



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

**Lenka Waschková Císařová  
Masaryk University, Czech Republic**



# 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



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SEA

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POLAND

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SLOVAKIA

AUSTRIA

FRANCE

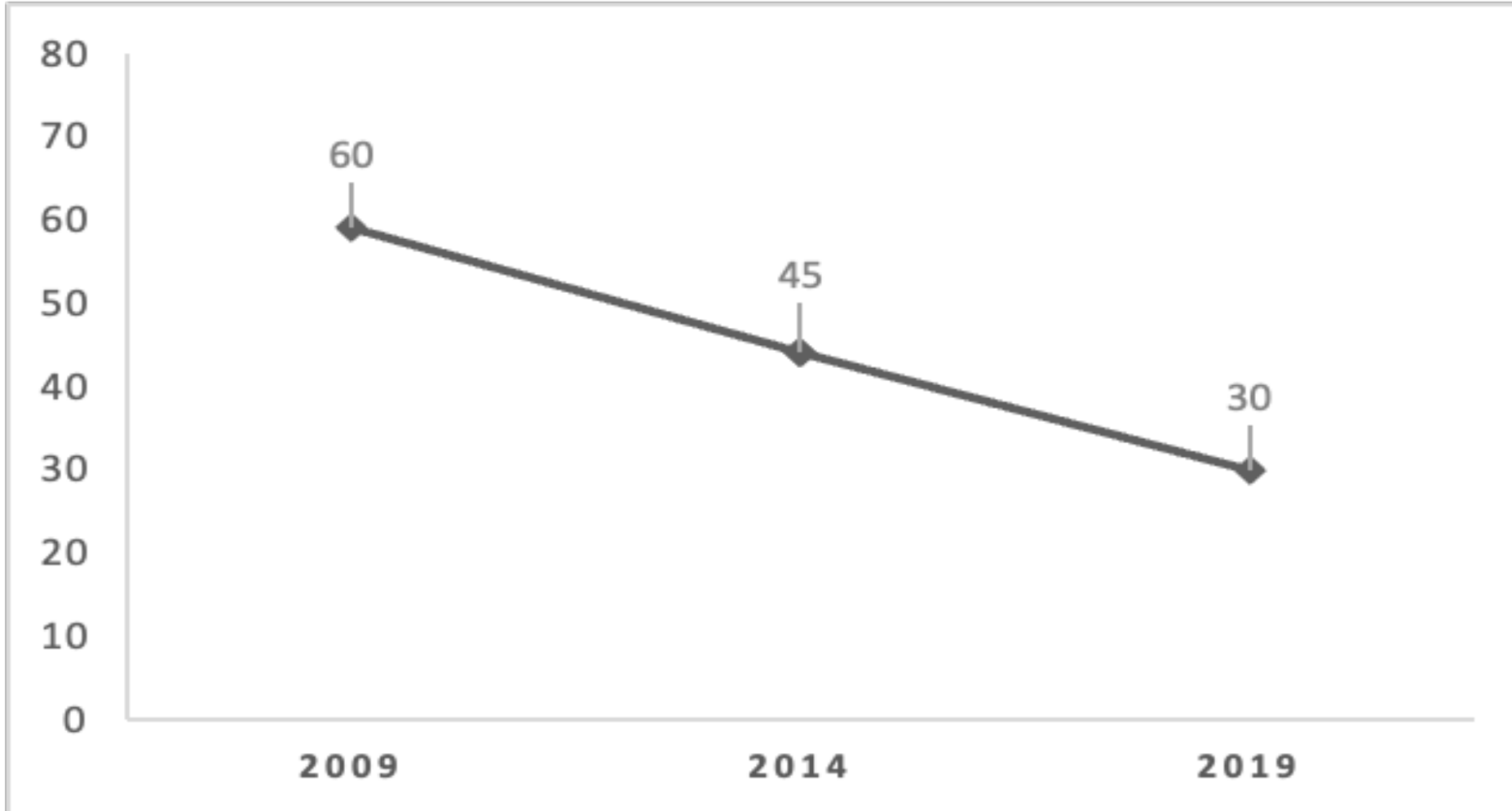
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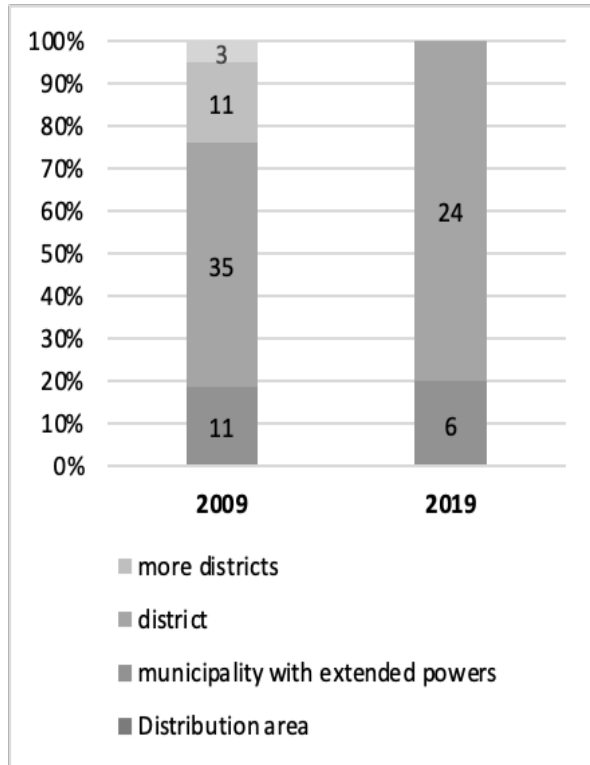
# Methods and context

- 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

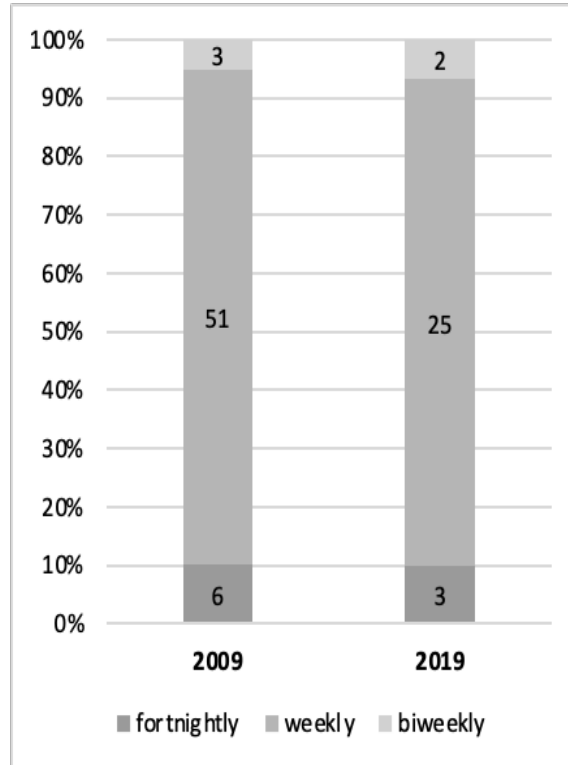
# Number of local newspapers in Czechia



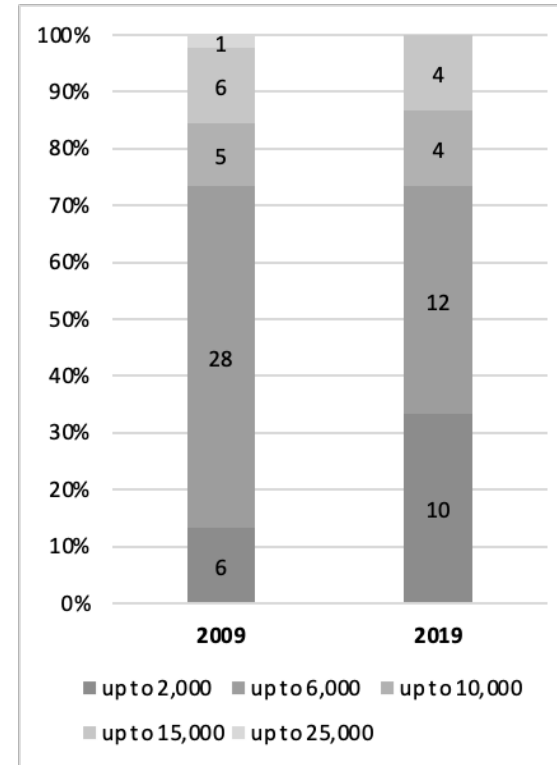
# Characteristics of local newspapers in Czechia



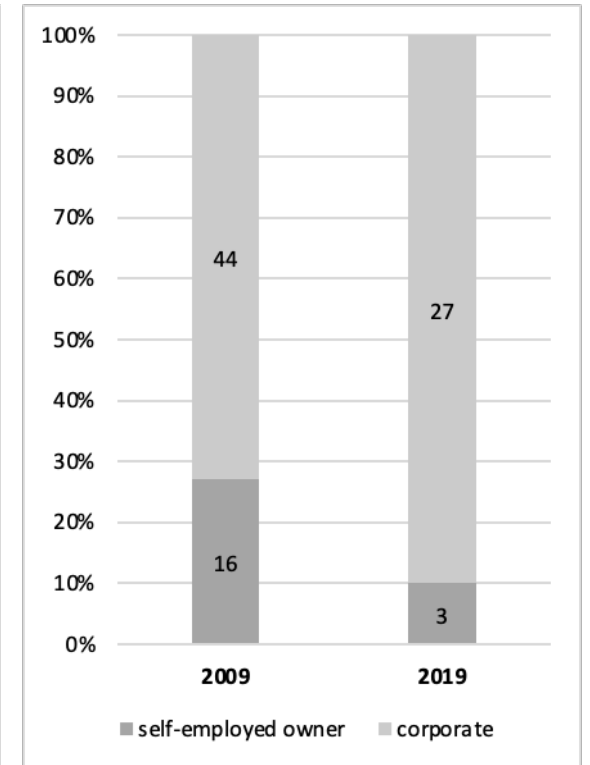
Distribution area



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

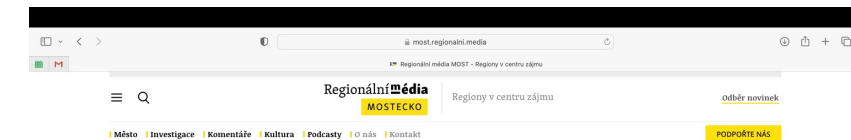
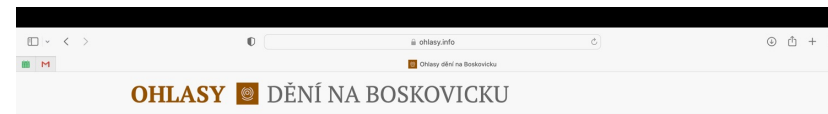
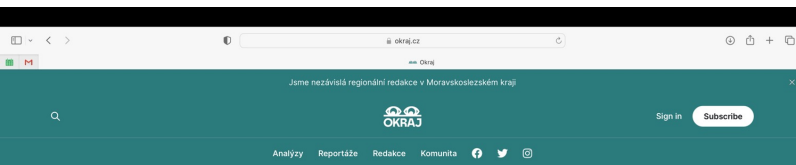
- 1. PLACE:** local journalist as a long-term active member of the local community
  - a. knowledge of and contact with the audience
  - b. cooperation with local partners (print, distribution, sales, advertising, donations, competitions), visibility in the locality
- 2. TIME:** longevity and tradition 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



Bylo to jen divadlo? Ticho kolem ostravského „greensteelu“



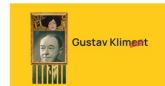
Ostrava chce po ministerstvu vnitra vyšší pokuty za rušení nočního klidu



REPORTÁŽE  
NASA volá Břidličnou. Žáci zkoumali znečištění potoka a uspěli v mezinárodní konkurenci



Hluk v Ostravě. Image je mnohdy pro město víc než spánek místních



Hříčka jako zápas s minulostí: Gymnázium chce změnit jméno ulice z Klimenta na Klimta



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