



TRENDS FOR OPTIMIZATION OF TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE AND MODELING OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN BULGARIA

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra5497>

ABSTRACT

The report reviews the existing problems of regional development through the prism of the necessary territorial changes. This article is devoted to the consideration of some territorial problems in the Republic of Bulgaria. The exhibition analyzes some of the author's views on spatial planning policies, as well as the possibility to take steps to introduce a new level of regional governance. Proposals have been made for a new structuring of the regions for planning and change in the functional structure of the settlements and respectively the Bulgarian village. Some new trends in regional development related to the spatial development of our national territory have been captured.

KEYWORDS: regional development, space, territory, structure, economy, management

JEL Codes: R10, R15

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world it is known that the management of regional development is the final stage of the complex and heterogeneous process of overall organization and functioning of activities in the national space, and hence of optimal territorial organization. In this direction, regional development should be perceived as a functional and integrative activity in which the territory and space are the basic vectors. In addition, the management of regional development is carried out on the basis of established regional (local, regional) structures and has an institutional hierarchy. Chronologically, it can be seen that the administration of regional government has its positive life cycle, but in the spatial sense there are processes such as increased emigration of human resources, deterioration of the environment, increasing costs for maintaining a sustainable quality of life. This leads to the search for permanent solutions to improve regional policy. Thus, we can assume that this requires a purely territorial approach to look for opportunities to improve the interaction between local business, society and public administration. In addition, the need to create a new regional level of government in Bulgaria is an increasingly appropriate endeavor, which would

certainly have a positive impact on our spatial development.

EXPOSITION

At the same time, the processes of innovation - digitalization, information technology, systematic scientific analysis, measurement of regional efficiency provide an opportunity for optimizing the profile of the administrative territorial units of different taxonomic levels. This gives us grounds in this presentation to present some important guidelines and approaches for optimizing the territorial structure of the Bulgarian state in order to overcome the deepening regional differences and imbalances. In recent years, various social factors have become major factors for the development of a settlement, important for its existence are the availability of health care, education, cultural activities and others that set the comfort and lifestyle. In chronological terms, the natural factors that were decisive in choosing the place for construction and development of a settlement were initially stronger in the Bulgarian lands, but in the last 40-50 years the change in the attitudes of the society is tangible and leads to the formation of a new civic and value system and a different approach to choosing a place

to live[1]. Without underestimating the modern management decisions, it can be concluded that not a small part of the problems of the settlement network in the country are currently due to the socio-economic changes in the second half of the XX century, as a result of which chaotic demographic and spatial expansion of certain urban centers, which causes over-concentration of population and mass depopulation of certain parts of the national geospace.

Trends in regional development and the implemented development policies

Perceiving the municipalities and districts as territorial systems, built of interconnected elements of natural, social, economic, cultural, ecological nature, it is logical which of them have a leading role in the consolidation of the territory and its separation into a system characterized by integrity, hierarchy, autonomy, stability, dynamism, specialization,

complexity. The starting point is that they are structured administratively and try to objectively manage the existing regional diversity and heterogeneity of territorial systems. In addition, the identified differences and growing high-intensity inequalities in the national geospace suggest a dynamic process of changing the structure, organization and functions of natural and social systems and the formation of new ones under the influence of a complex set of interconnected processes[2]. Therefore, factor analysis is the main method in the process of revealing the ongoing processes in the territorial and administrative structure. Insofar as the use of statistical data can be used to prove the growth of inequalities on the territory of the country, in the analysis of the factors for the efficiency of the territorial organization one can look for their change and choice of a new approach of territorial division.

Figure 1. The provinces of Bulgaria



Source: MRRB, NSI

In addition, regional development modeling should be at the heart of subsequent governance actions. Although, along with the importance of natural factors, the territorial division of labor may have a basic role in shaping the appearance of the territory. It is important for us to highlight the limiting importance of the large mountain massifs, or catalyzing influence - the valleys of the great rivers, the Upper Thracian lowlands, the Danube plain, the Black Sea coast. Because the importance of the territorial elements - geographical location, borders, natural potential, which can be defined as a prerequisite for the emergence of specific forms of spatial organization, which society through its activities upgrades, transforms, deforms and generates a new type of regional systems. It can be assumed that the revealed inequalities in the social,

economic and urban development during the studied period have an overall impact on the spatial and regional development of the individual region or territory. This raises the basic question of why the importance of the territorial component is abandoned at the expense of the managerial and purely bureaucratic way of defining the problems. In practice, a more accurate approach would be to combine several factors or conditions that the territorial and administrative structure should rest on [3]. The big deficit related to the derivation of the approach is the attempt to substantiate the view that the administrative and territorial structure in a more fragmented form also means spending more financial resources. In my opinion, this statement does not have a solid foundation, because the territorial policies are made for the population and respectively



for business facilitation, and not for imposing a centralized model of government with minimal importance to the individual territorial units at the expense of the central administration. Also, the regional dynamics of social indicators reveals the trend that economic growth is not always associated with an increase in the welfare of the population at the same rate. In addition, the regional contrast in social processes is growing. Emerging imbalances in social development generate changes in the functions of natural and social systems, as their basic elements change the way they interact with each other and with the external environment. This growing turbulence of the socio-economic reality in the country generates changes in the structure and organization of the country [4].

Regional diversity and the growing spatial inequalities that arise as a result of these processes form a new type of regional systems with different properties and characteristics. For example, the scope of territories under the influence of more than one settlement / economic center is expanding. Determining their regional affiliation is a complex problem from a methodological point of view, but also the management of this type of territory should be based on a qualitatively new approach, taking into account this feature and allowing for their development, which is not limited by administrative boundaries [5]. The spatial scope of the territories without a clear settlement / economic leader, engine of growth and development is also expanding. This causes further transformations and reorientation of capital flows and changes in the spatial behavior and actions of people.

Opportunities for structuring a new intermediate level of regional government

Spatially, the geographical location is the factor that determines the pace of territorial development of the modern nation state. For Bulgaria, as a crossroads in Southeast Europe, a number of territorial deficits have emerged in recent years. A number of imbalances emerged between the different districts in the country, the quality of the regional connection between the local centers has deteriorated, several regions are in decline, the condition of the border territories and municipalities has deteriorated. This is one of the reasons why the country is gradually becoming a transit zone for the movement of goods and capital from and to Europe to and from the Middle East. These findings suggest that in the current period we have a deteriorating quality of life in a number of regions, and hence conditions for the transformation of territorial systems through the formation of new regional and local identities [6]. The emerging new regional models of functioning of the systems do not have the necessary structure and sustainability, which has an

impact on people's behavior, and hence the difficulty of forming regions with attractive socio-economic development. The other significant factor influencing the spatial development of the country is the opportunity to promote economic development. The viciousness of these changes is that they retain the strong role of the state in horizontal and vertical power. It should be noted that the current administrative-territorial structure is the result of all the reforms made since the Liberation to date, but very rarely in these reforms to promote the process of decentralization. According to the current legislation, administrative-territorial units (ATU) are those that have legal status and these are the municipalities and districts. In this process, it should be borne in mind that in its current form the territorial structure was completed in 1998, when the reform of the administrative-territorial structure at the "district" level was reached. This reform erased the old districts created in 1987, and restored the old districts already under the name "districts" on the grounds that they had proved their viability and the sustainability of the established interconnections, transport schemes and relations with the central government. The reform was implemented through the amendment of Art. 6, in whose para. 1 of the Law on Administrative-Territorial Organization of the Republic of Bulgaria / SATURB /, where it is written that the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria is divided into 28 districts. Here it is necessary to note that the factors predetermined by the settlement network and the functions of the settlements have a certain demographic structure, which, however, after 1998 to 2020 gradually forms a new image and structure of the population in the country and requires re-search. opportunities for reform.

It is necessary to keep in mind that the settlement network is formed as a result of long-term historical development of the geospatial space, but it should not be perceived only as a mechanical sum of the population of places with different population numbers. It also includes their hierarchical subordination, their functional connection and the socio-economic relations between them. This picture changed after 2001, when the European horizons opened up for Bulgaria and led to high migration mobility of nearly 50% of the population in the country. The big question mark regarding the model of development and the correct assessment of it and the counterbalance with the European theory for studying the "behavior" of the settlements of different rank, expressing the hypothesis in the Sixth Cohesion Report. It stipulates that large urban centers, in addition to being major strongholds and engines of growth and development, are also more susceptible to external influences and more unstable in their behavior. Promoting these processes leads to a further increase in regional disparities and

imbalances between territories. The vision for the realization of successful regional development through the development of settlements network with population places "balancers" of large cities to be a top priority in practice increases the differences between individual settlements and regions.

Although according to the regional theory we accept that the settlements are a phenomenon of human civilization, carrier and exponent of the achieved level of development of societies, the priority development of certain urban areas at the expense of others further creates conditions for differences and imbalances. This presupposes that on the basis of the formation of a tendency towards the decrease of the population in the country, it also presupposes redesign of the territorial scope of the planning regions in Bulgaria, as well as their transformation into administrative territorial units. Given the established tradition, it is necessary for the current planning regions to remain 6, but to regroup so as to comply with NUTS II. Such zoning is possible if the city of Sofia (1,328 thousand d.), Sofia

district (226 thousand d.), Montana district (127 thousand d.) And Vidin district (82 thousand d.), Form the Western planning region. , Northern planning region form, Vratsa district (159 thousand d.), Plevna district (236 thousand d.), Lovech district (122 thousand d.), Veliko Tarnovo district (232 thousand d.), Gabrovo district 106 thousand e), Razgrad district (110 thousand e) and Ruse district (215 thousand d.), - Northeastern planning region to include the districts of Silistra (108 thousand d.), Dobrich (171 thousand d.), Varna (469 thousand d.), Shumen (172 thousand d.) And Targovishte (110 thousand d.).), Southeastern planning region to include the districts of Haskovo (225 thousand d.), Stara Zagora (313 thousand d.), Sliven (184 thousand d.), Yambol (117 thousand d.) And Burgas (409 thousand d. . d.), and the Southern planning region includes the districts of Plovdiv (666 thousand d.) Pazardzhik (252 thousand d.), Pernik (119 thousand d.), Kyustendil (116 thousand d.), Blagoevgrad (302 thousand thousand), Smolyan (103 thousand) and Kardzhali (158 thousand).

Figure 2. NUTS II Regions of Bulgaria



Source: MRRB, NSI

A new such division will create a precondition for a new model of regional development and changes in the territorial organization of the country in order to reduce regional disparities. This model can be developed because with a declining population it is necessary to expand the peripheries of the regional cities in which to concentrate the new economic activities of local rank.

At present, the settlement network in the country can be defined as a weakly polycentric network of urban centers, which may change with the new division. By increasing the number of supporting urban centers, the declining population and the deepening processes of depopulation and territorial expansion can be reduced and achieve a slowdown in negative

demographic trends, and in the medium term and their overcoming.

Structure, size and problems of the settlements in Bulgaria

In terms of demographics, the settlements have their development, and after 1878 they gradually increased until 1971, when the gradual slowdown in their demographic growth began. We can give several reasons for this, but the first is that the gradual modernization and urbanization of the country is changing mainly in the demographic structure of the population. As another reason, it can be deduced that in the urban environment or urban lifestyle the birth rate falls and thus negative demographic processes emerge. Another factor can be considered the lack of immigrants in Bulgaria

after the 50s of the twentieth century, and in the period after 1990 the reverse process of emigration of a significant share of the young population in the direction of Europe, USA and Australia. This predetermines the search for opportunities to optimize the existing territorial and structural policy. In this direction, the main criteria remains the number of their population. Although it does not reflect their hierarchical subordination and does not give an idea of their functions, the analysis based on this criterion in chronological terms gives an idea of the most general changes occurring in the settlement system of the country [6]. According to the number of their population, the cities in Bulgaria can not be classified into the largest (with a population of over 100,000 people), large (50,000-100,000 people), medium (20,000 - 50,000), small (10,000-20 000 people) and very small (less than 10,000 people). For example, when Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, 25 Bulgarian cities had a population of over 50 thousand people, and in 2018 their number decreased to 18. Of these, in 2007 10 cities had a population of over 100,000 people, with 49% of the urban population

and 38% of the total population living in them. As of 2018, only 6 cities have a population of over 100,000 people - Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, Ruse, Stara Zagora. 64% of the urban and 47% of the total population of the country live in these 6 cities. The accumulation of the population in 6 large cities makes nearly 217 cities with a population of less than 10,000 people, which means that the share of very small cities is predominant in the country. On the other hand, if we make a comparative analysis of the average area of 1 district we will see that it is 3964 sq. Km., But of the 28 districts in the country 17 have a smaller area. Therefore, there are very large areas and more very small areas. These territorial anomalies also affect regional policy. As of 2018, the average population of a district is 250,000 people, but 21 districts are below this indicator. The magnitude of the variation between the district with the smallest population - Vidin (84 thousand inhabitants) and Sofia - city (1.3 million inhabitants) is 16 times.

Figure 3. Distribution of provinces by NUTS III



Source: NSI and MRRB

It is necessary to conclude that there is no relative proportionality between the districts in two main indicators - area and population, which are important determinants. potential for regional development. The average number of settlements in one district is 190, but in 16 districts their number is below this value. With the smallest number of settlements are the districts of Sofia-city - 38 and Ruse region - 84, and with the largest number - Kardzhali region - 470, Gabrovo region - 356 and Veliko Tarnovo region - 336. The number of settlements in the district of Kardzhali is greater than their number in the North-Western region defined in the RDA for the purposes of regional planning (395). The total number of mayoralties in the country as of 2018 is 3187. The average number of mayoralties per district is 113, but in 13 districts their number is below the national average. A significant problem is that 13.0% of the settlements do not have land [6].

All this shows that the current territorial and administrative structure has its deficits and greatly contributes to the non-identification of the problems of the settlements and puts many puzzles in front of the possibilities for achieving efficiency of the regional development. These processes of increasing regional disparities lead to further territorial polarization in terms of social and economic development - few districts and municipalities have high incomes, the territorial concentration of economic activities is clear, and access to quality services and transport, health, educational infrastructure in many parts of the national geospace remains severely limited. As a result, the territorial scope of the areas with the manifestation of negative socio-economic processes and phenomena increases. In addition, the inefficient urban development is the reason for the deepening of the structural deformations in the separate territories. For example,



the large urban centers in Northwestern and Northeastern Bulgaria do not have balance cities, and the declining population of a number of medium-sized cities is the reason for changing their functions as support centers for development. This in turn reduces the vitality of the national territory and creates areas of mismanagement and a declining trend.

Another set of problems is emerging, which has brought to the fore the formation of specific neighborhoods, with a clear peripherality in terms of their participation in social processes and the creation of a typical deficit model of regional development. Border and mountain territories, as well as a number of municipalities with a population of less than 5,000 people can be defined as such. In these areas it is necessary to proceed to a change related to the change of the functional characteristics of the individual settlements. Mostly with the content of the concepts - neighborhoods, neighborhoods, holiday villages, urban area, suburban area, tourist complexes, and others. This change is related to the fact that the concept of "village" acquires a new characteristic that allows for targeted support from the state budget and the acquisition of an independent (autonomous) status related to public works and management of the territory. A step in this direction is to unite the villages in Bulgaria and to accept as a village a settlement with at least 100 houses, as the village may include neighborhoods, villa zones, rural neighborhoods, remote neighborhoods with at least 10 houses and others. As with an amendment to the Law on Territorial and Administrative Structure to enable the smallest territorial unit to acquire institutional status. The possibility to create rural municipalities with a population of at least 2,000 people or several villages with at least 500 houses should also be regulated. This will provide opportunities for more rational financing of settlements from the state budget, as well as independent policies in the field of regional development.

CONCLUSION

The problems of the territorial and administrative structure in Bulgaria are open. Their solution must be accompanied by consistent and targeted measures by the state to ensure a better business environment at regional and local level, to improve the quality and speed of administrative services and to create a sustainable and predictable public sector. On the other hand, the need for a change in a number of provisions in the legal framework governing the functioning and management of regional development is visible.

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