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NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF MUNICIPALITIES IN EUROPE – DIFFERENT MODELS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED POLITICAL COOPERATION

ABSTRACT. The article endeavours to identify and characterise selected national associations of municipalities across Europe, as well as to provide typical models of municipalities being associated into large groups representing their interests in relations with central government. A study that addressed 26 European countries has helped identify four principal organisational models of associations of local structures. These are as follows: (1) the consolidated model (existing in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden), (2) the bipolar model (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Switzerland), (3) the federative model (in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Spain), and (4) the fragmented model (to be found in France, United Kingdom, Poland, Hungary, and Romania).

KEY WORDS: inter-municipal cooperation, associations of municipalities, local government, Europe

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INTRODUCTION

Inter-municipal cooperation is currently one of the increasingly popular questions addressed in scientific research (Hulst and Van Motfort 2007). Studies to date have focused on a wide array of substantive manifestations of this cooperation. The most frequent have been analyses of cooperation in the provision and production of public services, e.g. in municipal waste management, water and sewage economy and public transport (Bel and Fageda 2006; Warner 2006; Sørensen 2007; Wollmann 2010; Bel et

al. 2013; Mäeltsemees et al. 2013; Bel and Warner 2015; Grešová 2016; Kołsut 2015). Such studies concentrate primarily on the economic side of cooperation and seek efficient and profitable institutional solutions for the implementation of the municipalities' statutory objectives (most often as an alternative to privatisation). Studies have also frequently focused on cooperation in the coordination of developmental and spatial planning policies in metropolitan areas as opposed to territorial reforms (Ostrom et al. 1961; Kaczmarek and Mikuła 2007; Lackowska 2009; Rayle and Zegras 2012; Mikuła 2014;

Krukowska and Lackowska 2017). Moreover, studies aim to analyse public management and territorial organisation with a view to seeking optimum legal solutions for urban agglomerations and metropolitan areas.

Far less frequent are analyses of inter-municipal cooperation which present the creation of joint representation of municipalities in their relations with the government (at the central or federal state level). This is a unique cooperation which most commonly takes the form of large interest groups gathering from a few dozen up to a few dozen thousand members. Mechanisms of operation of such organisations are most often addressed by political sciences and sociology, which make use of the findings of the interest group theory, collective action theory and public choice theory (Olson 1965; Nownes 2014). Relevant literature very rarely addresses the question of national associations of municipalities, which is most often discussed as part of an analysis of other issues. Kettunen and Kull (2009), for instance, touch upon the role played by associations of municipalities in three European countries (Estonia, Finland and Germany) in the development of the European Union policy via their offices in Brussels. Moreover, the question of national associations of municipalities often appears in the context of more comprehensive analyses of local-national relations (Blom-Hansen 1999; Cigler 1994; Entwistle and Laffin 2003; CCRE 2007; Stoney and Graham 2008; Chenier 2009; Agranoff 2014; Shott 2015). There is then a clear research gap concerning this question, which this publication aims to bridge to some extent, especially in the European context.

The objective of this publication is to identify and characterise selected national associations of municipalities in Europe as well as to indicate the typical models of municipalities being associated in large groups representing their interests in relations with the central authority. Analysis of relevant literature demonstrates an evident deficit of European research on this topic. The objective adopted in this study is first of all idiographic, i.e. addresses mainly

the seemingly simple individual solutions, their description and assignment to distinct categories. The typology of models of associations of municipalities proposed here is, however, an attempt to come up with unprecedented generalisations in the field. This is the new approach to this phenomenon, and presented typology is the author proposition to scientific discussion about national, political associations of municipalities. The following research questions will facilitate reaching the stated objective:

- How do municipalities create associations in various European countries?
- Is there only one association representing the interests of municipalities in a given country or are there more of them?
- What are the models of municipalities gathering into political organisations?
- What is the level of participation of municipalities in national political associations and what does it depend on?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present analysis has covered 26 European countries, member states of the Council of Europe. The study leaves out a few countries. The reason is three-fold. First, this analysis excludes countries which are very small in terms of size and their local self-government organisation is of incomparable smaller significance (Andorra, Liechtenstein, San Marino, Monaco, Luxembourg, Malta). Secondly, excluded are also those member states of the Council of Europe which are in fact located outside Europe (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia). Thirdly, the analysis does not include counties for which data concerning their political associations of municipalities are unavailable (Albania, Belarus, Cyprus, Ireland). The data factored in the analysis are taken from the official publications of the Council of Europe and the websites of the associations, which have been listed in the Table 1.

Table 1. Municipalities associations websites (the data source)

Country	Websites
Austria	http://www.staedtebund.gv.at , http://gemeindebund.at
Belgium	http://www.uvcb-vbbsg.be/vbbsg/homeNL.htm , http://www.vvsg.be/Pages/home.aspx , http://www.uvcw.be/ , http://www.avcb-vsgb.be/fr/accueil.html
Bosnia and Herzegovina	http://www.sogfbih.ba/ , http://www.alvrs.com/
Bulgaria	http://www.namrb.org/
Croatia	http://udruga-opcina.hr/en , http://www.udruga-gradova.hr/
Czech Republic	http://www.smocr.cz/
Denmark	http://www.kl.dk/
Estonia	http://www.emovl.ee/ , http://www.ell.ee/
Finland	http://www.localfinland.fi/
France	http://www.amf.asso.fr/indexc14.asp , http://www.villesdefrance.fr/ , http://www.grandesvilles.org/ , http://www.amrf.fr/Accueil.aspx , http://www.afccre.org/fr#.VKmcACuG8io , http://www.maisondeselus.fr/fnesr/ , http://www.cites-unies-france.org/index.php
Germany	http://www.dstgb.de/dstgb/Home/Homepage/ , http://www.staedtetag.de/index.html
Greece	http://www.kedke.gr/el/index.php
Hungary	http://www.mjvsz.hu , http://www.mozslap.hu , http://www.toosz.hu , http://www.faluszovetseg.hu/portal/content/view/12/31/ , http://www.kisvarosok.hu/drupal/
Italy	http://www.anci.it/ , http://www.uncem.it/
Latvia	http://www.lps.lv/
Lithuania	http://www.lsa.lt/lt/
Netherlands	http://www.vng.nl/
Norway	http://www.ks.no/
Poland	http://www.zmp.poznan.pl/ , http://www.zgwrp.pl/ , http://www.metropolie.pl , http://ump.home.pl/ump/index.php
Romania	http://www.amr.ro/ , http://www.acor.ro , http://www.aor.ro
Slovakia	http://www.zmos.sk , http://www.unia-miest.sk
Slovenia	http://www.skupnostobcin.si/index.html , http://www.zdruzenjeobcin.si/
Spain	http://www.femp.es/
Sweden	http://www.skl.se
Switzerland	http://www.staedteverband.ch/ , http://www.chgemeinden.ch/de/index.php
United Kingdom	http://www.local.gov.uk/home , https://www.wlga.gov.uk/ , https://www.nilga.org/ , http://www.cosla.gov.uk/

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

National associations of municipalities in Europe

National associations of local self-government entities are in fact created in every country with a self-government of municipalities. They can be defined as organisations gathering municipalities and representing their interests in relations with the central government. The prime characteristics of such associations are, then: (1) participation of municipalities as direct or indirect members (via regional organisations), (2) national scale (in exceptional cases, a scale of an internal region and substantial autonomy), (3) status of a representative of the local community in relations with the government. The operative criterion of including a given association in the analysis was its membership in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

Associations of municipalities take active part in many initiatives and play a variety of roles. These are as follows:

- contribution to the legislation process via providing opinions on draft laws, negotiations and meetings with parliament and government, public relations,
- promotion of modern and innovative, citizen-centred governance methods,
- participation in national and international forums,
- support to municipalities in their execution of power.

Analysis of national associations of municipalities in 26 European states has helped single out four principal models of organisation of joint representation (Fig. 1): (1) the simple consolidated model, under which the country's municipalities

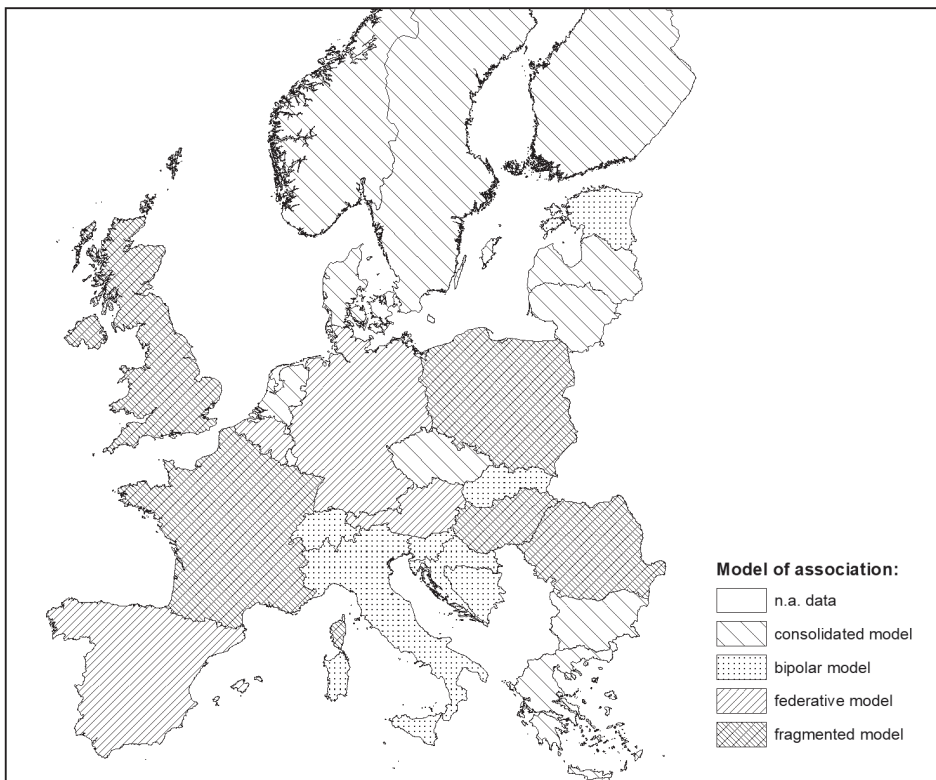


Fig. 1. Organizational models of national municipal associations in European countries

are represented by a single nationwide association, (2) the bipolar urban-rural model, where municipalities are represented by two separate associations upholding the interests of cities, towns and metropolises on the one hand, and of rural municipalities on the other, (3) the federative model, where municipalities are represented by an association (or associations) active on a regional level or at the level of the federal state, and finally (4) the fragmented model, with three or more national associations representing municipalities. Furthermore, the article discusses the individual associations within the above four models.

Consolidated Model

The consolidated model is a type with the simplest institutional structure (Fig. 2). It can be found in countries with a single joint network of municipalities. This type is the most common (covers 11 countries) and is represented by (Table 2) relatively small unitarian states (Croatia,

Czech Republic, Netherlands, Lithuania, Latvia), the Scandinavian countries, which show a high administration culture and a consensual political style (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden), and finally by medium-sized states with relatively big local self-government units (Bulgaria and Greece).

An example of a highly consolidated model is offered by the associations of municipalities in the Scandinavian countries; in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden there are single representations of local structures. In Denmark this role is played by the Local Government Denmark, an organisation that groups all the 98 municipalities and acts as a representative of local administration employees. This is a sizeable entity (employing ca. 400 people), established in 1970 (as a result of merger of three other organisations of local-self-government). At a similar time (1972) and in a similar manner (as a result of merging two associations) was created the Norwegian Association of Local and

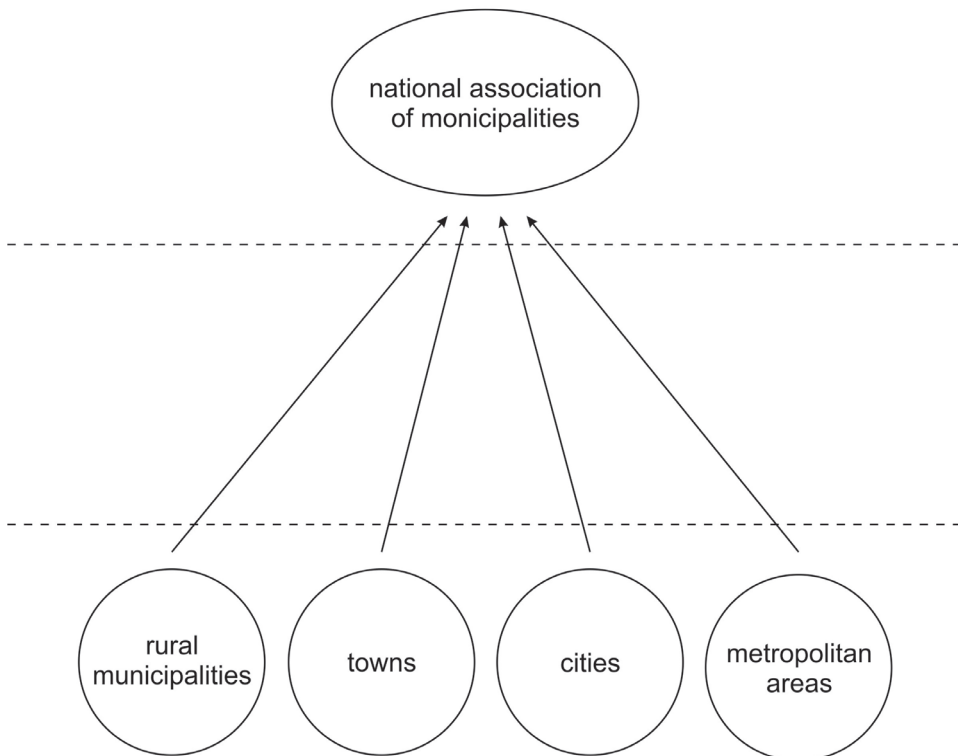


Fig. 2. The consolidated model

Regional Authorities. At present, it gathers all the 428 municipalities and (like its Danish counterpart) plays the role of an organisation gathering administration personnel. This is also the function fulfilled by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, set up in 2007 after a merger of a local and a regional organisation. It combines the potential of 290 Swedish municipalities. Scandinavian associations are a unique example of an almost ideal culture of cooperation and organisation. One should indicate, however, that all of the above states demonstrate a clearly consolidated structure of local structures (an average municipality is inhabited by, respectively: in Denmark ca. 57,000 residents, in Finland 17,000, in Norway 12,000, and in Sweden 33,000 residents), and the relatively small number of municipalities helps create a comprehensive and complete representation, legitimising all the actors of the local political scene. The potency of such a model of political representation is borne out by the study of The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CCRE 2007), which presents European states on a scale of quality of the consultation procedures between the state and the political representation of municipalities. It turns out that the Scandinavian countries are placed in the first category – “Consultation highly satisfactory” (Finland, Norway) or in the second one – “Consultation satisfactory” (Denmark, Sweden).

The simple consolidated model can be moreover found in the Netherlands. The country is rather small in terms of size, yet is very densely populated. The number of municipalities comes close to that in the Scandinavian countries, their average population being very high; a Dutch municipality is inhabited by an average of 43,000 people. This is, then, a situation similar to that of the Scandinavian countries, whose local self-government structures are also relatively consolidated. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities was set up in 1912; it therefore has a long history and enjoys an established position in the country. At present, it represents all the Dutch

municipalities. The Association supports devolution processes and cooperation on a local level. This organisation seeks to strengthen territorial self-government structures, their associations and training institutes not only in the Netherlands, but also in the developing countries and in the countries in transition. By developing premium quality standards of public services, it endeavours to promote adequate models for local self-government worldwide.

Apart from the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, the simple consolidated model can be found in Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, and Lithuania. All of the above states share a relatively high average size and the number of municipalities. In Bulgaria there are 265 municipalities, with an average local structure numbering ca. 27,000 residents, in Greece (after a recent consolidation of local structures) there are at present 325 municipalities inhabited on average by 34,000 residents, in Latvia the local structures are made up of 119 municipalities with an average of 17,000 inhabitants, while in Lithuania there are 60 municipalities with an average of 49,000 residents. The common denominator of the above four states is moreover a strong political representation in relations with the government, comprising all the municipalities within a state. These are, respectively, the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (set up in 1996), the Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (est. in 1991), and the Association of Local Authorities of Lithuania (set up in 1995). However, assessment of these organisations’ impact on national legislation provided by their representatives varies (CCRE 2007). Representatives of associations in Latvia and Lithuania are of the highest opinion of this impact and deem it “highly satisfactory”. In the case of representatives of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, consultation quality is regarded as satisfactory. In turn, representatives of the Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece believe that the “consultation is pure formality” and are rather critical of it.

Table 2. Associations operating in countries with the consolidated model

Country	English name	Original name	Year of establishment	No. of members
Bulgaria	National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria	Националното сдружение на общините в Република България	1996	265
Czech Republic	Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic	Svaz měst a obcí České republiky	1990	2564
Denmark	Local Government Denmark	Kommunernes Landsforening	1970	98
Finland	Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities	Suomen Kuntaliitto	1993	311
Greece	Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece	Κεντρική Ένωση Δήμων Ελλάδας	N.A.	325
Latvia	Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments	Latvijas Pašvaldību savienības	1991	119
Lithuania	Association of Local Authorities of Lithuania	Lietuvos savivaldybių asociacija	1995	60
Netherlands	Association of Netherlands Municipalities	Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten	1912	393
Norway	Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities	Kommunenes Sentralforbund	1972	428
Sweden	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions	Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting	2007	290

Another example, dramatically different from the others, is offered by the Czech Republic, a country with the highest (besides France) fragmentation of its local self-government structures. According to the data for 2016, in the Czech Republic there were ca. 6,300 municipalities (i.e. an average municipality has ca. 1,700 inhabitants). Such a vast number of municipalities may affect the relatively

low level of participation in the political associations of municipalities (ca. 41%). Czech municipalities are gathered in one such organisation, the Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic, established as in most post-socialist states in the early 1990s. This is an organisation which represents the interest of municipalities in their relations with the Czech government and parliament.

Its representatives assessed the quality of consultations with the national government as average relative to the other European countries (CCRE 2007: 234). It seems that the principal reason for this low level of participation is the high fragmentation of the local structures (their number increases the probability of negative phenomena in such a big organisation; they are inevitable in large groups and trigger a low willingness to cooperate) as well as the post-socialist legacy.

Bipolar model

The bipolar model (Fig. 3, Table 3) can be found in countries with two associations representing the interests of (1) cities and (2) urban areas (possibly also towns and joint urban and rural municipalities). In one case (Bosnia and Herzegovina), the bipolar representation is made up of associations active in the autonomous and separate parts of a given state. The entire group includes two federalised states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland), as

well as countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia). Another country demonstrating this model is Italy, with The National Association of Italian Municipalities and The National Union of Mountain Towns and Communities; both associations started an integration process in 2011.

Croatia is an example of a country with separate associations for rural municipalities and cities. There are two national associations, i.e. the Association of Croatian Cities and the Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Croatia (Table 3). They gather 404 municipalities (ca. 94% of the total number). Membership rate is, then, relatively high, possibly due to a rather small number of municipalities; research studies to date (Ivanović et al. 2010) indicate a series of weaknesses of inter-municipal cooperation in Croatia, including e.g. a lack of collaboration culture, absence of financial incentives, weakness of institutions, and passivity of central government, which does not support

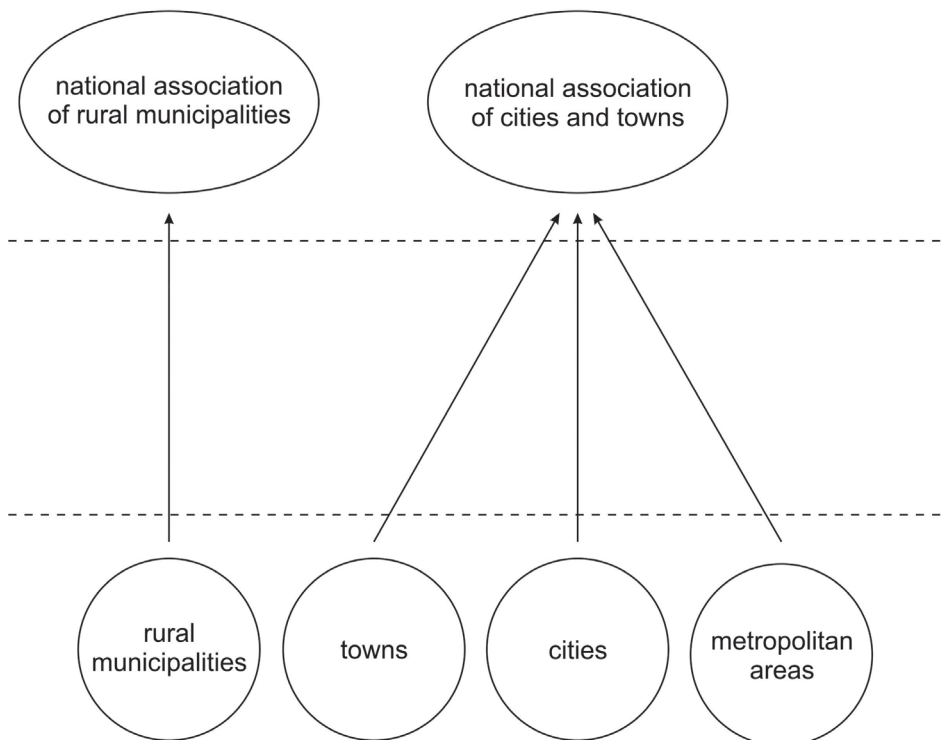


Fig. 3. The bipolar model of associations of municipalities within joint national representation

local structures in cooperation initiatives. Perhaps the last factor motivates Croatian municipalities to gather in opposition to state structures.

The bipolar model includes moreover representations of municipalities in three relatively small countries: Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Switzerland. Apart from the overall size, the above states share a relatively high fragmentation of the local structures – in Estonia there are 213 municipalities with an average of 6,000 residents, in Slovakia – 2,930 municipalities with 1,900 residents, in Slovenia – 212 municipalities of ca. 9,800 residents, and in Switzerland there are 2,324 municipalities with an average of 3,500

inhabitants. Most probably the relatively high fragmentation of the local structures may have contributed to the emergence of separate national representations for rural and urban municipalities.

Italy is a country with two separate national associations of municipalities. This is a rather unique situation, since apart from a representation of cities, towns and rural municipalities there is an association (The National Union of Mountain Towns and Communities) dedicated to so-called mountain communities, or structures composed of a few up to a dozen or so municipalities located in the mountainous regions (active in 6 Italian regions). It has to

Table 3. Associations in operation in countries with the bipolar model

Country	English name	Original name	Year of establishment	No. of members
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska	Savez opština i gradova Republike Srpske	1998	63
	Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Savez općina i gradova Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine	2002	79
Croatia	Association of Croatian Cities	Udruga općina u Republici Hrvatskoj	2002	283
	Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Croatia	Udruga gradova	2002	121
Estonia	Association of Municipalities of Estonia	Eesti Maaomavalitsuste Liit	1990	115
	Association of Estonian Cities	Eesti Linnade Liit	1990	45
Italy	The National Association of Italian Municipalities	Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani	1901	7318
	The National Union of Mountain Towns and Communities	Unione Nazionale Comuni Comunità Enti Montani	N.A.	N.A.
Slovakia	Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia	Združenie miest a obcí Slovenska	1990	2614
	Union of Slovak Towns and Cities	Únia miest Slovenska	1994	76
Slovenia	Association of Municipalities and towns of Slovenia	Skupnost občin Slovenije	1992	173
	Association of Municipalities of Slovenia	Združenje občin Slovenije	1999	143
Switzerland	Swiss Union of Cities and Towns	Schweizerischer Städteverband	1897	N.A.
	Association of Swiss Municipalities	Schweizerischer Gemeindeverband	1953	N.A.

be borne in mind, however, that in 2011 it began integration with The National Association of Italian Municipalities, the principal and the strongest corporation representing the interests of the local structures in relations with the government. The National Association of Italian Municipalities was created in the early 20th century and has at present over 7,300 members (ca. 90% of the total number of municipalities). It is therefore an organisation with a long history, gathering a vast majority of the many Italian municipalities.

A slightly different situation can be identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are two associations in this country, one for each of the two, relatively autonomous parts of the state. One of them (Association of Local Authorities of Republic of Srpska) represents the municipalities of the Republic of Serbia, and the other (Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) gathers the local structures of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is in order to point out that Bosnia is a federation state, composed of two relatively separate parts; unlike Belgium (where we deal with a conflict between Wallonia and Flanders), it does not have a single joint representation of the local structures.

Federative model

Some European countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and the aforementioned Bosnia and Herzegovina) are federations. There are also European unitarian states, like Spain or Italy, with a powerful role of the regional tier. This character of the state and local self-government has triggered the emergence of the federative model of municipality organisation (Fig. 4). It can be found in countries (Table 4) with at least one network gathering not so much municipalities, but rather regional organisations (of the federal states). This is a complex type of organisation, consisting in indirect participation of municipalities in the national network;

formally their members are regional associations of municipalities. Four of the states under discussion here, i.e. Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Spain, represent this very model. However, each of these countries developed their own modality of implementing it, differing as to some details from the other ones (Fig. 4).

Austria is a rather atypical case, with two national associations of a long-standing tradition: the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (established in 1915) and the Austrian Association of Municipalities (set up in 1947). The former association gathers directly cities and towns (a total of 249). The latter is made up of regional organisations that gather rural municipalities (the national representation is made up of 10 associations organised at the level of federal states, gathering a total of over 2,000 municipalities). In Austria, then, there are two nationwide organisations, one of which has a two-tier structure.

To some extent, a situation similar to that in Austria can be observed in Germany, where we also deal with two associations at the national level, both with a relatively long history. The difference is, however, that in both of them the main members are associations of municipalities of the federal states and the division of the local structures is different. The Association of German Towns and Municipalities groups 17 associations representing rural municipalities and towns of the federal states. In turn, the German Association of Cities represents large German cities and metropolises and incorporates 15 regional organisations.

Apart from Austria and Germany, the federative model can be found in Belgium. This is country of relatively substantial historical and cultural differences, highly politically polarised. Its two rather autonomous parts (Flanders and Wallonia) have their separate representations of the local structures – the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities and the Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia. Moreover, there is a separate



Fig. 4. The federative model of associations of municipalities within a joint national representation

structure representing the Brussels Region, i.e. the Association of the City and Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region. All the three organisations act in unison within the Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities, trying to represent the nearly 600 Belgian municipalities.

Spain is the last country with the federative model. This is no state with a typical federation organisation of state structures, but with a powerful position of regions, some of which enjoy a high degree of autonomy. This fact is responsible for the dominance of regional organisations associating municipalities, which together with the provinces make up the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, in operation for over 35 years. It gathers 16 regional organisations and represents municipalities in relations with the government in Madrid.

Fragmented model

The fragmented model (Fig. 5) can be found in countries with more than two national, political associations of municipalities. Their number depends on either the different kinds of municipalities (different representations of rural municipalities, cities, towns, metropolises) or regional affiliation (in the case of substantial internal divisions within a state). France is a country with the largest number of national associations; there are as many as 7 of them. In Hungary there are 5 national networks, with 3 active in Romania. The United Kingdom is atypical in that it has a national union gathered the local structures of England and Wales (with the Welsh municipalities having their separate association) and two autonomous networks, for Northern Ireland and Scotland. This type is

Table 4. Associations in states with the federative model

Country	English name	Original name	Year of establishment	Members	
				Associations	Municipalities
Austria	The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns	Österreichischer Städtebund	1915	-	249
	Austrian Association of Municipalities	Österreichischer Gemeindebund	1947	10	(2 089)
Belgium	Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities	Vereniging van Belgische Steden en Gemeenten	1995	3	(589)
Germany	Association of German Towns and Municipalities	Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund	1973	17	N.A.
	German Association of Cities	Deutscher Städtetag	1948	15	199 (3400)
Spain	Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces	Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias	1981	16	N.A.

moreover represented by Poland, whose municipalities participate in 4 national political associations.

The most similar examples of the fragmented model can be found in France, Poland and Hungary. In each of these countries there are separate associations representing rural municipalities, towns, cities and large urban areas (including metropolises). Representation of local structures in relations with the government is, then, highly dispersed. Moreover, associations active in the three states have dissimilar powers to represent municipalities. While nearly all of the great number of municipalities in France (over 36,000) participate in the activities of at least one national network, in Poland the ratio is disquietingly low (36%, i.e. ca. 900 from among nearly 2,500 municipalities participate in the work of national political

associations). The situation in Romania is slightly better, as ca. 60% municipalities belong to at least one of the national political associations.

The representation of local self-government structures in Romania is similar to that of France, Poland and Hungary. The three existing Romanian associations act separately on behalf of rural municipalities, smaller towns and finally large and medium-sized cities. The three organisations gather ca. 1,800 municipalities (from a total of over 3,100).

The situation in the United Kingdom is unique. The biggest and strongest UK organisation is the English Local Government Association. Apart from English municipalities, it gathers also 22 municipalities of the Welsh Local Government Association. Scottish

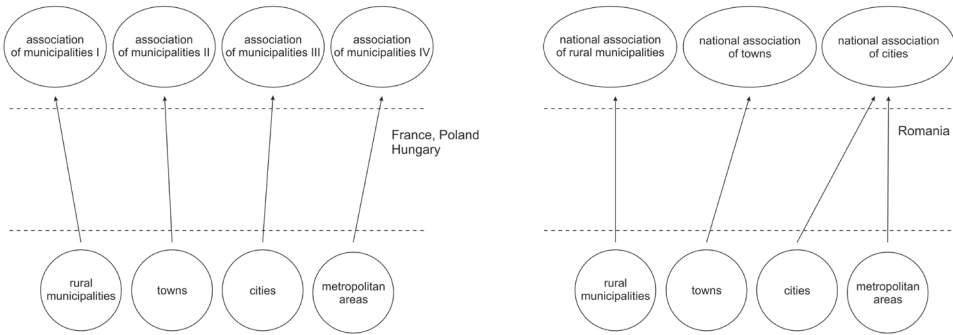


Fig. 5. The fragmented model of associations of municipalities within a joint political representation

municipalities (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) and those of Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Local Government Association) have created a completely autonomous representation. Thus, the relatively small number of municipalities of the United Kingdom (a country with a clearly consolidated local structure) make up a dispersed rather than a consolidated representation. Definitely, such decisions are mainly motivated by the socio-cultural differences and the history and tradition of the individual autonomous parts of the United Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

National associations of municipalities in Europe are at present a relatively little researched area of studies of public administration, local self-government and local policy. Earlier major studies on inter-municipal cooperation have focused mainly on optimising institutional solutions for metropolitan areas and on seeking more economic solutions to the implementation of public tasks by inter-municipal corporations. This article fills the research gap and moreover attempts to expand the insufficient relevant scholarship. It has set out to identify, account for and order a set of national political associations of municipalities, as well as to provide generalised conclusions in the form of models (simplified constructs of reality) of associations of municipalities.

A total of 51 associations municipalities (in 26 countries), representing these

structures in relations with the government have been identified during the analyses conducted for this purpose of this publication. These associations have a dissimilar history and often divergent objectives. Attempts at generalising individual cases have led to the identification of four principal models of association of municipalities: (1) the consolidated model (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden), (2) the bipolar model (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland), (3) the federative model (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Spain), and (4) the fragmented model (France, United Kingdom, Poland, Hungary, Romania). Each of these models has its unique organisation of joint representation, from single, through bipolar to fragmented. The mode of operation of these entities varies from country to country. Some are well-established and well-represented associations, i.e. in the Scandinavian countries, France, Germany, and Austria (all of these countries have a membership rate in the national political networks at the level of ca. 100%). There are also countries where local structures are represented the least frequently: Poland (a membership rate at the level of ca. 36%) and the Czech Republic (41%).

The studies conducted so far are but a preliminary review of this area of public administration and public policies. They should be continued, e.g. in the context of efficient operation of the models

identified and their multilateral relations and relations with central government. The area of joint political representation

of municipalities has a short research history and this scholarship gap must be effectively bridged in the near future. ■

Table 5. Associations in states with the fragmented model

Country	English name	Original name	Year of establishment	No. of members
France	Assembly of The Mayors of France	Association des maires de France	1907	35528
	Federation of Medium Cities	Villes de France	1988	161
	French Large Town Mayors Association	Association des maires de grandes villes de France	1974	49
	French Association of Rural Mayors	Association des Maires Ruraux de France	1971	10000
	French Association for the Council of European Municipalities and Regions	Association française du conseil des communes et régions d'Europe	1951	1449
United Kingdom	Local Government Association	Local Government Association	1997	350
	Northern Ireland Local Government Association	Northern Ireland Local Government Association	2001	11
	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities	1975	28
	Welsh Local Government Association	Welsh Local Government Association	1996	22
Poland	Association of Rural Communes of Poland	Związek Gmin Wiejskich RP	1993	552
	Association of Polish Cities	Związek Miast Polskich	1993	305
	Union of Polish Small Towns	Unia Miasteczek Polskich	1991	17
	Union of Polish Metropolitan Areas	Unia Metropolii Polskich	1993	12
Hungary	Association of Hungarian Cities with County Rank	Megyei Jogú Városok Szövetsége	1990	23
	Hungarian Association of Municipalities	Magyar Önkormányzatok Szövetsége	1990	N.A.
	Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities	Tanácsi Önkormányzatok Országos Szövetsége	1989	1577
	Hungarian Village Association	Magyar Faluszövetség	1989	201
	National Association of Small Cities	Kisvárosi Önkormányzatok Országos Érdekszövetsége	1990	93
Romania	Association of Romanian Municipalities	Asociația Municipiilor din România	1990	103
	Romanian Association of Communes	Asociația Comunelor din România	1997	1489
	Association of Romanian Towns	Asociația Orașelor din România	1994	217

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