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URBAN GOVERNANCE IN CROATIA: POTENTIALS FOR SUCCESS¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the role of the City Council in urban governance in selected Croatian towns. The analysis will be based on the questionnaire sent to all Croatian towns aiming to investigate priorities and importance of different activities at local level to obtain sustainable local development.

The key research questions of the paper are the following:

- (i) «What influence has the Council in Croatian towns concerning different activities important for local development?»
- (ii) «What is the importance of different tasks for successful urban governance in Croatia?»
- (iii) «What are the councillors opinions about goals which are important for urban local development and governance?»

In order to answer these questions, this paper will focus on selected Croatian towns which will be divided in several groups according to their size measured by total number of inhabitants.

Furthermore, this paper will provide a thorough analysis of the answers given by town councillors regarding achievement of local development and governance.

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Because of the fact that Croatian towns dispose with different amount of revenues, in this paper local fiscal capacity will be used as important indicator of successfulness of urban governance in analysed Croatian towns.

The results presented in this paper will enable to identify key constraints and potentials for sustainable local development in Croatia.

Key words: urban governance, city councils, local self-government units, Croatia.

JEL Classification: R28 Urban economics: Government Policy; R51 Finance in Urban Economics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban governance can be viewed as a process aiming to provide urban services by establishing system of urban management that will provide adequate living conditions and well-being to all urban citizens. To achieve major goal, adequate living conditions to all urban citizens, local self-government needs successful strategies for planning effectiveness at local level. Implementing of local strategies are duties of various stakeholders, including the City Councils and councillors.

The goal of this paper is to analyse the role of the City Council in urban governance in selected Croatian towns. The analysis will be based on the questionnaire sent to all Croatian towns aiming to investigate priorities and importance of different activities at local level to obtain sustainable local development.

The paper is structured as follows.

In the second chapter we are going to define urban governance and major aims and tools of urban governance. In this chapter short discussion on the issue of territorial and administrative structure, as well as the issue of decentralization in Croatia is presented.

The third chapter discusses used methodology in more details. Explanation of questionnaire and main characteristics of sample is given.

Further more thinking of urban governance in Croatia will be elaborated in the fourth chapter. In that chapter we are going to give answers on research questions. In order to answer these questions, this paper will focus on selected Croatian towns which will be divided in several groups according to their size

measured by total number of inhabitants. Furthermore, this paper will provide a thorough analysis of the answers given by town councillors regarding achievement of local development and governance.

In the last chapter we conclude our findings and propose some further research of this important issue.

2. URBAN GOVERNANCE

2.1 Defining Urban Governance

Governance can be defined in numerous ways. UNDP defines governance as exercise which comprises political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels². Governance comprises the complex mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, mediate their differences, and exercise their legal rights and obligations.

Governance can be defined as written and unwritten policies, procedures, and decision making of units that control resource allocation within and among institutions. Governance refers to the different process in society aiming to perform policies and decisions concerning public life, and economic and social development. Governance involves interaction between formal institutions and those of civil society (The Governance Working Group of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences, 1996).

Having all of above mentioned in mind we can conclude that governance is the process of decision-making and refers to the complex set of values, norms, processes, and institutions by which decision makers from the public sector and the civil society perform their public duties at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Governance in general has three dimensions: (1) the *political* dimension (processes by which those in authorities are elected, monitored and replaced), (2) the *economic* dimension (process by which public resources are effectively managed and sound policies implemented) and (3) the *institutional* dimension (processes by which citizens and the state itself respect public institutions).

² <http://www.gdrc.org/u-gov/governance-define.html>

Basic criteria for assessing governance might include the degree of legitimacy, the level of representatives, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness with which public affairs are conducted.

UNESCO defines urban governance as the processes that lead and take into account the various links between stakeholders, local authorities and citizens³. It involves bottom-up and top-down strategies to favour active participation of communities concerned, negotiation among actors, transparent decision-making mechanisms, and innovation in strategies of urban management policies.

Mehta (1998) looks at urban governance through a set of attributes. He introduces the attribute of *accountability* which he suggests is derived from how cities manage their finances, communicate on use of funds and achievements to their citizens, and remain to legal requirements and administrative policies. Embedded in Mehta's concept of accountability is the question of *responsiveness*, which includes the ability of a decentralized entity to determine and respond to the needs of its constituents. In doing so, city officials need to have processes of citizen *participation*, and a system for monitoring and evaluation, as well as reporting on results achieved. These three measures, accountability, responsiveness and participation, Mehta sees as a static concept of urban governance.

In addition to the static attributes of accountability, responsiveness, and participation, Mehta also includes a dynamic concept of urban governance which he calls *management innovation*, which measures the degree to which urban managers have been able to successfully implement changes in their systems of administration to achieve superior performance. Mehta introduces three measures which relate to the ability of cities to transform global opportunities to local value. These include measures such as public-private partnerships, local government-citizen interaction, and networking (Kaufman, Léautier & Mastruzzi, 2004).

UN-Habitat launched *the Global Campaign on Urban Governance in 1999* to support the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and contribute to the eradication of poverty through improved urban governance. Development of *the Urban Governance Index (UGI)* is one of the most important objectives of the campaign with two purposes. At the *global level*, the index is used to demonstrate the importance of good urban governance in achieving broad development objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals and those in the Habitat Agenda. At the *local level*, the index is expected to

³ http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/ev.php-URL_ID=5651&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

catalyze local action to improve the quality of urban governance. The Urban Governance Index is a tool to assist cities and countries in monitoring the quality of urban governance (UN-Habitat, 2005).

2.2 Aims and Tools of Urban Governance

The main role of urban development and urban governance is to provide urban services by establishing system of urban management that will provide adequate living conditions and well-being to all urban citizens. To achieve major goal, adequate living conditions to all urban citizens, local self-government needs successful strategies for planning effectiveness at local level. In theory attention is to many different theoretical models have been proposed to achieve greater planning effectiveness, strategies that public planning agencies follow to achieve greater influence in the development decision-making process, and the implications of what trying to achieve greater effectiveness means for planning education, values, ethics, and techniques.

To accomplish that, in many countries shift from government to governance is observed, and it is accompanied by shift and change in the form of organization in providing public services. Urban governance involves good governance practice aiming to achieve planned results in providing high quality local public services. Operationalizing good governance practice calls for an in-depth understanding the aims of governance, and the tools that can be used to achieve that aim. Summary of major aims and tools used in urban governance is given in Table 1.

Table 1 Aims and Tools of Urban Governance

Aim	Tools
Greater local participation and involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of city identity and a sense of citizenship for all • public meetings, participatory planning and budgeting • city referenda and public pleading • better democratic structures and culture • involvement of marginalised groups in the city systems
Efficient urban management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking account of all interests in promoting efficiency and better services • labour relations • efficient investment in infrastructure • delegation of decision taking to the lowest appropriate level • collaboration and partnerships, rather than competition • appropriate training to improve capacity of city officials • using information technology to best advantage • environmental planning and management carried out in co-

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> operation with the citizens disaster preparedness and crime control for safer environments
Accountability/ transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitoring of government activities by coalitions of outside organisations rigorous accounting procedures clear guidelines on conduct for leaders and officials that are enforced open procurement and contracting systems transparency in financial arrangements disclosure of information fair and predictable regulatory frameworks independent and accessible complaints procedures regular flow of information on key issues a wide range of suppliers
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regular and structured consultation with representative bodies from all sectors of society including individuals in the decision making processes access to government by all individuals and organizations access to economic opportunity protection of the rights of all groups

Source: Consultation on "New Frontiers in Good Urban Governance" held at the St. George's House, Windsor Castle, 27 - 29 June 2000, organized by the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF). <http://www.gdrc.org/u-gov/aim-tool.html>

In the next two chapters we describe Croatian practice in urban governance trying to identify the differences in the role of the City Council in urban governance in selected Croatian towns. The analysis was based on the questionnaire sent to all Croatian towns aiming to investigate priorities and importance of different activities at local level to obtain sustainable local development.

2.2 Urban Governance in Croatia

Before explanation of major characteristics of urban governance in Croatia based on carried out survey, short discussion on the issue of territorial and administrative structure in Croatia and the issue of decentralization is given. This is from our point of view important because it can be seen as an instrument for achieving more effective local development.

Croatia today has a *two-tier system of sub-national government*. *Municipalities, towns and cities* represent the local level of government and

counties represent the regional level of government. *The City of Zagreb* has status of a local and regional level of government. The territory of Croatia consists of 429 *municipalities and 126 towns (cities)* at local level, the City of Zagreb and of 20 *counties* at regional level, which makes 576 sub-national units. The population size of local and regional self-government units in Croatia varies widely. The majority of population lives in small municipalities, relatively small towns and medium-sized counties. Based on provisions of the Law on Local and Regional self-government, counties are responsible for the functions of regional character. Municipalities and towns (cities) perform tasks of local significance, which directly address the needs of citizens and which are not assigned to state bodies by the Constitution or by law. Towns with more than 35,000 inhabitants or county capitals may be also responsible for functions which otherwise fall within the competence of counties, as long as they ensure the necessary conditions for performance of these services. The current territorial division of Croatia is not ideal. Territorial and administrative organization does not follow geographic, historical and economic criteria seriously. In Croatia exist several very small local self-government units without economic and financial (fiscal) potentials to ensure local public services to their citizens as well as local economic development.

Since July 2001 the situation regarding local capacities for sustainability in Croatia started to be more complicated. At that time began the first phase of the decentralization⁴ of management and partial financing of several public functions⁵. The planned decentralization of self-government competencies was accompanied by attempted fiscal decentralization. In its first phase, 32 financially stronger towns, the City of Zagreb and all the 20 counties in Croatia were assigned additional local responsibilities. The state government delegated responsibilities and additional revenues to 32 big cities, the City of Zagreb and 20 counties to finance material and financial expenditures, as well as partly investment expenditures for providing public services in primary and secondary education, health care, social welfare and public protection (financing of public fire brigades).

⁴ The term “decentralization” includes a variety of concepts, definitions and approaches, but one of the most acceptable definitions understands decentralization as the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector. See Rondenelli (1999) and Dillinger (1995).

⁵ The proposed decentralization model was the following: expenditures for wages and employer contributions in primary and secondary education, expenditures for wages and employer contributions as well as part of current and capital expenditures in health care and social welfare sector has been ensured in the government budget, but other material expenditures, expenditures of current maintenance and capital investment in primary and secondary education, health care and social welfare sector has been transferred to the local government budget. Local government units are responsible for financing of all material and financial expenditures, expenditures of current maintenance and capital investment for public fire brigades.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Questionnaire

The urban governance in Croatia was analysed by conducting the survey among Croatian cities. The selection of questions was made on the basis of literature review dealing with this topic. The content of the research was based on the questionnaire which is one part of the international project Municipal Assemblies in European Local Governments (MAELG)⁶. For the purpose of this paper we identified three key research questions:

- (i) «What influence has the Council in Croatian towns concerning different activities important for local development?»
- (ii) «What is the importance of different tasks for successful urban governance in Croatia?»
- (iii) «What are the councillors opinions about goals which are important for urban local development and governance?»

To answer this research questions, we divided answers on the relevant questions from the surveys into the four parts. From 52 questions we chose four questions in which municipal councillors had to give their opinion about topics related to the importance of different activities in their town and priorities which they find most important for achieving faster and, what is even more important, sustainable local development.

The survey was conduct among all Croatian cities, meaning 123 cities⁷. The aim of the survey was to analyse does councillors in Croatian town recognise the importance of key goals and tasks of local governments which are necessary for successful urban governance. As a result of the literature review, as well as intention to answer the research questions, the total of four questions was identified for presentation in this paper. They were:

- Which influence has the Council in municipality concerning the following tasks?
- How the councillors evaluate the importance of different tasks?
- How important are the following goals for each local authority?
- How each councillor evaluates its contribution regarding the following tasks?

⁶ The basic idea of the MAELG survey was to organize identical survey of municipal councillors in various countries and then to analyze it jointly. The project assumes the collection of comparable data base on political careers, attitudes, values, preferences and styles of participation in local politics of municipal councillors in over 16 European countries.

⁷ According to the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings 2001 conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

The first part contained the list of nine activities, and the respondents (municipal councillors) had to rank each activity on the scale between 0 (no influence) and 4 (very high influence). The second question had the aim to evaluate the difference between councillors judgment in small, medium and large towns regarding their opinion about priorities of their town. The aim of the third and fourth question was to obtain the municipal councillors opinion regarding importance of different tasks for urban governance in Croatia.

3.2 Characteristics of sample

As it was already mentioned, the primary data for this study were collected through survey research. The questionnaire was sent to all Croatian cities with the main goal to investigate priorities and importance of different activities at local level to obtain sustainable local development. Classification of cities according to the number of their inhabitants is shown in the table 2. From the data presented in the table 2 is obvious that there is large number of very small and medium-sized cities in Croatia.

Table 2 Cities classification according to the number of inhabitants

Classification	Description	Total number of city	Number of city which answered the questionnaire
Large city	More than 35,000 inhabitants	16	7
Medium-sized city	Between 10,000 and 35,000 inhabitants	51	18
Small city	Less than 10,000 inhabitants	56	14
TOTAL		123	39

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics and author.

In the table 3 basic characteristics of the sample are shown.

Table 3 Sample characteristics

	Small city	Medium-sized city	Large city	Total
Share of inhabitants in small/medium/large cities in total number of inhabitants which live in all Croatian cities *, in percent	11.3	28.1	35.1	74.6
Share of inhabitants in small/medium/large cities in total number of inhabitants which live in small/medium/large* Croatian cities, in percent	28.0	34.2	55.6	-

Share of cities - respondents in the total number of cities in Croatia, in percent	25.0	35.3	43.8	31.7
Share of councillors – respondents in total number of councillors	-	-	-	7.2

* Without City Zagreb.

Source: authors' research.

As the 123 towns were questioned, and questionnaires from 39 Croatian towns were returned, the response rate was 31.7 percent. The 39 towns which answered the question have 74.6 percent of total Croatian population.

The respondents were councillors in towns. As the 2,260 councillors were questioned, and 312 were returned, the response rate was 13.8 percent. In total, 298 out of the 312 returned questionnaires were complete (95.5 percent).

4. RESULTS

In this part of the paper, the main results of the survey conducted among councillors in Croatian cities about the success of urban governance in Croatia are presented. The conducted survey had several goals. Firstly, to analyse whether the Council in Croatian towns has some influence on achieving different tasks which are essential for urban governance and who is responsible for this area, the committee or the council. Secondly, to analyse how local councillors evaluate the importance of different tasks and activities. And finally, what is the councillor's opinion about their role and their own contribution to the speed of local development. The primary goal of the paper was to analyse the difference between small, medium and large cities and between large cities and regional centres in Croatia for each of these research questions.

Table 4 Which influence has the Council in your municipality concerning the following tasks?

	Small cities	Medium cities	Large cities	Regional centre
Defining administrative procedures	5	6	4	7
Financial programming/evaluation	1	1	1	1
Urban planning	3	2	3	3
Industrial and economic development	9	9	9	8
Environmental protection	4	3	4	5
Strategic planning	6	5	6	2
Relations with other local authorities	7	7	8	3
Organisation of collective services	8	8	7	6
Appoint local chief executives	2	4	2	5

Source: authors' research.

In the first question municipal councillors had to rank their influence on different activities on the scale between 0 (no influence) and 4 (very high influence). According to their answers we then ranked their answers on the scale between 1 and 9, where 1 means the highest influence and 9 means the lowest influence. The municipal councillors in this town have very low influence on analysed task. It is very interesting that councillors in all Croatian cities, regardless of the size of the city, find that Council has the major influence of the financial programming and evaluation, while industrial and economic development of the local government is on the last place.

In the next part of our analysis we tried to investigate how important local councillors find different tasks.

Table 5 In your experience as a councillor, how important are the following tasks for you as a councillor?

	Small cities	Medium cities	Large cities	Regional centre
Defining the main goals of the municipal activity	1	1	1	2
Controlling the municipal activity	6	7	6	6
Representing the requests and issues before decisions are taken	2	2	1	1
Publicising the debate on local issues before decisions are taken	3	4	7	4
Explaining decisions of the council to the citizens	5	3	5	4
Implementing the program of my political party/movement	7	6	3	7
Reinforcing the executive	4	5	3	3
In mediating conflicts in the local society	8	8	8	9
Promoting the views and interests of minorities in the local society	10	10	8	10
Promoting the views and interests of women in the local society	9	9	10	8

Source: authors' research.

The results presented in the table 5 lead to conclusion that the most important task of local councillors in all Croatian cities is to define the main goals of the municipal activity and to represent the requests and issues before decisions are taken. Promoting the views and interests of minorities and women in the

local society have nearly no importance for city councillors in all cities in Croatia.

Table 6 How important are in your opinion the following goals for your local authority?

	Small cities	Medium cities	Large cities	Regional centre
To attract economic activities in the city	4	4	4	4
To develop highly qualified activities	6	6	5	5
To regenerate or rebuild the city-centre	8	7	9	8
To improve infrastructures and services for mobility	3	5	5	6
To improve the aesthetics of the city	11	9	11	10
To develop leisure services and cultural offer	9	11	12	12
To develop housing offer	16	16	15	15
To defend the traditional cohesion of the local society	14	14	13	14
To emphasise diversity and tolerance in the local society	9	10	7	8
To improve the level of services and well-being in the city	1	1	2	1
To reduce pollution	1	3	1	2
To improve the external image of the city	7	8	8	6
To attract new population	13	13	14	13
To attract a wealthier population	15	15	16	16
To improve the position of women in the local society	12	12	10	10
To fight against marginality and poverty	5	2	3	2
Other	17	17	17	17

Source: authors' research.

Data from the Table 6 show us that improvement of the level of public services and well-being in the city is at the top priority of all City councillors in small, medium, large local self-government units, as well as in regional centres. This is an expected answer because the major role of local self-government unit is to provide public services (including efficient investment in all kinds of infrastructure) at high quality. Surprisingly, councillors in small and large cities have the same opinion regarding the need to reduce pollution at local level. Environmental aspects of urban issues are becoming very important goals for local councillors in Croatia.

Table 7 In your experience as a councillor, how would you define your contribution regarding the following tasks?

	Small cities	Medium cities	Large cities	Regional centre
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Defining the main goals of the municipality	7	6	8	4
Controlling the municipal activity	5	7	9	7
Representing the requests and issues emerging from the local society	2	3	1	2
Publicising the debate on local issues before decisions are taken	4	4	5	4
Explaining decisions of the council to the citizens	1	2	2	1
Implementing the program of my political party/movement	8	5	6	6
Reinforcing the executive	3	1	3	3
In mediating conflicts in the local society	5	8	4	8
Promoting the views and interests of minorities in the local society	10	10	10	10
Promoting the views and interests of women in the local society	9	9	7	9

Source: authors' research.

The last question contains councillor's opinion about their role and their own contribution to the speed of local development. Explaining decisions of the council to the citizens are seen as the most essential tasks of city councillors in small cities. Opinion of local councillors in medium-sized cities is a little bit different and they give priority to reinforcing the executive. In large cities one of the most significant tasks of councillors is representing the requests and issues emerging from the local society. Explaining decisions of the council to the citizens have been seen as the most essential tasks of city councillors in regional centres.

5. CONCLUSION

Previous chapters briefly examine urban governance and identification of the role of the City Council in urban governance in selected Croatian towns.

Planning urban development can be viewed as a process which contains of several phases, starting with identification of a current situation, formulation of a future (vision), elaboration of financial framework for development projects, implementation phase, monitoring phase and finishing with evaluation of successful implementation. Successfulness of the implementation phase depends on all stakeholders involved in urban governance process. The main focus of this paper is given to city councillors and their role in urban governance.

There is no difference between small, medium and large cities and between large cities and regional centres in Croatia in selecting the most important tasks and activities for Croatian councillors aiming to achieve successful

urban governance. The priority in all tasks and activities for Croatian councillors is to define the main goals of the municipal activity and to represent the requests and issues before decisions are taken.

Councillor's opinion about their role and their own contribution to the speed of local development is reserved for explanation decisions of the council to the citizens. The local councillor's great priority give to represent the requests and issues emerging from the local society.

As cities are vital to the future of our societies and engines of local, regional and national development, opinion of the city councillors that the Council has the major influence on the financial programming and evaluation in the Croatian cities can be seen with great importance. This means that the Council's responsibilities in evaluation of local development policy will help to secure urban vitality in a long-term and improve future urban development and management of the local self-government units.

It would be interested to conduct the new survey among Croatian cities and newly elected city councillors⁸ and compare the new one with present answers given by town councillors regarding achievement of local development and governance. Although is not so easy task to predict any significant difference in future answers of new elected local decision-makers dealing with urban governance, it would be no doubt to conclude that there are a lot of potentials for success.

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⁸ The State Election Commission has reported that local elections at 17th of May 2009 Croats will elect 866 members of 21 county assemblies, 51 members of the city council of the City of Zagreb as well as 2,206 members to sit on 126 city and town councils and 5,343 members to sit on 427 municipal councils.

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