

Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

**They Forgot to Plan for Trams...
Constituting Effective Municipal Governance in Bratislava**

BACHELOR THESIS

Tomáš Štrba

Bratislava, January 2022

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the work of my own and has not been published in whole or in part elsewhere. All literature sources used in this thesis are attributed and cited in references.

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Abstract

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Cities everywhere are growing and therefore need an appropriate model of governance that will satisfy their needs to deliver effective public services and support sustainable growth. The thesis observes the latest dilemma festering in the city of Bratislava regarding processes of consolidation aiming to make its governance more effective. The work defines good governance, effective public services, and socio-cultural context regarding the two most popular models of decentralized governments— consolidated and fragmented. The empirical part examines deficits of the current fragmented model and analyses two alternative models (semi-consolidated and consolidated) with their impact on the public services and good governance. Models are qualitatively evaluated based on the principles of accessibility, accountability and strategic planning of public service, accompanied by the positions of experts. The thesis does not aim to fully answer the complex question of consolidated governance, but rather offer institutional perspective on offered alternatives, and clearly state that consolidation is not an instant formula of making effective municipal governance.

The thesis underlines the deficits of the current government as uncoordinated strategic planning and lack of clear accountability for each service, which could possibly be solved by the consolidation. The fully consolidated model lacks various layers of democratic participation and does not satisfy the original aim of lean governance. Model implying changes only partly solves deficits of strategic planning and lack of effectiveness in decision-making. Hypothesis 1 that consolidation will improve effective governance from the individual perspective—is not proven because the more consolidated model is less democratic, participatory, and responsive. Hypothesis 2 that consolidation will improve effective governance on societal level—is valid because the

fragmented model lacks strategic vision and forgets about public issues. The thesis discourages the implementation of the fully consolidated model in Bratislava and supports only a partial form of consolidation, respecting the principle of subsidiarity and local responsiveness.

Abstrakt

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Mestá sa rozvíjajú, čo vytvára tlak na potrebu hľadania funkčného politického modelu, ktorý zabezpečí efektívne verejné služby, ako aj udržateľný rozvoj. Bakalárska práca sleduje aktuálnu inštitucionálnu dilemu konsolidovať Bratislavu, so zámerom zvýšiť jej efektívnosť. Práca definuje teoretické koncepty chytrého spravovania, efektívnych verejných služieb a socio-kultúrneho kontextu, s cieľom aplikovať ich na dva najvýznamnejšie modely decentralizovanej politiky – konsolidovaný a fragmentovaný model. Empirická časť študuje deficity súčasného fragmentovaného modelu a analyzuje dva alternatívne modely, s ich dopadmi na zabezpečovanie verejných služieb a chytré spravovanie. Kvalitatívne hodnotenie modelov je založené na kritériách prístupnosti, politickej zodpovednosti a strategickom plánovaní verejných služieb, doplnené postrehmi expertov. Bakalárska práca neposkytuje komplexnú odpoveď na všetky aspekty konsolidácie, ale skôr ponúka inštitucionálny pohľad na alternatívne modely, ako aj pripomína, že konsolidácia nie je okamžitým riešením na zefektívnenie mestskej politiky.

Bakalárska práca poukazuje na deficit súčasného spravovania, ako nekoordinovanosť strategických plánov a nejasnosť politickej zodpovednosti v oblasti jednotlivých verejných služieb, obe potenciálne vyriešiteľné vďaka konsolidácii. Konsolidovaný model postráda viacero prvkov demokratickej participácie a neuspokojuje pôvodné ciele štíhleho rozhodovania. Kompromisný model, navrhujúci zmeny, iba čiastočne rieši deficity strategického plánovania a nedostatok efektívnosti v rozhodovaní. Hypotéza č.1 tvrdiaca, že konsolidácia zvyšuje efektívnosť riadenia z perspektívy občana – je nepotvrdená, nakoľko je konsolidovaný model menej demokratický,

participatívny a responzívny. Hypotéza č. 2 tvrdiaca, že konsolidácia zvyšuje efektívnosť riadenia z celospoločenskej a regionálnej perspektívy—je pravdivá, nakoľko fragmentovaný model zabúda na celospoločenské záujmy a strategické vízie. Bakalárska práca neodporúča implementáciu konsolidovaného modelu v Bratislave a odporúča iba čiastočnú konsolidáciu, rešpektujúc lokálnu responzívnosť a subsidiaritu.

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1. Introduction

All cities are trying hard (or they should try) to achieve the same – deliver effective public services in the manner of good governance. Sounds like an easy task, but in reality, is often very difficult because of the institutional obstacles, personal interests of stakeholders and citizens (including corruption), lack of resources or personal capacities, or all other aspects of political culture. All administrations have agendas, even the current one led by the leftist mayor Vallo (2018 - in office) “flirts” with the idea of changing the division of competencies and institutions of Bratislava. Their vision is to consolidate them on one layer/tier (combine competencies of three layers of institutions under the city of BA). It is not a new concept and is often discussed by academics—as an alternative to the two-tier (fragmented) model. This thesis observes the current model of governance in Bratislava, defines its deficits, and analyses two alternative models (Vallo’s model of consolidation and a hypothetical model of compromise consisting of changes). In another way, all cities want to achieve the same—reliable and integrated public transport, clean streets and public spaces, sufficient capacity of schools and social services, digital and innovative administration, a multitude of cultural and sports activities, and more. This thesis observes if the proposed model or any other could satisfy these mentioned needs of citizens (and needs of the region) from the perspective of public services and good governance. Making Bratislava’s governance effective is as in other cities, the challenge which needs good planning, positions of experts and mainly realistic expectations, observed in this thesis. Thesis' aim is to provoke a discussion whether Vallo’s recipe for a better Bratislava is truly an improvement for everyone. In addition, the thesis wants to argue that cities (their representation and institutional design) matter and under good circumstances may improve our lives even today. A discussion on the future of Bratislava begins

1.1. Cities are growing, and what next?

Cities are growing (no longer satisfying the needs of citizens, delivering inadequate public services, not reacting to climate or demographic change, plagued by corrupted and over-bureaucratized offices, creating urban sprawl, and producing social inequalities), which warrants a debate on their effectiveness and institutional design. Institutional arguments are well-considered, giving credits to all models and including reflection of all historical, economic, geographic, political, and social obstacles. When finding the most beneficial institutional design of a prosperous city: the form of centralization/decentralization, local and historical context, and institutional aims and expectations should be regarded. When constituting a new model, the metropolises (Bratislava included) expect the principles of good governance and effective delivery of public. This chapter underlines the core theoretical part of the thesis—it explains the central school of thought in the dilemma of consolidation vs. fragmentation; defines the good governance and approach its accessibility in metropolitan politics; observes local context and its influence on the prosperity of any model; and presents hypotheses and methodological approach in the empirical part.

1.2. Consolidation or Fragmentation?

The rapid growth of cities combined with a need for the effective delivery of public services recalls the modern democratic dilemma on which form of governance could best satisfy the needs of its citizens. As a solution, consolidated and fragmented municipal governments or their alternations are debated and tested. Historically speaking, cities have often changed in their institutional design and still find a new model for metropolitan governance. The dilemma of consolidation vs. fragmentation presents the central aim of politicians in prosperous metropolises—either to consolidate fragmented models to improve effectiveness or the exact opposite. This subchapter presents recent case studies and academic arguments for the processes of consolidation and fragmentation, their impacts on good governance and delivery of public services.

Bird & Slack (2008) distinguish the two most-frequent models of regional/urban governance: one-tier and two-tier models. While the one-tier (consolidated) model means that public services are supervised from the one-level institution, like a city or metropolitan council; the two-tier (fragmented) model divides the management of public services between two levels of regional institutions; as metropolitan/provincial council (upper-tier) and towns/districts (lower tier). Bird & Slack present the most popular school of thought, claiming that neither of these models “is clearly the best model of governance for large metropolitan areas” (Bird & Slack, 2008, p. 211). In finding a better form, they offer an argument of fiscal/economic efficiency, focus on which model is economically-sparer. Their results are not satisfactory as the popular hypothesis that consolidated governments are sparer has been disproved in some cities and proved in others (Bird & Slack, 2008). In the fiscal context (context of free market), fragmented governments allow a significant mixture of tax and service models according to the needs of citizens—giving smaller regional units a higher degree of financial autonomy. The fragmented model is popular with libertarians for the higher distribution of taxes and tax autonomy for the more developed districts. The benefits of the two-tier model are higher responsiveness and degree of fiscal and service independence. The opposition to the fragmented model (usually from the left) highlights the main deformations—the social inequalities, double service standards (as poorer districts lack finances), and lower accountability (Bird & Slack, 2008). The one-tier (consolidated) model promoted by the leftists focuses on the same standard of services, as one institution becomes an exclusive provider of all public services. It also deals with the negative externalities, when a municipality is responsible for providing services to non-residents (as transport, roads, and other forms of infrastructure).

Consolidation includes all externalities, so all users of metropolitan public services pay for them. Consolidated governance, from the opponent's perspective, is very limited in responsiveness (lacks individual and communal responsiveness). In addition, the model also does not provide any promised sparseness, which was often the main argument for its implementation (Fox & Gurley, 2006). Solely economic argument based on the fiscal-sparseness supports neither of the models but in some way supports different politico-economic schools: socialist/social-democratic in one-tier and right-libertarian/conservative in the two-tier model.

Fox & Gurley, in their report for the World Bank, take a similar stand on consolidation—that neither model is satisfactory (Fox & Gurley, 2006). They ask a similar question as Bird & Slack, whether consolidation improves regional governance, with a corresponding response. Fox and Gurley argue that the cruciality of a successful consolidation depends on the involvement of the regional actors, historical context and legacy of regime/political culture, and socioeconomic and geographic variables (Fox & Gurley, 2006). They evaluate consolidation/fragmentation from perspectives as the economy of scale, public trust, accountability, and delivery of services. The only generally applicable result is that "there is no single prescription that fits all places" (Fox & Gurley, 2006, p. 35) and consolidation/fragmentation may perfectly work but also fail, depending on the local circumstances. Different from others, Fox & Gurley offer an economic formula working as a compromise between consolidation and fragmentation. Based on that, some services are more suitable for consolidation, while others need fragmentation. More specifically, "more labor-intensive services including fire protection and education" (Fox & Gurley, 2006, p. 10) are more suitable for the two-tier model, as they may be managed more effectively, responsively, and economically-sparsely in fragmented units. On the contrary, services as sewage plants or transport "benefit from greater size" and cover negative externalities (economies of scale). In addition, they claim that environmental agenda or economic development may also benefit from a metropolitan model of governance. To conclude, Fox & Gurley indirectly suggest a possible solution to divide competencies for consolidation and to keep others fragmented, or the other way around. Altogether, Fox & Gurley find the fragmented model as more responsive, competitive, and inclined to corruption; and the consolidated model as politically stronger, economically-passive and transparent (from the point of public services). They underline the point that consolidation does not necessarily improve the effectiveness of governance, so it should not be regarded as an instant solution for unsuccessful two-tier administrations.

In her book *Cities in Transition* (2007), Rao states various arguments against fragmentation and in favor of consolidation. *Cities in Transition* presents the latest comparative study of trends in metropolises around the world. The book contains six case studies of the historical transition of the last century, precisely: stories of London, Tokyo, Toronto, Berlin, Hyderabad, and Atlanta. As the leading trend in urban governance, Rao identifies the re-engineering of the institutional structures. These reforms include reforms of democratic participation which tries “to close a gap between politics and people” (Rao, 2007, p. 172), but also reforms of city/region management (for more sustainable management of the growth and changes of the cities). Her position is more in favor of consolidation, focusing on several services (as transportation, urban planning, infrastructure) which according to her fail in fragmented models. She criticizes unduly decentralized small units without, “democratically accountable strategic body,” (Rao, 2007, p. 25) the metropolitan region. The Metropolitan region is essential for a prosperous city and sustainable growth—as “careful planning, cohesive development policies and targeted public investments” (Rao, 2007, p. 154) are necessary. To conclude, Rao’s work regards some form of consolidation as inevitable and does not exclude a form of compromise between consolidation and fragmentation.

Despite the still objective analysis of the contribution of both models, Slack’s position in the report *Managing the Coordination of Service Delivery in Metropolitan Cities* (2007) inclines more toward the support of a fragmented two-tier model. As a solution for the metropolitan governance, author presents the two-tier model, a balance when some services as transport are organized through the upper-tier, and services with a need for higher responsiveness and understanding of local context, as education, social care, or culture on the lower level. The two-tier model is not perfect as it is less transparent for tax payers, and it also contains overlapping agendas and delayed decisions (Slack, 2007, pp. 18-25). Slack’s arguments against complete consolidation (one-tier model) are: lower accessibility of services, too many responsibilities to handle for one institution, and lack of competition. Despite the point that neither of the models matches all expectations, a two-tier compromises several of the author’s recommendations. In other words, the author calls for a compromise—because too local or too metropolitan governance are both ineffective (Slack, 2007).

Critically, both consolidated and fragmented models are advantageous but also imperfect. Authors solve consolidated/fragmented dilemmas by calling for a compromise, claiming a neutral stance, or incline a little toward one over the other based on personal political preference. Bird & Slack (2008) and Fox & Gurley (2006) offer a neutral voice. Their recommendations are to analyze the

historical, geographical, and political uniqueness of the observed model in closer detail and find alternatives within a democratic tradition of the country. Slack in her report (2007) sounds slightly more right-wing supporting the two-tier model, based on her empirical evidence of fiscal effectiveness. Rao (2007) prefers the wellbeing of society (in some way avoids or ignores the fiscal aspects), which inclines her work in the more leftist spectrum. As can be seen, the general implication is that the fragmented model corresponds with the right spectrum, while the consolidated with the left.

1.3. Good governance through the institutional design

The following sub-chapter discusses good governance, a utopia that is partly accessible through institutional design. The main aim is to highlight the importance of the institutional design (institution-building) in respect to municipal governance, more specifically: general attributes of good governance in the city and the concept of good governance in line with the public services. The sub-chapter also intends to define good governance—the concept consisting of transparency, fiscal effectiveness, equity, rule of law, democracy, and others. From the point of this research, good governance forms a link between the consolidated and fragmented models into the model of effective governance for Bratislava, the leading research question for the empirical part.

Institutions and their design matter, that is the shortest explanation of the meaning of institutionalism. Lowndes & Roberts (2013) observe the latest understanding of the institutions and processes, changes, and evolutions, and as the title suggests: “institutions matter” (2013). The institutionalists claim that all solutions to political obstacles lie in the “hardware of politics” (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 41): in the institutions. Lowndes & Roberts state that institutions are not only relevant from the point of political science but everyday life, as “political institutions shape the opportunities that all of us have as citizens to make our voices heard, to participate in decision making, and to access public services” (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 4). Briefly, institutions matter as they manage efficiency, effectivity, transparency and accountability of politics. From the functionalist perspective, a good institution makes an efficient, effective, transparent, and accountable politics; in the words of Lowndes & Roberts “a good institution is one which performs that assigned task well and efficiently, usually while maintaining a commitment to other powerful norms such as democracy” (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 59). Therefore, their theory applied to urban governance means that prosperous cities care about a decent quality of public services (and should reform if they fail to satisfy their original institutional task).

Despite the variety of definitions, according to Saparniene & Valukonyte (2012), “good” in the context of good governance usually means to respect principles as “transparency, efficiency, participation, responsibility, rule of law, democracy and justice” (Saparniene & Valukonyte, 2012, p. 99). Their paper summarizes popular standpoints on good governance—as enlightened

policymaking (Saparniene & Valukonyte, 2012, p. 100, as cited in Brown, 2014), or as a democracy with transparent public agencies and successful participation of citizens (Saparniene & Valukonyte, 2012, p. 100, as cited in Farrington, 2009), or as accountable cooperation between the public and private sector in the delivery of public services accompanied by the fight against corruption (Saparniene & Valukonyte, 2012, p. 100, as cited in International Monetary Fund, 2005). As can be seen, it can be unmanageable to find one precise normative definition of good governance, but the general meaning of all of them is straightforward. Normatively, good governance undoubtedly contains a democratic process based on a vigorous civic society, respect for the rule of law, and human rights (Saparniene & Valukonyte, 2012). Equally importantly, it includes transparency and excludes corruption. Lastly, it has to deliver public services (accessible) to everyone according to their needs (be responsive) and with close cooperation of public and private sectors. All the mentioned definitions conclude recognized attributes of good governance by the United Nations: “participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and respectful to the rule of law” (UN ESCAP, 2009).

Beblavý & Sičáková-Beblavá (2006) promote fiscal efficiency, transparency, responsiveness, and fight against corruption as essential attributes of the good governance. Their work combines the previously mentioned normative and functional approach to good governance, and regard their close link as crucial. Public services are defined as all services provided by the public body (state) in the interest of others based on the general censuses or law (Beblavý & Sičáková-Beblavá, 2006, pp. 9-10). Their effectiveness should serve hand-in-hand with transparent and incorruptible administration. Undoubtedly, public services formulate an institutional dilemma as they depend on the institutional design based on competitiveness, responsiveness, and fiscal-sparseness (often contradictory criteria). According to Beblavý & Sičáková-Beblavá (2006), public services vary across administrations, as different political representations and electorates regard a non-identical need in them. Authors identify several dilemmas as responsiveness vs. economic-sparseness/effectiveness, claiming that the advantage of public services corresponding with the responsive needs of citizens (fragmented model) is higher than a small/vague increase in economic-sparseness in the consolidated model (Beblavý & Sičáková-Beblavá, 2006). Their general recommendation is that democratic responsiveness and transparency have to be prioritized above fiscal savings. To conclude, a democratic argument is that the aims to save costs should be placed in the context of democratic plurality.

Literature on political theory, institutionalism, and political thought has been trying to achieve an ideal model of good governance unsuccessfully. The closest to the ideal are the attributes of good governance constituting a modern, effective and successful governance at any level of politics. General academic, normative, and political consensus regards good governance to be respectful toward the constitutional norms and successful in the delivery of public services (Beblavý & Sičáková–Beblavá, 2006; Lowndes & Roberts, 2013; Saparniene & Valukonyte, 2012). Not less important, constitutional norms should concern liberal democracy and associated legal norms (transparency, rule of law, human rights). Equally important, accountable, effective, efficient, and responsive public services should be guaranteed.

1.4. Historical Context

Context matters when constituting a model of good governance. To be clear – institutionally-based models need to reflect, regard, and respect the historical evolution, political culture, and foreign affairs. Literature always underlines the importance of “national and local context” (Slack, 2007, p. 56) in the sense of understanding constitutional laws and customs (constitution in legal and normative manner). A historical point of view is another significant standpoint as the model works in the politics with history–political experience, traditions, and legacies of former regimes (Faltan & Krivy, 1999). Political culture also cannot be ignored, as frequently have stood as a reason for unsuccess. In other words, institutions shape politics and vice versa, they are interdependent, interact, and their success/failure is interconnected. The intention of institutionalism should be to find a realistic model respectful of the history, not to dream of a utopia, as only the implemented model has an impact on citizens, the public services, and democracy as such.

First and foremost, the Slovak Republic is “a sovereign, democratic state governed by the rule of law” (Const. of SR, Art. 1) where the state power is derived “from the citizens, who shall exercise it through their elected representatives or directly” (Const. of SR, Art. 2). As the Constitution continues, the Slovak economy is “based on the principles of a socially and ecologically orientated market economy” (Const. of SR, Art. 55) with an aim to “protect and encourage economic competition” (Const. of SR, Art. 55/2). From the point of view of local governance; territorial self-administration consists of the basic units–municipalities and higher territorial units (Const. of SR, p. Ar. 64). In the more historical general context, literature calls Slovakia a post-socialist state in the Central European region established in 1993; formerly part of the dissolved Czechoslovakia (later also; Czech and Slovak Federative Republic), and previously Habsburg’s monarchy (Faltan & Krivy, 1999). In short, as the leading historical point shaping the modern world are considered: presence in the multinational Habsburg–monarchy, first democratic Czechoslovakia with the ideas of Masaryk, invasion of Hitler into Czechia followed by the forceful fascist autonomy of Slovakia in 1938, the totalitarian state of the Soviet model for more than 41 years after the Second World War, the Velvet democratic Revolution (1989), and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993 and the creation of the independent democratic state (Faltan & Krivy, 1999). When thinking about history, it is necessary to perceive a young European (EU) democracy with reverberations of

communism and fascism in Central Europe, originally part of Austria-Hungary and later Czechoslovakia.

As already mentioned, communism is an explanatory story of the multitude of deficits in politics and society in Central Europe. Kruglashov observes the way from Moscow–back to Europe transition in institutional design and politics (2013, p. 7). According to him, the Soviet model was highly centralized and inefficient, and the process of decentralization popular in the EU was inevitable. In Slovakia, two main motivations of decentralization were the inefficiency as the soviet-centralized model “failed to provide local public services” (Kruglashov, 2013, p. 15), and the EU-accession criteria forcing Central European states to reform (Domorenok, 2013, pp. 35-58). Kruglashov reviews these reforms of decentralization, dated in the late ‘90 and early ‘00s, as a success and failure at the same time. To elaborate, they were successful as they reformed with the implementation of decentralized law but failed comparatively with the decentralized practice in the EU (Western Europe). According to Kruglashov (2013) despite the reforms, Slovakia is still a highly centralized, and significant level of regional and municipal decision closely depend on the central government (lack of fiscal autonomy). Also, Domorenok (2013) agrees with a positive influence of the transition processes but highlights imperfections in the administration of municipalities (as low professionalism, inadequate salaries, and too extensive agenda). Both authors conclude the complexity of the transition process from the soviet-centralized model to the good governance and remind the aspect of a long transition in the young democracies with the legacy of totalitarianism (Domorenok, 2013; Kruglashov, 2013).

Also worth mentioning, political parties and actors form a unique part of the context of the institutions, majority of scholars agree. In the case of Slovakia, the last self-administration reform was politically motivated by the 3rd Mečiar’s Cabinet, approved in 1996. As a result, eight higher territorial units within Slovakia were formed, with the metropolitan agenda as secondary education, social services, primary health-care, culture (theaters, libraries, museums, and others); later also the responsibility for the EU Investment and Structural Funds (ISF), in short known as the EU-funds (Faltan & Krivy, 1999; Kruglashov, 2013). As they were designed during the period of “black hole of Europe“ as Madeleine Albright named Slovakia and with a strong presence of nationalist stream in Mečiar’s Cabinet, they have attracted the attention of scholars from the beginning. Faltan and Krivý present two main critiques of these reforms: designed to maximize the electoral potential of

The Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and were ethnically motivated by “splitting up of several naturally formed regions” (Faltan & Krivy, 1999, p. 115), and forming artificial territorial units to weaken the political influence of the Hungarian minority. To summarize, political actors played a not surprising but radical role in setting up the higher self-administrative units, which resulted in the model ignoring geography and favoring nationalist politics (Beblavý & Sičáková–Beblavá, 2006; Faltan & Krivy, 1999; Kruglashov, 2013). On the whole, when constituting any model, the aims of the stakeholders are always present, and their goals should be analyzed in detail (Fox & Gurley, 2006).

Political culture cannot be excluded, as it is a part of the performance of any model. From the point of definition, political culture is defined as a set of views on political institutions and actors; “in terms of what it is that they do, why they do it, and how what they do is related to and affects what others do” (Almond, 1956, p. 393). For scholars as Beblavý & Sičáková–Beblavá (2006) or Kruglashov (2013), political culture dramatically influences the institutional performance, but also the strategies and acts of the political actors. Beblavý and Sičáková–Beblavá highlight the political culture in the form of the institutional obstacle when institutions are formed according to the general opinion of the public that may be counterproductive to their performance (Beblavý & Sičáková–Beblavá, 2006). Similarly, Rojas, Cuadrado-Roura, & Güell (2008) illustrate on a story of Latin American provincial governments that any institutions have to be linked to the political culture if success is expected. Beliefs of political culture have to be a part of the institutional design criteria as some may contribute to inefficiency, especially when concerning historical trauma stemming from totalitarian regimes.

To conclude—history, geography, and political culture matter, although politicians often ignore them. In Slovakia, stories of communism and nationalism are striking and have to be observed in detail when constituting a new model. Despite the focus of the thesis on the present and future institutional design, historical aspects of communism and nationalism are still embedded in the political culture that likely influences a model—for that very reason, attention should be on them. Also, the positions of all stakeholders are significant, as politics dictates the institutional building. In conclusion, the local context may not be the most fundamental parameter but is always present. Politics must not forget about the local context as it may destroy any model, and it should take it into account when planning.

2. Methodology

The empirical part of the thesis analyzes three simplified scenarios when constituting a model of municipal governance—status quo, changes, and consolidation. The status quo perceives the current institutional design of Bratislava and evaluates whether it satisfactorily serves Bratislava and its citizens; in other words, answers if the current model is reaching/will result in effective governance. The second model focuses on changes toward the more effective governance; more specifically: changes in agendas and possible consolidation of the city and higher territorial unit within a territory of the capital. The last, most ambitious and radical model, proposed by Bratislava in their program 2030, underlines consolidation of all institutions under the management of the city and significant political weakening of city districts. The thesis examines the effective governance in Bratislava in the proposed models and comments on possible advantages or disadvantages from the two perspectives defined by Mills—of personal troubles (perspective of an individual citizen/inhabitant of the city) and the public issues (perspective of the needs for the sustainable growth of metropolitan region) (Mills, 1959).

Hypothesis 1 examines if the consolidation of Bratislava's urban institutions improves the effectiveness of governance from the point of an individual citizen/inhabitant (perspective of personal troubles). The general assumption is that consolidation decreases responsiveness to the individual (but also collective) needs but increases accountability. Services (and their quality) for individuals may improve thanks to consolidation but may lose competitiveness and fiscal-sparseness because of one-institutions monopoly in all services. Expectations are that hypothesis 1 will be disproved, as the possible gains from consolidated services as accountability, more strategic planning, and standard of services do not compensate for the loss of responsiveness in the delivery of services. In other words, the general assumption is that an individual citizen may lose more than gain from consolidation. Hypothesis 2 examines if the consolidation of Bratislava's urban institutions improved the effectiveness of governance from the regional perspective (public issues). Hypothesis 2, (examining metropolitan perspective) is expected to be proved, as the consolidation undoubtedly improves urban growth.

The model of the current government is analyzed and compared with the two alternative scenarios. The first model of fragmented Bratislava deeply analyses the current model from three perspectives of accessible public services, accountable public services, and strategic planning of

public services. Three perspectives are chosen after the consideration of the published literature, comments of experts, and available data, having in mind the concept of the good and effective governance mentioned in the literature review. Institutional design is evaluated from three perspectives on a scale from 0 to 3, with 0 to be the unsatisfactory institutional design and 3 to be the most optimal (see Evaluation Criteria). The accessible public services are evaluated on the criteria of their quality, frequency, distance, barrier free and innovativeness. The accountable public services are evaluated by the degree of possible public influence if citizens can easily navigate between services and influence their quality or frequency. They also include general transparency of local government, quality of the information provided by the government in respect to services, and active involvement of citizens supported by the administration. The strategic planning of public services and urban development are evaluated on the existence of the strategic plans, through the results from international reports of environmental, transport, or other urban policies, existing data in managing the delivery of public services, existence and results of the metropolitan actor, and the quality of coordination between regional actors (see Evaluation Criteria).

As the thesis focuses on the institutional design, some aspects of the public services and governance were less relevant, thus less considered in the evaluation. The literature states that economic trends and conclusions in the context of these models are so ambiguous and complex that they require separate research. In the theoretical part, this work describes the main streams of views on consolidation on an economic scale. As several authors state, the financial side of these models is so specific to each city that it cannot be linked to consolidation in the form of a direct institutional question. Furthermore, due to the nature of the research, it is not possible to formulate criteria that take into account history, and thus political culture. Given the intention to formulate a clear message of the work, experience from the literature, as well as the availability of data—the criteria of accessibility, accountability, and strategic planning were chosen in evaluation of the models (see Evaluation Criteria). Some additional aspects are either directly stated in a specific part of the model evaluation, or are in the concluding remarks.

The evaluation highlights deficits but also good practices linked to current model, which are compared with the alternative scenarios. All models are evaluated based on the data of the Statistical Office of the European Union, Supreme Audit Office of Slovakia, City of Bratislava, Transparency International Slovakia, and other institutions. Data on accountability, accessibility, and strategic planning are compared with the official Reports on Bratislava by the EU and OECD

and other public reports on Bratislava. Interviews with experts and literature on other cities are also used. Based on the data selection, length and intensity of research, and its delimitation to the political science, the thesis focuses only on the most striking deficits, mainly linked to the institutional design and relevant to the question of consolidation. The thesis does not aim to favorite one model as the most suitable but rather reflects the impacts of all three models.

Thesis delimitation is a simplification of economic, human-geographic, cultural, and historical arguments. The work presents only the most fundamental points of economic and human-geographic stances in the context of urban politics. More complex attention should be paid to economics and human geography when applying models to real politics. The thesis aims are to provide a starting capacity to understand the leading challenges for the delivery of public services and good governance in the prosperous metropolis, based on the recent European trends and academic literature. The thesis aims to encourage a politically-neutral debate based on the insights from all models for the future reform of Bratislava, having in mind the end user-the citizen and regional development. And most importantly, it seeks to answer if the consolidation in some way improves Bratislava.

2.1. Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation of Bratislava's governance	0 unsatisfactory	1 needs development	2 satisfactory	3 advanced
Strategic Planning of the Public Services and Urban Development	Are not supervised; lack of strategic vision; lack of responsible regional actor/have too many responsible actors; are not coordinated; data are not used in planning	Are only a little included in the planning process; have large deficits in the strategic planning and coordination; many responsible actors; limited use of data in planning	Are partly included in the planning process; minor deficits in the strategic planning and coordination; existence of a collectively responsible actor; data are used in planning	Are included in the planning process; has a clear strategic vision; has a collectively responsible regional actor; are well-coordinated; use data as the primary source for planning
Accessibility of Public Services	Significant lack of public services; public services are generally not accessible; institutions do not provide public services	Services are delivered with significant disruptions, either of regional or time kind; services do not offer adequate capacity or frequency.	Services are almost accessible; specific locations may occasionally lack services for economic reasons; there is a significant demand for specific services without adequate offer	Services are fully accessible to everyone without exceptions or disruptions; public services are also designed for people with the specific needs, with a respect to social policy
Accountability of Public Services	To account/influence/response to services is not possible; lack of information on responsibility or accountability; lack of communication; lack of civil participation	Some forms of citizen's feedbacks available (in limited way); no clear (limited) provision on the responsibility for services; communication available (in limited way)	Most of services are accountable; several forms of citizen's feedbacks available (some are not solved); active communication in urgent situation (lack of pre-informing); citizens may know if are interested	Clear accountability of all services; several forms of citizens' feedbacks are responded and solved; active communication with citizens (for everyone); clear image of the cities' competencies

3. Fragmented Bratislava

This chapter evaluates the current model of the institutional design in Bratislava from three central perspectives—accessibility of public services, accountability of public services, and strategic planning and urban development in respect to public services. Specifically, it documents average performances in the accessibility and accountability of public services and explains the below-average performance in strategic planning and urban development. This chapter identifies the central deficits of accessibility, accountability, and strategic planning (and urban development) directly linked to the fragmented model of Bratislava. Data of the European Commission, the Eurostat, the Supreme Audit Office of Slovakia, the City of Bratislava, and other institutions, accompanied by examples of the day-to-day performance of the public services evaluates fragmented Bratislava in respect to the models of good governance and effective public services.

3.1. Accessibility of Public Services

Public services perform on the average level (1.5 out 3) from the perspective of accessibility.

Services are accessible to everyone regardless of their status or location within Bratislava. As stated in the Report of the European Commission (2018), the Final Report of Bratislava 2010–2020 (Bratislava, 2020), or Krizan’s (2009) Report of Service Accessibility—inhabitants of Bratislava enjoy a variety of services, fairly distributed within the region. Also, public services are barrier-free and accessible to the population concerning their specific needs (such as town hall services for the deaf people or visually impaired). Institutions of Bratislava have also digitalized their services, bringing several services accessible anywhere and at any time through their website or mobile app. Primary education and social housing are significant deficits of all institutions in Bratislava—that are pushing the grade down to unsatisfactory. According to Eurostat, Bratislava and its public services (all institutions) are placed in the last positions from the selected EU cities in the citizen’s satisfaction and trust toward the public services. While on average: 53% of EU citizens “agree that the administrative services in their city help people efficiently”—only 28% agree in Bratislava (40% in Košice) (Eurostat, 2015). To be more specific, only two cities from 79 observed EU cities are performing worse in the eyes of their citizens than Bratislava – Rome, and Napoli (Eurostat, 2015). Also, the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic (2019) finds deficits as underfunded and overcrowded kindergartens, lack of public investments into social housing or other public facilities (as new kindergartens, schools, or social care houses). To conclude, rating 1.5 is based on the unsatisfactory capacities in primary education, lack of investments into social housing, and general dissatisfaction.

As the literature suggests, a more fragmented model is more accessible as the services and their distribution are managed according to the principle of subsidiarity—at the lowest possible level of governance (Bird & Slack, 2008). The current model in Bratislava proves the validity that a more fragmented model distributes services closer to its citizens but fails in the management of services and needs strategic coordination. Kindergartens and social housing present examples of services when fragmentation weakens quality and quantity. The problem originates in the division of competencies (their fragmentation) and lack of coordination, especially with long-term strategic visions. While services, as road maintenance or waste disposal, are more easily improved by the

change of the provider or management; kindergartens and social housing need more (Rao, 2007; Fox & Gurley, 2006). The Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic stated that kindergartens and social housing are hardly changeable without reform, even with the most effective and active administration (Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic, 2019). In the strategic vision Bratislava 2030 (MIB, 2022), Bratislava recommends the more addressed delegation of competencies in these agendas (consolidation reform in favor of the city or metropolitan region), change of fiscal revenues for providing them (tax reform), and the creation of the body for the coordination. Today, Bratislava grows (especially in its suburbs), but the institutions cannot satisfy the needs for more flats and capacity in schools for the clash of competencies between several decentralized institutions (Šveda & Šuška, 2019). From the point of the accessibility of day-to-day services (public services), the current model fails in the elementary provision of education and housing. This is caused by institutional obstacles, despite its success in inclusive accessibility of other services.

3.2. Accountability of Public Services

Public services perform on the average level (1.5 out 3) from the perspective of accountability.

Services and administration at first appear to be accountable – several forms of citizens’ feedback exist, the administration solves complaints, and actively communicates on various platforms. Several reports, the Report of the Transparency International Slovakia included (Transparency International Slovakia, 2018), stated that several (not all) institutions of Bratislava offer a decent quality in informing. Data by the “Odkaz pre starostu” (a platform to write a complaint to your mayor) also shows the interest of the citizens in addressing their administration, and administration in majority identifying these civil complaints (Odkaz pre Starostu, 2021). Recently, institutions and politicians are on social media, which may also be a positive factor in accountability. Despite the negative impact of social media on politics, it is fair to state that they increase opportunities for citizens to complain or be informed, especially in the young generation less interested into the traditional media. Lastly, as can be seen in the latest Program of Economic and Social Development of the City (PHSR)–the use of data (data management) is improving, significant contribution to the city’s accountability (MIB, 2022; Bratislava, 2010; Bratislava, 2020).

Competencies are hardly understandable to ordinary people, and the public trust toward institutions is also weak. Based on the Urban Report of the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat, 2015) only 3.0% of Bratislava’s inhabitants completely trust the public administration of Bratislava, and 24.0% somewhat trust. Other data also suggest that administration and their procedures are reflected in the eyes of citizens more negatively. Despite the overall satisfaction with life in Bratislava (44.8% completely satisfied and 46.7% somewhat satisfied), citizens find several deficits in the performance of Bratislava (Eurostat, 2019). For illustration, only every tenth citizen (10.4%) of Bratislava regard the city’s procedures as “straightforward and easy to understand” (Eurostat, 2019). After all, deficits of institutional accountability are confirmed by several reports: “very low accountability and control of corruption” (European Commission, 2018, p. 909); “sometimes, citizens cannot directly affect what is happening” (Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic, 2019, p. 2); or other deficits originating in the very complex and hardly navigable division of competencies between 19 layers of institutions. To conclude, rating 1.5 is based on the unsatisfactory accountability originating in

the competence hell and below-average results of trust and accountability, despite the improvements in data management, citizens' participation, and access to information.

As the literature suggests, on one hand more, fragmented model is more participatory, but on the other, it is less accountable than the consolidated model (Beblavý & Sičáková–Beblavá, 2006; Bird & Slack, 2008). Currently, citizens enjoy more opportunities to appeal, making the fragmented model more responsive and closer to the citizens. However, citizens, together with more places of appeal experience higher difficulty to find a responsible institution for their problem. Simply, it is much easier to receive a response from the local administration, but the response may be unsatisfactory (as competencies in this agenda belong to other institutions). Critics of the current fragmented model claim that citizens can hardly understand the competencies and make a responsible decision in the elections based on the mayor's or MPs' performance. Also, Beblavý (Personal Interview, 2021) stated that in the current model, citizens are judging performance of the regional institutions on the PR-base rather than of their performance (as they can hardly understand competencies and compare institutions). Each country in the world has solved (or is still solving) this institutional dilemma differently. While London kept a fragmented model relying on the lowest possible level of accountability, Helsinki delegated metropolitan competencies to Metropolitan Agency (setting local at district and regional at metropolitan) (Rao, 2007). In Bratislava, provision of public services (as road cleaning and maintenance) is often illogically distributed between several actors—making these services hardly accountable. From the point of accountability, the division of competencies makes accountability harder and simpler at the same time; difficult as no one knows who is in charge, simpler as it is much easier to find someone who might be in charge (Sičáková–Beblavá, Personal Interview, 2021). After all, consolidation does not ultimately make administration accountable and transparent, as its proponents often claim.

3.3. Strategic Planning of Public Services and Urban Development

Strategic Planning and Urban Development is Non-satisfactory (1 out 3).

The city of Bratislava has approved the strategic climate and environmental plans and set them out in its Plan Bratislava 2020 and Bratislava 2030 specific actions to improve the quality of air, noise, water supply, and overall fight against climate change (Bratislava, 2010; Bratislava, 2020; MIB, 2022; Šveda & Šuška, 2019). Also, Bratislava established the Bratislava Integrated Transport, a company responsible for coordinating transport companies, unifying and connecting transport services in the region. Despite these examples of good practice, in general, the coordination and strategic planning of Bratislava is very ineffective, or most of the time—does not exist. Shortly, many reports and literature found the most striking deficits of the current institutional design in the lack of coordination and strategic planning (European Commission, 2018; Bratislava, 2020). The Final Report of Bratislava 2010–2020 (Bratislava, 2020) and Report by the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic (2019) found a lack of coordination concerning transport and strategic urban planning. Also, Šveda & Šuška stated that “the sufficient capacity of transport infrastructure is often not taken into account” (Šveda & Šuška, 2019, p. 257) when planning and building the new residential estates in suburbs (of Bratislava). Undoubtedly transport is only one of few strategic agendas that need a more complex strategic and unified approach of all regional actors. In particular, all built-up areas should link to all sorts of public services—like education, social care, transport, waste management, and others. The most successful cities create strategic plans linking strategy of urban (and metropolitan) development linked to services (Rao, 2007; Knowles, 2012). These strategies—as the famous Copenhagen’s Five-Finger Plan from 1947 (Knowles, 2012) determine urban planning concerning sustainable development: to preserve the environment, prevent traffic jams or provide sufficient capacities in kindergartens. Not to mention, some central governments even put in practice action plans with tasks for local administration to ensure that any urban development respect this goal, or other environmental (or societal) goals (as in Helsinki, Copenhagen or cities of Baltic) (Knowles, 2012; Rao, 2007; Rojas, Cuadrado-Roura, & Güell, 2008; Saparniene & Valukonyte, 2012). Bratislava hardly follows these trends common in the sustainable cities, despite the recommendations of the European Commission (European Commission, 2018) or the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015; OECD, 2020; OECD, 2021), still lacks strategic visions, and not having found solutions for coordinated urban planning. To conclude, some actors see institutional reforms as an inevitable

solution: to determine a metropolitan actor responsible for planning and to remove competencies of urban planning from small towns in suburbs or city districts (without the capacity to take regional development into account).

According to the Urban Report of the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat, 2015), only 8.0% of citizens in Bratislava see the measures of the city in fighting against climate change as adequate, 34.0% partly so. Climate change and demographic change have become (during the past decades) exigent challenges for cities with a need for strategic measurements and actions plans. Literature suggests that some forms of consolidation/cooperation are necessary concerning these challenges (Rao, 2007). Small towns or city districts often do not regard societal or environmental challenges as a significant part of their politics, despite their role to deliver services directly linked to them (as education, social care, waste management, environmental protection, public transport, maintenance of roads and cycle paths). Good practice from the prosperous cities as Copenhagen or Helsinki proves that the involvement of the small regional institutions in these challenges is irreplaceable, as they are often responsible for services or planning, which should respect these environmental goals (Knowles, 2012; Rao, 2007; Saparniene & Valukonyte, 2012). To illustrate this on a car example, 48.6% of citizens of Bratislava use a car as a preferred means of transport, in comparison with Copenhagen's 30.5% or Amsterdam's 30.8% (Eurostat, 2019), where the preference for ecological transport is much higher. To reduce cars is often one of the strategic goals for a cleaner environment – where strategic coordination is needed. To reduce cars in practice means to build a reliable integrated public transport, set preferences of alternative or public transport, build new railways, tram routes or cycle paths, and other actions implying the reduction of cars. In fragmented models (as Bratislava), these steps should be coordinated as different levels of administration are responsible for building trams routes, cycle paths, or providing public transport (Rojas, Cuadrado-Roura, & Güell, 2008; Rao, 2007). Cities of Europe have dealt with strategic vision through establishing a metropolitan region or agencies for coordinating the planning of fragmented actors, unstable voluntary cooperation, or consolidation (full or partial).

In conclusion, there is a significant space for improvement in the strategic urban planning of Bratislava. But such improvement needs courageous politicians and long-term planning based on data and resources. Experts, including Sičáková–Beblavá conclude that many changes are solvable by the “art of politics” (Sičáková–Beblavá, Personal Interview, 2021)—through the more competent

management, without a need for a comprehensive reform. Also, Radičová states that lack of coordination in the strategic planning is firstly caused by the politicians without will to cooperate, competencies or outdated institutional design to be the second cause (Radičová, Personal Interview, 2021).

4. Consolidated Bratislava

This chapter observes the fully-consolidated model in Bratislava from the perspective of accessibility, accountability, and strategic planning of the public services. Specifically, it discusses improvement, worsening, or not changing the current deficits of Bratislava's governance. The fully-consolidated Bratislava would mean the merge of the higher territorial unit, the city of Bratislava, and the city districts into the consolidated body of Bratislava. In other words, the chapter illustrates the impact of the potential change from the three-layer Bratislava into the one-layer Bratislava.

4.1. Accessibility of Public Services in the Consolidated Model

A consolidated model would improve the quality of services in the remote areas of Bratislava, it would increase the accessibility of some services thanks to strategic planning and coordination in the services. The quality of services (in less financed city districts) usually improves after the consolidation (Cuadrado-Roura & Güell, 2008; Slack, 2007). As is often happening after the merge of institutions, quality in less developed districts is increasing. So, there is a general assumption from the processes of consolidation that the less-developed districts as Devín, Vrakuňa, or Lamač would improve the quality of their services. But not only the less-developed districts would benefit. Everyone would benefit from it, as kindergartens, social care, or housing would be more accessible, thanks to the consolidated strategic planning.

However, consolidation can also lead to economic efficiency in certain services, i.e. a reduction in the supply of inefficient services that have been provided in a fragmented model in several places (Cuadrado-Roura & Güell, 2008). While some services (as waste management, public transport, or social care) may improve (increase in frequency, availability, or improved in quality), other services (as services of the city's administration) may be removed or limited (for the economic reasons). Generally speaking, improvement in the quality of the public services (expenditures) usually accompanied by reducing ineffective fragmented services (offices of institutions in remote areas). From the point of accessibility, public services may not change—as the consolidation sometimes would change neither the quality nor accessibility of services. Usually, improvement of some services happens after the institutional merge, but also the opposite—reduction of quality in other services tends to accompany the change.

4.2. Accountability of Public Services in the Consolidated Model

A fully consolidated model increases the accountability of public services and delegates competencies in a much more precise way (Slack, 2007; Fox & Gurley, 2006; Bird & Slack, 2008). The liability of public services usually serves as the leading argument behind any consolidation—also in Bratislava, where the city’s administration complains about the unclear delegation of competencies between city districts, their agenda, and the higher territorial unit. Merge of competencies delegates the most understandable accountability of who is responsible, as there is only one level of institutions left. A consolidated model is often proposed by the leftist political parties (as the coalition of the current mayor of Bratislava) as they believe that a centrally responsible city would decide in a more complex way and in favor of the community than any other model. Partly they are correct, as the consolidated model in Bratislava would increase political responsibility, on the other hand, it becomes less responsive to the individual complaints and feedback from small communities (Sičáková–Beblavá, Personal Interview, 2021). Literature suggests that these changes often lead to lower fiscal responsibility, claiming that the model becomes pricey. All these possible positive but also negative changes are highly dependent on political culture. In the Slovak (and Bratislava’s) case, there is a high probability that many issues will not be solved by the consolidation, as the post-socialist political culture contribution to governance is significant. There is still a notable presence of distrust toward institutions or low accountability of politicians to their citizens (voters), in which fragmentation is not the primary cause, but the political culture is. Radičová claims that there is no need to consolidate competencies by law to make politicians aware of their responsibility, as they are aware of their duties and challenges (Radičová, Personal Interview, 2021). Moreover, she highlights that conflicts of competencies are exclusive “struggles for the power, not the struggles for the public interests, as they claim” (Radičová, Personal Interview, 2021).

4.3. Strategic Planning of Public Services and Urban Development in the Consolidated Model

The strategic planning of public services and urban development are the most discussed motivations behind the story of Bratislava's consolidation. As was stated in the subchapter on strategic planning, strategic planning and urban development are often not taken into account or ignored. The merge of Bratislava may significantly contribute to the strategic planning of public services and urban development, as the coordination in transport, environmental policies, or waste management (Rao, 2007; Knowles, 2012; Fox & Gurley, 2006). Many cities have established one responsible metropolitan actor (so-called metropolitan region) with competencies to coordinate all regional policies and approve strategic visions of towns or city districts (Slack, 2007; Grindle, 2007; Cuadrado-Roura & Güell, 2008). In Bratislava, a higher territorial unit seems to be the metropolitan region but it lacks competencies or often competes for power with the city of Bratislava on who should plan or approve strategic visions. In addition, human geographers claim that the current borders of the Higher Territorial Unit of Bratislava are outdated, and Bratislava needs territorial reform (Šveda & Šuška, 2019; Nižňanský, Karpiš, Ódor, & Radičová, 2019). One of the solutions is the legal merger of the higher territorial unit and the city of Bratislava in the core region of Bratislava, the same as in Vienna or Prague (Dostál & Hampl, 2007). Beblavý claims that there are “no logical arguments” (Beblavý, Personal Interview, 2021) against the merge of these two institutions, making the city of Bratislava the metropolitan actor and leaving the local issues for the city districts. Generally speaking, several arguments favor the need to establish one metropolitan actor in Bratislava, but there are also other solutions than the complete consolidation (as presented later in the compromised model).

5. Semi-Consolidated Bratislava

This chapter observes perspectives of the semi-consolidated model of Bratislava from the perspectives of accessibility, accountability, and strategic planning of the public services. Specifically, it elaborates every perspective in the light of improving, worsening, or not changing the current deficits of Bratislava's governance. The semi-consolidated Bratislava is understood as the merger of the higher territorial unit and the city of Bratislava within the borders of Bratislava. In other words, the chapter observes the change from the three-layer Bratislava into a two-layer Bratislava (semi-consolidated city and seventeen city districts).

5.1. Accessibility of Public Services in the Semi-consolidated Model

The semi-consolidated model, from the point of accessibility, reflects the principle of subsidiarity. In the semi-consolidated model, some services (as social care, education, or culture) are managed from the lowest possible level—in the city districts, while the agendas of a regional character from the semi-consolidated city (Fox & Gurley, 2006). Transport, environmental, or urban planning policies need to be decided at the higher level of governance, as they need to reflect regional context. Also, some agenda (as education) may be beneficially delivered by the city districts, but with the methodological support from the city (by setting up standards of quality). This model allows a mixture of service delivery in different city districts, which is not possible in the consolidated model (Bird & Slack, 2008; Slack, 2007; Cuadrado-Roura & Güell, 2008). On the negative side, Bratislava's semi-consolidated model may fail by continuing the struggles for power between the city districts and the semi-consolidated city. The semi-consolidated model works as an inspirational institutional design from the point of view of accessibility, bringing a high degree of accessibility in services with a local need (in comparison with the fragmented and consolidated model). Literature also suggests that a semi-consolidated model often converts either to the fully-consolidated model or the fragmented model. In her comparative analysis *Cities in Transition*, Rao finds a phenomenon of political reality that a semi-consolidated model usually later either merge (consolidate) or unmerge (fragment), as happened in Toronto, London and Tokyo (Rao, 2007). In other words, many see the semi-consolidated model in accessibility as a test, sort of pre-consolidation or pre-fragmentation. Lastly, a semi-consolidated model (as all models) is not satisfactory in the accessible delivery of public services without a responsible political administration, as the institutional design may only partly solve the city's deficits (Fox & Gurley, 2006). The semi-consolidated Bratislava may be pluralistic in the agenda of different needs (as culture, kindergartens, social care), but also communal in using economy of scale and the same quality of services, in agendas of the metropolitan character (as waste management, environmental protection, police, transport).

5.2. Accountability of Public Services in the Semi-consolidated Model

The semi-consolidated model may partly improve the accountability of public services by dividing services into the metropolitan (by the merge of the city and the higher territorial unit) and local agenda (served by the city districts). This compromise between the merge of all institutions and deep fragmentation of several institutions is often used by the big metropolises within Europe and the world, as it combined the best of the consolidated and fragmented. In theory, the semi-consolidated model is a decent compromise, but in Bratislava, it would clash (as every model) with the deficits of the political culture—mainly, low trust toward the institutions, presence of corruption, and low accountability of politicians toward, their citizens (voters). In addition, another post-socialist deficit is the weak tradition of political decentralization, which may significantly influence the success of the model in Bratislava (Kruglashov, 2013; Domorenok, 2013). In general, expectations from the semi-consolidated model may be much higher than the actual gains influenced by the post-socialist political culture. Solely on economic grounds, the merge of the higher territorial unit and the city of Bratislava would decrease the costs on bureaucracy and make services more effective (Beblavý, Personal Interview, 2021), but the change from the citizen's perspective remains questionable. In the optimistic scenario, the semi-consolidated model would solve the deficits of accountability, but without affecting the local responsiveness of the city districts. The success of the semi-consolidated model in Bratislava is highly depended on the political administration, quality of management of services, motivations of the two layers to cooperate and deficits based on the political culture.

5.3. Strategic Planning of Public Services and Urban Development in the Semi-consolidated Model

The semi-consolidated model may improve the strategic planning and urban development of Bratislava without interfering with the principle of subsidiarity in the city districts. The merge of the city of Bratislava and the higher territorial unit will solve the most striking deficits of strategic planning and urban development (Nižňanský, Karpiš, Ódor, & Radičová, 2019). The semi-consolidated city (city+higher territorial unit) may design its environmental, transport, and other policies for sustainable development more effectively. Also, the situation may remain unchanged as the institutional change does not guarantee more responsible decision-making or priorities of the political representations. While the consolidated model forgets about the local voice in the strategic planning, the fragmented does not take into account strategic planning. This model may work as a compromise where both inputs (communal and metropolitan) would be influential. Not to forget, this change may remain insignificant when not linked to an electoral reform. The current majoritarian electoral system favors local needs over metropolitan, as the politicians represent smaller districts, not the metropolitan region (MIB, 2022). Possibly, politicians elected in proportional electoral system with one electoral district would favor the metropolitan interest, not the local (as their accountable electorate would be of regional size). The semi-consolidated model may improve strategic planning and urban development, as the conflicts (between the city and the higher territorial units) are eliminated, and interests (metropolitan and local) are distinguished. Despite the deficits of the political culture or the electoral law, the possible changes to the semi-consolidated model may improve the strategic planning and urban development. The semi-consolidated model may either improve or at least not worsen the strategic planning and urban development of Bratislava.

6. Concluding Remarks

Hypothesis 1 that consolidation will improve effective governance from the individual perspective is not proven, as its positive gains do not offset the losses caused by the consolidation. As has been argued, the current fragmented model is more participatory, democratic, and responsive as the consolidated. In the post-socialist political culture, several layers of local institutions work as democratic checks and balances. The one layer may be effective, transparent, participatory, and democratic, but only under a mayor and assembly of that kind. The worst possible political situation should also be judged before changing the institutional design. Therefore, the possible victory of an authoritarian mayor and the local council in a one-tier version should be taken into account, making the consolidated model more susceptible to authoritarian politics compared to others. The fragmented model has a higher probability of being responsive, participatory, and responsive, regardless of any possible mayor and assembly.

Hypothesis 2 that consolidation will improve effective governance on societal and planning levels is correct, as the fragmented model lacks strategies that are an essential part of the consolidated model. As has been argued, long-term environmental and transport policies require a coordinative political body of metropolitan kind, which today's Bratislava lacks. Specifically, relations between Bratislava and the higher territorial unit concerning strategic planning should be consolidated or reorganized. The most striking deficit in strategic planning and urban development will benefit from consolidation (or semi-consolidation). Concerning the metropolitan region in general, some degree of consolidation is inevitable, as long as sustainable development is a priority.

The merge of all institutions together is not the best and only solution for improving Bratislava's governance. Consolidation undoubtedly solves some issues, but some of their benefits are doubtful when linked to the political reality. The current institutional design is outdated and needs a reform by merging the city and the higher territorial unit, but the consolidation of city districts should be reconsidered, as it may cause the loss of elements of participation and responsiveness. The current and future politicians of Bratislava should also work to develop voluntary cooperation, as was the case in the project of the Bratislava Integrated Transport, which may improve strategic planning even without institutional change.

Having in mind the concepts of the effective delivery of public services and good governance (mentioned in the Literature Review), thesis discourages from the merge of all Bratislava's institutions but recommends consolidating the city and higher territorial unit. Semi-consolidated/Semi-fragmented model is a compromise in finding accountability, developing strategic planning, but without losing localness and responsiveness. This thesis also encourages a closer observation of Bratislava's governance from the economic and legal perspective, as this research was limited to the institutional analysis. At last, this thesis does not aim to solve Bratislava's consolidation but to explain the basic understanding of the considered changes and prepare the reader for further discussion on the future of Bratislava's governance. And as thesis tries to emphasize, the consolidation is not an instant solution for achieving the effective delivery of public services and good governance.

List of Experts

–Professor Iveta Radičová (prof. PhDr. Iveta Radičová, PhD.)

Professor Radičová utilizes experiences and comments, both from her academic career and professional political career as the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic; the Minister of the Defense; the Minister of Social Affairs, Labor and Family; and the Member of Parliament. Professor Radičová is the author of publications, articles, and research in the field of social policy, the European Union, open government, and more. Academic career includes international research in the field of sociology, and also reform plans on various subjects. The recent publication *Strong Region means Strong Citizen*, (2019) co-written with Nižňanský, Karpíš, and Ódor present, the latest approach to the Slovak municipal and regional governance. Professor Radičová's comments are a unique combination of political reality and a social-scientific approach, a very welcomed and appreciated enrichment of the thesis.

–Professor Emília Sičáková-Beblavá (prof. Ing. Emília Sičáková-Beblavá, PhD.)

Professor Sičáková-Beblavá is one of the most profound experts in the field of public policy, transparency, and effective governance in Slovakia. As the professor of political science and the director of the Institute of Public Policy at Comenius University, Sičáková-Beblavá consolidates the latest trends of public policy in publications, but also in research projects. Several publications as *Institutional Dilemmas in Providing Public Services* (2006); *Governing Local Administration: Why, What a How?* (2018); or *Smart Local Administration* (2020) answers the most debated trends of effective and good governance, from the Slovak perspective. Professor Sičáková-Beblavá's comments reflect the latest knowledge in the academia, an integral part of the thesis.

– Associate Professor Miroslav Beblavý (doc. Ing. Miroslav Beblavý, PhD.)

Beblavý is an economist and former politician, an expert in public policy, social policy, and economic policy. As the former State Secretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor and Family, and the Member of Parliament, he utilizes political experience and insight into the political realness of the proposed reform. Beblavý's career experience includes the private sector, political party leadership, and advising in strategic projects (as recently, the EU Recovery Plan). Several

publications, mainly co-written with professor Sičáková-Beblavá, are also included in the thesis. Beblavý's comments help to answer the economic and political aspects of the consolidation.

–Transparency International Slovakia, represented by its Director Michal Piško

Transparency International works as the most influential worldwide NGO with expertise in transparency. Interview with director of the Slovak branch Piško helps to understand the TIS's research and publications methodology. Data published by the Transparency International Slovakia are used in the evaluation of the three models. Transparency International Slovakia's comments present insights into the municipal and regional transparency, but also in the aspect of the political culture and how administrations shape the administrations' performance.

Resumé

Teoretická kapitola sumarizuje kľúčové teoretické koncepty ako chytré spravovanie, efektívne zabezpečovanie verejných služieb a socio-kultúrny kontext. Teoretické koncepty sú analyzované v kontexte procesov konsolidácie–zlučovania viacerých úrovní inštitúcií na jednu úroveň. V kontexte konsolidácie práca zhrňa ústredné názory akademickej literatúry na fragmentovaný (viac-úrovňový) a konsolidovaný (jednourovňový) inštitucionálny dizajn. Vo všeobecnosti, akademická literatúra konštatuje, že konsolidovaný dizajn sprehľadňuje politickú zodpovednosť za poskytovanie služieb a zvyšuje záujem politickej reprezentácie o vytváranie strategických plánov. Konsolidovaný model zároveň podporuje udržateľný rozvoj a pomáha k napĺňaniu strategických politík–predovšetkým environmentálnych a dopravných. Konsolidovaný model je kritizovaný predovšetkým pre nízku responzivnosť, nakoľko politická inštitúcia po konsolidácii reaguje pomalšie na jednotlivé podnety občanov oproti fragmentovanému modelu. Súčasne akademická literatúra pripomína, že konsolidácia nie je nevyhnutným a jediným riešením pre nízko efektívne samosprávy. Naproti konsolidovanému modelu, fragmentovaný (ktorým disponuje aj dnešná Bratislava) je participatívnejší a demokratickejší, nakoľko majú občania možnosť ovplyvňovať politiku aj na najnižších úrovniach. Fragmentovaný model je aj odolnejší voči vplyvom autokratických lídrov, nakoľko niekoľko úrovní volenej samosprávy zabezpečuje demokratickú funkčnosť a zložitejší spôsob ovládnutia samosprávy autokratickým lídrom alebo jednou stranou. Fragmentovaný model je však neprehľadný z pohľadu poskytovania verejných služieb, keďže jednu službu (ako správa ciest alebo verejná doprava) môže poskytovať niekoľko inštitúcií alebo poverených firiem. Fragmentovaný model je kritizovaný predovšetkým pre slabú koordináciu strategických politík, protichodnosť rozhodovania jednotlivých inštitúcií, či pre zdĺhavosť strategických rozhodnutí. Akademická literatúra nepreferuje ani jeden z modelov, zdôrazňuje dopad miestnych charakteristík, ako aj kľúčový vplyv politickej reprezentácie na efektívnosť riadenia. Inými slovami, fragmentovaný alebo konsolidovaný model sám o sebe nie je predpokladom na neefektívnosť, avšak ani na efektívnosť verejných služieb, ich dopad však nie je zanedbateľný.

Empirická časť bakalárskej práce pozostáva z hodnotenia dnešného inštitucionálneho modelu Bratislavy. Kritériami pre chytré spravovanie a efektívnosť verejných služieb sú–prístupnosť verejných služieb, aspekty politickej zodpovednosti za jednotlivé služby, ako aj zreteľ na strategické plánovanie verejných služieb a udržateľný rozvoj. V dostupnosti verejných služieb Bratislava

dosahuje priemerné hodnotenie (1.5 z 3) pre nedostatočné kapacity v predškolských zariadeniach, zariadeniach sociálnej starostlivosti, ako aj neuspokojivý stav bytovej politiky. Naopak, body boli udelené za prístupnosť veľkej časti iných služieb, inkluzívnosť a kvalitu služieb, ako aj úroveň digitálnych služieb. Práca konštatuje, že súčasný model z pohľadu prístupnosti verejných služieb zlyháva pri politikách vyžadujúcich dlhodobé plánovanie a koordináciu viacerých subjektov (bytová, školská, sociálna politika). V politickej zodpovednosti za verejné služby Bratislava dosahuje priemerné hodnotenie (1.5 z 3) pre zložitosť a nejasnosť kompetencií jednotlivých inštitúcií mesta a regiónu. Body sú strhnuté aj pre nízku dôveru voči inštitúciám a efektívnosti ich procesov z pohľadu jej obyvateľov. Pozitívne sú hodnotené jednotlivé nástroje participácie občanov na verejných službách, možnosti kritizovania a vymáhania politickej zodpovednosti. V dnešnom fragmentovanom modeli je zložité chápať jednotlivé kompetencie, avšak vyžadovanie nápravy pri konkrétnych kompetenciách je ľahšie. V strategickom plánovaní verejných služieb Bratislava dosahuje podpriemerné hodnotenie (1 z 3) pre slabú koordináciu verejných politík a nedostatok strategických cieľov. Strategická mestská a metropolitná politika je poddimenzovaná a vyžaduje zvyšovanie koordinácie medzi subjektmi, ako aj jasnejšie plánovanie. Strategické plánovanie je kritizované aj pre absenciu metropolitnej inštitúcie zodpovednej za koordináciu strategických politík, respektíve pre súboj medzi mestom a VÚC o túto zodpovednosť.

Empirická časť ďalej pozostáva z kapitol venovaných dvom alternatívnym modelom: konsolidovanému modelu Bratislavy a čiastočne konsolidovanému. Oba modely sú kvalitatívne hodnotené podľa rovnakých kritérií ako súčasný model—z pohľadu prístupnosti, politickej zodpovednosti a strategického plánovania. Čiastočne konsolidovaný model chápe zlúčenie mesta a VÚC, ako aj ponechanie súčasného stavu pri mestských častiach Bratislavy. Tento model prináša mierne zlepšenia v strategickom plánovaní, avšak experti zdôrazňujú, že uvedené výsledky sú dosiahnuteľné aj bez konsolidácie. Plne konsolidovaný model je chápaný ako zlúčenie všetkých inštitúcií na území hlavného mesta na jednu mestskú úroveň. Tento model môže priniesť významné zlepšenie strategických politík, súčasne však je demokraticky labilnejší pre nižšiu mieru participácie, ako aj systému brzd a protiváh. Analýza modelov odpovedá na hypotézy, či konsolidácia zvyšuje efektívnosť verejných služieb—z pohľadu jednotlivca a jeho individuálnych potrieb (hypotéza č. 1) a z metropolitného pohľadu a udržateľného rozvoja (hypotéza č. 2). Práca nepotvrďuje hypotézu č. 1, čím komentuje potenciálny negatívny dopad konsolidácie na potreby jednotlivca a jeho významnosť. Jednotlivec má totiž vyššie demokratické záruky, ako aj možnosti

participácie vo fragmentovanom modeli. Naproti tomu hypotéza č. 2 je pravdivá, nakoľko konsolidácia preukázateľne ovplyvňuje strategické plánovanie a politiky udržateľného rozvoja.

Vo všeobecnosti, práca zdôrazňuje, že proces konsolidácie nie je riešením všetkých problémov nízkej efektívnosti mesta a regiónu. Práca zdôrazňuje, že vzhľadom na ciele dlhodobého udržateľného rozvoja, klimatickú a demografickú zmenu bude nevyhnutné prijímať strategické politiky. Dnešná Bratislava umožňuje vysokú participáciu občanov, avšak zabúda na dlhodobé ciele a stratégie. Metropolitná politika zohľadňujúca environmentálne, dopravné, či sociálne politiky je kľúčová pre rozvíjajúcu sa metropolu, preto je existencia metropolitného hráča nevyhnutná. Práca sa prikláňa ku kompromisu zlúčenia VÚC a mesta, avšak s ponechaním responzívnych a participatívnych mestských častí. Práca tiež vyzýva k ďalšiemu akademickému výskumu v oblasti fiškálnej politiky a politickej kultúry v kontexte konsolidácie, ktoré boli pre dĺžku a charakter tejto práce opomenuté. Cieľom práce nie je podporiť jediné riešenie vhodného inštitucionálneho dizajnu, ale popísať ústredné deficity jednotlivých modelov v kontexte Bratislavy a jej metropolitného regiónu.

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Appendix

