

centage of GDP (or Net Material Product for the communist period). This is problematic as the share of social expenditures in GDP may be driven by many other factors than *policy* changes, among which changes in economic growth in first place: strong economic growth (decline) may hide real increases (decreases) in social expenditures. Although Inglot discusses important qualitative information that indicates periods of (partial) expansion and retrenchment, this is not guided by a proper evaluative framework in which benefit levels, eligibility criteria, number of beneficiaries, development/suspension of alternative/additional (privatised) programmes, etc., are integrated [cf. Seeleib-Kaiser 2008]. This may result in a flawed interpretation of expansion and retrenchment, especially since for the communist period no *yearly* figures of real economic growth are presented and in most cases figures of real growth in social spending are lacking altogether. A last critique does not pertain to Inglot's main argument: inaccuracies in tables and text, the lack of a clear grid for the organisation of text in some parts of the book, an unclear interpretation of the real evolution of benefits, and the lack of reference to the literature in the case of a discussion of the evolution of poverty [e.g. Atkinson and Micklewright 1992; Szulc 2006] gave the book a sometimes rather sloppy impression. Nonetheless, Inglot's book is a valuable contribution to the literature both at the theoretical and empirical level as one of the most comprehensive, detailed analyses of welfare state development in East Central Europe available today. As such it is recommended to those working on a theoretical framework of welfare state change as well as to everyone interested in the evolution of the welfare state in this fascinating region of Europe.

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**Tomila V. Lankina and Anneke Hudalla,
with Hellman Wollmann: *Local
Governance in Central and Eastern
Europe: Comparing Performance in the
Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and
Russia***

Basingstoke 2008: Palgrave MacMillan,
216 pp.

With a few exceptions, most comparative studies of local governance in Central and Eastern Europe have emphasised the cross-country comparison of national systems of sub-national governance. While such approaches are informative, argue the authors of this volume, they fail to adequately take into account the diversity of local governance that can exist in localities *within* a single country and the complex configuration(s) of factors that may explain such variations. To remedy this, their book presents an ambitious and detailed comparative study of local governance across eight medium-sized provincial cities in four post-communist Europe states: Sopron and Szolnok in Hungary; Karviná and Ústí nad Labem in the Czech Republic; Jelenia Góra

and Biała Podlaska in Poland; and Staraya Russa and Balashov in Russia. These cities are selected on the basis of population size (all have between 50 000 and 100 000 inhabitants), geographical location, and levels of economic development.

The central concern of the book is to explain varying levels of policy performance across the eight cases and to build generalisations from them. To allow in-depth examination of political processes, it focuses on two areas: 1) social services for children, women and families; and 2) strategies to promote local economic development. These are areas where local city administrations across the four states have similar responsibilities and sufficient latitude and autonomy for local configurations of power to make a difference. Drawing on the literature on local politics and urban governance in both new and established democracies, the authors identify three contrasting bundles of factors which might explain varying democratic performance: 1) the structure and concentration of the local economy and other 'structural givens' with economic consequences, such as proximity to the West; 2) the institutional structure of city government and its relationships with broader regional and national political institutions; and 3) elite partisanship and patterns of party competition. The book's seven chapters unfold this research design in a series of logical steps: Chapter 1 introduces the case countries and cities and justifies case selection; Chapters 2 and 3 assess policy performance; Chapter 4 considers the socio-structural context; Chapter 5 assesses the nature and impact of the 'intergovernmental setting' and, more specifically, the institutional, policy and fiscal relationships between local, regional and national authorities in the four states; and Chapter 6 examines the influence of local and national party structures before Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion of findings.

The book's methodology is qualitative

and comparative. Data are primarily derived from interviews with officials, politicians, businesspeople and NGO leaders from the eight localities in 2002–2003, and from documentary analysis. Outcomes and the causal factors are measured qualitatively by triangulating different actors' accounts and using the authors' expertise to categorise as high, medium or low. Rather than using raw quantitative measures of social problems or economic success which may vary for historical and contextual reasons unrelated to local governance, the authors opt for narrower measures: for example social services effectiveness is assessed through a composite measure comprising responsiveness to public pressures, cooperation between municipal authorities and NGOs and the quality and range of services. In this policy area, the Czech cities of Karviná and Ústí nad Labem and the Russian city of Staraya Russa perform best, while Biała Podlaska in Poland and Balashov in Russia are poor performers. The economic promotion policies of city governments are in turn assessed using a straightforward twofold measure: the agreement of a clear local economic development and the extent to which such strategies have in fact been implemented. Here, Karviná and Staraya Russa again perform well, as does Biała Podlaska, while Balashov and (surprisingly) wealthy Szolnok perform worst.

The causal patterns underlying such outcomes are assessed by analysing the more puzzling and problematic outcomes, using a mix of different types of comparison: traditional cross-country comparison of national cases, paired comparison of localities within the same state; and comparison of high and low performing cities across the four states. There are several unexpected or counter-intuitive results that require analysis. Despite Hungary's early adoption of a system of elected local government and its relative prosperity, the performance of the two Hungarian cities is

only middling to poor. Conversely, despite much lower levels of resources, the Russian city of Staraya Russa performs well in both policy areas studied. However the second of the two Russian case studies, Balashov, performs at a low level across almost all indicators. Also puzzling is the sharp disjunction in Jelenia Góra between the city's high effectiveness in local economic promotion and mediocre performance in social policy.

When set against the broad similarities of the post-socialist economic context, the structures and concentration of the cities' local economy can, the authors argue, be largely discounted as a causal factor. Nor, as the high policy effectiveness of Staraya Russa and mediocre performance of much wealthier Sopron sharply highlights, are levels of local and municipal resources an adequate explanation. Even allowing for the varying nature of social needs, there is little correlation between total or per capita social spending and policy effectiveness across the eight cases. Variations in the relationship of national, regional and city authorities, the authors find, do have some important impacts. In particular, the division of tasks between regional and local authorities appears to play a critical role. The good performance of Czech cities in social service provision is argued to stem partly from the flexible assignment of tasks between city governments and the 'district offices' that represented central ministries during the 1990s before regionalisation. In Hungary and Poland, by contrast, the rigid, legally entrenched assignment of tasks between regions and municipalities – and disputes over scarce resources between them – had led to a lack of cooperation, poor coordination and low quality and patchy services. Interestingly, the fluid informal, constantly re-negotiated nature of local-regional relationships in Russia – where regional authorities' structures and practices vary hugely – seems to have an ambiguous effect on performance. In Balashov it results in opaqueness and inertia. However, in Staraya Russa the informal na-

ture of power relations seems to have enabled flexible local-regional relationships to emerge, allowing the empowerment of local NGOs and social policy reformers and the adoption of highly progressive innovations in children's services in both the city and the wider Nizhny Novgorod region.

Fiscal relationships between the different levels of government also have some importance. Fiscal restrictions imposed by national authorities on city governments in Hungary, the authors find, partly account for the puzzling failure of the Hungarian cases to perform at a higher level. However, the reverse does not seem true. The greater fiscal autonomy enjoyed by Polish cities in spending tax revenues raised in their localities does not clearly lead to them to adopt more effective economic development strategies. While Jelenia Góra's strategy was highly effective in this area, the performance of Biała Podlaska rates only as middling. Contrary to the assumption of the early literature on decentralisation in CEE, devolving high levels of policy and fiscal autonomy to city level does not always and of itself benefit policy performance and, in the absence of scope for flexible local-regional coordination and adequate resources, may produce perverse effects.

Perhaps the most significant explanatory factor, the authors find, is the nature of party politics in the different localities. Unlike small communities where political parties are often overshadowed by independents, medium-sized provincial cities are sufficiently complex as to enable – and perhaps require – the emergence of parties as major actors. Cities in all three Central European states studied possess local party systems, which parallel at the national level. The exception is Russia which, both nationally and in the two cities studied, lacks stable, structured parties, whose role is instead performed by loosely knit elite alliances ('parties of power') which commandeer business and state structures as partisan vehicles. For each locality the au-

thors examine five party-related variables: the extent of participation of city assemblies; party-political polarisation; the turnover of incumbent parties; the extent to which non-political outside experts are involved in policy-making; and the presence or absence of post-election purges of city officials. Where, as in Ústí nad Labem and Szolnok, party politics is polarised and there is frequent turnover of governing parties (and, in consequence, regular politically inspired purges of officials), local policy-making suffers. Policy lacks continuity and coherence. In Karviná, by contrast, where local politics has been dominated by parties of the left producing a series of Social Democrat-led local administrations, post-election administrative purges have been largely absent. Such continuity, Lankina, Hudalla and Wollmann find, has led to highly effective policy-making and implementation based on an accumulation of expertise by officials and decision-makers and an extension of local politicians' time horizons. A similar dynamic could be observed in Sopron where the sharp party polarisation and sudden shifts in electoral support characteristic of much Hungarian politics was blunted by a well established local citizens' party, which served as a focus for compromise and co-operation. Such findings run counter to recent national-level studies of parties and the state in CEE, which associate robust inter-party competition with effective governance and extended incumbency with policy stagnation, party corruption and partisan abuse of public administration. In fact, the authors argue, for effective governance a middle way is needed. Moderate competition generating stable incumbency over the medium term is, they claim, likely to be optimal, while overly robust, polarising party competition or the absence of effective competition are (for different reasons) damaging and to be avoided. A further subsidiary finding is that the presence of 'old' elites (ex-nomenklatura officials) in local political structures is of little rele-

vance to contemporary local governance: such groups were pervasive in both Russian cases, which nevertheless diverge sharply in terms of effectiveness of local governance.

Local Governance in Central and Eastern Europe is a succinct, coherent and empirically rich work, whose innovative combination of cross-country and within-country comparison generates genuinely new insights, signposting multiple directions for future research. Its central underlying insight, ably demonstrated by the evidence marshalled, is that comparing national systems of sub-national governance is too broad-brush and too fixated with nationally-set, formal institutional powers to capture the complexity and diversity of local political processes and outputs. The bold inclusion of Russian case studies alongside those from CEE, although not justified as carefully as it might be in terms of comparative method, is especially productive in this respect. Russia's ability to produce a relatively well-governed urban community such as Staraya Russa, despite its divergence from the CEE region in terms of formal institutions and socio-economic development, allows simple socio-economic, resource mobilisation and institutional explanations to be discounted and throws up a host of research questions. Not the least of these is the relationship between democracy and efficiency. Like Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*, whose preoccupation with the interweaving of local-level social and political processes and use of sub-national comparison it self-consciously shares, the present volume takes the efficient formulation and implementation of policy as its main outcome of interest, downplaying conventional notions of democratic representation or broader measures of democratic quality. This might be of little consequence in a purely Western or Central European context, where liberal democracy is the only game in town. However, the inclusion of the Russian cases adds a new dimension to such Putnamian assumptions.

The authors concede that, while effective and progressive as deliverers of policy, both Staraya Russa and the broader Novgorod *oblast* have local political regimes which are so executive-dominated and uncompetitive that they scarcely qualify as minimally democratic. This raises the intriguing, if disturbing, possibility that informal elite networks and local consultative bodies able to foster consensus and trust can compensate for the absence of liberal democratic representation as drivers of effective governance. Indeed, it would seem to imply that the democratic or undemocratic character of city government is largely irrelevant to its effectiveness. Given the limited number of cases examined, further research would clearly be needed to substantiate both this and the other implications of the book. This perhaps highlights its main shortcoming. The multi-layered nature of its comparison and the complexity and richness of data uncovered sometimes overwhelm the book's ability to analyse them coherently. The book's analytical passages range confidently between different sets of cases or levels of comparisons but do so in a somewhat ad hoc fashion. This is more than effective for falsifying or qualifying existing explanations, but largely proves unequal to the task of integrating the key factors highlighted into a bigger analytical picture or sketching the beginnings of a new theoretical model. Instead, the authors appeal to Putnamian notion of local civic traditions as the master variable underpinning varying levels of institutional and policy performance. However, their chosen research design offers no scope for examining such a thesis – which would have required a quite different book. This leaves the reader only with a series of suggestive, but largely speculative, asides in lieu of a clear conclusion.

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Martin Horak: *Governing the Post-Communist City. Institutions and Democratic Development in Prague*
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This book presents an historical institutional analysis of the first decade of democratic local government in Prague following the collapse of communism. It attempts to measure the performance of government in two policy areas – transport planning and the preservation and development of Prague's historic core. To do this it applies two criteria – systematic policy-making and government openness. The principal argument that emerges from an analysis based on extensive, mostly interview-based research is that policy-makers eschewed systematic policy-making in favour of a short-term, incrementalist approach, and that this approach was relatively closed to the influence of civic groups and the public. In side-stepping the challenge of the 'critical juncture' – when 'the absence of a firmly established political order means that political actors have an extraordinary amount of influence over the future development of the polity' (p. 21) – their decisions did not, however, lack long-term consequences, due to a version of institutional lock-in, which Horak ascribes to the *increasing returns* of continuity with a certain policy direction.

Central to the whole account is the thesis that political institutions 'generate incentives [for political actors] that privilege certain forms of behaviour over others'. (p. 76) The book pursues this argument by examining the political influence of two sets of institutions in particular – the municipal administrative bureaucracy and organised civil society. It is argued that institutional incentives provide a particularly strong explanatory framework because of the weakness of political party structures and programmes. The loose, decentralised structure of the dominant parties in Prague