

Good governance on the regional level in the area of regional development in Slovakia

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Abstract

Regional government in Slovakia is a relatively new “player” on the public administration “market”. It has been expected to play substantial role in the area of regional development. After first five years regional governments still suffer from some deficiencies in this field. There are mainly insufficient effectiveness and efficiency of governance mechanisms, processes and methodologies for the decision-making process, lack of knowledge and skills in the field of regional development, insufficient cooperation with entities vested with co-responsibility for the regional policy. To reduce that it’s inevitable to improve good governance principles on the regional level in the area of regional development in Slovakia. Some findings from the analytical part of the international project - GOVERNANCE led by the Carpathian Development Institute are presented.

Key words: good governance; regional government; process of decision-making chain

1 Introduction

Territorial self-government in Slovakia (regions, cities, towns, and villages) does not follow “prescription-type” law (like state administration) but so called “enabling” law, thus it can do not only what the law prescribes but everything what is not by law forbidden. This aspect of the territorial self-government which brought the creativity into the environment is what self-government makes an interesting subject in the public sector particularly in the field of regional policy.

After coming into existence regional self-government gained from the state original co-responsibility in the regional development field as one of the first powers. However, because of short time after being established and lack of experiences, competencies, and regional policy instruments regional governments do not fully fulfill their role in this field.

Concept of good governance on the regional level can be applied to examine quality of decision-making processes, in the given legal, fiscal, and institutional framework. Quality of

governance can be thus assessed through different principles of governance like transparency, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, consensus orientation, etc.

This paper gives basic brief of good governance concept and shows the phased process of decision-making as leading motive of good governance on the regional level in the field of regional development. How to improve enabling environment for better regional-level governance in the regional development is a goal of the recently started project “Good governance on the regional level in the field of regional development in Slovakia conducted by the Carpathian Development Institute and financed by the Norwegian financial mechanism.

2 Concept of good governance

Concept of governance was created recently in 90-ties and in presence is still a fashionable concept which is broadly used in many different areas of society and science and by different institutions. In the western world, it has been used as political rhetoric to promote a minimal state [1]. In private sector the term (corporate) governance refers to accountability and transparency of corporate management to shareholders. In political theory governance is often presented as a theory of political participation [2].

In general the term governance describes the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Hereby, public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources, and guarantee the realization of human rights. Good governance accomplishes this in a manner essentially free of abuse, favoritism and corruption, and with due regard for the law. Good governance defines an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards this ideal

Different institutions define governance in a different way for instance the European Commission in its White Paper on European Governance [3] defines governance as rules, processes and behavior that affect the way in which powers are exercised at the European level, particularly as regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. This definition includes governance attributes - principles, which others connect with the term “good governance”. According the European Commission governance is not only at the European level, but on national, regional and local level too. In the simplest way the concept governance can be seen as a process of decision-making and a process of decisions implementation.

We focus on regional-level public authorities and in this context we understand governance as performance of power and implementation of policies through tools, mechanisms and institutions. Controlling, managing, administering and enabling are included in the concept of governance.

As it was above mentioned the EC White Paper on European Governance uses five principles of good governance: openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. Similarly UNDP defines good governance with eight major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law.

Participation means ensuring wide participation throughout the policy chain – from conception to implementation. Improved participation is likely creating not only more trust in

decisions taken, policies creation and in the institutions which take decisions and deliver policies, but also brings (as it was many time proven), higher quality of the development process and thus direct impact on citizens' well being.. *Transparency or openness* is built on the free flow of information from processes and institutions and should be accessible to those who are directly concerned or are interested in. It is not only question of information provision but also its timeliness and form to understand and monitor them. *Accountability* is a crucial demand for good governance. It represents the obligation of institutions to demonstrate and take responsibility for their performance in light of commitments and expected outcomes to those who are affected by their decisions or activities.

Consensus-orientation means a mediation of different interests in the region in order to reach broad consensus in what is the best interest of the whole community and how it can be achieved. *Equity and inclusiveness* is expressed as the principle that nobody relevant is or feels to be excluded from the processes leading to decisions. *Effectiveness and efficiency* means that processes and institutions produce results that meet needs while making the best use of resources.

Focusing on the process of regional policy design and implementation, *legitimacy* comes across as the basic aspect of good governance as undertaken by the regional self-government. Legitimacy can be understood as the right to hold and use power, usually based on the consent of the governed. It can be achieved by fulfilling of all relevant requirements of good governance connecting with different phases of the decision-making process. Legitimacy comes from an active participation of those subjects who should be inevitably involved and also those who are interested in the decision-making process and its outcomes. Looking for solution of any regional development challenge without involving all administrators acting in the region who are directly responsible for administration by course of law, and at the same time those institutions/subjects, which are competent professionally contribute to the problem solution, weakens legitimacy of the process. In addition participation of those who are interested in and want to participate in increases legitimacy of the process.

3 Process of decision-making chain

Decision-making is the process of thoughts and actions that lead to a decision. It lies at the heart of managing any entity and it should bear all of the principles of good governance. Let's look closer at the decision making process phases in the area of regional development.

Phase 1: Process of identification of common challenges

In this phase mechanisms and processes for distributing of information addressed to those who should be approached, for communication channels, for proactive looking for inputs, and for ensuring participation of all key stakeholders of regional development are the core of this phase. At the same, in this phase, on the one hand, no one regional challenge can be neglected but on the other hand, the process of criterion prioritization should be introduced.

Phase 2: Process of looking for individual responses on common challenge.

This part of the decision making process could be characterized by collecting of maximum different opinions/approaches how to address the identified common challenge. Those are based on different angles of views coming from different roles and responsibilities of regional actors as well as from different professional background and different values. To get as much as possible feedbacks to the "response basket" is the nature of this phase.

Phase 3: Process of finding collective response on the common challenge

This block is probably the most demanding step in the course of the decision making process. Find collective response needs, apart from clear criteria, mediation, consensus oriented attitudes, patience, time, etc. There are uncertainties which should be observed e.g. whether the real consensus was reached and what way, how much time the process consumed, who took part in discussions and debates, how the actors and public were informed, whether process was really inclusive etc.

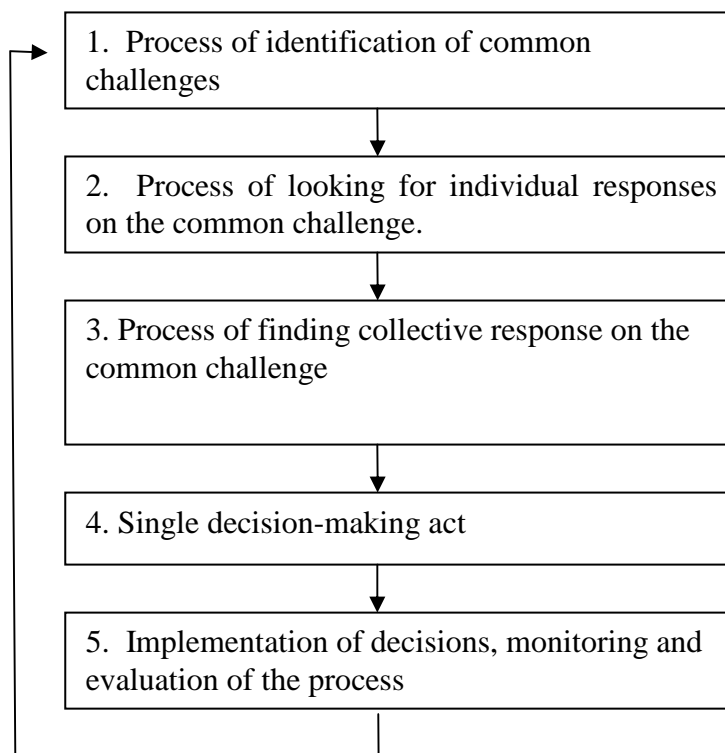
Phase 4: Single decision-making act

In the 4th phase there are very important factors, which can positively or negatively influence the decision-making act. Among them the question whether regional council made decision based on outcomes and outputs from previous phases, whether deputies had enough information needed for making decision, whether all arguments were presented in proper and understandable way etc.

Phase 5: Implementation of decisions, monitoring and evaluation of the process

Critical issues in this phase are effectiveness, efficiency, information dissemination, keeping deadlines and financial limits, as well as the public control. Monitoring of the decision implementation process and assessment of its impacts should be based on indicators set in advance.

Figure 1: Process of decision - making chain



4 Conclusions

- The quality of processes for managing regional development affects its efficiency.
- Communication, partnership, interaction and evaluation remain the general attributes of the good governance objectives.

- Regional government should be more involved in initiation, facilitation, and coordination of regional governance processes.
- Observance of the process of decision-making chain is the basis for good governance environment
- There is a need to abandon the present system of governing and define new methods, rules, mechanisms, procedures on which power of regional government in the field of regional policy would be exercised
- Improvement of good governance principles increases legitimacy of decision processes and increases citizens' trust in the regional self-government quality of decisions,
- Increased effectiveness in preparation of regional planning documents and in implementation of development programs results in more economic use of public resources.
- Increased transparency of the decision-making process results in reduced opportunities for favoritism and corruption.
- Increased participation of both institutions and citizens in the preparation of decisions results in a higher acceptability of decisions
- Evaluation before, during and after development processes is a vital element of their quality
- Good governance is the precondition for economic growth

References

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