



Photo: Jelena Pljonkina 2012

Introduction

For many Estonians, as well as for international experts interested in the country, the name Sulev Mäeltsemees is practically synonymous with Local Self-Government in Estonia. This is his calling, his vocation and his life-career. He has seen the Estonian city through the last years of Soviet rule, and he re-established the concept of Municipal Autonomy after the regaining of Estonian independence. Literally so: The respective provisions in the Constitution were authored by him. Between 1990 and 1993, he was Chairman of the Expert Committee for Administrative Reform of the Presidium of the Supreme Council (since 1992 Government) of the Republic of Estonia, and in 1992-1993 expert for Local Self-Government to the Constitutional Assembly.

Since then, Municipal Autonomy has had a tough stance in Estonia, partially for political reasons (in party choice and ethnicity municipalities would not always line up with the interests of the central government of the day), partially for ideological ones – the *fata morgana* of automatic efficiency gains through (forced) municipal amalgamation fit well with the neo-liberal outlook of many a ministry and minister and even president, empirical evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. It often was Sulev Mäeltsemees, with his background not only in Local Government and public administration, but also in law and in economics, who could and did set the record straight in innumerable lectures, trainings, publications and advisory opinions, but also from inside the public sector. For many years he was a member of the Commission of State Administration and Local Self-Government of the President of the Republic's Academic Council, and in the late 1990s, he also served stints as advisor (a formal position in Estonia) to the Minister of Regional Affairs and to the Legal Chancellor.

But the one city which is Sulev's own city is Tallinn, the old Reval; one of the proudest, richest, and today still most beautiful, Hanseatic towns, then and now international and dynamic, contested and trail-blazing. First and foremost, Tallinn owes him for his 1992-1993 Chairmanship of the City Council, a truly historical, indeed centuries-old key position that he ably executed during crucial times. From 1989 to 1996, he was a member of the Council, and from 1993 to 1999, also one of the Tallinn Central District Administrative Council, serving as Chairman between 1993 and 1996. He later continued as a member of the city's Council of Vision.

Among Sulev's many honors and awards are the Officer's Cross of the Order of the White Star, Estonia's main order of honor for services to the nation (2002), and

the Medal of Honor of the Citizenship and Migration Board of the Ministry of the Interior (2005), as well as – appropriately enough – many Local Government awards, such as the Gold Medal of the Association of Municipalities (2011), the Medal of Honor of the City Tallinn (2007), and the Honorary Award of the Estonian Association of Cities (2005).

And yet, first and foremost, Sulev Mäeltsemees is an academic – someone who beautifully (and, one could say, necessarily) combined public service and scholarship, to be sure. But at the end of 2016, Professor Dr. Sulev Mäeltsemees will retire from his positions both as Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Tallinn University of Technology (TUT) and as Chair of Local Self-Government and Regional Policy at the Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance within that faculty. It is no exaggeration to say that with this, an era comes to an end – Sulev “created” both positions by serving in them from the beginning. The Faculty of Social Sciences was founded in 2008, but he already was the dean of its predecessor, the Faculty of Humanities, between 2004 and 2008. Somewhat appropriately, the faculty will cease to exist institutionally as well, as it will be merged (along some former but still powerful trends in higher education) with the economics faculty in 2017. Much of the success of that faculty, as regards both output in teaching, degrees, research and projects, but also concerning the collegial and friendly atmosphere in what was quite a heterogeneous combination of units already, can be credited to his wise, steady and level-headed steward- and leadership. Between 2001 and 2015, Sulev was also Speaker of the University Council of TUT and thus one of the senior leaders; the representative of those actually engaged in teaching and research, of the entire university.

Born in 1947, Sulev studied at the University of Tartu, graduating in 1970 as an economic geographer (*cum laude*) and receiving, in 1975, a doctorate with a thesis entitled *Analysis and Prognosis of the Regional Development of the Service Industry*, which already set the path for his future career. In line with the background and context of Local Self-Government in Estonia, which both today and traditionally is more based on the German system than any other, he has spent formative times at leading German institutions dealing with this topic: In 1983, a year at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main; twenty years later, a shorter period at the Universität Osnabrück with Professor Jörn Ipsen and at the Deutsche Universität für Verwaltungswissenschaften Speyer with Professor Hans-Herbert von Arnim (with whom I co-incidentally studied Municipal Finance in 1989, as well). A reflective memoir of these times is included at the end of the volume because of its general as well as biographical interest.

Professor Mäeltsemees started his work at the Academy of Sciences in Tallinn; between 1978 and 1986, he already served at TUT (then Tallinn Technical Institute) in the Faculty of Economics as the Head of the Chair of Service Economy. Afterwards he rejoined the Academy, specifically the Institute of Economics, where he was Research Director from 1990 to 1992. Between 1993 and 1997, in the “heavy phase of transition”, Sulev led as Rector the Estonian Institute of Public Administration, the central training institution for the civil service, which has also vanished in the wake of the 1990s outsourcing reforms. Internationally, Professor Mäeltsemees has been, since 1998, the Estonian Expert (since 2011 substitute member) of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Authorities of the Congress

of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRAE) of the Council of Europe; between 2002 and 2014, he was a member of DEXIA's European Network of Experts.

On occasion of his retirement, *Sulev Mäeltsemees: Municipal Autonomy in Context* is a special issue of *Administrative Culture* that comprises some of the highlights among the author's publications. The articles offered here are all single-authored, except one, and since – in spite of their importance – they were never published in monographic form (even if this may be a format that is fading away), to combine and present them here, in Sulev's "house journal" seemed both very appropriate and also advised.

The first one, "Local Self-Government in Estonia", is a definitive account of its, and Sulev's central, topic; published in a survey volume by the Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública (INAP) Madrid in 2011, it is his internationally most cited work. "Die Entwicklung der Verwaltungsreform in Estland in den Jahren 1989-2016" takes the historical perspective from the beginning of the regaining of Municipal Autonomy in Estonia during the collapse of the Soviet Union until today. (In Estonian discourse, "administrative reform" is often used synonymously with "territorial" or "municipal unit reform".) *Dieser Aufsatz wurde, wie der fünfte Beitrag, auf Deutsch verfaßt und reflektiert so Professor Mäeltsemees' wissenschaftlichen modus operandi*; it is also his most recent work. The co-authored essay – with Professor Ülle Madise and Dr. Priit Vinkel, both PhD's from the Nurkse School – "Dimensions of Administrative Culture in Estonia", which appeared in *The European Dimension of Administrative Culture* in 2008, next to its overall interest in our context, ideally fits the name and mission of this journal and adds yet another dimension to our topic.

Having focused on capital cities generally, of which Tallinn is a prime example, and having organized important international conferences and delivered academic papers about the topic, the fourth essay, from a NISPAcee publication, looks comparatively at those cities in the former "second world": "The Capital City in the Local Self-government System in Central and Eastern European and Caucasus Countries" of 2010. The final essay, the memoir of Sulev's time as a visiting scholar in Germany from the perspective of last year, is not only an interesting account from an academic perspective, but, as befits such a publication as the present one, it also adds a "human element" and gets the reader closer to Sulev Mäeltsemees the scholar and the person.

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Municipal Autonomy is still debated in Estonia, both in the political arena and academically – often based on the old clichés of size and efficiency and without any empirical basis. So, the voice of Sulev Mäeltsemees cannot be missed, and we are sure it will not be, as this is, as we said, his profession as well as his calling. Institutionally, the team that was assembled and that developed under his Deanship, especially at his own department, the Ragnar Nurkse School, to one of the three leading ones in the former "Second World", will remain a memorial to his dedication and leadership. And if one needs a memorial to his services for the city and for his city, standing on Tallinn Town Hall Square and looking around will remind one of the centrality, today as much as ever, of the citizen's life within a real, autonomous city.

Wolfgang Drechsler