

TERRITORIAL STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC, THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND THE HUNGARIAN REPUBLIC – A COMPARATIVE VIEW

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Territorial structure of local government in the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic and the Hungarian Republic – a comparative view.

The paper analyses the territorial structure of local government, its quantitative, qualitative and time-spatial changes in three Central European countries: the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic and the Hungarian Republic. The paper introduces the size structure of communities, their distribution over territory and defines the cities in the administrative structure. It also aims to examine the fragmentation phenomenon typical for the countries and seeks solutions for consolidation of the local level of government. The territorial arrangement of local governments and rescaling of powers have an impact on administrative efficiency. The paper, in a comparative way, offers the view into the inner territorial structure and sets the role of local governments since the middle of the 20th century.

Key words: Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Hungarian Republic, size structure of municipalities, fragmentation, intermunicipal cooperation, Central and East Europe (CEE)

INTRODUCTION

A country's territorial structure of local governments is considered an interdisciplinary research topic emphasising the relevant features of the particular scientific discipline, which defines it (economic, sociological, geographical, administrative aspects of territorial structure of local governments can be widely considered). Geography traditionally contributes to such research in its time-spatial complexity. Geographers' attention is mainly drawn to the spatial and temporal dimensions of the administrative systems representing the territorial structure of municipalities living in the territory of a country. The arrangement of the territorial structure of local government became more vivid and articulated after the decentralization and foundation of local and regional governance in the region of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The transfer of responsibilities through the devolution process has prompted many local government bodies to consider restructuring.

The paper focuses, in a descriptive way, on the territorial structure of local government in the *Slovak Republic*, *Czech Republic* and *Hungarian Republic* and the quantitative and qualitative changes during the 20th century in a comparative survey. It discusses the current social, economic and political aspects of local government reform, which directly reflects the territorial structure of a country. From the territorial point of view, the paper will examine the regions where a high number of small municipalities are concentrated. Governments seek solutions to the fragmentation phenomenon, one of the major barriers for

the decentralization and effective functioning of the system of local government (Swianiewicz 2010).

The paper aims to:

- analyse the territorial structure of local government in each country,
- discuss the role of cities and capitals in the administrative structure,
- address the issue of fragmentation of administrative structure at the local level,
- map the regions under the most pronounced territorial fragmentation and approaches of governments to the fragmentation problem (heated debates sparked on the ways to solve it with the new powers being transferred to the local bodies).

The topic of fragmentation in the ECE countries is hot both for the academics and practitioners of different scientific disciplines. An overview of the theoretical discussion, as well as some of the empirical studies presented in the context of Central and Eastern Europe can be found in Swianiewicz (2002) and Jordan (2010). The latest comprehensive release by Swianiewicz (2010) offers a huge account of information on the territorial cohesion in many European countries. The country-profiled papers are also necessary in such research. In the Slovak Republic, the territorial changes in the settlement structure are presented by Slavík (1998a) and Slavík et al. (2005b); rural areas are investigated by Zubriczký (1999 and 2004) and Spišiak (2005). The question of local government reform and delimitation of nodal regions of intermunicipal cooperation is introduced in Slavík et al. (2005a), Lovacká (2009a,b), Buček (2008), and Slavík et al. (2010). The quest for the optimal size of a municipality in the Slovak Republic in comparison to other European countries can be found in Klimovský (2009 and 2010). In the Czech Republic, accounts by Perlín (2006a and 2006b), Illner (2008 and 2010) and Vajdová et al. (2006) illuminated the situation in the country both from the geographical and sociological points of view. Halás et al. (2010) presented the delimitation of micro-regions in the Czech Republic by nodal regions. In the Hungarian Republic, Bajmóci and Hegedűs (2008), Hajdu (2008) and Pfeil (1999 and 2010) examine the public administration reform and intermunicipal cooperation in their papers. The statistics used in this paper have been taken from the official websites of the statistical offices of particular countries.

TERRITORIAL STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC, CZECH REPUBLIC AND HUNGARIAN REPUBLIC

Lots of political and socio-economic changes influenced the administrative systems in the countries of Central Europe in the 20th century. 1989 was the year of the political breakthrough. Before 1989, most decisions and resources came from the central government during the Socialist Era. Vertical links were highly developed whereas the horizontal cooperation among municipalities was not high on the agenda. The most intensive factor to influence the administrative structure was the process of industrial urbanization that moved population out of the rural areas to the towns and cities. The network of municipalities was

restructured according to a central place-based settlement system coming from a hierarchical and subordinated structure of municipalities.

The decision making and investments in them were under the state control. In the quantitative sense, a radical drop of local government units mainly in the 1960s and 1970s happened at the stroke of a pen due to the involuntary merging into larger administrative municipalities.

After 1989, the transitional policies were aimed at the re-establishment of local self-government accompanied by a process of territorial reorganization. It resulted in the re-establishment of the merged local self-governing units that was generally understood as a natural need for local democracy.

In 1950, there were 3 344 local administrative units in *the Slovak Republic* while in 1989 their number dropped to the lowest (2 694) ever registered in the modern history. The process of disintegration came to the fore after 1990. The local government institutional framework is based on the Law No 369/1990 Coll. on Community adopted after the autonomous Slovak Republic was established. It was a manifestation of democracy of the society and as well as the reaction to unreasonable integration (Slavík 1998b). There were 242 newly re-established municipalities. Currently, the basic administrative unit in the Slovak Republic is called the “*obec*”. One can distinguish the rural municipality (*vidiecka obec*), implying a rural character of municipalities and the urban municipality (*mesto*) implying an urban character of municipalities. In 2009, there are altogether 2 891 local administrative units 138 of which are awarded the status of a town or city. The smallest municipalities (extreme examples of fragmentation) are Havranec (11 inhab.), Příkra (12 inhab.) and Rohožník (district of Humenné) (13 inhab.) in the northeast of the Slovak Republic. The detailed size structure of municipalities is given in Tab. 1 and Fig. 1. To prevent further fragmentation legally, the Law on Municipalities amended in 2002 defines the threshold for a municipalities to be established at 3 000 inhabitants.

Tab. 1. Size structure of municipalities in the Slovak Republic in 2007

Size category	No of LAU (abs.)	No of LAU (%)	No of inhab. (abs.)	No of inhab. (%)
0 - 199	382	13.21	47 119	0.87
200 - 499	791	27.36	272 335	5.05
500 - 999	769	26.60	544 261	10.10
1 000 - 1 999	559	19.34	783 756	14.54
2 000 - 4 999	263	9.10	772 346	14.33
5 000 - 9 999	55	1.90	381 901	7.09
10 000 - 19 999	32	1.11	451 621	8.38
20 000 - 49 999	29	1.00	840 604	15.60
50 000 - 99 999	9	0.31	634 904	11.78
100 000 - more	2	0.07	660 330	12.25
Total	2 891	100.0	5 389 180	100.0

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Slovak regions (2007)

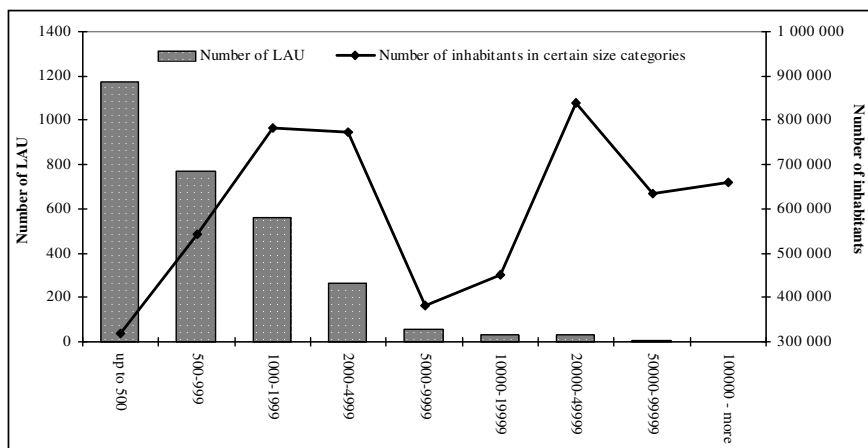


Fig. 1. Size structure of municipalities in the Slovak Republic in 2007

Source: based on Tab. 1

The size category of municipalities to compare the level of fragmentation is generally stated to be the ones with less than 1 000 inhabitants. As Tab. 1 implies, more than 67% of municipalities have less than 1 000 inhabitants although only 16% of the population lives in them. More than a tenth of the population lives in the two largest cities with more than 100 000 inhabitants – Bratislava and Košice.

In the *Czech Republic*, involuntary annexations radically changed the territorial structure of local government. In 1950, there were 11 459 municipalities in the Czech Republic. Almost 20% of all municipalities existing in the 1960's were administratively merged with their larger neighbours (Illner 2008). Between 1950 and 1989 the number of municipalities was reduced by as much as 50%. The process of disintegration was like an avalanche until the end of 1995. New municipalities (2 168) came into existence, having been separated from 1 032 municipalities (Illner 2008). Nowadays, administration at the local level is dense, consisting of a large number of villages, and small towns and few middle-size and large cities. The Municipality Act (last amended in 2006) defines the *obec* (municipality) as a municipality (a settlement or group of settlements) with a local authority. The Czech Republic has the highest number of local administrative units within the studied region – in 2009 there were as many as 6 248 local administrative units. The smallest municipality awarded the status of a town is Přebuz with 74 inhabitants (2009). The smallest municipality is Vlkov with 18 inhabitants (2009). A new municipality can be established if it has at least 1 000 inhabitants (Act on Municipality No. 128/2000 Coll.). Extreme territorial fragmentation is considered to be one of the most relevant obstacles to improving the effectiveness of local government in the Czech Republic (Illner, in Swianiewicz 2010). Despite many social and political changes throughout history, the fragmented network of municipalities has survived (Perlin 2006b). Its structure and population are given in Tab. 2 and Fig. 2.

Tab. 2. Size structure of municipalities in the Czech Republic (2007)

Size category	No of LAU (abs.)	No of LAU (%)	No of inhab. (abs.)	No of inhab. (%)
0 - 199	1 614	25.8	197 865	1.9
200 - 499	2 016	32.3	655 165	6.4
500 - 999	1 302	20.8	910 087	8.9
1 000 - 1 999	671	10.7	929 167	9.1
2 000 - 4 999	376	6.0	1 139 318	11.1
5 000 - 9 999	138	2.2	939 382	9.2
10 000 - 19 999	68	1.1	954 239	9.3
20 000 - 49 999	41	0.7	1 197 676	11.7
50 000 - 99 999	17	0.3	1 206 595	11.7
100 000 - more	5	0.1	2 129 888	20.7
Total	6 248	100.0	10 259 382	100.0

Source: web page of the Czech Statistical Office, www.czso.cz

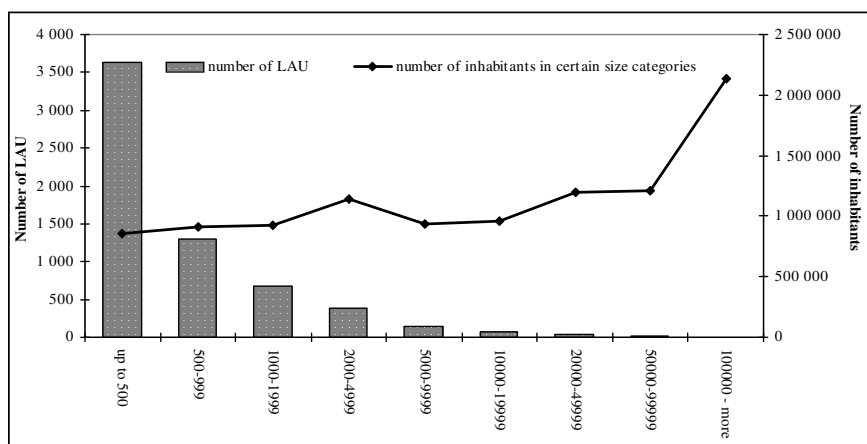


Fig. 2. Size structure of municipalities in the Czech Republic in 2007

Source: based on Tab. 2

The Czech Republic usually ranks the first among European countries in the share of small (up to 1 000 inhabitants) municipalities accounting for 78.9% (Tab. 2). Only 17.2% of the population lives in this category. A fifth of the Czech population lives in the cities with more than 100 thousands of inhabitants. There are at least four more cities approaching that threshold.

Up to 1990, the council system operated in the *Hungarian Republic*. Municipalities were then grouped into approximately 1 300 councils and the county level – the middle tier – was a powerful level since it was represented in the central government's planning committees and the counties had the authorization to distribute their revenues to the local level (Teller 2004). In 1990, the Law on Local Government (Évi LXV. törvény a helyi önkormányzatokról) was

approved. A new system of local democracy was established based upon the principles of the Hungarian tradition and the European Charter of Local Self-Government. By 1990, the number of local governments increased to 3 154 (1999) from 1 523 as a political reaction to the forced annexation policy of the 1970s. The territory of the Hungarian Republic is partitioned into counties at the regional level and cities and municipalities at the local level. There were 3 152 local administrative units in Hungary in 2009. The size categories and the population share are presented in Tab. 3 and Fig. 3. According to Pfeil (in Swianiewicz 2010), the relevant legislation set the population threshold for the establishment of an independent local authority at 300. As a result, the number of local authorities in Hungary is ever increasing.

Tab. 3. Size structure of municipalities in the Hungarian Republic (January 2008)

Size category	No of LAU (abs.)	No of LAU (%)	No of inhab. (abs.)	No of inhab. (%)
up to 499	1 062	33.7	281 425	2.8
500 - 999	674	21.4	486 440	4.8
1 000 - 1 999	640	20.3	921 012	9.2
2 000 - 4 900	496	15.7	1 484 595	14.8
5 000 - 9 999	138	4.4	960 713	9.6
10 000 - 49 999	122	3.9	2 342 470	23.3
50 000 - 99 999	11	0.3	708 813	7.1
10 000 and more	9	0.3	2 859 933	28.5
Total	3 152	100	10 045 401	100

Source: Bajmóci and Hegedus (2008); Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2008)

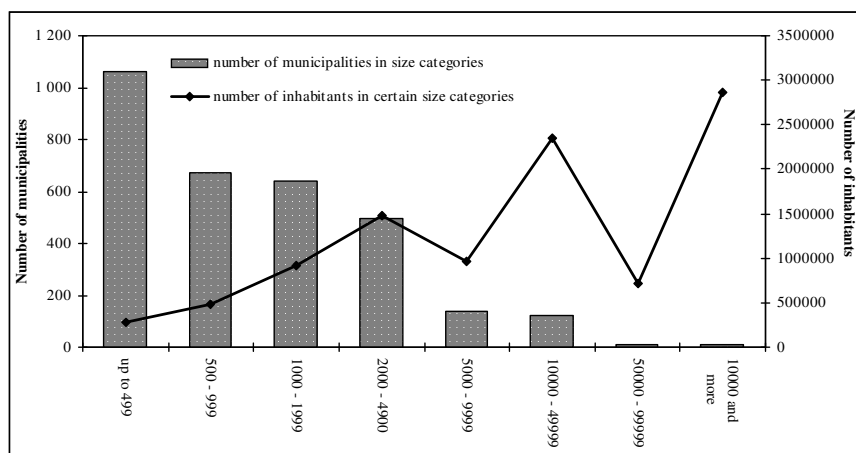


Fig. 3. Size structure of municipalities in the Hungarian Republic (2008)

Source: based on Tab. 3

Table 3 shows that there are 55.1% of municipalities in the category below 1 000 inhabitants. The category of 100 thousand and more is represented by 9 cities including the capital of Budapest.

DEFINING A TOWN/CITY IN THE STUDIED COUNTRIES

At the end of the Second World War before the socialist regime, the proportion of the population living in the city-like areas was rather lower than nowadays in the studied countries. The term city was closely linked to urbanization understood as a process of an increasing percentage of people living in cities and urban municipalities due to migration flows. A city became an economic and social scene, whereas the rural municipalities had agricultural and residential functions. In the post-socialist period the cities had to face the transformation processes. The closer they were located to the growth poles (the capital or other large cities) the easier they coped with the transformation processes and adaptation to the new economic climate.

The definition of a town/city varies in the studied countries. The population criterion is not crucial, and the administrative criteria prevail. Other criteria including administrative function, public utilities (schools, hospitals, employment services), population density and architecture respected as well. The threshold population for a town in the Slovak Republic stands at 5 000 inhabitants, in the Hungarian Republic it was 10 000 inhabitants in the past, nowadays it is not clearly stated. In the Czech Republic the threshold for a town is 3 000 inhabitants.

The statuses of a town or city were usually granted by the political representatives. Either they are the statutory cities (24), the towns with an established council or market towns („*městys*“) in the Czech Republic. The market towns are mainly historical towns, awarded the status before 1954 and according to Law 234/2006 Coll. allowed to reuse the status after 1990. This makes the Czech Republic vague in understanding the rate of urbanization since altogether there are 590 cities and towns, many of which have less than 100 inhabitants (Přebuz 74 inhab. Or Loučná nad Klínovcem 90 inhab. in 2009).

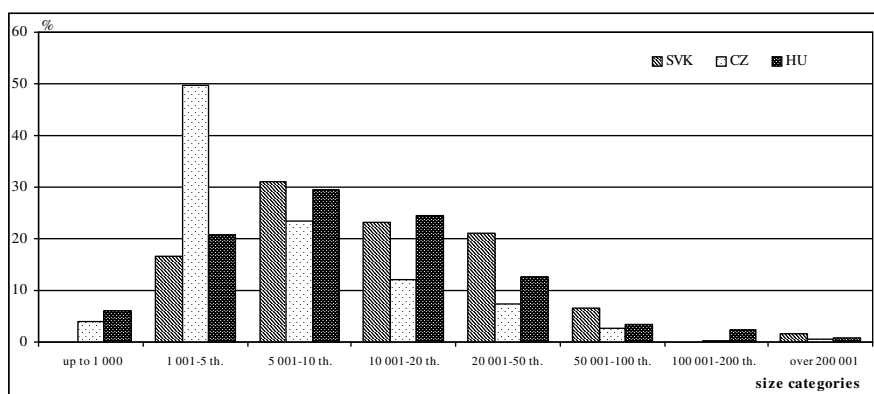
There is no population figure in the Hungarian Republic case. Regardless of the population figures, there are “towns” small in population and functions in all countries; for illustration (Pálháza 1 038, Óriszentpéter 1 187, Igal 1 290, Zalakaros 1 808, Pacsa 1 816, Visegrád 1 864 inhab. in 2009). The least populous towns in the Slovak Republic are for example Dudince (1 512 inhab.) and Modrý Kameň (1 563 inhab. in 2009).

The surge of the urbanization rate was accompanied by a strong industrialization mainly in the Slovak Republic. While in the middle of the 20th century the studied countries did not reach even 40% of people living in the cities (except for the Czech Republic with 41%), at the end of the century all countries substantially exceeded that indicator. The rate of urbanization at the end of the 20th century exceeded 60% (except in the Slovak Republic). Between 1950 and 1990 there had been a more than 30% surge of the urbanization rate in the Slovak and Czech Republics, and almost 25% in Hungary (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4. The share of inhabitants in urban and rural municipalities in the Slovak, Czech and Hungarian Republics

	1980	1990 ¹⁾	1996 ²⁾	2001	2004 ³⁾	2007 ⁴⁾
<i>Czechia</i>	10 291 927	10 364 124	10 321 344	10 230 060	10 220 577	10 323 000
Urban (%)	60.5	74.8	73	72.6	71.6	71.4
Rural (%)	39.5	25.2	27	27.4	28.4	29.2
<i>Slovakia</i>	4 991 168	5 271 711	5 367 790	5 378 951	5 384 822	5 393 637
Urban (%)	44.2	56.1	55.7	56	55.5	55.3
Rural (%)	55.8	43.9	44.3	44	44.5	44.7
<i>Hungary</i>	10 711 000	10 373 153	10 321 229	10 198 315	10 090 330	10 066 158
Urban (%)	63.6	64.1	*	65.2	66	64.6
Rural (%)	36.4	35.9	*	34.8	34	35.4

* N/A. 1) data of 1990 or 1991. 2) data of 1996 or 1998. 3) data of 2004 or 2005. 4) data of 2007 or 2008;
 Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Czech Statistical Office. Hungarian Central Statistical Office.
www.citypopulation.de

**Fig. 4. Size categories of towns/cities in the Slovak Republic, Czech Republic and Hungarian Republic in 2007**

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Czech Statistical Office, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, www.citypopulation.de

To compare the rate of urbanization is therefore questionable due to several reasons. The rate of urbanization does not express the real urbanisation and may cause confusion in defining what urban means because of arbitrarily awarded statutes. Provided the population threshold was 5 000 inhabitants for the purpose of our calculations, the rate of urbanization stands at 53.7% in the Slovak Republic, 63.2% in the Czech Republic, and 66.4% in the Hungarian Republic.

Within the urban municipalities of the studied countries, the most frequent size categories of towns are the lower ones (Fig. 4). In the Czech Republic the

most frequent category up to 5 000 inhabitants encompasses 50% of the total number. In the Slovak Republic the most frequent category, including 31% of all towns and cities is from 5 000 to 10 000 inhabitants. A similar situation can be found in the Hungarian Republic (30.2%). Size categories in all countries are presented in Fig. 4. Fig. 5 depicts the share of inhabitants living in certain categories. The highest shares are registered in the highest categories, namely more than 200 000 inhabitants. As many as 27.7% people in the Hungarian Republic and 25.6% in the Czech Republic live there. As shown in Fig. 5, in the Slovak Republic most urban people (28 %) live in the category from 20- to 50- thousand inhabitants.

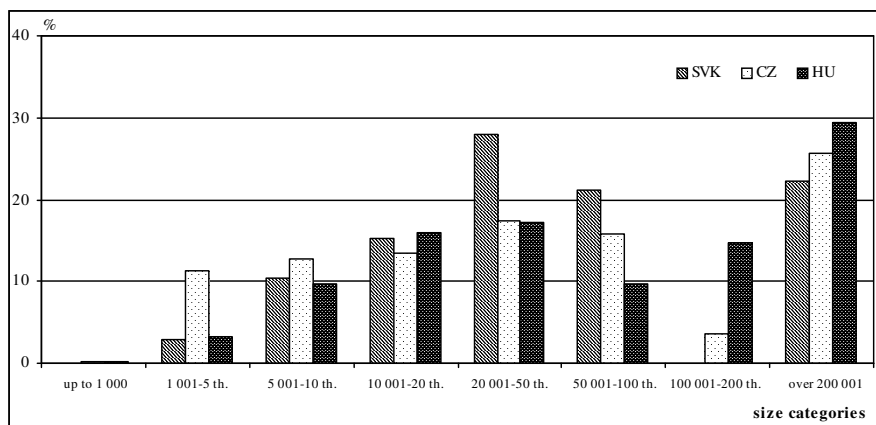


Fig. 5. The share of urban population in size categories in the Slovak Republic, Czech Republic and Hungarian Republic in 2007

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Czech Statistical Office, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, www.citypopulation.de

The post socialist period in Central Europe has hindered the rise of population flows to urban municipalities. The development of the urban population rate stagnated or in many cases regressed. The situation has been caused by changes in the social, political and economic spheres, living conditions, demographic behaviour and changed migration streams from urban areas to rural municipalities. The most striking regression took place in the Czech Republic (-3.4%).

The Slovak Republic fell by not more than one per cent. The Hungarian Republic is the exception due to the rising number of cities in the country. Between 1990 and 2009 the number of towns and cities increased from 166 to 328, and the urbanization rate increased accordingly (from 61.8% to 69.4%), even though the newly established towns and cities do not fulfil the roles. Urbanization calculated in 2010 with those 166 towns and cities shows 58% of population living in urban areas.

Some heavy drops in population can be observed in many cities with more than 100 thousand inhabitants, partly in the capitals. The capitals are more or less stabilized, with especially Prague and Bratislava demonstrating a steady increase. Budapest as the largest of all the studied capitals decreased in population by al-

most 300 thousands (Fig. 6). Apart from these, a dramatic decrease in 2001-2007 is observable in the Hungarian city of Miskolc (0.93).

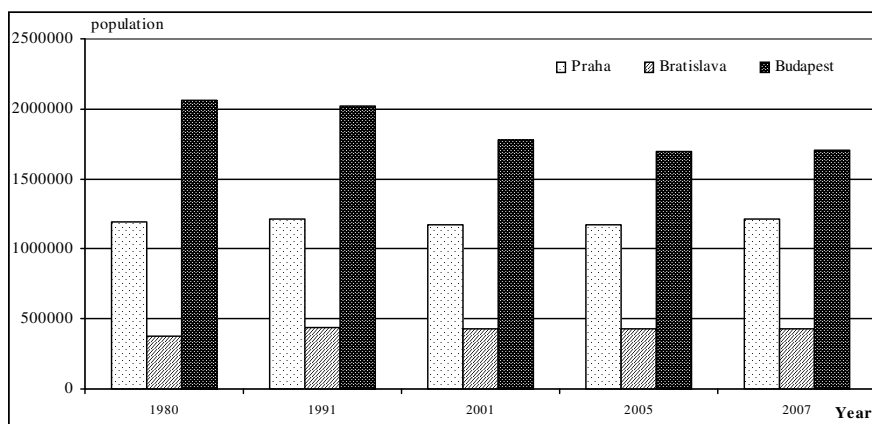


Fig. 6. Population of the Capitals from 1980 to 2007 in the Slovak Republic, Czech Republic and Hungarian Republic

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Czech Statistical Office, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, www.citypopulation.de

The processes of suburbanization caused the regression tendencies in urban areas. This process changes the migration behaviour of the population; people migrate back to rural areas, mainly in the proximity of cities. Urban peripheries are growing much faster than the city centres) that are overcoming the problem of population decrease. The most intense suburbanization can be observed in the hinterland of large cities. It seems that the spatial patterns of urban areas in the post socialist countries are transforming thanks not only to suburbanization but also to the demographic change (predominantly regression in natality) as a reflection of the political-social changes and patterns of the West European countries.

REGIONS OF CONCENTRATED FRAGMENTATION

It is difficult to answer the question, why is the settlement structure so fragmented in these countries as there are more aspects to consider. When posing a question what does, in general, influence the development of the settlement structure, the following aspects have to be contemplated:

- *Natural (physical-geographical)* conditions of the landscape with effects on the territorial distribution of the settlements – this is a rather stable aspect.
- *Historical* – formation of the medieval towns along the historical routes, serving of plenty functions to the inhabitants – stable at that time.
- *Governmental decisions* – the second half of the 20th century. The socialist period tended to integrate the local government whereas after 1989 the disintegration process commenced – now stable, but changing in recent history.

The most fragmented regions in the studied countries are listed in Tab. 5 and illustrated in Fig. 7.

The south of the central and east part of the Slovak Republic, the west of the Hungarian Republic and the central part of the Czech Republic cover areas of concentrated territorial fragmentation.

Tab. 5. Regional overview of most fragmented regions in the Slovak Republic, Czech Republic and Hungarian Republic (by authors)

Share of small mun. in %	No	Slovakia (8 regions)	No	Czechia (13 regions)	No	Hungary (19 regions)
Up to 50	1	Bratislavský	0	–	10	Pest, Fejér, Komárom-Esztergom, Hajdú-Bihar, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Bács-Kiskun, Békés, Csongrád, Heves, Szabolcz-Szatmár-Bereg
51 - 60	3	Nitriansky, Trnavský, Žilinský	1	Moravskoslezský	3	Gyor-Moson-Sopron, Tolna, Nógrád
61 - 70	1	Trenčiansky	2	Karlovarský, Zlínský	1	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén
71 - 80	3	Banskobystrický, Košický, Prešovský,	4	Ustecký, Liberecký, Jihomoravský, Olomoucký	2	Veszprém, Somogy
81 and more	0	–	6	Stredočeský, Jihočeský, Plzeňský, Kralovohradecký, Pardubický, Vysočina	3	Vas, Zala, Baranya

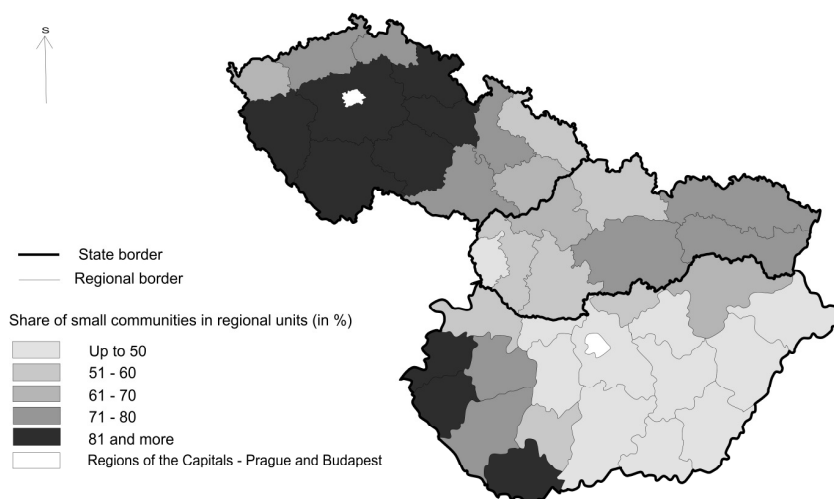


Fig. 7. Share of municipalities up to 1 000 inhabitants in the regional units of the Slovak Republic, Czech Republic and Hungarian Republic

Many rural municipalities lost their administrative autonomy and chances of developmental in the previous political regime. The reforms aimed to increase the economic and administrative efficiency of local government but also to strengthen the administrative and political control of the small municipalities commenced in the early 1990s. Inter-municipal cooperation (IMC) is considered a remedy for fragmentation. It refers to two or more neighbouring municipalities working together to perform administrative tasks, deliver public services to citizens and promote local development in a more efficient and effective way than through an isolated action. These intermunicipal institutions are created voluntarily, in the bottom-up manner.

Fragmentation in the sense of being independent but being economically ineffective caused heated debates. Generally, there are two types of solution to territorial fragmentation (Lovacká 2009a):

1. structural solutions: depending either on amalgamations or on intermediate levels of single or multi-purpose authority,
2. cooperative solutions: leaving basic local authorities with functional responsibilities exercised through forms of cooperation or buying in.

As stated in Intermunicipal co-operation, Manual of the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (Council of Europe 2008), intermunicipal cooperation can be defined as the number of local authorities in proximity to one another, which join forces to work together on developing and managing public services, amenities and infrastructure or on service delivery, to respond better to the needs of their users and with the aim of local development. Establishing associations (voluntary process) while adopting the principle of voluntary cooperation, the municipalities join with their political autonomy preserved. This alternative is preferred in France. The cooperative solutions are believed to be impulses for a swifter development of local-government and microregions. They encourage the effectiveness of public service provision, the autonomy of municipalities and help to preserve their identity.

In the Slovak Republic, one of the most frequent types of the voluntary intermunicipal cooperation is to establish the joint municipal offices (JMO) to execute the devolved powers. Despite the fact that such associations could be established since 1990, the Slovak municipalities started to cooperate in 2003 after the decentralization process was finished. In 2004, there were 194 JMOs compared to 234 existing today. Their activities mainly concentrate on the building process, communications, education, day-care, and nature protection. Another type of the voluntary intermunicipal cooperation is that of microregions with the common goals for the member municipalities. Microregions handle social issues, nature protection (mainly waste disposal and waste water cleaning), local transport, education, culture and local tourism. They are considered important as they can prepare development programmes that increase the quality of life in rural areas. Such cooperation can help further municipalization. The statistics concerning microregions are relatively demanding because they are not obliged to report about themselves. In 2004, there were 245 microregions encompassing altogether around 2 500 municipalities (though one municipality can be a member of more than one microregion) in the Slovak Republic. It is estimated that around 1 880 – i.e. 65% of all municipalities joined microregions (Ministry of Interior of the SR 2008).

Nowadays, there are generally two forms of cooperation in the Czech Republic (Perlín 2006). Many municipalities participate in public corporation (association of municipalities) with the aim of ensuring the “complex territorial development”. The municipalities often participate in one or more associations. The willingness of the rural municipalities to cooperate voluntarily is strong. They reject amalgamation of any delegation of some self-government powers to other bodies (*ibid.*). The municipalities can also further cooperate through the contractual delegation of certain powers to other units, however we speak about the state – devolved powers in this case. By a special agreement, they delegate some powers to municipalities with the “extended powers” coined in 2003. There are 205 municipalities with “extended powers” as successors of the former districts (73). There are 425 microregions in the Czech Republic, with around 4 680 municipalities which means almost 70% of all municipalities.

In the Hungarian Republic, the right of association is defined as a basic right of the municipalities by the Constitution and the Act on Local Government. The system of administrative districts was built on the historic notary districts and notary offices after 1990. The notary districts as common offices of the municipalities are usually considered to be administrative associations with general powers. Creation of the notary districts is only recommended by the Act for villages with less than 1 000 inhabitants. In 1991, out of all 3 074 municipalities, 1 548 possessed independent offices. The remaining 1 523 municipalities were integrated into 529 notary districts. A third of villages with less than 1 000 inhabitants did not join any notary district. The notary districts as organizational forms of public administration are relatively stable spatial categories among all other types of associations (Pfeil 1999). In an attempt to restructure the formerly substantial number of local government units, the Hungarian Republic has created a system of incentives for the municipalities to cooperate together in multipurpose microregional associations. A microregion can comprise 2 – 65 municipalities, as designated by the government, and the centre of a microregion is, in most cases, a town. At the end of 2006, the rate of institutionalization was 97.5 percent, since 162 (out of total 164) multipurpose associations were established (Pfeil 2010).

Hajdú (2008) states that a solution to the fragmentation is to leave representation at the level of the settlements and at the same time organize the administrative work more extensively into the notary districts in a more conscious and powerful way than at present. Moreover, it enjoys the acceptance of society (*ibid.*)

CONCLUSION

The territorial structure of local governments depends on the geographical, historical, social and political development of a country, integration or disintegration of the governmental tendencies. The region of Central Europe is traditionally characterized by a large number of scattered municipalities with small populations. All the three investigated countries – the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic and the Hungarian Republic rank among the most fragmented ones in terms of the rate of small municipalities in Europe. The question of their territorial rearrangement became highly debatable when the decentralization processes coincided with European integration.

We looked at the role of the towns/cities and capitals in the administrative structure. In the second half of the 20th century there was a dramatic surge in population living in urban areas (migration flows from rural to urban). Afterwards, the post socialist period hampered the continuing rise of urbanization due to changes in the socio-economic and political spheres. The demographic changes and the change in migration flows (from urban to rural) shaped the population figures of cities. Heavy drops in population were observed in the cities with more than 100 thousand inhabitants excluding the capitals. The capitals are more or less stabilized, with especially Prague and Bratislava showing a steady increase. Budapest as the largest of all studied capitals decreased in population by almost 300 thousand.

Many West European countries reformed the local level of government for the purpose of their economic effectiveness and an optimal size in the second half of the 20th century creating larger municipalities. However, the region of ECE affected by the consolidation from the past bears the traits of the past and any kind of integration is painful and rejected by the public. The negative experience of the forced top-down annexations in the 1970s and 1980s created an antidote against the efforts to reopen the consolidation issue after 1989. The public administration after 1990 strengthened the consciousness of autonomy in the municipalities. The right to be small is being articulated today.

The paper is supported by grant project VEGA 1/0175/09 Rozvoj mikroregionálnych rurálnych štruktúr Slovenska s podporou lokálnej a regionálnej samosprávy (Development of microregional rural structures of the Slovak Republic with support of local and regional self-governments). Principal investigator: Prof. RNDr. Peter Spišiak, PhD.

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ÚZEMNÁ ŠTRUKTÚRA MIESTNEJ SAMOSPRÁVY V SLOVENSKEJ REPUBLIKE, ČESKEJ REPUBLIKE A V MAĎARSKEJ REPUBLIKE

Zmeny vyvolané v roku 1989 hlboko zasiahli do transformácie sídelného systému krajín strednej Európy, či už v urbánnych alebo rurálnych regiónoch. V období pred rokom 1989 označovanom ako socialistická éra sa prudko rozvíjal proces urbanizácie, kým v mnohých štátoch západnej Európy sa etapa prudkej urbanizácie skončila pred niekoľkými desaťročiami. V tomto období v týchto krajinách výrazne stúpal počet obyvateľstva žijúceho v urbánnych regiónoch. Okrem toho sa značne zväčšoval aj počet veľkomiest nad 100 tisíc obyvateľov s výnimkou Slovenskej republiky. K nárastu dochádza aj v oblasti udeľovania štatútu miest, resp. jeho prinavrátenie obciam. Proces urbanizácie bol v ére socializmu sprevádzaný procesom silnej industrializácie, a to obzvlášť v Slovenskej republike. Kým v polovici 20. storočia predmetné krajiny nedosahovali ani 40 % obyvateľstva žijúceho v urbánnych regiónoch (s výnimkou Českej republiky 41 %), na konci uvedeného storočia všetky krajiny podstatne prevýšili tento podiel obyvateľstva. Postsocialistické obdobie vývoja spoločnosti v krajinách strednej Európy spôsobilo pribrzdzenie miery urbanizácie. Bolo to spôsobené zmenami predovšetkým v politickej, ekonomickej a sociálnej oblasti, čo sa odzrkadlilo v zmenených životných podmienkach obyvateľstva, obzvlášť v demografickom správaní sa obyvateľstva a zmenených migračných prúdoch „mesto → vidiek“. Porovnanie súčasnej miery urbanizácie je sťažené rôznymi administratívnymi kritériami definície mesta v daných krajinách a tento ukazovateľ pre objektívne poznanie „mestskosti“ nestačí. Ak zoberieme do úvahy všeobecne proklamovanú hranicu mesta nad päť tisíc obyvateľov, v jednotlivých krajinách miera urbanizácie v rokoch 2007, resp. 2008 činila v Slovenskej republike 55,3 %, v Českej republike 71,4 % a v Maďarskej republike 64,6 %. Najväčšie poklesy v počte obyvateľov možno sledovať vo veľkých mestách nad 100 tisíc obyvateľov s výnimkou hlavných miest krajín. Hlavné mestá majú populačný rast viac menej stabilizovaný, predovšetkým Praha a Bratislava majú mierny nárast obyvateľstva. Budapešť ako hlavné a najväčšie mesto z porovnávaných krajín zaznamenalo pokles urbánneho obyvateľstva o necelých 300 tisíc. Tieto regresívne vývojové tendencie v počiatočnej fáze spôsobili procesy suburbanizácie predovšetkým v zázemí miest, ktoré poskytovali vhodnejšie sociálne, ekonomické i environmentálne podmienky pre život svojmu obyvateľstvu. Ďalším spoločným znakom administratívnej štruktúry krajín vybraného regiónu je jej rozdobenosť v zmysle vysokého počtu populačne

malých obcí. Súčasná územná štruktúra Slovenskej republiky, Českej a Maďarskej republiky patrí k najfragmentovanejším územným štruktúram v Európe. V Slovenskej republike zaznamenávame 67,17 % obcí do 1 000 obyvateľov, v ktorých žije iba 16,02 % obyvateľov, v Českej republike je to 78,9 % so 17, 2 % obyvateľstva a v Maďarskej republike je 55,1 % do 1 000 obyvateľov, v ktorých žije 7,6 % obyvateľstva. Malé obce sú z ekonomického hľadiska neefektívne a tak vlády jednotlivých štátov v rôznej miere pristupujú k riešeniu problému roztrieštenosti. Možností riešenia územnej fragmentácie sú v zásade dvojakého typu. Ide buď o zmenu administratívnej štruktúry obcí – plošné zlučovanie obcí (tzv. amalgamizácia alebo municipalizácia) alebo podporu foriem medziobecnej spolupráce, ktoré by sa nedotýkali existencie samotných obcí, ale iba zefektívnenia ich činností. Obce sa môžu zlúčiť alebo združiť podľa právnych noriem možností štátu s cieľom postupného vytvorenia siete administratívnych jednotiek na spoločný výkon kompetencií. Mienka širokej verejnosti prezentovaná v akomkoľvek prieskume opätovnej integrácie obcí pre účely efektívneho výkonu kompetencií obcí však naráža na odmietnutie a nedôveru.

