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Önkormányzati rendszer és társadalom – Jogszociológiai vizsgálatok – Book review

On the 13th of October 2019, a country-wide election was held in Hungary. Citizens had a chance to elect representatives into the local governments. The outcome of the election was surprising, at least for one of the interested parties that have been governing Hungary since 2010. The 2019 election of local governments brought significant changes in many of the major cities of Hungary, where the united parties of the opposition took over the control. In early 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic reached Hungary causing a dramatic economic recession. The crisis provided ground for the central government to cut the budget of the local governments making their situation harder. This decision seemingly worsened the situation of those specific local governments, where the opposing parties took the power in 2019. This fact had turned up the volume of a serious debate that has been going on since 2010 when the central government had centralized many of the former competencies of the local governments. This discussion is about the economic position and social, administrative responsibilities of the local government. The monograph of Attila Badó, Gábor Feleky, and Zsófia Patyi brings the world of local governments closer to the reader by providing a rich dataset of interviews and surveys about the functions and operation of the local governments.

The book is based on extended empirical research in the field of sociology and legal sociology provides an insight into several aspects and composition of local governments. At first, the book, allowing the reader to put the topic into historical context, introduces the historical background of local governments starting with the socialist era. After that, the authors enumerate the challenges that the local governments have to face in the 21st Century. A detailed chapter deals with the local citizens' relationship towards local governments by analysing how local citizens are satisfied with the work and how deeply they are involved in the work of local bodies. Territorial and social aspects of the citizen-local government relationship are studied with special regard to the satisfaction of the local citizens with the governments' work.

The monograph highly relies on surveys related to the literacy of distinguished groups regarding specific legal and economic fields in local governments' work. It examines whether the average citizens, on one hand, and employees of governments, on the other hand, are aware of facts, such as the election or selection of the mayor, representatives or other high-ranked officials, the reputation of the mayor and representatives, or the legislative power delegated to the local governments. High emphasis is put on the literacy of citizens about the relationship and co-operation between the state and local governments' competencies, in the light of local authority, democracy, and the specific tasks that have to be dealt with on the local level, such as public education, public services.

Data collected from the local government of Szeged, which is not only a local government, but a county seat with more than 100.000 inhabitants, gives a detailed view to the reader about the demographical, educational composition of the employees of the city hall. They were questioned not only via a straw poll, but they also answered a detailed questionnaire. Although the authors aimed at studying a wider range of local governments in Csongrád county and also on a nationwide level by questioning a representative amount of citizens (1.000), the collected data led them to focus only on the city of Szeged. The book, therefore, provides us a well-structured, detailed set of information about the local government of Szeged, the relationship

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to the national competencies, and the opinion about the functionality of local governance from the point of view of citizens and employees of the local government.