



The standards of regionalism

Jovan Komsic (ed.), *Principles of European regionalism*.
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This book helps to understand this area. The book *Principles of European regionalism* was published by Jovan Komsic.
The authors' opinion is categorised by various questions asked:

- Does a generally applied standard of decentralisation and regionalism exist?
- What does the government of modern states and societies require in the late 20th and the early 21st centuries?
- Did regionalism in the European integration appear alongside with globalisation (or as an effect of it) as a response to it?
- What kind of institutional system ensures its effectiveness?

In this certain book we can get satisfying answers. The authors demonstrate the way of decentralisation by revealing the general regionalism theory and also the attached caseworks; which is the greatest value of the book.

In this perspective of this regionalisation of Southern Europe (and according to our general knowledge also Northern and Middle Europe) and its relationship with the local and state level can be understood truly.

Decentralisation represents a more attractive and acceptable democracy, in which there are more possibilities to distribute economical and social resources more effectively. The conception that regionalism has a great role in the process of the European integration is in harmony with this certain point of view. Stable democratic order can serve as the basis of everything, of course.

Debate arose among scientists about which level(s) play(s) a higher role in the integration. (Veinfeld, 2003: 21; Guy Herald):¹

- a) local
- b) national
- c) supranational.

The common point is in all theories that the most important component of the European Union is its political communication and its decision making procedure. Authors compare the possibilities and methods of centralisation and decentralisation from the point of view of effectiveness and practicability.

Supporters of centralisation explain it with several factors, such as creation of national unity, the only option of harmony and creation of equality and welfare. In contrast with this, decentralisation is justified by higher involvement in political life and institutional closeness. Due to these power becomes sharable, and impeachment can be secured by the public. In globalisational challenges national level is extremely low and adequate competence is not available; this indicates the supranational decision making process.

Since Kelsen the decentralised state would form the political system that contains basic norms. A part of these norms is generally applied, while others can be used in local and provincial governments. Several differences can be observed among countries, but its basis is in the level of decentralisation.

Local governmental efforts are ambiguous —on the one hand they want autonomy, on the other hand alliance is needed—. This relationship can be defined by several factors:

- relationship between the general political powers
- to which system units are the functions assigned
- features of inner organisations' basic norms
- type of electoral system, how much it depends on regionalism
- possibilities of regional units.

Several requirements had to be fulfilled in order to reach the defined effectiveness; the legitimacy of the government, supporting the existence of communities and ci-

1 Veidenfeld V. & Vesels V. (2003). *Evropa od A do Š* (Europe A to Z). Belgrade: Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung, Guy Herald, 223 pp.

vic activities are priorities. The main scale for citizens are circumstances of life, participation in decision making and communication.

Effort to achieve autonomy and regionalisation can be closely connected. Considering many languages the words of the above stated effort and regionalisation are in connection, and also the words *part*, *region*, *county* and *province* carry the same definition.

The authors presented the process of regionalism from the 19th century, also its historical, economical and social references. The regional changes in the 19th century changed and defined the regional boundaries; on the other hand this process formed an alliance between the general and special units. Later in the middle of the 20th century the geographical strategy appears, which resulted not only in the establishment of the EU, but also in the organisation of Europe on a regional basis. It became popular that in greater units smaller organisational units were established depending on its features —ethnics, culture, history, language, etc.—. If these are supported and protected by administrative instruments of the government, then the recently established regions will be stabile. During World War II these regions became political organisations, and their main task was to support defence. After World War II in Great Britain they had a great role in ensuring regional and institutional system of common services and controlling development. Authors present the history of regionalism in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, emphasising their special features and strong points, such as immigration politics, employment and energy politics.

The book contains the three main models about the evolution and development of regionalism:

- a) regionalism were formed by absolute development (Sweden, Germany)
- b) the decentralisation of a regionally solid state evolved into regionalism (Portugal)
- c) political regionalism.

The book also focuses on subsidiary, as a basis of regional policy. It emphasises federalism, decentralisation and effort to achieve autonomy. The level of decision making is strengthened by increasing dimensions of responsibility. Subsidiary means the principle that the law of the state is general. In parallel with this exists the laws of the community which are unique and independent, therefore limited to the region they were formed.

The authors also present arguments for and against decentralisation, considering the analysis of the local governments and the cities. Based on Tocqueville's, Ro-

bert Dahl's, Max Weber's and Thomas Eliot's theories (who have been cited many times), the authors claim that the powers of free nations are in the hands of the local governments. The absolute positive factor is that the local level is clearly closer to the individual than the governmental one. According to Weber's theory they claim that the local government evolved from the ancient polis, meaning that it can be older than the state itself. They also focus on the fact that during the operation of modern states local governments can be/are attacked by the state, since centralisation and decentralisation — as ambiguous processes — are always present. In this fight the authors prefer helping the operation of the local level. This is considered as the ideal of democracy, in which voting can be equal and participation in decision making is possible. The book wants to prove that without highly developed local democracy there is no real democracy. In order to prove this the authors focus on the features of local power, however they make no difference between its levels:

- impeachment
- transparency of the public offices' operation, due to their closeness
- participation of citizens
- possible mobilisations
- chance of political socialisation
- establishment of minorities' defence
- applying the principle of communities and solidarity
- autonomy
- separation of power
- pluralism.

Due to this we get a strongly idealised picture of the local power in use. The book adds an argument about the statement that centralism is characterised by listing totalitarian and anti-democratic countries. Presenting the politics of the 1920's and 1930's in Germany and Italy stands in opposition with the argument for decentralisation (Robert Dahl, Habermas, J. S. Mill). According to Thomas Eliot decentralisation can be the harmonic product of unity and diversity. Exaggerated standardisation, centralism can appear in the history of various countries, which can be dangerous not only for the country itself, but also for the neighbouring countries.

In the following parts of the book the theory of the EU's regional bases appear. In these parts they focus on eliminating borderlines inside the EU and the new quality of the institutional connections, and they also focus on mutual strengthening of the economical, social and cultural potentials of near-border regions, and through this they try to create balance. The authors present the regional policy of the Coun-

cil of Europe and the European Union, exclusively through their own documents and contracts. They list the general problems of co-operation inside the EU without mentioning examples, like:

- different administrative structures and legislative methods
- low level of cooperation among the member states (and their regions)
- everyday border problems
- inequality in foreign currency
- differences in wage system and tension
- environmental problems.

The conclusion of the book is that supporting the local level is necessary and important, without local democracy the operation of real democracy is not possible. The most important values of the studies in the book are the positive views supporting the local policy. Therefore it is recommended to everyone involved in politics, not only on regional and local, but on national and supranational level.