

Inner boundary reform in Košice – the most fragmented city in Slovakia

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Abstract

In the first part of the paper the aim is to provide the reader with a theoretical insight into models of government structure at the local level and provide evidence from European countries that underwent reforms during the second half of the 20th century. In the Slovak Republic (Slovakia) the renewal of local self-government in 1990 brought changes to the administrative boundary map with more than 200 municipalities re-established bringing the current number to 2,929 local administrative units. This has resulted in some discussion regarding a reduction in the number of local government units in this country. The second part of the paper is focused on Košice; the second largest city in Slovakia with 234,000 inhabitants. The city is organised at two administrative levels; one covering the whole city, the other covering 22 wards. When compared to cities of a similar size, Košice has been criticised for its high number of city wards and councillors, with the concomitant financial inefficiency it can bring. There has been an ongoing debate on reducing their number since 2010. The paper reports on the search for an administrative structure that would best tailor to the citizens' needs and provide effective management in Košice. It uses traditional methods of qualitative research (historical method, content analysis and synthesis) accompanied by statistical data organised in tables and figures.

Keywords: city administration, government structure, boundary reform, merger, Košice, Slovakia.

Introduction

Slovakia adopted a dual model of public administration after 1989. It operates as two separate entities; local government and state administration. Local self-government, emanating from the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Council of European Communities, 1985), is defined as the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population. It is a respected level of local self-government in democratic political systems in which citizens can participate in public matters. It has become a source for establishing the local self-government in the new political and social circumstances after 1989.

The Municipal System Act No. 369/1990 Coll. approved in 1990 defines municipality as an auton-

omous, self-governing, territorial unit encompassing permanently living inhabitants, with its original competencies, property and incomes. The jurisdiction of the local level of self-government in Slovakia is as follows:

- single-tier municipalities (2,750) follow the Municipal System Act,
- single-tier towns up to 200,000 inhabitants (138) follow the Municipal System Act,
- two-tier cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants (Bratislava and Košice) follow the Act No. 377/1990 Coll. in the Capital of Bratislava and the Act No. 401/1990 Coll. in Košice.

Policies aimed at the re-establishment of local self-government, in some states, have resulted in the establishment of a high number of small, local self-govern-

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ment units. The Slovak Republic, when compared to states of similar area and population, is such an example. It has many more local governments with smaller populations than other similar size countries. In 2016, there are altogether 2,890 self-governments in our country and the exercise of competencies is much the same in almost all of them. As many as 70 % of all municipalities fall into the category of less than 1,000 inhabitants. In order to solve this so-called fragmentation problem, many countries have undergone consolidation reforms to create a functional and cost-effective administrative system (Klimovský, 2010, 2014). In general, there are two patterns of reform that can be followed; the first is to amalgamate the municipalities, while the second is based on forms of inter-municipal cooperation. Municipalities are financed by shared and local taxes; shared taxes are allocated by different criteria; such as population, the number of children attending school facilities, the number of people aged 62 and above, and municipality altitude while local taxes are the responsibility of the municipalities themselves. Alongside the decentralisation process, state bodies have devolved the competencies to municipalities over recent years. Many of these municipalities have been struggling with financial problems and their management is not sufficiently effective; reflected in the ineffective exercise of their powers and the lower quality of their public service provision. Having reflected on the territorial administrative structure of Slovakia, there have been discussions (Lovacká, 2009; Csachová, 2013; Klimovský 2014) on the necessity of realising local government reform and maintaining a better quality of public service provision. However, for the time being, no concrete policy has been forwarded to reform it.

The fragmentation problem touches not only on rural but also urban structures. The city of Košice, as the second largest city in Slovakia with 234,000 inhabitants, is administratively organised on two tiers – the upper tier (a city-wide self-government) and the lower tier (local self-government in city wards). A city ward is understood as a self-governing, administratively delimited unit subordinated to the city with its own competencies and finances. It may be compared to boroughs in London, city districts in Prague or sectors in Bucharest. The city of Košice has 22 city wards – the highest number among Slovak cities, with the capital city of Bratislava totalling only 17 city wards – and its number has been subject to many public debates in recent years with a high degree of criticism from both political and academic representatives.

This paper will review the different ways in which formal governance may be structured, focusing particularly on administrative mergers, exemplified by the city of Košice. The following will be looked at:

- the socialist urbanisation process and merger period in the second half of the 20th century,
- a critique of the existing administrative structure with arguments for and against the current situation,
- boundary reform – disputes, proposals and local social climate.

Administrative amalgamation – 'Is bigger better?'

As stated above, during the second half of the 20th century many European countries underwent amalgamation reforms to create a functional and cost-effective administrative system. The first phase of the reforms, between the 1950s and the 1970s, can be characterised as centrally undertaken and affected north-western Europe and the states of the Eastern bloc. The second phase started in 1990 and has continued to the present day (Musilová, Heřmánek, 2015). The reforms resulted in a drop in the number of local governments and a redrawing of administrative boundaries.

The reforms have renewed a scholarly interest in the geography of governance. This is evidenced in Germany in Blatter (2006), while Swedish boundary reform is described in Hinnerich (2009), Danish municipal reform in Blom-Hansen (2012) and UK urban governance reform in Slack and Côté (2014). Country-profiled local government reforms in Central European states can be found in studies in Klimovský (2010), Swianiewicz (2010) and practices of decentralising government from all across Europe are given in Buček, Ryder (eds.) (2015). Outside Europe, clear evidence of amalgamation reform is shown in Toronto (Slack, Birvwd, 2013) and Japan (Nakazawa, 2015). Many studies do not unequivocally confirm that consolidated structures are more efficient (Ali et al., 2012) and promised cost savings from amalgamations for example, in Canada, have proved to be elusive (Slack, Bird, 2012). In the USA it was shown that consolidated structures were generally associated with higher spending (Boyne, 1992 in Slack, Bird 2012).

The city as a social and economic entity is obliged to deliver a wide range of services and infrastructure to its citizens at different levels. Its key public services are transportation, water, sewage management, waste collection and disposal, police and fire protection, parks and recreation, cultural facilities, child care services and social assistance. The quantity and quality of service provision depends, to a considerable extent, on how its governmental structures function. Slack (2004) and Slack, Côté (2014) compare different models of government structure at the local level and evaluate their advantages and disadvantages. They use a set of criteria for designing government structure:

economic efficiency, economies of scale, externalities, regional coordination, equity, access and accountability. Government structure at the local level can be classified, then, into four models of government structure: a one-tier model in two forms (fragmented and integrated), a two-tier model, voluntary cooperation and special-purpose districts. It is, however, stated that there is no model that stands out from the rest and that the appropriate governing structure depends on its specific characteristics; the nature of the services it provides, the revenue sources available to it, the size and location, and other factors (Slack, 2004).

Blatter (2006) discusses the localist and regionalist dichotomy or advocates of centralisation (consolidation) and advocates of decentralisation (fragmentation) processes. He develops ideas and considers small versus large-scale governments, few versus many scales of government and a broad versus a narrow functional scope of government institutions. He introduces the assumption that the dominant trend is a geographic expansion of socio-economic activities which will be or should be accompanied by a similar scalar expansion of political regulation and governance. Proponents of larger local government cite the economies of scale in service and administration, while public choice theory argues in favour of smaller self-governing units, with better conditions for local democracy, and preserves the competitiveness of public services provision.

In improving the economic effectiveness and efficiency of municipalities, the process of their amalgamation is suggested by Slack (2004). This is seen as a merger of two or more lower-tier municipalities within the existing region or by annexation - the appropriation of the municipality by an adjacent municipi-

ality. Amalgamation is seen as a way to ensure that municipalities are large enough to be financially and technically capable of providing the extensive array of services with which they are charged (Slack, Bird, 2012). It is generally perceived as a solution to territorial fragmentation (Csachová, 2012).

The arguments against larger units is the danger that the needs and interests of localities may not be well served. The argument for smaller units is the proximity to the citizens, adoption to the local specific features and responsibility of local representatives. If units are large they are losing their relationship to the citizen, if they are too small, they face the problem of not having close contact to the decision-making processes at the higher level. Another question is to rightfully differentiate between the city-wide and city-wards competencies. City-ward level is important for functions where the city-wide level is unfavourable and does not have the abilities and capacities.

Barlow (1994 in Buček, 1999) identified the three models of metropolitan governance: monocentric (unitary, one-tier), polycentric and two-tier. The monocentric model is responsible for providing a full range of local services. However, it brings a lot of centralisation, imbalances the interests of city wards and provides only one body for taxing and spending. The main drawbacks of the polycentric model are that it is missing a central authority, has disadvantages in the ineffectiveness of public services provision, produces rivalry between the city wards and lacks a development plan at a city-wide level (Buček, et al., 2010). The two-tier model combines the advantages of both the monocentric and polycentric models and is common in many metropolises (for example, Toronto, London,

Table 1. City-wide and city-ward functions in the two-tier model suggested by authors

City-wide functions (Bennett, 1992, Smith, 1993)	City-wide functions (Sharpe, 1995)	City-ward level (Slack, 2004)
city-wide functions of providing services to all inhabitants (integrated nets of infrastructure),	physical and strategic planning	roads and bridges
financial burden evenly distributed	administration of main transportation lines	street lighting
high scale functions	public transport	side-walks
functions of strategic planning and decisions	recreational areas	fire suppression
functions of redistribution of financial resources for lower levels to overcome the differences	housing	local land use and planning
managerial tasks in cooperation with private sector (joint projects)	public utilities: sewerage, water supply	parks and recreation
realisation of projects (technical, investment) that overlap the possibilities of city wards (due to finances)	police	libraries
realisation of functions that most people benefit from	cultural institutions	
	fire protection	
	protection of natural environment	

Source: adopted from Buček et al. (2010), Slack (2004), modified by author

Prague, Paris). It has a clear, city-wide level of elected authorities and city-ward elected authorities. Pacione (2001, adapted from Barlow, 1991) states that in a two-tier government the boundary problems are reduced and scale advantages are gained by an area-wide upper tier of government, while, additionally, small-scale democracy and local control can be retained and local needs met by the lower tier units of government. The main difficulty lies in implementation and in ensuring a good working relationship between the two levels of government (Barlow, 1991 in Pacione, 2001).

Historical and geographical profile of Košice

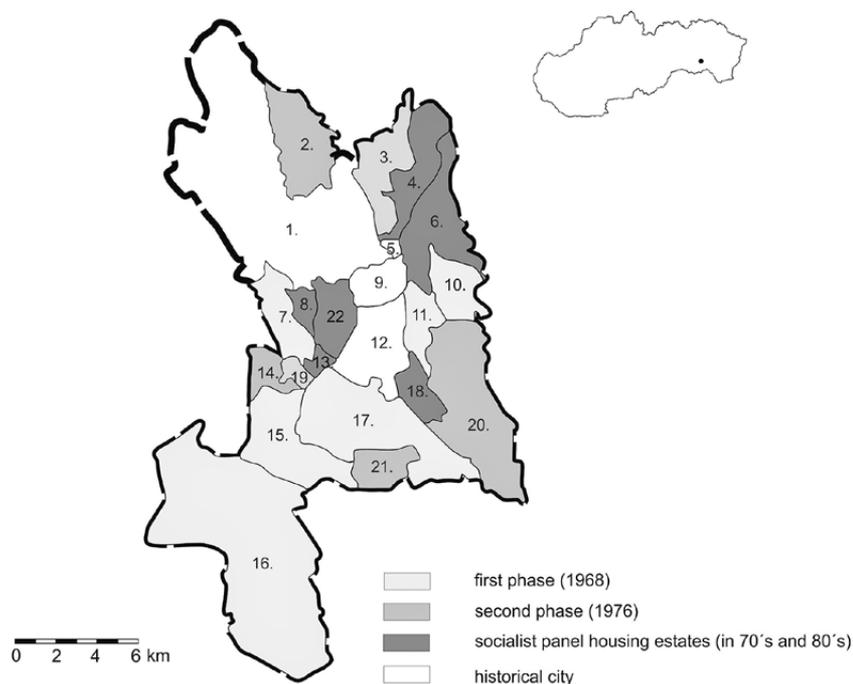
The city of Košice is the second largest in Slovakia with 239,464 inhabitants (2014) and an area of 243,7 km². It is administratively organised into 22 wards. There are 8 wards with more than 20,000 inhabitants. The largest cadastral area (54,62 km²) is Sever (North) and the smallest is Džungľa (Jungle) (0,47 km²). The population density is the highest in Západ (West) with 7,322 inhabitants/ km² and the lowest in the rural wards of the city (Šebastovce, Krásna, Barca and Poľov). The city of Košice is primarily known for the steel industry (US Steel) and the largest Roma urban concentration in Slovakia (Luník IX).

In the early modern period, the city of Košice was a privileged kingdom city and a well-renowned eco-

nom ic centre in the Kingdom of Hungary. In the course of the 19th century the population continually increased due to people migrating to the city from the surrounding rural areas. The ethnic composition of the population was quite diverse – Germans, Hungarians and Slovaks. Another very important impetus to city growth was the construction of the Košice-Bohumín railway line in the second half of the 19th century which connected Silesia with East Slovakia. Population growth decreased during the period of both world wars and more notably when Košice was annexed by Hungary from 1938 to 1945.

With the end of the Second World War, and a new political and economic regime in place, began a new and huge construction era for Košice. The city increased due to three main aspects: intensive industrialisation, industrial urbanisation and administrative integration. The political decision to build up a steel plant, the East Slovak Steel Company, brought importance to the city. Its construction started in 1960 and by 1975 had 23,000 employees.

In 1960, a national reform of the administrative structure was carried out and the city of Košice had its status as a city district withdrawn. However in 1968, the city national board granted Košice district status again and also a new “Košice-surrounding district” was established. By process of administrative annexation, the city grew rapidly (the municipalities of Barca, Košická Nová Ves, Pereš, Poľov, Šaca, Ťahanovce and



City wards in Košice:

1. Sever, 2. Kavečany, 3. Ťahanovce, 4. Sídliisko Ťahanovce, 5. Džungľa, 6. Sídliisko Dargovských hrdinov, 7. Myslava, 8. Sídliisko KVP, 9. Staré Mesto, 10. Košická Nová Ves, 11. Vyšné Opátske, 12. Juh, 13. Luník IX, 14. Lorinčík, 15. Poľov, 16. Šaca, 17. Barca, 18. Nad Jazerom, 19. Pereš, 20. Krásna, 21. Šebastovce, 22. Západ

Figure 1. Administrative annexation in Košice during the socialist period

Vyšné Opátske were annexed) (Figure 1). The national aim was to show the urbanisation indicators as one of significant indicators of economic and social power of states. In January 1976, the city grew with another phase of annexation; the municipalities of Kavečany, Krásna nad Hornádom, Lorinčík, and Šebastovce (Figure 1) were annexed. All these processes resulted in a huge increase in the city population; with the population more than doubling between 1960 and 1980 – from 90,000 to 200,000. Cadastral boundaries from that time resemble today's ones with even the period of the re-establishment of local governments after 1990 not bringing changes to Bratislava's and Košice's administrative maps. All the previously merged city municipalities have been preserved to the present.

The 1990s brought changes in ideological, political and social life, which was reflected in the slowing population increase up to the year 2000. Only in recent years Košice's population growth is more the result of increasing suburbanisation of the surrounding areas (Nestorová-Dická, 2014).

To understand the inner structure of Košice, we made a simple classification of city wards inspired by Hinnerich (2009) showing the example of Swedish boundary reform. He uses criteria to show the free riding effect using geographical indicators such as population density, percentage in agriculture, percentage in manufacturing and economic indicators – tax rate, tax base per capital and debt per capita. Having been inspired by this study, Csachová, Višňovský (2013) analysed the spatial structure of the city using five geographical indicators: total population, area, population density, land resources and number of flats, and then identified the inner structure of city as a set of homogeneous regions.

We have used the statistical data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic for the city of Košice from 2013. We came up with three types of city wards in Košice – urban, rural and mixed (urban-rural) type. The first group comprises **six** urban city wards: Staré Mesto, Západ, sídl. Dargovských hrdinov, sídl. Ťahanovce, Nad Jazerom, and KVP. This includes the historical city centre, the inner city with the inter-war built-up areas and the panel housing estates of the 1970s and 1980s. The second group included **twelve** rural city wards: Kavečany, Ťahanovce, Džungľa, Košická Nová Ves, Vyšné Opátske, Krásna, Barca, Šebastovce, Poľov, Lorinčík, Pereš, and Myslava. Most of them (except Džungľa) are administratively merged municipalities from the socialist era of the 1960s and 1970s, having a rural character through the suburbanisation process. The mixed character can be identified in **four** city wards: Sever, Juh, Luník IX, and Šaca. All four are specific in some way – Sever is the largest (largest forests in area), Juh is the largest

industrial area, Šaca is influenced by its proximity to US Steel and Luník IX is the largest ghetto of excluded, predominantly Roma, population.

With reference to the competence division between the two tiers in Košice, the city is divided into large and small city wards. There are 8 large city wards with a population of more than 20,000 inhabitants. The key competences that the city delivers to citizens are: transport communications, public lighting, public green space, culture and sport, social assistance and school facilities. City wards are predominantly responsible for maintaining local roads (except roads for the local transport system) lighting, public green space, cultural and sports activities. In big city wards, many competencies are delivered at a city-wide level (public lighting, public green space, culture and sport). Only the KVP housing estate provides two competencies that other large city wards do not; transport communication and public green space as inherited from the 1990's competence division.

Redrawing the administrative boundaries in Košice

The city of Košice has been recently considering whether the inner boundary amalgamation, the result of which larger administrative units are to be created, would bring the expected savings. The city mayor, Richard Raši, claimed to have the city delivering more and better-quality services at the lowest cost. He advocates redrawing the city boundaries to have more effective cost-saving governance. To achieve this, two procedures were suggested; a reduction in the number of local representatives and a merger of city wards. The high number of city quarters councillors (305 in 2014) were debated hand in hand with the amendment of the Act on the Košice City approved in 2013. Even though it has brought a considerable drop in the number of city and city wards councillors, the boundary reform has not been realised (Figure 2) and it can be stated that there is more willingness to reduce the number of representatives rather than reduce the number of city wards.

Notwithstanding, there are some legislative limits that do not favour city ward reduction. According to the Act on Košice ...'to create, to dissolve, to merge or to split the city ward or to make boundary changes can be exercised by regulation endorsed by a city board. In order to approve it, a majority of the electorate is necessary. Creation, dissolution, merger or split of a city ward can be refused by local inhabitants in the referendum if approved by a majority of electorate.'

It can clearly be said that no city ward mayor advocates merger with another city ward. Based on prelim-

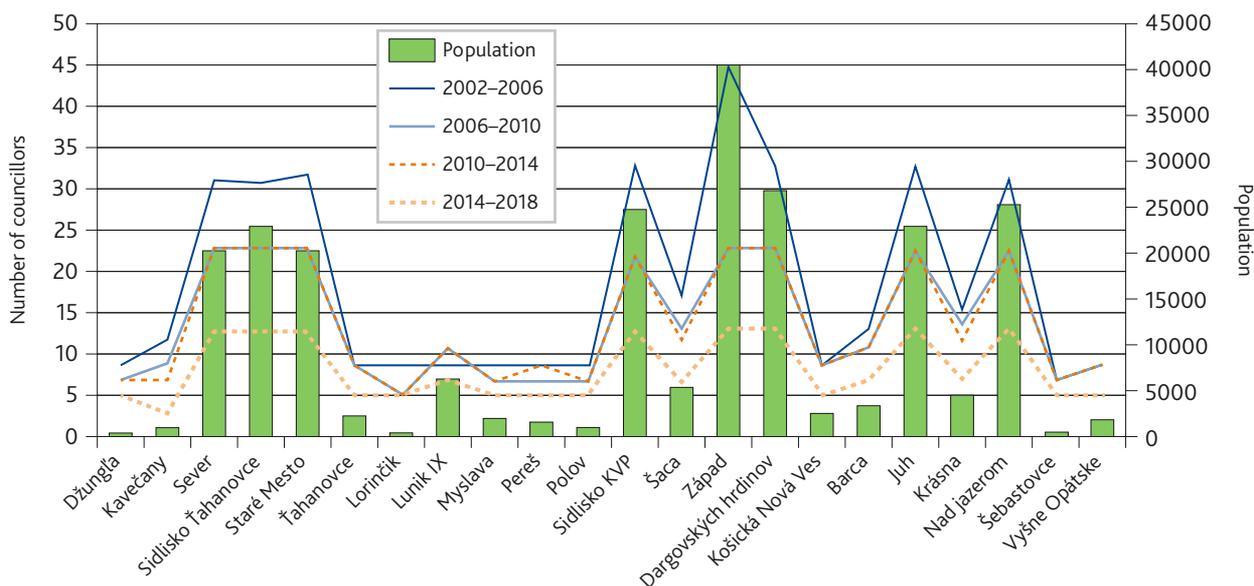
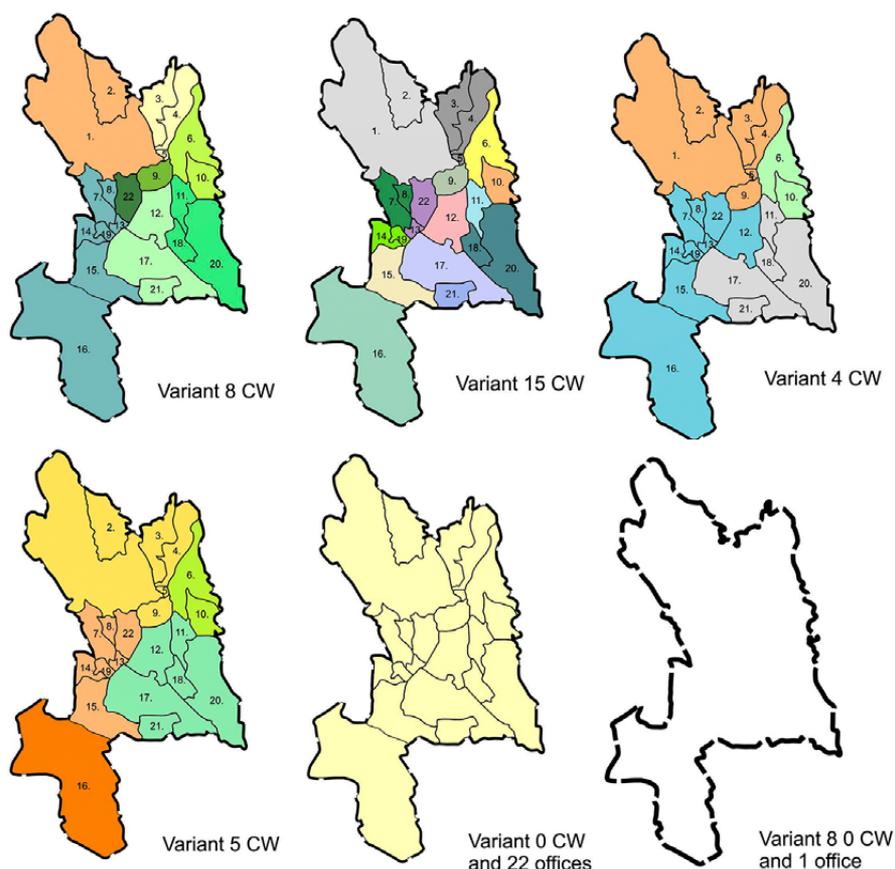


Figure 2. Population in city wards and number of councillors respectively
 Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic [online], www.statistics.sk



City wards in Košice:

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14. Lorinčík, 15. Polov, 16. Šaca, 17. Barca, 18. Nad Jazerom, 19. Pereš, 20. Krásna, 21. Šebastovce, 22. Západ

CW - city ward

Source: City Council Meeting of 16 January 2015, accessible at www.kosice.sk

Figure 3. Variants on administrative restructuring in Košice (2015)

inary surveys, the vast majority of local governments are reluctant to merge (Csachová, 2016). Generally stated, mayors of urban city wards and panel housing estates are more open to integration, whereas the mayors of historically rural municipalities call for the continued autonomy. Here, the legislatively given population limit of minimum 3,000 inhabitants for newly established local administrative unit can be faced. It is thus very unlikely that city wards having less than 3,000 inhabitants could regain autonomy. The city mayor, Richard Raši, gave six alternatives for inner boundary reform and provided the legal expertise to the city board on January 18 (2016) (Figure 3). The first suggests 8 city wards with the principle that 'larger takes smaller'. The most fragmented model accounts for 15 city wards, so the changes are minimal. The more radical changes are presented in a third model of 4 city wards, the fourth model gives 5 city wards. The most considerable changes are the last two variants; a one-tier model with 22 local authorities, and a one-tier model. It concluded with the city board not supporting any of the presented variants. His effort to hold a local referendum together with National Elections (in March 2016) was rejected too.

Table 2. Variants of the boundary reform in Košice

Variant	savings (in millions €)
8 city wards	2,1
15 city wards	2,6
4 city wards	4,4
5 city wards	4,1
22 administrative offices	4,3
1 administrative office	6,3

Source: Reports from the City Assembly (18 January 2016)

The situation can be summarised as follows; despite starting some steps towards administration changes, there is no real political will to realise it. We will be observing the forthcoming events to evaluate this ongoing process. What has changed recently is that many city wards have started to discuss the merger issue. We have noticed a more serious approach with public discussions and plans to arrange referendums. Many city wards are holding them in the coming months, and, already, a first referendum being held in one of the smallest (671 inhabitants) wards Džungľa.

Two questions were raised:

- Question 1: Do you agree with dissolution of Džungľa?
- Question 2: Do you agree that Džungľa merges another city ward?

The turnout was 60.5 % (297 out of 491 of the electorate), 95 % of whom cast a vote to reject a merger.

Conclusion

Boundary reforms of local governments with the trend towards larger local governments were a frequent phenomenon in Europe during the second half of the 20th century. It is evidenced by many studies across Western and Eastern European countries that they underwent the processes of decentralised concentration of powers. Since the provision of public services is major function of local governments, the reforms should be tailored to meet the citizens' needs. In this sense, 'is bigger better?' is a common question raised in discussions when questing for the optimal model of government structure in urban and rural structures. The arguments against larger units is the danger that the needs and interests of localities may not be well served. The argument for smaller units is the proximity to the citizens, adoption to the local specific features and responsibility of local representatives. If units are large they are losing their relationship to their citizens, if they are too small, they face the problem of not having close contact to decision-making processes at the higher level. In terms of city governance models, one can think of three basic models – polycentric, unitary, and two-tier model.

The city of Košice, with around 234,000 inhabitants, is a two-tier self-government – the upper city-wide tier and lower tier consisting of 22 city wards. It has the highest number of city wards and city councillors (altogether 253) amongst all Slovak cities. A reduction in them has been called for political and economic reasons. For the purpose of economic efficiency, there have been voices to merge them into larger administrative units. Retrospective factors – such as a history of the city and the rise in urbanization during the second half of the 20th century is instructive. The city's size increased due to three main aspects – intensive industrialisation, industrial urbanisation and administrative integration. At present, according to urban-rural criteria, 12 city wards still preserve a rural character and are affected by the process of suburbanisation, 6 city wards are strongly urban – apart from the historical centre, these are typified by panel housing estates built in the 1970s and 1980s. The remaining 4 are of mixed character.

We assessed the critique of the current administrative division raised by the city mayor Richard Raši, who advocates the redrawing of the city boundaries to achieve more effective governance. City councillors, on the one hand, call for administrative reforms, but on the other hand they do not want their city ward to be merged with another one. Discussions and proposals for a new administrative structure are presented. Even though a reform is likely to happen in the future, for the time being, no proposal has been approved and

Raši's proposal to hold a referendum on a merger on the date of Slovak national elections (March 2016) was rejected too.

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