

# Chapter 4

## The Citywide/District Relationship and the Question of Integrity: A Study of Bratislava\*

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Intensive discussions about the future of self-government in Bratislava began in 1993. Practically all those engaged in the process of self-government agreed that the existing system needed to change, and thus an effort was made to reform the basic legislation governing these processes (Act No. 377/1990). Although this effort failed, there was continued pressure to institute changes, and in the weeks leading up to the November 1994 local elections, discussions regarding these changes intensified.

At present, the system of self-government in Bratislava is composed of seventeen districts (*mestská èast*) and one citywide institution. In the debate over the optimal system for Bratislava, opposite poles were represented by supporters of a more resolute concentration of decision making (the citywide mayor [Primátor] and the city magistracy [Mestsky Magistrát]), on one hand, and by advocates of decentralized self-

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government (the Mayors [Starosta] and councils [*zastupiteľstvo*] of the districts), on the other hand. Competition between these two groups resulted in the submission of two legislative proposals to the Slovak Parliament. These were labeled as the Primátor's proposal and the Starostas' proposal.

This chapter focuses on the identification of problems concerning self-government in Bratislava, in particular, the financial aspects of reform. First, the main features of both proposed acts will be compared. Second, the factors influencing tendencies toward disintegration and integration in the city's decision-making system will be examined. Third, an attempt will be made to identify principles that optimize the management of the city within the cognitive framework of a theory of metropolitan government.

## The Main Problems with Self-Government in Bratislava

The search for a new system of self-government follows from the need to craft better solutions to existing difficulties. The first objective of this chapter is to identify clusters of actual problems and outline the issues that are repeatedly debated at various levels of self-government, expressed in official documents, and exhaustively covered by the mass media.

### Relations within the City

In Bratislava, there are four main problems facing the city: (1) issues surrounding fiscal and financial policy (e.g., deficit concerns, constant changes in the principles of local finance in city statutes, difficulties with the efficient administration of the city's property, and obstacles to financing the delivery of services); (2) issues dealing with the relationship between the citywide government and the smaller, district-level administrative units (e.g., varied local interests and territorial clashes between districts); (3) issues surrounding territorial and strategic planning (e.g., regulatory plans, housing issues, support for investment activities, and discussions concerning the environmental aspects of investment); and (4) issues dealing with decision-making

processes (e.g., complicated and lengthy procedures, overemployment in public administration, and strained relations between the executive bodies of the city's magistracy and the districts).

### **Relations between Bratislava and Slovakia's Other Cities and Communes**

Bratislava's transition to the status of a capital city raises questions about its relationships with other Slovakian cities (e.g., the role Bratislava should play in the institutions created to unite Slovakia's towns and communes). Bratislava's Primátor is a member of the Club of Mayors, but Bratislava is not a member of the reorganized Association of Towns and Communes in Slovakia (ZMOS) or the Union of Cities. In contrast, a majority of Bratislava's districts are members of ZMOS. The problem facing the future position of Bratislava as a center of regional self-government is determining the role the municipal government must play in public administration at the district level.

### **Relations between Bratislava and the Central Government**

Bratislava's relationship with the central government is characterized by the central government's limited and unclear involvement in the interests of the capital city. The central government lacks a general strategy concerning Bratislava and has no reasonable mechanism for coordinating, negotiating, or clarifying the interests of the city. The central government has also failed to determine the role it will play in promoting cooperation and the development of relations between Bratislava and other important regional cities (e.g., Vienna and Budapest).

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## The Proposed Acts Concerning Self-Government in Bratislava

### The Primátor's Proposal

Bratislava currently consists of eighteen diverse, relatively independent units, with functions divided between citywide institutions and the seventeen districts (all with their own budgets). According to the Primátor's proposal, Bratislava would become a single legal entity. This proposal addresses problems dealing with insufficient oversight of the city's economy; overemployment in public administration; and conflicts over functions, nonsystematic innovations, and administrative reorganization. The existence of varied local acts governing the districts has resulted in different conditions across the city. Investors cannot find a single, unified partner for business projects and have suffered from inefficient decision-making procedures at both the district and citywide levels.

According to this proposal, the main institutions of the city would be preserved: a city council (*mestské zastupiteľstvo*) and a mayor (who would be called the *mesanosta*—a title comparable to the German Burgemeister). The city council would be the highest representative institution with decision-making power, though the proposal recommends a smaller number of councilors (sixty). These councilors would be elected from within the districts, with each district having at least one representative. The *mesanosta* would be elected through a direct election and would have two vice mayors who are elected by the city council. The *mesanosta* would also chair the city board (*mestská rada*) and the board of mayors (*rada starostov*).

The Primátor's proposal calls for institutional changes as well. The city board, the body closest to the *mesanosta*, would consist of twelve members, including vice mayors. The board members would be elected according to the party composition of the city council. A council of the mayors was proposed as a completely new advisory body to the *mesanosta*. Its members would include the mayors of the districts and one member of the city council. The commissions of the city council

would be preserved under this proposal, as would the city's magistracy, the main executive body of self-government at the city level. The city architect and city controller, elected by the city council, would keep their functions as before.

According to this proposal, the most powerful institutions and person in the districts would be the district committees and the mayor, respectively. The district committee would be the representative body of the district; the executive of the district would be its mayor, who would represent the district in dealings with the city. The mayor of a district would function according to the powers, commands, and rules decided at the city level. A further important change suggested by this proposal is the concentration of all property at the city level. All districts would lose their original autonomy and sovereignty and would fall under the supervision of city-level decision making. Furthermore, a very significant innovation in this proposal is the creation of a new central district called the "City" from five districts—Staré Mesto, Ruinov, Petralka, Nove Mesto, and Karlova Ves—at the core of the city. This new central district would be under the direct control of the citywide administration, without being privy to the elected institutions found in other districts.

### **The Starostas' Proposal**

The Starostas' proposal favors the traditional territorial design of Bratislava. The authors of this proposal prefer the decentralized control of public spending and budgets (in contrast to a centralized budget). They criticize permanent changes in the city's charter, failures in the management of the city's property, and interventions by the city's magistracy in district self-government. They also demand a special item for Bratislava in Slovakia's state budget.

The key institutions on the citywide level, the city council and the Primátor, would be comparable to the current structure. Their functions are described in detail in the proposal and would be related to Bratislava's role as a capital city and a potential regional unit of self-government. The proposal also outlines specific citywide functions for Bratislava's city government and for the district of Staré Mesto. At the

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district level, institutions would remain comparable to the active district council and mayor, and their activities would be strictly related to local affairs. A very important innovation in this proposal is the explicit identification of the role of the citywide government in relation to districts. The citywide government would be responsible for economic and social policies, territorial planning, environmental issues, city property (but not district property), public security, fire services, and waste management.

In this proposal, the citywide council would consist of two chambers, a chamber of mayors and a chamber of representatives, and a reduction in the number of representatives (approximately one per 10,000 inhabitants) is suggested. The city board would consist of seven members (two of whom are citywide vice mayors). The remaining institutions would work as they do now. On one hand, this proposal has greater continuity and is designed to eliminate the inadequacies of the current arrangement. On the other hand, the Primátor's proposal would require greater changes to the present organization of self-government in Bratislava.

### **The Basic Problems of Local Fiscal and Financial Policy in Bratislava**

At first glance, it is obvious that financial problems are crucial to the discussion. The citywide/district duality has some impact in this respect. Districts are dependent not only on the fiscal policy of Slovakia's central government but also on the fiscal policy of the city. Unhealthy financial developments at the citywide level ended after the distribution formula regarding shared taxes was changed. The city previously received 40 percent of this income, while districts received 60 percent. In March 1994, the city council changed the city charter so that smaller and more peripheral districts (Jarovce, Rusovce, Ľuďovo, Devín, Vajnory, and Záhorská Bystrica) would receive 55 percent and the city 45 percent of shared taxes (according to population). The other larger and more central districts would not have access to this level of income.

The real value of budgets at the citywide and district levels decreased substantially due to changes in income, inflation, and rising costs. This financial stress had a strong impact on relations between districts and the city. Districts became more dependent on local fees and taxes (especially the real estate tax) and on the sale of property and other resources, but they remained in a better financial situation than the citywide government. The citywide government receives only a small percentage of its income from local taxes and fees (0.32 percent in 1994). It is mostly dependent on the sale and privatization of the city's property (47.88 percent) and on income from the state budget (14.98 percent of which is from shared taxes and 27.93 percent is from specific grants). The situation is untenable in the long term because almost half of the budget comes from the sale of city property. Since 1992, there has been a dramatic reduction in the amount of transfers from the state budget (from 2.127 billion Slovak crowns (SK) in 1992 to SK 0.633 billion in 1994). City-level administration is responsible for the financially troublesome public services—mass transportation, unfinished housing projects, etc. At the beginning of 1994, the city's debt reached SK 310.8 million (13.7 percent of the city's total estimated income in 1994).

The expenditures of the citywide budget are generally allocated to the noninvestment sectors of administration and to functions of self-government (36.44 percent of planned expenditures in 1994). Mass transportation, as the main financial problem of the city, required 35.8 percent of the city's total budget in 1994. A special part of the problem with mass transportation is funding its investment requirements and increasing costs of operation. State subsidies have systematically declined from SK 786 million in 1992 to SK 414 million in 1994.

Other important expenditures were in the areas of housing (12.89 percent), development projects (2.5 percent), and cultural reconstruction projects (1.95 percent). Institutions partially funded by the city's budget have also seen their support reduced. Noninvestment expenditures have been stabilized, which confirms the existence of a certain effectiveness in this sphere. The poor situation of the city's finances is observable largely by the extreme decrease in total investment expenditures. The

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city, traditionally a strong investor in its territory, is from this point of view paralyzed. Also under discussion are the yields from and problems associated with the exploitation of real estate worth an estimated SK 90.4 billion.

Individual districts have their own important financial problems. We will concentrate only on the presentation of their different financial conditions. The level of income per capita is an appropriate example, although all budgets suffer significant disturbances from year to year. The highest level of income (more than SK 3,000 per capita) can be found in the peripheral, smaller districts of Èuðovo, Rusovce, Jarovce, Záhorská Bystrica, and Devín. However, the total volume of their individual budgets does not permit the funding of significant activities. Petralka and Dúbravka had the lowest income of all districts (below SK 1,000 per capita), while the districts of Staré Mesto, Ruinov, and Devínska Nová Ves had average incomes between SK 2,000 and 3,000 per capita.

A brief outline of the basic financial difficulties shows why these were key issues in the dispute between the two sides. According to the Primátor's proposal, districts would have sufficient budgets (based on decisions of the city council). According to the Starostas' proposal, the citywide government would transfer to the districts a sufficient amount of revenue for them to function. (The amount of the transfer would be determined, for example, on the basis of a district's population.) Districts fear that a central city budget will overlook smaller issues that are important for local communities. The opposite approach—transferring money from districts to the citywide budget—also has inherent problems: it would create a dependency of the city on the districts.

## The Integration and Disintegration of the City

The level of support for the Primátor's proposal was very vulnerable because the proposal was not submitted to the city council and, therefore, was not approved. Important support for this proposal came from the city's magistracy. In opposition to this proposal, the Club of

Mayors introduced itself as a vital institution uniting the mayors of the districts. They succeeded in achieving support from the districts' local councils. This cooperation crossed party lines and is rooted in the closeness of districts' interests. The decisive importance of the Starostas' proposal was noted as being its protection of the interests of the districts, not in the disintegration or abolition of city-level self-government. Above all, the districts sought to protect their autonomy and the position of their representatives. In fact, one district (Devínska Nová Ves) even began investigating the possibilities of withdrawing from the territorial unit of Bratislava.

This brief presentation of the districts' financial situation demonstrates their limited potential for improvement if they left the city. Districts could probably be fully functional but would have severe difficulties developing projects and funding much-needed investments (e.g., mass transportation and technical and social infrastructure). Within the process of decentralizing functions to the local communities, these difficulties could lead to further problems for the districts. For the smallest districts, the options are even more tenuous. Furthermore, it is important to mention the processes that created "Greater Bratislava" in the first place. A distinguishing feature of the city's enlargement was the direct administrative integration of neighboring local communities, which became the present-day districts. This process proceeded faster than the indisputable growth of the compact city center. Most of these communities had their own Local or Area National Committees during the former regime and were provided with some degree of autonomy within the limits of that era.

Crucial fears revolved around the expectation that the problems of the districts would become marginal in comparison to those of Bratislava. The expected decline in the districts' autonomy raised questions about the role of the institutions of self-government as a source of autonomy, local identity, and protection for the interests and participation of citizens in local affairs. For most of the citizens, however, the strengthening of local self-government became a symbol of change after 1989 and has produced prevalently positive experiences in the management of local matters. The pressure to concentrate decision

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making at the city level provoked a consolidation of the citizens' interests, outweighing the differences that may have previously divided the community. This process provided significant support for a revitalization of the districts' self-identity, especially that of their representatives.

Peripheral districts are settlement units remote from the city center (the distance of Záhorská Bystrica and Ľuðovo, for example, is more than fifteen kilometers from the center of the city). Most districts are not a part of the compact city area and have a rural, nonmetropolitan character (e.g., Devín and Vajnory). A. Bours (1994) writes about "Kohr's Dictum," which states that the interests, responsiveness, and involvement of the center in its hinterland decreases according to the distance separating it from specific subareas. Thus, disintegration on the periphery of great cities is nothing exceptional.

A critical factor in determining the ability of a district to meet the needs of its inhabitants is the size of its population. According to the census of 1991, the smallest district, Devín, had only 771 inhabitants, while Petralka had 128,251 inhabitants. This difference (Bours 1994) and the fears of districts about their position in a future common management mechanism exert a strong influence on the attitudes of districts. The ratio of Devín to Petralka is 1:166. Moreover, there are seven districts with less than 10,000 inhabitants and two large districts—Ruinov (73,131 inhabitants) and Petralka (128,521 inhabitants). The level of attention devoted to districts and a sensitivity to their problems would be quite different if the decision-making process was centralized. The proposed "City" would have 312,871 inhabitants or 70.6 percent of the total population of Bratislava (according to 1991 figures).

J. Pasiak (1993) studied civic participation in Bratislava. During his research, he found only a moderate divergence between a willingness to participate in city-level matters (47.6 percent) and a willingness to participate at the district level (49 percent). He noted that people with ancestral roots in Bratislava (an important percentage of these people

live in the peripheral districts) identified more with the city and saw a greater importance for a citizen's participation at both levels of city government.

Another problem is the political interpretations of both proposals. The present system seems suitable for most political parties. Political parties have a significant opportunity to achieve the highest elected positions in at least some districts. A concentration of local policy making at the citywide level would probably diminish the influence of certain political parties in Bratislava. The political preferences of districts are diverse, so relations between the *mesanosta* and the mayors of the districts might be in question if they belonged to different political parties. The present system allows for the emergence of a local political elite and local institutions with natural ties to the community. Both of these groups have a natural interest in defending their role and power in the community and are naturally opposed to diverting power out of their sphere of influence. With concentrated decision making, however, the city could probably implement a large-scale entrepreneurial policy. Effective and prompt decision making that is equipped for ambitious projects would then be possible.

When attempting to understand the principles governing the management of Bratislava's territory, it is necessary to consider some basic factors influencing the future of the city:

1. many interested parties are active in Bratislava (local elite, representatives of the city and districts, local entrepreneurs, etc.);
2. territorial administration has operated under various forms in Bratislava—since 1989, the districts have been encouraged to act autonomously;
3. some districts are located far from the developed center;
4. the districts vary in size;
5. each district has a unique population, with varying relationships to the city and to other districts;
6. each of the districts has different political preferences;

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7. differences exist in the development of infrastructure, in the amount of property owned by each district, and in the hierarchy of local problem-solving techniques.

Thus, there are many influential factors shaping relations in Bratislava. It is not surprising that there were, for example, forces in Devínska Nová Ves advocating succession. This district is the farthest from the city center, the smallest, and for a long time it was the most autonomous. It has a lower share of residents with ancestral ties to Bratislava (there was a rapid population growth in the 1980s), a greater instability of political preferences (there are often large shifts in electoral preferences), a limited financial potential, as well as a myriad of problems specific to the district. In fact, only discussions about alternatives for the future position of the district helped people understand their position relative to other parts of the city.

There are obvious reasons to support the integrity of the entire city. Besides the existence of their own autonomous histories, districts have for a long time been integrated into citywide processes, especially in the large local labor market. A high degree of daily commuting within the area of the city is common in Bratislava because of the low mobility of the people and the rigid housing market. Other important aspects weighing against disintegration include the difficulty of separating systems of technical infrastructure, the appearance of many problems and special costs connected with separation, and the identification of a new way of arranging the necessary coordination. The following factors support the integrated character of self-government in Bratislava:

1. a dependence on the system of mass transport;
2. a respect for the specific features of districts;
3. the fact that districts provide compact, built-up urban spaces;
4. the unclear financial advantages of disintegration and low financial potential in case of separation;
5. a strong identification with Bratislava, especially in the case of those people with ancestral ties to the city;

6. an unclear economic future and the resulting problems with possible changes in the field of technical infrastructure;
7. the need to be involved in important activities of the whole city and in determining its goals within the sphere of planning strategies for development.

All the documents concerning Bratislava (the current municipal act, the charter, and both proposals) offer detailed information about the city, its territory, and its identity. These documents have a certain level of legitimacy. They are based on the opinions of representative citizens of Bratislava, and some have been approved by the relevant institutions of self-government.

Both proposals locate the city's central administration with the district of Staré Mesto. The Primátor's proposal would create the "City" from five inner districts. This step partly relates to the changes in Bratislava's charter. These districts, it is presumed, share a common metropolitan identity and way of life and have similar problems. We must also consider, however, the outer districts and the rural districts. Bratislava, which at first sight might be understood as an administratively homogenous territory is in reality a complicated urban system. It is not a simple amalgam of districts. Bratislava is composed of localities with different histories, characteristics, conditions, and interests. These facts have an impact on the future development of relations between the city and the districts. They can also influence considerations about the best system of self-government for the territory of Bratislava. An effective system of management for Bratislava requires an elaborate structure of basic territories, which would include the management of (1) the center (the "City" or the district of Staré Mesto); (2) each of the other districts (with their possible differentiation); (3) the entire territorial unit of Bratislava; (4) the outer districts of Bratislava; and (5) the greater metropolitan area of Bratislava.

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## **A Theory of Metropolitan Government and the Future of Self-Government in Bratislava**

The arguments used by the supporters of both proposals are well known and point out the basic advantages and disadvantages of various options for managing large cities. Barlow (1994) identified three basic models of metropolitan government: polycentric, unitary, and two-tier.

The polycentric model lacks an elected central authority for the city as a whole. Self-government is decentralized to the numerous local offices. The main shortcoming of this model is an ineffective provision of public services, which is an important issue that contributes to equality among the citizens of a single city. This model also lacks an overall perspective for metropolitan government (e.g., a long-term vision or strategy for infrastructure planning). Sometimes, rivalry, which can be caused by inequality among the districts, can act against the total interests of the city. The unitary model's biggest problems are in connection with the interests of particular localities and their resistance. The main failures of this model are its overcentralization of power, the distance between the wielders of power and the citizens, and its tendency toward huge bureaucracies. The majority of cities adopting this model have had to react to the demands of lower-level administration.

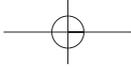
The two-tier model tries to combine the advantages of the above models by reducing fragmentation and, at the same time, preserving the advantages of smaller units. This model also has a number of particular problems that require each city to adopt this model to local realities. Through this model, however, there is a chance that functions involving the whole city can be managed and become more effective.

The Primátor's proposal tends toward the unitary model. The Starostas' is an example of a two-tier model of metropolitan self-government. For the functioning of a two-tier model, it is necessary to have clearly defined functions; this will help to prevent clashes among the two levels of self-government. Examining the existing theoretical knowledge (Bennett 1992; Smith 1993) and the practical issues that concern Bratislava, we conclude that the following citywide functions should be linked to the city's central administration:

1. tasks covering the entire city of Bratislava (e.g., integrated networks of infrastructure);
2. functions with economies of scale;
3. strategic planning and decision making—at a time of increased competition between metropolises—this is an especially important function for the centralized city government;
4. the distribution of financial resources to lower levels, based on the principle of equalization;
5. specific managerial roles within the public sector and in the field of cooperation with the private sector (e.g., the oversight of private contractors for joint projects and projects in the public sector);
6. a share in solving problems caused by economic restructuring on the citywide level;
7. projects that are technically and financially beyond the ability of districts to handle;
8. areas that benefit the majority of citizens living in Bratislava.

There are practically unlimited possibilities for the division of power. The options may change over time and depend on the capabilities of the representatives of self-government. It is not suitable to automatically transfer models from other countries, as the conditions of cities are different, especially in terms of economic environment. In Bratislava, the influence of the transformation still remains, with its specific political and social aims (regulated prices, social aspects of reforms, etc.).

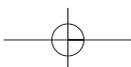
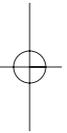
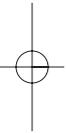
Considering various factors, there is a possible alternative for reforming the existing two-tier model. Both levels must have important competencies that are considered essential and must garner respect for their activities from the citizens. This alternative would offer two levels of self-government with direct elections and relative autonomy. Which level has greater authority does not need to be clearly stated, but it must be clear which level has control over which function. There is a need for a clear distribution of functions between both levels and the central



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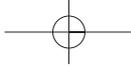
government in order to avoid potential conflicts. Both levels must also be given the proper mechanisms and be encouraged to cooperate with one another.

The districts would be responsible for implementing functions that should not be implemented by the city's central government. Districts have as their main role the preservation of flexible management, the ability to react to specific local needs, and the need to respect the preferences of local inhabitants. Districts offer the chance to maintain direct local representatives and create opportunities for strengthening local democracy and the community. All the issues mentioned in this study document the potential for differentiation in the city's self-government but do not prove the need for disintegration. In fact, there are just as many factors that support a greater integration of decision making as there are that support the relative autonomy of districts.



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