

**Machyniak, J. (2021). Výkon samosprávy na úrovni obce, mesta a regiónu. Slovensko 1990 - 2020. (in English: Exercise of self-government at the level of municipality, city and region. Slovakia 1990 - 2020). Trnava: Fakulta sociálnych vied, Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave, 2021. 123 pp. ISBN 978-80-572-0121-2.**

The publication presented is a research monograph with the scope and contents corresponding to the standard aspects set for this type of publication. The text under review introduces an original view on the various issues of local self-government in the Slovak Republic, i.e. on the levels of municipality, city and region, the issues traditionally discussed rather often. A self-government, in variety of its forms, comprises one of the pillars of a democratic order of any society. A relatively large number of territorial-administration communities involved in a self-government, make it also include a political, economic and social dimensions. Therefore, this research monograph, in particular, successfully contributes to the professional debate at a time, when democracy and democratic values are tested because of political, economic and social development.

Despite the rather a large number of works devoted to this topic, this publication introduces the author's original approach to the researched issue, as well as some new knowledge and insights in addition to the already known facts. The author describes his findings of a long- time research made in identifying problems undoubtedly associated with the subsystem of local self-government with the solutions recommended. The monograph in its structure also underlines this intention. The three- chapter structure reveals a logic of research and argumentation introduced, with the text divided further into subchapters.

As already mentioned, the text of the reviewed monograph is structured into several parts. Even though they represent relatively separate components, while reading the text the reader acquires a clear and distinct sense of their logical continuity. The first chapter deals with democracy – an essential framework for a self-government. In this context, democracy is considered especially as a democratic political establishment, i.e. an existential basis of self-governing activities of public administration entities. In relation to aforementioned, attention is turned to the process of decentralization, as well as the theories related to the institutionalization of the self-government

subsystem in the Central European countries. These countries share common historical experience - not just due to history of undemocratic regimes, but also due to the transformation processes undergone in the society, political system, and public administration institutions as well. Subsequently, the author raises questions on importance of self-government and the key roles it should play in a democratic political establishment. This comprises a precise theoretical basis offering the opinions of the experts in the past; as well as contains the author's subjective conclusions in his effort to critically reflect the current situation in both levels of local self-government in Slovakia.

The second chapter is devoted to the issues of legislative and legal framework, its political definition, and certainly, the overall functioning of territorial self-government. At one point, the author reviews both territorial administrative levels and makes an effort to provide a rather comprehensive, but factual and clear view of the issue. In this context, the author deals with the formal relations between various stakeholders of local and regional self-government, and identifies problem areas that require further discussion on alternatives to address them. Many of them are caused by exercising the self-governing tasks insufficiently and protracted discussions held by professional public. Despite the fact that upon initial review this part of the monograph appears rather descriptive in its character, the author refers several of his valuable evaluations. Table no. 2 (25-26pp.) should be mentioned as a minor flaw, as it seems content-less in the first moment, although the overall context of the chapter reveals that the author's intention was to reinforce the claims about the non-existence of an universal model of regional self-government.

In the final, third chapter of the monograph, the author shifts from theoretical concepts to selected practical lessons learnt by territorial self-governments in the the Slovak Republic. In this context, the author's attention focuses on various topics of significant relevance. With its content, this chapter reflects selected problems within both territorial levels of self-government in Slovakia. The exercise of self-government is at the forefront, with regard to the fragmentation of the settlement structure and selected forms of direct democracy - however less used in practice, still presented as an tremendously important part of democracy exercised at the local level. The author deals with the fragmentation of the settlement structure in Slovakia from several points of view. The author's research should be appreciated as it incorporates also the European context, when referring to the relevant researches of recognised experts in this issue on the European

level (e.g. Pawel Swianiewicz). Considering municipalities in Slovakia, the author further discusses several problematic aspects of fragmentation of the settlement structure, focusing not only on the size and number of local governments, but also on financial support allocated to the municipalities to exercise their original and transferred competencies. An interesting finding here is an identification of cases where management of municipalities lacks human resources, in addition to insufficient material resources.

Within the third chapter, the author launches a discussion on the possibilities of further progress of the second level of territorial self-governments. The fact, that citizens and residents of these self-governing units are unable to fully reflect the very existence of these units, is emphasized here as a significant problem of regional self-governments in Slovakia. The author believes that the reasons lie in political decision purposefully taken on suitable model of the organization of regional self-government, as well as in deficient public interest in administering public affairs at this level of self-government. The author determines the area of competences as a significant problem of regional self-government. He states that the public often sees no distinction between competencies of municipalities and cities, and the competencies of self-governing regions. Subsequently, the author introduces suggestions for tackling this problem, perceiving an inevitable reassessment of the competencies of self-governing regions altogether with their further rationalization. Subsequently, the author presents his view on the solution of this problem, when in the case of self-governing regions, he considers it necessary to proceed to the reassessment of competencies and, ultimately, to their very rationalization. The author believes that a different model might be a solution, with municipalities and cities, self-governing regions and government exercising their relevant material competencies.

The monograph comprehensively combines theoretical background and practical examples, as well as opinions and attitudes, which could contribute to resolution of this long-term problem, which occurred in Slovakia due to the uncompleted reform of territorial self-government, along with the associated issues of decentralization of public administration. In this context, the question arises whether some issues discussed in the monograph would not require a higher analytical degree, but given the balance of individual chapters, the structure of the monograph can be considered as appropriate. The author further opens and raises some questions and leaves them unanswered, leading to a debate whether it was the author's intention.

Quality of any scientific monograph is interlinked also with the list of bibliographic references as well, which sums all information sources cited or

paraphrased within the text of the presented publication. Considering this, the author states an adequate number of relevant research sources, mainly national but also foreign ones, in alphabetical order, in accordance with the academic standards. The primary research sources comprise monographs and academic articles, published in peer-reviewed scientific journals and conference proceedings, as justified by the content of the monograph. Based on the aforementioned, content of the reviewed monograph is prepared thoroughly as proved by relevant and expert argumentation of the author; high level of systemizing the author's ideas, and moreover, author's independent expert conclusions (developed using an adequate number of predominantly national, but also foreign expert sources as well). The practical benefit of monograph lies is mostly in opening the discussion about improving and increasing the exercise of self-government at various vertical levels of governance in Slovak conditions. When considering the overall evaluation and assessment of this expert study, the author's compliance with the formal standards need to be taken into account. There are given rules of writing and editing the documents, and if the authors fail to respect them, the overall value of their text is weakened significantly. The text offers an explanatory, factual, clear and comprehensive content with structure logical to a reader, written in terminologically accurate language. The author managed to avoid using "terminological synonyms" which confuse comprehensibility of a text, as different terminology and different terms describe the same phenomenon. No such disturbing attributes are present in this monograph. The aesthetic aspect of the monograph is also in a precise way, which increases overall positive impression.

The book entitled "Exercise of self-government at the level of municipality, city and region. Slovakia 1990 - 2020" introduces a content interesting and comprehensive not only for the professional public dealing with public administration, public policy or political science, but also for the general public. Moreover, broad spectrum and complexity of the topic and content of this monograph undoubtedly offer a potential for further research in the matter.

**PhDr. Martin Švikruha, PhD.**

*Faculty of Social Sciences*

*University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava*

*e-mail: martin.svikruha@ucm.sk*