

Social innovations on municipal level in Slovakia

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INTRODUCTION

As the part of LIPSE 7FP project our group of researchers from Matej Bel University searched for innovative examples of co-creation on the local government level in Slovakia in two areas – social welfare and rural/urban regeneration. According to theories of decentralization (see for example summary in Bailey, 1999), local governments that are closest to citizen are expected to serve to local needs. This should mean that in the area of social innovations local self-governments are the level, where a lot of co-creative innovations happen.

To obtain as comprehensive information about co-creation on the local government level in Slovakia we realized the document analysis of relevant policy documents, databases and websites and conducted interviews with various experts on co-creation processes during public innovation. On this base we were able to indentify expected ten co-creation projects on local level (five in welfare area and five in regeneration area), but this list is close to the full enumeration of existing co-creation based innovations on given level in Slovakia.

The goal of this paper is to introduce co-creative innovations, but especially to try to define purposes, why co-creation is not common practice in Slovakia and particularly why local government willingness to participate in co-creation projects is rather limited.

CASES INVESTIGATED

Cases investigated in social welfare are as follows: Conciliation councils, Social housing Kojatice, “Godmothers”, Electronic guard. In urban regeneration we found following cases “Relax path Martin”, “Priestory” and in rural regeneration “Green Patrol” in Bratislava, Interactive portal Green Patrol, Trash out, City in mobile.

Conciliation councils

The goal of this project is to support positive relations and positive conflict solving between majority and ethnical minority (Roma - Program for Roma Integration). All types of conflicts are involved – ethnical conflicts, conflicts between ethnic minority communities and administrative offices, conflicts between citizens (neighbors). The institution of “conciliation councils” has been created as the citizen structure in multi-ethnic regions (cities Levice, Nové Zámky, Kežmarok, Rimavská Sobota, Prešov and surroundings).

Conciliation council is citizen initiative, association of citizens (mediators) ready to help with solving of all kinds of conflicts. So in this case citizens act as initiators, (co)designer and (co)implementer. Other actors are Non-profit organization Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia (coordinator), C.S.Mott Foundation (providing part of resources) and municipalities in given areas.

Conciliation councils deliver conflict management training activities, supervisory meetings and consultations for volunteers from different social and professional groups, with different nationality, political orientation and religion. Mediator helps to find solutions and common agreements and supervises developments. We can identify following potential outcomes from this initiative - improved cooperation of different local communities, improved relations between local communities and their leaders, new citizen initiatives in a region, extra training capacities, improved cooperation between non-profit sector, self-governments and state administration.

Social housing Kojatice

The goal of this project is building of social houses for Roma citizen, who live in very poor social conditions. University students are co-designers and co-initiators. Roma citizen are co-designers, too. The necessary actor is local self-government and its mayor. Another actor is ETP Slovakia, financial non-profit body, managing the common fund.

Before this initiative 144 Roma citizen lived in the village in 21 small, not maintained houses/huts on private land owned by other citizen (almost illegally and in very bad social conditions). The project was initiated by the Faculty of Architecture, Comenius University Bratislava staff and its students, in cooperation with the self-government/mayor and NGO Človek v tísní, n.o. ETP Slovensko, with participation of 13 Roma families. All participating Roma families started to contribute into the common fund 20 EUR/month, students projected houses and self-government provided part of funds and land for new houses. In summer 2013 first three new houses were finished and Roma received better housing. The rest of houses are expected to be finished in 2014 and 2015. The involvement of Roma into building of new houses and financing their costs is important guarantee that the houses will be much better maintained compared to old huts. The output of this initiative are new houses, outcomes are improved social atmosphere in the village and developed capacities of Roma to work and to maintain their houses, improved integration of this ethnic group into the local society.

“Godmothers”

This voluntary activity focuses on the creation of supportive network for individually living mothers. Citizens associated via the NGO “Sanca pre nechcenych” are the key of this initiative. They act as initiator, designer, coordinator and as implementer. Other parties such as government and private organizations participate. Other actors are sponsors: Nadácia SPP – SPP pre budúcnosť, Nadácia VÚB, Nadácia Orange and involved municipalities that decided to support the project.

Individual volunteers (well known ladies from well situated social groups) “godmothers” serve as long term mentors for young women/mothers in social need (living alone in difficult social conditions), become friends of them and help them in all difficult life situations – care about children, managing households. By this the initiative represents the form of non-institutionalized social inclusion service. “Godmothers” are regularly supervised (minimum one supervision in 8 months) and can get any needed advice from coordinator “Šanca pre nechcených”.

The core objective is the comprehensive material and non-material support to young mothers in social need to support their inclusion into the society. The core outcomes from this initiative are as follows - integration of young mothers in social need and children staying with mothers instead of placing them into long term social care establishments.

Electronic guard

Electronic Guard is the innovative concept of social service provided by municipalities. This service is actually delivered in three Slovak municipalities: Martin, Trebišov, Košice and is going to be provided in Brezno. Many other Slovak municipalities have asked Ministry of labour social affairs and family of the Slovak Republic for subsidy of Electronic Guard as social service.

Electronic Guard works on electronic connection between localisation device users and the dispatcher centre administered by municipal police. Senior or disable citizen/user carries the localisation device, which captures the GPS signal, calculates its location and sends the data to the dispatcher application. If in need, user presses the ALARM button and alerts the dispatcher operator. Electronic Guard also works as a mobile phone: user can receive phone calls, send text messages about his location and dial preconfigured phone numbers (1 to 4). Dispatcher operator/municipal police employee monitors real-time position of the user with the localisation device. If a user sends an alarm, operator receives a notification in the application including a sound alert. He knows immediately which of the users need help, where he is, including other information such as: age, health concerns, blood type, emergency instructions, etc. If the user does not respond to call, operator sends out emergency service. Senior citizens and citizens with disabilities, people with dangerous diagnoses, whose health changes suddenly, appreciate the Electronic Guard service, that gives them the constant connection with an operator and the security that in need they can press one alarm button to call for helps. Comparing to using the standard mobile phone, the emergency service is sent out by dispatcher operator to the user of the localisation device also in cases, when the user cannot communicate and describe health problem or location. The core potential outcome is improved life of elderly citizen with disabilities.

The core actors are as follows - involved local self-governments, software is provided by private IT company YMS, private telecommunication company Orange provides its network for data and voice transmissions and subsidises the localisation devices. Involved private companies are the initiators of service delivery. They had made the proposal of the Electronic Guard as a Social Service for local self government.

Relax path Martin

The initiative is joint action of the city Martin and several citizen initiatives (Joga v dennom živote, DIAMART – club of people with diabetes and a Club of pensioners Martin). Citizen and the city worked together on the design of the path and also during its construction. Club of pensioners Bielsko Biala (Poland) – helped with its experience (partner of Club of pensioners in Martin).

The city Martin allocates regularly certain amount of resources for the better life of elderly people as a part of its services to this group. In this case the city consulted the best use of resources with several actors in the city and the decision was to build barrier free public relaxation infrastructure – nature path for relaxation of elderly people. The path has also educational function – training places are equipped with basic infrastructure to exercise but also with information tables describing fauna and flora in the area. One of outputs is also publication describing simple exercising activities for elderly. The path is so well placed and built that it is regularly used also by other age categories for relax. The core expected outcome is improved life for elderly.

“Green Patrol” in Bratislava

The initiative is joint action of the city Bratislava and citizen initiative “Green Patrol”. As of today 45 volunteers are involved and the initiative is supported via social media by 6 800 citizens. However, the city is not very active and ready to capitalize potential benefits from joint activity.

„Green Patrol“ directly cleans selected localities in their members own initiative. Besides direct cleaning it also aims on increasing of attention to all aspects of environmental pollution in the city and provides information to the municipal bodies about any problems in this area. The aim is not to replace municipal services, but to increase citizen participation for healthy environment. Expected outcomes are increased citizen participation for clean green areas, better quality of environment in the city, improved responsibility of citizen for “their” green areas.

Interactive portal Green Patrol

The portal is recent initiative, significant extension of the original “Green Patrol” initiative. The portal includes several types of on line information connected with urban regeneration in the city Bratislava and already involves about 450 000 volunteers. The portal also allows for material support to “green activities”. Involved citizen initiatives are initiators, designers and implementators of social initiatives in order to revitalize the urban environment. The co-participation of the city hall is more than limited.

The portal has several functions. It provides virtual space for different initiatives in the area. It maintains interactive map, where any information about problems with public spaces can be placed. It includes the database of individuals and organizations willing to participate in maintenance of public spaces, to communicate existing problems and to invite city hall to react. It organizes media campaign to promote awareness about the importance of volunteerism and its impact on local physical environment. As the special services it allows to borrow needed material for voluntary maintenance of public spaces – and it maps where such activities have been realized. The core objective of this initiative is improving and maintaining the quality of physical environment in the city, promoting local participation and improved collaboration between citizen, participating organizations and the city.

Trash out

Citizen can free install Trashout application available for Android, iPhone and Windows Phone and report the illegal dumps by taking a photo of it, defining its size and type, or adding a comment. The report will appear in the TrashMap. TrashOut cooperate with local governments, environmental organizations and waste companies in citizen's region and notify citizen about the progress in cleaning of reported illegal dump. Application is available in English, Spanish, French, German, Czech and Slovak language and works in Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Austria, Romania, Albania, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The project helps to identify and to clean illegal dumps. Nowadays are 10 000+ illegal dumps in Trashout database (outputs) and 400+ illegal dumps updated to status cleaned (outcomes). The expected outcomes are improvement of physical environment and improved collaboration of all sectors.

The project is a partnerships of private organizations, public authorities and citizen. The initiator is the private Slovak IT company (Trash out, s.r.o., other actors are involved local governments in Slovakia (Martin, Piešťany, Liptovský Mikuláš, Turčianske Teplice, Senica, Púchov, Moravský Sv. Ján), involved environmental organizations (Greenpeace, Let's do it, Enviweb cz, Emerald Planet, Priatelia zeme, Greenoffice sk, Dobrakrajina sk), waste management companies working for participating areas, and central administration bodies: the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic and the Environmental Fund of the Slovak Republic. Medial support is provided by Ecomania, Enviroportal, Turiecportal, Geocommunity.eu, Promospravy.sk.

City in mobile

The service is based on mobile application allowing for direct and permanent contact and communication between the municipality and its citizen via mobile. Mobile application includes the functionality "Podnety" serving for urban/rural regeneration. Citizen from participating areas can inform municipal halls about any environmental problem – the application allows for sending photos, GPS localization, plus text message. The direct outputs from this initiative are followed by Datalan – as of today 75 municipal halls are involved, 2 600 inhabitants installed the application and 40 environmental reports have been send. The expected outcome is improved physical environment.

Involved citizen initiatives are co-designer and co-implementator. The co-initiator is the private company Datalan, a.s., responsible for software solutions. Other actors (depending on project) are municipalities in Bratislava self-governing region, Bratislava self-governing region, inhabitants of participating municipalities.

“Priestory”

This project allows realization of low cost investment projects executed by volunteers living in the area. The examples of products might be parks, sport places, green places, etc. All projects shall allow for disabled access. Local volunteers are “best experts” to know concrete needs of their area. As of today 33 small projects are already finished. Expected outcomes are improved collaboration between sectors and improved physical environment.

The initiative involves all types of actors and represents important form of cross sectoral collaboration. Citizen initiatives are co-designer and co-implementator. The initiators are local initiatives, the foundation “Ekopolis” provides resources. Other actors (depending on project) are participating municipalities (Zvolen, Rimavská Sobota, Banská Bystrica, Pohorelá, Medovarce, Banská Štiavnica, Prša, CSOB bank and local sponsors, providing additional funding.

ROLE OF ACTORS

The above information indicates that several interesting co-creation innovation initiatives exist in Slovakia on local government level. In this part we summarise the role of different groups of actors (Tables 1-3).

Table 1 The role of different actors in co-creation based initiatives: initiation of project

Role Project	Citizen initiative(s)	Formalized NGOs	Private sector	Municipalities
Conciliation councils	Yes	Yes	No	No
Kojatice	Yes	Yes	No	Partly
Godmothers	Yes	Yes	No	No
Electronic Guard	No	No	Yes	No
Relax path Martin	Yes	Yes	No	No
Green Patrol Bratislava	Yes	No	No	No
Interactive portal Green Patrol	Yes	No	No	No
Trash out	No	No	Yes	No
City in mobile	No	No	Yes	No
Priestory	No	Yes	No	Partly

Source: own compilation from our research data

Table 2 The role of different actors in co-creation based initiatives: design of project

Role	Citizen initiative(s)	Formalized NGOs	Private sector	Municipalities
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Project				
Conciliation councils	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Kojatice	Yes	Yes	No	Partly
Godmothers	Yes	Yes	No	No
Electronic Guard	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Relax path Martin	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Green Patrol Bratislava	Yes	No	No	No
Interactive portal Green Patrol	Yes	No	No	No
Trash out	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
City in mobile	No	No	Yes	Yes
Priestory	Yes	Yes	No	No

Source: own compilation from our research data

Table 3 The role of different actors in co-creation based initiatives: implementation of project

Role Project	Citizen initiative(s)	Formalized NGOs	Private sector	Municipalities
Conciliation councils	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partly
Kojatice	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Godmothers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partly
Electronic Guard	No	No	Yes	Partly
Relax path Martin	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Green Patrol Bratislava	Yes	No	No	Very limited
Interactive portal Green Patrol	Yes	No	No	Very limited
Trash out	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partly
City in mobile	Partly	No	Yes	Partly
Priestory	Yes	Yes	Partly	Partly

Source: own compilation from our research data

The data collected by our research (from more than just informative sample of co-creation based innovative projects) indicate that municipalities normally do not initiate co-creation and are not very active in design and implementation phase.

Two types of actors are initiators of co-creation in Slovakia – formal or informal third sector structures of private sector. Private sector is active especially in IT area, what is very much is obvious, because the implementation of project also improves their sales.

We feel the core problem is very limited interest of municipalities to participate in activities proposed and designed by other partners (lack of will to “minimum involvement”). From ten projects there is clear “yes” in the Table 3 only once. “Partly” means that from many contacted only few municipalities decided to participate, or that their involvement changed during the project realization phase – from positive to indifferent or negative. Direct interviews with representatives of involved actors confirm the problem and responses from “participating” municipalities are frequently – “we are not aware about the project”.

We may also present concrete examples of municipal approaches to some projects mentioned above. In case of “Electronic Guard” several municipalities promoted the project during the local election campaign as important result (especially city Martin) but after elections their interest disappeared. During our interviews in Martin we discovered that most citizens are not aware about the availability of this service. Company YMS stopped to support the project because of too small number of users.

In case of “Green Patrol” we have to mention that local self-government is not very happy about this project. Its financial allocation for removal of illegal dumping is only 14 500 EUR in 2014 what does not cover even basic needs for this area (request from responsible city department was 100 000 EUR). Reporting illegal dumpings increases number of cases to solve – this is complication and not benefit for the city from short-term perspective.

In case of “City in Mobile” local self-governments involved do not promote the service. Only 100 inhabitants from all participating municipalities downloaded the application! Taking into the account costs of this innovation this is really poor performance.

The project “Priestory” also indicates many problems. Most municipalities originally involved stopped to support local initiatives within the project.

Purposes and possible solutions

Existing research (for summary see Bekkers et al, 2013) expect (between many other characteristics) that in order to be attractive, local governments are expected often use the quality of services as a source of competitive advantage. However, this did not prove to be truth in Slovakia. Why?

We can use two types of factors (see Bekkers et al, 2013) determining the level of involvement of local governments into co-creation based initiatives to try to find possible explanations:

1. The social and political complexity of the environment in which public organizations operate (may but must not lead to specific demands that function as an external ‘trigger’ for innovation).
2. The type of governance and state tradition in the country or policy sector.

As Vesely (2014) indicates, accountability and responsibility are not well developed good governance characteristic on any level of governments in Central and Eastern Europe. This fact, combined (based on?) with the heritage from “socialist” period of development of our countries may well serve as effective explanation for the behavior of local self-governments in Slovakia in our area. The values of local politicians and bureaucrats are still influenced by the understanding of the state (on any level) as “ruler” and not “server”, accepted by majority of inhabitants (see Buncak et al, 2008). Co-creation is not progress, but burden for too many local politicians and bureaucrats, especially if it reveals some existing deficiencies.

We can state, concerning Slovakia, that the problem (limited will) is not the consequence of legal and financial status of municipalities in the country. In Slovakia the local self-government law almost fully respects all principles of the European Charter for Local Self-Government and municipalities are legally and financially viable institutions.

In such situation, short term measures are not well available to cope with the limited will of municipalities to develop and support co-creation. Only long term changes are possible – based on major changes of actors ´ roles:

a/ citizen switch from passive consumers of “donations from the state” to active subject of local and national democracy,

b/ politicians and bureaucrats change from “rulers” to real policy makers and service delivery institutes.

CONCLUSIONS

Our paper lists examples of co-creation based innovations on local level in Slovakia. On this base it proposes that local self-government role in co-creation in the country is rather limited. Our opinion is that the core purpose for such situation represents long term problem, inherited from previous “socialist” history of Slovakia and cannot be treated immediately.

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