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HOW TO MAKE THE DIRECT CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT MORE EFFICIENT IN THE CONDITIONS OF SMART CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES (BRATISLAVA, 19 NOVEMBER 2021) / Ľudovít Máčaj

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On 19 November 2021, Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Law organized an international scientific conference entitled "How to make the direct citizen participation in local self-government more efficient in the conditions of smart cities and municipalities". It was organized online via the MS Teams application. The conference represented the outcome of the research team concerning the project VEGA No. 1/0757/20 titled "*Means of direct democracy in the conditions of smart cities and municipalities*", awarded by the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

This conference was one of the scientific outputs of the above-mentioned grant and it was a direct follow-up to the conference called "*International and national legal aspects of direct citizen participation in local self-government*", which was organized last year.

The aim of the conference was to identify the most significant shortcomings of the existing legal regulation of the means of direct democracy at the level of municipal self-government. The ambition was to offer proposals for improving the legislation,

especially in terms of the possibility of electronic implementation of the local referendum in the Slovak Republic. The conference presented solutions that will enable a broader digitization of public administration with a special focus on the implementation of direct forms of local democracy in the Slovak Republic.

A total of 26 participants registered for the conference, while 14 separate scientific submissions were presented during the meeting. The conference was attended by representatives of the academic community from Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Law, members of academic community from Slovakia as well as the Czech Republic, but also representatives of legal practice and the third sector.

The conference was held under the auspices of doc. JUDr. Lívia Trellová, PhD. from Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Law. She opened the conference with a speech and also welcomed all guests. In her scientific submission, she also approached the issues of the local referendum and its legislative potential in the conditions of smart cities and municipalities, thus pointing to the central subject of research in the above-mentioned scientific project. At the same time, she presented the practical research carried out and its results concerning the practice of using the means of direct democracy at the level of local self-government.

The scientific part of the conference was divided into three separate sessions, at the end of each, there was a valuable discussion, also with other participants, not only presenters.

During the first session, our guests from the Czech Republic, as well as other important experts proved the universality of the issue of local direct democracy. In the first lecture, JUDr. Ing. Josef Staša, CSc. from Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Law, Czech Republic pointed out the complexity of the concept of the public in relation to local self-government, as well as the definition of its rights. Subsequently, doc. JUDr. Pavel Mates, CSc. presented a paper that he prepared together with his colleague JUDr. Petr Čechák, Ph.D. from University of Finance and Administration, Prague, Czech Republic. He presented to the conference participants the issues of digital services and electronic communication with municipal authorities and practical problems with their implementation. Subsequently, doc. JUDr. Michal Maslen, PhD. presented lecture that he prepared together with his colleague JUDr. Ľubica Masárová, PhD. from Trnava University in Trnava, on the issues of local direct democracy in relation to environmental protection, specifically participatory environmental rights of the public and their implementation in the conditions of local self-government. Next lecture was given by doc. JUDr. Marek Domin, PhD. from Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Law, who outlined the campaign regulation issues as one option of the streamlining of direct democracy at the municipal level. In the last presentation during the first session, JUDr. Matúš Radosa, presented a paper prepared together with prof. JUDr. Marián Vrabko, CSc. from Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Law. They pointed to a number of considerations for simplifying access to electronic communications in the area of local self-government.

The second session of the conference was opened by doc. PhDr. Daniel Klimovský, PhD. from Comenius University, Faculty of Arts, explaining issues of participatory budgeting, its legislative definition, theoretical aspects and application in practice. Mgr. PhDr. Rastislav Král, PhD. from Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Faculty of Public Administration, focused on the "participation clause" as a legislative vision in support of direct participation of the population in the performance of municipal self-government. In the following lecture, Mgr. Ing. Kristína Jančovičová Bognárová, PhD.; doc. Ing. Erika Neubauerová, PhD. and doc. Ing. Alena Zubařová, PhD. from University of Economics in Bratislava analysed selected forms of civic participation also in connection

with local self-government. Representatives of the third sector attracted the participants of the conference with an interesting practical lecture, namely Ing. Paul Pirovits and Ing. Vladimír Ješko from the civic association Priama demokracia (Direct democracy). They pointed to local referendums in Slovakia from 1993 to 2020 in terms of their number, result and other aspects. The session ended with the submission of Mgr. Roman Bisták from Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Law. In a very interesting and current lecture, he approached the use of the institute of a referendum in the dismissal of the mayor of the municipality.

The final session was opened by Mgr. Kristína Slámková from Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Law. In her remarkable contribution, she presented several considerations focused on the cyber security issue in smart cities. Subsequently, Mgr. Ján Ivančík from Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Law presented very actual issues of distant municipal council meetings, public access to information and related current challenges, which are becoming increasingly important in the current situation. In the last lecture, JUDr. Lukáš Tomáš from Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Faculty of Law, presented reflections on the wording of Section 15 of the Act on Self-Governing Regions (or what can be improved in the legal regulation of a regional referendum). Finally, doc. JUDr. Lívia Trellová, PhD. concluded the conference and informed the conference participants with other tasks within the project research and thanked them for participating in the conference.

The conference provided a presentation of several interesting views on the implementation of direct democracy institutes at the local government level. Several papers pointed to the theoretical aspects of this issue, as well as their practical use. The conference represents a valuable result of research within the mentioned project and it is the basis for further research and the contribution of the proposals to the application practice.

