



**Inspiration from newsrooms for newsrooms:  
Takeaways from longitudinal research  
on local press**

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# Topic

- 15 years of research on the Czech local newspapers
- local news still carried by newspapers + traditional business model
- invisible from the national level + marginalized by centralised media
- localities turning into news deserts (LM4D, 2023; Napoli et al., 2018)
- **highest time – for the lessons that the local newsrooms can learn from this development + what we must not overlook in local media research**
- segmented media X not omnibus media – “the category of ‘omnibus’ extends to all media outlets which ‘maximize their clientele by neutralizing their product’ (...) such as most regional newspapers” (Bourdieu 2005: 8, 22)
- small-market newspapers (Ali et al., 2018); rural journalism (Perreault et al., 2024)

# Aims

highlight two problems:

1. **unrealistic expectations** of researchers that does not translate to/reflect the actual situation in local newsrooms
2. **invisibility** of the real problems that small newsrooms deal with on a daily basis

and on top of that offer:

3. ten points of **inspiration for success/survival** based on findings from research in local newspapers newsrooms



NORTH  
SEA

DENMARK

BALTIC  
SEA

UNITED  
KINGDOM

NETHERLANDS

GERMANY

POLAND

BELGIUM

PRAGUE

CZECH  
REPUBLIC

SLOVAKIA

FRANCE

AUSTRIA

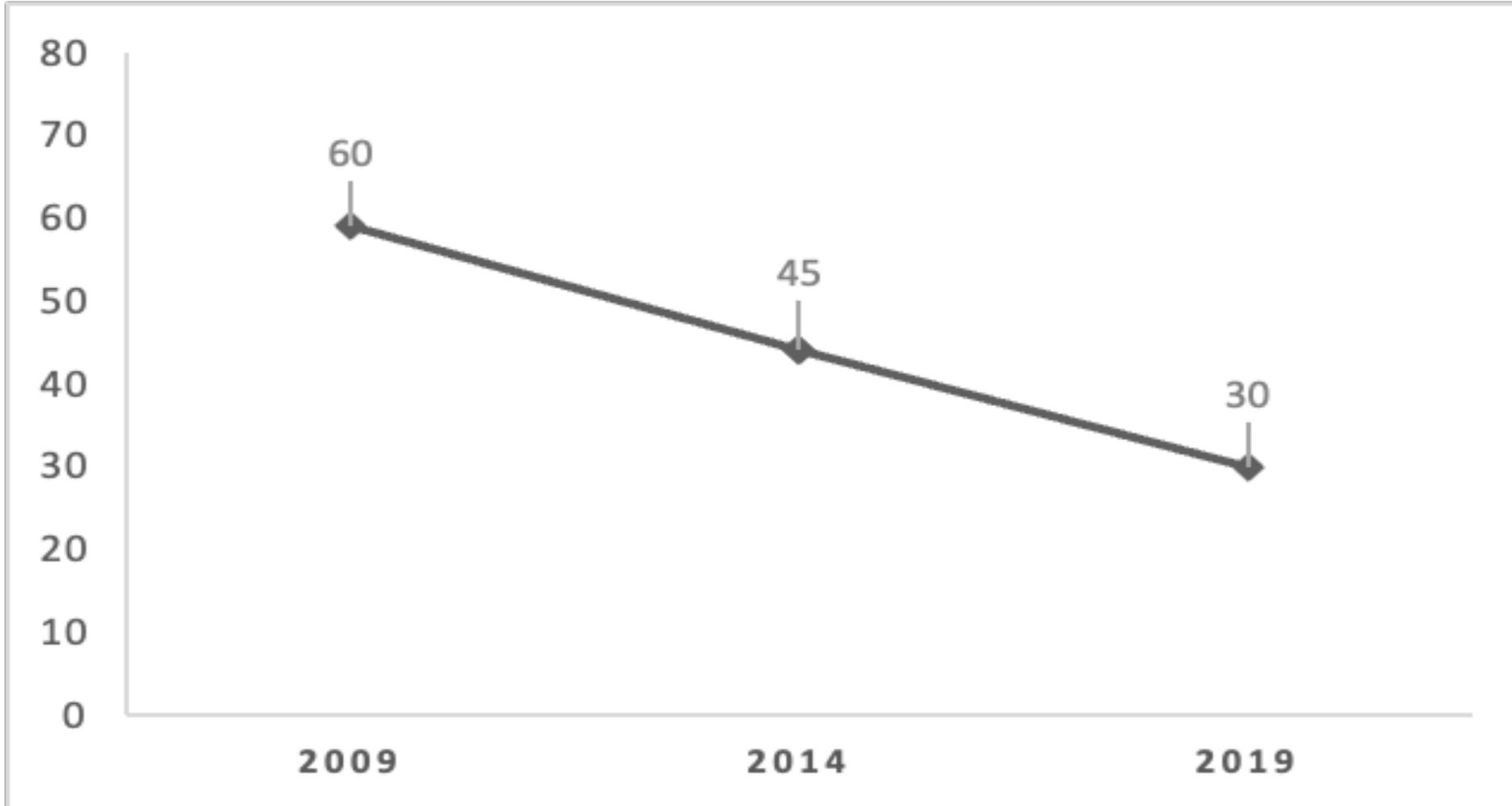
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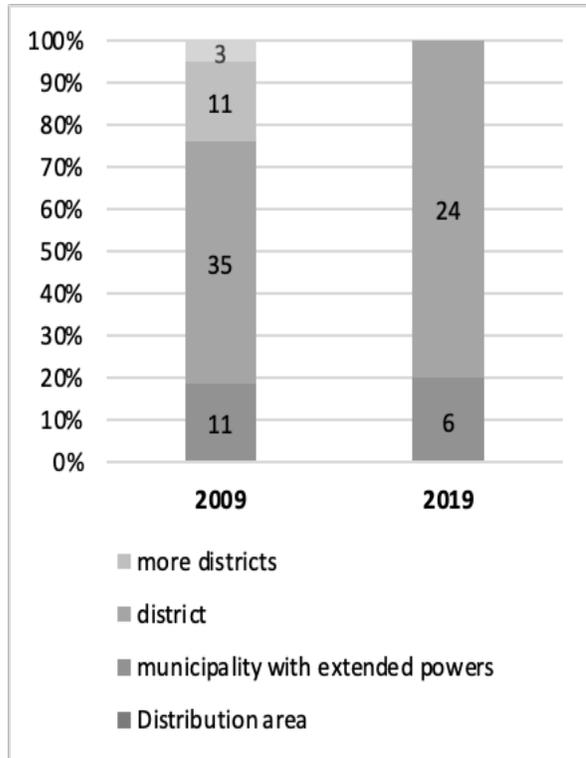
# Methods and context

- surveys in all local newspapers in 2009, 2014, 2019, (2024)
- ethnographic study: in-depth interviews (33), participant observations (2) during 2019/2020 and in 2024
- **local newspaper**: covers a district; located in a district town or the second largest town in the district (approx. population 10–25 thousand); weekly; circulation 1,500–6,000 per issue
- in 2019: total printed copies of the 30 titles estimated at 190,000/week
- gradual reduction of distinctive features: distribution area, periodicity, scope, variability of content + size of the teams ([Lokálník/Localmedia](#))
- on the other hand, growing coverage of local news online was not visible only until recently

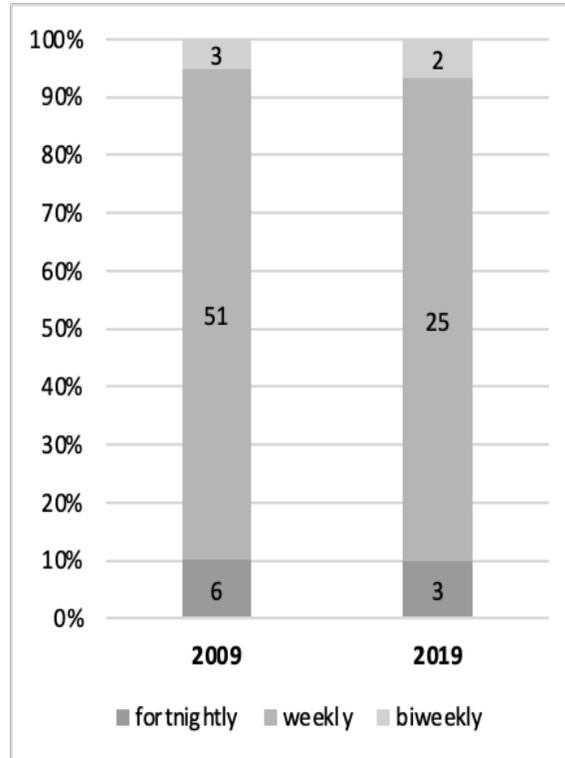
# Number of local newspapers in Czechia



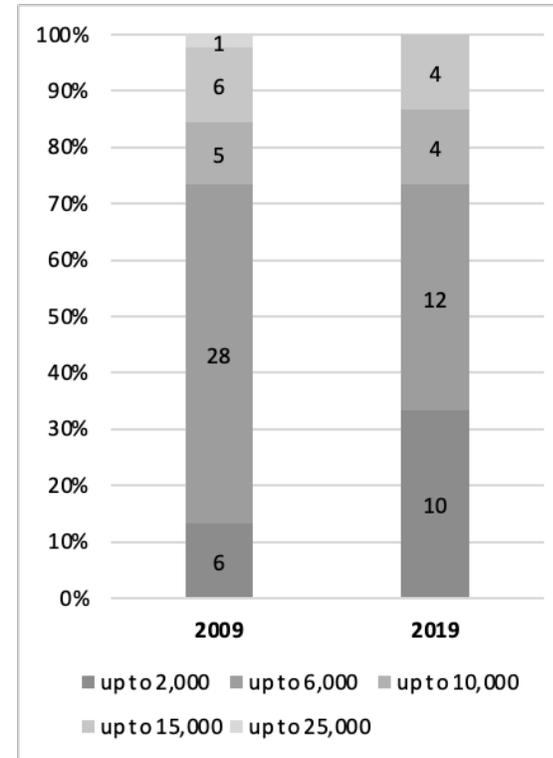
# Characteristics of local newspapers in Czechia



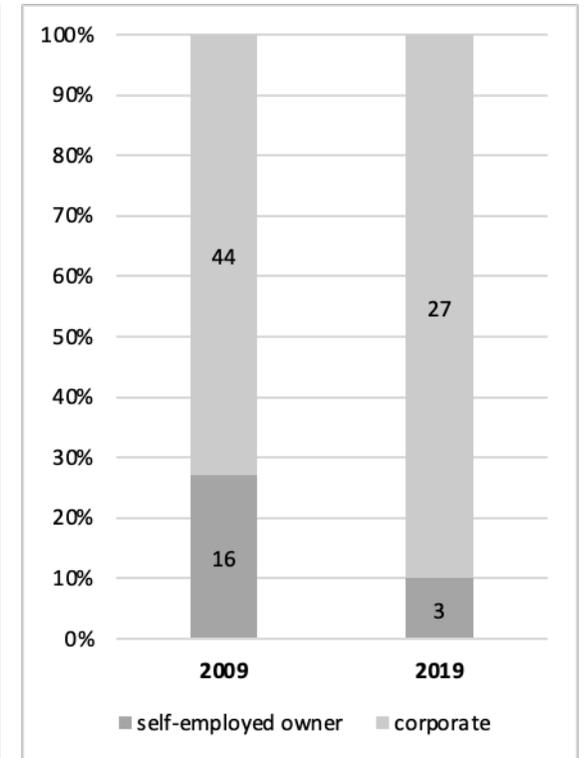
Distribution area



Periodicity



Copies sold per issue



Type of ownership

# 1. Unrealistic expectations

assumptions of:

- strong relationship between local audience and local media/journalists
- community building potential of local media
- inevitability of the digital transition of local print media

in the Czech reality different situation:

- local audiences underestimate local journalists and do not reflect the relevance of local media + local journalists don't know/meet their audience (Waschková Císařová, 2023c)
- it implies a limited community building potential of local newspapers (Waschková Císařová, 2023c)
- muted digital transition and the perception of an online outlet as competition to the print edition (Waschková Císařová, 2023a)



## 2. Invisibility of real problems

real problems of local newspapers mostly invisible, marginalized and abused from a national perspective:

- disintegration of the local publishing infrastructure (ancillary organisations) inevitable for local newspapers' survival (Waschková Císařová, 2023b)
- problems of the local entrepreneurship, journalist-entrepreneurs and their succession (Waschková Císařová, 2022)
- precarious working conditions, burn-out and related growing passivity (Waschková Císařová, 2023a; 2021)
- unwillingness to cooperate (Waschková Císařová, 2023b)

# 3. Ten points of inspiration

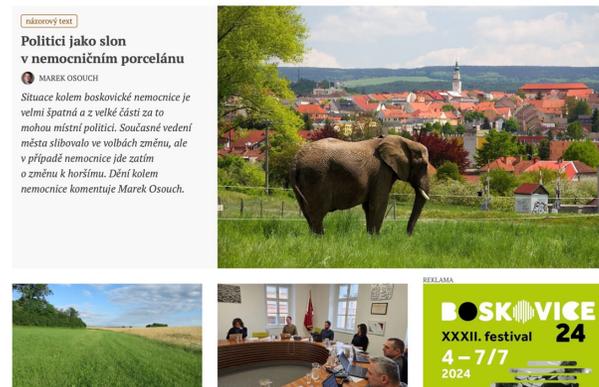
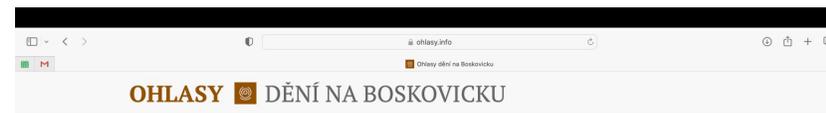
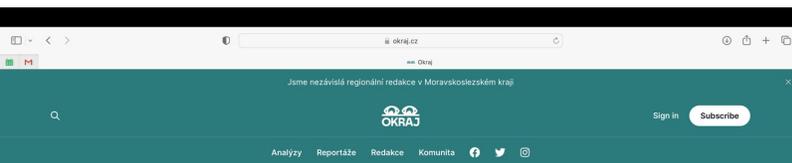
- 1. PLACE:** local journalist as a long-term active member of the local community
  - a. knowledge of and contact with the audience
  - b. cooperation with local partners (print, distribution, sales, advertising, donations, competitions), visibility in the locality
- 2. TIME:** longevity and tradition of building relationships in the locality
  - a. long-term relationship building with sources, readers, reputation building
  - b. tradition of media existence in the locality, medium being part of local rituals
- 3. CONTENT:** adherence to professional standards: topicality, topics and voices of local people, control of the powerful, topics from the field
  - a. active search for own topics, cooperation with other journalists; not succumbing to the feeling of self-importance; responsibility towards audience
  - b. not being linked to local power groups (economic or political); working on the integrity and credibility does not mean infallibility, but transparency

### 3. Ten points of inspiration

4. **ECONOMY:** key part of survival, but while maintaining the wall between the business and editorial parts of the medium
  - a. journalist part of the editorial discussion about economics, strategies, tactics and funding; while separated from the implementation by a “wall”
  - b. no need to “reinvent the wheel” or jump on current trends, rather the pros and cons of best practices; preparation of a long-term strategy, including investments for innovation and short-term tactics; medium not a generator of profit or local influence; local media working together to solve structural (economic) problems
5. **EMOTIONS:** integral part of the functioning of (mediated) communication
  - a. local journalist active, willing to put energy into the job reasonably – yes to “love for the job”, no to burnout
  - b. promoting internal diversity of voices; collaboration within the team and with others outside the newsroom, everyone's opinions carry equal weight, tactics and strategies are arrived at through discussion; new things are invented, ideas and innovation are encouraged; team works together to create good working and economic conditions for everyone

# Conclusions

- **best practices** – cooperation with the role players – Association of Regional Journalists
- grim impression of data and the killer heat of news deserts – **partial victories** in the fight against invisibility – grant opportunities (EU – LM4D, Foundation for Independent Journalism)
- **slow development** of online local media – **success stories**
- results from other research show (cf. Gulyas et al., 2023) that the findings and proposed guideline are transnationally applicable



Paparega s Hrvolem se doznávají, že nejsou fanoušci dobrých výsledků, transparentnosti a přístupu řádného hospodáře. Chovají se jako snowflakes, které se před médii a veřejností schovávají za zdmi Repre



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