

## Territorial Decentralization in Lithuania: a Missing Continuum

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### Abstract

Territorial – administrative division is a tangible entity of the existence of each state. It serves for the implementation of multiple organizational purposes, shows the scope of decentralization. Legally, the 6<sup>th</sup> Government of Lithuania developed the territorial decentralization reform in 1994. At present we have the 16<sup>th</sup> Government in Lithuania. Despite that we have a rather stable system of territorial – administrative division the ongoing debates over the regional level of governing and regional policy appear to be puzzling, they arise in the government's programs rather than in public and academic discourses. Thus the question persists: what are the *trajectories* that the debates over territorial decentralization could disclose along the followed *scenarios*? The paper is based on Pollit and Bouckaert's (2011, p. 75-76) methodological ideas. It aims at revealing the debate *trajectories* and *scenarios* applicable at least in three ways: (1) theoretically – a new historical fact has been substantiated; (2) discursively – the debates have been made public and (3) practically – governments could better understand the evolution of programs. While implementing the task, the official documents should be analyzed (government programs, laws, regulations, national and regional strategies, etc.), other scientific sources should be used as well.

**Keywords:** territorial decentralization, regional governance, *scenario*, *trajectories*.

### Introduction

Decentralization is the issue of extreme importance for any state. The historical development of a modern world proves a need to introduce sub-national levels of government/governance regardless of all functional centralization-decentralization conflates. Thus territorial decentralization is an essential element of the government's agenda.

Despite a seemingly relative stability, territorial decentralization may be altered depending on statehood conditions. Since the 1990s Lithuania has underwent several deeper waves of the territorial decentralization reform in Lithuania, however, none of them were completed. Since we agree that the territorial decentralization reform (or

territorial – administrative division) has not been yet completed (if it is ever possible) in Lithuania it is worth of special attention. Legally, the territorial decentralization reform in Lithuania was developed by the 6<sup>th</sup> Government in 1994. Presently we have the 16<sup>th</sup> government. Despite that we have a rather stable system of territorial – administrative division, the ongoing debates over the regional level of governing and regional policy appear to be puzzling, they arise in the government's programs rather than in public and academic discourses. So the question persists: what are the *trajectories* that the debates over territorial decentralization could disclose along the followed *scenarios*? The paper is based on Pollit and Bouckaert's (2011, p. 75-76) methodological ideas. They provide the basis for exploring reforms by the *scenario* that comprises analysis of three basic elements, namely, initial situation, development *trajectory* and a goal to be achieved.

Thus, the paper *focuses* on the debates in the political legal documents on territorial decentralization in Lithuania. The *aim* is to clarify the trajectory inherent in decentralization policy at the regional level. The following *tasks* have been set in order to reveal the object and the aim: 1) to present decentralization debates and a new methodological approach to research on territorial decentralization reforms; 2) to analyze official documents on regional issues by using the *scenario* research strategy; 3) to discuss political paths from *alpha* to *omega*.

The issue of decentralization in public administration has been analyzed by many scholars. For example, Astrauskas (2002, 2007, 2011), Mačiulytė and Daugirdas (2006), Zigiene (2012), Zilinskas (2010) - with regard to local self-government; Astrauskas and Svetikas (2005), Zilinskas (2009), Gaule (2011) - the position of counties in the context of decentralization; Raipa and Backunaite (2004), Baltusnikiene (2009), Baltusnikiene and Astrauskas (2009) - focusing on the theoretical – methodological issues of decentralization. All

of them provide a comprehensive picture of the multidimensionality of decentralization. We join these debates by providing some new research aspects. Firstly, we propose a new methodological approach. By analyzing a reform *scenario* the path of development regardless of its normative implications will be evaluated. Secondly, by referring to planning and regional studies a traditional political-administrative framework for decentralization discussions will be expanded.

## Debates over decentralization

As Dubois and Fattore (2009, p. 706) point out in their significant study on decentralization, its definitions and typologies, the concept itself has not been defined although an enormous range of works deal with decentralization<sup>1</sup>. Decentralization is a multidimensional concept (as defined by Dubois and Fattore, 2009); it may take various forms and shapes as well as different fillings, be analyzed in different contexts and spaces, become a reason for change or be used as a tool. Its territorial (as well as *spatial*) dimension is one of many others and, undoubtedly, one of most important. It is inseparable from the territorial – administrative division of the state. Although de Vries argues that definite answers in the *territorial decentralization* discussion are missing (Vries de, 2000, p. 196), Illner and Wollmann (2003, p. 314) propose an acceptable form of analysis by describing territorial decentralization as: *devolution of the state's functions to (democratically elected) autonomous territorial governments which can act, within the scope of decentralized functions, on their own behalf, without recourse to higher-standing authorities. Local or regional autonomy is introduced in this way. Decentralization is thus the process of changing the balance of power from the central to sub-national institutions* (Illner and Wollman, 2003, p. 314).

The paper focuses on decentralization related to local governance in general and regional governance in particular. How the discussion over decentralization has been developed by distinguished scholars? Despite the *polysemic* (as defined by D. Slater, 1989) nature of the term, discussants usually agree about two acceptable *conditions*: 1) unequal spatial distribution of decentralization perceptions, and 2) rise of the relevance of the topic in times of (radical) historical political transformations.

<sup>1</sup> The authors appeal to the idea proposed by C. Pollit and published in: Pollit C. (2005). Decentralization: a central concept in contemporary public management. In E. Ferlie, L.E. Lynn and C. Pollit (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management* (371-397). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Firstly, most of the authors agree about an uneven spatial spread of the decentralization issue across the world. Being an unquestionable icon in the politics of Western (capitalist) democracies, the concept of decentralization still provokes conflates and some kind of frustration in the so-called peripheral and semi-peripheral (as described by Slater, 1989) or developing (as proposed by Rondinelli, 1990, Samoff, 1990) parts of the world. Although democracy inseparable from decentralization, the latter is not simple. Each state has its unique territorial – administrative division or the so-called *codification of space*. As Slater points out, “*codification of space*, creation of administrative units or regions listed numerically, reflects the central state's transformation of the territory into space as partitioned entities of *governmentalization*” (Slater, 1989, p. 504). Here Slater (1989) strongly refers to the ideas by M. Foucault and his *disciplinary space*<sup>2</sup> thus linking the state, power, space and territory. Taking the process of de-colonialism as an example, Slater, following M. Foucault, uses the concept *implanted state*<sup>3</sup> to show that decentralization is not an inevitable companion of democracy but rather a *floating signifier* (Slater, 1989, p.509; Slater, 1990, p.504). This leads to the insight about different decentralizations in different parts of the world.

Secondly, decentralization debates seem to be an endless story in the times of transformations as well. This is widely acknowledged by different authors (Slater, 1989, Rondinelli, 1990, Vries de, 2000, Hutchcroft, 2001, Lidström, 2007). Usually they distinguish quite similar decentralization tendencies in developing countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia during the periods of transformations. All of these transformations are unique although they have some common features. *Path towards democratization* is one among these common features that leads to the revision of *space codification*. Transformations, however, are happening in developed countries as well. According de Vries, *centralization to the EU seems to go hand in hand with decentralization to regional and local levels* (2000, p. 210). Lidström (2007) summarizes all European processes as *simultaneous developments towards homogenization and fragmentation, as mosaic of various solutions within the unified framework*. Where is Lithuania

<sup>2</sup> D. Slater follows Foucault M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish. The birth of the Prison*. London: Peregrine Books, p.143.

<sup>3</sup> Again, D. Slater follows M. Foucault, this time Foucault M. (1980). *Question on Geography*. In Gordon C. (ed.). *Power/Knowledge: selected Interviews and Other writings 1972-1977*, p.63-77. N.Y.: Pantheon Books, p.70.

moving in fluctuating processes towards the EU type of decentralization with the Soviet background?

Being a part of the EU, Lithuania is swamped by the whirlpool of *asymmetry and variation*. Modern territorial decentralization (in the form of territorial – administrative division) started in 1990. At that time Lithuania clearly took a *path towards democratization* and needs an acceptable *codification of space*. Differently from many other developing countries, there are no clear traditional ties in the history of Lithuanian statehood. Lithuania is a clear example of *implanted state* in the Soviet as well as in the European period of its existence. In both cases Lithuania has to follow totally extraneous tendencies, namely, the introduction of *xenogeneic* territorial governance. A recent introduction of the regional level of governance is part of such *xenogeneic* governance. While regionalization, as an element of territorial governance, assumes new colors in the development of the EU and has some kind of flexibility, Lithuania has bristled with difficulties that, following Lefebvre (2007), could be named *production of space*. The government has underwent transformations during a very short period. Its thinking trajectory has been running from *Euclidian* (the Soviet period) to *post-structural* (the European period). As Buser explains: *in contrast to Euclidian interpretations which see space as a physical surface or container, in post-structuralist understanding, space is socially constructed and relational* (Buser, 2013, p. 280-281). How the transformations of thinking could be investigated?

In this sense a useful framework for reforms has been offered by Pollit and Bouckaert (2011). According to the authors, any reform takes some kind of *scenario*. Any *scenario* consists of the three basic elements: an initial solution (*alpha*), a *trajectory* (chain of steps and events), and a future state (*omega*). *Alpha* starts from the situational analysis; *omega* contains destination or state of affairs to which the trajectory leads; *scenarios* are not always complete, in the sense that one or more of the three basic elements may be missing (Pollit and Bouckaert, 2011, p. 75-76). Presence of *omega* without a clear specification of *alpha* or of *trajectory* is called *utopia* or *paradigm*, meanwhile critique of the existing *alpha* and a desire to move in a particular direction without a clear picture of destination (*omega*) is called a kind of *drifting with the tide* (Pollit and Bouckaert, 2011, p. 75-76). M. de Vries (2000) recommends to focus on time lines and justifications of the periods of decentralization

while approaching government reforms. For that purpose we chose to analyze the programs of the governments of the Republic of Lithuania (as resolved by the resolutions of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania) by using different research methods such as discourse analysis in general and re-contextualization in particular.

Have we ever had a consistent *scenario* as regards Lithuania's territorial decentralization? Can all three elements be seen in the official documents starting from 1990 up to 2013? How do the starting choices look like? What about the continuity of the choices following changes of the governments? Which choices have been implemented? When and why the idea of territorial decentralization appears: the starting point from Euclidian to the flexible thinking?

### Untangling the regional level: main trajectories

While evaluating the reform *scenario* in Lithuania, we decided to analyze *trajectories* within a chronological framework. Using the lenses of regional policy and the idea developed by Burbulytė, Kutkaitis and Normantė (2013), we propose to distinguish four phases of territorial decentralization in Lithuania, each of which provides a completely different vision of territorial formation and may undergo some sub-phases.

**Phase I** (up to 1997): a specific period since the territorial – administrative reform was developed. The phase might be divided into two sub-phases:

- Up to 1994: different visions of territorial – administrative divisions were elaborated; the sub-phase ended with the adoption of the *Law on the Territorial Administrative Units and their Boundaries* (1994);
- 1995–1997: implementation of the Law. Lithuania was divided into 10 higher administrative units, counties, and 55 municipalities.

According the Law (LR Parliament, 1994): “the county shall be a higher administrative unit of the territory of the Republic of Lithuania the governance wherein is organized by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania pursuant to the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Local Self-government and other laws” (this norm was legalized in the Constitution by 1992). It is laid down by the Law that “the county shall be formed from the territories of municipalities characterized by common social, economic and ethno-cultural interests”. The result of many reforms was that the competency of the higher

administrative units was not properly separated from the state and municipal competency. As appeared later, this division was not optimal in terms of governance, territorial boundaries and the number of residents (inhabitants). Experts from the EU Commission (Lithuania is seeking membership in the EU at that period) point it as a problem. According to the Commission report (European Commission, 1997), the created higher administrative units – counties – are not proper units to be treated as regions in European understanding. Counties are not suitable units to replace regions in territorial as well as administrative understanding (Burbulytė et al., 2013). Thus the phase ended with efforts to revise the implemented reforms as soon as started.

**Phase II** (1997–2001): the period started with the initiation of regional policy and is characterized by various visions of regional development and regional level of government/governance; the period ended with the adoption of *the Law on Regional Development*.

As Burbulytė et al. (2013) point out, everything started in 1997, when the Prime Minister of the Republic signed a Decree (LR Government, 1997) to set up a working group. The main task of this working group was to solve the problem of regions in Lithuania's regional policy (their appearance in Lithuania's territorial – administrative division). It had to evaluate all possible alternatives and propose a solution how to organize Lithuania's territorial – administrative division (corresponding to the European NUTS system). Another task of no less importance was to propose a solution how Lithuania's *regional governance* should be organized. It encompassed such questions as institutional organization of regional policy, strategy of national regional development and other complex problems. In 1998 the government passed a Resolution (LR Government, 1998). According to it, the proceedings of the working group were approved. The proceedings of the working group and the Resolution in 2000 resulted in passing the *Law on Regional Development* (LR Parliament, 2000a). According to the Law, "*the region shall mean an integral part of the territory of the State wherein the national regional policy is under implementation; county is the main territorial unit where national regional policy is implemented; the Government may form regions from several bordering counties or municipalities if needed*" (LR Parliament, 2000a). In parallel with that, in 1999 the idea about the 2<sup>nd</sup> period of the administrative reform to increase the number of municipalities to

93 was raised (LR Government, 1999). Initially, the Law and other documents seemed to move to the two main directions: in a short-term perspective the counties were to be treated as temporary substitutes of the regions; in a long-term perspective - until the introduction of 'real' regions in Lithuania's territorial – administrative division. This idea was introduced in the program of the 11<sup>th</sup> government where some kind of *destination* to be followed appeared for the first time – a proposal: "*to prepare amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania to legalize five administrative territorial units of the second level in compliance with the requirements of regional policy of the European Union; to dismiss administrations of ten counties, and establish five representative administrative territorial units instead; to assign to the regional representative institutions the functions qualified as the second level self-governance functions which municipalities fail to perform; to transfer all institutions accountable to county administrations to the municipalities of those towns or regions on which territories they are located*" (LR Parliament, 2000b). Following this line of development, in 2001 three projects of a potential regional level of governance was presented to society (LR Government, 2001). The 11<sup>th</sup> government, however, managed to hold power only for 8 months; the new government, the 12<sup>th</sup>, stopped the processes of decentralization that started and proposed a *new line of development*, which became a distinguishing feature of the next phase.

**Phase III** (2002–2008): the period when the counties and the administrations of county governor as the main stakeholder of regional development dominated. It ended with the decision of the new government to abolish the administration of county governor.

The 12<sup>th</sup> government started an interesting trim in regional policy. In 2002 the Master Plan of Lithuanian Territorial Development (LR Parliament, 2002b) was adopted (elaboration of the Plan had started in 1996). According to this Master Plan, Lithuania's territory had to be treated as divided into four particular layers (levels, according to urban hierarchy), one of which was regional and had to consist of five regional centres and their respective territories. The counties were treated as the basis for the regions. This document treated the regional level more as an analytical tool than a normative requirement. In the same year, 2002, the government passed the Regulation on the means for

the implementation of regional policy for the year 2003–2005 (LR Government, 2002). At the beginning (in 2002) it was laid down in the Resolution that 5 regions to had to be established to get structural support from the EU although, after the amendments of 2004, the regions were specified as counties and the so-called problem areas (*where the Ministry of the Interior coordinates the issue with the councils of the municipalities of the particular region*). In the year of 2003 two new documents concerning the plans of decentralization and de-concentration were approved (LR Government, 2003a, 2003b); in the year of 2005 a territorial development vision until 2013 was adopted (LR Government, 2005). All these documents treated the regions quite flexibly using various territorial units more as analytical tools for the purpose to solve economic and social disparities. Moreover, the new government suspended the legal documents of 1999 and 2001 issued by the earlier governments. This step was critically evaluated by Kavaliauskas: “*deferment of municipal reform (as it was proposed in 1999) leads to the impossibility to start the reform of the higher territorial administrative units*” (Kavaliauskas, 2004). The new government diverted regional policy towards *socio-economic cohesion*. Post-structural thinking appeared to be quite acceptable for the left government. Even the efforts of the Parliament to react properly to the recommendations of the EC Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (in 2001) to establish self-governing regions in Lithuania ended with the same substitution vision to identify the counties as regions and the regions as counties (for more, see LR Parliament, 2006; LR Parliament, 2007). But the changes of the governments changed everything upside down again.

**Phase IV** (2008 – present): abolishment of the administration of county governor, new stakeholder in regional development policy. This phase might be divided into two sub-phases:

- 2008/2010–2012: radical steps of the 15<sup>th</sup> government to abolish the administration of county governor and present the vision to introduce regions and a regional level of governing by 2014;
- From 2012: change of the government and the new-old policy “*doing nothing*”.

The new 15<sup>th</sup> post-crisis government in 2008 presented its program where the administration of county governor had to be abolished by 2010 (LR Parliament, 2008). The initial (and the main) aim of this radical reform was to cut down budget spending

and, secondly, the institutions of bureaucracy. To be clear, the abolishment concerned only the administrations of county governor. The counties as territorial units remained composed of respective municipalities. The *Law on Regional Development* was amended due to this reason. Since 2010, “*the national regional policy shall be implemented in the State’s territorial administrative units – counties and municipalities. Regional development planning shall be carried out in the counties*” (LR Parliament, 2010). This abolishment was part of the reform of the counties presented in the government’s program with the ambition to complete the introduction of regions as full-fledged functioning territorial units by the year 2014 (LR Parliament, 2008). However, the reform was ‘freezed’ after the abolishment. The following strategic documents of the government (LR Government, 2011a, 2011b; LR Parliament, 2012) did not mention any change in territorial – administrative governing. It partly coincides with the resignation of the Minister of the Interior in 2012.

The change of the government at the end of 2012 brought the 16<sup>th</sup> government and a new program. The new government did not plan any changes in regional governance; no plans for the future of the counties were foreseen either.

Summarizing all 23 years of “reforms” we can state it has been tramping at the same starting point as in 1990. The question arises whether we know what path we take. Maybe we do not know where from (*alpha*) and where to (*omega*) we are moving. This needs a deeper look.

### **Initial state of affairs: What is wrong with *alpha*? Which path shall we take? Where shall we go? What is *omega*?**

Initial solution of territorial decentralization in Lithuania, or, what Pollit and Bouckaert (2011) name as *alpha*, has a very concrete starting point – the year of 1990 and the restoration of statehood. Until that, being an *implanted state* in the Soviet regime, Lithuania had an enforced *xenogeneic* system of territorial governance. An exceptional feature of that system was the *Euclidian vision* of *space codification*. The restoration of statehood evoked a huge wish to *re-code space*. Thus, the issue of the administrative division of the territory could be found in the program of the very first governments. All the period till the year of 1994 is distinguished as the period of intense discussions and debates when different concepts and visions were provided, various projects were elaborated. Despite all efforts

to find some ties with historical statehood in the past the salient loop of territorial decentralization is fixed in the Constitution, adopted in 1992: it envisages self-governing municipalities and higher level administrative units where “*governance shall be organized by the Government according to the procedure established by Law*” (LR Parliament, 1992, article 123). This concept was already fixed in the program of the 4<sup>th</sup> government (September 1992). Following this clear path of division, the 6<sup>th</sup> government implemented the reform in 1994 by adopting the *Law on the Territorial Administrative Units and their Boundaries* and establishing, thus, 55 local self-governing municipalities and 10 higher administrative units – counties. What is characteristic of this run of changeover?

Firstly, all efforts to revive the historical *codification* or to adopt something new and modern, actually resulted in the same state of affairs – the *Euclidian* division of the territory into administrative cells. Secondly, there are no traces of the introduction of regional *governance* in any government’s document at that time. A meaningful exception is the program of the 6<sup>th</sup> government where a proposal to “*solve the question of regional governance services*” (LR Government, 1993) was mentioned. As well as the *Resolution of the Parliament on the Implementation of the Law on the Territorial Administrative Units and their Boundaries* (LR Parliament, 1994) where a demand to *regionalize* central government was mentioned along with the proposal for the Government to prepare a draft of government *decentralization and de-concentration*. In both cases the concept *regional* was used as a substitute for *territorial* with no evident references to *regional governance*.

The situation changed suddenly. What happened? Lithuania applied to membership in the EU. Despite a perplex political situation, this application was followed by a reply from the EU – the European Commission report on the situation in the countries accessing its membership *Agenda-2000* (European Commission, 1997). The *Euclidian codification* appeared to be not proper for the implication of European structural (regional) policy. *Regions* were required. Despite that the 8<sup>th</sup> government had no such intentions stated in its program, it had to take decisive steps towards solution, and these steps started in 1997 when the Prime Minister signed a Decree establishing a working group for regional development (as described above).

What is so specific about the *alpha*? What is *wrong* with it (as we titled this section)? Nothing is wrong at all although nothing is good either. *Alpha* duplicates: one arises as a need to *re-code* space, the other – as the implementation of external prescription (officially, at least). It is useful to remember the idea of Pollit and Bouckaert (2011, p. 75-76) about *drifting with the tide*. This *drifting*, however, seems to be more exogenous than the endogenous: being immersed in the whirlpool of the asymmetric European regional affairs we had to determine our destination and define the way to reach it (or even *vice versa*). So the question arises whether the paths (*trajectories*) taken by the authorities lead to the desired (?) destination (*omega*).

While analyzing the changes of the governments, it becomes absolutely clear that most of the time the style *drifting with the tide* without clearly provided destination prevailed. A perplex political situation during the first 10 years of statehood determined the impossibility to define any clear frameworks of *omega*. *Taking the path of democratization* led to the some kind of *drifting*, what, in turn, led to the absence of cardinal/radical changes. The cardinal/radical spiral (or zigzag) changes started with the 11<sup>th</sup> government in 2000. Namely that government was the first to propose a very clear and framed *omega* of territorial rearrangements and regional level of governance. Brief 8 months of its existence conditioned that most of the plans were not started at all. The new 12<sup>th</sup> government (and the following 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> governments) immediately recalled the newly created *omega*, thus, ‘freezing’ the entire course towards regional governance. The pendulum returned back with the coming of the 15<sup>th</sup> government that revived the *omega* proposed by the 11<sup>th</sup> government naming the territorial reform of the counties as one of primary works to be done. Four years of governing, fatally, were not enough to reach the vision that was again broken and ‘frozen’ with the coming of the 16<sup>th</sup> government. Although it sounds as a reproach for inflating actions, in fact it is supposed to mean a fact.

### Conclusions: the *scenario* dances twist

Analysis of Lithuania’s government documents provides us with a very interesting material about the process of territorial decentralization in Lithuania. Revision of the documents of the period of over 20 years reveals that, actually, we never had a consistent *scenario* regarding territorial decentralization. This is determined, as appears from the analysis, more

by the exogenous than endogenous forces. Efforts to implement a regional level of governance that started in 1997 changed the initial choices of the 1990s. On the other hand, initial solutions (or *alpha*) have not changed much since then (i.e. 1997).

Political swings (left – right) are mostly felt in the sphere of *trajectories* and *omega*. Right wing politicians have a very clear aim (*omega*) to change territorial – administrative division by establishing the regions and a regional level of governance, they clearly know what and how should be changed. Sometimes these resolute steps resemble the *Euclidian form* of thinking. Left wing politicians provide us with a fluctuating and obscure *omega* that strongly resembles the style *drifting with the tide*. This *drifting*, however, is not that simple at all. The left paves a tough path towards *cohesion*. In their political vision the regions are only analytical tools meanwhile the regions are the goal for the right phalanx.

The situation interestingly resembles the famous quote by Isaiah Berlin<sup>4</sup> about a hedgehog and a fox: *the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing* (Berlin, 1995, p. 333). In the case of territorial decentralization as regards regional policy in Lithuania the fox and the hedgehog awkwardly dance twist while the Ministry of the Interior does its own stuff. So the question remains: what are the *trajectories* that debates over territorial decentralization disclose along the followed *scenarios*? As research revealed, despite permanent talks on the need to change territorial governance, in fact no particular goals could be seen. Since continuity is missing an appropriate trajectory still remains a big matter for us to choose in the future.

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Berlin, here, quotes the famous Greek poet Archilochus

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## Teritorinė decentralizacija Lietuvoje: trajektorijos ir spragos

### Santrauka

Teritorinis-administracinis padalijimas yra esminis kiekvienos valstybės egzistenciją užtikrinantis veiksnys, sudarantis galimybes įgyvendinti daugybę organizacinių tikslų. Neabejotina, kad teritorinis-administracinis padalijimas yra teritorinės decentralizacijos sudedamoji. Nepaisant santykinai stabilaus įvaizdžio, teritorinė decentralizacija yra kintantis reiškiny, priklausomas nuo pokyčių, vykstančių tiek valstybės viduje, tiek ir aplink ją. Nuo Nepriklausomybės atgavimo 1990 metais Lietuva išgyveno keletą didesnių teritorinės decentralizacijos reformų. Nė viena iš reformų nebuvo iki galo baigta, nes reikėdavo pradėti naują. Vadinasi, ištikus du dešimtmečius vyko nesiliaujanti kaita. Tokių nesibaigiančių reformų analizei tinkamas Pollit ir Bouckaert (2011) pasiūlytas *scenario* instrumentarijus. Šie autoriai siūlo reformas tirti kaip *scenario*, susidedantį iš trijų pagrindinių elementų: pradinės situacijos (*alfa*), reformos raidos *trajektorijos* ir siekiamybės (*omega*). Remiantis šiuo instrumentarijumi ir decentralizacijos debatų metodologiniais pagrindais, straipsnyje analizuojamas teritorinės decentralizacijos procesas Lietuvoje. Tyrimo tikslas yra išaiškinti decentralizacijos politikos trajektorijas, susijusias su regionų ir regioninio valdymo lygmens įdiegimu Lietuvos teritoriniame-administraciniame suskirstyme. Siekiant įgyvendinti užsibrėžtą tikslą, pasitelkiami uždaviniai: 1) pristatyti akademinius decentralizacijos debatus ir naują metodologinį požiūrį į teritorinės decentralizacijos reformų tyrimą; 2) taikant *scenario* strategiją, iširti Lietuvos valdžios oficialius dokumentus, susijusius su regioninės politikos įgyvendinimu; 3) pateikti regioninio valdymo situacijos analizę teritorinės decentralizacijos kontekste.

Akademinių decentralizacijos debatų analizė atskleidė, kad decentralizacija yra įvairialypė samprata (kaip apibrėžia Dubois ir Fattore, 2009). Teritorinė decentralizacija yra tik viena iš decentralizacijos formų, tačiau, kaip teigia M. de Vries (2000, p. 196), visoje decentralizacijos diskurso gausoje, teritorinė decentralizacija išlieka iki galo neapibrėžta. Nepaisant daugiareikšmės (*polisemantiškos*, pasak D. Slater, 1989) termino prigimtios, dauguma diskurso dalyvių sutinka dėl dviejų sąlygų: 1) decentralizacijos suvokimas skiriasi politinėje ir geografinėje erdvėje; 2) diskusija suaktyvėja įvairių (radikalių) istorinių politinių transformacijų metu.

Nors demokratija nėra įsivaizduojama be decentralizacijos, negalėtume teigti apie pastarosios priklausomybę nuo demokratijos. Nepaisant įvairių politinių fluktuacijų, kiekviena valstybė (ar ji būtų demokratinė, ar ne), turi savo unikalų teritorijos administracinį padalinimą, kurį D. Slater (1989), remdamasis M. Foucault idėjomis, vadina *erdvės užkodavimu* (angl. *codification of space*). Remdamasis kolonijinių valstybių pavyzdžiu, D. Slater (Slater, 1989, p. 509; Slater, 1990, p. 504) pritaiko M. Foucault suformuluotą *implantacijos* sąvoką. Mokslininkas teigia, kad *implantuotos valstybės* susiduria su ypatingomis teritorinės decentralizacijos problemomis. Modernią teritorinę decentralizaciją Lietuva pradeda 1990 metais atkūrusi savo valstybingumą. Pasirinkusi demokratizacijos kelią (angl. *path towards democratization*), valdžia pasiryžta *per-koduoti erdvę*. Toks siekis yra būdingas visoms transformacijoms išgyvenančioms valstybėms. Didžiausia problema yra ta, kad prarasti saitai su istorinėmis šaknimis. Būdama sovietinės valstybės dalimi, Lietuva buvo *implantuota* valstybė, kuriai primetė svetimą – *ksenogeninį* – teritorijos administravimą, išsiskiriantį *euklidiniu erdvės suvokimu* (Buser, 2013, p. 280–281). Pasiryžusi tapti ES nare, Lietuva vėl tampa *implantuota* valstybe, ji įmetama į Europoje vykstančių regioninių procesų sūkurį. Šiuos regioninius procesus galima įvardinti kaip santykinio, *po-struktūrinio* (Buser terminais, 2013, p. 280–281) mąstymo padarinį, prie kurio tenka prisiderinti naujoms vyriausybėms.

Ėjimas link regioninio valdymo Lietuvoje gali būti sugrupuotas į keturis pagrindinius laikotarpius.

*Pirmoji fazė* – laikotarpis iki 1997. Tai didelių pokyčių metas. Administracinio teritorijos suskirstymo klausimai minimi jau pirmųjų vyriausybių programose. Pamažu pradeda išsikristalizuoti dviejų lygių valdymo sistema, kurią sudaro savivaldybės ir aukštesnieji administraciniai vienetai – apskritys. Apskirtyse įstatymo nustatyta tvarka valdymą organizuoja Vyriausybė. Tokia nuostata įtvirtinta ir 1992 metų Konstitucijoje, įdiegta 1994 metais priėmus Lietuvos Respublikos teritorijos administracinių vienetų ir jų ribų įstatymą, remiantis kuriuo Lietuva padalinama į 55 savivaldybes ir 10 apskričių. Iki kito reformos etapo prieita nebuvo.

*Antroji fazė* – laikotarpis nuo 1997 iki 2001 m. Narystės ES siekis lėmė, kad Lietuvai teko priderinti ką tik

atliktą administracinę teritorijos padalijimą prie ES regioninės (struktūrinės) politikos reikalavimų. 1997 m. buvo sudaryta darbo grupė regioninės politikos principams suformuoti. Darbo grupės veiklos rezultatas – 2000 m. priimtas Regioninės plėtros įstatymas. Tiek įstatymas, tiek ir politinė aplinka leido numanyti, kad iki įdiegiant „tikrus“ regionus, apskritys bus traktuojamos kaip laikini regionų ir regioninio lygmens pakaitalai. Atėjusi į valdžią vienuoliktoji Vyriausybė imasi labai konkrečių veiksmų, siekia diegti regionus ir regioninį valdymo lygmenį. Vyriausybės programoje pirmą kartą aiškiai suformuluotos siekiamos vizijos (*omega*) gairės ir imtasi konkrečių veiksmų toms gairėms įgyvendinti. Deja, trumpa aštuonių mėnesių kadencija neleido Vyriausybei net pradėti daugelio užsibrėžtų planų. 2001 metais atėjusi į valdžią dvyliktoji (o vėliau ir tryliktoji, keturioliktoji) Vyriausybė visus planus atšaukia ir savotiškai „išaldo“ esamą situaciją. Šis „išalas“ būdingas visai trečiajai fazei.

*Trečioji fazė* – laikotarpis nuo 2002 iki 2008 m.. Šiuo laikotarpiu atsisakoma apskričių pertvarkos, regioninė politika pasukama ekonominės ir socialinės sanglaudos linkme. Regionai tampa nebe tikslu, o analitine (ir labai lanksčia) priemone siekiant sanglaudos. Tiek naujojoje Regioninės plėtros įstatymo redakcijoje (2002), tiek ir vėliau patvirtintuose Vyriausybės ir Seimo dokumentuose regionai traktuojami kaip „nepririšti“ erdviniai vienetai, kuriais gali būti ir apskritys, ir kelių apskričių ar kelių savivaldybių junginiai, naujai apibrėžti tiksliniai regionai. Laikotarpis baigiasi 2008 metais į valdžią atėjus penkioliktajai (ekonominės krizės) Vyriausybei. Prasideda ketvirtoji fazė.

*Ketvirtoji fazė* – laikotarpis nuo 2008 iki 2012–2013 m. Penkioliktoji Vyriausybė apskričių reformą įvar-

dijo kaip vieną svarbiausių darbų ir tuoj pat ėmėsi jį įgyvendinti, panaikino apskričių viršinių administracijų. Taip pat programoje numatyta parengti reformų paketą, remiantis kuriuo nuo 2014 metų Lietuvoje turėtų būti įdiegti funkcionuojantys regionai. Tačiau šis išsipareigojimas liko neįgyvendintas, nes vėliau priimtuose strateginiuose dokumentuose apie teritorinio-administracinio valdymo kaitą nekalbama. 2012 metais atėjusi šešioliktoji Vyriausybė švytuoklę sugrąžina atgal į „išalo“ laikus.

Reformų trajektorijos analizė atskleidė labai įdomių dalykų. Pirmą, paaiškėjo, kad per visus 23 Nepriklausomybės metus niekada neturėjome nuoseklaus nepertraukiamo *scenario*. Iki vienuoliktosios Vyriausybės apie administracinio teritorijos suskirstymo pertvarką nebuvo kalbama. Akcentuojamas tik valdymo sistemos optimizavimas, centrinio ir teritorinio valdymo struktūrų funkcijų ir uždavinių peržiūra, valstybės valdymo decentralizacija ir dekoncentracija (nekonkretizuojama, ką tai reiškia), apskričių tapimas regioninės politikos centrais. Antra, tokia situacija iš dalies susiklostė dėl to, kad poreikį įdiegti regioninį lygmenį Lietuva patiria kaip spaudimą iš išorės. Todėl pradinės sąlygos (*alfa*) gali būti įvardintos kaip egzogeninės, bet ne endogeninės. Trečia, konkrečiai siekiamybė (*omega*) suformuluojama tik dviejų (vienuoliktosios ir penkioliktosios) Vyriausybių (dešiniųjų) programose ir pradedama įgyvendinti. Kitų Vyriausybių (kairiųjų) valdymo metais susiklosto vadinamoji *dreifavimo su potvyniu* situacija, kurią įvardina ir Pollit su Bouckaert (2011).

Galima apibendrinti, kad, nepaisant nuolatinio kalbėjimo apie teritorinio valdymo pertvarkos būtinumą, konkretus norimas rezultatas vis dar siejamas su tinkamos trajektorijos pasirinkimu.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** teritorinė decentralizacija, regioninis valdymas, *scenario*, *trajektorijos*.

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