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QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN SLOVAK PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SECTOR

УПРАВЉАЊЕ КВАЛИТЕТОМ У СЕКТОРУ ЈАВНЕ УПРАВЕ У СЛОВАЧКОЈ

Summary: *Public administration in the Slovak Republic has been coordinated through several quality management policies aimed at increasing the efficiency of public services. The Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing, as a central authority of the state administration, acts as the coordinator of the national quality policy. The aim of this paper is to analyse the development of the National Quality Programmes of the Slovak Republic, adopted on the basis of the European Policy for the Promotion of Quality (1994), across individual years since 2004, which marked Slovakia's accession to the European Union. The analysis shows that the overall results of the National Quality Programmes indicate a clear developmental trend towards the professionalisation and institutionalisation of quality management in public administration in the Slovak Republic. A comparison of individual periods demonstrates that quality management has gradually shifted from a focus on formal compliance with standards towards strategic integrated management, measurable performance, and the creation of public value. This represents a fundamental change in the understanding of the role of quality management within the public administration sector. An analysis of the results of the National Award of the Slovak Republic for Quality and Social Responsibility for 2024 shows that, within Slovak public administration, the City of Nitra and the Self-Governing Region of Žilina received awards. A comparison of entities participating in the competition during the previous evaluated period led to the conclusion that the following public administration institutions were repeatedly awarded for quality and social responsibility: the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic (twice), the Bratislava–Petržalka City District (three times), the University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Košice (three times), and Trnava University in Trnava (twice).*
Keywords: *public administration, state policy of quality, National Award of the Slovak Republic for Quality and Social Responsibility, competition*
JEL Classification: *L15*

Резиме: *Јавна управа у Словачкој Републици координисана је кроз више политика управљања квалитетом усмјерених на повећање ефикасности јавних услуга. Словачки завод за стандардизацију, метрологију и испитивање, као централни орган државне управе, дјелује као координатор националне политике квалитета. Циљ овог рада је анализа развоја Националних програма квалитета Словачке Републике, усвојених на основу Европске политике за промоцију квалитета (1994),кроз појединачне године од 2004. године, која је обиљежила приступање Словачке Европској унији. Анализа показује да укупни резултати Националних програма квалитета указују на јасан развојни тренд ка професионализацији и институционализацији управљања квалитетом у јавној управи у Словачкој Републици. Поређење појединачних периода показује да се управљање квалитетом постепено помјерало са фокуса на формално испуњавање стандарда ка стратешком, интегрисаном управљању, мјерљивим перформансама и стварању јавне вриједности. Ово представља суштинску промјену у разумијевању улоге управљања квалитетом у сектору јавне управе. Анализа резултата Националне награде Словачке Републике за квалитет и друштвену одговорност за 2024. годину показује да су у оквиру словачке јавне управе награде добили Град Нитра и Жилински самоуправни крај. Поређење субјеката који су учествовали у такмичењу током претходног евалуираног периода довело је до закључка да су сљедеће институције јавне управе више пута награђиване за квалитет и друштвену одговорност: Министарство одбране Словачке Републике (два пута), градска општина Братислава–Петржалка (три пута), Универзитет ветеринарске медицине и фармације у Кошицама (три пута) и Универзитет у Трнави (два пута).*
Кључне ријечи: *јавна управа, државна политика квалитета, Национална награда Словачке Републике за квалитет и друштвену одговорност, такмичење*
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INTRODUCTION

At its meeting on 13 November 2023, the newly appointed Government of the Slovak Republic adopted Resolution No. 590/2023 entitled *Programme Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic for 2023–2027: Living Better, More Peacefully and More Securely*. Section 4 of the Programme Statement "*Strengthening the Role of the Democratic State"*. This programme emphasises that effective public administration is essential for ensuring services for citizens, the smooth functioning of businesses and public institutions, as well as for fostering citizens' satisfaction with and pride in their state. In this area, it is necessary to build on positive examples from the past, such as the initiated reform of *Efficient, Reliable and Open Public Administration* , as well as on the strong potential of the Slovak Republic. In particular it relates to its dynamic domestic digital sector, whose further development may also be supported through cooperation with public administration.Periodic reviews of specific policies can provide more in-depth analyses of performance and help assess the continued relevance of individual policies. In addition, monitoring and evaluation enhance transparency and contribute to strengthening the accountability relationship between governments and citizens, thereby helping to build trust (OECD 2014).According to the *Programme Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic for 2023–2027* (PSGSR), the development of effective public administration will be based on three pillars: (1) active monitoring of communication between citizens and the state, structured around citizens' life situations; (2) effective digitalisation of the public sphere; and (3) reorganisation of public administration with the aim of increasing its efficiency and transparency (PSGSR 2021).

The reform process of public administration in the SR began in 1990 and focused primarily on decentralisation, administrative reform, and the reform of the territorial and administrative organisation of the state. The main objective of this reform was to improve the quality of services provided to citizens, to shift from a model of "management" to one of "care", and to transfer greater competences to local governments.

Complex reforms that cut across ministerial silos must strike an appropriate balance between centralisation and flexibility. Achieving such a balance requires careful consideration of the roles and responsibilities assigned to the Government Office (OECD 2014).

In line with public administration reforms aimed at improving quality and efficiency, the SR introduced the *National Award of the Slovak Republic for Quality* in 2004, targeting both public administration bodies and enterprises within the national economy.

1.THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

One of the conditions for the accession of the Slovak Republic (SR) to the European Union (EU) was the implementation of the document adopted by the Council of Ministers of the EU entitled the *European Policy for the Promotion of Quality* (1994). The European Commission required each EU Member State to develop national quality programmes. By Government Resolution No. 177/1995, the *Main Directions of Quality Policy for 1995–1997* were adopted, prepared in accordance with the EU framework and the recommendations of EU experts in the field of quality policy. Subsequently, Government Resolution No. 900 of 24 September 2003 approved a new *National Quality Programme of the Slovak Republic for 2004–2008*. The objective of the National Quality Programme was to serve as a government-approved framework of intentions and objectives. As well as methods and instruments influencing the quality and level of services, activities and products within the national economy and public administration. The aim was improving conditions for the entry of

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Slovak entities into the EU single market and enhancing their competitiveness in European and global markets (National Quality Programme of the Slovak Republic 2024).

In Slovakia, the process of public administration reform, its subsequent modernisation, and accession to the European Union are primarily associated with the need to enhance the quality of self-government performance and improve the delivery of public services (Bandlerová 2025). Quality management systems are becoming increasingly important not only for private enterprises but also for public administration at all levels, with particular emphasis on local self-government (Kollárová and Tománková 2012).

Despite the decentralisation process, which transferred competences previously exercised by the state to municipalities and cities, local self-government in Slovakia remains highly fragmented. This is reflected in the high number of municipalities—currently 2,927 in the Slovak Republic (Bačík 2022). By contrast, many countries, particularly Scandinavian ones, have reduced the number of municipalities through public administration reforms. For example, as noted by Lidström and Madell (2021), local government in Sweden consists of two tiers: 290 municipalities and 21 regions, each corresponding to a county. A comparable reform of self-government has not yet been implemented in the SR.With regard to self-government, reforms have aimed at establishing more autonomous local and regional authorities. However, a major challenge remains the extreme fragmentation at the municipal level—nearly 3,000 municipalities nationwide, most of them with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. Numerous studies confirm that amalgamation, or at least functional amalgamation, is necessary; nevertheless, there is currently no political will to initiate such a process (Nemec 2018).

Quality represents an important dimension of the overall management of any contemporary organisation and society, including public institutions and local public administration authorities (Bălăneasa 2020).

2.OBJECTIVES, MATERIAL, AND METHODS

Objectives of this paper focus on the quality policy of public administration in the SR for successive periods since 2004, namely 2004–2008, 2009–2012, 2013–2016, 2017–2021, and 2022–2026. Individual National Quality Programmes, prepared by the Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing (SOSMT) across the respective time periods were compared.

This paper hypothesizes that self-government administrative units are more likely to receive repeated recognition within the National Award of the Slovak Republic for Quality and Social Responsibility.

Using analytical methods, the study identifies the principles of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) model, which is applied primarily by public administration institutions to improve their quality management practices. The article draws on the findings and perspectives of both international and domestic authors who address quality management in public administration, including Bălăneasa, Nemec, Bandlerová, Baschung and others.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The issue of evaluating quality management in public administration, illustrated through the example of public administration entities participating in the competition for the *National Award of the Slovak Republic for Quality and Social Responsibility*, is cross-cutting, as it extends into public policy, management, and economics. The creators and key actors in

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this process are not only the state or municipalities, but also other stakeholders. Enhancing the quality of public administration management to increase efficiency, improve citizen orientation, and reduce bureaucracy is consistent with the modern concept of New Public Management (NPM). The NPM concept places particular emphasis on improving efficiency through the application of management models that were until recently predominantly used in the private sector. The results of the comparative analysis of the National Quality Programmes of the Slovak Republic for the period 2004–2026 indicate a gradual transformation of quality management in public administration from a fragmented approach towards an integrated system. This development is illustrated in *Table 1*, which summarises the main characteristics of the individual periods and enables the identification of dominant trends in strategic orientation, standardisation, indicators, digitalisation, and citizen orientation. During the initial period from 2004 to 2008, quality in public administration was perceived primarily as formal compliance with standards. Slovakia sought to approximate the basic operational level of public institutions in line with EU requirements. As shown in *Table 1*, the strategic orientation was process-based and normative, while process standardisation reached only a low to medium level. The introduction of quality management tools occurred in isolation, which was reflected in minimal emphasis on measurable indicators and a declarative orientation towards citizens. Although the documents emphasised the need to increase citizen satisfaction, mechanisms for its measurement were lacking. Quality management in accordance with the ISO 9001 standard was voluntary and depended on individual initiative. In parallel, the CAF model began to be introduced in the form of projects and self-assessments. Individual institutions proceeded independently, resulting in a high degree of heterogeneity. Digitalisation did not constitute a systematic element of quality management during this period but developed separately, while the electronic transformation of public administration remained at an early stage (National Concept od Public Administration and Informatization, 2008). Based on the analytical findings, the period from 2009 to 2012 can be characterised by a shift towards a more coordinated approach through the Council of the National Quality Programme of the Slovak Republic and enhanced inter-ministerial cooperation. As indicated in *Table 1*, greater emphasis was placed on indicators, scoring systems, and feedback mechanisms. Instruments such as the CAF model and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model were introduced, alongside competitions including the National Award of the Slovak Republic for Quality, Top Quality Managers, and the Award for Publicistic Contribution, as well as training programmes and conferences. This shift signals a transition from formal compliance to performance evaluation. At the same time, the level of digitalisation increased moderately through the implementation of information systems and electronic services. Underestimation of the benefits of e-services, skepticism and risk aversion, or general rejection of ICT adoption can lead to persistence. Governments that are already delivering services effectively may not perceive the necessity for e-services (Marienfeldt 2021). Citizen orientation acquired more concrete content through improved service accessibility, satisfaction surveys, and impact assessments (Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing, 2008).

The analysis of the period from 2013 to 2016 indicates a further qualitative change in the approach to quality management. The model evolved into an integrated system including dimensions of corporate social responsibility (CSR), environmental management, and sustainability. This development was reflected in a high degree of process standardisation and stable use of indicators. As shown in *Table 1*, the range of applied instruments was extended to include international cooperation and the Quality Charter of the Slovak Republic. Processes achieved a high level of standardisation due to interdepartmental coordination, the integration of standards, and auditing. Digitalisation reached a medium to high level and was linked to the quality of public services. Citizen orientation was strengthened and moved beyond

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satisfaction measurement towards a broader understanding of quality encompassing safety and environmental aspects (Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2012).

The period from 2017 to 2021 further deepened the preceding strategies, with an emphasis on continuous improvement, stakeholder participation, and benchmarking. *Table 1* documents the expansion of quality instruments to include the Weekly Managerial Control System (WMCS) and the National Award of the Slovak Republic for Social Responsibility. Additional electronic training programmes and international partnerships were also introduced. The emphasis on measurable indicators was particularly strong, with performance measurement, benchmarking, regular feedback applied at all levels. Compared with previous periods, citizen orientation was more pronounced, as participatory mechanisms and links to social responsibility and environmental aspects were strenghtened. This development indicates a shift from perceiving quality as an internal tool towards understanding it as a public value (Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2016). The *National Quality Programme of the Slovak Republic for 2022–2026* (2021) builds on these trends and represents a phase of integration of quality management, social responsibility, and digital transformation. As shown in *Table 1*, all criteria reach a high level. The Programme continues to apply existing instruments while introducing new ones, such as the ZET model (Responsible-Efficient-Transparent), the CAF Centre, and international partnerships. In this period, quality management is conceptualised as a comprehensive system based on external evaluations, action plans, and benchmarking. Digitalisation becomes a cross-cutting element, and citizen orientation is understood as a multidimensional concept. However, this is an ongoing period, and its full impacts can only be assessed ex post.

Table 1: Comparative analysis of the National Quality Programmes of the Slovak Republic, 2004-2026

Period	Strategic orientation of quality	Tools	Citizen orientation
2004-2008	Process-based, normative	ISO 9001, pilot implementation of the CAF model	Largely declarative
2009-2012	Strategically oriented	Systematic use of the CAF and EFQM models, competitions, training, conferences	Satisfaction surveys, feedback
2013-2016	Integrated, oriented towards social responsibility	Extension to include the Quality Charter of the Slovak Republic, international partnerships	Education, awareness-raising, service quality, safety and environmental aspects
2017-2021	Orientation towards continuos improvement	Introduction of TQM, benchmarking and e-learning, international partnerships	Stakeholder involvement, participatory process, service accessibility
2022-2026	Integrated and digital	Introduction of the ZET model, CAF Centre	Citizen as a client of public administration understood in a multidimensional context

Source: Autohors‘ own elaboration based on National Quality Programmes of the years 2004-2008, 2009-2012; 2013-2016; 2017-2021; 2022-2026

Overall, the results demonstrate a clear developmental trend towards the professionalisation and institutionalisation of quality management in public administration in the Slovak Republic. Quality has gradually shifted from formal compliance with standards towards strategic integrated management and measurable performance. This represents a fundamental change in the understanding of quality management within the public administration sector.

3.1. National award of the Slovak Republicf quality and social responsibility

The Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing, as the coordinator of the state quality policy, organises the *National Award of the Slovak Republic for Quality and Social Responsibility* (Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2022). In the SR, the competition has a long-standing tradition and represents a key activity of the *National Quality Programme*. The mission is to involve the public administration organisations and private entities in the application of management methods that contribute to increasing efficiency and performance and, consequently, to improving the quality of life of citizens. As the only competition of its kind in the SR, it offers organisations the opportunity to highlight strengths, assess performance and confirm organisational excellence (Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2021). The competition is intended for organisations with legal personality registered in the Slovak Republic, as well as for organisational units with legal personality. Upon submission of a binding application, applicants are classified into categories according to employees and the focus activities (National Award of the Slovak Republic for Quality and Social Responsibility 2024).

The competition comprises two categories: *Quality* and *Social Responsibility*. Within the *Quality* category, the competition is based on the principles of excellence of the CAF model and on ISO 9000 and ISO 9001 standards. These reflect organisational results, including customer and employee satisfaction, societal benefits, and performance outcomes. The application leads organisations to achieve outstanding financial and non-financial results.

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a modified version of the EFQM model that was developed for the public sector (Baschung 2023). It represents the European quality management tool adapted to the needs of public administration organisations. The CAF addresses all aspects of organisational excellence and supports continuous improvement. The CAF self-assessment tool helps identify improvements, weaknesses and new ideas for management practices (Buday 2014). The CAF model is based on the assumption that excellent results are achieved through leadership, strategy and process management. The new CAF 2020 model represents the fifth revised version, updated to respond to development in digitalisation, sustainability, and diversity. High-quality public administration is evaluated based in its impact on quality of life. The purpose of the CAF model is to guide public organisations towards the best possible results. To date, more than 4,000 organisations have implemented the model, demonstrating effectiveness. International partnerships have been strengthened through European-level meetings and experience exchange. Tools such as CAF Education and CAF Excellence Recognition support systematic quality improvement (The Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2026a).

The Award has been operating since 2000 as a tool for evaluating and stimulating quality. Its development corresponds to the stages of implementation of the National Quality Programmes. During 2004-2008, the competition was dominated mainly by manufacturing organisations applying ISO 9001 and the EFQM model, while the CAF model in public administration remained at a pilot stage. The competition served as a stimulative tool for identifying processes and indicators. From 2009 to 2012, evaluation became more systematised through the EFQM and CAF models, enabling benchmarking and supporting process improvement. The period 2013-2016 marked a shift towards integrated evaluation with emphasis on social responsibility, including environmental and social dimensions.

From 2017 to 2021, tools such as Weekly Managerial Control System (WMCS), international benchmarking, and e-learning analytical evaluation and innovative practices. In 2022-2024, evaluation processes were fully digitalised, with the application of the ZET model, CAF Centres and ESG principles, enabling multi-perspective evaluation across key dimensions.

Table 2: Analysis of the National Quality and Social Responsibility Award of the Slovak Republic (2004–2026)

Period	Dominant types of awarded organizations	Predominant evaluation model	Nature of the competition and main trends
2004-2008	Private manufacturing enterprises, first public institutions	EFQM, pilot use of CAF	Focus on process management, implementation of ISO 9001, basic principles of quality management
2009-2012	Private sector with a growing representation of public administration	CAF, EFQM	Systematic performance assessment, benchmarking, measurable indicators
2013-2016	Public sector (cities, universities, institutions)	CAF, EFQM	Integrated approach to quality, emphasis on CSR, safety and environmental aspects
2017-2021	Public administration and educational insitutions	CAF, EFQM	Suport for continuos improvement, stakeholder involvement, service accessibility
2022-2024	Public administration and CSR-oriented enterprises	CAF, EFQM, ZET	Digitalization, ESG principles and a multidimensional understanding of the citizen

Source: Autohors‘ own elaboration based on Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2026b; Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2024; Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2026c

The analysis of the results of the National Quality and Social Responsibility Award of the Slovak Republic in 2024 enabled the identification of key factors improving organisational performance and efficiency. The competition evaluates organisations from both the public and private sectors, while private ones serve as a benchmarking models for the public organisations.

The evaluation is based on the application of the EFQM, CAF, and ZET quality models. Based on the results presented in *Table 3*, improvements in quality were driven by systematic quality management, transparent processes, self-assessment, benchmarking and employee involvement.

Table 3: Winners of the National Quality and Social Responsibility Award of the Slovak Republic in 2024

Category	Awarded organisation	Type of organisation	Key quality factors	Evaluation model
Quality	Magna PT, Ltd.	Private entity	Continuos process improvement, customer orientation, benchmarking, management efficiency	EFQM
	VÚRUP, JSC.	Private entity	Implementation of quality management, increased competitiveness, customer orientation	EFQM
	City of Nitra	Local government	Efficient management of public services, citizen orientation, employee participation, process quality improvement	CAF
Social responsibility	Slovenský plynárenský priemysel, JSC.	Private entity	Transparency, ethical behavior, environmental responsibility, community development participation	ZET
	Self-governing region of Žilina	Local government	Development of quality services for citizens, optimization of internal processes, enviornmental and social aspects	CAF
	Československá obchodná banka, JSC.	Private entity	Implementation of CSR principles, ethical and transparent management	ZET

Source: Authors‘ own elaboration based on Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2024

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In the business sector, successful entities were recognized for process optimisation, effective resource management, and customer orientation, ensuring competitiveness and performance improvement. Within local government, quality improvements were achieved through the integrated process management, transparent service provision, and systematic monitoring, contributing to more efficient services and higher citizen trust.

Table 4 presents an overview of selected repeatedly recognised entities within the National Quality and Social Responsibility Award. These are primarily public administration and private sector organizations. In the cases of MONDI SCP, JSC. and Slovenské elektrárne, JSC., the awards were combined in both quality and social responsibility categories within a single year, indicating an integrated approach to process management and sustainability. Water Management Construction, a state enterprise and the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic achieved repeated placements, highlighting systematic application of quality principles. The Bratislava - Petržalka District, the University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Košice, and the University of Trnava were repeatedly recognized within CAF or EFQM quality models. These entities represent examples of long-term quality and social responsibility practices, serving as inspiration for other organizations.

Table 4: Selected entities repeatedly recognized within the National Quality and Social Responsibility Award

Entity	Year	Competition category	Type	Nature of repeated award
MONDI SCP, JSC	2022	Social responsibility (winner), Quality (finalist)	Private entity	Repeated awards in different categories confirming an integrated approach to quality and sustainability
Slovenské elektrárne, JSC	2022, 2004	Quality (winner), Social responsibility (finalist)	Private entity	Concurrent awards in quality and social responsibility
Water Management Construction, a state enterprise	2022, 2023	Quality (finalist), Social responsibility (winner)	State enterprise	Continuos process improvement and focus on environmental aspects
Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic	2022, 2023	Quality (finalist)	State body	Repeated finalist placements indicating systematic implementation of quality principles
City district of Bratislava - Petržalka	2014, 2016, 2018	Quality (winner, finalist, quality improvement)	Local government	Long-term application of the CAF model and systematic performance enhancement
University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Košice	2012, 2014, 2016	Quality (finalist, participation in competition, performance improvement)	University	Gradual development of the quality system and continuous improvement of management processes
Trnava University in Trnava	2010, 2016	Quality (participation in competition, winner)	University	Progressive implementation of quality principles with gradual achievement of the highest award

Source: Authors‘ own elaboration based on Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2026b

The analysis of the National Quality and Social Responsibility Award demonstrated the ability of evaluation mechanisms to systematically support performance improvement, adaptation of organizational processes, and the integration of social responsibility. The development of the competition reflects a transformation of approaches to quality management and allows monitoring of trends for further policy development.

The hypothesis that Self-government administration units will be repeatedly recognized within the National Quality and Social Responsibility Award was partly confirmed, however we can state that only big city district – in the capital city of the SR – Bratislava competed.

3.2. Reasons for the limited representation and low success of local governments in recent years

Although the aim of the Award is to involve the widest possible range of public and private organisations, the representation of local governments has been consistently limited. *Table 4* shows that only a narrow circle of cities and regions appear among winners and finalists, with no significant placements in recent years. This can be explained by the demanding participation and evaluation process, which constitutes a barrier, particularly for smaller and medium-sized municipalities (Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2026b; Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2022). Participation requires the comprehensive assessment materials on CAF, EFQM, and ZET models, including self-assessment, performance measurement, and external evaluation. These requirements place high demands on human and financial resources, which are often limited in smaller municipalities due to budget constraints and administrative burdens (Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2022). In contrast, larger cities, state institutions, and business entities have greater resources and experience, resulting in higher success rates in the competition. Municipalities may also focus more on internal improvements rather than external evaluation.

Previous repeated recognition (e.g., Bratislava – Petržalka District) confirms that success is possible with long-term application of quality management principles. At the same time, it suggests that direct comparison with organizations possessing significantly greater capacities may be competitively challenging for smaller municipalities. Therefore, the low number of municipal awards does not indicate the absence of quality management, but rather the need for methodological support and better preparation for external evaluation.

3.3. Comparison of quality management implementation in the cities of Nitra and České Budějovice

Following the evaluation of competitions in quality and social responsibility, this part focuses on comparing practical application of quality management in local government. Attention is given to the City of Nitra in Slovak republic, and the City of České Budějovice in the Czech republic, a comparable partner city. Both are medium-sized regional centres in Central Europe with developed public administration and long-term experience in public service management.

Table 5 summarizes the key differences in quality management approaches between the two cities. In Nitra, quality management is implemented within the Department of Project and Strategic Management of the City Office, specifically in the Strategic Management and Quality Management Unit, which coordinates planning, monitoring, and evaluation of quality processes. In České Budějovice, quality management is part of the Department of Development and Public Procurement of the City Hall, integrated into the broader framework of the city's strategic development, without a dedicated organizational unit exclusively focused on quality management (City of České Budějovice 2022; City of Nitra 2024).

In Nitra, several formal tools are used, primarily the CAF model and elements of the EFQM model, along with the ZET tool, benchmarking, and systematic citizen feedback. In the Czech Republic, the CAF and EFQM models are officially recommended as quality management tools in public administration under the National Quality Policy of the Czech Republic and methodological guidelines issued by the Ministry of the Interior.

České Budějovice uses MA21 indicators (Local Agenda 21 – an international method for improving public administration quality and supporting sustainable development at

municipal and regional levels), strategic planning, and benchmarking. Publicly available documents do not indicate systematic implementation of the CAF and EFQM models as standalone internal quality management systems in České Budějovice (City of České Budějovice 2017; City of Nitra 2024).

Table 5: Comparison of quality management approaches in the cities of Nitra and České Budějovice

Criterion	City of Nitra (Slovakia)	City of České Budějovice (Czech Republic)
Responsible unit	Department of Project and Strategic Management of the City Office (Strategic Management and Quality Management Unit)	Department of Development and Public Procurement of the City Hall
Quality management tools	CAF model, elements of EFQM, ZET, benchmarking, citizen feedback	MA21 indicators, strategic planning, benchmarking; CAF and EFQM as recommended tools in the Czech Republic
Quality management orientation	Integrated, focused on continuous improvement, social responsibility, and sustainability	Strategic, process-oriented, focused on plan implementation (less formalized quality management)
Performance assessment	External evaluations through the Slovak National Quality and CSR Award, CAF self-assessment, benchmarking, partnerships	Assessment via internal indicators of the strategic plan and MA21, benchmarking, partnerships
Digitalization	Integrated into quality management, electronic tools for self-assessment, e-learning, process monitoring	Supports strategic management, not a standalone quality system
Citizen orientation	Multidimensional, including citizen satisfaction, service quality, participation, and environmental aspects	Part of strategic planning and participation, less measurable and formalized
External awards	Slovak National Quality and Social Responsibility Award, 2024	The city as a municipal authority has not received such awards

Source: Authors‘ own elaboration based on City of České Budějovice 2017; City of České Budejovice 2022; City of Nitra 2024; Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2023; National Council for Quality of the Czech Republic 2023; Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2018; Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2024; The Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2026b

In Nitra, quality management is integrated and encompasses dimensions of continuous improvement, social responsibility, and sustainability. In České Budějovice, quality management is strategically and process-oriented, forming part of the broader development framework without formal standalone institutionalization (City of Nitra 2024; Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2023).

Digitalization is fully integrated into Nitra’s quality management system, including electronic tools for self-assessment, e-learning, and process monitoring. In České Budějovice, it is primarily applied to support the quality of strategic activities and administrative processes, without evidence of systematic integration into a separate quality management system (City of České Budějovice 2017; City of Nitra 2024).

Citizen orientation in Nitra includes satisfaction, participation, service quality, safety, and environmental aspects. In České Budějovice, participation and citizen orientation are implemented within strategic planning; however, the city has not received a national award equivalent to the Slovak National Quality and Social Responsibility Award.

In the Czech Republic, National Quality Awards are granted under the EXCELENCE, START, and CAF programs for social responsibility, sustainability, and quality in family businesses. In 2023, the National Award for Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development was granted to the Technical and Economic University in České Budějovice and the Charity České Budějovice, but not to the city itself. Nitra was awarded as the winner of the Slovak National Quality Award in 2024 (National Council for Quality of the Czech Republic 2023; Slovak Office of Standards, Metrology and Testing 2024).

CONCLUSION

Quality in public administration in Slovakia developed positively between 2004 and 2024, moving toward professionalization and institutionalization of quality management. It is primarily caused to Slovak quality policies, digitalization, citizen-oriented approaches, and the activities of the Office for Standards, Metrology, and Testing of the SR as coordinator of the national quality policy.This office organizes the National Quality and Social Responsibility Award annually, aiming to engage not only public administration institutions but also the private sector. Participation requires the preparation of comprehensive evaluation materials in accordance with various quality management models. These models involve systematic self-assessment, performance measurement, and external evaluation.

Our research results demonstrated that public administration institutions in Slovakia primarily used the CAF and EFQM models. Quality improvements in public administration were driven by the application of systematic quality management procedures, transparent process management, implementation of self-assessment, benchmarking, and active employee involvement in organizational leadership.

Evaluation of the competition results revealed that only a narrow circle of cities and regional authorities appeared among winners and finalists. Public administration institutions repeatedly recognized included Bratislava – Petržalka District and the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, which can serve as examples for other public sector organizations.

We conclude that our hypothesis was confirmed only partly - larger municipal and state administration institutions have the capacity to implement quality management and social responsibility principles systematically and over the long term.In this article, we compared the level of quality management between the Slovak city of Nitra, which received the National Quality Award in 2024, and a selected partner city abroad, České Budějovice. Both municipalities apply CAF and EFQM models. The difference in approaches is reflected in organizational structure, as Nitra has a dedicated quality management unit, while in České Budějovice, quality is implemented as part of strategic activities, reflecting differences in process formalization.

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