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PARTICIPATION AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Abstract

Municipal level consists of the municipalities, the municipalities with the status of towns and last but not least of the personal attribute, who are the citizens - residents. In applying the principle of subsidiarity, the municipal level i.e. the local self-government of municipalities and towns is the most appropriate predisposition to application of the various forms of participation as a exemple influence of social networks and media. The aim of this paper is to point out the current state of the possibilities of participation at the municipal level. When writing this paper, we will mainly use an analysis of legislation related to the research problems. The result will be evaluation of the current state and prediction of possible new innovative forms of participation at the municipal level.

Key words: Participation, Local government, Municipality, Citizen, Social Networks

1 INTRODUCTION

The need for citizen participation in public affairs and matters that concern them directly is very important and deserves an attention. Participation rate also affects the rate of democracy at the local level. Citizens should be perceived as those who intervene into society and develop it. Municipal level consists of the municipalities, the municipalities with the status of towns and last but not least of the personal attribute, who are the citizens - residents. In applying the principle of subsidiarity, the municipal level i.e. the local self-government of municipalities and towns is the most appropriate predisposition to application of the various forms of participation. We need to realize that the residents of the municipality or town, have the right to influence by their thoughts the things that affect them and they are able to affect it with the various forms of participation.

The State, as well as higher territorial units and local self-government of municipalities and towns are very important in supporting the participation. Local government i.e. municipality, town should enable the residents to participate in its performance, which causes the connection between local government executives and the most important attribute of self-government, who are residents. Participation

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of residents is realized in accordance to the local representative democracy. It is the role of each municipality or town to create appropriate conditions for participation mainly based on Law no. 369/1990 Coll. on municipal administration, or on innovative forms of participation. The main purpose of participation is to enable residents to be a part of the decision-making and show the need of communication between the representatives of the municipality and residents. If these conditions are fulfilled, participation of the residents will be effective and at high level. It could bring success not only for a municipality, town, or for the residents, but it also can be an inspiration for others. It will ultimately raise the level of the society including national and European level.

2 LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Each country as a form of organizational unit, was established in the historical process of developing a society that exists to this day. During this development, for a maintaining of the state, the implementation of various activities had to be continued. These activities had to contain the procurement of all matter, tasks connected with the existence and life of such territorial unit and the organization of relations within it (Sotolář, 2011).

With the arrival of a democratic society the new opportunities appears for an implementation, management and exercise of public authority. We can see new ideas, draft measures and efforts to reform the content of public administration. For a modern democratic country we consider a country which is typified by the attributes of a democratic political system, rule of law, protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms, pluralism and political association, free elections and so on.

Democracy is addressed to the citizens because the society and the country consists of the rights of citizens who have the real power. Power of the State originates from the people. This real power is reflected in rights, which causes the formation of institution. The reason is for example an application of the electoral law, through which they elect their representatives. The representative democracy is formed and based on real people power. We can tell, that the democracy is an expression of the people. Democracy is identified with „justice, equality, tolerance etc. And we can see a means to solve all the problems and conflicts in it.“ (Sumárek – Gbúrová- Dudinská, 2006, p.141).

The extent of representation has become the basic condition of modern representative democracy. We talk about universal and equal voting rights, which allowed citizens - voters indirectly participate in the creation of representative and executive authorities in the State (Sumárek – Gbúrová- Dudinská, 2006). In our opinion, we can say that, the most important power in a democratic country is occupied by citizens in the form of legitimacy. The citizens delegate their power to conduct and control the state through their representatives, but the local

government regards the exercise of the government of municipality or towns. Citizens have an important position in democratic country because of the several reasons. They are important with regard to the legitimacy of power, and also from the view of all citizens and residents in the country. Democratic way of government guarantees, that citizens are able to participate in the management of the society.

It is natural, and due to the growing population during the development of humanity also understandable, that the number of people increased, and it was necessary to create a mechanism to ensure effective management and functioning of the State. The interest in the things that concerned citizens of the country appeared. Citizens became interested in public affairs, delegated their power to those who should represent them. They use the right to choose those, who will be the best representatives in their opinion.

Representative democracy exists also in the form of local self-government. The representative bodies at a municipal level are local and regional authorities. The interests of the citizens are reflected through these bodies, because they are electing their representatives. The existence of those authorities is based on representation in the legal sense, based on elections (Sumárek – Gbúrová-Dudinská, 2006).

Not only at the national level, but also in the conditions of municipalities and towns, the same form of decision-making is used. Citizens on the basis of the legitimacy of its representatives demonstrate the intention to be represented in public affairs, in matters which will be decided in favor of citizens. Within this, there is a kind of brake on the part of the citizens when they can put their power into the hands of other representatives. They can do it through the next elections, that are held at regular four-year intervals. This will minimize the abuse of public position, and citizens have a right for a change if they are not satisfied with the work carried out by representatives in their favor.

We consider the local democracy to be a democracy at the local municipal level, that is closest to the citizen and therefore can react flexibly to their needs and interests. Citizens have right to engage in public matters, they have also the right to participate at the exercise of self-government, which has its power in the exercise of public affairs on citizens. This form of democratic order of social relations closely corresponds to the principle of direct democracy, such as the participation of citizens in decision-making, active participation of citizens in terms of local government, local referendum and so on.

The smallest and basic unit within the administrative organization in Slovakia is the municipality. Therefore the closest to the citizen is a local self-government. In each level, the people are the first from whom everything depends, what means that local „citizens at the same time have the opportunity to confront the democratic principles of construction law declared in the Constitution with a reality, because

it is one of the ways of participation in public affairs.“(Posluch – Cibulka, 2000, p. 174).

2 LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

The idea of self-government is associated with the formation of civil society. „Self-government is a special form of expression of the plurality of views on the local level in the company, and therefore it is an important component of the rule of law“ (Sotolář,2011, p.18.). The local government as an element carries justification within each state. Local government can not be seen as an opposite to the government, because it is part of it. Local government authorities contributes, so that the public policy and public services receive the direct responsibility of citizens.

According to Joseph Sotolář, we understand the local government as a „constitutionally guaranteed right of territorial unit (as a territorial community of citizens) to decide independently within autonomous spaces defined by the Constitution and laws of their affairs. Autonomy is determined by a specific competens“ (Sotolář,2011, p.8.).

It is an exercise of a state tasks by independent state-certificated public entities. Self- government means managing of its affairs concerning her own matters by its own means. Forms and methods by which government controls and ensuring their performance don't have a state and power nature.

The aim of the local self-government is to decide separately about the matters relating to it and also to manage its affairs. The principle of subsidiarity is applied here. Execution is governed by a law and administered by its own needs and own free will. Important is also to satisfied the needs and interests of the self-governing community. Self-government provides a limited range of permanent and independent management of allocated common issues in a comprehensive manner (Sotolář, 2011).

Local democracy can be fully understood and considered as the slightest (means the territory within the state) form of democracy as well as closest from the perspective of population (residents). We believe that self-government of the town/municipality, can be considered as local democracy. Local self-government manages and executes its tasks itself without the outside interference. We can therefore conclude that the self- government has the nature of collective decision-making of local democracy. Therefore we understand a self-government as an integral part of the public administration of a modern state with a democratic political system, and of the above mentioned local democracy.

Autonomous management is derived from the will of the citizens. Self-governing model is an alternative to a concentration of power in one center. And that is the biggest benefit for the life of the citizens. Generally speaking,

if the solution of task is more effective, fully and rationally in the terms of local self-government, then that is the place where it should be solved. Local self-government can function effectively as long as the integrity of the power is ensured, the competencies are retained (originally delegated or transferred) and as long as the decisions are not annulled by the other authorities in state. From this perspective, we can say that municipality decides authoritatively to a certain degree while maintaining the nature of self-governance.

3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS A BASIC FOR MUNICIPAL LEVEL

An integral part of the modern democratic state is also the public administration, which includes the territorial self-government. The territorial self-government has experienced a lot of moments during its existence, that were related to its establishment and the dissolution. One of these moments occurred in 1989 when there was a restoration of self-government. This year was of key importance, in terms of its present form of self- government, or municipal.

The process of constituting the self-government of municipalities and towns in the Slovak Republic was clearly accompanied by profound social changes after 1989. The recourse from which was the fact that the system of the national committees as an instruments of administrative - directive management of the state, have minimize the activity of local self- government and municipalities and enforce centralized management of all life components. Weaknesses of the system of bodies has led to the drafting of the reform of the national committees. The gradual development showed up that neither the reform of national committees would make conditions for the emergence of municipalities. Therefore, they proceed to the speedy development of the proposal which we now know as the Law on Municipal Administration.

In the new conditions it was not possible to have a lack of local self-government in a democratic state. The year 1990 meant the adoption of the Law no. 369/1990 Coll. on Municipal Administration and the elections to municipal bodies were held simultaneously. This law formed the legal and factual prerequisites and conditions for the launch of local self-governments in Slovakia. The law was connected with the Law No. 472/1990 Coll. on the organization of local state administration as an essential legislative base of the new system of local government and state administration (Sotolář, 2011).

A new document about the municipalities has created the autonomy of its institutions, competencies and other necessary components for the performance of local self-government. Transition from a totalitarian to a democratic political system which significantly strengthened individual rights and freedoms contributed to the new structure of local self-government and restoration. Changes occurred

when creating conditions for a higher degree of citizen participation in public affairs to respect the principle of subsidiarity, also meant the empowerment of local government, but also the development of municipalities, towns.

Any changes that have occurred since 1989 in self-government, conducted together with the reform of public administration which was directed to „make promises to public administration to get as close to the citizen as possible“ (Mesežnikov - Nižňanský, 2002, p. 16).

Local self-government is understood as the sum of local issues whose direct provision and performance is a precondition for running the municipality or town with direct implications for its citizens living in the municipality or town. We also agree with the understanding of local government by Eleonóra Kováčová who says „local government can be considered as the most suitable area for democracy and therefore, the local community can elect its bodies independently from the state government. These bodies fulfill tasks and are responsible for achieving results to a citizens“ (Kováčová, 2010, p.74).

The essence of the municipality as stated by the J. Sotolář implies the unity of three components, namely: private (personal) basis of the municipality, a territorial (territorial) basis of the municipalities and execution of local (municipal) self-government. Personal base of the municipality is the population of the residents of municipality. On the one hand, it has the same rights but on the other hand it also has responsibilities. Territorial basis of the municipalities is formed by the territory of the municipality with boundaries where the municipality or town lies. The territory, which forms the municipality or town is linked to historical evolution, or it might be the merger of several municipalities or by separation. Execution of the local municipal self-government is based on the bodies, ensuring its proper functioning. These authorities are the mayor of the municipality and municipal council, as well as municipal office. All these three components are making up the community, they are interlinked and we can say that the loss of any one of them could cause the loss and ultimately extinction of the municipality. Therefore they are a necessity for local self-government.

4 PARTICIPATION AS A TOOL OF ENFORCEMENT AND ITS FORMS

Participation (from lat. Particeps - taking part) is translated as a fellowship or co-decision. In the broadest sense it is an expression of opinion, participation in decision-making, administration, management and resolution of common things in the family, school, community, leisure time, in municipality, in the workplace (Trvrdoň, 2006). Participation is a source of positive motivation, personal satisfaction and beneficial outcomes, it helps to make the lives of children and young people richer, more complex, but at the same time more difficult and

demanding. Participation refers to the way of living in a democracy. It does not only mean physical presence in the activities, but especially internal involvement. This requires to take responsibility for deciding, following proceedings and improving of the current situation.

The purpose of participation is to know and apply the concept of citizenship since childhood and adolescence, based on the understanding of external attributes of democracy (the mechanism of elections, public administration institutions, etc.). It should be continuous and permanent, active and responsible contribution to the life and development of environment. Participation occurs in all areas of society. With active participation citizens use democracy to carry out their power.

We differentiate between the political and civic participation, but the difference might not be obvious because sometimes effort to influence the non-political character of the activities can gain political character. Political (civic) participation is currently included among the fundamental pillars of democracy. „Participation is primarily“ citizen power „, ie an essential element of sustainability of democracy through the individual's right to participate in public decision-making“ (Macháček, 2011, p. 176).

The concept of civic participation in Slovakia is associated with the beginning of the ninety years of the twentieth century. In this period it increasingly began to use the term associated with citizens. There is a change at the role and the status of citizens to public because they became interested in public affairs. They began to exert their authority, the importance of the right to participate in public affairs. Citizens were transformed from passive recipients of decisions by authorities to active proponents of change. Together with their activities, their civic potential is realized.

In the broader dimension of citizen participation it can be understood as political participation. By participating in public meetings, participation in political life and elections or through the membership in social organizations. By L. Macháček opposed to civic participation, which includes various non-institutionalized activities (initiative campaigns, movements projects), the political participation is mainly associated with formally accepted and institutionalized activities, which include the right of voting and petition, assembly and multiplexing (Macháček, 2009).

Political participation is usually understood as a civic activities aimed at influencing the government and public policy (Briška, 2010). Therefore, we can say that participation is usually understood as activities of citizens aimed at influencing authorities and local self-government bodies of municipal politics.

From the perspective of classification participation can be divided into passive and active. Under passive participation, we understand participation in actions and activities that were prepared by adults. This form of participation is particularly suitable for disadvantaged target groups that would not be involved otherwise

in any activities. It provides an example and motivation for the preparation of similar activities, but of course ideally with a growing participation. The second type is the active participation that is important for local government and lies in the fact that young people are involved in the whole decision-making process from idea to delivery of a particular problem.

Another classification tells us about the internal and external participation. Internal participation is when people are directly involved in activities (preparation, implementation) within their own structures, such as civil society organizations. External participation is then the case of interaction between citizens and other entities in the community, such as politicians, government as a whole or sponsors.

Another subdivision of the participation is from the point of view of communication to a direct or indirect participation. Direct participation is when people communicate or negotiate with third parties directly. That means the intermediaries are excluded from the communication. The indirect participation is when citizens communicate with others, or communicate to the public via their representatives or leaders of youth. Both types of participation have their advantages and disadvantages. At the indirect participation, experienced representatives can interpret the views of others, depending on the situation, especially if they have enough practical experience. At the direct interaction, citizens can personally and immediately get reactions from third parties. The disadvantage of direct participation is the fact that citizens can directly talk with third parties, but their impact on the overall decision is by no means guaranteed. In this case it is about the attitude that third parties have towards people. The effectiveness of participation is also based on operating tools that are in the area of participation: the right to information, the right to petition and the right to assemble peacefully.

5 WAYS AND FORMS OF PARTICIPATION AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

Citizens are the main focus of the local self-government, whose basic unit is the municipality. It is mostly the citizen as a resident, who is actively participating in public affairs concerning the municipalities. This reflects the direct influence of residents in the process of social, economic and political decision-making. Resident through his civic activities significantly contributes to the development of his municipality and the standart of living for residents is increasing. Through the participation in public affairs, residents implement their political and civil rights guaranteed directly by the Constitution of the Slovak republic.

Participation of citizens follows directly the Lawno. 369/1990 Coll. on Municipal Administration. Residents have the right to attend municipality council meetings, together with members of local government council. They can also

directly participate in the work of various commissions, committees and other bodies. Residents also have the right to express their opinion on the major issues of mutual interest to the municipality or city in a local referendum. The most important and according to Horváth, that the most frequently used is the right to vote and participate in elections (Horváth, 2004).

In this part we will sum up the ways how residents can participate in the self-government. They participate by exercising their rights, namely: right to elect local authorities of the municipality and also to be elected to the local authority of the municipality, right to vote on important matters of life and community development through a local referendum, right to attend meetings of the municipal council, the public gatherings of community residents and to express their views on them, right to use the municipal facilities and other property of the municipality, right to turn to municipal authorities with their complaints and suggestions, right to request assistance in times of sudden emergencies.

Creating the conditions for mobilization of people to participate in local self-government is not providing a lot of offers for leisure activities – this would be the wrong way to participate. The point is to let residents really participate in the actual decision-making about the matters which are relating to them. Therefore, it is necessary to change the approach of the local government authorities towards the citizens and ask them first what they need for living, how they would deal with the tasks, and so on. In general, to involve them in solving specific tasks. Only in this spirit the cycle of prosperity and urban development of municipalities and region can be preserved.

Local and regional authorities support and promote the representation of citizens and they help them to address the challenges and current issues. They can also effectively solve the problems and challenges together. Due to the fact that local government authorities are closest to the citizen as has already been mentioned several times, they play a very important role in promoting their involvement in the process, for example through the institutional groupings. Every municipality or town have to solve its tasks and problems and they know what is and what is not a benefit for them. They can also identify the priorities that they want to devote and they look upon the needs of their residents. Only by knowing the participation of citizens at the local level in Slovakia, it can be objective, conceptual, useful, rational and efficient. Its success rate and building is based on the will of the representatives of the competent local authorities and those who work with youth.

6 INNOVATIVE FORMS OF PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

In conclusion we mention some observations to innovative forms of participation, to serve as a complement to the abovementioned form and manner of participation. We have compiled them based on the results of research and analysis of identified experience so. We consider the following as an innovative forms of participation:

- the need for the involvement of citizens as actors in government decision-making on matters relating to young people, thereby a partnership mutually respectful relationships between adults and young people can be created;
- active participation of citizens, entities and their inclusion of general in the development of concepts and action plans;
- information via the Internet as well as on the websites of municipalities and through local media,
- transparency of information on government websites,
- ensuring the safe sharing of citizens' opinions on social networks,
- learning about the e- democracy,
- realizations on social sites, „it is them that is one of the hottest phenomena of contemporary internet.“
- inform the public about the importance of voting in connection with the life in the municipality / town
- to initiate a dialogue between citizens, civil society organizations as entities who promote the views of citizens on the one hand and the government on the other, on matters concerning local government.

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