

Working Papers in Sociology 3 / 2019

ISSN 2453-6970

**Determinants of Proactive Disclosure of Information
at the Municipality Level in Slovakia**

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November 2019

Abstract

Transparency is a key attribute that facilitates public accountability. Provision of information enhances control over government, provides society with important knowledge and increases legitimacy of decision making in politics. In our paper we concentrate on proactive transparency, i.e. provision of data without prior information requests. Previous studies on factors of proactive disclosure of information show rather mixed results and our aim is to shed more light on the topic. In order to do so, we collected data from all 2,926 municipalities in Slovakia and analyze political, economic and social factors that affect proactive transparency of these local bodies. This case selection provides two advantages. First, we study a case that has so far not been analyzed and second, the size of our sample is substantially higher than samples in most of existing studies on proactive transparency. Hence, our findings provide insight to proactive transparency on the local level with broader implications on this field of research.

Keywords: transparency, Slovakia, municipality, local politics, information, governance

Introduction

There is a general consensus that transparency, “the availability of information about an organisation or actor allowing external actors to monitor the internal workings or performance of that organisation” (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer 2014), is one of the core features of good governance (Hood 2006). It supports accountability, enables control of institutions and if citizens receive more information about political process, decision-making, goals and results it may lead to higher trust of government and even provide more legitimacy to democratic governments. It may also enhance the performance of representatives, and while it is not a tool to completely root out corruption, research suggests it can help to decrease it (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer 2012; de Fine Licht 2014; Hood 2006; James and Moseley 2014; Lagunes a Pocasangre 2018; Meijer et al. 2015). Nevertheless, it is important to note, that these consequences are heavily influenced by specific factors of political systems (Cucciniello et al. 2017; de Fichte Licht 2011), so they may differ country to country. That is why it is essential to study transparency, its effects and factors influencing it in various contexts. Our study focuses on active transparency on a local level in Slovakia, area we believe is severely understudied. Previous research of different kinds of transparency focuses on established democracies, such as Spain, Netherlands, United States, Canada, United Kingdom or on emerging and limited democracies such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico or China (e.g. Adiputra et al 2018; Araujo and Tejedo-Romero 2016; Birkinshaw 2010; Caamano-Alegre et al 2011; Grimmelikhuijsen et al 2018; Larsen and Walby 2012; Ma and Wu 2011; Magalhães and Santos 2016; Peisakhin and Pinto 2010; Pozen and Schudson 2018; Scott 2006; Stanić 2018; Worthy et al 2017). However, research of new democracies in Eastern Europe is quite limited (Musa et al. 2015; Spáč et al. 2018). We aim to follow on previous research in Slovakia and deepen the narrow knowledge we have about the ways the transparency works in this region.

In general, we can divide transparency into passive (reactive) and (pro)active (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer 2014). Passive transparency is connected to Freedom of Information (FOI) laws, that require institutions to provide information to people and it aligns with legal compliance. In this sense, provider of the information hands them over but is not doing anything further to make it available for others potentially interested in them. On the other hand, active transparency means proactively providing this information to the public, for example online. These are however connected; one influences the other.

According to Darbishire (2009), there is number of benefits of proactive disclosure. For instance, citizens are informed about the laws and decisions that affect them, they have information needed to participate in decision and policy-making, and it creates equality of access. Also, from the institutional point of view, it creates better information management, increases internal information flow and in the end increases efficiency. In our study, we focus on this type of transparency, when we study factors influencing municipality’s ability to publish electoral results of local election on its website. We are therefore looking for specific information and not measuring the overall level of transparency. In Slovakia, central bodies, such as Statistical office of Slovak republic, publish only results of elected candidates, to get complete results (both for elected and non-elected) one must turn to municipalities for information. Law does not require the results to be disclosed online, so by reporting them on their websites, municipalities are proactively spreading the info to anyone interested. Our research goal is to discover determinants that cause municipalities to be transparent or not.

FOI and Active Transparency

Since the first modern FOI act passed in the USA in 1966, we could witness a few waves of adoption of transparency laws, and over time, FOI acts have become a regular feature in countries all around the world (Hazell and Worthy 2010; Walby and Larsen 2012). It is hypothesised that it was these kinds of laws that were one of the core reasons for increasing proactive transparency of institutions in many countries. In a sense, real transparency is achieved by instruments of access to information legislation that allows people to access public information by requests and which forces the institutions to proactively disclose them (Musa et al. 2015). Worthy et al. (2017) identify compliance – doing as the law asks – and concordance – going beyond the lawful obligations and do more – as two ways government can respond to citizens' requests. Richter and Wilson (2013) suggest that transparency laws make people and institutions incorporate transparency norms into themselves and if these laws become part of the culture, they move from mere compliance to increased concordance. Experiment by Worthy et al. (2017) shows that FOI requests are effective in encouraging bodies to do more than the law asks and levels of support for FOI grow once it is ingrained within the system. This conclusion is supported by Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2018) in different context. This would mean that municipalities which have a successful history and experience with dealing with citizens' requests are more likely to be actively transparent. On the other hand, there are other influential factors that can affect or hinder the process of transparency.

Political, Demographic and Economic Factors Influencing Transparency

One of the factors that seems to influence transparency on a local level is the size of the municipality. Cities with a larger population tend to be more active in the provision of information (Albalade 2012; Bearfield and Bowman 2017; Lowatcharin and Menifield 2015). More populated municipalities receive more resources (Styles and Tennyson 2007), which means that these towns can hire more personnel and therefore, can provide more services. This is connected to problems of small municipalities, mainly those on peripheries, that do not gain extra resources and capacities and are not able to adopt innovations as fast as larger ones. What is more, along with larger budget, larger municipalities may have better-trained staff and IT departments, which help them to embrace new practices (Moon and Norris 2005). Lowatcharin and Menifield (2015) show that American counties with higher economic stress and an older population were more likely to display lower levels of transparency. This conclusion is also supported by Tavares, and da Cruz (2017), the average age of the population and unemployment rate are both negatively associated with transparency, and by the same token, higher economic status (lower unemployment) affects transparency positively, (Piotrowski and van Ryzin 2007). All in all, population and economic status of a municipality are essential factors affecting overall transparency (Chen et al. 2019).

Another aspect of determining transparency on a local level is political competition. If the level of competition is high, those in power have incentive to show good governance and may use disclosure as a strategic instrument to gain the legitimacy from the public and increase the chances of being elected, mainly in situation, when the re-election of incumbent is not certain (Adiputra 2018; Esteller-Moré and Polo Otero 2012). In situation, where the executive has majority, it feels less pressure to interact with citizens and less demand for democratic governance (Thomas 2010). Also, since politicians in these situations expect more to stay in power, their effort to be transparent decreases (Piotrowski and Bertelli 2010). Also, Tavares

and da Cruz (2017) argue that increasing incumbent's consecutive terms in office have got an adverse effect on transparency, while turnover in the office rises transparency (Berliner 2014).

On the other hand, for example, Grimmelikhuijsen and Welch (2012) argue that a higher level of political competition may mean that those in power perceive a greater risk revealing information because it can weaken their position or they can lose the control over the message. However, in situations of low competitions, those in power may feel more confident in their position and be more willing to share information. Similarly, while higher electoral turnout may mean that citizens have more information and are more express more interest in local matters, local government may want to be more proactive in publishing information if the electoral turnout is low, to gain trust, legitimacy and increase involvement of voters (Araujo and Tejedo-Romero 2016).

Previous studies agree that political ideology and partisanship are another element that shape the level of transparency on a local level (e.g. Piotrowski and Van Ryzin 2007). However, there is not a clear consensus. For example, Albalade (2012) associates local left-wing leaders with better transparency indexes. Similarly, Grimmelikhuijsen and Welch (2012) suggest that if left-wing parties have stronger position, transparency is higher. Nevertheless, Garrido-Rodriguez et al. (2017) show that conservative governments grant more importance to transparency than progressive ones. This conclusion is supported by Araujo and Tejedo-Romero (2016), who claim that municipalities led by right-wing parties are more transparent than others. There are also differences between partisans and independents. The research proposes that partisans view local politics as a temporary stage and independents try to maximise their performance on this level. This also stems from the fact, that while partisans are backed by their parties in electoral competition, independents must rely solely on their performances in the offices (Gendzwill 2012; Nagatomi 2013; Reiser and Holtmann 2008).

Differences in promoting transparency are also between male and female mayors. Fox and Schumann (1999) submit that female mayors are more active in engaging citizens in decision-making process, encouraging participation, communication and input. Tavares and da Cruz (2017) reveal that female mayors score significantly higher on transparency indexes than their male counterparts and Araujo and Tejedo-Romero (2018) sum up that representation of woman in local politics fosters information transparency and reduces information asymmetry in their municipalities.

Based on the above findings and also on previous research from other countries we formulate the following hypotheses:

Local economic and demographic conditions

H1: Municipalities with lower unemployment have a higher level of proactive transparency.

H2: Municipalities with a higher population mean have lower level of proactive transparency.

H3: Municipalities with higher population have a higher level of proactive transparency.

Local political competition

H4: Local level of electoral competition affects the proactive transparency of municipalities.

H5: The local turnout affects the proactive transparency of municipalities.

H6: Higher number of consecutive terms of mayors in office decreases the proactive transparency of municipalities.

Partisanship and gender of a mayor

H7: Municipalities with independent mayors have higher proactive transparency than municipalities with partisan mayors.

H8: Municipalities with female mayors have higher proactive transparency than municipalities with male mayors.

Proactive and reactive transparency

H9: Higher passive (reactive) transparency of municipalities is positively associated with higher proactive transparency.

H10: Previous exposure to FOI request on specific information positively cultivates proactive transparency of municipalities in the longer run.

The hypotheses are divided into four groups based on their theoretical background. Hypotheses one to three address the local economic and demographic conditions. Next three hypotheses cover the impact of political competition. Note that due to mixed results in the literature hypotheses four and five do not expect a specific direction of the respective effects on proactive transparency. Hypotheses seven and eight deal with personality of mayors namely their partisanship and gender. Finally, hypotheses nine and ten are included to measure the relationship between proactive and reactive transparency and the cultivation effect of previous exposure to FOI request respectively. The expected effects are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. List of Hypotheses.

| Hypothesis | Content | Expected effect |
|------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| H1 | Unemployment | - |
| H2 | Mean population age | - |
| H3 | Population size | + |
| H4 | Electoral competition | +/- |
| H5 | Local turnout | +/- |
| H6 | Incumbent terms in office | - |
| H7 | Independent mayor | + |
| H8 | Female mayor | + |
| H9 | Reactive transparency | + |
| H10 | Previous exposure to FOI request | + |

Slovakia and Transparency on the Local Level

Slovakia enacted Freedom of Information law in 2000 and during the last couple of decades parliament has passed a number of laws that promote transparency, such as publishing of court decisions online, obligation of political parties to create transparent accounts during electoral campaigns or responsibility to disclose contracts that deal with public finance before they become valid. On the other hand, research shows that local agencies are not always following central policies (Berliner 2017). There is only limited research on how transparent municipalities are and how transparency works on a local level in Slovakia. Transparency

International (TI) publishes transparency chart of hundred largest Slovak municipalities. To create the transparency index, TI takes to the account different parameters, the most critical being, for instance, proactive disclosure of information and compliance with FOI law. While this is not a representative sample, the latest analysis (Piško 2018) shows that larger municipalities are more transparent. Also, independent mayors and mayors from central-right parties are more transparent than mayors that are from the largest Slovakia political party – social democratic party SMER and its coalitions.

The most significant analysis to date of transparency on a local level in Slovakia was done by Spáč et al. (2018). Authors created field experiment including all Slovak municipalities and focused on FOI law and legal compliance when they asked municipalities to send complete information about the results of local election from 2010 and 2014. The results show that the most important factor of receiving requested information was a mention of law in a mail appeal. As well as this, it was more likely to get a reply from larger municipalities and towns with independent and female mayor. On the other hand, municipalities with larger Hungarian minority were less likely to send the information. We want to follow on this study and look for the same information, that Spáč et al. (2018) requested in the emails using FOI law, but instead of compliance we want to look on proactive spread of information. Since the publication of electoral results is not required by the law, we investigate which municipalities go beyond their obligation a proactively disclose complete electoral results from local election 2018.

Data and Methods

In this part, we explain our variables, the data sources and the methods used for the analysis. Our dependent variable deals with active information disclosure of municipalities in Slovakia regarding local elections as one of the essential electoral competitions in the country. More specifically, the variable covers whether and how municipalities provided key information on 2018 local election, i.e. candidate lists and results of election, on their websites. The variable is ordinal with three possible values. Value two is given to municipalities that provided full information on both the candidate lists and the results. Towns that published none of the required information are given value zero. Finally, municipalities which provided only partial information such as incomplete candidate lists or results without actual number of awarded votes are given value one. The higher value of the variable thus represents a more transparent behaviour.

We now turn to independent variables. The unemployment and mean age of municipal population are measured as interval variables. The population size is also an internal variable, but we use a log of the actual population. We measure the electoral competition as the margin of votes between the incumbent mayors and their strongest rivals from previous local election which was held in 2014. The variable is thus measured on the interval level with non-zero values up to 100. The latter case represents a scenario in which the mayor won the election without any rival, i.e. she obtained all the votes.

The variable of local turnout also addresses the 2014 local election, and it is measured on the interval level. The number of consecutive terms in office of mayors covers the seniority of mayors. We were able to collect data on career tracks of mayors since 1994, i.e. for six electoral terms. Hence, we can distinguish between mayors with only a single term, those who were elected repeatedly as well as mayors who hold their office for more than one or two decades. To track the independent mayors, we use a dummy variable with value one for mayors who are

independent and zero otherwise. Similar approach counts for gender of mayors. We use a dummy variable which gets value one for women and zero for men.

Finally, we include independent variables regarding the relation between active and passive transparency based on data from a previous experimental study conducted in Slovakia (Spáč et al. 2018). To capture the association between active and passive transparency we use a dummy variable with value one for municipalities that responded to information request in the respective experimental study and zero otherwise. To address the effect of FOI requests on active transparency in the long run we also use a dummy variable. The variable has value one for municipalities that, in the 2016 experimental study, belonged to experimental group which received an FOI request, i.e. a request backed by the law and obliging the municipalities to respond. Value zero is given to the remaining towns that obtained less formal asks in the experimental study.

Given that the data collection lasted for around four months, the flow of time might affect the data listed on the websites. Because no law in Slovakia prescribes municipalities to provide information about local elections online, there is also no legal provision setting any minimum period such information should be displayed. We thus cannot exclude that with time following the 2018 local election part of municipalities that included the data on their websites later deleted this information. Based on that we use a control variable that covers the number of days between the 2018 local election and the day we visited the website of the municipalities. The list of variables and the basic descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2.

Slovakia consists of eight regions. To accomplish the data collection in roughly the same time, each of the authors collected data from several regions that in total included a similar number of municipalities. The coding process was organized in such a way that data was collected from all municipalities of a single region, after that another region came to place etc. Inside of each region, we visited websites of municipalities in alphabetic order, i.e. in an order that has no relation to any feature of the municipalities including their level of transparency. However, to eliminate any potential bias given by order of regions used for the coding process, we apply dummy controls for regions.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics.

| | Mean | Std. Dev. | Minimum | Maximum |
|---------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|---------|
| Unemployment | 20.75 | 13.16 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Mean population age | 40.79 | 3.96 | 21.10 | 59.56 |
| Population size (log) | 6.62 | 1.15 | 2.64 | 11.57 |
| Electoral margin | 40.8 | 33.15 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Local turnout | 63.68 | 12.66 | 15.22 | 97.98 |
| Incumbent terms in office | 2.48 | 1.50 | 1 | 6 |
| Independent mayor | 0.39 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 |
| Female mayor | 0.23 | 0.42 | 0 | 1 |
| Reactive transparency | 0.29 | 0.45 | 0 | 1 |
| Previous FOI request | 0.33 | 0.47 | 0 | 1 |
| Days since election | 56.83 | 33.27 | 2 | 121 |
| N = 2,799 | | | | |

Our initial aim was to collect data for all 2,926 municipalities in Slovakia. However, during the process of collection, we found that small portion of towns do not have their websites or we were not able to track them. Similarly, in several municipalities the 2018 local election was not held due to low number of candidates or some other logistical and technical issues. Altogether we had to exclude 127 cases (roughly four per cent of all municipalities) from our analysis and the final dataset consists of 2,799 towns. Despite this reduction, the number of cases is larger than in most datasets in other works on transparency.

The data were collected from various and mostly open sources. The information on unemployment, mean municipal age and population size were gathered from official census and central governmental bodies. The data on electoral competition, turnout and characteristics of mayors was obtained from Slovak Statistical Office. Regarding data on reactive transparency, we were able to use data from previous work on municipal transparency in Slovakia (Spáč et al. 2018).

We use ordinal logit regression for our analysis. This is due to the ordinal nature of the dependent variable. The variable has three values (no data, partial data, full data) which have a natural and meaningful sequence, but the distances between the levels are not assumed to be equal. Ordinal logit regression is suitable for such scenario (cf. Kleinbaum and Klein 2010).

Results

To test the hypotheses, we ran two ordinal logit models with different specification. Table 3 shows the results. Based on Model 1, some of the explanatory variables affect the level of active transparency of municipalities. Concerning local economic and demographic conditions, both the unemployment and population size have significant effects in the expected direction. In accordance with the literature (Piotrowski and van Ryzin 2007; Tavares and da Cruz 2017) we found that municipalities with lower unemployment show a higher level of active transparency. Figure 1 visualizes the predicted probabilities of the effect. If all other variables are held at their means and dummy variables are set to zero, towns with zero unemployment have more than 57 per cent probability of providing full information on local elections. With rising unemployment this probability decreases and finally ends below 25 per cent for municipalities with maximum share of unemployed people.

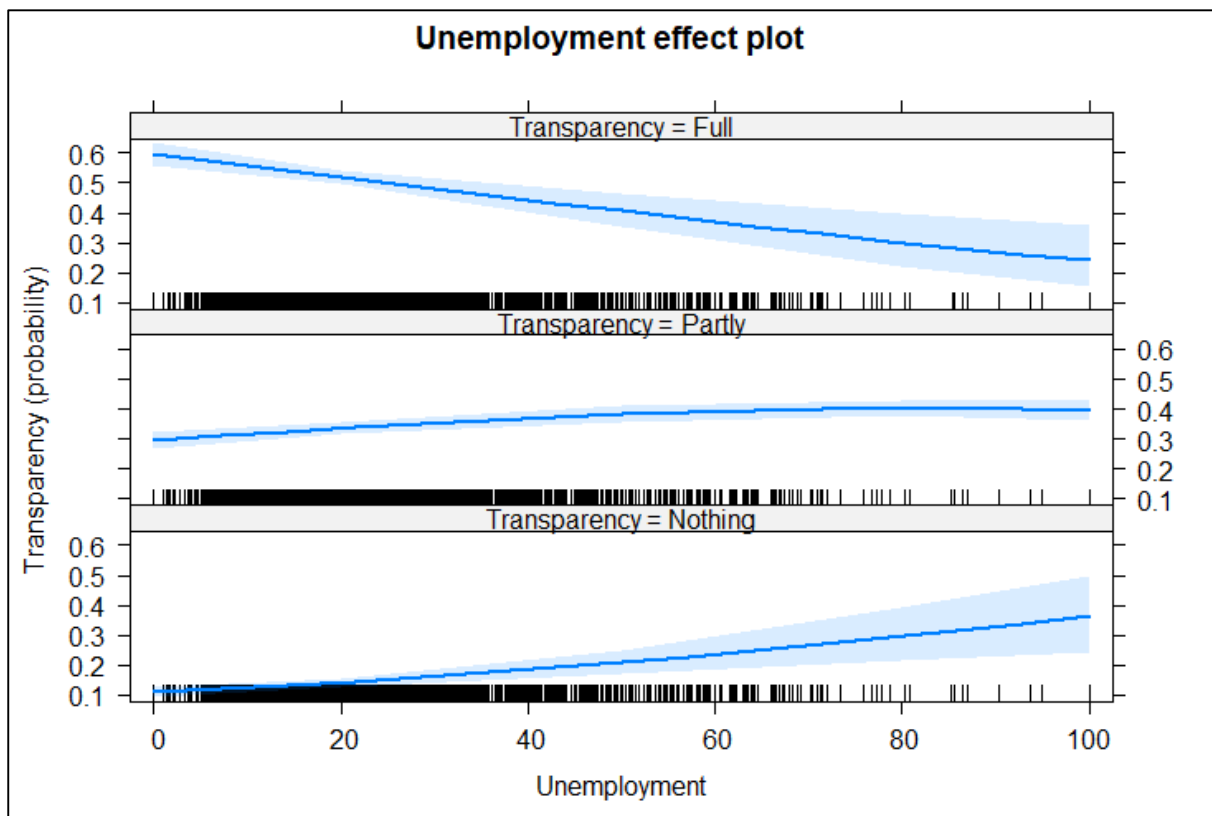
Table 3. Results of Ordinal Logit Regression.

| | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|------------------------------------|---------|-------|-----|---------|-------|-----|
| | B | SE | Sig | B | SE | Sig |
| Local conditions | | | | | | |
| Unemployment | -0.015 | 0.004 | *** | -0.015 | 0.004 | *** |
| Mean age | -0.009 | 0.012 | | -0.009 | 0.012 | |
| Population (log) | 0.840 | 0.059 | *** | 0.831 | 0.060 | *** |
| Political competition | | | | | | |
| Electoral margin | 0.001 | 0.002 | | 0.002 | 0.002 | |
| Local turnout | 0.002 | 0.005 | | 0.003 | 0.005 | |
| Mayor terms in office | -0.038 | 0.027 | | -0.036 | 0.027 | |
| Partisanship and gender of a mayor | | | | | | |
| Independent | 0.039 | 0.085 | | 0.052 | 0.086 | |
| Woman | 0.156 | 0.094 | . | 0.167 | 0.095 | . |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------|-------|-----|--------|-------|-----|
| Active and reactive transparency | | | | | | |
| Reactive transparency | 0.246 | 0.093 | ** | 0.216 | 0.094 | * |
| Previous FOI request | -0.108 | 0.085 | | -0.088 | 0.086 | |
| Controls | | | | | | |
| Days since elections | -0.009 | 0.001 | *** | -0.005 | 0.003 | * |
| Region dummies | No | | | Yes | | |
| (Intercept 1) | 2.785 | 0.925 | ** | 2.103 | 0.992 | * |
| (Intercept 2) | 4.495 | 0.928 | *** | 3.842 | 0.995 | *** |
| N | 2,799 | | | 2,799 | | |
| AIC | 4851.9 | | | 4811.9 | | |

Significance: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, . $p < 0.1$.

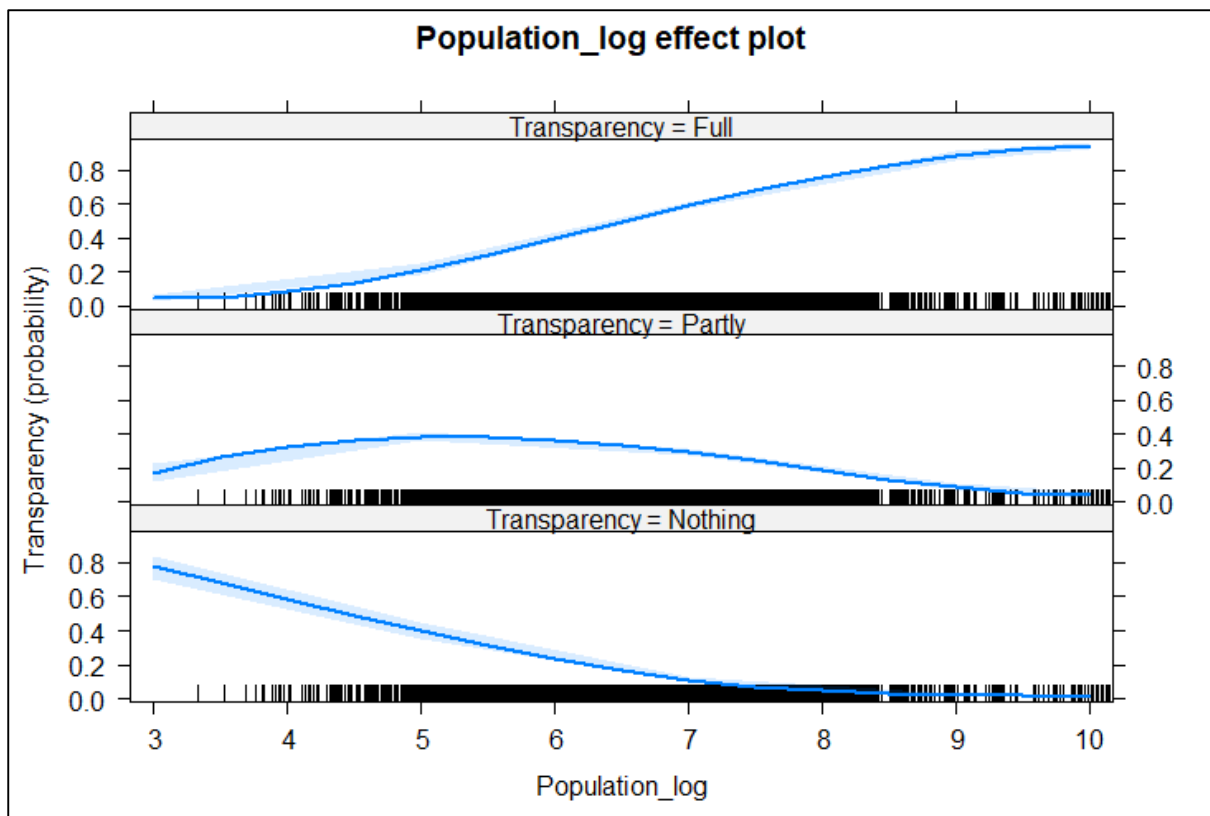
Figure 1. Predicted Probabilities (Unemployment).



The analysis further shows that population size is the strongest predictor of active transparency of municipalities. Our results confirm the expectations from the literature (Albaladejo 2012; Bearfield and Bowman 2017; Lowatcharin and Menifield 2015) and show that higher population results into a more transparent approach of local governments. The explanation is quite straightforward. More populated towns have more resources and more staff what allows them to provide better public services including provision of information. As Figure 2 shows towns with small population have high probability of sharing no information on local election with the public. With rising population size this scenario changes substantially as the probability of full information disclosure increases quickly and for larger urban areas becomes

virtually the only alternative. To address this effect in more detail, we provide predicted probabilities of full information disclosure for towns with different population. Towns with 100 people have only 15 per cent probability of giving complete information on local election. For municipalities of 500 inhabitants this number rises to 41 per cent and for towns with thousand people to 55 per cent. Finally, cities with 10 thousand people have a 90 per cent probability of publishing full information. This shows that population size is a crucial predictor of transparency at the local level. On the other hand, we found no effect for mean age of municipal population.

Figure 2. Predicted Probabilities (Population size)



We now turn to variables concerning political competition. Although the previous works suggested these variables to affect the level of transparency (cf. Adiputra 2018; Esteller-Moré and Polo Otero 2012; Piotrowski and Bertelli 2010; Thomas 2010) our analysis confirmed none of these expectations. All three variables, namely the margin of victory, local turnout and the number of consecutive terms of incumbent mayors in the office are found without any effect on active transparency of municipalities.

On the other hand, we find that the characteristics of mayors might affect the approach of municipalities toward more transparent behaviour. This accounts for gender of mayors (at $p < 0.10$). According to our analysis, municipalities led by women show a more transparent approach than towns with male mayors. More particularly, with all other variables held constant municipalities with women elected as mayors have higher probability of providing full information than towns led by men by four percentage points. Similarly, towns with male

mayors have two percentage higher probabilities that they publish either no or only partial information. This result is in line with existing literature (cf. Araujo and Tejedo-Romero 2018). On the contrary we find no similar effect for independent mayors. Our results show that active transparency is not affected by the fact whether the mayor is a partisan or an independent. This somewhat contradicts findings from previous works (cf. Gendzwill 2012; Nagatomi 2013) on better performance of independents in local politics and also the results of Spáč et al. (2018) regarding reactive transparency in Slovakia.

The last group of independent variables concerns the relation between active and reactive transparency. In this regard, our analysis shows an existing association between both types of transparency. We find that municipalities which were more responsive in 2016 experimental study also provide more information on 2018 local election on their websites. More specifically, with all other variables held constant, active response to information request in 2016 experiment is associated with a six percentage point surplus in probability the town actively provided full information on 2018 local election. Such results indicate that both transparency types, i.e. active and reactive do not work separately, but they are related to each other. In other words, such finding shows that municipalities more responsive to information requests are also more willing to actively provide information to the public.

Recent literature (cf. Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2018) suggests that FOI requests not only increase responsiveness, but they improve transparency on a broader scale. Following this, FOI requests have not only a direct effect on response rate of the asked subjects but are more supportive to transparency in a more general sense. Our analysis is however not in line with this finding. The results show that previous exposure to FOI request does not support active transparency in a longer run and unlike several other factors it is found without any impact on the outcome variable.

Finally, according to the results, with more days since 2018 local election, the municipalities show less transparent behaviour. With all other variables held constant, ten days after election municipalities have nearly a 60 per cent probability of providing full information on candidate lists and the election results. With 50 days after election this probability decreases to 51 per cent and with 100 days after voting to 40 per cent. This indicates that part of the municipalities that provided the information on local polls on their websites did this only temporarily and later deleted the content.

In the previous section, we suggested that the order of regions applied in the process of data collection might affect our analysis. To address this issue, we calculated Model 2, including the regional dummies. Its results show that the found effects of independent variables, namely the unemployment, population size, gender of mayor and association between active and reactive transparency remain unchanged in their size, direction and significance. Based on that we assume that the order of regions used for data collection does not bias our results. In sum, we find support for four of our hypotheses, namely H1 (unemployment), H3 (population size), H7 (gender of mayor) and H9 (reactive transparency). On the other hand, we find no support for the remaining hypotheses due to absence of any effect of the respective independent variables. The paper follows with the final chapter which discusses the findings from a broader perspective.

Conclusions

Transparency is a key factor of good governance, and it provides insight on relations between political representatives and the public in terms of accountability, responsiveness and control. Concerning active transparency, i.e. provision of information without prior request, previous works have found several factors that affect how public authorities provide information to the general public. Despite important findings there are still gaps that require further study and this accounts primarily for relation between active and reactive transparency.

This paper provides an analysis of active transparency at the local level. We studied all 2,926 municipalities in Slovakia and their approach toward proactive information disclosure on 2018 local election. To do so, we tracked the municipal websites and sought the information on candidate lists and electoral results. Our findings provide important implications not only to the case of Slovakia but to the study on transparency in a more general manner.

The results of the analysis show that active transparency depends on several factors of different nature. These include economic and demographic conditions of the municipalities as well as characteristics of mayors. In line with the previous literature we find that towns with higher population and better economic conditions are more transparent. This also accounts for towns led by female mayors. On the other hand, despite expectations from existing research, we find no evidence that active transparency is by any means affected by the level of political competition regardless the applied measure of this concept.

As a crucial contribution, we consider our findings on relation between active and reactive transparency. Compared to other factors such as population size or local economic conditions, this link is still underdeveloped in the literature and requires more testing. Our analysis indicates two different results. First, we find that there is an apparent association between both types of transparency. Our results show that towns that responded earlier to information requests also provide more information actively on the same subject matter. This outcome suggests that although we can differentiate between active and reactive transparency, political authorities tend to operate in both similarly. In other words, local authorities tend to be more transparent actively and passively at the same time and vice versa.

On the other hand, the link between active and reactive transparency seems to have its limits. In general, the authors agree that FOI requests lead to higher responsiveness of public authorities because they provide important legal protection for the requesters (cf. Spáč et al. 2018; Worthy et al. 2017). In other words, FOI requests are found to have a positive immediate, and direct effect on reactive transparency of political bodies, and they increase the probability that requesters obtain the information they seek compared to less formal asks. Recent literature suggested that FOI requests also have an indirect effect positively influencing transparency at a broader scale (cf. Grimmerikhuijsen et al. 2018). Such effect would indicate that FOI requests do not support only reactive transparency, but they also boost active information disclosure as well. Our analysis, however, does not find any support for such claim. We tested whether previous exposure to FOI requests leads to higher level of active transparency on the same subject matter, i.e. information on local election, but we found no effect for this variable. In practical means, the usage of FOI requests may boost reactive transparency, but it does not affect active transparency in the longer run.

We, however, refrain from stating that FOI requests do not have any potential to improve active transparency for several reasons. First, our analysis is conducted on information disclosure on a specific topic, i.e. local elections. Although such type of information is of key importance to the general public, it is still one of many kinds of information the local authorities (do not) provide to the people. We cannot exclude that focus on other types of information, e.g. local budget, wages of public employees or local environmental measures, would lead to different results. More generally, the level of transparency might vary based on the type of information we study. Absence of effect of previous exposure to FOI requests on active transparency thus might exist when information on local election are at place, but the results might change if another sort of information is tested. Second, the non-existing effect of FOI requests on active transparency might result from the character and conditions of such requests. In this paper we tested whether a single FOI request from 2016 affected proactive transparency of local authorities two years later. It is possible that a single request is not enough to change the attitude of public authorities towards more transparent behaviour and repeated requesting from multiple requestors would lead to different outcomes. Hence, our results indicate that FOI requests do not cultivate a more active transparent behaviour of public authorities in a long run, but we suggest that more testing is needed with focus on amount and character of such requesting.

Our findings contribute to the theoretical debate about factors of active transparency mainly at the local level. However, we did not detect various effects expected by the literature. This leads us to the suggestion that transparency varies among countries and results of its studies depend on the content of the analysed information. We thereby suggest further works to seek a more comparative approach in study on transparency at the local level. In this regards, two main options are available. First, these comparisons should analyse transparency of municipalities from various countries concerning the same type of information, thus controlling for countries specifics. Second, comparative works might consider examining transparency of municipalities within a single country on various sets of information. Both these approaches can substantially improve our knowledge of information provision of public authorities.

Acknowledgement

This research is supported by grant projects APVV-18-0218 and MUNI/A/1117/2018.

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