

# THE HUNGARIAN ONE STOP GOVERNMENT OFFICES AS GOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The focus of the paper is on one of the innovative policy coordination measure - introduced by the Hungarian government also: the newly established "Government Windows" one-stop-shop initiative. The introduction of one-stop-shops in public administration is a frequent element of recent administrative reforms that operate as a particular form of coordination within public administration. In connection with the one-stop shop concept, the paper seeks to elaborate that why one stop shop arrangements in public administration are, in general, to be considered as a governmental coordination mechanism. Secondly, it intends to explain the differentiation of western paradigm and Hungarian mainstream interpretations of the coordination concept.*

**KEYWORDS:** *public administration, governmental coordination, one-stop shop, organization reform;*

**JEL CODE :** *K 4*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper has two main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to elaborate and bear out that why one stop shop arrangements in public administration are, in general, to be considered as a governmental coordination mechanism. Secondly, the paper intends to explain the differentiation of western paradigm and Hungarian mainstream interpretations of the coordination concept.

The purported aim of the one stop shop model is to make services feel seamless for citizens and service users, by providing a single entry point into the policy domain. One-stop shops therefore present a possible mechanism for achieving 'joined-up' policy implementation (Pollitt, 2003).

The first question needs some justification however. The claim that one-stop government is a particular form of coordination within public administration seems to be trivial and well-trodden in the Western-European and Anglo-Saxon academic literature and mainstream thinking. Despite of this understanding of the one-stop shop initiatives, in

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Hungary there are recurrent reflections<sup>1</sup> on the acceptability of the idea that one-stop shop can be categorized under the umbrella of coordination measures.. This academic polemic and debate prompted me to deal with this question and elaborate and underpin that the one stop shop – including the Hungarian Documentary and Registry Office (DRO) and the newly established Government Window (GovWin) – are instruments of government coordination.

I seek to answer this question in two steps. (1) Firstly, I give an overview of some important pieces of recent academic literature (e.g. Pollitt 2003; Perri 2004, Halligan 2008; Askim et al 2011, Christensen and Laegreid 2012) that support the claim that one-stop shop can be seen as a governmental coordination mechanism. (2) Secondly, based on a well-received typology of one-stop shop models (Kubicek and Hagen 2001, Askim et al 2011) it intends to justify that the Hungarian DRO and the GovWin are can be considered as one type of one stop shops.

The second ambition of this paper is closely related to the first question. It seeks to identify and explain those motives that seem to cause divergences between the international and the Hungarian academic and professional discourse on one-stop shops as governmental coordination mechanisms.

## **2. ONE STOP SHOP AS A GOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION MECHANISM**

The main aim of this section to present those academic arguments that consider – without any doubt - the one stop shop as a significant elements of the recent government coordination reforms. The function of one stop-shops was defined as providing “as nearly as possible a complete service (including if possible the power to make decisions) in one place, at one visit, and with members of the public having to deal with not more than one or two different officers”( RCAGA 1976:161).

In recent years, coordination has been seen as a central effort within current reforms or reform movements within the public sector in most of the developing and developed countries.

States have developed new approaches intended to eliminate the horizontal and vertical fragmentation brought about by NPM, to enhance governmental coordination and to integrate the public sectors (Osborne 2009). The new coordination practices come in various shapes and names - such as integrated governance, joined-up government (Pollitt 2003; Perri 2004), holistic government (Perri 1997), whole-of-government (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007) – and the coordination tools and mechanisms are also various and multiform. The one stop shop – as a coordination tool - is a relevant and common element of most of the academic literature dealing with governmental coordination practice and their tools.

In the following section of my paper I summarize the arguments of the mainstream literature in other to review the state of the art of government reforms and coordination practices. *Pollitt* (2003) clearly considers the one stop shop as a tool of achieving joined-

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. Discussion of Hajnal- Kovacs (2012) paper in the Political Scientist Institution of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (25/10/2012), or the internal discussion of the research plan in the topic of governmental coordination in Hungary in the Political Science Ph.D. School, Corvinus University of Budapest

up government (JUG), when describing the four underlying goals of JUG. He stresses that the fourth goal of JUG – “to produce a more integrated or seamless set of services from the point of view of the citizens who use them”- can be realized through the establishment of One Stop Shop (Pollitt 2003, p. 35).

The governmental coordination practices are also analyzed by *Perri* (1997, 2004) through the exploration of the holistic government and the JUG. He claims that “there are two quite specific areas at the service and client levels, of what has been defined (...) as joined-up integration (...). These are the physical “one stop shop” buildings which provide citizens with access to a very wide range of public services from a single point of access, and the development of the online equivalent of the one stop shop over the World Wide Web” (Perri 2004, p. 120). In this paper Perri (2004) presents taxonomy of different coordination tools and depicts the levels at which the coordination and integration can be pursued in a matrix (see Figure 1). In this taxonomy the one stop shop is defined as a coordination tool at the local services and clients level, where the “joined-up integration can be defined around a set of activities on the supply side of services, which can be brought together because of their basic similarity in production.” (Perri 2004, p. 107.)

**Table 3**  
Levels at which Coordination and Integration May Be Pursued

| Activity  | Geographical Unit   |  |   |  |
|---|---|--|---|--|
|   | Nation (Central Government)   | State/Region   | Locality  | Neighborhood   |
| Policy formulation: Policy coordination   | e.g., cross-cutting spending reviews, interministerial committee  | e.g., regional integrated environmental, economic, and transport policy  | e.g., local strategic planning partnerships   | e.g., multi-agency community strategy process                                    |
| Program: Coordination and integration in relationships between programs comprising clusters of more (or less) mutually supportive services  | e.g., interdepartmental civil service group to oversee interaction between state pensions and regulation of commercial financial services | e.g., regional economic development forum involving land use planners, transport authority, health, and so forth | e.g., local authority and health joint commissioning of integrated health and social services       | e.g., area-based multi-agency public health or employment action network         |
| Service-providing organizations (including regulatory agencies): Coordination and integration in relationships between services, not necessarily with coincident geographical catchment areas | e.g., joint inspections by health and safety, environment, and data protection regulators   | e.g., integrated air-rail-road-taxi ticketing scheme   | e.g., joint initiative to combat juvenile delinquency between schools, police, health, and so forth | e.g., integrated child welfare program with interprofessional targeting of cases |
| Services to individual client: Integration around the needs or preferences or deserts of individual clients   | e.g., integrated service call center or data sharing for fraud control between records for cash benefits, police, health, and immigration | e.g., integrated service call center   | e.g., “one-stop shop” center  | e.g., integrated online package of services defined by “life events”             |

(Resources: *Perri* 2004, p. 109.)

Figure 1: The levels at which the coordination and integration can be pursued

*Kettl* (2000) stresses as regards the trends of global public management developments that "...the global reform movement seeks to strengthen government's ability to develop coordination responses to problems that stretch beyond the boundaries of individual bureaucracies." He emphasizes the role of one stop shop in the American and British government reforms when he writes about that government "committed (...) to joined-up government - one-stop shops to improve the coordination of government services." (p. 45)

The one stop shop is also presented as a key motive of government reform by other authors. *Halligan* (2006, 2008, 2011), for example, focuses on the Australian reform, where one-stop shop (Centrelink) "was established as a (...) multi-purpose delivery agency to provide services to several purchasing departments, and therefore provides an ambitious case of horizontal coordination of service delivery."

Another example of the one stop shop as a tool of government coordination reform is the introduction of the welfare reform in Norway (NAV). "The trajectory of the NAV reform followed a sort of stimulus-response pattern regarding specialization and coordination [...]. The reform itself had a clearly holistic, integrating ambition focusing on coordination issues." (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007, p. 17.)

The cases studied by *Askim et al* (2011) are about applications of the one stop shop model in Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom which were intended "to solve coordination problems" (p. 3) as well.

*Christensen and Laeg Reid* (2012) in their recent research have focused on "identifying trans-boundary innovative coordination practices and related modes of specialization and steering instruments in welfare administration reforms" which can contribute to handle cross-boundary issues (p. 3.). The central issue of the paper is outlined around the one stop shop administrative structures in different countries (Norway, Canada, Australia) as horizontal innovative collaborative arrangements (pp. 12-16).

Coming to the conclusion it seems undoubtedly that coordination has again become a salient issue internationally with a movement away from disaggregation (*Halligan* 2008), and the one stop shop has become one of the governmental coordination tools in order to enhance the horizontal coordination through integrated service delivery.

### 3. THE HUNGARIAN MODELS OF ONE STOP SHOP

This section intends to describe the main characteristic of the Hungarian physical one-stop shops: Hungarian Documentary and Registry Office (Okmányiroda) and the newly established Government Window (Kormányablak). *Kubicek and Hagen* (2001) offer a structural typology for classifying different types of one-stop shop models. This typology seems to be useful for proving that the Hungarian experiences can fall under the umbrella of one-stop shop concept. Even though, that is controversial in the Hungarian academic thinking. At this point it is necessary to elaborate the distinction - made by *Kubicek and Hagen* (2001) - between different sub-types of one stop shops regarding the task portfolio they are delivering. The relevant literature (*Kubicek and Hagen* 2001; *Askim et al* 2011) suggest three categories of one stop shops, namely, first stop shops, second stop shop or "convenience stores" and true one stop shops.

- The *first stop shop* is „a mere information provider and metaphorical signpost, one that guides the citizen to relevant services” (*Askim et al* 2011, p. 6).

- The *second-stop-shop* or “*convenience store*”, where many different transactional services are located in a single office or on one web-site. This delivers more complex services for users; more of the joining up is done on behalf of the clients, although they are still usually required to take further steps (e.g. visit of the decision-making office).

- The third type, the ‘*true one stop shop*’ integrates concerns of specific client groups, or focuses services around specific life events or administrative matters affecting citizens.

Taking into account the services that Hungarian DRO and GovWin deliver, the DRO can be classified into the third category, while the GovWin is located between the first and the second categories. The DRO was established for a specific group of administrative matters affecting all citizens (administrate the personal data and address of the people, administrate vehicle registers, issues ID, licences and other official certifications). It is a real one stop shop due to the capability of full scale administration. All provided cases are completed in one place. If we look at the task portfolio of GovWin compared with the DRO, it covers almost all of the administrative case types, but the depth of the task portfolio is quite shallow. In a certain number of cases GovWins receive requests and documents from clients but another office is in charge of handling and deciding the cases. A small proportion of the cases can be fully completed (e.g. modify records in official registries, issue certification) only by GovWins. In the greatest proportion of the cases GovWins operate as information/ signposting only. In these cases only information is provided concerning the procedure. Further steps – e.g. visit other offices - are required from the clients to complete cases.

However, the two Hungarian administrative organizations presented above are delivering different types of services in different depth, on the basis of brief overview of the relevant classification, technically both of them satisfying the definitional criteria for being a one stop shop.

#### **4. THE REASONS OF CONTROVERSIAL CONSIDERATION OF OSS IN HUNGARY**

In the previous sections I have overviewed why one stop shops can be considered a coordination mechanism and why the Hungarian DRO and the GovWin can be classified as one stop shops. Even though, some explanation seems to be necessary to understand the reason – as it seems – strong rejection and scepticism regarding the coordination effects of one stop shops in Hungary. For this reason this section attempts to present some potential motives underlying the differences between the Hungarian and the international academic and professional approaches.

Related to this question two explanatory factors seem to be relevant: (i) in Hungary the academic and professional consideration of government coordination mechanism in general differs from the mainstream international concepts. It allows a much narrower interpretation of governmental coordination than suggested in the international literature. The one stop shop seems to be out of – or at least on the boundary of - this narrow concept. (ii) Secondly the newly established GovWin – mostly for their special structural features – seems to have limited coordinating effect for that time that causing scepticism

about the one stop shop structures itself. The following subsections arguing these statements.

*a. The scarcity of scholarship on government coordination in general , and on one-stop government as a coordination mechanism in particular in the Hungarian literature*

Comparing the Hungarian and the international governmental coordination literature significant difference can be shown regarding the scope and variety of coordination tools and mechanisms.

Throughout the past 22 years of the post-communist era, the governmental coordination mechanisms have been almost entirely absent from Hungary's public as well as academic discourse. Or maybe better to say: coordination or similar, closely related concepts most of the time were, and still are, conceived of in a way which seems to be, compared with the international discourse, selective and biased, focusing exclusively on the "(central) control versus (regional/sectoral) autonomy" dimension, and disregarding any non-hierarchical – let alone market or cultural – mechanisms of coordination (Hajnal - Kovacs 2012). In contrast with this, the international literature shows a much broader and varied picture of the governmental coordination mechanisms. Much of these coordination practices have traditional character, but it also seems to have acquired new perspectives and emphases (Peters 2006). The new coordination practices across most of the European and Anglo-Saxon countries come in various shapes and have various names, such as whole-of-government (Christensen and Lægreid 2007), integrated governance, outcome steering, joined-up governance (Pollitt 2003, Perri 2004), holistic governance (Perri 1997), new public governance (Osborne 2009), networked government, partnerships, connected government, cross-cutting policy, horizontal management or collaborative public management (Gregory 2003). The common feature is the notion that working across organizational boundaries will enable more efficient and/or effective policy development, implementation and service delivery" (Christensen and Lægreid 2012), and pursuing not only vertical and central coordination mechanisms, but also enhancing horizontal and bottom-up coordination practises.

From the overview of the Hungarian and international patterns of the governmental coordination literature I arrived to the conclusion that many forms of governmental coordination practices – including the one stop shop - are not in the scope of academic thinking in Hungary. This narrow and historically biased perspective of governmental coordination - based on the national traditions - causes the dissonant approach of one stop shop.

*b. Scepticism about Government Windows. Do the Government Windows really enhance the coordination in any way?*

The second reason of controversial consideration of one stop shop as a coordination tool seems to be the skepticism about the form how the one stop shop has been introduced in Hungary. It can be mostly justified in the latter case - the establishment of GovWin – based on interviews with senior professionals and academic discussions.

Regardless of the fact that, the Hungarian Government Windows are technically satisfying the definitional criteria for being a one stop shop - as it was justified in the 2. Section - stretches the concept of one stop shop in some way (Hajnal- Kovacs 2012). It does not seem to provide the advantages – for that time - that one stop shop would guarantee (e.g. reduce transaction costs and duplications both from citizens, providers and government perspectives).

Theoretically they should reduce the time and effort that citizens must spend to access the services they need. The Hungarian GovWin does not seem to provide these advantages. The reason for this can be explained by the type of task portfolio. The extended task portfolio of GovWin is extremely broad but very shallow. The delegated tasks show various picture and embrace almost every public sector. Nevertheless the GovWin operates mostly as information/ signposting only. Further steps are required from the clients to complete cases. So, it does not really mean a real “cost” savings from the side of the clients. The advantages cannot be clearly demonstrated from the government or provider perspectives either. The one stop shops theoretically envisage cost reduction by establishing integrated services, eliminating parallelism and reduce duplication of activity across agencies. Instead of this, in Hungary new, parallel (partly overlapping) structures have been established by the introduction of GovWins. There are overlaps and parallelism between GovWins and the authorized agencies’ branch offices, because clients can submit documents and requests to both.

The scarcity of these advantages listed above and the insufficient introduction and operation of Hungarian one stop shops seems to emerge the question about the real coordinating effects of the structure in partial and - in an extended way for the whole one stop shop concept - in general.

It might be questionable in some ways that the GovWin has real coordinating effects in particular, however it would be unwise to reject the whole one stop shop concept as a governmental coordination tool in general. There are dozens of arguments and good examples – presented in the 1. Section - underpinning the coordinating function of one stop shops.

#### Findings

There is not a clear definition of what is a one-stop-shop or at least it has different levels from the point of coordination strength. Furthermore, these OSSs are sometime well implemented and well functioning but sometime they do not.

As far as coordination is concerned the western paradigm looks at it as a broad concept and often enhanced by agency (such as technological agency like the OSS). The Hungarian approach on the otherhand, looks at coordination more from an institutionalist point of view where agency does not play a strong role.

Finally, the author justifies this Hungarian point of view by the low level of coordination strength of the two Hungarian solutions and their questionable implementation and functionality success.

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