

BASIC INFORMATION ON SUB-PROJECT

NAME OF PROGRAMME/FUND	Scholarship Fund - Sciex NMS ^{ch}
RESEARCH FIELD AND OTHER RESEARCH FIELDS INVOLVED (if applicable)	Legal and Social Sciences, Economics
TITLE OF THE SUB-PROJECT	Local governments in small municipalities: local democracy and managing of tasks (LOCDEM)
REGION OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC (according to the location of the home institution)	Prague
GRANT AMOUNT SPENT	55 149,12 CHF
INTERMEDIATE BODY	Swissuniversities
HOME INSTITUTION	Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (Institute of Sociology)
HOST INSTITUTION	University of Zurich Political Science
NAME OF THE FELLOW	Josef Bernard

ABSTRACT OF THE SUB-PROJECT

The Czech Republic and Switzerland have a very fragmented structure of municipalities. In both countries small municipalities with only several hundreds of inhabitants dominate. Such small political entities have various specific features which influence the democratic aspects of the government, its ability to accomplish goals and the way how its diverse tasks are managed. In the proposed project, the diverse means, which the representatives of small municipalities in Switzerland use to achieve the democratic qualities of government and to accomplish effectively their goals are to be investigated. This focus is based on the idea that the size of municipalities is an important variable influencing the form of its internal political life and the character of democratic processes within its government. However, the influence doesn't have to result inevitably in more or less democracy and more or less efficiency in bigger or smaller units. Size differences result rather in different local resources and challenges for which size-specific solutions are necessary. The proposed project is inspired by a just finished research on the influence of local governments in small municipalities in the Czech Republic on local development, which the investigator conducted between 2009 and 2011. Expanding the research to another country with small self-governing political communities existing in a different political, socio-economical and historical context should provide additional value to the previous research, by providing a comparative dimension to it. The methodology of the project will be based on a set of qualitative case studies in small municipalities in Switzerland and secondary analysis of accessible statistical data sets regarding opinions and activities of local government representatives and attitudes of citizens towards local democracy.

MAIN RESULTS

A scientific paper „Democracy in the Village: What we can learn about size effects on democracy by case studies in small Swiss municipalities” was prepared as an output of the project. The abstract of the paper, summarising the main arguments of the paper, is included below.

Based on the paper, a chapter in a monograph was published:

Bernard, J. 2015. „Demokratie im Dorf - Demokratiequalität in kleinen Schweizer Gemeinden.“ Pp. 59-92 in Daniel Kübler, Oliver Dlabac (Eds.). *Demokratie in der Gemeinde: Herausforderungen und mögliche Reformen*. Zürich: Schulthess.

The empirical material collected during the fellowship was further used and will be used in subsequent research and publications.

The fellowship enhanced contacts between the Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Political Science, University of Zurich and Institut für Demokratieforschung Aarau.

Abstract of the paper:

The scholarly debate on size-specific features of local democratic systems is inconclusive. Contradictory arguments concerning size effects have been formulated for three normative qualities of democracy – participation, accountability and representation and for system capacity. It has been argued that increasing municipal size has the potential to improve the democratic process, but also that municipal fragmentation is the basis for quality of democracy at the local level. The relations between size, system capacity and different democratic principles have usually been studied empirically by using quantitative analyses of various features of political systems of different size. Most interest has been devoted to democratic aspects which can be quantified relatively easily. Other aspects which play an equally important role in normative democratic theory were left aside. In the paper the importance of municipal size for democratic decision processes was studied in a less common way. Instead of large-scale comparative analyses, three qualitative case studies in extremely small municipalities were conducted, aimed to investigate in-depth the political processes within the municipalities. The results did not indicate any fundamental deficiencies in terms of concentration of power, political apathy, marginalization of social groups or missing transparency of the political process, nor insufficient capacities of effective governance, as implied by some theoretical premises in the debate on size and democracy. On the other hand, the analysis neither confirmed that such small municipalities would automatically enhance quality deliberation of public issues and an intense participation of all citizens. The level of opportunities for participation and deliberation was determined primarily by the executive board’s willingness to create such opportunities.

DATE OF REALISATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP	1.1.2014 - 31.7.2014
MORE INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME	www.sciex.ch