadable registration form) and contact details for sending the registration. The website informed the users that "written registrations for the discussion have priority over registrations conducted in the way of raising one's hand". It further referred to the rules of procedure. The form for comment making downloadable from the council website was also provided by the statutory city of Olomouc ("Form for application for the discussion at Olomouc council").

Only 4 statutory cities (České Budějovice, Liberec, Olomouc and Plzeň, Brno)[3] made the supplementary materials for the council meeting accessible on the website. They were either materials for the following meeting or for past meetings. The link of the Opava council website "Agenda and supplementary materials for Opava council" only included general information that the supplementary materials for each council meeting are always available from the city registry ('podatelna') (the address was also provided) at least 6 days prior to the meeting, that the materials are free for citizens to look at and that they can also be copied for citizens or provided on a CD (these services are paid).

The council web pages of all cities gave the information on the council composition (in most cases, there were photos of the council members, their names, political affiliation, sometimes even contact details – the address

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3   At the time of the research (October 27) link "Supplementary materials for Brno council meeting", which was to take place on November 11, did not provide any materials. When the website was visited again on November 14, the materials had already been made available.

and phone number). As far as the city boards are concerned, the information on their meetings is usually limited to the dates of meetings in the current term of office. In 4 cities the information on the following meeting was provided in the form of an invitation, in other 4 cities there were invitations to the previous meetings. At the time of the research the link to the board composition in Ostrava did not work.

The Teplice website did not contain an independent part devoted to the board; the names of the board members could be directly seen in the chart with the names of council members. The Teplice website was untypical in the examined sample; it only provided information on the elected bodies – in the section called "City Office", where the board was not included in the menu. The link "City Council" gave the users a chart with names of council members, the year of their birth, political affiliation, sometimes a note that they are also board members (there also was a column for e-mails but it was empty). The Teplice website did not even provide any dates of council or board meetings, which were available on most website of other examined cities. Another city whose website did not contain an independent part devoted to the board was Karviná. As well as in Teplice, there is short information on the board incorporated in the council web-pages and there is no meeting agenda. However, the Karviná council web-pages provided board's resolutions; the Teplice web-pages did not offer resolutions of either the board or the council, even the website map did not help (the map is provided in 13 other websites of statutory cities), nor the searching tool on the introductory web -page.

As far as boards are concerned, city websites did not always provide the same types of information as in the case of councils – e. g. the rules of procedure, the information on the board members (still sometimes this sort of information is more detailed than in the case of councils). Also the structures of board web pages and council web pages differed sometimes.

4.2. ELECTRONIC SPACE FOR OFF-LINE DISCUSSIONS

The practical application of tools which enable users to use the introductory web pages of the cities to initiate communication that can result in a discussion of public matters is presented in Table 2.

The subject of the website analysis	Number of websites
1) Explicit link to e-registry on the introductory webpage	17
- e-registry in the e-mail form	23
- e-registry in the form of a direct online form	3
2) Electronic tool to monitor the status of citizen's inquiry during the process of its being dealt with	?
3) Office hours on the introductory webpage	10
4) Phone directory/Contact details on the introductory webpage	17
5) A tool for searching on the introductory webpage	23
6) A tool of the "Contact us" type (unless the inquiries of citizens are published)	3

Table 2 - Electronic space for off-line discussions on websites of Czech statutory cities

Most of the websites provide access to a tool explicitly called "electronic registry" on the introductory page. The e-registry is sometimes included in the part of the website devoted to the city office. The website of Karlovy Vary worked with the link called "e-services". If stated on the introductory web-page, links like 'registry@...' ('podatelna@...') were also included in the Table 2, but not the links called "e-mail" or "send an e-mail" as these do not show obviously that they are associated with the electronic registry (case of the Karlovy Vary and the Karviná websites). The Přerov website provided "electronic registry" on the bottom bar of the introductory web-page so a user had to scroll down for quite a long time (in spite of that this website was included in the chart). All the cities had an e-mail e-registry, in three cases there was even a special application (a form) which asked for registration and which might enable the users to monitor the status of the inquiry (however, the accompanying information did not describe this feature; that is why there is "?" in the table).

Most of the explored statutory city websites also had a link to a phone directory/contact details on the introductory web-page. However, some of them only contained contact details of city office clerks or city office departments. In cases where the office hours were not accessible on the introductory web-page or through a link to "Contact details"/"Contact details and office hours", they were usually available on the website of the city office. The Frýdek-Místek website provided the office hours together with the phone directory in the "City Hall" link, the Jihlava website used the "City Office – City Hall" link, the Přerov website provided the office hours on the

city office web-page, the link "Information in compliance with Act no. 106/1999" (Act on Free Access to Information).

All the introductory web pages of statutory cities had a tool for searching. The use of the tool of "Contact us" contains an "Anti-drug counselling centre" included in tab "Communication with the public" on the Kladno website, and a "Mail to the Lord Mayor" link (mail to :) offered on the introductory page of Ústí nad Labem. Moreover, the Table 2 includes the links "Inquiries – office matters" and "Remarks or inquiries concerning the web pages" (both of the mail to :) which were placed on the bottom bar of the Opava introductory web-page.

4.3. TOOLS FOR TRANSPARENT E-PARTICIPATION
Table 3 summarizes the use of transparent e-participation tools on websites of statutory cities. Generally spoken, these tools were used much less than the tools of the previous type. The websites of the cities make use of these tools mostly only rarely.

The subject of the website analysis	Number of websites
1) a blog/a discussion forum, where a visitor can suggest a topic which is then visible to all and to which all users can react	2
2) questions and inquiries sent to a specific city representative / department; website visitors can see the submitted question and even the reply	4
3) a specialized tool for e-consulting where the discussion topic is issued by a public authority representative and the topics are visible to all users of the website	1
4) electronic questionnaire/survey on the introductory webpage (or a link to it on the introductory webpage)	9
- survey archive available	5

Table 3 – Practical use of transparent e-participation tools
on websites of Czech statutory cities

A tool like a discussion forum, where a website visitor could suggest a topic which was then visible to all and all users could react, was found in only 2 out of the 23 websites of statutory cities.

1) The Jihlava website had the link "Discussion forum", where all visitors could suggest a topic in the "List of topics" on the introductory webpage of the forum where general groups of topics were listed by the city. There also was a section called "Cafe", whose description said "Freely about anything you might be interested in concerning Jihlava". As this tool

was also used for suggesting new topics visible to all, this tool was taken into account twice in the Table 3 – also for purposes of indicator 3).

2) The other statutory city offering a "City Office discussion forum" was Zlín. The very introduction to the discussion web-page contained the link "General description of the discussion forum" which provided the following information and guidelines for users – something that was not provided on the Jihlava website. Let us quote:

- Employees of the Zlín City Office give their replies in the forum.
- The City Office discussion forum is here for everybody who wants to ask about the situation in the city or give their opinion. However, the questions and inquiries have to be directed to the employees of the Zlín City Office.
- Questions and inquiries for the members of the Zlín Board or the Zlín Council, or for established organizations and companies, will not be published here.
- In future, you will not find any vulgar or offensive inquiries or reactions in the internet forum of the Zlín City Office. Also anonymous inquiries, such as those signed Eraser etc. will not be allowed. The senders' e-mails have to be in use and this will be checked before the contribution is sent.
- The inquiries which are continually repeated showing that the author is not interested in the reply but only in providing non-constructive criticism need not be published.
- The employees will not react to opinions and commentaries of citizens.
- The discussion forum is moderated.
- All contributions are sent to the administrator and they will be published the next working day.
- The maximum length of a contribution is 2000 signs including spaces.
- The discussion forum is not to be used for asking for information in compliance with Act no. 106/99 on Free Access to Information.
- All contributions will be visible for 1 months starting on the day of the first contribution concerning the topic.

The tool which enabled citizens to send a question or an inquiry to a specific city representative or department and website visitors could see the question and sometimes even the reply was provided on websites of 4 cities (Brno, Karlovy Vary, Kladno and Mladá Boleslav).

1) The web page of Brno Lord Mayor offered the link "Questions for the Lord Mayor". This was probably a choice of mails sent to the Lord Mayor which he decided to reply to and to publish the reply on his web page. However, the method for gathering and selecting the questions was not described.

2) Also a "Contact us" link on the introductory web page of the Karlovy Vary website concerning city authorities (the link "City Office") was included in the practical use of this indicator. The purpose of this tool was explained in the following way: "Are you worrying about something in Karlovy Vary? Contact us. Selected commentaries will be published (a link). Please write your → suggestions and inquiries (a link)". The link "will be published" led to inquiries and reactions of city office representatives. However, it was not clear how, on what basis, the inquiries had been chosen. The link "suggestions and inquiries" contained a form where senders had to give their name, phone number, e-mail, the code displayed and the text of their message ("Fields marked with an asterisk are obligatory", only their address was not obligatory).

3) "Questions and answers" on the Kladno website (in the "Communication with the public" tab on the introductory web-page) were of a different character. This tool is also included in indicator 2 in the chart. Registered users could state their question and a city office employee reacted (sometimes 3 weeks later). This was a two-side communication which was not expanded– no other persons reacted. I some cases (exceptionally) the office employee added another reaction to the original question some time after their first answer.

4) "Write to the Town Hall" on the introductory page of the Mladá Boleslav website was similar as it also was for registered users only (the website was explored on November 2, the last question was from November 1 and the last reaction was from October 29; there were 5 unanswered questions at the time).

The "Discussion forum" link on the České Budějovice website was only found by accident.[4] The link was not accessible from the introductory web page (even though the path of the link states "Introduction > Other > Discussion forum") and when the link was used, the following information was displayed: "Dear web page visitors, starting on December 1, 2006 the communication with the public using web pages of the Statutory city of České Budějovice and of the City Office of České Budějovice will change. The discussion forum did not serve its purpose of a platform for objective discussions of city matters. Therefore, the public can now send their suggestions, questions and commentaries using e-mail to individual city office departments and their employees (Phone directory). Furthermore, it is possible to send inquiries and suggestions directly to the Lord Mayor (Lord Mayor) and his deputies (deputy mayors). Also, we recommend you to see sections (Life situations) and (Frequent questions), where the situations when a citizen needs to arrange for something with the city office are de-

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[4]   The link was found when we were looking for information on office hours using the searching tool of the website.

scribed and there are instructions and recommendations for these situations." An archive of surveys could be found in a similar way.

The Karviná website offered an access to city TV coverage but this was not included in the Table 3. It showed chosen news provided by Television portal of the Moravian- Silesian region, which is also used by other cities of the region.

Although the Olomouc website presented an article of October 15, 2008 saying that "Olomouc is launching a special website because of the urban plan in preparation where people will be able to discuss on-line" and promising that "next week people will be able to have on-line discussions with the representatives of the conception and development department on www.olomouc.eu/uzemni-planovani", at the time of the research (November 2) this tool was not available. The article said that a representative of the new urban plan submitter or elaborator would be available for the on-line discussion at a set time. At the time of website research there only was information that the first on-line discussion was planned for October 20. However, it was not clear if the discussion took place and in what way. The web page with message of October 27 saying "Olomouc citizens can submit their commentaries on the urban plan till the end of the year" contained a downloadable form – "commentary sheet", which could be considered a form of a questionnaire. There also was a survey asking "Are you going to join in the preparations of the urban plan actively?"

The most frequently used tool on statutory city websites was a survey. Nine of the websites used surveys on the introductory web pages. The websites of České Budějovice, Děčín, Mladá Boleslav, Most and Přerov also provided archives of past surveys summarizing their results. The following survey questions appeared:

- "Club of senior citizens – new name" (Děčín);
- "How long does it take to load these pages?" (Frýdek-Místek);
- "Are you happy about the range of cultural programmes offered in municipal facilities?" (Mladá Boleslav);
- "Do you like the new city website?" (Opava);
- "Which hypermarket, shopping centre or department store in Ostrava protects you and your car against theft best?" (via a question link "Where do you feel safe?" on the introductory web page of Ostrava in the section called "Events, campaigns and projects");
- "Do you think that web casting of city council meetings is useful?" (on November 15; Plzeň);
- "Which part of the website is the most useful for you?" (with options Self-administration, City Office, About Přerov, For tourists, For entrepreneurs, Sending news, The entire website).

- Two surveys were in progress on the Most website. One of them was used for inhabitants of a specific street ("A survey for inhabitants of Josef Skupa Street and the surroundings [see the map]") and there was a downloadable survey sheet with question "Which of these would you be happy to have in your place of living?" (with options: a playground; a car park; repairs of pavements and roads; greenery, benches; other suggestions). There was also the appropriate e-mail address and the information that it is possible to hand in a filled in survey sheet at the city office reception. The second survey asked "When did Most become a statutory city?";
- The above-mentioned question about the preparations of the urban plan in Olomouc.

4.4. TOOLS FOR MONITORING THE PROCESS AND THE RESULTS OF MEETINGS OF POLITICAL BODIES

The practical use of the tools for monitoring the process and the results of meetings of political bodies used on websites of Czech statutory cities is presented in Table 4.

The subject of the website analysis	Number of websites
1) electronic documents with minutes of a council meeting (resolution or minutes)	22
- also the information on how individual council members voted is available	12
2) electronic documents with minutes of a board meeting	21
3) a video record of a council meeting (ex post)	3
4) an audio record of a council meeting (ex post)	6
5) a webcam taking the council meeting real-time	4

Table 4 – Tools for monitoring the process and the results of political body meetings on websites of Czech statutory cities

Nearly all of the cities make minutes of their board and council meetings available. Only the Teplice website did not show any minutes of meetings at the time of research. These documents were not even found using the searching tool or the link "Document archive", where only city office documents were stored. On the Mladá Boleslav website there were no minutes of board meetings, board web pages did not contain a similar link to the one available for council meetings ("Minutes of council meetings and resolutions").

Mostly, the web pages devoted to the particular political body contained the minutes of the meetings of the body. The Brno website used the link "City documents" where there were minutes of meetings of both the council and the board. Karviná provided the resolutions of board meetings on the web pages of the council; the board did not have separate web pages.

An audio record of a council meeting was available on the websites of České Budějovice, Děčín, Hradec Králové, Jihlava, Mladá Boleslav and Pardubice. A video record of a council meeting was available on three websites. The Děčín website contained both an audio and a video record. In Karlovy Vary there was only the video record of the most recent meeting, not of the meetings before as was the case of the other cities that provided video records. The Jihlava website was the only one which besides video record provided all the tools under exploration.

On-line web casting of the current council meeting was provided by the Brno website (at the time of research the website stated "No web-casting is in progress now"), the České Budějovice website (at the time of research there was only an outdated invitation to the last council meeting), the Jihlava website (using Vysočina region web casting) and the Plzeň website (on September 4, 2008 for the first time).

Some websites also offered records providing information on how individual council members voted. Such a type of information makes council meetings more transparent in cases when the audio or video records of meetings are not available.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of websites of Czech statutory cities clearly showed a prevailing presence of the surveyed e-information aspects over aspects of transparent e-participation. A discussion forum was only found on 2 out of 23 websites (Jihlava and Zlín). The Zlín website also included the information on its purpose and instructions for use. Surveys were the most frequently used instrument for consulting the public.

More kinds of information searched for on the websites of the cities were found concerning council meetings than concerning board meetings, which is probably affected by the requirement stipulated by law for public character of council meetings. Information about meetings of both political bodies only rarely contained additional data like contact details of people responsible for providing information on the following meeting. A third of the cities only informed about the planned dates of council meetings. Two cities offered a downloadable form for citizens to join the discussion during a council meeting. Only 4 statutory cities made supplementary materials for council meetings available.

As far as city boards are concerned, the web pages did not always provide the same types of information as council web pages. In two cases

(Teplice, Karviná) the board did not have its separate web pages, which was also reflected in the limited amount of the electronically accessible information.

Nearly all of the cities provided the minutes of board and council meetings on the web pages of the particular bodies. Only the Teplice website did not provide any minutes of either council or board meetings. No board meeting minutes were found on the Mladá Boleslav website. Audio records of council meetings were available on 6 city websites. Video records of council meetings were offered by 3 cities. 4 statutory cities provided on-line web casting of an ongoing council meeting. Some websites also offered records of the way individual council members voted.

The revealed deficits of existing practice may be overcome by larger cooperation of statutory cities, greater awareness of their citizens and their consequent initiatives, and also by more systemic central government control and evaluation particularly in the case of requirements prescribed by the legislation. Practices may be improved also by promotion of good as well as bad practice.

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Appendix 1 – Czech statutory cities

Statutory city	Abbreviation used	Number of inhabitants	Territorially subdivided	Seat of regional self-administration	Statutory city website
Brno	BR	366 680	x	x	www.brno.cz/
České Budějovice	ČB	94 747		x	www.c-budejovice.cz/
Chomutov	CH	49 817			www.chomutov-mesto.cz/
Děčín	DĚČ	52 165			www.mmdecin.cz/
Frýdek – Místek	FM	60 505			www.frydekmistek.cz/
Havířov	HAV	83 000			www.havirov-city.cz/
Hradec Králové	HK	94 255		x	www.hradeckralove.org/
Jihlava	JIH	109004		x	www.jihlava.cz/
Karlovy Vary	KV	50 691		x	www.karlovyvary.cz/
Karviná	KAR	63 045			www.karvina.org/
Kladno	KL	69 276			www.mestokladno.cz/
Liberec	LIB	98 781	x	x	www.liberec.cz/
Mladá Boleslav	MB	43 923			www.mb-net.cz/
Most	MO	67 691			www.mumost.cz/
Olomouc	OL	100 168		x	www.olomouc.eu/phprs/
Opava	OP	59 156	x		www.opava-city.cz/
Ostrava	OS	309 098	x	x	www.ostrava.cz/
Pardubice	PAR	88 559	x	x	www.mesto-pardubice.cz/index.html
Plzeň	PL	163 392	x	x	www.plzen.eu/cz/home/index.html
Přerov	PŘ	46 912			www.mu-prerov.cz/
Teplice	TEP	51 046			www.teplice.cz/
Ústí n. L.	ÚNL	94 565	x	x	www.usti-nad-labem.cz/cz/
Zlín	ZL	78 122		x	www.mestozlin.cz/