

## Support of governance in Slovak cities by participative strategic planning

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### Abstract

Main aim of this contribution is to outline the development of urban governance in Slovakia and its support by strategic planning processes. Governance in this context put emphasis on participation, networks and partnership of various actors in managing cities and urban development. The intention is to reveal links among formation of governance in Slovak cities with important innovation in planning – introduction of strategic development planning within the last decade. My hypothesis was that this line of planning positively influences expansion of governance in Slovak cities. It is especially linked to preference given to participatory oriented approaches in strategic planning.

Analysed is group of the largest Slovak cities (with population exceeding 50 thousand inhabitants). I am focusing on their approaches to strategic planning, used procedures and methodology in strategic plans elaborations, as well as actors involved. As main source of information were used strategic plans of cities (in Slovak – Programme of Economic and Social Development), related decisions adopted by City Councils and available media coverage of strategic planning in cities (predominantly local media).

For years there were missing more extensive links among local self-government, other local public institutions and private, as well as non-governmental non profit sphere. They were not involved in more extensive and systematic co-operation. Existed collaboration was occasional (sell/buy), individual (contracts, rarely joint companies), or e.g. grant schemes/contract for NGOs. Nevertheless there existed links among various institutions within formal procedures like urban planning (Master Plans), not mentioning that they have had access to local self-government institutions. At the same time there appeared also conflicts, selective approach, exclusions of some potential local partners. There were missing wider common goals in urban development or wider common collective action. Unclear were rules of relations among partners from various sectors. It was partly caused by the position of local self-government that was not so attractive partner having less powers and scarcity of resources. This perception has changed by decentralisation accompanied by rise of powers and resources available at the local level.

I can conclude that the central state by “strategic planning legislation” achieved more goals. It has not only improved the development planning processes, but it also has supported formation of „more governance“ based managing of cities. Local self-governments started to be more initiative and partnership oriented. Most of cities turned to participatory based approach to strategic plans elaboration. It generated visible progress – new partners were attracted from all segments of the local society and economy. It was used as big opportunity especially by NGOs and various associations, previously overlooked. It also improved the outcomes – more complex oriented priorities were identified. Despite shorter term of application, it seems that it can establish certain tradition and „forum“ for partnership, networking, co-operation among various actors in cities also outside strategic planning field. It also confirmed leadership of local self-governments in managing urban development.

This process has been successful in more cities, but it is still not a general practice. We still have some local self-governments that are less participative and do not use this opportunity. As a result they have strategies for local self-government in (managing) urban development, but not for overall urban development. In some cases strategic planning process did not attract all important partners. They are often not interested, prefer own priorities, individual approach, feel that they are too global and less local (large companies). There also appeared problems with various partners' participation (as changes of representatives, absence on meetings of working groups). There is also no chance to avoid some criticism from participants, especially those whose ideas and interests were not respected. However more balanced and informed relations among actors are achieved.

**Keywords:** governance, strategic planning, participation, actors, local self-government, Slovakia