

**Vratislav Havlík:**

*Města jako partner v procesu vládnutí:*

*Případ českých a německých měst*

*(The City as a Partner in the Process of Governing:*

*The Case of Czech and German Cities)*

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Reviewed by Veronika Bajerová

Vratislav Havlík ranks amongst the experts operating in the field of research into the activities of local figures in the European Union, the Europeanisation of political systems and the contemporary politics of Hungary and Germany.

The reviewed book aims at an examination of the participation of Czech and German cities in governing within the framework of the regional policy of the European Union. The author deals with the question as to what factors influence the share of the studied towns in this multi-level governance. A number of research questions were formulated. The first of these concerned whether the form of the political system in the given country influences the participation of towns in multi-level governance. The second question investigates whether an organisational reconfiguration has taken place

in the studied towns in order for them to be better incorporated into multi-level governance. The third research question related to the difference between Czech and German towns in the use of domestic access points (to be understood as activities). The fourth question examined the extent to which the use of the Brussels access points is a component of the portfolio of the towns with regard to their activities in multi-level governance. The fifth, penultimate question investigates whether the length of a country's EU membership is an independent variable in this research. The sixth and final question concerns whether or not the activities of towns within a single country are similar from the perspective of multi-level governance.

The entire work is divided into ten chapters. The theoretical section deals

with both the research design and with the theoretical starting points of the work. Within this framework, the author deals with the concepts of Europeanisation, multi-level governance, Europeanising perspectives of top-down and bottom-up, the partnership principle and paradiplomatic approaches. Of the individual approaches, the researcher selects only those which can be utilised within the work. None of the theoretical approaches is applied in a complex manner.

The analytical section contains chapters which progressively attempt to respond to the individual research questions. It also contains an empirical study which was created on the basis of an analysis of primary documents and data collection conducted in the field in the period from February 2011 to January 2013 (questionnaires and in-depth interviews, in which the respondents were town hall employees whose main job content is the processing of EU agenda). In the introduction the author provides a rationale for his choice of data collection method, nevertheless the selection of the specific investigated towns lacks a deeper consistency, and the author himself concedes that his selected criterion of population size is insufficient and “*somehow legitimate*” (p. 28). Eventually the researcher chose towns with a population of over 100 thousand for the study, but also adds that exceptions could be granted. In fact this entire work is accompanied throughout by exceptions, and exceptions from exceptions. Of the Czech towns the author studies

four cities — Brno, Ostrava, Olomouc (in the meantime the population of this city dropped below the set limit) and Liberec. On the German side ten towns were chosen. These towns were not chosen by the method of random selection, since the researcher considers the historical-political perspective to be more important than the correct methodological structure.

What are the researcher’s conclusions? They could be summarised within a few sentences. The political system of a given country does not have an influence on the share of a city’s participation in multi-level governance. Czech and German towns have undergone similar organisational changes. As regards the use of domestic access points, no pronounced differences were found between Czech and German cities. The Brussels access points are not widely used by the cities. The length of membership of the individual countries does not have an influence on their incorporation into multi-level governance, the sole advantage of German towns is apparently the solid network of their Brussels offices. The response to the last research question is equivocal, but it can be stated that differences between Czech and German cities generally do not predominate. The author states that the actual activity of the individual towns is of far more fundamental significance.

As we see, the conclusions of the study create a somewhat confused impression. The author himself concedes that the research encountered a number of risks of distortion, and so it is not possible to

provide unequivocal responses, which will naturally not escape the attention of the careful reader. This therefore begs the question as to what actual significance the entire study brings... The author's note at the end of the monograph that the study in question must be considered only a point of entry into the issue thus expresses all. Although the researcher attempted to focus on a new and on first glance novel theme, his study bore no fruit.

This publication is without doubt designated for the academic sphere. It

is not possible to recommend the book to interested laypersons, since the language in which it is written is pronouncedly technical. The entire book creates a clumsy and ponderous impression, as if the author is attempting to hide the results of his research behind a large volume of excessively formal, technical text. Perhaps it would be better to publish his conclusions in the form of a classic academic article which could simply present the fundamental matters. Such a text would undoubtedly be more bearable for the reader.