

BOOK REVIEW

Milo Haček, Marjan Brezovše & Simona Kukovič, *Slovenian Democratic Evolution and Praxis* (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Zagreb, Croatia and Faculty of Social Sciences, Ljubljana, Slovenia. Zagreb and Ljubljana, 2013)

Governance Reform and Practice in Slovenia

Reviewed by Warren Master

Governance Reform and Improved Practice in Slovenia

Slovenian Democratic Evolution & Praxis by **Milo Haček, Marjan Brezovše & Simona Kukovič**, focuses on overall governance reform and improved practice in Slovenia since gaining independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. The e-book available online provides a thorough overview of the transition from the highly autocratic system and centralized processes of government to the democratic and more distributed arrangement in place today. Chapter by chapter, the authors describe the consolidation of these reforms in constitution law, regulation and the division of powers among the branches of government and regional and local self-government. Of particular interest to the global community of public management practitioners is Chapter 3, devoted wholly to the institutionalization of Slovenian democratic practice. What has been accomplished and what remains to be done?

Local Self-Governance

Having practiced local self-governance in a fashion from the mid-19th century until 1955, Slovenia had an unusually long tradition of local autonomy. Then, after 40 years of Communist Party communal rule, local elected governance returned to Slovenian communities in 1995. The major change at that time was a Constitutional provision and Local Government Act providing for local governments to independently “manage and perform their own matters” within their areas of competency. This includes: satisfying needs of its inhabitants; providing complete public education and primary health care services; social services; assuring basic necessities; public utility infrastructure; postal and library services; etc.

Here’s where the division between the state and local governance becomes sticky. For municipalities to engage in urban development, for example – a state responsibility – it would need to demonstrate competence in cutting across all functional jurisdictional lines (e.g., transportation, spatial and urban planning, public utilities, health, etc.). And while the Constitution seems to favor delegation of authority to the lowest level practicable, there seem to be many bureaucratic turf battles over which level is better qualified to take the lead.

Complicating matters further is the constitutionally-established regional level of governance – which comprises several municipal-level entities that voluntarily agree to collaborate across jurisdictional and functional lines. The sticky issue here – which appears to be the biggest challenge in practical, inter-governmental cooperation – is the

BOOK REVIEW

financing of such initiatives that inevitably rely on state resources, thus tending to diminish local government control and choice.

Civil Society & NGOs

After an interesting historical and largely theoretical discussion of civil society in Slovenia, the authors get about addressing some of the practical challenges in engaging such organizations that “have the ability to indicate society’s needs and demands.” Compared to Western democracies, Slovenia shows much more limited collaboration and networking with governmental entities and even across the NGO community or with the private sector. Here is where the potential exists to improve governance practice and the public’s regard for government’s decision making.

European Union

For those interested in Slovenia’s relationship with the European Union, the authors devote a chapter to these matters as well. A member for the past nine years, Slovenia gains financial support for growth, development and related regional coordination from its relationship. What I found intriguing was the many potentially indirect practice-oriented benefits that could and should result from collaboration within the way of efficiencies and improved performance on: border and customs control activities, gas and power line grids, energy networks, renewable energy strategies and operations, cost of agricultural production and marketing and food safety and distribution, drug trafficking and related criminal justice management, international tourism,

Curbing Corruption

Finally, in the chapter on Slovenian political culture, the authors address the significant increase in corruption. Oddly, while findings of Transparency International and other objective trend data show that corruption is below the European average and diminishing in the past few years, public opinion surveying among Slovenians offers a much less flattering view. And as for public corruption, opinion polling follows the same pattern. That is, better than two-thirds of the population believes that all public officials and civil servants behave in a corrupt manner – compared with 58 percent in 2008 and 44 percent in 2002. Moreover, these subjective accounts were most pronounced in the areas of health & health services, construction, food quality & inspection, police, customs and justice activities, with a relatively lower percentage of corruption in public education. Also, these views were not significantly different at all levels of government – national, regional and local.

Recommendation

For professional public management practitioners interested in the journey from a highly centralized, authoritarian society to an emerging democracy seeking greater agility and accountability, this book offers a helpful background – particularly in the few areas I’ve highlighted in the review. Having done related management consulting work for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Bosnia more than a decade ago – with a focus on devolving authority and responsibility to municipal officials – I would have benefitted from such a heads up before traveling to Sarajevo. This e-book is available

BOOK REVIEW

at: www.fdv.uni-lj.si/zalozba.

.....
Warren Master is Chairperson of ASPA's Section for Public Management Practice and Managing Editor, [Good Governance Worldwide](#). He can be reached at: wciwmaster@aol.com.