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Political Actors in Intergovernmental Coordination: Perspectives and Priorities

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Introduction

Many challenges to governance today are multi-level in nature. This starts with climate change and pandemic policy and continues with food security and transportation. In the vast majority of cases, solutions can only be achieved through the coordination of executive and legislative action across different levels of government. Coordination takes place among governments of the same level (horizontally) and or vertically, between the state and its regions or regions and their local governments. But while it is easy to think of these levels and arenas of governance as unified actors, it is impossible to analyse and provide policy advice to strengthen such processes without understanding the political actors involved in such intergovernmental coordination.

Against this background, this conference aims to bring together established and early-career scholars; experts and practitioners to examine the concept, scope and roles of different types of actors involved in intergovernmental coordination. This includes actors in both vertical and horizontal coordination, focusing on local, national, and international governance coordination. It covers all policy areas, and relations between them, that include elements of intergovernmental coordination, as well as governmental and non-governmental oversight bodies. In short, the conference aims to gather, broaden, deepen, and synthesize the knowledge of scholars and practitioners so as to better understand the different types of actors involved in intergovernmental coordination and their strategic interactions in all regions of Europe, including countries outside of the European Union.

These topics and issues were the central element of the 1st IGCOORD conference *“Political Actors in Intergovernmental Coordination: Perspectives and Priorities”*, which was held in Budapest, Hungary, 18th and 19th May 2023. Around 80 lectures were presented at the conference which covered the multi-layered, multi- and interdisciplinary nature of the above-mentioned topics. This proceeding is a selection of several papers. The topics of this proceeding show the diverse issues which were analysed by the conference. Three major issues can be distinguished: first of all, the general questions on the role of political actors in the field of horizontal coordination is analysed. IN the second part of the proceeding, the major questions on the administrative structures on horizontal intergovernmental coordination are reviewed. The third part of the proceeding shows several important public policy issues of the above-mentioned major topic. However, this proceeding covers just partially the diversity of the presented papers and lectures, but the diversity of the topics, the multi-layered structure of the analysis can be seen by the reading these extended abstracts.

The abstracts have been even developed after the conference: the scientific debates resulted in a better understanding of the topics, and several papers have been developed into articles, which has been published or are close to the publication in distinguished, prestigious scientific journals. Therefore, we hope, that the publication of this proceeding can show the first results of the cooperation of the international scientific community on intergovernmental coordination. The umbrella of this cooperation is the COST Action CA 20123 IGCOORD, which was the organiser of the conference. We would like to thank the help and funding of the COST Action on the publication of this short book, and we hope, that this first short book will be followed by several publication sponsored by the COST Action CA 20123 IGCOORD.

September 2023

The Editors

Contents

Part I Political actors of the horizontal intergovernmental coordination 5

Jurga Bučaitė-Vilkė: Political actors in designing social investment policies on territorial level: the case of social innovations in Lithuanian municipalities	6
Ondřej Kuba & Jan Stejskal: Electronic voting as tool to reduce unequal voter turnout in the Czech Republic	14
Nikoleta Jakuš Muthova & Maria Murray Svidroňová: The role of political leaders in handling COVID-19: the case of Slovakia	19

Part II Administrative structures and procedures and horizontal intergovernmental coordination 22

Nevila Sokoli Xhindi & Noémia Bessa Vilela Oplotnik: The latest wave of administrative and territorial reform in Albania: the role of political actors	23
János Fazekas: The European Court of Justice as political actor in intergovernmental coordination	28
István Hoffman: Platform centralisation: a new form of coordination?	31

Part III Public policies and horizontal intergovernmental coordination..... 35

Robert Bat'a, Martin Šmíd, Barbora Kovářová & David Bohadlo: Problems of public policies in the field of energy sustainability	36
András Bencsik: The role of artificial intelligence in the functioning of public administrations, with particular reference to the evolution of centralisation and decentralisation	4136
Gabriela Neagu: Typologies and mapping of the institutional actors involved in the Youth Guarantee (YG) program. Comparative analysis in four East European countries	436

Part I Political actors of the horizontal intergovernmental coordination

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Political actors in designing social investment policies on territorial level: the case of social innovations in Lithuanian municipalities

Keywords: social innovations, local authorities, political actors, territorial cohesion, territorial governance.

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Many European countries have experienced prolonged austerity regimes that have seen significant reductions in central government funding, which has either led to withdrawal from providing some services and/or severe reductions in their standard and availability. This may have served as a stimulus for local forms of social innovation to fill in gaps and to develop new forms of service delivery at the municipal level that are better targeted and address the needs of diverse local groups (Marques et al., 2018; Vigare et al., 2020). Various forms, for example, the creation of new joined-up delivery systems, linking beneficiaries to welfare services, employment training, or entrepreneurial activities, might become a “tailored” solution for territorial development and more efficient inter-governmental relations. What is also clear is that many of the social innovation initiatives are embedded in local social-demographic and economic contexts and depend not only on the role of local political actors but also on other factors, such as territorial capital or inter-institutional governance. Nevertheless, it is worth looking at the mechanisms and processes associated with social innovations that provide lesson-learning opportunities. This mechanism would be advantageous in contexts with significant gaps between social needs and existing welfare policies, such as the Lithuanian case.

In discussing this, we provide relevant examples of social innovations in Lithuania's rural, urban, and suburban municipalities in implementing social investment policies (for an empirical example, we use the early childcare and education (ECEC) policy field). In other words, we focus on the conception of territorial governance as necessary for the mobilization processes and effective use of territorial capital and linkages between different actors. The main question analyzed

here involves the mechanisms and arrangements of territorial governance, collaborations, and coordination of territorial capital for implementing territorially driven ECEC policy. Different perspectives of community, local governance, and business stakeholders in the localities reveal the diversity of territorial governance perceptions.

There are many theoretical interpretations of territorial governance approaches and concepts (Healey, 1997; Stone, 1989; Stone, 1993; Rose, 2000; Jessop, 2002; Atkinson et al., 2019). With this, we consider four territorial governance issues: vertical coordination, horizontal coordination, the participation and involvement of social stakeholders' interests, and territorialized collective actions (Davoudi et al., 2008). Vertical coordination refers to the principle of re-scaling and subsidiary in self-governance systems. It also indicates the allocation of decision-making power to different governmental scales and the distribution of competencies for implementing decentralization policies in countries (Sellers, Lindstrom, 2007). In the Lithuanian case, the single-tier system reflects the vertical coordination principles by distributing sectoral policies and functional competencies from central authorities to the municipal level (for example, see data from the Local autonomy index, Ladner et al., 2021). The horizontal coordination dimension underlines the networking and collaborative mechanisms among different local-level stakeholders and actors. Integrating different territorial assets and resources and implementing sectoral, local policies are linked to vertical subordination, involving a variety of central and municipal actors (multi-level governance). The participation dimension is linked to the involvement forms and strategies stakeholders and policy actors use. Here, the capacities and resources are essential in local welfare policy decision-making and implementation processes. Finally, territory as a decision-making arena in linking territorial governance, local assets, and collective action is important. Faludi (2012) refers to the argument of specific territory and territorial dynamics to define multi-level governance specificity (Faludi, 2012).

The discussion derives from the qualitative interviews with local experts implemented in 2018-2019 in three Lithuanian municipalities. The cases demonstrate the importance of local political actors and local authorities in enforcing vertical and horizontal coordination to re-design local services delivery. We also identify the key drivers of innovation and the mechanisms and the processes that may be transferrable to other geographical and institutional contexts that can facilitate and support social innovations "embedded" in their territorial contexts. Local government and political actors might take a less 'directive role' and more facilitative role to foster local welfare in childcare services.

Methodology and case studies. The paper discusses three case studies of the rural (Pakruojis district municipality), urban (Kaunas city municipality), and suburban (Kaunas district

municipality) Lithuanian municipalities. The empirical analysis is based on qualitative data from interviews with three different groups of informants: active community actors, business actors, and governance and policy actors (representatives from local communities, business enterprises, NGOs, and local authorities). The list of interview questions addresses three main topics, including (1) the level of territorial disadvantages and advantages related to the locality, (2) the level of collective efficacy related to local life opportunities, and (3) mechanisms and arrangements of territorial governance, collaborations, and coordination to mobilize territorial capital and implement the policies of preschool childcare, active labor market, urban area regeneration, vocational training, and economic growth. The interviews were performed in three urban, suburban, and rural localities (20 interviews in each municipality, 60 in total) during July-November 2018. The snowballing sampling strategy was used as a methodological tool for identifying the most critical experts in the field and excluding the irrelevant ones. The list of interviewees represents different fields of expertise, social and professional backgrounds, and different degrees of public engagement in social investment policy fields.¹

Why is childcare (ECEC) policy important for territorial governance studies? Urban and rural areas' attempts to alter and build their territorial governance approach may be significantly impacted by the territorial social-demographic profile of municipalities and institutional ECEC policy design. First, discussing territorial policies, the ECEC policy field is a case that reflects social-economic indicators and territorial discrepancies (e.g., the share of working-age families, demographic shift, household income, and dynamics of the labor market). Second, it is also important to analyze territorially sensitive policies focusing on local welfare and well-being, such as early childhood education and care (ECEC). The selected policy is crucial in triggering labor market participation, family and work reconciliation, and social inclusion. By referencing numerous works on the welfare state and social investment perspectives (Hemerijck, Vandenbroucke 2012; Hemerijck 2013, 2014, 2015), childcare policy is aligned with the effective parental leave arrangements and supported by in-kind and in-service incentives contributes to active economic participation of parents, enables to deal with social risks in low-income households.

¹ This paper is a part of the COHSMO research project "Inequality, Urbanization, and Territorial Cohesion: Developing the European Social Model of Economic Growth and Democratic Capacity" (Horizon2020 Grant No. 727058, implemented in the period from 2018 to 2021). The project addressed social inequalities and socio-economic differences between neighborhoods, cities, and regions across European countries (Poland, Greece, Austria, UK, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania). It also emphasized the social investment approach and the role of social policies in delivering economic growth and better quality of life implemented by employing multi-layered and multi-scaled governance forms, tools, and mechanisms. One of the leading project questions is whether "place" matters in implementing a social investment policy framework at the territorial level.

As for ECEC policy arrangements, early childcare, and education is a state-subsidized municipal function. In Lithuania, the central authorities provide state-allocated funding for the ECEC system and regulate the teaching provisions and the qualifications of the ECEC teachers. The role of municipalities is related to regulating the institutional network of ECEC institutions, the quality of childcare services, and the enrolment procedures, discounts, and fee policies. National policy goals include the expansion of services' accessibility in different regions, educational content, and better inclusion of children with special needs. According to strategic documents, the expansion of participation in the ECEC in rural areas is expected to grow. In addition, expansion in urban areas is expected to be implemented by creating "sustainable and equitable funding models" (Education in Lithuania, 2020). The standardization and equalization of the ECEC policies between the territories are sustained through national-level financing mechanisms. The ECEC is funded jointly by governmental funds and municipalities that cover facilities' maintenance expenses.

ECEC analysis also reflects the macro-level demographic shift in the country. Lithuania has been characterized by a highly consolidated local government system with a relatively stable municipality number for almost three decades (Stonkutė, Gaule, 2017; Lazauskienė, 2008). Demographic factors such as external and internal migration, demographic decline, and aging explain the changes in local government structure. At the beginning of 1991, Lithuania had 3,7 million inhabitants; as of 2023, only 2.84 million remained. These demographic data also reflect the changes in the average number of inhabitants in Lithuanian municipalities. In 1991, the average number of inhabitants in Lithuanian municipalities was 63,800 thousand, and in 2021 has dropped to 46,500 thousand inhabitants and continues to decline (the average area of municipalities is about 1 088 km²) (Statistics Lithuania, 2023). The internal variation of municipality size is significant; for example, 7 percent of urban municipalities have more than 280.000 inhabitants compared to 75 percent of municipalities with less than 29.000 inhabitants. Rural municipalities, which are mostly located far from urbanized zones, have been affected by the sharp decline in population due to the migration processes, economic "center-periphery" factor, low birth rate, and a relatively high rate of elderly people (Pociūtė-Sereikienė, Kriaučiūnas, 2018). On the contrary, suburban municipalities around Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda experience positive population growth that can be explained by the economic and urbanization convergence factors as economic productiveness triggers.

Childcare policy as a territorial place-based response: summary. To summarize, the paper demonstrates that implementing a national childcare policy could be treated as a case of collective engagement and territorially driven service delivery design. We also discuss the question

of whether collective action and heterogeneous networks are a response to the necessity of sustaining local welfare provisions. The role of intermediaries in tackling different local social-demographic problems is also important as a reference to the interlocking nature of territorial governance.

Due to Lithuania's longstanding legacy of top-down municipal service delivery and significant functional autonomy, sectoral policy approaches should be prioritized to address territorial issues, such as demographic change, aging, effects of regional economic divergence on household income, labor market fluctuations, and others. The divergent experience of all municipalities reveals that the ECEC policy is flexibly adapted to territorial diversity; for example, it reflects a demographic change in the early-age children groups by establishing more childcare facilities. As for a municipal policy goal, the high quality and accessibility of childcare services are articulated and recognized as the priority of the municipality agenda. Empirical evidence analyzed in the paper also uncovers the growing tendencies towards decentralization in childcare policy regarding the growth of potential leadership and social innovations at the municipal level. Horizontal networks become a critical collective mobilization factor in tackling territorially sensitive challenges, such as social-demographic change, household income, labor market activation, and local welfare. The case of ECEC policy demonstrates that, for example, in rural municipalities, an aging population combined with a decrease in the size of the younger population necessitates a re-modification of the educational institutions and a transformation of the kindergartens or schools into multifunctional community centers. The demographic change in specific areas raises the issue of the spatial accessibility of the services by implementing small-scale services provision innovations, such as re-structuring the ECEC institutions' network. For example, the rural municipality also organizes transportation for children from home to the preschool institution or kindergarten between remote elderships and more urban ones. The overview of empirical results is presented in Table 1, which demonstrates the specific design of territorial governance, leadership, and territorial capital.

Table 1. **Municipal versions of ECEC: a combination of territorial governance, leadership, and territorial capital.**

Characteristics	Urban case	Suburban case	Rural case
1. ECEC as the policy priority goal	+	+	+
2. Top-down (municipal level) innovations as a response to supply-demand challenge	+	+	+
3. Mode of governance (vertical / horizontal)	+(vertical)	+(limited interventions by horizontal networks)	+(limited interventions by horizontal networks)
4. Innovations related to the accessibility of ECEC services	-	+ / -	+
5. Innovations related to the quality and diversity of ECEC services	-	+	+ / -
6.Role of local political actors in tailoring policy to local needs	-	+	+

Source: own elaboration.

The first lesson includes the dimensions of territorial governance. Considering data from the municipal cases, territorial governance is perceived more as a vertical collaboration with strategic partners and social stakeholders than horizontal networks to tackle problems of demographic decline in childcare care provision. In rural cases, the innovative governance arrangements are mainly designed by local municipal authorities rather than community or parental committees' efforts (top-down approach). The bottom-up initiatives are sporadic and rely on the “soft” community capital, territorial identity, and leadership. Their bottom-up initiatives are limited

due to insufficient financial resources and administrative or managerial capacities to foster large-scale projects. State-subsidized approach and high-level control mechanisms to childcare services provisions become a limitation for higher inclusion in community networks and interconnectedness.

The second lesson we can learn is that effective governance is crucial for local engagement in finding innovative solutions to local (social and demographic) challenges. Collective solutions are essential to tackle redistribution and spatial justice issues that differ in urban, suburban, and rural cases. For example, effective partnerships between local authorities and citizen initiatives or local communities can facilitate new childcare service solutions and foster collective responsibility to solve territorial issues concerning services accessibility and parental costs. These competencies and local resources networks (social connectivity, trust, interpersonal relations, and social capital) become a predominant framework for formulating and implementing territorially-driven welfare policy solutions.

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Electronic voting as tool to reduce unequal voter turnout in the Czech Republic

Keywords: electronic voting; voter turnout; Czech Republic; vote-facilitating rules; election.

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Introduction

E-voting is one of several tools that have the potential to facilitate public voting and make it more convenient for citizens (Henry, 2003). This vote-facilitating tool has been introduced into the decision-making processes in many countries, but in other countries, including the Czech Republic, the introduction of e-voting is still under political discussion.

Prior studies that have evaluated the effects of e-voting introduction ex-post have found that e-voting did not increase citizens' interest in voting in certain cases (Chevallier, 2009; Goodman & Pyman 2016). Moreover, it has caused deeper disparities between voters because only certain groups of citizens use this rule (Alvarez & Nagler 2000; Gibson 2001).

This ex-ante analysis examines the potential impacts of e-voting in the Czech Republic. It investigates whether the e-voting introduction will boost voter turnout, compares the effects with other vote-facilitating tools, identifies citizens demanding e-voting, examines whether e-voting will potentially narrow the gap in voter turnout among various social groups.

Methodology

Based on the theoretical research, the following four hypotheses are established:

H1: The introduction of e-voting in the Czech Republic will increase voter turnout in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies.

H2: E-voting will increase the voter turnout of citizens in the Czech Republic more than the introduction of another vote-facilitating rules.

H3: After the introduction of electronic voting in the Czech Republic, voter turnout will increase, especially among irregular voters.

H4: E-voting will narrow gaps in voter turnout between different social groups.

The input data for the analysis are the responses of respondents (n = 807), obtained through an online questionnaire in the Czech Republic in May 2020. The questionnaire was prepared by the sociological company Sociores, which provides a representative sample of respondents (gender, age, education) selected from the users of the Czech National Panel. Pilot survey was conducted to check the clarity of the questions and the sufficiency of the range of answers before the questionnaire survey.

The analysis is based on basic statistical methods, but also on multinomial logistic regression and the Parson chi-square test. These methods are applied to verify the significance of the relationships between dependent and independent variables.

Results

The answers of the respondents show that the declared participation of citizens in the system without tools facilitating voting is 80.4 %. This declared participation is higher than the actual participation in the last 10 years, when the participation was above 60 %. If e-voting were introduced, the declared turnout would increase by 8.5 percentage points. An increase in voter turnout can also be achieved by introducing voting on holidays (by 5.0 percentage points). Rules such as postal voting, proxy voting or concurrent voting are less effective.

Table 1 Demand for e-voting based on voter turnout in previous elections.

	Irregular voter		Regular voter		First-time voter	
Intercept	-2.625***	(0.784)	-4.427***	(0.783)	176.887**	(69.979)
Age	0.033***	(0.009)	0.059***	(0.009)	-8.505**	(3.381)
Sex (female)	0.325	(0.265)	-0.193	(0.252)	5.454**	(2.707)
Education	0.398***	(0.153)	0.749***	(0.151)	1.539	(1.177)
Size of municipality	-0.030	(0.088)	-0.021	(0.084)	-1.176	(0.765)
Political information	0.179	(0.425)	0.694*	(0.404)	-8.039	(5.276)
Political knowledge	0.272**	(0.115)	0.471***	(0.110)	-2.061	(1.267)
Unemployed	-0.657	(0.495)	-0.982**	(0.489)	19.612	(12.759)
Level of satisfaction	0.015	(0.106)	0.315***	(0.101)	3.492	(2.275)
E-voting	-0.262	(0.273)	-0.578**	(0.261)	2.496	(2.319)
N	807					
Cox & Snell	0.486					
Nagelkerke	0.544					

Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; Logit Coefficients/ Standard errors in parentheses; Non-voter is reference group

The results of the multinomial logistic regression (Table 1) show that the e-voting variable is significant only for regular voters and the coefficient is negative. This means that compared to non-voters, regular voters do not demand e-voting. The differences between the other groups are not significant in the demand for e-voting.

Table 2 Significance of differences in voter turnout between individual social groups.

	No rule facilitating voting				E-voting			
	Pearson square	Chi-	df	Significance	Pearson square	Chi-	df	Significance
Sex	3.364		1	0.067	2.890		1	0.089
Age	9.151		3	0.027	3.762		3	0.288
Education	19.699		3	0.000	10.789		3	0.013

Findings in the next part of the analysis (Table 2) indicate that introducing e-voting has the potential to narrow the gap in voter turnout between younger and older citizens.

Conclusions and discussions

The results of the analysis suggest that the introduction of e-voting has the potential to increase voter turnout in the Czech Republic (H1), and the most among all the tools examined (H2). E-voting is considered effective primarily because its introduction would currently be the only alternative to traditional in-person voting. In systems where another tool, such as the correspondence voting rule, is already established, the introduction of another tool would not necessarily have the same effect.

If e-voting were introduced as a complementary tool to the current system, it could narrow the gap in voter turnout among social groups, especially between the younger and older citizens (H4). Regarding the demand for e-voting in relation to previous turnout (H3), the findings show that regular voters do not demand e-voting, while non-voters do. This contrasts with research conducted in, for example, Estonia, Canada and Switzerland (Chevallier, 2009, Goodman & Pyman, 2016), where e-voting was found to be used primarily by citizens who had previously voted.

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The role of political leaders in handling COVID-19: the case of Slovakia

Keywords: COVID-19; political leaders; crisis management, Slovakia, governance .

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is the first pandemic of modern times which affected the entire world in about three months. Although the pandemic is mainly a health crisis, the effects of the pandemic are economic, social and, last but not least, political crisis. The global scale of the crisis and its impact on various sectors create challenges for political leaders. However, crisis management often takes place in an environment of uncertainty. It is precisely the uncertainty of the outcomes and impacts of the measures associated with the COVID-19 crisis that has been affecting political leaders and also the rise of populist leadership. This research paper aims at analysing the links between the pandemic and a governmental crisis that occurred just after the elections in 2020 in Slovakia and the subsequent changes of government, a governmental crisis of the newly elected government, which led to the replacement of the Prime Minister and also the Minister of Health.

Research and results

The first confirmed case of coronavirus infection in Slovakia was on 3rd March 2020, while already on 6th March 2020 the first two deaths associated with complications of coronavirus infection were reported. These events were followed by the tightening of measures by the outgoing government headed where all international airports in Slovakia were closed, a mandatory state quarantine was introduced, a state of emergency was declared and retail outlets were closed except for food, drugstores and pharmacies. At the beginning of the pandemic, according to the survey

“Ako sa máte, Slovensko - How are you doing, Slovakia?” (SASD, 2020), scientific institutions had the highest credibility, with more than 64% of respondents trusting them. After the scientific institutions, the President of the Slovak Republic - was followed by more than 57% of the respondents and health professionals, who were trusted by more than 50% of the respondents. On the contrary, the lowest trustworthiness was in political parties, which were not trusted by up to 85% of respondents. High levels of distrust were also achieved by Parliament, which was distrusted by 75% of respondents, the government, which was distrusted by 72% of respondents, and newspapers, which achieved the same level of distrust as the government at 72%.

In February 2020 the national election took part and on 21st March 2020, the new government led by the Prime Minister Igor Matovič came to power. On 25th March 2020 the new government made the wearing of the mask/respirator compulsory and then on 8th April 2020 restricted free movement. The restriction of free movement allowed to go to buy basic groceries, drugstore and medicines, to visit a doctor and if it was not possible to work from home, it was possible to go to work. Measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus were implemented by decrees issued by the Chief Public Health Officer of the Slovak Republic. The decrees of the Public Health authority of the Slovak republic regulated the obligations with the wearing of respirators, meeting or conditions of opening of services according to the COVID traffic light rule. Although the decrees responded to the current situation in various areas, this caused their high number, opacity and gradual rejection and non-compliance by society. In total, there were over 400 of them. At the same time, the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic granted the LEX Corona², which was a package of measures to change laws from the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Culture and the Office for Regulation of Network Industries

The populist leadership features could have been identified very soon after the newly elected parliament adopted the government's program. The prime minister declared “war on the disgusting disease” and publicly announced that the COVID is his personal enemy and he as a prime minister will take and do whatever is necessary to win the war. Creating the publicly announced enemy could be seen as the first step towards populist public leadership.

Soon after the first step, typical autocratic populist steps have been taken by the prime minister. Naming and shaming of all other stakeholders with different or alternative opinions. Dumping coalition partners' proposals on how to solve problems in their sectors and even public defamation soon became a standard managerial tool for the prime ministers.

²Act no. 67/2020 Coll. on certain extraordinary measures in the financial area in connection with the spread of the dangerous contagious human disease COVID-19, available at <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2020/67/20210212.html>

The key idea of the prime minister was to be the one that solves the crisis and brings the relief. To achieve this aim, more and more expensive measures with questionable value-for-money and ability to deliver expected outcomes started to occur.

We can say that the COVID-19 virus has caused two kinds of crises, namely a health crisis and an economic crisis. With the new mutations, the society was more and more reluctant to comply with the measures, due to some tiredness with the number of changing measures, long-term restrictions, but also due to the new characteristics of the virus. Despite the low vaccination coverage of the population, which is below 60 %, with large regional differences, but lower occupancy rates in hospital beds, the Government decided on 23rd February 2022 to end the state of emergency. Subsequently, after the Easter holidays on 21st April 2022, the government cancelled the compulsory wearing of masks and respirators, except in hospitals and social service facilities.

Discussion and conclusions

In Slovakia, the pandemic is linked with elections, change of government, and later the government crisis that occurred a year after the elections, which led to the change of the Prime Minister and also of the Minister of Health. These circumstances were accompanied by the secret purchase of the Sputnik V vaccine, an initiative to increase people's motivation to vaccinate through a vaccination lottery, a middleman's bonus and a vaccination bonus for the elderly.

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**Part II Administrative structures and procedures and horizontal
intergovernmental coordination**

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The latest wave of administrative and territorial reform in Albania: the role of political actors

Key words: reform; decentralization; administrative; territorial; governance

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Abstract

This paper investigates the causes of the present wave of decentralization in Albania, its effects, and particularly its potential for a new administrative and territorial reform. There was significant public interest in both the opposition's demand and the majority's agreement to review the 2014 reform and find a solution. In contrast to the 2014 reform with a strong top-down approach, a bottom-up approach based on technical and professional experience, independent of any party interest, was a solid way to re-correct the territorial division. As a result, it should be noted that the findings presented here later on (soon maybe) may need to be revised.

Introduction

In this paper we may argue that, since communism's downfall in Albania, decentralization has been a hot topic in academia and politics, with prospects for success being examined and assessed. As a result, while the current paper offers a minor contribution to the theoretical and policy debate, future study directions can delve deeper into what went wrong with Albania's decentralization efforts, why local governments weren't given greater authority, what issues need to be resolved in the country's upcoming territorial-administrative changes, etc.

Methodology

The first section, literature review- assesses what appear to be changes in basic conditions, and in the temper of the times-and dismisses a few things which had little impact. The second section briefly links these with decentralizing Albanian politicians' mixed motives and objectives. The third section considers a body of work which advances, within limits, our understanding both of the origins and of the implications of decentralization reform in Albania. That will open the way to a more detailed discussion in the future.

Research limitations/implications

Despite contributing to the existing gap in the literature, additional research will be necessary to better understand the decentralization process not only in Albania, but in all SEE countries.

Literature review

The causes of decentralization differ substantially from one place to another. The multiplicity of theories and the diversity of experiences suggest the probable validity of the following propositions (Huntington, 1993):

- No single factor is sufficient to explain decisions to decentralize in all countries or in a single country.
- No single factor is necessary to decisions to decentralize in all countries.
- Decentralization in each country is the result of a combination of causes.

The new territorial mapping in the former Eastern European region was directly influenced by two forces, one internal and the other external. The internal variables were the domestic demographic shifts that the countries in the former communist Central and Eastern Europe had to contend with once they started the processes of democratic pluralism and market reform. (E. Gadjanova, 2006) The demand for conformance and the European regulations they had to implement in order to increase local autonomy, decentralize power throughout the nation, and more efficiently allocate resources comprised the external side. Additionally, they had a ton of experts sent by developed nations to help them with the structural reforms that boosted the power of regions, and they had a lot to learn from the experience of Western countries in this regard (CoE, 2019). As a result, the interaction of these two factors produced two separate reform phases.

Waves of territorial and administrative reforms in Albania

During the 30 years of democracy in Albania, the local government has gone through several stages of administrative and territorial reform. In general, the reforms in the local government were made with the consensus of the political parties and with the support of the international partners.

Decentralization of government became a reality when local administrations were first democratically elected in Albania at the beginning of the 1990s. The 1992 reforms created the groundwork for the establishment of democratic local authorities, which progressively opened the door to accepting more responsibility and functions relating administrative or fiscal autonomy, albeit we may not yet be able to state so for certain.

The second crucial turning point in the decentralization of government was the unconditional ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (8548/1998) and the adoption of the Law "On Organization and Functioning of Local Government" (8652/2000), laying the groundwork for complete administrative and fiscal decentralization.

According to the 2015 Local Self-Government Law and the 2014 Territorial Reform, Albania's local government system consists of 61 municipalities and 12 counties or regions (qarks), albeit the reform was one-sided and carried out without the political consensus of the Albanian opposition. The 2014 administrative territorial reform sought to systematize the area through new administrative boundaries by reorganizing the local governments that were deemed to be too fragmented, which led to the fact that the public services provided to local communities were unsatisfactory and that there were no economies of scale but that there were excessive administrative costs. The Democratic Party chose to abstain, hence the most recent municipal elections in 2019 were held unilaterally for political reasons.

The majority of municipalities continued to struggle with unsatisfactory and frequently dysfunctional governance systems, which included ineffective resource distribution, ineffective revenue mechanisms, and subpar provision of essential public services (Xhindi, N; Xhindi, T, 2023). Public transportation, housing, and the maintenance of rural roads, among other things, continue to be in high demand; innovation, a vital engine of local productivity in places outside of cities, leaves much to be desired, etc.

A legislative committee for a new administrative territorial reform was established in June 2022 at the Democratic Party's request in an effort to reorganize the administrative systems prior to the anticipated new local elections in May 2023.

Conclusions

Furthermore, the focus on the Albanian case study through comparative lenses gives the current research not only theoretical and empirical added value, but also policy-making importance as it corresponds with a new political and public discussion on developing a new and mutually agreeable territorial map. Along with the new electoral reform and other constitutional changes, this has been formally proposed by the Democratic Party and the Albanian opposition, and the ruling Socialist Party has at least in principle accepted the idea that a new consensual reform may be on the political agenda in the upcoming months. As a result, this study aspires to offer a small contribution to the current academic, political, and public discourse.

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The European Court of Justice as political actor in intergovernmental coordination

Key words: European Court of Justice, political question doctrine, conditionality mechanism, rule of law, European Union, judicialization

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The European Court of Justice (ECJ) is not a direct political actor, but it can play an important role in solving political debates and policy issues within the European Union (between member states or between EU bodies or member states and EU bodies). This important role can manifest itself when the court decides individual cases, interprets EU law, and gives opinions on drafts of international treaties. As a result, the ECJ must make rulings on political – policy-related – issues decided by EU bodies, or issues with strong political overtones but which are essentially legal ones. The ECJ has always been jealously guarding its power of review, protecting its right to apply legal rules to political questions. Although the ECJ has never elaborated a comprehensive political question doctrine, it has had to decide on a case-by-case basis whether a political problem is justiciable. Doing so, the Court has stepped into the European political arena in several cases from the 1970's (e. g. the Lothar Matthäus-case) up to now (see the so called conditionality mechanism). The ECJ as every court must carry out the principle of rule of law and review the operation of the Executive including the EU bodies and the member states' governments from a legal point of view. On the other hand, courts usually refrain from cases of directly political substance which are not subject to clear legal standards, because if they did, they would take over the role of the political actors (see the critics of judicialization). The aim of the research is to examine how the ECJ has tried to balance between these requirements, and in which cases did it shape European intergovernmental relations through its adjudicating powers. The analysis, using the toolkit of the so-called black letter methodology, is mainly based on concrete court cases and their political

context and covers the normative background and the theoretical foundations of governmental actions and their judicial control.

The paper firstly deals with the topic's theoretical background: judicial review of governmental acts and political question doctrine. After reviewing the American roots of the doctrine including the famous US Supreme Court landmark decision *Baker v. Carr* (1962), the paper investigates the European emergence of the doctrine. After that the paper examines political issues in the case law of the ECJ.

The paper concludes, *inter alia*, that there would seem to be a strong case for the ECJ to develop and, of course, apply its own coherent political question doctrine, as this would draw a clear line between what is and is not justiciable on the borderline between law and politics. At present, the ECJ has no such clear doctrine on that matter.

Whatever the fate of the doctrine in the Court's practice, it is clear that politically sensitive issues will not be avoided in the future. One need only think of the procedure concerning the so-called rule of law or conditionality mechanism, which affects both Hungary and Poland. The purpose of this procedure is to enable the EU to ensure, or even to enforce, the rule of law in the member states and scrutiny the usage of the EU's financial sources. It can be seen that the EU is walking on the borderline between law and politics, since the application of these values depends on the political decisions of the governments of the member states. Hungary and Poland brought legal action against the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, seeking the annulment of the EU legislation governing the rule of law mechanism. The ECJ dismissed the actions in February 2022, so the European Commission triggered the mechanism against Hungary in April 2022. It is obvious that the ECJ ruled the legal actions justiciable and did not consider the conditionality mechanism case to fall under the scope of the political question doctrine.

If the Court continues down this path, it seems that will follow some kind of prudential theory of political questions. This means that the Court carefully considers whether a politically sensitive case is justiciable and draws the boundaries of the political question doctrine as narrowly as possible and seeks to ensure that as many acts of the Executive as possible are subject to judicial review, provided, of course, that the legal (constitutional) conditions for doing so are met. It is highly desirable, especially in view of the recent trends on limiting judicial power throughout Europe and the whole world. A theoretical analysis of the process of judicialization (judges taking over the role of elected politicians when deciding on political matters) provides the theoretical basis for this displacement. Furthermore, certain political moves tend to limit the scope of judicial review. E.g. in Hungary with the amendments to the Fundamental Law overruling certain decisions of the Constitutional Court (CC), the CC has less and less power to interfere in the decision of cases that

the legislature and the constitutional branches want to keep to themselves. In addition, in the United Kingdom, several government officials, including then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson said regarding the Miller/Cherry case in 2019 regarding Brexit that the courts got involved in politics, which is a matter for ministers and Parliament.

If the political cohesion within the European Union is going to get stronger, it is vital that the Court as the main body of the European judiciary can rule on politically sensitive cases. The judiciary can namely take the case out of the current political context, which means that the impact of the decision will go beyond the specific case. In this way, the Court can decide issues on which it is very difficult or impossible to reach political consensus, or even cool the heat of political conflict. Doing so, the Court could help Europe to become a cohesive and organic political community.

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Platform centralisation: a new form of coordination?

Key words: artificial intelligence, administrative activities, platforms, centralisation, automated decision-making, administrative procedures, Hungary

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1. Introduction and main questions

First of all, it should be emphasised that social systems have been transformed by the ICT revolution. This extremely rapid transformation has also brought significant changes to the economy, perhaps most notably in the last decade with the widespread adoption of platforms. Platforms can be approached from several angles: firstly, as a specific product development outcome, secondly, as a specific technological strategy, and thirdly, as an industrial economic phenomenon (Baldwin and Woodard 2009). Platforms can be examined from the perspective of market theory, technology management and strategic management. However, platforms can also be analysed as a specific network, typically connected to the Internet, and as a specific system or as ecosystem. Platforms are interpreted by the market theory approaches as network interfaces connecting different groups and as systems that creates value through a common architecture. The ability of the platforms to produce content and/or functionality and are emphasised by the technology management approach. Similarly, it is highlighted by these interpretations that on the other hand, they are standardised ecosystems which are highly interconnected and systemised. Corporate operation of the platforms as networks and systems of processes that create value are emphasised by the strategic management interpretations (Hein et al. 2020) These platforms are most familiar to the general public are systems connected to the provision of services, including various entertainment platforms and systems (e.g., Netflix, Disney+, Spotify), systems in the

tourism sector (booking.com, Airbnb) and some personal service solutions (e.g., Uber, Taxify – now Bolt). However, the role of platforms is much broader than that: in fact, modern corporate governance relies extensively on these solutions, which can be easily adapted to your own corporate processes and to other companies' systems because they are standardised. Taking into account the impact and results of platforms in economic life, the administrative systems also have started to use platform-like solutions relatively early, at the turn of the millennium (Kim et al. 2022).

The aim of my paper is firstly to analyse the transformations of public service provision based on the digitalisation and platformisation, and secondly to analyse the impact of this platformisation on the role of the municipal services, and on the centralisation of the public service provision.

2. Methods

My paper focuses on the analysis of the regulation, and it focuses on the analysis of the legal norms, soft law documents and partly the policy papers. Secondly, the major fields of public service provisions have been examined by my paper. Because the national legal systems are different, even in the European Union, my paper focuses on the analysis of the Hungarian national legislation and partly the legislation and regulation of the European Union. Thus, the regulatory issues have been part of the examination, but – as I have mentioned earlier – even the policy issues of these public services and platforms of them, and similarly the major economic data has been analysed.

3. Platforms and municipal governance: towards a new type of centralisation?

Centralisation and decentralisation have taken different forms, but two main trends have emerged in the various reforms affecting municipal administration. The first form has been typical of the Western and Northern European states, where various reforms have been partly top-down and aimed primarily at modernising systems. In the field of local public services, these states were more reliant on local government systems, the various reforms were primarily aimed at transforming the economy of scale of municipalities. Although these reforms also sought to create larger local and regional units, they were carried out within the local government system. Therefore, they could be interpreted mainly as concentration and not centralisation of local governance (Pálné 2019). The trends towards integration and concentration were further reinforced by the changing municipal framework at the turn of the millennium, in particular the increasing urbanisation trends. The

emerging housing crisis in large cities, with affordable housing being pushed to the periphery of large cities, and the resulting intensification of suburbanisation, posed challenges that could not be adequately addressed by traditional municipal spatial structures, as service units extended well beyond the administrative boundaries of municipalities. In order to manage these units, a variety of solutions have been adopted: either merged units or specific forms of compulsory inter-municipal cooperation. Local government concentration, for example merging of municipal units and the development of inter-municipal associations, have posed additional challenges, particularly in the field of public human services. Municipal human service systems must therefore provide services to a relatively uniform standard. This has created a particular tension in these systems. Given the wide range of local government functions, both in education-cultural and welfare public services, a specific latent 'stealth' centralisation has emerged, whereby the freedom of local communities to organise services has been eroded through the regulation of various service standards, typically not by law but by ordinance and in many cases by soft law. Alongside 'stealth' centralisation, a trend has emerged since the 2000s in some decentralisation solutions in northern and western European countries, which the literature refers to as 'cynical decentralisation'. In this case, the primary aim of reform was not to strengthen welfare functions, but was in fact to shift responsibility, as additional resources were not provided for increasing tasks, or were provided inadequately (Pálné 2019).

The emergence of municipal platforms can be interpreted as a part of this latent centralisation process. They can be seen as a specific twenty-first century form of 'stealth' centralisation. With the widespread use of ICT and the emergence of the information society, information and data related to public services are becoming increasingly important. In the majority of modern states, these data systems and platforms are generally organised at central level. Since without this data, the new types of public service organisation solutions for municipalities cannot be implemented or can only be implemented to a limited extent. The ownership of data and access to them have also led to a 'soft' centralisation in these states, which is only indirectly perceived at first sight, but it is a very real one. As we have mentioned above, this soft centralisation – albeit on a smaller scale, because of the extensive direct centralisation of the 2010s – has also been present in the Hungarian local government system, especially in larger, urban municipalities. Indeed, smart city solutions inevitably entail data requirements, which central systems can provide. However, access to data also implies adaptation to central platforms, and local systems must be interoperable with central systems. This necessarily implies adaptation to the interface and logic of the central systems. This allows the central government and its agencies to have a significant influence on the local service provision through the design of its own data systems, without seeming to interfere. A unified data

management and processing system also reinforces the centralisation of an administration, it makes the system more centralised, even if this is not, or only barely, noticeable at first sight.

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Part III Public policies and horizontal intergovernmental coordination

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Problems of public policies in the field of energy sustainability

Keywords: public policy, energy, sustainability, Czech Republic.

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The current EU energy policy represents one of the biggest challenges for contemporary society due to its ambitious goals. Its goal is to achieve carbon-neutral and sustainable energy while preserving the quality of life. (European council, 2022)

The number of measures followed, including the fit for 55 package. The targets set by these approaches create enormous pressure to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency. If the goals are to be achieved in such a short timeframe (fit for 55 e.g. by 2030), public policies cannot afford to use problematic tools to achieve their goals or to fail in their application by creating technically inefficient solutions. In this context, 2 basic questions need to be asked (in line with Drucker, 1980):

- 1) 1) Are the tools, technical solutions and their parameters precisely known in terms of achieving the objectives of these policies?
- 2) Are the measures taken at all directed towards the stated public policy objective?

In this context, the question of Pareto-efficiency is crucial, as it is the goal of further research. It is a good idea to examine the problem both in terms of the effects in terms of the amount of energy gained and in terms of economic sensibility (primarily the economic sustainability of the project).

The following model studies the risks to both the environmental and economic efficiency of the projects described will be shown.

Model study 1

The customer requires covering of its energy consumption by direct conversion of solar energy. The requirement is to cover as much as possible % of the energy consumed. The usable roof area is 60m². Let's compare the technical possibilities:

For the implementation of his project can use photothermal solar system, the price for the collector 6 912 CZK/m² efficiency of this type of collector is 75%, lifetime approx. 60-80 years (SVP Solar, 2022), or photovoltaic solar system, the price for the collector is 2 789 CZK/m². The efficiency of this type of collector is 16%, the lifetime is approx. 25 years (SVP Solar, 2022a).

In the conditions of the Czech Republic it is possible to calculate the available amount of incident solar radiation around 1000 kWh.m⁻².r⁻¹. In the first case, can be extracted approx. 4.6 MWh of heat energy from 60 m² and thus saved 1.7 t CO². In the second case, it can obtained 0.9 MWh in the form of electricity and thus saved 1.06 t CO².

Taking into account expected lifetime of both devices, for the same volume of energy obtained from one m² is in the first case 735 CZK (30,6 EUR) while in the second case it remains 2 789 CZK (116,2 EUR).

It is clear from the above example that if the aim is to reduce CO² emissions as much as possible, photothermal solar systems should primarily be promoted.

It is clear that the massive promotion of photovoltaic systems in the past decade does not lead to Pareto-efficient solutions if the objective of the relevant public policy is to achieve as much renewable energy as possible at the lowest possible cost. The consequence of Pareto inefficient solutions is the high cost of renewable energy, its scarcity, which in turn leads to a certain skepticism in the use of renewable sources. Overall, then, society tends to postulate statements such as:

The idea that it is necessary to "suffer" economically for a better environment is a completely artificial construct, which is mainly due to negligent preparation of renewable energy projects resulting in their inefficiency, as shown in the second model study.

Model study 2

Let's have a biogas plant. The biogas plant consists of a fermenter and a cogeneration unit.

The balance of material and energy flows is presented in the table 1:

Table 1: The balance of material and energy flows

Transition T1			
Inputs		Outputs	
Biomass	1 000 kg	Biogas	220 kg
		Digestate	780 kg
Transition T2			
Biogas	149,28 kg	Energy thermal	<u>232 kWh</u>
		Electricity	250 kWh
		Untapped energy	103,5 kWh
		CO	0,558556 kg
		NO _x	0,3851424 kg
		SO ₂	0,1127474 kg
		Particulate matter	0,0057224 kg

Source: own (based on measurements)

Any parameter used in the model can act as an independent variable, so the behavior of the biogas plant can be observed from many points of view.

Economic and environmental inefficiencies result from the amount of unused energy could be determined. The result shows a different value for the remaining unused thermal energy than Table 1. This is due to the subtraction of the process heat (fermenter). The value of 35% represents the actual unused energy volume in case the biogas plant is not connected to the district heating

network. The heat output of the biogas plant can be used in winter for heating, in summer the heat can be used for cooling and all year for hot water production. If the unused heat energy would be used for cooling, it has an electricity value that will be saved. E.g. for a biogas plant producing around 700 MWh of electricity/month, this is a loss of up to 27,000,000 CZK (1,125,000 EUR) per year, calculated for a 40% energy conversion efficiency in a plant using district heat instead of electricity for cooling. This financial value exceeds by 1/3 the amount of subsidy that biogas plant operators can get from the state (own according Tzb-info. 2020).

Environmental stress can be understood by looking at the balance of material and energy flows from two perspectives. This is the view:

- 1) from the input side. The process involves an input that is only partly used in a meaningful way,
- 2) from the output side, where it is possible to express how much of the residual output is attributable to energy production that is not used.

Environmental inefficiency is due to the part of residual outputs that is attributable to the production of unused but otherwise usable energy, in this case in the form of heat. This is the amount of heat that the biogas plant is able to supply to customers, but which cannot be used due to the location of the specific biogas plant (no connection to the district heating system is available).

As can be seen from the above analysis, it is only due to the flaws in the relevant policies that the economic sustainability of biogas plant operation is on average difficult to achieve and usually cannot be achieved without subsidies. There are also cases where the operator closed the biogas plant because its operation was not profitable even with subsidies. In such cases, it was always one or a combination of the above problems.

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The role of artificial intelligence in the functioning of public administrations, with particular reference to the evolution of centralisation and decentralisation

Keywords: public administration - artificial intelligence - centralisation - decentralisation - digitalisation.

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The public administration (including its organisational structure, its operational mechanisms and its staffing framework) does not (or cannot) remain unchanged, cannot be independent of the trends of the contemporary world, and thus it can be said that public administration is constantly in flux. One of the major challenges of our time is digitalisation in the broadest sense, which has required a reorganisation of both the public administration's approach to citizens and its infrastructure in all the countries of the world.

It is also worth pointing out that, however inevitable the emergence of the digital explosion in the public sector may be, experience to date - especially in the CEE region - does not necessarily suggest that it is a complete success story. The reasons for this include the difficulty of taking organisational and procedural aspects into account at the same time, the slow and costly process of building infrastructure, and the general resistance to change (especially in human resources), which is also a classic barrier to innovation.

For the sake of completeness, however, the author of this paper cannot fail to highlight the undisputed virtues of optimal digitisation of public administration, which are also relevant to this presentation. There is a consensus in the relevant foreign literature that the use of proven digital tools can have a pull effect, which can legitimise the use of new technological tools in new sectors not previously affected by digitisation. This effect is reinforced by the fact that standardised platforms and other digital solutions from the competitive sector can be easily transferred to public administrations, within certain scope and under certain conditions. In fact, this intermediary, interactive online value creation is a phenomenon also known in the 'traditional' offline economy,

which generally operates on the technology and infrastructure of a business. On the other hand, it should also be stressed that technological tools can be used to a greater extent to achieve and reinforce the objectives declared as goals to be achieved by national and EU public administration policy (e.g. customer focus, efficiency, subsidiarity, etc.), particularly with regard to the activities of public authorities and the organisation of public services.

Based on this, the presentation will attempt to map the digitalisation of public administration, touching upon the relevant types of public administration activities and - related to these - the possible applications of artificial intelligence. It also assesses the evolution of the principles of centralisation and decentralisation.

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Typologies and mapping of the institutional actors involved in the Youth Guarantee (YG) program. Comparative analysis in four East European countries

Abstract

Since 2013, the Youth Guarantee (YG) program has been launched in EU countries with the aim of improving the education and working conditions of young people. The complexity of the program requires a holistic approach, a consolidation of vertical (coordination between the European, national, regional, and local levels) and horizontal coordination (integration of social partners, and intersectoral coordination of policies from the main domains). The aim of this proposal is to examine the main characteristics of the way YG program coordination is carried out on both dimensions at the level of the four Eastern European countries: Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. Methodologically, we will use a systematic review (PRISMA) of the documents published in various databases. The selection of documents will cover the period 2015-2022 and will contain references to institutional actors involved in the coordination of the program in the four selected countries. We expect that the analysis of the selected documents will indicate how and with what impact different instruments (legislation, institutions) have been partially or totally modified to allow the implementation of the YG (vertical coordination). Horizontal coordination is expected to be revealed by the number of institutional partnerships, and the purpose and results of the partnerships.

Key-words: *Youth Guarantee, vertical coordination, horizontal coordination, systematic review, Eastern European countries, comparative analysis*

1. Introduction

The effectiveness and efficiency of public policies depend on the existence of certain information, supported by scientific evidence. In this context, the systematic review of the literature has become a useful tool for decision-makers and not only. The results of different research are collected, classified, and evaluated, providing a complete, up-to-date, and reliable picture of the issue addressed. The systematic literature review is one of the more frequently used research

methods in recent years because, according to some researchers (Littell et al. 2008), the number of supporters of the current evidence-based practice has significantly increased.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the European YG program using a systematic review. The selection of documents will take into account the 2015-2022 period and will contain articles that analyze the YG program's coordination mechanisms in four Eastern European countries: Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Hungary.

2. Mechanisms of coordination

Modern societies are characterized by a super-specialization at all levels, in all fields of activity, which facilitates the democratic process of governance, and decisional transparency. Although it has important advantages, this type of leadership, coordination of the activities of a society or a supra-state structure such as the EU must face numerous challenges. One of the most important is that, in order to achieve an objective - for example, the implementation of a European program such as YG - different sectors of the public administration (education, social assistance, and protection, employment services) must collaborate with different spheres of the social environment - economic - companies, private and public companies - but also with organizations that represent civil society (e.g. NGOs).

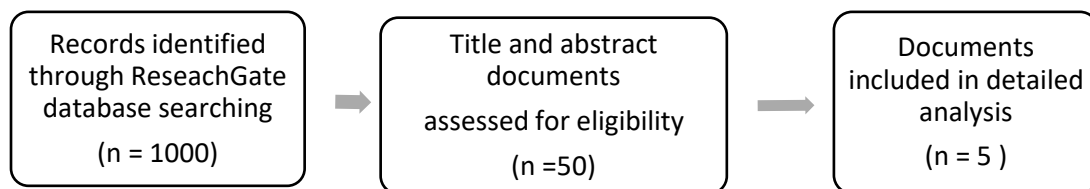
When we talk about the implementation of a European program - YG, for example - proposed and promoted by a supra-state structure, all these sectors, and spheres at the national level must interact with structures at the EU level. There are opinions (Chircop et al., 2015) that the obstacles that may appear as a result of the differences between national and cross-national actors can be overcome by combining vertical and horizontal coordination. Strictly referring to the YG program, vertical coordination means issuing, taking over, and adapting some norms, and rules established at the EU level for all member countries regarding the national implementation of the YG. The horizontal coordination is participative, it is based on the cooperation between the institutional actors responsible for the implementation of the YG. The process of vertical and/or horizontal coordination is not a simple one because it requires the acceptance of what O'Leary & Vij call "the paradox of balancing autonomy and interdependence" (O'Leary & Vij, 2012: 510): institutional actors must find a balance between giving up a part of the independence and preserving the autonomy to act, to decide.

3. Metodological framework

The systematic review is considered a method with an important role in the document analysis process because, unlike traditional literature reviews, systematic reviews have the advantage of standardization, and the use of transparent and reproducible techniques (Moher et al. 2009).

In the document selection process, we considered the following criteria: a) the time period 2015-2022; b) to include terms such as "youth guarantee", "horizontal coordination", and "vertical coordination"; to refer to at least one of the countries included in the study; written in English. The databases from which documents can be selected for a literature review are very diverse, but for this paper, we will analyze only those published on the ReseachGate platform. The selection process includes three steps: (1) checking the titles and abstracts of all the eligible articles for the inclusion criteria mentioned above; (2) only the articles that referred to the coordination mechanisms of the YG program were retained for the analysis and excluded those that analyzed other dimensions; (3) for the retained articles, the full text was checked. Figure 1 presents the flowchart for the selection of the included studies.

Figure 1. Summarising an overview of the selected documents



Source: Author

All articles considered relevant were coded in terms of authors' names, year of publication, country for which the analysis was carried out, institutional actor involvement, and type of coordination mechanism (Table 1). The coding of articles was done to ensure that all articles met the established criteria.

Table 1 Summarising overview of the selected studies (N = 5)

<i>Author (s)</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Type of cooperation</i>		<i>Institutional actors</i>
		<i>Vertical cooperation</i>	<i>Horizontal Cooperation</i>	
Spasova, L. (2017)	BG		New formal institutions Institutional partnership	National Local

Krekó, J. Molnár, T. & Scharle, A. (2021)	HU	Access to funding YG program		National
Pobeda, L. (2018)	BG	Access to funding YG program Changes in the legislation	Institutional partnership	National Regional Local
Petrescu, C. Neagut, A. & Mihalache, F. (2021)	RO	National Implementation Plan of the YGP. Access to funding YG program	Creating youth advisory councils and community youth centers	National Regional Local
Eleveld, A., Bazzani, T., Cour, A. De Le & Staszewska, E. (2022).	PL	Country-specific goal; Monitoring and control	Monitoring boards	European National Regional Local

Source: Author

4.3. Results

To analyze and classify the two dimensions of the mechanism of coordination of YG, we considered a series of criteria that were tested during other analyses (Dingeldey et al. 2017:6-7): for the analysis of vertical coordination

- ✓ accessibility of funds and conditionality of financing, country-specific goal-setting in combination with European monitoring and control, participation in mutual learning processes, and differences in implementation across regions and policy levels.

and for the horizontal coordination:

- ✓ scope of partnership approach, intensity, and quality in the involvement of social partners, the institutionalization of cross-policy field coordination, and holistic governance.

For Spasova, L. (2017) one of the important observations is that in Bulgaria there "has not been a large-scale structural reform to create institutions or unify the existing ones in the sphere of the so-called <single services> in relation to youth policies and YG." (Spasova, 2017:76).

Krekó, et al. (2021) analyze how, through the implementation of the YG program, the labor market in Hungary changed significantly and had the effect of transforming and developing market instruments. The authors analyze the effect of accessibility of funds to support YG and the positive results on the labor market in Hungary.

Pobeda, L.(2018) analyzes the coordination mechanism of the YG from both perspectives: vertical - changing the legislation and accessibility of funds - and horizontal by discussing inter-institutional partnerships. Regarding vertical coordination, the conclusion is that the change in legislation had a significant impact on redefining the position that young people must occupy in the concerns of the authorities (Pobeda, 2018:46). Access to financing funds is very important for implementing the measures and increasing their quality. For the development of the YG program, inter-institutional partnerships are necessary, but their number and quality depend on (1) the motivation of the targeted and involved partners and (2) the national and local socio-economic situation. (Pobeda,2018:47)

The Romanian authors- Petrescu et al. (2022) - include in their analysis both elements related to vertical coordination (e.g. National Implementation Plan of the YGP) and horizontal coordination: creating youth advisory councils and community youth, for example. The analysis of the YG situation in Romania leads Petrescu et al. (2022) to the conclusion that exists poor coordination between the ministries (central level) and the subordinate agencies responsible for the YG implementation (local level).

Eleveld et al. (2022) compare the YG situation in four countries - Greece, Netherlands, Poland, and Spain from the perspective of its coordination. The analysis focuses on the adequacy of the norms and rules specific to each country and their adequacy with the recommendations at the EU level. Based on the data analyzed, the authors conclude that the "Employment Committee's multilateral surveillance review of youth employment found the Youth Guarantee to be well established in Poland and to be complemented by an effective monitoring system and a strong partnership framework with youth NGOs." (Eleveld et al. 2022: 294)

5. Discussion and conclusions

By analyzing the selected articles, based on frequency analysis, we found that the dimensions that characterize the two types of coordination have different: vertical coordination is more

frequently addressed compared to horizontal coordination. Vertical coordination is better represented because the four former communist countries have experience with the EU pre-accession process. This process assumed changes at the institutional level, legislative changes, more frequent contact between national and European institutions, and the creation of new national, regional, and local actors who had the responsibility and management of the resources of some European programs. (Chirac, 2009). This experience and the capacity for European collaboration are a solid foundation for the success of the YG program. The main actors involved in vertical coordination are those at the central level: ministries, and national agencies, and in many situations, the type of organization and work in the implementation of YG is strongly centralized.

Horizontal coordination is more difficult, with less satisfactory results because it has a higher level of complexity: it involves cooperation between public and private, local and regional institutions, initiative, involvement, and negotiation. The socio-economic differences at the local level, the fact that the actors involved - local public authorities, NGOs, and medium and small companies - have a more limited experience and representation, a reduced mobilization capacity, and a lack of resources are also reflected at the YG program level. The success of the YG program depends on both types of coordination and on all categories of actors involved.

6. Research limits

This paper has several limitations and the results must be interpreted with this in mind: the criteria that guided the selection of studies for this review may have influenced the results obtained: they are restrictive and some relevant studies may have been excluded; the 5 documents that were included in the final selection were not distributed so as to reflect the situation at the national, regional, or local level; the YG program is ongoing and requires permanent adjustments, which means that the coordination process can be influenced.

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