

## DEVELOPING THE CAPITAL CITY FUNCTIONS OF BRATISLAVA

Vladimír SLAVÍK, Robert GRÁC

### Abstract

*Bratislava – along with ten other cities – is one of the European capitals that came into existence most recently after the formation of new States at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the birth of the Slovak Republic in 1993, Bratislava became the capital of an independent State entity for the third time in its history. The objective of this paper is to analyze the process of developing capital functions, not only in the past but primarily after 1993. In previous research, several authors have dealt with the issue but, in most cases, questions regarding the spatial location of institutions were capital-related and the administrative function was neglected. After a brief recapitulation of the function of the capital in the past, we examine the process of developing a network of all central authorities and other public administration institutions, at regional and lower levels.*

### Shrnutí

#### Formování funkce hlavního města Bratislavy

*Bratislava patří spolu s deseti dalšími velkoměsty k evropským hlavním městům, která vznikla teprve nedávno po vytvoření nových států na konci 20. století. Po rozdělení Československa a zrodu Slovenské republiky v roce 1993 se stalo město Bratislava hlavním městem nezávislého státního subjektu po třetí v dějinách. Cílem tohoto příspěvku je analyzovat proces vývoje funkce hlavního města nejen v minulosti, ale zejména po roce 1993. Doposud se uvedeným tématem zabývalo několik autorů, avšak ve většině případů byl aspekt týkající se prostorové lokalizace institucí dáván do souvislosti s kapitálem a správní funkce byla opomíjena. Po stručné rekapitulaci funkce hlavního města v minulosti, zkoumáme proces rozvoje sítě ústředních orgánů a dalších veřejně-správních institucí na regionálních a nižších úrovních.*

**Key words:** Bratislava, capital, administrative function, central authorities, public administration, Slovakia

### 1. Literature review

We have registered an increased interest in issues concerning Bratislava since 1993. One of cardinal reasons is a re-emerged function of the capital city. Most of previous works dealt with selected present and planned changes in the city (Beňuška et al., 1993; Divinský, 2000; Korec, Galasová, 1994; Korec, Husárová, 1994; Strapec, 1994, etc.). The historical development of the above mentioned function of Bratislava was chiefly addressed by J. Buček (1995). Comparative analyses of Bratislava with chosen capitals (Divinský, 2001a, 2001b) or evaluation of its position within the pan-European system of capitals (Slavík, 2003) are rarity up to now. Several authors attempted to demonstrate the current position of Bratislava in the system of largest Slovak cities (Divinský, 2001c; Korec, 2005; Korec, Rochovská, 2003; Slavík, Kožuch, Bačík, 2005) or to compare Bratislava with the neighbouring capital of Vienna (Matznetter, 2004; Mládek, Buček, Korec, 1996; Mládek, Šimko, 1998; Wolf, 2005). The new position of Bratislava after the birth of Slovakia and its gradual incorporation

into the system of European capitals was a reason to assign by the author of this contribution more theses works to students (Bačík, 2001; Katonová, 2005; Lilko, 1994; Oleárik, 2000). The spatial analysis of public administration institutions – their development, location, relocation, distribution and the like in the territory of the city – has hitherto been least covered out of all topics related to the administrative function of Bratislava. Therefore, most recently, it has been discussed in a thesis work elaborated by R. Grác (2007). In this context, some non-Slovak titles dedicated to comparative analyses of European capitals may definitely be interesting for the reader. One may more often meet with comparative analyses of a chosen group of capitals (Grimm, 1994; Häusermann, 1997; Newman, Thornley, 1994 and so on). Examples of analyses of all European capitals are rare (Vandermotten, Vermoesen, De Lannoy, De Corte, [eds.], 1999). Effort to present a hierarchization of examined capitals is a positive phenomenon. Several works try to analyze new developmental trends in the concerned cities (Häusermann, 1997; Musil, 1992; Wusten, 1994, etc.). The development of administrative function, creation of the

capital and resulting changes in the spatial structure are fundamental subjects of a model publication about the Czech capital Prague, also with examples of other European cities (Barlow, Dostál, Hampl, 1994).

## 2. Geographic position of Bratislava

Favourable geographic position is one of essential prerequisites for the successful function of the capital. The geographic position of Bratislava was important and strategic in the past, as well as is at present. These attributes are most often considered to be the main assets within the geographic position of Bratislava: its gateway position, the position on the Danube River, the position at the boundary lines of three States, and the position close to neighbouring capitals. Contrast to these, the eccentric position within Slovakia is taken for a negative feature; however, it is today unambiguously overshadowed by the above mentioned pros.

C. Votrubec (1980) defined four kinds of urban position from the socio-economic viewpoint. Most of European capitals are characterized by dominant defensive or transport positions, which are often complementary. Bratislava belongs exactly to this group of cities. Particularly ports are cities with an extraordinary favourable transport position. As many as 14 European capitals are seaports (London, Amsterdam, Lisbon, etc.). Bratislava belongs to river ports, which benefit also from the fact that they lie at the confluence of two rivers (similarly to Kiev, Beograd). Really unique is the position of Bratislava in the vicinity of two other capitals (Vienna – just 67 km, and Budapest). This is a very good precondition for multilateral cooperation (besides fulfilling the function of the capital).

## 3. Historical aspects of making Bratislava a capital

The objective of this text part is not to provide an exhausting view of Bratislava's historical development, but rather to point out in a brief form crucial periods and events that influenced most decisions leading to the establishment of Bratislava as a capital city. According to several authors dealing with the history of the city (Buček, 1995; Horváth, 1990; Šášky, 1992, Špiesz, 2001), it is possible to identify three periods when Bratislava fulfilled the role of the capital:

- a. the capital of the Hungarian Kingdom during the Turkish wars;
- b. the capital of the Slovak State during WWII;
- c. the capital of the Slovak Republic after the split of Czecho-Slovakia.

For the first time, Bratislava became the capital of the Hungarian Kingdom in 1536. In that year, the then capital city – Buda – was conquered by Turks and its

function was transferred to Bratislava. The Hungarian Parliament declared Prešporok (the then name of Bratislava) the provisional capital of the Hungarian Kingdom, the seat of the Parliament, central authorities, and the Primate. The Royal Council of Governor-General and the Hungarian Court Chamber were the most significant central authorities at those times. In 1563, Prešporok became also a coronation town of Hungarian kings and thus joined the list of European coronation cities (Aachen, Speyer, Vienna, Cologne, Cracow, and others). In the course of almost 3 centuries (1563-1830), altogether 19 coronations were held in Prešporok. This function was before fulfilled by Székesfehérvár (Fundárek, 1971; Holčík, 1986; Horváth, 1982).

The Royal Council of Governor-General was established in 1526; it operated in Bratislava from 1530. Its role was to decide on the internal affairs of the Kingdom, to supervise the defense of the country, the activities of the Chamber and the whole system of jurisdiction. The Council's seat was in the very city center (today the building is used by the Slovak Republic Government Office).

The Hungarian Court Chamber (Fig. 1) fulfilled the tasks in the area of State economy management, kept files on royal and provincial properties, and supervised tax collection. It may be stated that the Chamber was an analogy to the Ministry of Finance and the National Property Fund. Currently, the University Library has its seat in the original Chamber's building.

Moreover, Bratislava hosted sessions of the Hungarian Parliament as a legislative assembly of privileged classes in the Hungarian Kingdom. Therefore, numerous Hungarian nobilities used to come to the city in parallel with the given central Hungarian authorities. Because of frequent sessions and the resulting need to sojourn in Bratislava, these nobilities bought up estates and built own residencies in the town (Šášky, 1992). More of them were quite large and luxury palaces that are today of historical significance and some serve as seats of important institutions. Typical examples are: the Kutscherfeld Palace – now the seat of the French Institute and French Embassy; the Pálffy Palace – the seat of the Austrian Embassy, the Grassalkovich Palace – during 1939-1945 the seat of the then president Jozef Tiso, later renamed to the House of Pioneers and Youth, and since September 1996 once again the seat of the President of the Slovak Republic; then Lafranconi Palace – at present the seat of the Ministry of the Environment, and many others. Thus, as demonstrated, in the historical context, right this period may be characterized as crucial from the viewpoint of making Bratislava a capital and, simultaneously, an administrative center.



*Fig. 1: The Hungarian Court Chamber (Photo R. Grác).*

Bratislava was the capital until 1783 when the central Hungarian authorities were transferred back to Buda; however, the Hungarian Parliament worked in the city until 1848. "Decision on Bratislava as the capital was substantiated by not only external factors (Turkish raids), but also by internal geopolitics of the State. The position of Bratislava between the two wings of Hungaria was apparent, thereby the city played an important integrating role for the whole Hungarian Kingdom" (Buček, 1995). Bratislava took advantage of its position – proximity of Vienna, the strategic position protecting it against the invasion of enemies from the west, control over the Danube River, safe distance from peripheral pressures.

For the second time, Bratislava became the capital during World War II. According to J. Buček (1995), sovereignty was achieved under the influence of external pressures (the Munich Dictate, the Vienna Arbitrage) and related territorial transformations. But this time, Bratislava was perceived as a full-valued capital city of the new State. The relevance of this fact is evident from the viewpoint of potential territorial changes in Slovakia in the case of non-accepting the function of the capital; if Bratislava had not been recognized as the capital city, Slovakia would have likely lost the city's territory and even the access to the Danube R.

For the third time, Bratislava became the capital city in 1993, after the split of Czecho-Slovak Federation and the establishment of a new country in Central Europe – Slovak Republic. J. Buček (1995) assessed the qualitative aspect of Slovak statehood formation. According to him, it was diametrically opposite compared to the preceding periods with regard to international détente, non-interference of other countries, respecting interior affairs and decisions, the peace situation and the continuity of capital city function in the past periods. The location of the capital was not challenged at this stage at all.

#### **4. Making Bratislava a capital and an administrative center since 1993**

Following the division of Czecho-Slovakia, Bratislava as a capital of the Slovak Republic and a regional centre of European significance concentrates important administrative functions. This fact is reflected in the current extent and sensible growth of administration which is represented by a wide range of international, national, regional, local and urban facilities.

Within public and State administration, facilities of central authorities of State administration have a special position; this results from the position of Bratislava as



a capital of the Slovak Republic. Bratislava is naturally a representative centre of the State, diplomatic missions, government authorities, municipal and district authorities. It is also a prominent administrative and executive centre with the seat of the President of the Slovak Republic, the National Council of the Slovak Republic, and the Government of the Slovak Republic with individual Ministries. Bratislava is at present also a financial centre of Slovakia with agencies of financial institutions from abroad. The city is the seat of representation, management, administration and operation of important economic subjects, design agencies, social organizations of local and national significance. It is thus an economico-political and socio-cultural centre.

With respect to the contemporary lack of representative rooms and representative and fully equipped administrative buildings to rent, many administrative functions are located notably in the historical zone of Bratislava with

potential negative impacts on the surroundings and social structure. Both diplomatic representative offices and central organs of State administration have high demands on the high quality of rooms, therefore only some of them meet high criteria for dignified representation.

#### 4.1 Creating a network of central authorities, State administration bodies with national competencies, and local authorities in the city's territory

Prior to performing a spatial analysis of the mentioned administrative institutions, it is necessary to explain the current territorial-administrative division of Bratislava. Since 1996, the capital has been divided into 5 administrative districts (Bratislava I to V) and 17 town districts (Fig. 2). As to the location of public administration related to the capital, the most important city part is the Old Town that is simultaneously territorially identical with the administrative district Bratislava I.

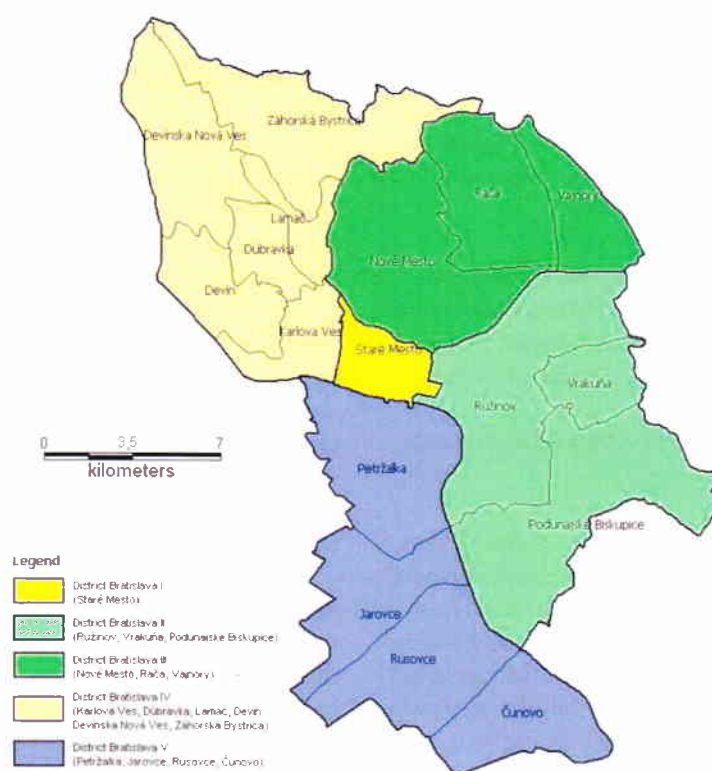


Fig. 2: Territorial-administrative organization of the Bratislava city (2008)

The first prerequisite for fulfilling the function of the capital in the Slovak Republic was an optimum seat for its President. The selection of an adequate locality took some time. Particularly two localities – that played such an important role already in the past – were carefully considered. One of the proposals was to place the seat of the President in the Bratislava Castle which was during the period, when Bratislava became the capital of the Hungarian Kingdom, the seat of Kings (Fig. 3 – see cover p. 4). Finally, this idea was abandoned because

the Castle premises do not comply with requirements of high-quality representation. (Today, the Castle serves as a museum and its large and a long-term reconstruction is planned.)

The second variant suggested to place the seat of the President in the Grassalkovich Palace that already fulfilled such a function. This palace partly assumed the role of the Castle Palace at the end of the period when Bratislava was the capital for the first time (Holčík,

1986). During 1939-1945, the building served as a seat of the then President of the Slovak State Jozef Tiso. Later, the Palace of Grassalkovich was used by pioneers and renamed to the House of Pioneers and Youth. Since September 1996 – after a reconstruction – it became once again the seat of the President of the Slovak Republic (Fig. 4 – see cover p. 4).

The Parliament was another significant institution to be considered. Since 1945, the seat of the then Slovak National Council was several times changed. At first, the Council was located in the Trebišov town, later in the city of Košice where the Council structures were completed – the Presidium, the Plenum, and the Board of Commissioners – and, finally, in Bratislava. Towards the end of the Czecho-Slovak Federation, the seat of the Slovak National Council was situated at the former Zhupa House in the contemporary Zhupa Square (not far from the present Presidential Palace) (Fig. 5 – see cover p. 3). After the erection of a new building close to the Bratislava Castle (Fig. 6 – see cover p. 3), the Parliament moved to new premises, but it retained also the old ones. With regard to the fact that the new building was originally intended and partially built for other purposes (the Central-European University), it does not have all qualities of a modern parliament. Later, new office spaces for the Members of Parliament were rebuilt on the premises of the Bratislava Castle.

The Government of the Slovak Republic was situated in the former Summer Archbishop's Palace, which housed the Government already in the communist period and which is located not far from the Presidential Palace.

#### **4.2 Development of ministries in the Slovak Republic during 1990-2008**

It is natural that Ministries and other central bodies of State administration had the greatest spatial demands – because of their number. In this case, the most rational variant was chosen, at least in the first years – single ministries were located in those buildings where ministries worked also in the period of the Czecho-Slovak Federation. At searching new localities, priority was given to those ministries, which were missing in the system in Bratislava under communism. These were, for example, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications of the Slovak Republic. At the end of the Czecho-Slovak Federation, there were 18 ministries in Bratislava. After the birth of an independent Slovakia, some of them were abolished, some merged, some were renamed, and some new ones were established. A total number of Slovak ministries finally stabilized in 1995 was fifteen. The last change occurred in 2003; the Ministry of State Property Administration and Privatization was abolished and the total number of ministries was reduced to 14.

Regarding the placement of ministries within the hitherto development, we cannot speak of a tendency to concentrate them in selected localities, since their network was assumed from the past. Most of the ministries are situated in areas closely surrounding the historical core of Bratislava, in which large administrative buildings emerged in communist times. In view of the city's administrative division, it is still within the boundaries of the Staré Mesto (Bratislava I) where one may find 9 of currently existing 14 ministries. Three ministries lie in the Bratislava III district and two are located in the Bratislava II district with the latter having a specific position. The Ministry of Economy is currently the largest Slovak ministry as to the number of employees and, above all, the number of competencies. The Ministry of Construction and Regional Development changed its seat as the very last one, moving to new administrative premises. However, the experience from this relocation is rather negative, as the Ministry just rented the premises. A special feature of large ministries is that they are usually located in two or more buildings (Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Interior).

#### **4.3 The phenomenon of "government quarters"**

In the recent period, a new phenomenon of "government quarters" or "government towns" begins to appear worldwide. This phenomenon did not avoid Slovakia either. The latest news emerged about an attempt of some current Slovak ministers to enforce in the Government a project of "central government city" to be implemented before 2010. One of alternatives is to move at least four ministries into one complex. As a matter of fact, the objective of the idea is to integrate these ministries at one place with a new, global, comprehensive infrastructure. And another minor alternative is taken into account and investigated – to unite the headquarters of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Defense. Implementation of such a project should curtail the costs related to operation. The idea of the project meets with a positive response so far, but opinions have been expressed that the "government town" should be established outside Bratislava – e.g. in Žilina, or in Banská Bystrica. It is argued that Bratislava has an eccentric position and that a need exists to locate these institutions in regions located closer to the centre. The described idea of moving the capital city appeared for the first time in the media some 10 years ago.

The idea of creating the "government towns" is currently a relatively often discussed topic and it was debated also in the past. The phenomenon of "government towns" has been recently discussed in Budapest where the Hungarian Government plans to create a "government quarter" right in the city center. It is planned to transfer all ministries to this place and other central State institutions until

1990-1999	2000-2008	The Seat by district in 2008
The Ministry of Economy of the SR	The Ministry of Economy of the SR	Bratislava III
The Ministry of Finance of the SR	The Ministry of Finance of the SR	Bratislava I
-	The Ministry of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications of the SR	Bratislava I
The Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the SR	The Ministry of Agriculture of the SR	Bratislava I
The Ministry of Construction and Building of the SR	The Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the SR	Bratislava III
The Ministry of Interior of the SR	Ministry of Interior of the SR	Bratislava I
-	Ministry of Defence of the SR	Bratislava II
-	The Ministry of Justice of the SR	Bratislava I
The Ministry of International relations SR	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the SR	Bratislava I
The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the SR	The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR	Bratislava I
The Slovak committee for Environment	The Ministry of Environment of the SR	Bratislava I
The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the SR	The Ministry of Education of the SR	Bratislava II
The Ministry of Culture of the SR	The Ministry of Culture of the SR	Bratislava I
The Ministry of Health Service of the SR	The Ministry of Health Service of the SR	Bratislava II
Ministry for State Property Administration and Privatization	Ministry for State Property Administration and Privatization	-
The Ministry of Business and tourism of the SR	-	-
The Ministry of Forest and Wood Economy of the SR	-	-
The Ministry of Verification of the SR	-	-
The Ministry of Industry of the SR	-	-
Ministry for economy strategy SR	-	-

Tab. 1: Development of ministries in the Slovak Republic during 1990-2008

Notes:

During 1990-1992, Slovak ministries operated within the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic

Ministry of Economy – newly established ministries in 1990

Ministry for State Property Administration and Privatization – abolished as of May 1, 2003

2009. Only the seat of the Prime Minister should be an exception remaining in the existing place.

Similarly as the “government quarters” or the “government towns”, artificially created capital cities emerged for instance in Canberra, Australia as a compromise between Melbourne and Sydney since they both argued about the political power. The construction of Canberra began in 1913, and in 1927, all ministries and the Government were moved in. Another example of an artificially created city is Brasíl. It officially came to existence in 1960, although the idea was born much earlier. Artificial capitals were established under totalitarian regimes too – for example Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, which arose in the Stalin era.

Another model we can see in the United Kingdom or in Germany. The London and Berlin models represent a natural concentration of ministries and other State institutions. Characteristic of these model is that Prime Minister and several ministries have their seats relatively close to each other. The analogical model we can see in Austria where the seats of President, Chancellor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Parliament are situated next to each other. However, in most cases, ministries are located within wider city centers as for example in Prague or Paris.

#### 4.4 Network of other central authorities of State administration

A whole range of other institutions belongs in the network of other central authorities of State administration in Bratislava. In contrast to ministries, the number of these institutions in the city markedly increased after the birth of the Slovak Republic. While at the end of the period of Czecho-Slovakia merely 6 institutions were on the list of other central authorities of State administration, in 2007 their number approached 20. Besides them, a network of other institutions of State administration (of which some with national competencies) was gradually created. Likewise gradually, a network consisting of authorities of judicial power and public prosecution offices was established. In this group of institutions, efforts to situate some of them outside Bratislava and thereby to strengthen the importance of the administrative function in a selected town were enforced. In this way, the Postal Regulatory Office was thus located in Žilina, the Industrial Property Office and the Tax Investigation Office were situated in Banská Bystrica. The identical tendency was also evident in the network of institutions of judicial power and public prosecution offices. Some institutions were moved – or as newly established ones were situated – out of Bratislava. The Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic was thus transferred to Košice; new institutions – the Special Court and the



Special Prosecutor's Office – were established in the Pezinok town in an area of former barracks after their reconstruction.

Another group is formed by institutions of State administration with national competencies. In this case, their concentration in the Old Town is not so noticeable. Eight institutions of this kind (Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family, State Treasury, Telecommunications Office and others) have their seats in Bratislava I district, in Bratislava II district even more – 9 such institutions (Customs Directorate, Public Health Authority, Presidium of the Fire Fighting and Rescuing Corps, etc.). The most important institutions of public administration not only in this group, but in general, are least represented in the districts of Bratislava IV and Bratislava V. In Bratislava IV, there are three institutions of this group. In Bratislava V (Petržalka, etc.) one may find in a modern building the Tax Directorate of the Slovak Republic just recently moved back to Bratislava from Banská Bystrica. Besides it, four other institutions have gradually been situated out of Bratislava, namely in Košice, Banská Štiavnica, Nitra and Trenčín.

Concluding this part we may claim that – besides public administration institutions related to the function of the capital – a whole series of institutions ensuring the smooth operation of local State administration and self-government is concentrated in Bratislava. Local State administration is created by a network of regional and district offices (both general and specialized). Self-government has a particular position in Bratislava. It is organized at three levels. The first, regional, covers

the city and 3 neighbouring districts (the seat of the self-government region); the second represents the city itself (the City Municipality), and finally the last level is formed by 17 city parts (with 17 Local Offices).

All the mentioned institutions are spread over the territory of Bratislava. Requirements for their location in the city centre have been expressed especially by the regional administration and regional self-government (it struggled for several years for the Zhupa House, but unsuccessfully) and of course by the chief representation of the city administration – Bratislava City Municipality. This institution occupies several historical buildings in the city centre, among others – notably for representation purposes – the Primate's Palace, which is thought of as the most representative palace in the city (Holčík, 1986). This palace, known also as the Winter Archbishop's Palace, entered the history of Bratislava after the fire of the Bratislava castle (1811) as the temporary residence of Hungarian kings during their coronations and the place where the Treaty of Pressburg was signed in 1805.

As regards the spatial organization of local State administration, it is necessary to say that locating two or more offices in one building has been practiced very often. This is the case of several institutions of State administration with national competencies, common institutions at the regional or the local level (e.g., environmental offices, cadastral offices, land offices, courts, public prosecution offices, etc.) or some institutions of specialized State administration with the competency for several districts of Bratislava (tax offices, cadastral branches).

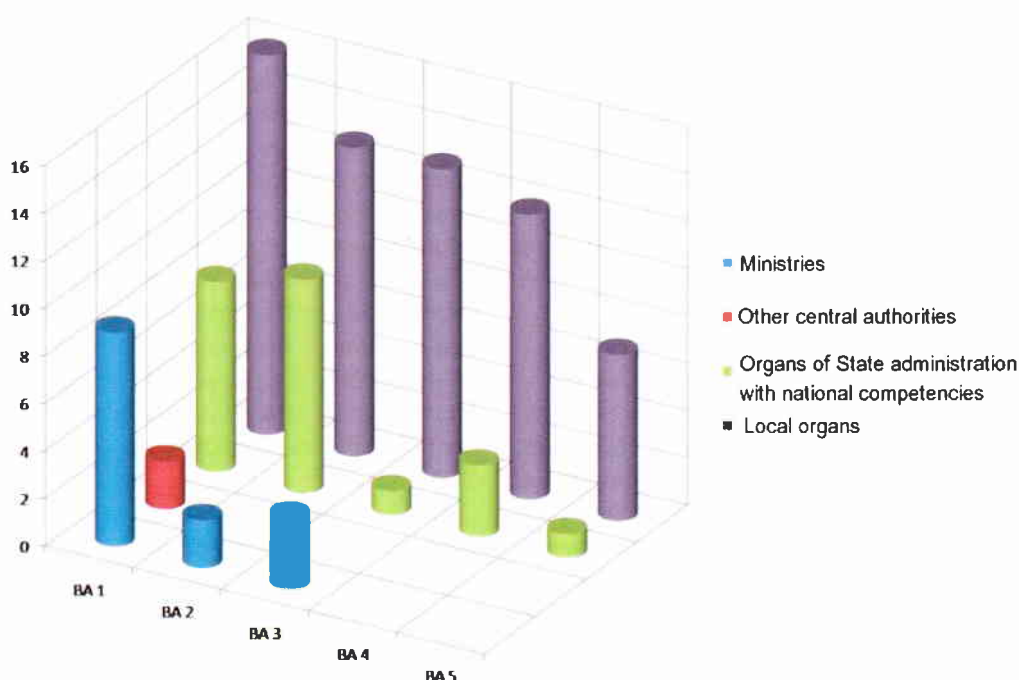


Fig. 7: Network of central authorities, organs of State administration with national competencies, and local organs in the city's territory (2008)

## 5. Conclusion

The function of the capital returned to Bratislava in 1993. To a great degree, the potential inherited from the rich history of this city function has been used in gradual creation of the network of relevant institutions and in fulfilment of the tasks related to the capital of Bratislava during the recent period. Basically we may claim that most of the national institutions were located in the existing stock of significant historical buildings in the city center (in the case of need, inevitable reconstruction was

performed). Central authorities were only exceptionally situated in newly constructed buildings. The capacity of new administrative spaces will quickly grow after the completion of unfinished (or just planned) important investment projects that should radically transform several city parts in zones surrounding the city core in a short time. In the next period, we may expect that the problem will increase of how to make the created network of central administrative institutions more rational and effective, together with looking for reserves for the location of new institutions.

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#### Authors' addresses:

Doc. RNDr. Vladimír SLAVÍK, CSc. e-mail: slavik@fns.uniba.sk  
Mgr. Robert GRÁC, e-mail: grac@fns.uniba.sk  
Comenius University in Bratislava,  
Faculty of Natural Sciences, Dept. of Human Geography and Demogeography  
Mlynská dolina, 842 15 Bratislava, Slovak Republic

#### Reviewers:

Assoc. Prof. RNDr. Vladimír IRA, CSc.  
Prof. RNDr. Arnošt WAHLA, CSc.



*Fig.5: The former Slovak National Council seat*  
*Photo R. Grác*



*Fig. 6: National Council of the Slovak Republic today*  
*Photo R. Grác*

Illustrations related to the paper by V. Slavík and R. Grác





*Fig. 3: The Bratislava Castle*  
*Photo R. Grác*



*Fig. 4: Grassalkovich Palace*  
*Photo R. Grác*

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