

The assessment of the M.A. dissertation by Olena Ivantsiv
“Sustainable governance of the Visegrad countries”

IMS FSV UK, summer 2012

Olena Ivantsiv chose for her dissertation a very complex and difficult topic – assessment of the development of the sustainable governance of four new EU member states – the members of the Visegrad Group. Her research questions are how successfully do the Visegrad countries realize sustainable policy outcomes and what are the tendencies of the regions’ development when it comes to sustainability.

She wisely decided to use the Bertelsmann Sustainable Governance Indicators for the years of 2009 and 2011 as well as declarations and reports by international organisations which monitor the development of the respective countries.

She defines the sustainable development by drawing on wide range of academic and expert literature. Her decision to take the Desta Mebratu multidimensional approach as the conceptual basis of her dissertation works well with the focus of her analysis, the data and sources involved.

The bottom line of her argument is that sustainability can not be achieved without an efficient executive management performance, adjustment of the traditional national decision-making models. Also, she points out at the importance of political will as a precondition for progress on the issue of sustainable development.

The international and multilateral dimension is acknowledged and elaborated on. The author points out at the specific role of the EU in pursuing the goals in sustainable development, introduces the EU’s Strategy for Sustainable Development, its instruments and programmes. The normative and institutional framework of the EU’s strategy became a part of the ‘acquis’ and has been ‘downloaded’ by the Visegrad states on their way into the EU.

The author correctly argues that the Visegrad group has not engaged into co-operation specifically on the sustainable development, but point towards Visegrad group’s co-operation on energy or environmental issues as dealing de facto with certain elements of the agenda.

The SGI Status index shows how the Visegrad countries perform in a very complex set of policy areas including development of democratic political system, social policies, in dealing with natural (including human) resources. The SGI Management index assesses performance in terms of decision-making, policy planning, co-ordination, implementation, public control and accountability, participation. While the first index shows relatively good performance of the Visegrad countries, the second places the countries under scrutiny below the 20th best performing countries of the index.

The author shows that in some categories the policy performance has improved considerably (for example in economy results). In most areas the further progress was however, halted (taxes, social affairs, incl. Healthcare, environment policies, etc.). There is a decrease in performance in the area of external security or research and innovation policies as well as education. In all areas, the data and figures confirm, that the Visegrad countries as being far from homogenous.

The author proved very good skills in working with the wealth of data and figures contained in the Sustainable Governance Indicators Status and Management indexes for 2009 and 2011 as well as with other resources. She produced an impressively rich and differentiated picture of the individual Visegrad countries and of the group as a whole - in relations to the other most developed OECD states.

The dissertation thus answers correctly the two research questions set in its introduction. The findings are however only rather loosely linked with the concept of sustainable development as presented in the introduction. Also, the author seeks to interpret the findings and partly also to explain the differentiated picture of the performance of the Visegrad countries rather briefly. Her ability to do this would have been helped by employment of a suitable concept (perhaps one of the concepts used by transition studies). At present, the study remains mainly descriptive.

The text is written in very good English and is rich as to data, references to sources and literature. The proposed mark is “very good”.

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