

Geography and territorial administration in the Czech Republic: Issues of fragmentation and rescaling

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Abstract

The post-1989 reforms of the Czech system of territorial administration and self-government have involved debates on traditional key issues: (i) reform of multipurpose territorial government, (ii) fragmentation of administrative and self-governmental system, and (iii) rescaling of competences in changing hierarchy of the system. The paper focuses on the last major reform establishing in 2003 an administrative level of 205 small districts. The three key issues of administrative geography are assessed in a wider context of the post-1989 reforms. The issues of multipurpose territorial government, fragmentation and rescaling of administrative tasks and self-governmental competencies are interconnected. The formation of 205 small administrative districts at micro-regional level is considered in relation to fragmenting consequences of an extraordinary big number of municipalities. Finally, there are made concluding remarks on public administration and regional organisation of the current (post-communist) society. It appears that the 205 small administrative districts established under the post-1989 democratic regime “from below” tend to correspond more to existing regional socio-economic structure of the country than former 77 larger districts created by the communist regime from above on the basis of an “equalitarian” ideology.

Key words: territorial administration – reforms – self-government – regionalisation – post-communist transformation – the Czech Republic

Introduction

On January 1st 2003, an important change in the organisation of territorial administration in the Czech Republic took place. The offices of multipurpose state administration of 77 districts inherited from the former totalitarian regime were abolished. In the associated rescaling process of tasks and competencies, most of numerous administrative tasks of the 77 districts were delegated downwards the administrative hierarchy to specialised administrative departments in selected 205 self-governmental municipalities, (so-called municipalities of level III) and some tasks were shifted upwards to administrative offices of 14 regional multipurpose self-governments. After the establishment of municipal multipurpose democratic self-governments in 1990 and multipurpose self-governments of the 14 regions in 2000, the 2003 change in

the Czech system of administration at the micro-regional level was the last most important reform of the system since 1989. The 205 selected multipurpose self-governmental municipalities have been given delegated administrative tasks to serve inhabitants in areas of surrounding municipalities with small populations (in this paper these areas are called small districts). These reforms created a proportional hierarchy of territorial units in the system of state administration: the central government of the country – 14 regions – 206 small districts (including the capital city of Prague) – 6258 municipalities (respectively 6253 municipalities and 5 military areas). Accordingly, the post-1989 reforms enabled the central government some forms of state downscaling. On the one hand, the central government delegated numerous tasks of *state administration* to each of the lower tiers. On the other and, however, the reforms also implied that *multipurpose self-governmental* competencies and tasks were given in the current hierarchy of the Czech territorial government only to the 14 regions and to the 6258 municipalities at local level. It is therefore little surprising that the post-1989 reforms of the Czech system of territorial administration and self-government have re-opened traditional key issues of (i) integrative territorial competence of multipurpose government, (ii) the fragmentation of administrative and self-governmental systems, and (iii) the significance of rescaling of competences in the changed hierarchy of the entire system. Therefore, it is worthwhile to assess in this paper the last major reform step of establishing the 205 small districts in critical terms and consider these three key issues of administrative geography in the wider context of the post-1989 reforms thereby using a scale-sensitive and geographically attuned approach.

Accordingly, the paper is organised as follows. In the second section, we discuss briefly interconnected issues of multipurpose territorial government, fragmentation and rescaling of administrative tasks and self-governmental competencies and set them in the context of the Czech reforms. In the third section, we assess the formation of the so-called small administrative districts at micro-regional level. In the fourth section, we turn to fragmenting consequences of the extraordinary big number of municipalities. Finally, we make a number of general concluding remarks on public administration and regional organisation of current globalising post-communist society.

Issues of fragmentation and rescaling

Integrative territorial competence of multipurpose governments

In the current era of globalisation, external and internal pressures have been leading across Western Europe and other developed democracies and open market economies to decreasing integrative territorial competence of multipurpose governments at local and regional levels. In consequence, issues of population size, territorial size and effectiveness and efficiency of scale reform politics have become even more salient (see Bennett, 1992; Brenner, 1998; Scott, 2001). Similarly, since the fundamental regime change in 1989 the significance of these pressures have been recognised also in the Czech Republic and has resulted in the recognition of increasing need for institutionalisation of integrated powers of local and regional self-governments (Dostál

and Hampl, 1993; Blažek, 2002). The fast integration of the Czech economy and society into global economy and global cultural changes after decades of isolation has also led to a growing need for considerations of local economic conditions and adaptations to the fact that the room for economic interventions by central, regional and local governments has become limited and that in conditions of an open and liberalised economic regime regional and local economies are competing more directly with each other nationally and internationally (Dostál, 2000; Musil, 2005). Importantly, in the specific circumstances of post-communist countries, the democratisation debates also implied a well-known key claim of administrative geography conveying that a sufficiently wide range of competences allows for co-ordination of public service provision and gives room for balancing competing priorities and checking on the segmented power of organised partial interests (Dostál and Hampl, 1999; Dostál, 2002). In brief, this claim asserts that integrative competence of multipurpose (or general purpose) governments must rest on a wide range of tasks allowing for a significant level of self-governmental discretion and priorities to be established between one policy and other (such as education, housing, roads, industrial premises or electronic communication networks). The issues of weakening of the integrative territorial competence has been particularly felt in the Czech Republic in respect to the structure and functioning of multipurpose territorial government and, obviously, much less as special-purpose (single-purpose) territorial administrations have been concerned (Hampl, 1999; 2002).

The post-1989 debates and realised reforms concerning territorial self-government in the democratising post-communist country have shown the necessity to interrogate two traditional major principles of administrative geography. First, there is the view stressing the key role of local and regional self-governments as a part of any democratic regime enabling participation and education of citizens in political decision-making and governing. Second, there is the above-emphasised supplementing claim emphasizing the importance of wide ranging competencies of local (and regional) self-government based on multi-functional package of tasks guaranteeing provision of services efficiently and effectively using local/regional knowledge and interest articulation and ability to oversee local or regional affairs. This twofold conceptualisation gave the post-communist debates on the nature of territorial government a comprehensive perspective of a hierarchy of relatively autonomous, multipurpose governmental bodies providing public services, having capacity to raise local or regional taxes and regulated democratically by elected representatives overseeing the functioning of full time professionals (see general discussion in Dahl, 1990). It is, however, important to note that post-communist transformation requirements also implied considerations of functioning of the multipurpose systems of government in respect to tasks and functions of special-purpose governments such local and district labour offices, tax offices, etc. Moreover, the debates on this basic distinction between multipurpose and special-purpose systems have further been expanded (see table 1) by the crucial distinction between territorial representative (i.e., self-governmental) and non-representative (i.e., administrative) governments (see Humes and Martin, 1961; Dostál and Hampl, 1993).

Tab. 1 Basic forms of territorial self-government and administration

	REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTION	NON-REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTION
MULTIPURPOSE COMPETENCIES	MULTIPURPOSE SELF-GOVERNMENT	MULTIPURPOSE ADMINISTRATION
SPECIAL-PURPOSE COMPETENCIES	SPECIAL-PURPOSE SELF-GOVERNMENT	SPECIAL-PURPOSE ADMINISTRATION

However, assessments of the outcomes of the post-communist transformation process of multipurpose territorial governments have also identified adaptations of the multipurpose government tending to fragment the capacity of comprehensive political decision-making (Hampl, 1999; Dostál, 2002; Blažek, 2002). Barlow has recognised four key roles of an upper-level multipurpose self-government in relation to lower-level governments: (i) functional role concerned with public services provision requiring wider organisation and territory, (ii) strategic role focused on planning, economic development, etc., (iii) resource-allocation role relating to distribution of financial resources, and (iv) managerial role involving “the various elements of the public sector and encouraging elements of the private sector...” (1994b page 129).

However, Barlow has also recognised disintegrative tendencies. Fragmentation necessarily results from functional (or special-purpose-oriented) solutions of decentralisation of competencies in the self-government and from splitting of tasks and scarce means in the deconcentrated state administration by separate sectors (Barlow, 1994a; see for recent critical discussions of special-purpose governance and partnership systems in Rhodes, 1997, Elander, 2002; Dostál, 2002). Obviously, also in the context of Czech reforms it is important to note that the fragmentation of decision-making in local/regional democratic bodies of self-government and even more in deconcentrated non-elected state agencies, tends to compel actors to interact more along vertical lines with actors in the same policy sector at national level. In consequence, horizontal interactions in the policy-making are constrained and the integrative character of territorial competence of the multipurpose self-government or administration tends to be weakened. The point to be highlighted here is that the establishment of special purpose interactions usually implies too much importance given to tendencies towards segmented (i.e., partial or one-sided) views of interest articulation and interest aggregation of actors in one sector. There is also another crucial point to be mentioned in the context of Czech reforms. The multipurpose character and resulting sufficiently wide range of competencies of local/regional self-governments is needed for revealing and reconciling preferences and also for stimulation of deliberative capacity at local and regional levels of the (post-communist) political system (Dostál and Hampl, 1999; Dostál, 2002).

These are key claims of the argument in our paper. Thus, a wide range of competencies is necessary when current Czech local and regional governments are expected to play an important role in bringing individual segments of the policy-

-making together. Because only a wide range of competencies can enable sufficient decision-making capacity. Decision-making capacity is particularly important given the increasing uncertainty and spill-over effects of many of the issues confronting local and regional areas in the era of globalisation and in circumstances of the post-communist transformation process. The integrative character and complexity of interest formation of a multipurpose territorial self-government also derives from increasing comprehensiveness of its co-ordinating function. Due to increasing complexities of economic, social, political and ecological processes in its territorial domain, traditional co-ordinating and balancing roles of the multipurpose government or multipurpose administration have become inevitably more complex (Dostál and Hampl, 1999; Dostál and Saey, 2000). Here, we arrive at one of the central assertions of our paper. It can be claimed also in the context of the Czech post-1989 reforms that democracy and also territorialised democracy in the form of local or regional multipurpose self-government is an integrative affair which has to provide indispensable co-ordinating and public interest articulating and aggregating framework for partial and less complex interest formation and behaviour of other corporate actors and individual citizens.

Fragmentation and rescaling of competencies

This emphasis given to increasing complexity and integrative character of decision-making of multipurpose governments as corporate actors, relates thus to the issues of fragmentation of self-governmental and administrative systems. These issues were examined in a number of publications (see for example Barlow, 1991; 1994; Bennett, 1989; 1993). Fragmentation refers to situations when functions and competencies of government at a territory are divided between various special-purpose authorities and agencies, i.e., functional fragmentation. As we already emphasised above, the (non-elected) administrators of special-purpose bodies are inclined to function from the perspective of their one-sided (partial) identity and interest formation and are lacking the integral perspective of a multipurpose self-governmental body. It must be noted that a multiplicity of special-purpose corporate actors is confusing to citizens, lines of accountability are often hidden and decision-making tends to be concealed from democratic control. Consolidation of the various special-purpose actors into an integrative multipurpose territorial self-government is the obvious solution to this fragmentation problem. As Barlow (1994) and many other observers explained, some functions are of technical character and may be carried out more effectively outside the more politicised multipurpose government. Special-purpose bodies tend to be anonymous and removed from the scope of political control. However, the point to be emphasised in this paper on the Czech reforms is that if reform proposals would be one-sidedly carried on the trend towards local or regional special-purpose solutions and, thus, the importance of the integrative character of decision-making of territorial self-governmental and administrative bodies would not be recognised, than the functional and territorial fragmentation could enforce each other and create extreme variety of problems in terms of effective size, scarce resources and co-ordination and capacity for action. Such fragmentation would lead in a cumulative manner to further decreasing territorial competence of the multipurpose self-government and administration (see

Dostál and Hampl, 1999; Dostál, 2002). Obviously some special-purpose administrative solutions can be preferred when technical tasks or issues are involved.

It must be noted that in the debates on the Czech reform functional fragmentation has attracted less political and public attention than the divisions and fragmentations of territories. This emphasis given to the issues of territorial delineations also appeared in an unusual procedure that was chosen by the Czech central government when micro-regional units of small administrative districts had to be established. The procedure and its outcomes will be assessed below in the third section of our paper. Discussions on "activity spaces" and "truly bounded" administrative units or on an "optimal" state of territorial correspondence of administrative and spatial functions (see Bennett, 1989; 1997; Bours, 1989) have indicated also in the Czech case the general character of this basic question of administrative geography. Ideally, each self-governmental area has to contain an important community of interest and its boundaries have not to dissect local or regional patterns of interactions such as journey to work, services or to schools. Local and regional boundaries should be delineated in such a manner that they fully contain activities that are to be controlled, co-ordinated and managed (Hampl and Müller, 1996, 54ff; Hampl, 1999, 107ff). Therefore, each local or regional self-governmental area must have a local or regional centre on which daily or other frequent interactions are spatially focused. In other words, self-governmental units – and also usually administrative units – would be of an organic character. From a socio-geographical perspective, a crucial aspect of effectiveness of territorial government appears to be the extent to which territorial government units form a cohesive whole and are supporting the integrality of local and regional government that is based on the multipurpose package of tasks and competencies (Dostál and Hampl, 1993; 1999). The lack of the organic character of self-governmental and administrative units is thus also an important aspect of the fragmentation of governmental systems. However, the realities of territorial government reorganisations indicate that the principles of political community of interest and identity and the principles of functional interactions and interdependencies are always compromised (see Bennett, 1989; 1992; 1997). Territorial patterns of political communities usually correspond only in part to functional patterns of spatial interactions. Furthermore, the territorial and population-size requirements of one function do not usually suit to other functions that local or regional self-governments or administrations have to fulfil. It is clear that functions and scales are interrelated (Leemans, 1970). Therefore, the rescaling of a function to higher-level or lower-level of territorial governments is a common reform strategy. Rescaling upwards or downwards along the vertical dimension of the self-governmental or administrative system has therefore also been a crucial aspect of the post-1989 reforms in the Czech administration and self-government has to be considered further this paper.

Interrelated questions

One can assess as a positive feature of the new system of the 205 small administrative districts of selected municipalities of level III, the relatively high degree of organic character of the districts, their considerable correspondence to the current socio-geographical regionalisation and formation of local and regional communities.

Regarding this essential feature of the new territorial structure of the small districts there are only a few partial issues to be solved at the level of the 14 regions. Because in the procedure delineating the new self-governmental regions instituted in 2000 the central government had the political wish to use as their building units the 77 old large multipurpose administrative districts. The old districts were already established in 1960 and their delineation was not and is not corresponding to the existing nodal organisation of urban centres and hinterlands (Hampl, 2005; see also Hampl et al., 1996; 1999).

These minor distortions notwithstanding, the organic character of the territorial administrative units at regional and micro-regional levels and the hierarchical proportionality of their systems are considerable. Therefore, from a long-term perspective one may anticipate that the current geographical division of the Czech administration will not need some major changes and will be showing considerable stability. Obviously, such a long-term prospect can only be sketched as regards the geographical form of the state administration. The functional issues (division of competencies and especially procedures of financial resources-allocation) and the quality and effectiveness of realised administrative service provision currently present serious problems of division of functions and their eventual future rescaling in the system of administration. Such problems will still be demanding solutions (often also long-term solutions). Nevertheless, the establishment of the system of administrative units has relatively suitable territorial forms and is also an important prerequisite for the effectiveness of their functions and division of competencies. In this respect one must point out that there are obviously differences between the much demanding changes in geographical forms of the system, on the one hand, and the rescaling of functions and competencies of territorial self-government and administration, on the other. While the scale shifts in the division of competences and in ways of financing can be frequent and realised quickly, the changes of the centres and boundaries of territorial units in self-governmental and administrative systems demand long time periods in professional and political debates and consume considerable financial resources (moving offices and buying or construction of office buildings, modifications in territorial statistics, etc.).

Thus, the current stage of the transformation of territorial administration in the Czech Republic can be characterised as a completion of changes in the geographical form of the system, but also as a beginning of necessary deeper changes in its functioning. In the latter meaning, one can expect that there also is an increasing pressure on the quality and effectiveness of territorial administration following the 2004 accession of the Czech Republic in the European Union. Accordingly, there is a need from the perspective of administrative geography for geographical analyses of the current state of affairs, old and emerging problems and also of conceptual issues of functional delineation of territorial administration and in particular territorial self-government. We can consider two bundles of questions and associated issues that also give further orientation of following parts of our paper and its structure.

First, we elaborate further on the 2003 substitution of the old system of administrative offices of the relatively large districts (the 77 units including 4 self-governmental large cities with delegated administrative tasks of the district level –

Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň and Prague) by the new system of 205 small administrative districts of municipalities of level III (including Prague as separate self-governmental region). The formation of the character of a bottom-up procedure chosen by the central government in selection of 205 centres and delineation of their small districts enables us to ask questions concerned with some important aspects of the correspondence between the geographical structures of (i) natural (organic/functional) regions and (ii) normative units of administration and self-government.

Second, we deal further with questions concerning in particular territorial integration or fragmentation of public administration and self-government. These questions relate to issues of a suitable size of administrative units at various scales and formations of types of functions or agendas. In specific circumstances of the Czech Republic, the issues are of great importance at the local and micro-regional levels given the extraordinary large share of very small municipalities necessarily bringing about considerable fragmentation at the basic level of territorial self-government and administration (there is an extremely low average population size of municipalities of 1635 inhabitants). As a consequence, there also is considerable plurality of various types of special-purpose administrative structures at lower scale levels and arising issues of functional and territorial fragmentation.

Formation of administrative districts at micro-level

The realisation of the fundamental changes in the territorial organisation of administration at micro-level has had a number of reasons. First of all, there was the acceptance of so-called fused model of territorial administration in which the state administration tasks and activities are carried out by the self-governmental bodies (i.e., co-governmental tasks). For this fused model voted 167 members of the lower house of the Czech parliament of the total of 176 present members. Second, there was the demand of a hierarchical proportionality. Because, the 77 districts inherited from the totalitarian regime were considered to be too large for the 14 new self-governmental regions. Third, there was of course the classical aim of almost any reform, namely to bring administrative activities closer to the citizens.

The scope and character of this stage of the reform of public administration were extraordinary. It is necessary to note that in the Czech Republic only the system of 77 districts was a multipurpose administrative structure that remained stabilised in long-term (since 1960). Further, despite of the lack of organic character of its units, the system was well-anchored in the perception of citizens. It must be anticipated that the delegation of administrative tasks to the self-governmental offices of the 205 selected municipalities (without Prague) will cause serious personnel and material problems. It is little surprising that the preparation of the 2003 stage of reform took many years and was very complicated. However, for the assessment of the reform it is crucial to emphasise that the procedure followed by the central government had an important merit in its peculiar democratic character. The procedure was based on a conjectural mechanism between, on the one hand, the centre (in particular the Ministry of Internal Affairs) making proposals and specifying the number of small districts and their

boundaries and, on the other hand, the numerous municipalities expressing their wishes. Since 2000, there were also made proposals by the authorities of the fourteen self-governmental regions. In consequence, the resulting system incorporated in the end many of wishes of municipalities and recognised interests of local communities. Importantly, there were often organised public opinion surveys in municipalities when there were disputes about their eventual belonging to one of about 200 district territories proposed. Therefore, the wishes of municipalities were often accepted and often influenced specific delineations of the new small districts. The selection of the centres of small districts was mostly based on proposals made by experts. The lobbying of some towns trying to get delegated administrative functions had some success in a smaller number of cases. The lobbying materialised in an increase from about 180 proposed centres originally by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the final 205 municipalities (and Prague) of level III introduced on January 1st 2003 and their areas surrounding municipalities (see Table 2 for some basic data on population size and territory of the small districts).

Tab. 2 Size structure of small districts of municipalities of level III.

Population size	Number of units	Area in km ²	Area share in CR (%)	Population number	Population share in CR (%)	Population per km ²
-9 999	1	459 000	0.2	9 500	0.1	60
10 000-14 999	19	4 214	5.3	241 750	2.4	57
15 000-19 999	33	8 067	10.2	588 432	6.0	73
20 000-24 999	31	8 346	10.6	691 508	6.8	83
25 000-29 000	22	6 566	8.3	594 374	5.8	91
30 000-49 000	42	19 317	24.5	1 675 295	16.4	87
50 000-99 999	43	24 982	31.7	3 004 056	29.4	120
100 000+	15	7 215	9.2	3 425 145	33.5	475
Total	206	78 866	100.0	10 230 060	100.0	130

Note: there are 205 small districts of municipalities of level III; the capital of Prague is self-governmental region, but it is also having competencies of municipalities of level III.

Source: Census of March 3rd, 2001. Czech Statistical Office. Prague.

Some basic information of a more analytical character on the size structure of small districts of the municipalities of level III is given in Table 3. It shows that there is a clear asymmetry in the population size distribution of the districts. More than a half of the 206 districts have less than 30 000 inhabitants and their share in total population of the country is only 20.8 percent. It must be noted that the Ministry of Internal Affairs wished to maintain minimum population size of a district equalling to 15 000 inhabitants. Table 3 also indicates that the population numbers are below that limit in almost one tenth of the districts. This outcome does not result only from the above-mentioned lobbying and final concessions of the central government, but it is also an outcome of specific considerations of location or transport circumstances in less-populated areas of the Czech Republic by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Tab. 3 Population size differentiation in selected systems of normative and natural regions

Territorial units	Number	Population size (in thousands)			Median/ Mean	Modus/ Mean
		Mean	Median	Modus		
<i>a) Normative territorial units</i>						
Areas of municipalities of level II.	394	26	14	7	54	27
Districts of municipalities of level III.	206	50	30	20	60	40
Large districts in Czechoslovakia	109	126	109	105	87	83
<i>b) Natural socio-geographical units</i>						
Sociogeographical						
micro-regions (level I.)	147	70	41	19	59	27

Notes: regions of municipalities of level II. and III. are units with delegated administrative tasks in delineation on January 1st 2003, population on March 1st, 2001; large districts were established in Czechoslovakia in 1960. Socio-geographical regions are outcomes of socio-geographical regionalisation of the Czech Republic based on commuting to work, schools and services; population data refer to March 3rd 1991.

Sources: Population census results in 1961, 1991 and 2001. Czech Statistical Office. Prague; M. Hampl et al. (1996).

The peculiar democratic elements in the procedure emphasised above made it possible to allow for a considerable population size differentiation in the set of 205 small districts and the capital city of Prague. This interesting outcome of the reform clearly indicates that there was a tendency in the procedure to prefer an organic character of the districts and to follow a regionalisation based on the existing attractiveness of the centres. There were rejected mechanistic applications of some criteria of accessibility of the centres in terms of travel time needed by municipal personnel and citizens from municipalities of the districts to reach the selected micro-regional administrative centres. Therefore, we may claim that the principle of regional integrity of organic nature of socio-geographical units was also one of the basic principles of the formation of this administrative micro-regional level, and thus of its normative territorial units. This can be documented by some features of population size differentiations of normative and natural (socio-geographical) micro-regions shown in Table 3. Comparing three median values of the distribution, one can compare, on the one hand, the size differentiation (asymmetry) in the set of socio-geographical micro-regions and, on the other hand, the size differentiations in the sets of normative territorial units. In this way, one can assess the two sets of normative administrative units introduced in (a) the period of the post-1989 democratic state and (b) the era of the communist Czechoslovakia from 1960. Of course, it is necessary to take into account influences of detail and frequency on the measure of the size differentiation or asymmetry. It is apparent, however, that the administrative units that were established under the post-1989 democratic regime are more corresponding to the existing socio-economic regional structure than the districts from the totalitarian period created on the basis of an "equalitarian" ideology.

This assertion is claiming a more organic character of the division in the small districts of the municipalities of level III. This claim can also be supported in another way. One of the teams making for the Ministry of Internal Affairs proposals for the

selection of the municipalities of level III, was Department of Social Geography and Regional Development of the Faculty of Science at Charles University in Prague (see Výběr, 2001). The team selected 215 centres that were divided into 4 categories in accordance with differences in their suitability to fulfil functions of the municipalities of level III. The final decision of the central government on realisation of this proposal was considerable:

- (i) category A (recommended centres), 170 centres that were altogether selected (realisation of 100 percent)
- (ii) category B (less-recommended centres) 14 centres, 13 were selected (realisation of 93 percent)
- (iii) category C (sufficiently large units that could be part of districts with stronger, more attractive centres) 9 centres, 7 were selected (realisation of 78 percent)
- (iv) category D (rather non-recommended) 22 centres, 12 were selected (realisation of 55 percent).

In the final selection of the municipalities of level III by the Ministry of Internal Affairs there were included also 4 municipalities that were not selected by the team. One of them was selected formally (Černošice) because the office of the suburban district is in the inner part of Prague, and another case is the population size minimum of the entire system of small districts (geographically isolated area surrounding municipality Králupy on the Polish border) having less than 10 000 inhabitants.

The system of the smaller administrative districts can be evaluated as a positive outcome of the post-1989 reform, but we may add a critical note on the delineation of the districts on borders of the new self-governmental regions. As we mentioned earlier, in some cases, there were respected "unnatural" boundaries of the abolished large districts from 1960. These distortions emerged due to insufficiently co-ordinated and less-systemic conception of the post-1989 administrative reforms that was to some extent fragmented and realised in number partial steps.

In contrast to the assessment of the geographical form of the new system of small districts, there are limited possibilities to appraise its functioning. A deeper assessment is impossible due to the short time period since its establishment, unsolved issues of its financial base and the transfer of some administrative competencies. One can anticipate a number of problems because of fiscal difficulties of the central government and the high speed with which the system of 205 municipalities of level III and their small districts was introduced. Budget deficits of the last years necessitate decreasing expenditures and there also emerge tensions between the central government and territorial self-governments (especially tensions with the new multipurpose self-governmental regions). One can also anticipate problems in the functioning of the small districts system due to complex interpenetration of administrative (co-governmental) activities and the self-governmental activities of the selected municipalities. The small districts are established on the basis of an agenda of the state administration, but the directive and operation activities have the offices of the 205 multipurpose municipal self-governments concerned. The self-governmental authorities of the municipalities of level III can favour their positions in their respective districts (for example during natural disasters such as flooding). On the other hand, however, one can also expect in the current conditions an increasing

financial burden for the municipalities of level III; these municipalities make a deeper assessment impossible; they can be forced to reserve a part of their financial resources to ensure the new administrative tasks service.

Big number of municipalities makes fragmentation of administration necessary

The final outcome of the administrative reform in the Czech Republic can be assessed in positive terms. But, there still are serious issues of fragmentation at the lowest tiers of the administrative system. Importantly, the fragmentation influences the number of tiers in the whole hierarchy of administrative units, and thus “necessitates” the two tiers at the regional level, although it would be more effective to maintain one regional tier given the size of the Czech state. Existing “atomisation” at the municipal tier of the multipurpose self-government may be understood as a reaction on the administratively enforced amalgamation of municipalities under the former communist regime and thus seen as an outcome of the post-1989 democratization process carried on a renewal of self-identification of local communities. Therefore, some regulatory decisions from the central government in the direction of a systematic consolidation of municipalities cannot be anticipated. The formation of large municipalities with sound economic basis will presumably be realised only in far future. Nonetheless, the extraordinary large number of municipalities with very small population and the extreme asymmetry of the population size differentiation have caused serious problems. The actual state of the extreme differentiation is documented by data in Table 4. The average population size of municipalities on March 1st 2001 was only 1635 inhabitants, the median value was about 380, and the highest modal frequency was about 140. The share of municipalities with small population in the total national population is understandably low, but the share of national territory administered by small municipalities is significant. Municipalities with less than one thousand of inhabitants house only 17.1 percent of the total population, but they administered 57.7 percent of national territory, and their share in the total number of municipalities is 79.5 percent. When we would use some other indicators of the size differentiation such as job opportunities or services the share of the small municipalities would be even lower. More qualitative indicators such as attained educational level or demographic structure would show a significant worsening of the socio-economic situation of municipalities with decreasing population size category (see for more details Hampl and Müller, 1998).

The extraordinary high share of small municipalities creates a number of unfavourable conditions for the functioning of the multipurpose self-government and also for the provision of administrative services on most of the state territory. As the local self-government is concerned, first of all, there is the issue of lacking economic sustenance of a great number of municipalities. For example, insufficient financial resources do not enable larger investment projects and often also limit the provision of very basic services such as public transport, litter collection and liquidation, etc. Small municipalities usually do not employ qualified personnel, and thus, administrative decisions are often with errors and contested. In the smallest municipalities, there

often emerge situations of political destabilisation when municipal councils are falling apart and early elections are necessary (for example in the period February 1995 – February 1997 there were needed about 200 early municipal elections).

Tab. 4 Size structure of municipalities on March 1, 2001

Size category inhabitants	municipalities	area in km ²	number of inhabitants	population density	share in CR (%)		
					municipalities	area	inhabitants
-49	77	723	2904	4.0	1.2	0.9	0.0
50-99	471	2231.7	35 977	16.1	7.5	2.8	0.4
100-149	561	3214.2	69 692	21.7	9.0	4.1	0.7
150-199	552	3583.3	96 513	26.9	8.8	4.5	0.9
200-249	517	3680.7	115 560	31.4	8.3	4.7	1.1
250-299	384	3530.7	105 433	29.9	6.1	4.5	1.0
300-399	661	6534.0	229 057	35.1	10.6	8.3	2.2
400-499	479	4807.0	213 377	44.4	7.7	6.1	2.1
500-999	1280	17 213.3	893 581	51.9	20.5	21.8	8.7
1000-1999	652	12 657.7	903 835	71.4	10.4	16.0	8.8
2000-4999	363	9665.1	1 118 446	115.7	5.8	12.3	10.9
5000-9999	130	4260.7	898 301	210.8	2.1	5.4	8.8
10 000-19 999	68	2377.7	965 097	405.9	1.1	3.0	9.4
20 000-49 999	41	1985.9	1 220 039	614.3	0.7	2.5	11.9
50 000-99 999	17	1231.6	1 232 360	1000.6	0.3	1.6	12.0
100 000+	5	1168.4	2 129 888	1822.9	0.1	1.5	20.8
Czech Republic	6258	78 865.3	10 230 060	129.7	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: There were 6253 municipalities and 5 military areas on March 1st 2001;
Sources: Czech Statistical Office. Prague; Czech Geodetic and Cadaster Office. Prague.

Especially in the multipurpose self-governmental and administrative system the integrative nature and quality of administrative decision-making and service provision is importantly conditioned by the population size of municipalities. The fragmentation at the municipal tier made necessary the establishment of several scales of administration at the local and micro-regional levels. On the one hand, there was the organisational form of delegating of administrative tasks and services of the state administration to municipal offices of the selected 206 municipalities; on the other hand, the ministries established specialised field offices of special-purpose administration (such as local financial offices). From the perspective of citizens needs, we can give the emphasis to 7 of these administrative subsystems; five of them are indicating a hierachisation of municipalities (frequencies of units per January 1st 2003):

- (i) municipalities level I, i.e., all 6253 self-governmental municipalities (5 military areas have special status)
- (ii) seats of birth registers (1231 instances)
- (iii) seats of building offices (618 instances)
- (iv) municipalities of level II with some delegated tasks of state administration (389 instances; 5 military areas have special status)

(v) municipalities of level III with so-called extended delegated administrative tasks; this system is described above (205 instances and Prague).

There are further Financial Offices and Labour Offices or their outlets. Localisation of Labour Offices is irregular due to regional concentrations of unemployed. Also other ministries have obviously their field offices with specific (single-purpose) functions and tasks. It is characteristic that the selection of the centres and corresponding areas for specific functions by the Ministries does not provide a unified territorial system. For example, there are some differences between the systems of the Financial Offices (Ministry of Finance) and the small districts of the municipalities of level III that can document this lack of geographical correspondence. There are 202 centres with Financial Office and the 205 municipalities of level III. Only 176 centres have both functions. Thus, there are 26 centres with Financial Offices that are not municipalities of level III and 30 municipalities of level III do not have Financial Office. There are also smaller imbalances in the scale hierarchy of the administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (see the above-indicated five categories). For example, two municipalities of level II do not have a birth register office and three have no Building Office, twelve municipalities level of I have Building Office, but no Birth Register Office.

The plurality and fragmentation of the territorial administration and self-government are seen by some authors as favourable features of a more flexible organisation (see for example Bennett, 1989; Barlow, 2002). However, we believe that this claim can be contested. From the point of view of citizens who must visit a number of centres at the micro-regional scale in order to realise face-to-face contacts with the personnel providing basic administrative services, such a horizontal fragmentation is not favourable. Moreover, easy orientation for citizens appears difficult in such a spatially fragmented system. The geographical fragmentation also complicates co-ordination and co-operation at local or micro-regional scale among communities: interdependent administrative agendas are disconnected and the necessary integrative nature of territorial units is constrained. Excessive plurality and fragmentation are usually also demanding more financial resources and fragmented systems are more difficult to control and lack necessary transparency.

Therefore, in circumstances of the Czech Republic, the fragmentation of the administrative systems at lower scale levels is primarily the consequence of the fragmentation at the municipal level, i.e., the number of municipalities in a state of ten millions of inhabitants is extraordinary large. We have mentioned above that there is little chance to change this situation due to dominant political values and views. However, also in the perspective of a few years it does not seem realistic to expect a significant change in this respect that would lead to effective amalgamations of municipalities orientated on the create larger units of administration and self-government at the local scale level. The amalgamation process is a politically complicated procedure with necessary interventions and co-ordination from the central government level. Generally, it involves finding of a compromise between the principles of economic and organisational rationality leading to integrative tendencies and the principle of democratic choice and civic activity and involvement that lead usually to fragmenting tendencies. The polarity integration – fragmentation is structured along two dimensions: (i) dimension of population size (small – large

municipalities) and (ii) functional (multipurpose – special-purpose sector tasks, respectively autonomous tasks of partial types of affairs). Therefore, there is a need for increasing population size of municipalities by amalgamation and also for unification and simplification that would reduce the pluriformity of the local and micro-regional administrative systems. A strategic aim would be the strengthening of one of the micro-regional scale levels of the administrative system. It would involve a concentration of the functions of state administration and also economic preferences for the centres that would except amalgamation at least with some of surrounding small municipalities in micro-regional frameworks of the small districts. Such a territorial consolidation, re-scaling and concentration of functions could be focused on the municipalities of level II (389 units) or on the municipalities of level III (205 units) that were delineated with regard to real relations in the settlement structure (commuting to work, services, etc.). If there would follow a “partial” strategy of integration without consolidation, then it would be advisable to prefer the integration of the self-governments in economic and administrative sphere and maintain eventually their political autonomy. The resulting two tier model of local administration would function in the state administration as well as in the self-government. However, the multipurpose character of the self-government would be in such municipalities significantly constrained.

Public administration and regional organisation of society: some concluding comments

In our preceding discussion we have turned attention to actual changes in the territorial administration and self-government in the Czech Republic. We have been particularly concerned with the changes in the geographical forms of the administrative and self-governmental organisation that in a number of respects already reached a “final state”, while the current conditions and quality of the functioning of the administrative system at the various scales will still need considerable improvements. First of all, there is needed a clear, effective and stable system of financing of territorial units (see Blažek, 2002) and also a clear definition of competencies and re-scaling of competences in the hierarchy of the administrative and self-governmental tiers. This remark especially applies to the lower tiers because there are too many levels at the local and micro-regional scales and some reduction will be necessary. The questions of geographical forms of administration and the questions of functional contents of administrative and self-governmental tasks and activities can be approached as separate issues, but they are obviously interconnected and constitute the integral character of the whole system (see also Dostál and Hampl, 1993; 1999). The integrative character of the territorial administrative and self-governmental system is articulated in the form of the multipurpose territorial systems (Dostál, 2002). We can speak in this sense of the main societal function of the administration and especially of the territorial self-government. In the debate concerned with these questions, it is possible and necessary to explain the importance of geographical conditions for the functional tasks of the territorial administration and the significance of necessary correspondence between the functional contents and the selection and organic

delineation of administrative and self-governmental units (see also Dostál and Hampl, 2002). Our preceding analyses provide some basis for a more general assessment.

There are traditionally two approaches in debates on basic functions of the territorial administration and self-government. First, there is the emphasis put on political functions, i.e., on the crucial importance of representative democracy and issues of interests and “power” articulation and legitimacy. Second, there is the stress on the integrative functions and co-ordination, i.e., on the territorial competence of multipurpose governments and tasks of management and “development”. With evolving democratisation of society there took place a shift from multipurpose state administration towards multipurpose self-government and, thus, towards a strengthening of the complex function of co-ordination of territorial administration and self-government. The integrative function and co-ordination is the great merit of the multipurpose territorial administrations and self-government because these systems usually have wide range of tasks and competencies allowing (i) balancing competing priorities, (ii) multidirectional co-ordination of public provision, and (iii) checking on segmented power of organised partial interest of separate sectors (see Dostál, 1984; 2002). The integrative function is orientated on co-ordination of processes and solution of social, economic, cultural, political and ecological issues, thus on the approaches stretching “across partial sectors”. Accordingly, the territorial multipurpose self-government forms a fundamental component also in the current democratic society and it is a partner of the central government and provides indispensable counter-balance against the sector-orientated organisational channels of the central government administration. The multipurpose local and regional government provides public interest-articulating and aggregating framework for the partial and less complex interest formation and behaviour of other corporate actors and individual citizens.

The conception of the multipurpose territorial self-government as an integrative and co-ordination orientated institution, stresses also its role of a complex subject of local and regional development (see also Dostál and Hampl, 1993) and its relations with other local scale levels of local and regional organisation of the society. It is possible to distinguish four basic levels of this societal organisation (see also Hampl, 2003):

- (i) ecological level that is a result of interactions of the society with natural environment expressed in the formation of cultural landscape, structure of land-use, and exploitation of natural resources;
- (ii) settlement and production level that is primarily shown in the territorial division of labour and thus in the hierarchical organisation of settlement;
- (iii) communitarian level that can be understood as the formation of local and regional communities based on regionalised identities and conditioned by participation of citizens and social groups in territorial division of labour, formed by further contacts in the framework of the social system and articulation of interest integration within territories concerned;
- (iv) institutional level that is a result of political articulation and, in particular, societal integrity of local and regional communities and provides institutional and organisational tools for external assertion of common interests and internal

co-ordination of activities; the institutional core of this level is the territorial multipurpose self-government and administration.

These four levels of the territorial organisation of society are different and interactively mutually interdependent structural layers and characterise the structuration of this organisation. It is possible to distinguish the levels also in evolutionary terms in accordance with the sequence indicated above and in the sequence of their importance in the entire organisation and development of territorial units. It is also shown in the extraordinary development of activities of regional institutions during a few last decades in Europe (see Europe of Regions and increasing regionalism in Europe – cf. Newhouse, 1997). These activities contribute to the strengthening of territorial units proper, but more or less also in indirect ways to deepening and strengthening of mutual interactions between the structural levels of the organisation indicated above. It is clear that only multipurpose self-government can have a higher capacity for necessary co-ordination of heterogeneous processes and interests in territory when it indeed has enough competencies and also financial resources for its activities and service provision. Generally, the character of “integrality” has to be preferred before fragmentation in special-purpose systems. Obviously, also co-operation with private sector is useful in partial activity fields because it can usually increase effectiveness and flexibility. Contracting out, outsourcing and involvement of private sector firms by the multipurpose self-governmental institution is usually effective, but the key decision-making has to remain in the hands of public subject and public control and clear political accountability maintained (cf. Elander, 2002; Dostál, 2002).

The emphasis put on the integrative nature of the multipurpose self-governmental functions also indicates the advantage of the organic character of territorial self-governmental units. In a simplified way, it means that self-regulation must involve units and actors that “belong together”. Therefore, administrative normative units would have to be “derived” from the real organic units and wholes. The application of this principle is complicated due to two fundamental problems. First, there is the size differentiation and the lack of equivalence in the hierarchical and asymmetric differentiation in sets of real territorial systems, i.e., the population size differentiation of settlements and consequently also of their regional influence. This is obviously in contradiction with the administrative and self-governmental equivalence of units at a certain hierarchical level, i.e., with the similarity of their tasks, competencies, etc. The tension of this type can be identified, among other things, in the differences in theoretical definitions of the hierarchy of centres in classical geographical constructions: the rank-size rule (continuous change in size) versus the central place theory (hierarchical steps). Therefore, all reforms of administrative and self-governmental systems are based on some “compromises” between the “natural/real” regions and the “normative” territories. However, such compromises can also be based on imbalances. The above-discussed formation of the municipalities of level III and the comparative data in Table 2 indicate that under the conditions of a democratic regime there is a tendency to follow the principles of the organic nature of delineation and not a mechanistic egalitarianism of a totalitarian regime. Second, there is issue of the conception of the natural/organic territorial units. Basically, it concerns the

correspondence between the delineation of socio-geographical regions and local/regional communities. In the delineation of socio-geographical region, there is crucial the interconnectedness resulting from the territorial division of labour (commuting to job opportunities and services, co-operation relationships, etc.). In territorial communities, there are crucial socio-cultural relationships and identities and overlapping interests. The correspondence between the two forms of integration is thus primarily conditioned by the socio-cultural homogeneity of the larger societal environment. In the conditions of the Czech Republic the correspondence between the two kinds of territorial integrations is very considerable.

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Résumé

Geografie a územní správa v České republice: Problémy fragmentace a posunů měřítkových úrovní

Reformy českého systému územní správy a samosprávy zahrnovaly po roce 1989 debaty týkající se tradičních klíčových problémů: (i) reformou integrální územní správy, (ii) fragmentace správního a samosprávního systému a (iii) posunů měřítkových úrovní kompetencí v měnící se hierarchii systému. Příspěvek se zabývá poslední hlavní reformou, která zavedla v roce 2003 úroveň 205 malých správních okrsků. Tři jmenované problémy administrativní geografie jsou hodnoceny v širším kontextu reform, které byly zavedeny

po roce 1989. Problémy integrální územní správy, fragmentace a měřítkové posuny správních úkolů a samo-
správních kompetencí jsou vzájemně propojeny. Formování 205 malých správních okrsků na mikroregio-
nální úrovni je hodnoceno v kontextu následků fragmentace na úrovni municipální (velký počet malých
obcí). Závěrečné poznámky se týkají veřejné správy a regionální organizace současné (postkomunistické)
společnosti. Ukazuje se, že 205 malých správních okrsků, které byly zavedeny „ze spodu“, více korespon-
dují s regionální sociálně-ekonomickou strukturou státu než teritoriální struktura 77 dřívějších větších okre-
sů. Větší okresy zavedl komunistický režim „seshora“ na základě „rovnostářské“ ideologie.