

Changing local and regional government: issues of democracy, integrality and hierarchies

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Abstract: In this paper the authors discuss some crucial institutional and geographical concepts relating to issues of democratization and rationalization in systems of territorial administration. They point to social, economic and material pressures and to challenging issues of integrality/complexity of territorial self-government and administration. The integral nature of territories (environments) necessarily implies complex tasks of multi-purpose local and regional self-governments. The authors argue that contemporary challenges relate to decreasing aspirations of welfare state, simultaneity of decentralization and centralization, and flexible system capability at local and regional levels. Indicating possible future development tendencies, the authors claim that reforms of territorial self-government and administration will always lag behind of economic changes. However, democracy and also territorialized democracy in the form of local and regional multi-purpose self-government is an integral affair providing indispensable coordinating framework for partial and less integral interest formation and behaviour of economic and other corporate actors and individual citizens.

Key words: territorial administration, democratization, decentralization, integrality.

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1. Introduction

Looking back at debates concerning reforms of local and regional government and territorial administration in the 1980s and 1990s we can see in many European countries a political and academic agenda seeking change in systems of local and regional government and administration. Obviously, it is little surprising to see that reforms have been sought under pressures of societal and economic changes in European countries concerned and increasingly also under impacts of internationalization and globalization tendencies (cf. Smith, 1985; Bennett, 1989; 1992; 1993; Barlow, 1991; Johnston, 1990; Sharpe, 1993; King and Stoker, 1996). It is, however, interesting to observe that basic issues on the general agenda did not change much. The agenda still involves the search for more appropriate structures and functioning of (i) local (municipal) and regional (provincial) self-government and/or (ii) local and regional tiers of deconcentrated central state administration (i.e. locally or regionally operating agencies of central state). With Leemans (1970) and also recently with Bennett (1997) we have to recognize that mutually connected systems of territorial self-government and administration have inbuilt tendencies to become obsolete. Thus, as debates and research taking place in the IGU Commission on Geography and Public Administration have shown, structure and

functioning of the systems are continuously subject of discussions on the need for reform and require more or less continual reform. Moreover, also we emphasize in this paper that European systems of territorial self-government and administration and their reforms are across countries certainly more variable than uniform and are showing little tendencies to become more similar. As a result of this evident variability it seems appropriate at an academic level to direct attention to a number of issues and principles that possibly can guide ongoing debates on reform in spite the variability recognized.

Accordingly, we are concerned in this paper with a number of principles and issues that have seemed to be central in academic concerns and political debates on appropriate structure and functioning of territorial self-government and administration. We examine issues of democracy, integrality and hierarchical relations in multilevel systems of local and regional government and administration. We give particular emphasis to the importance of integral (multifunctional) coordination of qualitatively heterogeneous activities in territories (environments) of local, regional and national communities. The reason for this is obvious, yet important. Increasing complexity of societal and economic structures, their intensity and integration at higher geographical levels (scales) underline the need for an appropriate and proportional development of coordinative tasks of territorial self-government and administrations, nation-states and also of supra-national organizations such as the European Union. Because each of these public institutions are confronted with continuing and difficult tasks to articulate and represent "general" public interests. It seems therefore safe to claim that these governmental institutions are decisive for development of qualitatively higher forms of democratization and, within the framework of democratization, also for continuing rationalization of societal life. An addition reason to study these issues is provided by challenges to processes of democratization and economic liberalization emerging in the post-communist part of Europe (see Dostál 1992; 1998). It is clear that in future there will be a need to change current ways of functioning of hierarchical systems of the governmental institutions and to enrich existing contents of their functions and competencies.

Our paper is organized as follows. First, we make an attempt to indicate at a more abstract conceptual level some crucial institutional and geographical concepts relating to issues of democratization and rationalization. We point to social, economic and material pressures and to challenging integrality/complexity of their interconnectedness within the hierarchy of contemporary settlement systems. We indicate how these pressures and complexity influencing structures and functioning of territorial self-government and administration conceptualized in a number of traditional principles and issues. We point to the importance of integral nature of territories (environments) and necessarily complex tasks of multi-purpose local and regional self-governments. Second, building on this examination of traditional principles and issues and their current importance, we attempt to indicate a number of contemporary tendencies and complex issues and principles. We argue that contemporary challenges relate to (i) decreasing aspirations of (welfare) state, (ii) simultaneity of decentralization and centralization tendencies in entire hierarchies of self-government and administration, and (iii) flexible system capability at local and regional levels. Finally, we speculate on future development tendencies.

2. Traditional principles and issues

It is well-known in Great Britain and also elsewhere that at least since Mill's "Considerations on Representative Government" published in 1861, a series of normative arguments and conceptual principles in favour of local (and regional) government have strongly influenced debates on territorial administration in various European countries. Going further than utilitarian norms of central state supervision and efficiency of administration, Mill's work emphasized both the importance of systematic hierarchy of administrative bodies and the need for the capacity of local (and regional) institutions (cf. also Storker, 1996). At least since that time, traditional conceptualizations concerning territorial government in democratizing countries were based on two major principles. On the one hand, there was the view that local (and regional) self-governmental institutions have to be part of any democratic regime in order to provide for participation and education of citizens in political decision-making and governing. On the other hand, there was the supplementing view of wide ranging competencies of local (and regional) self-government based on multi-functional package of tasks guaranteeing provision of services efficiently and effectively due to local/regional knowledge and interest articulation and ability to oversee local or regional affairs. This twofold conceptualization gave politicians and scholars a comprehensive perspective of a hierarchy of relatively autonomous, multi-purpose governmental bodies providing public services, having capacity to raise local or regional taxes and regulated democratically by elected representatives overseeing the functioning of full time professionals.

Another noteworthy abstract contribution to this conceptualization has been provided by influential work of Dahl. Let us summarize briefly his message. In his "After the Revolution. Authority in a Good Society" Dahl (1990) has given a contemporaneous reformulation of this normative base of democratization and rationalization. In pondering the complexity of relations between goals of democratization and rationalization, Dahl has provided four general criteria that have to be reconciled in any major reform of democratic local/regional government. First, there is principle of affected interests saying that every citizen who is affected by the decisions of a government should have the right to participate in that government (1990: 49–51). Second, there is criterion of economy curbing the former principle. The criterion of economy emphasizes saving of time, scarce means and human effort. Among other things, this criterion implies the need for delineations of territorial domains within which the affected interest principle can be applied (Dahl, 1990: 30ff). Third, there is the criterion of competence saying that democratic authority must be professional and thus qualified by appropriate knowledge and skills (1990: 21ff). Finally, there is criterion of personal choice. Also this criterion is complex in its implications and must be reconciled with the other three principles of democratic authority. But, according to Dahl, the personal choice principle is usually resulting in rational self-interest: one citizen cannot satisfactorily gain his/her own ends unless he/she allows others an opportunity to pursue their ends on an equal basis (1990: 9). Indeed, Dahl's message is a complex one pointing towards the integrality of affairs of territorial self-government and administration, but at least two conclusions to be drawn are clear. First, one-dimensional simplistic ideas about territorial democratic authorities and rational use of scarce means are bound to be wrong. Second, systems based on

democracy-cum-administration are necessarily systems based on delegation-cum-delegation. Horizontally, there is delegation from democratic representatives to professional officers. Vertically, delegated authority entails hierarchies of competencies, control, scarce resources and thus of power (Dahl, 1990: 71–75).

These normative and traditional approaches dominated ongoing debates on the need for reform in 1970s and 1980s. Some crucial institutional and geographical concepts used in the debates are summarized in a diagrammatic way in Figure 1. As Leemans (1970) and later also Sharpe (1993) made sufficiently plain there were major concerns during the 1970s and 1980s with rational-functional set of factors. This set of factors was basically connected with issues of rationalization (see seven of such issues and principles indicated in Figure 1) having to do with social and economic and ecological interdependencies and pressures and leading largely to scale enlargement of local and, often also of regional units of self-government and administration in order to cope with impacts of urbanization and suburbanisation and new responsibilities for public services provision. Later, the importance of internationalization and globalization impacts was taken into account (cf. for example de Smidt, 1987; 1990; Barlow, 1993). On the other hand, however, there were also concerns with normative issues of democratization as we indicate in Figure 1 by pointing to seven major principles and issues emerging time and again in the debates (cf. Leemans, 1970; Sharpe, 1979; Bennett, 1989). There is little need to examine here all fourteen issues and principles indicated in Figure 1, because these are examined in relevant literature. However, the issue of integrality of multi-purpose political decision-making as well as the issue of territorial effectivity of internalization of external effects within one jurisdiction deserve a more detailed examination.

3. On integrality of local/regional political decision making

From Mill onwards the advocates of traditional conceptualization of multiple-purpose local/regional representative government have shared a common underlying understanding (cf. Stoker, 1996). It is the principle of a sufficient integrality of political decision-making at each self-governmental tier. This principle particularly implies a wide range of competencies and means in fields of political decision-making that mutually communicate with each other. In brief, this principle warns against fragmentation of political decision-making necessarily resulting from functional (or single-purpose-oriented) solutions of decentralization of competencies in self-government and splitting in deconcentration of scarce means in deconcentrated state administration. Furthermore, fragmentation of decision-making in local/regional democratic bodies and state agencies tends to compel actors to interact more along vertical lines with actors in the same policy sector at national level. The point to be underlined here is that this is usually implying to give too much emphasis to segmented (i.e. partial or one-sided) views of interests of one sector (cf. also Hägerstrand, 1976; Törnqvist, 1980). The crucial point is that a sufficiently wide range of competencies allows for coordination of public service provision and gives room for balancing of competing priorities and checking on the segmented power of organized partial interests (Dostál 1984:29–35). Yet, there is also another point to be emphasized in this context. The multi-purpose character and a

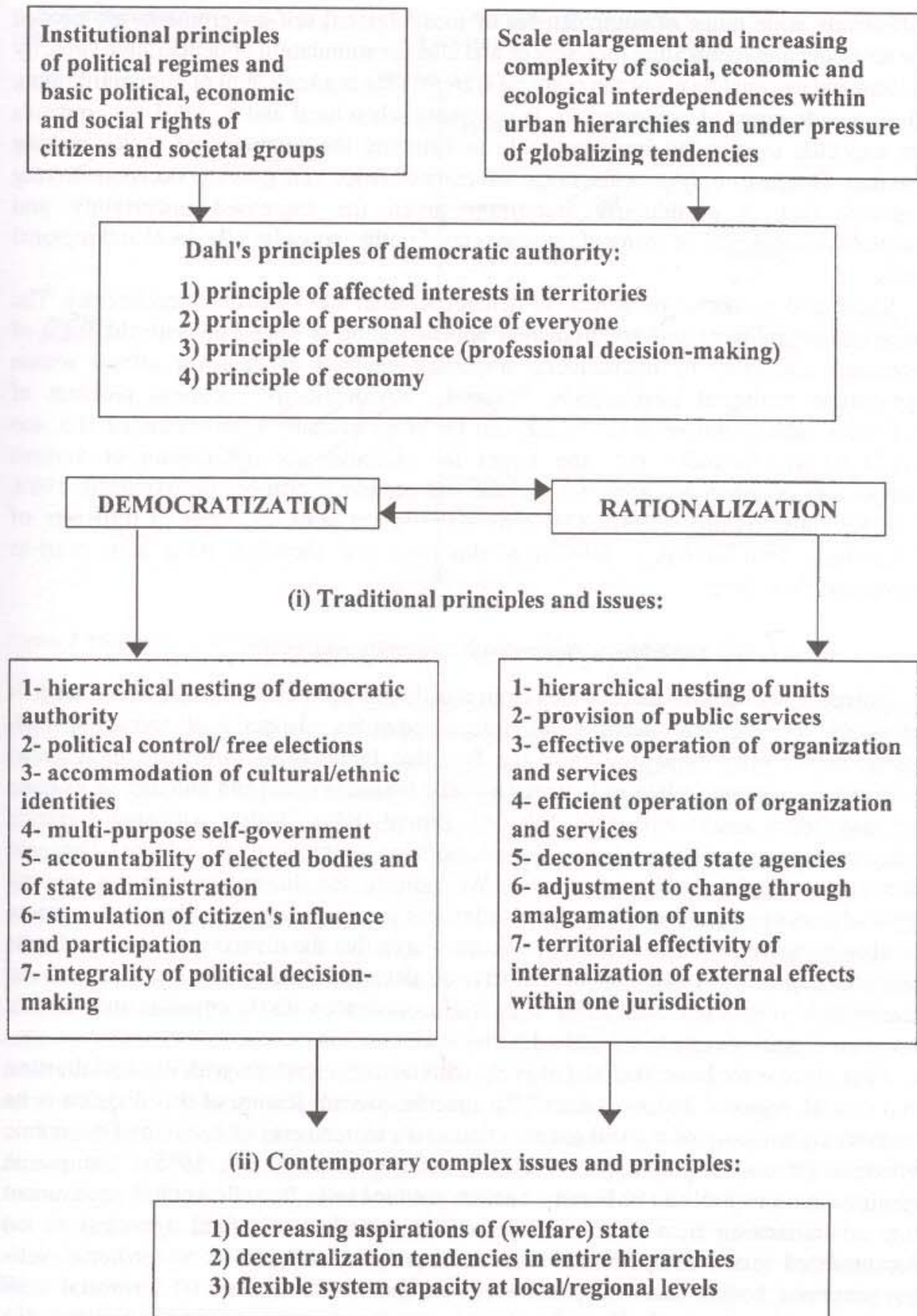


Figure 1 Some institutional and geographical concepts concerning reforms of systems of local and regional government

sufficiently wide range of competencies of local/regional self-governments are needed for revealing and reconciling preferences and also for stimulation of deliberative capacity at local and regional levels of the political system. This is a key claim of our contribution. Thus, a wide range of competencies is necessary when local and regional governments are expected to play an important role in bringing the segments of policy-making together. Because, only a wide range of competencies can provide decision-making capacity that is particularly important given the increased uncertainty and integrality/complexity of many of the issues confronting nowadays the local and regional areas.

Social and economic pressures for democratization and rationalization interact. The issue of integrality of self-governmental policy-making is linked up with the issue of territorial effectivity of internalizing important external or spillover effects within appropriate territorial jurisdictions. There is, obviously, the recurrent problem of instituting administrative areas which can be geographically under-bounded (i.e. too small) or over-bounded (i.e. too large) for effective accommodation of various components of urban and regional societal and economic changes (cf. (Bennett, 1989, 7–9. Recently, Bennett (1997, 325–328) identified at least six areas of difficulty of achieving a “true bounding” solution of this issue and, therefore, there is no need to reexamine them here.

3.1. Two hierarchical dimensions: integrality and levels

However, we look at these issues from a different perspective. We believe that it is necessary to take into account the integral/complex character of territorial self-governmental systems arising from the fact that hierarchical forms are represented primarily by systemic relations between a whole (entire system) and plurality of its parts (cf. also Dostál and Hampl 1993: 260–264; Hampl 1998). Dealing with such systemic relations we must distinguish two complementary hierarchical dimensions. They are shown in a simplified way in Figure 2. We indicate, for illustrative purposes, several types of actors (subjects or objects involved in relations) in order to emphasize the variety of administrative forms and relations. We must note that the distinctions between levels and the degree of integrality/complexity of decision-making of actors cannot be determined in some too exact terms. This is in accordance with the complex and variable structure of self-governmental and administrative systems.

First, there is the basic skeleton of every administrative systems with its usual division into central, regional and local tiers. The specific societal feature of this division is its legitimate monopoly of control (or sanction and enforcement) of social and economic activities (actors) within a given territory of the state (Smith, 1985). The public administration control can be based on deconcentrated tasks from the central government (i.e. administration in a narrow sense of the central state’s field agencies) or on decentralized tasks, competencies and accompanying obligations of territorial self-governmental bodies. Basically, however, we must reiterate that (i) territorial self-government is an integral affair of multi-purpose decision-making, and in contrast, (ii) territorially deconcentrated agencies of the central state are representing sectors (i.e. ministries) at regional and local levels.

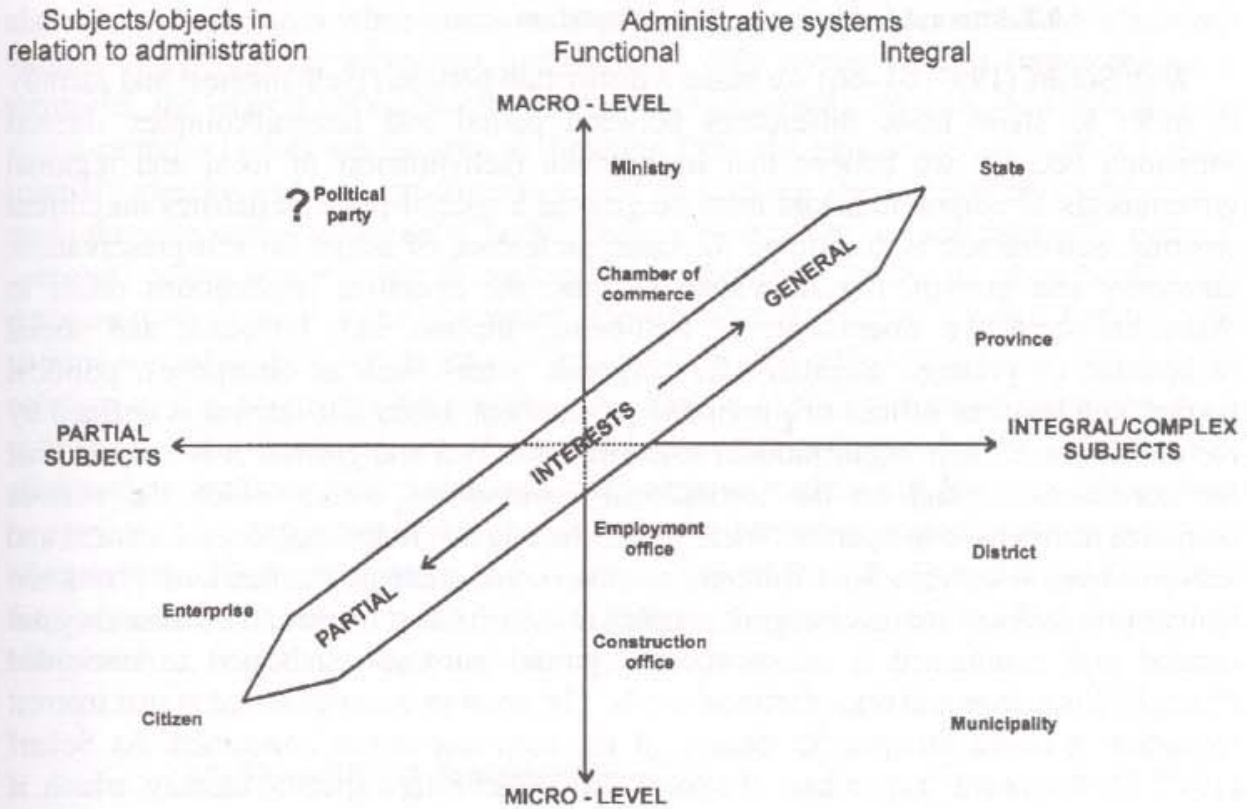


Figure 2 Structuration of territorial systems of administration and their influences

With Johnston (1990, 66) we can emphasize that decentralization of competencies towards the local/regional self-government is promoted in order to constitute a check to power of the central state and also to provide an organizational mechanism able to deal with the geographical variations and heterogeneities in need and capacity that result from uneven territorial development (cf. also Dostál and Hampl, 1995). Second, there are also hierarchical relations between, on the one hand, relatively integral/complex multi-purpose self-governmental bodies fulfilling a wide range of tasks such as municipalities, districts or provinces and, on the other hand, less integral/complex actors and bodies with partial and private tasks such as enterprises or citizens in their roles as owners of properties, consumers of services, polluters of environment and so on. Importantly, there is also an intermediary sort of autonomous actors and bodies such as tax-collector's offices, chambers of commerce or employment offices. These are single-purpose institutions operating in addition to the self-governmental authorities of integral administrative territories in order to perform specific functions.

This conceptual disaggregation of the notion of hierarchy into the two complementary dimensions has advantages, among other things, for dealing with the fundamental integrality/complexity of (i) interests formation of individual and corporate actors, and (ii) issues of vertical and horizontal fragmentation of self-governmental and administrative systems. In brief, the vertical scale hierarchy (state-region-locality) and the "horizontal" hierarchy following different levels of integrality/complexity of decision-making of actors.

3.2. Interest formation and fragmentation

With Scharf (1997, 61–66) we make a distinction between (self-)interest and identity in order to show basic differences between partial and integral/complex interest formation because we believe that institutional (self-)interest of local and regional governments as corporate actors must be granted a special place in debates on current reforms. Self-interest is describing the basic preference of actors for self-preservation, autonomy and growth. For individual citizens, the operative implications relate to Weberian normative orientation of well-being, income and, influence and social recognition of prestige. Similarly for corporate actors such as enterprises, political parties, employment offices or provincial government, basic self-interest is defined by the conditions of their organizational autonomy, survival and growth. It is obvious that the conditions depend on the institutional environment within which the various corporate actors have to operate. What matters here is that individual, organizational and self-government interests have different normative and strategic implications. Firms and similar organization are less integral/complex in their interest formation because they are created and maintained to serve specific partial purposes, indicated in one-sided (“simple”) missions and organizational goals. The point to be emphasized is that interest formation is based on specific identity of the corporate actors concerned. As Scharf (1997, 65) has noted “actors have the possibility of defining a specific identity, which, if adhered to, will specify their own choices and which, when communicated and believed, reduces uncertainty for other actors (and for researchers as well)”.

Identities of corporate actors must be relatively stable over time in order to be effective and forming a necessarily predictable environment for mutual interaction and functioning. Here, we arrive at a crucial point of our argument. Firstly, we believe that the great integrality and complexity of functioning of local/regional self-governmental units derives from the necessity to (re-)articulate by democratic procedures their identities. Given the heterogeneity of self-interests of citizens forming a local or a regional electorate, a territorial self-government will always have the crucial general task to balance and reconcile emerging partial interests formations within territorial jurisdictions concerned. Secondly, the relative integrality and complexity of interest formation of a multi-purpose territorial self-government also derives from increasing comprehensiveness of its coordinative function. Due to increasing interconnectedness of economic, social, political and ecological processes in its territorial domain also its coordinative and balancing role becomes inevitably more complex. Here, we arrive at a central conclusion of our paper. It can be claimed that democracy and also territorialized democracy in the form of local/regional self-government is an integral affair providing an indispensable coordinating framework for partial and less complex interests formation and behaviour of other corporate actors and individual citizens.

Our emphasis given to increasing complexity/integrality of decision-making of corporate actors along the horizontal axis in Figure 2 relates to issues of fragmentation of self-governmental and administrative systems. In the work of the IGU Commission these issues were examined a number of publications (cf. for example Barlow, 1994). Fragmentation refers to situations where a territory is subdivided into several contiguous governmental subterritories such as municipalities, districts or provinces. Fragmentation

also refers to situations when functions of government at a territory are divided between various single-purpose authorities and agencies. The former case of fragmentation is territorial, the latter is called functional. As we emphasized above, the administrators of single-purpose bodies are inclined to function from the perspective of their one-sided (partial) identity and interest formation and are lacking the integral perspective of a multi-purpose self-governmental body. Thus, a multiplicity of special-single purpose corporate actors is confusing to citizens, lines of accountability are often hidden and decision-making tends to be concealed from democratic control. Consolidation of the various special-purpose actors into an integral territorial self-government is the obvious solution to this fragmentation problem. As Barlow (1994) and many other observers explained, some functions are of technical character and may be carried out more effectively outside the more politicized multi-purpose government. However, the point to be emphasized is that when in reform proposals the integral character of decision-making of territorial self-governmental bodies is not recognized than the territorial and functional fragmentations can enforce each other creating extreme variety of problems in terms of effective size, scarce resources and capacity for action.

3.3. Structure and development

Dealing with questions of effectiveness of systems of territorial administration and their possible changes we must distinguish between different types and ranks/scales (i.e. levels) of relevant wholes. As we summarize in a schematic way in Figure 2, the understanding of relationships between wholes and their parts is crucial (cf. also Dostál and Hampl, 1992, 197ff). The emphasis is put on the division of functions, their mutual influences and accompanying competencies. These distinctions are connected with well-known polar conceptualizations such as centralization vs. decentralization, integration vs. disintegration or autonomization, and so on. Two main approaches are interesting here. A first one is focussed on structural features; for example on the division of competencies in a given state of system of administration. A second approach deals with processes, i.e. developmental changes such as the strengthening of functions of the whole (state or centre) or strengthening of functions of its integral parts (province and municipality).

From the standpoint of structural proportions, an adequate state of affairs can be defined in general terms as a 'well-balanced' one, that is suitable for individual parts as well as for the whole. Such a well-balanced structural state can only be realized under the circumstances of a democratic regime in which component parts agree within the organizational framework of the whole. The structure of such a state can be called well-balanced if (i) there is sufficient room for autonomous activities of parts and, (ii) there is also room for the necessary coordination and accompanying synergic effects at the level of the whole. So-called 'unbalanced' states are basically two. First, there can be highly centralized power and competencies at the level of the entire whole: the well-know situation under the totalitarian regime of communist etatist socialism. Second, a lack of balance characterizes also a state of far-reaching powers and competencies of parts: an anarchistic type of systems.

From a developmental perspective, the main point of interest is to understand changes of states and to point to accompanying tendencies. In a simplified way, it is possible to indicate changes of the state when we focus on the relation between centralizing and decentralizing tendencies which can be assessed differently; i.e. as positive or negative processes. For example, increasing centralization can be associated with transitions from a democratic system to a totalitarian one like in Czechoslovakia during the late 1940s. Obviously, transitions are also conceivable from anarchistic systems lacking stability to systems which are integrated in democratic ways based on mutual reconciliations and agreement. Of course, these general examples of primary types of organization of systems are extreme cases. It is therefore necessary to deal with centralizing and decentralizing tendencies in the same type of organization, as tendencies that are associated with the developmental process of the whole (system) concerned. In the case of post-totalitarian Czechoslovakia, the role of both tendencies has been associated with the change towards a democratic system. Here, however, it is necessary to conceptualize the two relatively antagonistic tendencies in a non-mechanistic way. It is more appropriate to replace the terms centralization and decentralization by terms integration and autonomization. Moreover, it seems to be useful to consider possibilities of simultaneous development of both tendencies. Of course, this is a challenging point we make here. It would imply a simultaneous improvement of coordination and cooperation of component parts in the frame of the whole to which they organizationally belong as well as intensification and spread of activity of parts within their own domains of autonomous space. In various instances it will be seemingly possible to realize larger effects. On the one hand, the development of an integral coordination would be realized. On the other hand, a development of autonomization of parts would be stimulated. We believe that it is necessary to recognize the importance of both scale-increasing and scale-decreasing processes caused by the current social and economic change. These abstract considerations of territorial administrative systems point to chances of a simultaneous development of integrating and autonomous tendencies. Basically, this involves development of cooperation-orientated character of organization of the whole (system), i.e. increasing effectiveness of the system's hierarchical order connected with increasing participation of its parts.

4. Some contemporary tendencies and issues

Building on this examination of traditional principles and issues and their current importance, we turn now attention to a number of contemporary tendencies and issues. We go to argue that contemporary challenges relate in particular to (i) decreasing aspirations of (welfare) state, (ii) simultaneity of decentralization and centralization tendencies in entire hierarchies of self-government and administration, and (iii) flexible system capability at local and regional levels (see the lower part of Figure 1). Processes of decentralization appear to be more important and have to contribute to greater flexibility of contemporary systems of territorial self-government and administration. Accordingly, these processes and issues are dealt with in section 4.2.

4.1. Decreasing aspirations of (welfare) state

Since Bennett's convincing assessments of the welfare models of post-war development of modern democratic states (1993) and some additional examinations (cf. Welch, 1993) we know well how important impacts of post-war increasing aspirations of the welfare state have been on the structure and functioning of local/regional self-government and administration. In order to indicate the impacts it is useful to distinguish four levels of aspirations of equalization that most of the central governments in West Europe instituted in their nationwide legislation (cf. also Goedhart, 1989; Dostál and Blažek 1992: 158–160). A first aspiration level concerned the aim to equalize local fiscal capacity. Taxation was increasingly more centralized in the hands of the central government enabling redistribution of a part of tax revenues towards poor regional and particularly local governments. A second aspiration level was reached when the principle of equalization of expenditure needs was accepted. This resulted in the acceptance of some more or less objective criteria of indicating interprovincial and intermunicipal needs. On the one hand, there came objective criteria for distribution of general grants. On the other hand, new specific grants (mainly for education, social housing, provision for the poor, etc.) were introduced. A third level of aspiration of the central governments was reached when the principle of equalization of local and regional capacity to provide public services was accepted in the national legislation. It is clear that especially this third level of legislative aspiration resulted in awarding of numerous specific grants and accompanying tasks to regional and in particular to local (municipal) governments. A fourth level of aspirations was reached when the postwar legislation on the redistributive mechanisms of the welfare state even resulted in equalization (standardization) of the services themselves. This highest level of aspiration of the central legislation has meant that the room for manoeuvre of local and also regional self-governments has been considerably limited. The provision of expensive social welfare services is a good example of this aspiration level of the central legislators (cf. also Esping-Andersen 1990).

In the perspective of necessary reforms, it is important to realize that the four levels of equalization in the public sector provisions still are simultaneously present in contemporary systems of territorial administration. On the one hand, there are instances of social welfare assistance in which the fourth level of aspiration is maintained. On the other hand, there is a majority of fields of public service provision where the second or third aspiration levels of nationwide legislation have been attained. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, most of the central government have recognized the necessity to shift the emphasize back to the third or second level. For example, in the Netherlands and in some other countries, the following points have been emphasized: (i) the necessity to strengthen further the financial situation of the largest municipalities, (ii) the deregulation and lump-sum form of special grants reducing bureaucratic control of the ministries, and (iii) the search for possibilities to increase the role of local and regional taxes (Dostál and Blažek, 1992). Thus, as an important result of reexamination of the aspirations of the central legislators, there emerged a general tendency to decrease the aspiration levels in provision of public services. On the one hand, this allows for a certain decentralization of finances and taxation from the central government. On the other hand, this also allows for some relaxation of pressures on the local and regional governments to implement

public service provision of the central state. Welfare state burdens became too heavy. One of major solutions of the welfare state cost issues pursued by central governments has been privatization of welfare state responsibilities (cf. Clark, 1998). The increasing importance of the private sector at this field has inevitably selective impacts on provision of welfare services at local and regional levels emphasizing meritocratic principles at cost of equalitarian ones (cf. also Dostál 1984:17–19; Dostál and Hampl 1992: 199–201).

4.2. Decentralization and flexibility

These adaptations are linked up with issues of simultaneous decentralization and centralization tendencies in entire hierarchies of self-government and administration. As we have already suggested above in Figure 2, it is useful to distinguish between vertical and horizontal decentralization issues. Vertical decentralization is the shifting of functions and competencies from a higher level to a lower level implying a change in rank/scale level of performance. Horizontal decentralization is taking place when functions and competences are shifted from multi-purpose government to single-purpose bodies. This sort of decentralization is thus expanding the corporate actors at intermediate level of integrality/complexity of the identity and interest formation. A more extreme form of decentralization is externalization of function and competencies from the systems of government and administration towards private sectors, i.e. privatization. It is obvious that the horizontal decentralization tendencies are part of the current post-welfarist agenda. However, we have to note that these change are an important component of continuous and gradual reforms having also adverse implications for the structure and functioning of entire hierarchies of local/regional government and administration. These tendencies have fragmenting and even dismantling impacts and this is certainly a problematic to be studied in the field of administrative geography.

Finally, we arrive at a point of our discussion where the issue of flexible development perspective and system capacity at local and regional levels has to be dealt with. Our aim is to address some basic conceptual principles that are underlying the notion of flexibility in structure and functioning of territorial government and administration. Bennett has introduced a useful distinction stressing a twofold flexible approach: “flexible decentralization to the most basic and smallest units where the demand for participation, legitimacy, representation and community identity can be met; and flexible aggregation of basic units into collectives, co-operatives and associations for which efficient sizes of administration can be achieved which allow internalization of externalities and technical-bureaucratic efficiency. This suggestion, however, opens more questions than it answers” (1993: 303). However, in his introduction it appears that “flexible aggregation of different sizes of units is the only means of maintaining an adaptable but stable financial and administrative structure. This leads to arguments for different mixes of co-ordination, agency arrangements, ‘associations’ of local administrative units and different mixes of public administration, public finance and private (market) responses” (1993, 7). Thus, it seems that flexible aggregation (i.e. scale enlargement) is more required than flexible decentralization. However, the question arises whether current developments and pressures for reforms confirm this assessment or whether resolving current tensions in territorial self-governmental and administrative systems have to follow a course of

flexible decentralization (i.e. scale decreasing adaptations). In particular there is the question whether increasing flexibility demands structural changes or whether it seems more appropriate to change ways of functioning of territorial self-governmental and administrative systems.

It is clear that the notion of flexibility belongs to the popular vocabulary of this time and possesses an important mobilizing value as regards efforts of local and regional authorities (cf. also Dostál, 1988). Flexibility is future-oriented notion. Flexibility relates to the wish to keep open the present situation in the view of coming future situations. It is also clear that the notion of flexibility is an instrumental one. Thus, it cannot be an important goal of reforms, because it can only be used as a tool. Moreover, it is appropriate to recognize that flexibility is a notion having various connotations. It is being used as a catch-all notion. In particular, flexibility seems to refer to shifting of functioning of organizational systems along the following dimensions: (i) from uniformity to pluriformity, (ii) from permanency to variability, (iii) from rigidity towards readiness for action, or (iv) from detail towards general delineation. Thus, it seems that flexibility refers to the capability of organizational systems to react fast on ongoing variety in the environment. It refers to ability of organizations and their principal decision-makers to operate rapidly in environment that is characteristically a fast changing one and very difficult to comprehend (i.e. to forecast), and consequently, to control effectively. Scott (1987) claims that these insights are challenging wide-spread assumption that some generally applicable organizational principles can be developed that can be suitable in all places and times. Accordingly, we seemingly have to accept the following three propositions: (i) there is no best general way to organize, (ii) any way of organizing is not equally effective and efficient, and (iii) the best way to organize is always depending on the character of the environment to which the organization must be related given its tasks and ambitions or obligations. In short, this ecological reasoning claims that those organizations whose internal features best match the circumstances of their environment will achieve the best adaptation as indicated by organization's performances (cf. also Minzberg, 1983, 143ff). We may draw the conclusion that the popular view that flexibility must be understood as associated with tendencies to hasty 'demolitions' of existing institutional and organizational systems lacks its base. Instead, the notion of flexibility appears to refer to the capability to react on unpredictable future developments by enlargement of management capacity by alternative new steering and decision-making rules. Correspondingly, flexibility does not necessarily refer to changing existing organizational structures of territorial self-government and administration, but to adaptations of their functioning, and thus, to increasing flexibility of "rules of the game".

5. Concluding remarks

Contemporary and future tendencies in territorial self-government and administration have to be assessed in a wider context of development of societal organization at all significant ranks or scale/levels. Changes in structure and functioning of self-government and administration are necessary, but they are only a partial component of societal development and are thus influenced by a wide range of other processes (Dostál and

HAMPL 1995; Hampl 1998). Indeed, in this sense necessary reforms of territorial self-government and administration will always lag behind economic changes. Intra-national, international and global divisions of labour (of economic activities) are fast processes taking place at these various, yet interconnected scales. Supranational integration processes are lagging behind intra-national integration processes. At the supranational level, economic integration (economic globalization) is dominant and integration of societal coordination at this level can only be very slow, and extremely difficult to realize. Economic actors operating at intra-national and supranational levels are forming a large plurality of subjects led by articulation of partial interests. They confront territorial self-government and administration with important pressures for change. However, it must be recognized that democratic governments are representing more integral interest formations. Therefore, it is little surprising that territorial governments and administrations appear to possess in-built tendencies to become obsolete. However, we have to emphasize again that democracy and also territorialized democracy in the form of local and regional multi-purpose self-government is an integral affair providing indispensable coordinating framework for partial and less integral interests formation and behaviour of corporate actors and individual citizens. Democracy and also territorialized democracy provide integral frameworks for economic and other corporate actors and citizens. Change of structure and functioning of democracy always relates to new divisions of power in society. A basic issue in any calls for reforms is obviously the asynchronicity of economic changes with changes in (territorial) democracy. It seems that this issue never can be avoided, yet only reduced.

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VÝVOJ LOKÁLNÍ A REGIONÁLNÍ SAMOSPRÁVY: OTÁZKY DEMOKRACIE, INTEGRÁLNOSTI A HIERARCHIE ŘÍZENÍ

Résumé

Příspěvek je věnován přehodnocení tradičních přístupů pojetí územní správy, a zvláště pak samosprávy, z hlediska současných tendencí ve vývoji geografické organizace společnosti. Tyto tendence jsou dvojího druhu. Prvý představují „objektivní“, převážně integračně orientované procesy, vedoucí k prohlubování propojenosti prvků systému osídlení. Výrazem tohoto propojování je na jedné straně zvětšování organických územních celků a na straně druhé zesilování komplexity, resp. integrálnosti problematiky vývoje těchto celků: prohlubování vzájemné provázanosti a podmíněnosti sociální, ekonomické, politické a ekologické problematiky. Tyto procesy v řadě ohledů zvyšují význam územního řízení, a to především z hlediska potřeb větší integrálnosti koordinace lokálního a regionálního rozvoje. Soustava jednotek územní samosprávy by v tomto ohledu měla plnit na prvním místě funkci „partnera“ centra a vytvářet tak významově adekvátní protíváhu rezortnímu řízení národního systému. Druhý typ tendencí je spojen s proměnami společenských institucí samotných, a to na prvním místě s omezováním dosud naprosto dominantní úlohy (národního) státu. Tyto tendence jsou spojeny jednak s vnitrostátními procesy a jednak s procesy v úrovni nadnárodní, speciálně pak s procesy globalizačními. V prvním případě má zásadní význam proces decentralizace moci, a tedy prohlubování demokratizace společenské organizace. Významné jsou však i navazující tendence ekonomické liberalizace (post-welfare state) směřující především k zvýšení autonomie a flexibility územní samosprávy. To vše je přitom vynuceno procesy druhého typu, tj. integračními procesy v nadnárodní úrovni a odpovídající globalizací ekonomiky.