

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS DURING THE TIME OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY DECLARED DUE TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Summary: In the conditions of the "galloping" global pandemic Covid-19, and the state of emergency declared due to it in the Republic of Serbia, the importance of local self-governments in terms of creating a safe environment for human life and work, could be seen. Although limited in their actions by incomplete decentralization, as well as numerous structural, i.e. institutional and normative shortcomings, LGUs acted in the direction of adequate organization and self-organization of interactions and building mechanisms for response within their own local structures. In order to gain a detailed insight into the above, this paper, first of all, provides an overview and analysis of the relevant strategic and normative framework in the field of disaster risk reduction and emergency management, as well as in the field of public health and local government. Then, from the angle of the strategic-normative framework, considering the practical applicability of certain provisions in a crisis situation, and the relationship between the strategic level of decision-making and the level of local self-government, a critical analysis of the activities of local self-government was approached, emphasizing the role of civil society organizations and the business sector during the time of the state of emergency. In this way, the observed shortcomings and examples of good governance practice were pointed out.

Key words: local self-government units, COVID-19, state of emergency, civil society organizations, business sector

Introduction

After the 2014 Southeast Europe floods, a state of emergency declared due to the COVID-19 outbreak, put the local self-government units (LGUs) to another test in terms of creating a safe environment for people's life and work. Due to the rapid spread of the infectious disease COVID-19, the World Health Organization declared an "international emergency in the field of public health" on January 30, 2020, while a pandemic was declared on March 11, 2020 (Bjelajac & Filipović, 2020: 388), and

* tadicv33@gmail.com

the Republic of Serbia declared the outbreak of this disease on March 19, 2020 (Naredba o proglašenju epidemije zarazne bolesti COVID-19, 2020). In a crisis situation, the engagement of local self-government in the field of security is based on real needs arising from the risks to which citizens are exposed due to the epidemic, on the one hand, and the rights and obligations arising from the authority of the local self-government, established by the strategic and normative framework, as well as a set of regulations in relation to the crisis situation, on the other hand (Đorđević, 2013: 168).

However, a fuller understanding of the place and role of LGUs, including the business sector and civil society organizations (CSOs), isn't possible only through consideration of relevant strategies, policies and regulations, without taking into account the wider environment, so the relationship of political structures and strategic level of decision-making according to the local government level, and the relationship between LGUs and society as a whole (Todić, Ignjatić, Katić & Plavšić, 2012: 14). With that regard, the issue of the role of local authorities in the implementation of measures prescribed by the state in a crisis situation, which is largely highlighted as the participation of LGUs in the implementation of national regulations, is related to many other issues related to the process and state of society (Todić, Ignjatić, Katić & Plavšić, 2012: 12). In particular, first of all, issues related to the functioning of the state and reform of the political system, improvement of the strategic framework for reform and strengthening the role of the local self-government system, and the process of decentralization and identification of its economic, legal, cultural and other relevant bases and goals.

This is especially important if we have in mind that the process of transferring jurisdiction, tasks and finances from the national to the local level, in order to strengthen the capacity of LGUs, is, to a large extent, at the very beginning. Although implemented, certain reform changes in the direction of strengthening the autonomy of local government, increasing their functional capacities and creating partnerships between local authorities and the state, aren't sufficient to ensure adequate and independent resolution of political, social and other issues imposed by the epidemic (Đorđević, 2011: 183). Distancing the state from numerous obligations, both economic, social and similar, transferring them to the local level, and on the other hand, providing limited freedom of LGUs in action, with the requirement for a high degree of compliance with the state, and neglecting regional specifics and differences in the level of political, economic and institutional development of various LGUs, and thus processes and conditions in society, in the end, can result exclusively in the application of universal patterns of action, without the ability to opt for their own response strategy, primarily in accordance with specific circumstances. By leaving a certain degree of independence to the LGUs and accepting the role of coordinator, conditions would be provided for the practical implementation of the original jurisdictions of the LGUs, in a crisis situation dependent on special needs of the population, and that the stated would not lead to the disempowerment of central authorities.

Given previously stated, the aim of this paper is to, from the angle of the strategic-normative framework, and the relationship between the strategic level of deci-

sion-making and lower levels of government, approach the analysis of the actions of LGUs during the state of emergency declared due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and thus point out the observed shortcomings and examples of good governance practice.

Strategic and normative framework

The starting point for considering the action of the strategic, operational and tactical level of decision-making in a crisis situation caused by the COVID-19 epidemic is the relevant strategic and normative framework that regulates the area of their action in both regular and extraordinary circumstances. Given that disasters are a challenge that shows the degree of preparedness and ability of the state and society to respond, they can be avoided if society or the state has an effectively established strategic and normative framework that creates the basis for reducing risk and limiting the consequences of disasters (Nacionalna strategija zaštite i spasavanja u vanrednim situacijama, 2011). The Republic of Serbia has developed a National Strategy for Protection and Rescue in Emergencies (2011) (hereinafter: National Strategy), and the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management (2018) defined as the Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management, whose revision, in accordance with the enacted law, hasn't yet been approached. The National Strategy (2011) identified five strategic areas, i.e. disaster risk reduction activities, as follows: ensure that disaster risk reduction becomes a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation; identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and improve early warning; use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of security and resilience at all levels; reduce the risk factor; prepare for a disaster in order to respond effectively at all levels. The National Strategy (2011) also identified the shortcomings of the then protection and rescue system, both institutional-organizational and material-technical, as well as numerous shortcomings in the field of cooperation, coordination and exchange of public information and human resources and education, which can be noticed even after nine years from the adoption of this strategic document.

Furthermore, the area of emergency situations is regulated by the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management. The given law specifically regulates a number of issues of importance for the organization and functioning of the system of disaster risk reduction and emergency management. However, what is noticeable when considering certain provisions of the law, is that it doesn't differentiate between an emergency situation and a state of emergency. Namely, the law provides only a conceptual definition of an emergency situation as "a situation that arises from a declaration by the competent authority when risks and threats or consequences for the population, environment and material and cultural goods are of such scope and intensity that their occurrence or consequences cannot be prevented or to be eliminated by regular action of the competent bodies and services, due to which it is necessary to use special measures, forces and means for their mitigation and elimination with an intensified regime of work ", while the conceptual definition

of the state of emergency, as a constitutional category, isn't offered by the specified law (Zakon o smanjenju rizika od katastrofa i upravljanju vanrednim situacijama, 2018). Also, the law doesn't make a clear distinction between terms such as emergency, crisis and disaster. Prominent terms are used with the common meaning of *disaster*, which is contrary to the analogy of *risk management*, which replaces the term disaster with a more appropriate term *crisis*. Also, the Law of the epidemic of infectious diseases, i.e. infectious disease specific to the number of cases, place, time and affected population, doesn't recognize and doesn't explicitly identify as a risk or disaster. Pandemics, epidemics of infectious diseases and epidemics of livestock infectious diseases, are recognized only through the conceptual definition of natural disasters, classifying them in a given category, without necessarily distinguishing them as biosphere disasters of special origin, nature and characteristics, in relation to other occurrences of hydrological, meteorological or geological origin.

Citing previously stated, it is necessary to refer to the most important strategic document in the field of public health - the Public Health Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2018-2026 (hereinafter: the Strategy). Unlike the aforementioned law, the Strategy recognizes epidemics of infectious diseases as the leading risk to human life and health, and thus places emphasis on preparedness and response to emergencies and health hazards. The Strategy (2018) prescribes numerous goals in terms of prevention and control of diseases and leading health risks, the most important of which are: the adoption of the Strategy for the Development of Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Systems in the Republic of Serbia; improving epidemiological surveillance; improving the performance of the system for early detection and control of epidemics and support; sustainability of the application of specific measures to combat epidemics and the like. In addition to the Strategy, the areas of protection of the population from infectious diseases, epidemiological surveillance and control, and especially the implementation of protection measures in emergency situations caused by the epidemic of infectious diseases, are specifically regulated by the Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases (2016).

Other relevant regulations governing the jurisdictions and activities of lower levels of government, first of all local self-government, include the Law on Local Self-Government (2007) and the Public Administration Reform Strategy in the Republic of Serbia (2014), i.e. the not yet adopted Decentralization Strategy. Local self-government, defined by law as "the right of citizens to directly and through freely elected representatives manage public affairs of direct, common and general interest to the local population, as well as the right and obligation of local self-government bodies to plan, regulate and manage public affairs that are within their jurisdiction and of interest to the local population ", as one of the main jurisdictions is to take care of the security of all citizens (Zakon o lokalnoj samoupravi, 2007). However, what is noticeable is the fact that the law doesn't clearly specify the responsibilities of LGUs in the context of disaster risk reduction and emergency management, except for generally prescribed obligations regarding the organization of protection against natural and other disasters and fire protection, and other jobs of local importance determined by law. More detailed consideration of the jurisdiction

of LGUs government in the field of emergency management (organization and functioning of civil protection, education of emergency headquarters, preparation of risk assessment and adoption of relevant plans, planning and provision of budget funds, etc.) is regulated by the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management (2018). What is important to point out is that the law prescribes the primary role of LGUs in disaster risk management and gradual use of forces and resources in the event of a state of emergency (Zakon o smanjenju rizika od katastrofa i upravljanju vanrednim situacijama, 2018).

When it comes to the level of local self-government, and having in mind the aspiration of LGUs to achieve a certain degree of independence and material possibilities for practical implementation of original jurisdictions, it is inevitable to refer to the non-existence of Decentralization Strategy. Namely, the Public Administration Reform Strategy in the Republic of Serbia (2014), as one of the key goals, identified the need for further decentralization in order to improve the system of local self-government and more efficient distribution of jurisdictions between individual levels of government. Decentralization, in the broadest sense understood as a process of transferring jurisdictions and finances from the central level to lower levels of government, would enable balanced economic development and quality satisfaction of everyday needs of citizens, where those needs can best be recognized by those closest to citizens (Strategija reforme javne uprave, 2014). Thus, the adoption of the Decentralization Strategy would lay the foundations for building a stable and democratized society, encouraged to involve citizens in the decision-making and implementation process. This is especially necessary in the conditions of disasters, which endanger the life and health of people, and thus make it difficult or, ultimately, impossible to exercise basic rights - political, economic and social, as well as meeting the daily needs of citizens.

The relationship between the strategic level of decision-making and local self-government in a crisis situation

While the process of centralization of power, in order to strengthen the authority of the state, implied the existence of limited rights and jurisdictions of LGUs and the interdependence of national and local decision-making, in the conditions of still unfinished decentralization the trend of limited role of LGUs and significant influence of central authorities is still noticeable. In this way, the relationship between centralization and decentralization of power gave rise to the actual existence of two structures or systems - local (virtual) and national (real), while the third, provincial, could be considered an example in itself. As prominent structures - the state as a whole and LGUs, as it's component, represent complex, nonlinear, dynamic and social systems, consisting of elements that interact to achieve a common goal, their stability is possible only when the inter-relational relations of these structure brought into a state of equilibrium, i.e. a state of absence of animosity and the existence of a certain degree of autonomy and cooperation. However, when it comes to situations of such threats to the security of the entire country, such as the COVID-19 epidemic,

it seems that only one of them represents a real external, autonomous and authoritative system, limited by its own political, economic, social and other interests, as well as resources and capacities. Thus, it seems that the efficiency and effectiveness of LGUs in a crisis situation doesn't depend only on material and staffing conditions, but also on the requirements of the state leadership, as a previously designated system, i.e. regulator, which, in addition to adopting measures in the field of public and social life, sought to successfully organize the activities of each level or entity that implements the prescribed measures (LGUs, health sector, police, military, etc.), without the need to impose requests for by harmonizing the actions with the state, clearly defines the obligations and responsibilities of each of the mentioned entities, and to take on the role of coordinator.

In this context, the differences between the operational and tactical levels are blurred, and there is no horizontal and vertical delegation of responsibilities and obligations. Thus, LGUs, marked as an envious, internal and potentially competitive system, become to some extent limited in the implementation of jurisdictions determined by the normative framework, both those related to the protection of citizens in crisis situations and solving accompanying problems, and those related to LGUs participation in preparation of regulations whose content is of special importance for local self-government, and their right to be informed by the republican authorities about the measures they are taking or intend to take in a specific situation, as well as other issues of immediate interest for the realization of the local self-government system and the work of local self-government bodies and the right to receive professional assistance in relation with the performance of their duties in a crisis situation (Zakon o lokalnoj samoupravi, 2007). Ultimately, the insufficient degree of jurisdictions and authority of local self-government, as a consequence of the autonomy and authority of regulatory structures that provoke a state of discord, has made most of the rights, obligations and decisions on how to exercise them, retained at the national level, without sufficient autonomy to choose their own mechanisms that would enable faster and more efficient resolution of accompanying problems and without the possibility to establish a valid degree of both formal and informal cooperation between central authorities and important institutions and actors at the local level (health, social, economic and educational sector, as well as CSOs).

Contrary to the previously pointed dependence of LGUs on higher management structures, the practice has given rise to bright examples. Some autonomous LGUs in the Republic of Serbia, such as e.g. of the city of Sabac, on their own initiative approached the urgent undertaking of the necessary measures, relying exclusively on their own capacities and mechanisms, which, in the end, resulted in a smaller number of infected people on the territory of the given municipality. Other urban areas, such as Smederevska Palanka or Kikinda, thanks to the work of emergency headquarters, were highlighted as LGUs, which in the first place, before officially adopted measures, started closing public facilities, both service and catering, and thus laid the foundations for further action of their fellow citizens. Thus, it seems that, despite the permanent dependence, as a limiting factor in terms of regulating the situation and processes in a given area, adaptability and effectiveness of LGUs in crisis situations, rests not only on the organization of interactions with ex-

ternal, autonomous and governing systems (central bodies and political structures), but also on adequate and efficient organization and auto-organization of interactions and construction mechanisms for crisis response, within their own local structures.

Local self-government during a state of emergency - a view from a strategic and normative angle

Today LGUs, defined by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006) as municipalities, cities and the city of Belgrade, exists in almost every democratic state. According to Rajović (2003), marked as an expression of the aspiration and right of people to manage the affairs that directly concern them, local self-government exists as a confirmation of people's sovereignty and the degree of development of democratic government, but also as a confirmation of freedom and rights of citizens (Љубоја, 2013). It represents the form and manner of democratic solution of all problems concerning the local community (cities/municipalities/local communities), which are characterized in a state of emergency by a much higher degree of complexity and significance for the inhabitants of those places (Рајовић, 2003). Understanding good governance in LGUs as a dynamic process in response to a crisis situation, on the one hand, is limited by the supremacy of the state, as a governing body, over local self-government, as its inseparable component, while, on the other hand, it is conditioned by the complexity of local self-government system, as well as its competence to regulate interactions and understand the internal dynamics of its own system. Thus, it is best to consider the degree of development of good governance practice in local self-government during the state of emergency through the analysis of interactions in this, previously indicated, dependent, internal and potentially competitive system, considering the fulfillment of normative requirements and real needs on the ground, and thus, noting the benefits, disability, available resources and functional/structural interactions.

Starting from the analysis of normative acts at the national level, first of all, the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management and the Law on Local Self-Government, as well as the National Strategy for Protection and Rescue in Emergencies, the good strategic and normative grounding of the role of local self-government in emergency situations is noticeable, whereby the adequate application of certain regulations and, thus, the efficient realization of their function in practice is often lacking. More precisely, if the analysis of applicability is approached, the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management (2018) prescribes the principles of the primary role of LGUs in disaster risk management, and gradual use of forces and resources from LGUs, in the situation when with the COVID-19 epidemic, contradictory conclusions can be drawn. Namely, the key and primary role of LGUs in the implementation of prescribed measures and thus in preserving the health of citizens, and at the same time in satisfying their basic needs, is indisputable and noticeable. However, the applicability of the outlined principles is called into question, and if the regional specifics and differences in the level of economic development of different LGUs are included in the consideration, the fact that many

local governments do not function as such in the true sense of the word. A large number of LGUs are economically dependent on city budgets, so small municipalities, facing an epidemic that requires the use of special forces and resources, remain deprived of the possibility of practical implementation of original jurisdictions, depending on special population needs and, in the same way, application of given principles. At the same time, the aspiration of the central authorities to implement the above, as well as leaving the local authorities to solve the problems imposed by the crisis situation and the need to act harmonized with the state in many segments, without trying to provide adequate conditions and resources to those municipalities that do not have adequate resources and capacities, prevents their effective operation.

This further leads to the conclusion that some LGUs, with the exception of the city of Sabac and other economically stable and autonomous cities/municipalities, aren't able to fulfill their legally established obligation, in terms of planning and providing budget funds to fight the epidemic. Thus, the question of the lack of funds for financing the emergency management system arises. In the considered context, the problem of job systematization can be noticed, as well as the lack of trained staff in the staffs for emergency situations of local self-government, which is also one of the shortcomings of the former protection and rescue system, recognized by the National Strategy for Protection and Rescue in Emergencies (2011). Emergency headquarters, faced with an epidemic of infectious disease, in order to respond effectively and professionally, should include experts in the field of public health, social policy, public information, police chiefs, civil society organizations and the like, which isn't the case in many smaller municipalities. However, despite this, the effective response of the city/municipal headquarters for emergency situations of many municipalities/cities, such as Smederevska Palanka, Kikinda, Bor, Loznica and many others, cannot be disputed. In terms of possessing appropriate resources and capacities, as well as in terms of staff training, and important for efficient action in a crisis situation, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of innovation of local government, in the context of establishing an efficient public administration system. Namely, some authors emphasize that, in the conditions of the epidemic, municipalities and cities that have implemented the tools of the new public administration that enables administrative work "remotely", much easier to adapt to the new situation, and passed with much smaller consequences (Srbijanović & Gligorijević, 2020).

Considering, the National Strategy for Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situations, defined strategic areas and highlighted goals, other institutional and structural shortcomings are noticeable, as well as examples of good management practice in terms of local self-government response to the COVID-19 epidemic. Thus, it can be pointed out that many LGUs don't have developed program-planning documents that would integrate the goals of the National Strategy and thus enable effective preventive and reactive response of LGUs in various crisis situations, including in a given crisis situation. In addition, there is a lack of functional cooperation between the subjects of the protection and rescue system at the national and local level. Contrary to the lack of coordinated cooperation between national and local level entities, there is a noticeable efficient cooperation between individual

LGUs, as entities of the protection and rescue system, and other relevant entities at the local level (public services, companies and other legal entities, entrepreneurs, civil society organizations, etc.), in the field of resolving issues that are important for the protection of the population, in the first place, the realization of their basic rights and the satisfaction of special needs in the conditions of the epidemic, where the valid distribution of jobs, tasks and other activities of these entities is of great importance. This confirms the thesis that efficient, high-quality and timely satisfaction of the basic needs of citizens (economic, social, health, security, etc.) is possible only in the immediate LGUs, joint efforts of all relevant actors.

We also need to focus on the decentralization of social protection services and their reform towards the local level, which is noticeable by considering strategic and action plans in areas that belong to social protection (Srbljanović & Gligorijević, 2020). Thus, during the state of emergency, those municipalities that had a system of providing social protection to their citizens, which according to the Law on Local Self-Government (2007), falls within the jurisdiction of the LGUs, showed effective action. Among them, the city of Priboj can stand out. Efficiently organized social protection system of this city, performs numerous activities in the field of providing social services to its fellow citizens, starting with: shelters for the care of victims of domestic violence; supported housing for young people who are becoming independent; day center for the elderly; day care for children with disabilities; home help service; foster care; family accommodation for adults and the elderly, etc. (Srbljanović & Gligorijević, 2020). This type of organization of social protection, while publicly prominent and accessible to all, was able to provide support and assistance to all vulnerable and marginalized categories of the population. As a contribution to the effective response of the system of providing social protection services, i.e. the subjects of the protection and rescue system at the local level, they provided databases on human, technical and material resources at the local level, for the needs of crisis management. Although not all LGUs update the databases in a timely manner, and if we look again at Priboj or Loznica, which provided technical (vehicles) and human resources for the needs of the mobile patrol, a coordinated exchange of data between the main actors is noticeable. This enables the use of resources in terms of meeting the basic needs of the population, especially when it comes to housing and supply of vulnerable and marginalized categories of the population, which requires the possession of adequate space for accommodation, vehicles, other technical means, people and other relevant resources.

Also, when it comes to vulnerable and marginalized categories of the population, the National Strategy (2011), as well as the Law on Local Self-Government (2007), prescribes the obligation of LGUs, and in terms of protection of human and minority rights, i.e. protection opportunities available to all (children, the elderly and people with disabilities), and in terms of informing the population about the risks of disasters. Thus, due to the state of emergency declared due to the COVID-19 epidemic, local governments were notified by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, which states that “in order/due to the necessity for the adopted measures in the fight against the epidemic to be available to the entire population, it is necessary to ensure that measures and announcements addressed to citi-

zens are available, i.e. published in the languages of national minorities in official use in the local self-government unit” (Obaveštenje jedinicama lokalne samouprave o izveštavanju tokom vanrednog stanja i na jezicima nacionalnih manjina, 2020).

The media provide citizens with information and analysis, facilitate communication within society and to a significant extent enable self-government (Bjelajac & Filipović, 2018: 13). However, considering the available media of the LGUs (local news, press and newspaper portals), it is noticeable that the consistent application of the sent invitation/notification was missing. On the other hand, the existence of timely and valid informing of the population by the local media about the situation on the territory of individual LGUs, as well as about the situation at the national level, is noticeable.

Furthermore, when it comes to the protection of previously prominent categories of the population, following the decisions of national institutions and public companies, it is also recommended to postpone the payment of obligations and duties for which the local government is responsible (environmental, utility and other taxes, property taxes and etc.), to the extent possible, as well as delaying the payment of bills to local public companies (water supply, info station, municipal waste disposal services, etc.), for persons older than 65 who are in a disadvantaged financial position, unemployed persons and socially endangered citizens (Srbijanović & Gligorijević, 2020). Accordingly, the moratorium on accounts in LGUs is provided to the above categories of persons, while the moratorium on loans by banks is provided to all citizens, without restrictions. Among the municipalities, Mali Zvornik stood out, which prescribed the obligation of the municipal settlement of the population's bills for water and communal waste.

It is necessary to refer to the legally prescribed obligation of LGUs in terms of guaranteeing safety, as well as providing health care to all categories of the population (Zakon o lokalnoj samoupravi, 2007). Many local governments, in order to ensure the above, have used, to the greatest extent, the possibilities of the primary level of health care. Health care in some cities (Sabac, Loznica, Leskovac, Pirot, etc.) was well organized, and triage centers were formed in each of these cities, which adequately implemented the legal obligation in practice. In that way, adequate isolation of persons who aren't infected with the COVID-19 virus, and who require other types of health care, is enabled. Also, some cities, using their own capacities, in order to provide accommodation and adequate care for infected people, have formed temporary Covid hospitals.

On the other hand, speaking about the safety of the population, and in particular, implying control and supervision over the implementation of prescribed measures by the competent bodies of LGUs and thus the protection of all citizens, as limiting in many environments, there are socio-structural factors and, among other things, the mentality of the population, which is heterogeneously (culturally) different in rural areas. Many municipalities were faced with the problem of adequate organization, implementation or control of population activities. The cultural factor, common trends in living and behavior in certain areas, citing the example of Novi Pazar, resulted in the need for daily contact with fellow citizens, and thus a greater

degree of violation of prescribed measures and, ultimately, less internal control and increased number of infected people.

The role of civil society organizations

The circumstances in which, due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the Republic of Serbia found itself, require not only an urgent reaction of official institutions, i.e. local government bodies, health and social services, but also a general social response, in terms of engaging numerous civil society organizations. Namely, the issue of competences of LGUs and CSOs can first be viewed from the normative aspect - through defining the scope of work of CSOs, which, according to the Law on Associations (2009) are defined as voluntary, non-profit, non-governmental organizations, primarily dealing with social services, culture, media and similar issues, and according to the competencies of local self-government (*Zakon o lokalnoj samoupravi*, 2007), and in terms of establishing associations, as well as cooperation with non-governmental, humanitarian and other organizations, in order to achieve the interests of local self-government and residents. Therefore, the role of local self-government and CSOs should not be seen as conflicting issues, but as strongly connected partners, especially in the context of crisis response such as this, which, regardless of national, regional or global character, have a pronounced local dimension (Todić, Ignjatić, Katić & Plavšić, 2012: 14). Therefore, the implementation of various activities in specific conditions is associated with numerous circumstances, as well as processes and the situation in society within local self-government, and determined, first of all, by cultural factors, and thus a specific way of manifesting various problems at the local level of all key actors (Todić, Ignjatić, Katić & Plavšić, 2012).

In the past, the civil sector played a significant role in providing international humanitarian assistance in wartime conditions, while today the daily changes in the nature of the threats have posed different challenges to civil society. Thus, the epidemic imposed the need for wider involvement of the civil sector in adapting the population to the changed living circumstances, demanding the provision of a different range of services. The importance of the civil sector, in this particular situation, could be seen in the implementation of preventive activities and health protection, as well as in terms of prevention and protection of mental health, improving quality of life (delivery of basic necessities, providing social security, paying bills and providing other forms of assistance) elderly people, and other vulnerable categories of the population (single mothers, people with disabilities, residents of informal settlements, etc.). Thus, some cities hired volunteers, and opened Operational Call Centers, in the work of which, in addition to volunteers, pedagogues and psychologists were also involved. Also, databases and other relevant resources of the Social Welfare Center and the Red Cross were mostly used. Thus, the existence of adequate conditions provided by the local self - government is noticeable, and improved and efficient horizontal and vertical coordination and supervision have been established, as well as operational cooperation between all relevant entities (authorities, public

institutions, Red Cross, various associations - CSOs, etc.), which is also one of the postulates indicated by the National Strategy for Protection and Rescue in Emergencies (2011).

The role of the business sector

In addition to the important role of civil society organizations, and having in mind the nature of the threat and so, the necessity of joint and urgent reaction of all relevant actors who can contribute to the fight against the epidemic, it is necessary to emphasize the role of the business sector. Namely, the business sector, on the one hand, represents one of the most important links in the chain of protection of citizens in a certain territory, while, on the other hand, it represents the weakest link in the system, which is mostly exposed to the negative effects of the epidemic. In the first, the active participation of business entities, as, at the same time, the subjects of the protection and rescue system, in providing support to LGUs (material, technical, etc.), for the purpose of protection and satisfaction of basic needs of the population, is noticeable. Also, the continuation of the work of local business entities in those activities in which the regulations enabled it, including the possession of adequate conditions and capacities by the above, as well as the continuity of payment of local taxes, although regulations abolished during the state of emergency, reduced pressure on LGUs, and the inflow of funds into local budgets was enabled, thus contributing to the economic stability of the LGUs.

Regarding the prominent exposure of economic entities to the negative effects of the epidemic, they faced a number of difficulties. First, many business entities were faced with the problem of collection and liquidity provision, while, on the other hand, some were faced with issues of reorganization of work in the new circumstances. In this regard, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government passed the Decree on the organization of work of employers during the state of emergency (2020), which specifies that employers are obliged to enable employees to perform work outside the employer's premises at all workplaces where this is possible, while in cases where it is not possible to organize work in this way, there is an obligation to harmonize operations with emergency conditions. Thus, numerous business entities, which weren't able to organize work from home, and were forced to suspend it due to the adopted regulations, faced financial losses. The decline in revenue varied across business sectors. The sectors of tourism and catering, traffic and transport, environmental protection and agriculture, as the most endangered, suffered the largest decrease in income (NALED, 2020). In the agricultural sector, the closure of green markets during most of the state of emergency was a major blow to agricultural holdings, especially to individual agricultural producers (Srbijanović & Gligorijević, 2020).

In this segment, in addition to the adopted *Decree on fiscal benefits and direct benefits to business entities in the private sector and financial assistance to citizens* and the *Decree on determining the program of financial support to business entities for maintaining liquidity and working capital in difficult economic conditions*, by the

Government of Serbia, the challenges of local economic development and the legally prescribed obligations of LGUs come to the fore. Namely, LGUs, according to the Law on Local Self-Government (2007), have a prescribed obligation in terms of providing support to small and medium enterprises, which are especially necessary in epidemic conditions: care for the development and improvement of tourism, crafts, catering and trade; adoption and implementation of programs to encourage local economic development, undertaking activities to maintain existing and attract new investments and improve general business conditions. Consideration of the fulfillment of the indicated legal obligations is difficult to approach due to the reasons still, at least not to a sufficient extent, of the obvious economic consequences of the current crisis situation and such prominent planned programs of local development and support.

Conclusion

The current COVID-19 epidemic has made obvious the shortcomings of the institutional, i.e. structural and strategic-normative framework, both in the field of disaster risk reduction and emergency management, and in the field of local self-government and public health. First of all, the necessity of revising the National Strategy for Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situations, and the adoption of the Decentralization Strategy and the Strategy for the Development of Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Systems in the Republic of Serbia, envisaged by the Public Health Strategy. If we turn our attention to the level of local self-government, the still unadopted Decentralization Strategy is a limiting factor in terms of the autonomous operation of local self-government. However, during the state of emergency, the importance of local self-government could be noticed, which, although limited in unfinished decentralization and marked shortcomings, acted in the direction of adequate organization and self-organization of interactions and building mechanisms for response within their own local structures.

However, having in mind the identified shortcomings, it is necessary to give recommendations in order to eliminate them, and highlight the need to build a strong institutional and strategic-normative framework that will be able to provide an effective response to many challenges, risks and threats that our country may face in future. This can be achieved by a comprehensive analysis of all significant segments, hereinafter indicated, which may result in the development of a relevant document, which would provide guidelines for further modification, or building an adequate framework that would contribute to eliminating the identified shortcomings. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the response of local self-government and the state in a crisis situation can be proposed, in relation to existing regulations, in order to identify advantages, disadvantages, available resources, as well as regional, economic and other specifics that affect the actions of these actors, and, in that way, tests the applicability of the provisions of certain regulations in practice. In this context, an analysis of institutions at the local level and their competencies can be proposed, which would enable efficient cooperation and coordination of entities at the

local level in crisis situations. It would be important to start developing a strategy for prevention, preparedness and response of the health sector in similar crises, at the local level.

The above is all the more significant if we consider that the state as a whole, local self-government as its inseparable component and society as a common element of the first two, form a hypercomplex, nonlinear, dynamic and open social system. Their functioning and development is accompanied by a large number of problems, i.e. challenges, risks and threats which, in the absence of preventive or timely and effective reactive action, can endanger the development and survival of the system (Keković, Savić, Komazec, Milošević & Jovanović, 2011: 15). The basis for such a reaction and response to the above and similar crisis situations, is precisely the analysis of prominent issues and understanding of the risks and internal dynamics of the designated systems. Thus, dealing with extreme risks, and understanding the behavior of these systems, understanding and discovering shortcomings and principles of organization, is the basis for preventing strategic surprises, and establishing a new and improving the existing framework, by including, based on analysis, decisions made regarding risk management.

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ЛОКАЛНА САМОУПРАВА У ВРЕМЕ ВАНРЕДНОГ СТАЊА ПРОГЛАШЕНОГ УСЛЕД ЕПИДЕМИЈЕ COVID-19

Сажетак: У условима „галопирајуће“ глобалне пандемије COVID-19, те ванредног стања проглашеног услед исте у Републици Србији, могао се уочити значај локалних самоуправа у погледу креирања безбедног окружења за живот и рад људи. Иако у свом поступању ограничене недовршеном децентрализацијом и бројним структуралним, односно институционалним и нормативним мањкавостима, ЈЛС деловале су у правцу адекватне организације и ауто-организације интеракција и изградње механизма за реаговање унутар властитих локалних структура. Како би се стекао детаљан увид у претходно назначено, овим радом је, пре свега, дат приказ и анализа релевантног стратешко-нормативног оквира како у области смањења ризика од катастрофа и управљања ванредним ситуацијама, тако и у области јавног здравља и деловања локалне самоуправе. Потом је, погледом из угла стратешко-нормативног оквира, разматрајући практичну примењивост појединих одредби у кризној ситуацији, те односа стратешког нивоа одлучивања и нивоа локалне самоуправе, приступљено критичкој анализи деловања ЈЛС, истичући посебно улогу организација цивилног друштва и привредног сектора за време трајања ванредног стања. На тај начин указано је на уочене мањкавости и примере праксе доброг управљања.

Кључне речи: јединице локалне самоуправе, COVID-19, ванредно стање, организације цивилног друштва, привредни сектор

