

Chapter 7

Experience with Managerial and Political Reform Measures at the Local Level in Slovakia: Intended and Unintended Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is focused on the Slovak experience with decentralization and relating political and managerial innovations. A main goal is to analyze both managerial and political innovations which have been implemented since 1990, when a democratic local government system with directly elected local government bodies was renewed. An additional aim is to show not only intended outcomes but also the outcomes which can be described as unintended. Main attention is especially paid to inter-municipal cooperation, performance budgeting, participatory budgeting, direct elections of mayors, local referenda, etc. However, attention is paid also to those innovations which have never been implemented in Slovakia, e.g. gender quotas or territorial consolidation (amalgamation).

INTRODUCTION

Generally, over the past twenty-five years, most countries around the world have undergone significant processes of decentralization (Selee & Tulchin, 2004: 295). Videlicet, as it is stressed by Manor (1999), most of the countries in the world, regardless of their political systems, geographical locations, histories, levels of economic development and cultural traditions, are now experimenting with some forms of regional and local governance. For better understanding, it is possible to point out, as stated by Crook and Manor (2000), that approximately 80% of all countries have implemented some decentralization forms since the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s. Oxhorn (2004) characterized decentralization as one of the most striking, but probably least noticed present political trends. According to Kevenhörster (1986), decentralization necessity results from the following reasons:

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1. Decentralization acts against overcharge of a central government and makes such an exercise of administrative tasks possible and as an impact from this exercise it focuses on the right target groups;
2. Decentralization raises sensitivity of the state towards the citizens' needs, makes flexible adaptation to variable problem situations possible, and makes some administrative units (such as central tax offices or central control apparatus) redundant;
3. Decentralized state apparatus enables a fast creation of free and democratic value concept corresponding to both a plural structure of political opinions formulation and interest articulation in society.

Implementation of decentralization was not any final destination and the democratic countries continue in introducing various reform measures (some authors tend to call them “innovations”). Recently this phenomenon has attracted huge research attention, especially in so called “Western democracies” (e.g. Kersting & Vetter, 2003; Loughlin et al., 2011; Schaap et al., 2010; Schiller, 2011; Wollmann, 2012).

Central and Eastern European countries entered a sphere of the Soviet Union's political interest immediately after the World War II and more or less successfully implemented the strictly centralized political systems according to the “Soviet model”. After a collapse of those political systems at the end of the 1980s or in the early 1990s, the Post-Communist countries faced a necessity to constitute new political systems. Simultaneously with these processes, the decentralization period began in these countries. It may lead us to the assumption that decentralization policies in the Post-Communist European countries in this period were historically, as well as politically, very much alike. Despite the logic of this assumption, their deeper analysis confirms that the Post-Communist European countries have introduced various polities, including local government systems, into action and, with reference to the present time, there are significant differences in the field of local government systems in European countries, i.e. not only between the Western European countries and the Post-Communist countries (e.g. Mouritzen & Svava, 2002, Heinelt & Hlepas, 2006), but also between the countries within any of these two numerous groups (e.g. Hesse & Sharpe, 1991; Klimovský et al., 2014; Page & Goldsmith, 1987; Swianiewicz, 2014). As stated by Swianiewicz (2014), Slovakia, alongside with Poland and Hungary, is a member of the group of so called “champions of decentralization”. However, a present state of the degree of decentralization in Slovakia is a result of turbulent development since 1990, and it has been heavily influenced by various reform measures which, at least theoretically, could lead to higher economic efficiency and/or higher quality of local democracy. Therefore, the main focus of this chapter is to answer the following research question: “What reforms/reform measures have been implemented at the local level in Slovakia since 1990, and what outcomes have been achieved thanks to them?” Taking into account the same jurisdiction of differently sized local governments as well as a high degree of fragmentation at the local level, we may assume that outcomes of the introduced reforms have varied a lot.

To sum up, this chapter is focused on the Slovak experience with decentralization and relating political and managerial reforms. The main goal is to analyze both managerial and political reform measures which have been implemented since 1990, and to show not only intended outcomes but also the unintended ones. For a better illustration of these outcomes and their visibility, data from various official statistical databases are used.

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