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Influence of Voluntary Associations of Municipalities on the Territory Development

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to analyze current state of the Register of municipalities in the Czech Republic with the focus on its influence on the territory development. Voluntary associations of municipalities represent one of the ways of interregional cooperation; the purpose of all associations of municipalities is to provide public services to their members. The first voluntary associations in the Czech Republic were founded in the early 1990s. Association of municipalities is a public corporation, which can be voluntarily created by municipalities for the purpose of cooperation, protection and promotion of their common interests. Association of municipalities is mainly responsible for the fulfilment of public administration tasks in the areas of education, social care, healthcare, culture, fire protection, public order, environmental protection, tourism, communal waste and sewage, technical infrastructure, local roads and public transport. Since voluntary associations provide a wide range of services to their members, it is possible to identify the fields to which the investments needed for the sustainable development of the area could be directed. With the exception of the facilities for drinking water supply, drainage and wastewater treatment as well as building a common sewer system where the associations have already set up their own organizations to ensure these needs, the field of investment cooperation could be particularly designated as the area of environmental protection, common facilities providing pre-school childcare, social services focused on the elderly as well as social housing. This paper maps association of municipalities established in individual regions with a detailed analysis of the situation in the South Moravian Region.

1. Introduction

The aim of the article is to map the current state of Registers of municipalities in the Czech Republic and to determine their impact on the development of the territory. By providing voluntary volumes of municipalities with a wide range of services for their members, it is possible to identify areas where the investments needed for the sustainable development of the area could be directed.

Voluntary Associations of Municipalities (VAM) represent one way of inter-regional cooperation. Their establishment was allowed by the change in legislation adopted at the beginning of the 1990s by restoring municipal self-government and enabling the municipalities to join together to address common needs in shared areas [1]. Although the original range of possible activities was specifically targeted and aimed at activities in the field of education, social and health care, culture, management and maintenance of public facilities, community cleanliness, waste collection and disposal, it also allowed to address some needs in the field of public facilities such as water supply, water drainage and wastewater treatment.

The amendment to the Municipal Act, adopted in the middle of the year 2000, preferring voluntary associations of municipalities as bodies of inter-municipal cooperation, extended the scope of their activities to other areas related to the provision of transport services, management of local roads and



forests, residential and housing capacity, operation of quarries, sandpits as well as facilities for mining and processing of minerals and air protection [2].

2. Voluntary associations of municipalities in the Czech Republic

Voluntary associations of municipalities were created from the very beginning as independent legal entities associating several municipalities or cities, in order to fulfil common public interest. The legislation also allowed them to implement co-operation through private-law contracts or participation of municipalities in other public or private companies. In addition, municipalities could develop co-operation with municipalities or associations of municipalities of other countries, possibly through membership of international associations composed of territorial self-governing units.

The purpose of the establishment and existence of all voluntary associations of municipalities is to ensure and provide public services to the citizens of the associated municipalities. Although their legal form is determined by law, the internal conditions, i.e. the types and number of bodies, the funds, the scope of the delegated powers, the subject of the services provided, the responsibility and the method of financing may be adapted according to mutual needs and conditions, as the law does not state them strictly. This variability enables municipalities to create an organizational structure and focus their activities in a way that fully suits their situation. The establishment of voluntary association of municipalities is bound by law to the adoption of two obligatory documents, namely the agreement on the establishment of association of municipalities and the statute, which form its annex. The voluntary association of municipalities must be then entered in the relevant regional register and the documents entered into the corresponding collection of documents.

The original idea of the harmonious development has been completed by the idea of the equality of opportunity and creation of common financial funds for financing investment activities. The requirement for efficiency in invested funds became a new implemented mechanism [3].

Besides the adjustment of the internal relations, the documents deal with the property relations regarding the fact that the way of management is determined by both the law and the rules which are binding for the association of municipalities. The supervision of the association of municipalities' management is ensured by being the subject to the obligatory audit or through the employees of the relevant regional authority as well as the citizens of associated municipalities, who can express their opinion on the budget draft and the final financial account. The supervision itself of the activities of the association of municipalities can be carried out by the citizens of the member municipalities by their personal participation in the session of the bodies.

2.1. Associations of Municipalities Register

A prerequisite for the establishment of a voluntary association of municipalities is its registration in the associations of municipalities Register. These registers are kept by individual regional authorities and associations of municipalities are registered in them according to the location of their place of residence. Associations of municipalities Register is a public register enabling the persons interested to obtain information on the existence of the association of municipalities (date of establishment, cancellation and dissolution), its identification data (name, address and identification number), activity orientation, contact details of the persons forming the statutory body (their name, surname, including the address of their place of residence and course of action, the date of establishment or termination of their position). The Register also includes a collection of documents in which both a contract for the establishment of the association of municipalities and its statute including amendments to these documents are stored. Despite the fact that keeping registers is mandatory for all regions, there is no established way of data recording and publishing.

There are currently 13 Registers of the voluntary associations of municipalities administered by the corresponding regional authorities, which register 817 entities. There is no voluntary association of municipalities registered in the capital city of Prague and therefore Prague does not manage any register. The numbers of voluntary associations of municipalities in the individual regions can be seen from the following Figure 1. It represents the situation in the first quarter of 2018 year [4-16].

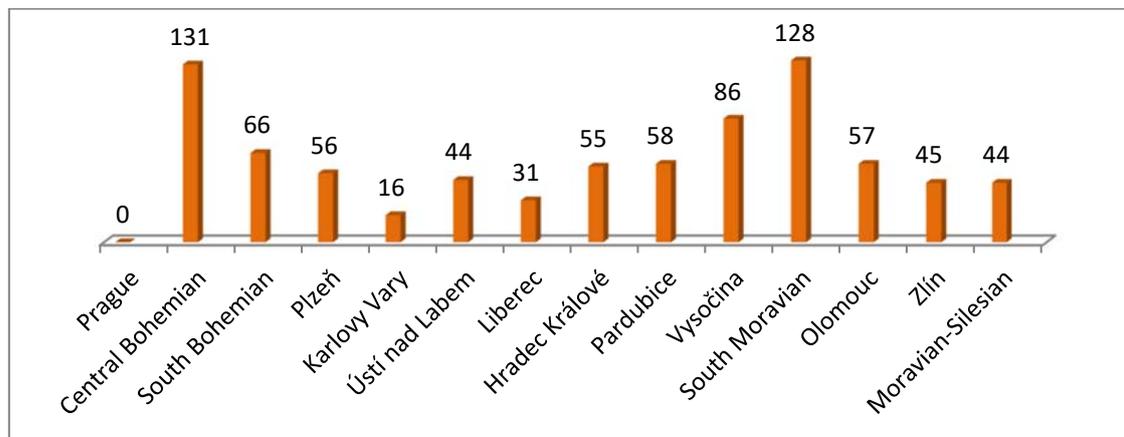


Figure 1. Numbers of VAM in the individual regions [authors 'own work according to the documents 4 -16]

Of the 14 regions, most of the voluntary associations of municipalities were created in three regions – the South Moravian, the Central Bohemian and the Vysočina regions. Population of these regions represents less than a third of the population in the Czech Republic, yet they account for more than 42% of the registered voluntary associations of municipalities. Table 1 below shows the data for these regions.

Table 1. Data for the South Moravian, the Central Bohemian and the Vysočina regions [17]

Region	Number of VAM	Number of municipalities in the region	Population of the region	Area [km ²]
Central Bohemian	131	1,144	1,338,982	10,928
South Moravian	128	673	1,178,812	7,188
Vysočina	86	704	508,952	6,796
Total	345	2,521	3,026,746	24,912

On the contrary, there are regions where municipalities use this type of co-operation only minimally, for example the Plzeň region. On average, 7 municipalities are associated in a voluntary association of municipalities; more are in the South Bohemian region (9.4 municipalities) and the lowest number in the South Moravian region (5 municipalities). The overview of the municipality number and VAM in the Czech Republic can be seen from Figure 2 below. Although there is a large number of VAM in the Central Bohemian region, their number represent only a half of that of the South Moravian region in proportion to the number of inhabitants and the number of municipalities.

2.2. Voluntary associations of municipalities of the South Moravian Region

Based on the above stated findings, further research was focused on a deeper analysis of the VAM in the South Moravian Region. The South Moravian Region is the fourth most populous with 1.17 million inhabitants and the fourth largest with 7.1 thousand square kilometres in the Czech Republic. In terms of the number of municipalities, it occupies the third place with 673 municipalities and in the number of voluntary associations of municipalities the second place. It consists of 7 districts, in the territory of which there are 128 voluntary associations of municipalities representing 15.6% of the total number of registered VAM by regional authorities of the Czech Republic. Table 2 below shows the distribution of associations of municipalities in individual districts of the region.

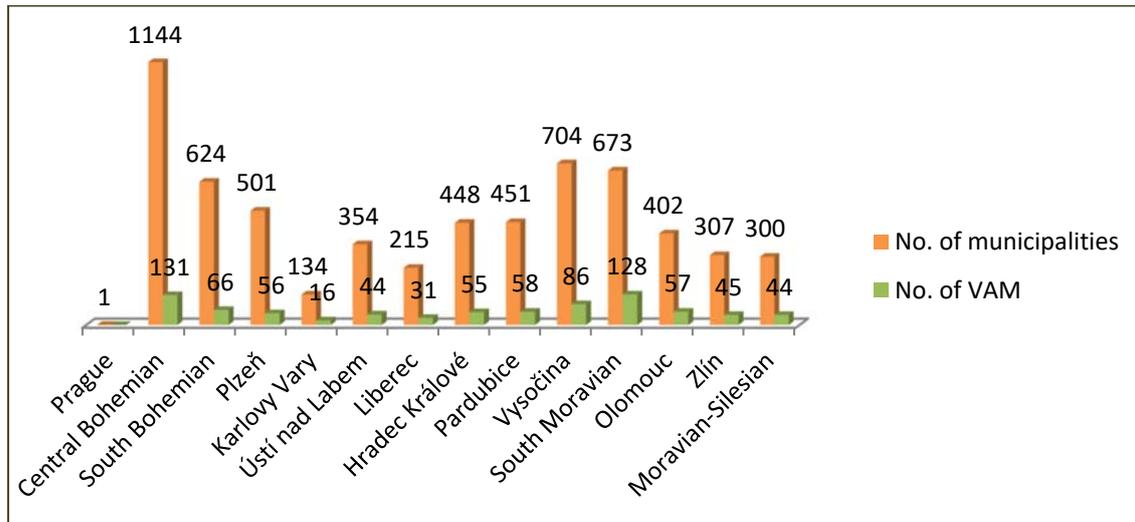


Figure 2. Number of VAM in the individual regions [authors' own work according to the documents 4 -16]

Table 2. VAM according of the individual districts of the South Moravian region [17]

South Moravian Region	Number of VAM	No. of municipalities in the region	Number of inhabitants in the region	Area [km ²]
Blansko	12	116	108,248	862
Brno-City	1	1	377,973	230
Brno-Country	43	187	217,720	1,499
Břeclav	11	63	115,432	1,038
Hodonín	21	82	154,589	1,099
Vyškov	7	80	91,133	869
Znojmo	33	144	113,717	1,590
Total	128	673	1,178,812	7,188

It is also true for the South Moravian Region that the establishment of the first voluntary associations of municipalities was connected with the amendment of the Municipal Act of 1992, which allowed the establishment of the first voluntary associations of municipalities. In terms of the number, their establishment was uneven culminating a year later and then at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, when between 1999 and 2005 68% of the voluntary associations of municipalities were established. The emergence of new associations stopped in 2012 and no further voluntary association has been created since 2013 up to now [4]. Development of the established associations of municipalities can be seen from Figure 3.

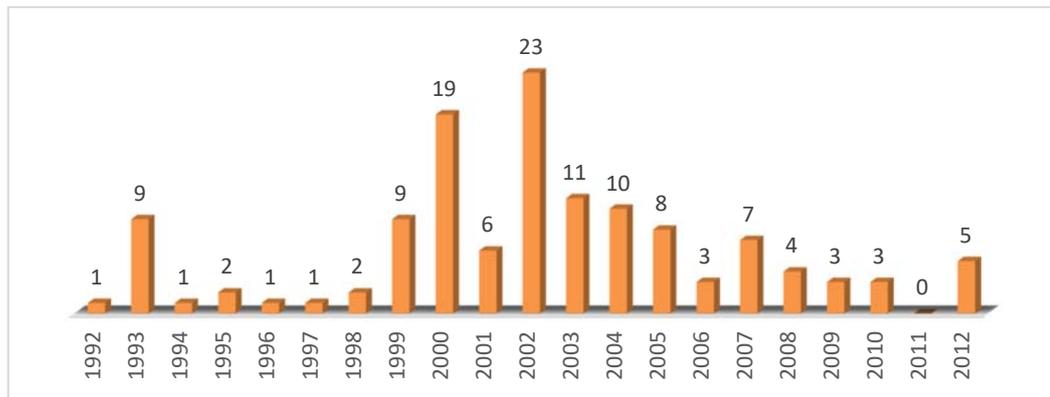


Figure 3. Numbers of VAM in the individual regions [authors' own work]

Similarly to other regions, their common interest and a common border were often prerequisites for their establishment. The common border of the established association of municipalities in the form of coherent territories does not always have to coincide with the boundaries of the region. The South Moravian Region Register registers 18 municipalities from the neighbouring regions, especially from the Vysočina and the Olomouc Regions [15].

Cooperation of the very first association of municipalities was focused on the disposal of municipal waste (1 VAM). Voluntary associations of municipalities were established in 1993 with the purpose of supplying drinking water (8 VAM). The construction and operation of sewerage systems for the purpose of voluntary associations of municipalities started to be implemented in 1993 by 7 VAM. In the 2000-2004 period, 6 VAM were gradually established for the purpose of the construction of wastewater treatment plants.

Only one fifth, i.e. 25 voluntary associations of municipalities, is single-purpose. The other 79% (102 VAM) provide a wider range of services. The provided services and activities may or may not have a thematic link. Most often the multi-purpose activity is aimed at the construction or operation of a common water supply, sewage system and wastewater treatment plant, where 20% i.e. 27 VAM are involved. The second most frequent area of activity is mutual cooperation and development of the region. 17%, i.e. 23 associations of municipalities have such purpose. The third area concerns the environment and technical infrastructure, which concerns 12%, i.e. 17 VAM [18]. It is possible to see the overview of voluntary associations of municipalities' distribution according to the subject of activity in the Figure 4 below.

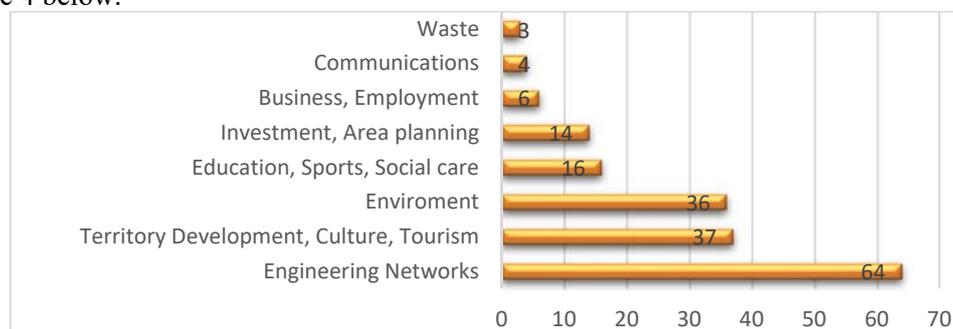


Figure 4. Number of VAM according to the subject of their activity [authors' own work]

In terms of the number of municipalities forming one association, voluntary associations consisting of 5 to 10 municipalities are the most typically represented. It is also affected by whether the association provides a single-purpose or multi-purpose activity. Figure 5 shows the number of municipalities associated in the voluntary association.



Figure 5. Number of municipalities associated in the VAM [authors' own work]

The comparison carried out shows that the associations of municipalities made up of municipalities with a smaller number of inhabitants predominate. There are 50% (64) VAM in the South Moravian Region associating municipalities with a population of up to 5 thousand inhabitants. The second most represented group is the association of municipalities with a population of between 10 - 50 thousand inhabitants. This type of associations of municipalities represents 28% (36) VAM. The third most significant group of the association of municipalities consists of municipalities with a population between 5 - 10 thousand inhabitants, which represent 16.4% (21 VAM). It can be seen in more detail from Figure 6. [18]

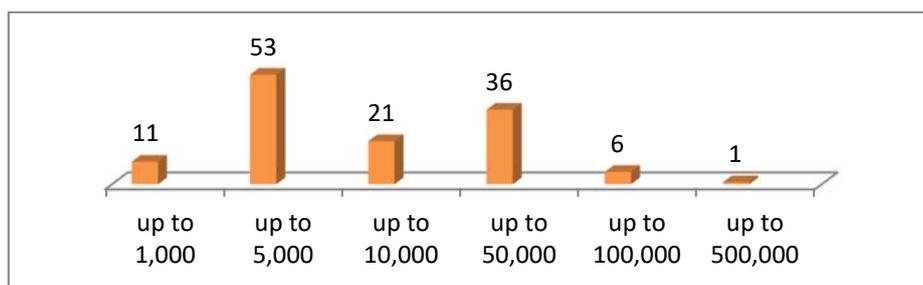


Figure 6. Number of VAM according to the population of municipalities [authors' own work]

The Brno-Vienna Cycle Path is the largest voluntary association of municipalities in terms of the number of inhabitants in the municipalities associated in the union. This number of inhabitants is so large especially because one of the members of this association is the statutory city of Brno. It is the only association of municipalities in the South Moravian Region, of which Brno is a member [18].

3. Possibilities of VAM funding

The problem of municipal financing encounters the obstacle, which is lack of funds. One way to deal with the lack of funds is the cooperation of municipalities. Subsequently, there were investigated the financial resources by which the investment and operating activities of individual municipalities are covered. Based on the analysis of the budgets of individual associations of municipalities and the questionnaire survey, it was found that the associations used lower extent of contributions from particular members, but the investment activity was predominantly financed from grant sources. They used grants from both the EU funds and the state and regional budgets.

Subsidies from the state budget and the National Fund for the 2014-2020 period are focused on the financial support of 10 national operational programmes in a total amount of nearly € 24 billion [19].

South Moravian Region supports activities of VAM in many areas, for example by issuing 17 programmes from which they can draw funds. These include, for example, the support to water management and drought fighting, improvement of the services of tourist centres, promotion of cycling and cycle transport, development in the area of culture and heritage conservation, support to activities leading to the improvement of health and life quality and many others. [20]

Voluntary associations of municipalities (VAM) in the Czech Republic represent one of the ways of interregional cooperation, which allows using all available resources much more efficiently.

Effectiveness is achieved by the use of such resources in order to achieve maximum volume and quality of products. [21]

4. Results and discussion

Municipalities try to invest in their development to meet the increasing needs and demands of their citizens. With the exception of the facilities for the drinking water supply or sewage and wastewater treatment as well as the construction of a common sewerage system, where the associations have already had their own organization providing these services, the area of investment cooperation can be identified especially as environmental protection, joint facilities in the field of providing pre-school care and social services focusing on the elderly and social housing. It was found out that the availability of services mainly in the municipalities on the periphery of the region is insufficient and leads to gradual depopulation.

The research findings revealed further ideas for research in the area of territory development. First of all, defining the availability standards of basic services to provide good quality of life in the municipalities should be carried out as well as their comparison to real state. To improve them, it is necessary for the state administration to propose measures (both financial and non-financial) with the aim to ensure adequate and economically sustainable provision of the area by public services. Subsequently, the reality of the proposed measures has to be assessed in relation to the valid area development planning documentation and the territorial analytical documents of the municipalities.

5. Conclusions

This article deals with the possibility of using voluntary associations of municipalities for providing sustainable quality of life in municipalities. Because of the fact that voluntary associations of municipalities provide wide range of services to their members, it is possible to identify areas into which investments could be directed and in which preparation and implementation they would take share with other public private-law entities.

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