

Applying the Logic of Regionalisation in Minority Studies

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This paper aims to highlight why the logic of regionalisation can be applied in minority studies. Overall, the introduction of a regionalised structure benefits minority groups in a country, simply because through decentralisation their voices can be better heard. Two components constitute regionalisation: the strengthening of regional identities within the population, and the political will of the central state to enhance effectivity in public administration. Regionalisation is a concept based on the rediscovery of the necessity of territorial management which is slowly returning to public administration structures all over Europe, but especially in Spain, Italy and France. These three countries are represented in this paper as examples of countries where the status of minorities can be examined through the analysis of the regionalisation process introduced there.

Keywords: region, regionalisation, minority, language, public administration

Introduction

The world as we know it today experiences very serious and fundamental changes. Recognising that these have already been discussed by several papers at length, this present one wishes to highlight how the various global changes affect the international system, societies and minorities. We are now on the verge of the process that will probably lead to the erosion of the Westphalian system of nation states, and the rise of a new order that for now is difficult to define, and where both supra- and subnational levels are bound to gain in relevance. What I notice is that this new structure favours the creation of regions where local, national and transnational identities are also taken into consideration at the same time. Globalisation and localisation together point to a direction that prompts traditional nation states to decentralise, which might give room to new and more successful measures of minority protection.

As the world is becoming more and more globalised and new administrative, economic and social structures emerge we tend to think of subnational regions as a post-modern concept, losing sight of the fact that regions had been integral

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parts of governance up until the birth and the consolidation of the modern nation state. There are some researchers who believe that especially within the European Union a 'Europe of regions' will emerge making the regional level the most important among the above-mentioned ones. I personally disagree with this idea, yet I think that the regions will gain in relevance in the decades and centuries to come, especially in nations where relatively big proportions of the population belong to minority groups. I put a special emphasis on linguistic minorities, given my conviction that while most elements of the individual and group identities can be shaped by political will and systemic regulations, changing the mother tongue of a people is extremely problematic, almost impossible to realise.

Research materials discussing nations and minorities tend to overlook why an individual identifies with either one of them or both. To remedy this, I offer one possible solution, through the analysis of the connection between territory and identity. When a minority is confined in a smaller geographical space in a way that individuals are born to the community and do not leave it not even when they reach adulthood, maintaining a minority identity is easy. To establish and to impose national identity in a country where there is a considerable number of individuals not naturally sharing it is a difficult and a long process. When the imposition of a new national identity is needed political elites usually create imagined communities.² This concept introduced by Benedict Anderson is applicable not only in determining what holds national communities together, but we can also use it in defining the boundaries naturally developing or sometimes artificially being developed between a national majority and the minorities. These are constructed phenomena in my opinion that are continuously shaped and reshaped by the political elites both on a national and occasionally on a regional basis. When members of a community spread out on a vast territory, it is necessary to create and to continuously renew an identity members of the entire group can relate to, or at least aspire to be able to relate to. When regional identities strengthen within a formerly assimilated society, these constructed concepts erode presenting the need for something new. As central states do not tend to give up control over territories and populations, they introduce regionalisation so that they can remain in control of constructing identities while allowing a little space to regional characteristics. That is why instead of the essentialist approaches applied by many scholars I choose the modernist one, recognising the fact that national and minority identities have relevant historical roots, but arguing that it is rather a construction process that have been shaping them the way we encounter them today.

In several countries regions are historically well-established institutions. When giving a vague definition of the region – given the fact that different countries have different understandings of this concept – we have to draw attention to the following elements: it is a level of administration below the state but above the local level; it has its own capacities and areas of authority; it benefits from its own financial resources; it

2 ANDERSON 1983.

relies on its own organisation led by its own functionaries; and sometimes in addition to the executive powers it can also exercise judiciary powers. After presenting my understanding of regionalisation, I will attempt to examine how it can influence the situation of minorities, and following that, I prove my assumptions through the examples of Spain, Italy and France.

Spain's situation in terms of its relationship with its regional elements is the most complex, as we cannot say that it is a federalised country, yet its autonomous communities benefit from a high level of self-governance. In Italy, the notion of regions is strongly linked to the regional identities of the population, which is stronger in the case when minorities inhabit the territory. France, on the other hand, puts no emphasis on the identity of regional populations, in its centralised structure regions only serve to distribute development funds and carry out the highest possible level of social justice. In all three of these states regionalisation as a concept appeared as an alternative way of decentralisation or at least deconcentration as opposed to the heavy centralisation they had been experiencing for centuries before that.³ In the second half of the 20th century, there were two forces triggering the need for regionalisation: regionalism and modernisation. Regionalism is a bottom-up process which calls for regions because of the re-found regional identities of the population, while the need for modernisation comes from the central state and sees an opportunity in smaller divisions of administration and economy.⁴ Leading scholar Michael Keating introduced the concept of the "New Regionalism"⁵ which is different from its medieval and pre-modern forms, in fact it is a post-modern form of regionalism, which means that for nation states in order to be able to function properly among the various challenges of our day, they will have to let go of the two centuries old rigid idea of nationalist and assimilative centralisation, and re-discover the historical roots they were built upon.

The concept of regionalisation

The term "region" comes from the Latin verb *regere* which originally meant: to govern.⁶ My research is based on this ancient concept of region, from a governmental point of view. I would like to uncover what the institution of regions adds to the effectiveness and inclusiveness of a nation's public administration. There are several fields of science where they use the word region varying from geography to international relations theory. In my viewpoint an interdisciplinary approach is absolutely crucial when establishing the public administration of a country, especially if it is one where minorities reside. The birth of regionalisation in the second half of the 20th century took place in Western Europe, in a geographical area where for

3 KEATING 1988: 184–204.

4 JÓZSA 2006: 166–170.

5 KEATING 1998.

6 SIPOS 1993: 13.

centuries the concept of centralisation and homogenisation prevailed. Before every state strove to establish a solid national identity that was commonly shared by every citizen and could be passed on to immigrants, if need be. However, since the 1960s what we experience is the strengthening of group identities that are linked to specific territories usually considerably smaller than a nation state. What once had been a scene for nationalisation and assimilation, became the scene for regionalism by the turn of the millennium.⁷ Regionalisation is a concept present and applied more or less in the whole of Western Europe, and it is especially developed in Southwestern Europe. The condition of regionalisation is regionalism which is a bottom-up movement in societies where territoriality, ethnicity and socioeconomic disparity are equally represented. Regionalism emerges in countries where there are definable political, economic or socio-cultural regional differences.⁸

Regionalisation can be equally conducted in countries with unitary and with federal systems, despite their different understandings of regions. While for a unitary government, regions are merely a level of governance, in federal systems regions are organic elements of the administrative structure and they tend to grant more capacities to regions as well. Incentives for regionalisation are stronger in countries where autochthonous minorities reside on an easily definable territory, where they might represent a regional majority. In my take, regionalisation is one form of decentralisation, where the new subnational units are the regions. It is important to draw attention to the fact that in this framework the regions are supposed to be the level of governance right below the central, state unit. Decentralisation is a tendency that we can see developing in European countries, since the 1950s. While then, it was only a quarter of the European population that lived in decentralised countries, this figure grew to 60% by 1990,⁹ and today we can hardly find a state where at least a low degree of decentralisation has not yet gone underway. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that when we assess the results of regionalisation on minorities living in those regions, we also have to consider that decentralisation is designed and carried out according to the interests of the national majority, and often it is based on their good will whether political elites are open to give room for increasing the capacities of the regions vis-à-vis the central state.

Regionalisation is a process that started as a consequence of the re-territorialisation of politics in Western Europe. Territory as a central element of political and social life, of economic exchange and structure of markets was rediscovered. State functions once again were connected to territory, just this time not in a centralised framework but a decentralised one. It became obvious in the second half of the 20th century that politics cannot be conducted without taking the identities of the populations into account. Indeed, one of the important elements of personal identities is territory, as it gives the everyday ground of life. Territory builds cohesion among people that share

7 A. GERGELY 1997.

8 HUEGLIN 1986: 439–458.

9 HORVÁTH 2001.

it, and recognising the linguistic and cultural differences that derive from territorial particularities is one of the most effective bases for minorities to thrive. This is why taking territory into consideration in social sciences is absolutely necessary, especially because it had been overlooked for such a long time. The region as a territory defined within a country came to life once again because of the re-discovery of territory and the benefits of territorial management. Regions as a specific type of territory can be defined according to the arrangement of differentiated physical spaces in the country, the economic functions attributed to it, and – what is central to the topic of this paper – characteristics of the population inhabiting it.¹⁰

It needs to be highlighted that regionalisation is not the same as federalisation. Regionalisation can be conducted both in federalised and in unitary structures. In the former, the federalised units are given well-defined powers and their constitutional role is better articulated than in the case of the latter. In a federation the units' political autonomy is enshrined in the constitution, while with the case of a regionalised state it is the centre's right to define their role in the administrative structure, their territory and their capacities, and very importantly their budgets, too. The power relations between the centre and the decentralised units are very different, and when it comes to minority protection a federation might seem more effective, yet if a country transitions from a totally centralised unitary structure to a looser one, regionalisation can in fact remarkably enhance the advocacy potential of minorities and regional communities. Often one of the most important reasons behind regionalisation is in fact the presence of groups on the national territory which have a common cultural and linguistic identity that differentiates them from the majority of the population. Besides, there is no guarantee whatsoever that a federalised structure will benefit minorities. Regionalisation is always based on a political decision but it can be additionally based on several different factors such as the presence of regions throughout the country's history, the surge of separatism among minority groups, too big territory to be governed in a unitary structure, over-concentration of the population on certain territories, remarkable socio-economic differences between certain territories. Overall, regionalisation is a highly flexible solution compared to the structure realised in federalised states.¹¹

My approach to regionalisation and its application in defining the relations between minorities and the majority depicts a long process that can be best described by dialectics: the process started with assimilation, then as a response to that came regionalism, which in the end resulted in regionalisation. Assimilation is a tool in the hands of the homogenising nation state that has the objective of depriving minorities of their cultural and linguistic characteristics, hence to carry out acculturation. In this framework the cultural genocide can happen in two different ways. There can be an aggressive form of assimilation that requires citizens of the state to adopt the same culture, language, customs and traditions as the majority of the population

10 KEATING 1998.

11 JÓZSA 2006: 170–182.

discriminating against those who do not comply with this requirement. On the other hand, it can also be incentivised and rewarded, by presenting all the benefits that belong to the majority, ranging from social mobility to international respect and recognition. It should also be noted that aggressive assimilation tends to be the means of dictatorships and totalitarian systems, while incentivised assimilation is applied more often by liberal democracies. Still, we can hardly mention an example of a European nation-building where we cannot detect at least some form of assimilation.¹²

After the period of assimilation came to an end, most countries could experience the effects of regionalism, which is a bottom-up process, where elements of the society re-discover their regional identities and make effort for preserving it for the next generations. When looking at the relationship between the national majority and the minorities from a public administration point of view I consider regionalism to be an intermediary stage which softens the strong desire for homogenisation, and transforms the public administration and the governance mindset of the political elites. Regionalisation on the other hand is a top-down process where it is the central state that initiates decentralisation for different reasons.¹³ These reasons can vary from domestic to international. When they are domestic, they are often political, by this, I mean that it is implemented in order to enhance the effectivity of governance or to avoid social tensions and above all the secession of a territory inhabited by a dissatisfied minority group. They can of course be economic, when the central state realises the opportunity to reorganise national supply chains in a way that better access can be provided for nationally produced goods to the international markets. There are obvious international economic benefits of regionalising a country, especially when it is a member state of the European Union where the distribution of cohesion funds is based on a regional system. Last but not least there are also international political push factors which in the EU can be the respect for the principle of subsidiarity which is best ensured by administrative decentralisation. Within this approach I consider territorial autonomy to be a region within the state that has been granted a special status and additional decision- and policy-making capacities in order to enhance the advocacy potential of a minority group constituting majority on that territory and to effectively calm tensions within the society between the majority and the minority. Territorial autonomy inherently implies that a certain geographical area has been granted self-governing capacities. It is a region because it is based on a territorial concept, yet, at the same time it is much more than that, as it gained considerable independence, and it is not directly governed by the national centre.¹⁴

Regionalisation can be best introduced by reshaping the public administration of a country in a decentralised manner in a way that in the newly established administrative structure the regions, especially those where there is a strong presence of minorities and regional communities are granted some sort of a regional

12 GYÖRI SZABÓ 2006: 51–53.

13 WAGSTAFF 1999: 6.

14 BRUNNER–KÜPPER 2003: 11–36.

government. This allows them to take part in national decision-making mechanisms and gives them certain capacities when it comes to the governance of their territory. The prerogative to organise a state's territorial management usually belongs to the executive, although sometimes to the legislative branch.¹⁵ It is important to add here that when a country decides to carry out some sort of a decentralisation, they usually do it after a very centralising and assimilative regime, often a dictatorship, which did not give much room for the interest articulation of the minorities. We can see this trend for example in the case of Spanish democratisation, when the Franco regime ended and the monarchy was restored; but Italy also started similar processes once the over-assimilative fascist regime fell right after the Second World War. Indeed, minority communities usually need a strong push factor before they start articulating their own group interests and advocating for their group rights.

How regionalisation affects minorities

In my research I rely on Francesco Capotorti's definition of a minority, in spite of the fact that there is no widely-accepted definition used in international law. Capotorti grasped the essence of a minority group by claiming that it is a group of citizens that is smaller than the rest of the society, it is not in a dominant position within the country, its members share such ethnic, linguistic and religious characteristics that differentiate them from the majority of the population and they share a sense of belonging and a will to survive as a group.¹⁶

When a group is considered a national minority, then we can presume that some time in the past they must have been discriminated against, they must have suffered the consequences of assimilation or acculturation.¹⁷ Being a member of a minority group is generally considered to be a disadvantageous position when we compare it with the social status of someone who is a member of the majority. Since the second half of the 20th century, national policies towards minorities have changed, aggressive assimilation has been tamed and eventually it became integration. There are some cases though where the central state took a different perspective abandoning the idea of homogenisation and turned towards the preservation of diversity. To maintain the heterogeneity of a society where different regional minority groups reside some countries applied the concept of regionalisation which allowed minority groups to take over some policy areas after a certain degree of decentralisation was introduced in the public administration system of the state.

Regionalisation is first of all a concept introduced into public administration. When we apply this idea in minority studies, we have to pay close attention to the relations between the power structure of a state, the relationship between the minority groups and the national majority, and how that is reflected in the geographical demarcation

15 HORVÁTH 2004: 1–9.

16 CAPOTORTI 1979.

17 A. GERGELY 1997: 20.

of the regions. This is especially essential when we are trying to assess the situation of autochthonous minority groups that tend to be concentrated on definable geographical units. But as regionalisation is a top-down process owned by the central state, the way regional boundaries are drawn might not reflect the patterns of minority population concentration on the national territory. Indeed, sometimes, like in the example of the French regionalisation, the concept is used to further restrict minority movements, limiting their ability to hold important decision-making powers. Yet, creating regions totally in correspondence with areas inhabited by minority population does not guarantee either their inclusion in decision-making mechanisms. The state can freely decide what kind of authority it is willing to attribute to subnational administrative units.¹⁸

The relationship between the state and the established regions strongly influences the situation of the populations living there. When regions are merely considered administrative units, then minorities cannot expect noticeable amelioration of their status, there should necessarily be some additional factors that allow minorities to benefit from a regionalised structure. Identity-wise minorities can profit from the fact that in most Western European countries, but especially in Italy, Spain and France regional identities pre-dated the establishment of national ones, reaching back to them now might seem easier than in other countries, where the evolution of identities happened differently.¹⁹

Very often regionalisation is confused with autonomies. While I argue that some types of autonomies can be considered regions within the state, this might not always be the case. It is a scientifically and empirically well-established fact that autonomy is an effective tool in the endeavours to uphold minority identities and save minority languages and cultures. Regionalisation per se can be realised in countries where there is no noticeable presence of minority groups; however, the concept has been proved more effective in countries where regional identities are well-established within the society. As mentioned above, in my view granting territorial autonomy can be considered a form of regionalisation, given the fact that the territory of the autonomy is smaller than the entirety of the national territory, yet it is bigger than the territories under municipal governance. It is also true though that sometimes, just like in the case of the provinces of Trentino and South Tyrol, the autonomy is attributed to the provincial level, but then the terminology states use in order to describe their specific units of administration can vary significantly, yet usually they refer to the same concepts and ideas. When a region is created in a way that it can be considered sort of a territorial autonomy, often we find minority groups on its territory that constitute the majority of the regional population. In these cases, when a decentralised region becomes a territorial autonomy, there is always a representative body that is often elected by the regional populations, though in some cases its members can also be appointed by the central elites. It is important to

18 KYMLICKA-STRAEHLE 2001: 221–241.

19 KEATING 1998: 7–15.

note that this representative body should serve the overall population of the region, not only those belonging to the minority. Regional autonomies can be the result of the central political will in an attempt to avoid secession, but it can also be the outcome of a bottom-up regionalism. It proves to be really long-lasting and effective when the interests of the national majority and the minority collide and both groups make efforts in order to create the frameworks for a successful coexistence.²⁰

Case studies

In the next part of this paper, I am going to showcase some examples of countries where a certain degree of regionalisation has been introduced. Interestingly enough their results turned out to be dramatically different, but at the same time we can identify similarities as well. It is predominantly in Southwestern Europe where we can find strong regional identities, that strengthen the argument that regionalisation is more likely to happen in countries where a surge of regionalism has already happened. Spain, Italy and France all throve to become homogenous nation states, with a unitary administrative structure, but while in the former two dictatorships imposed heavy assimilation, in the latter this was conducted by a democratic, republican type of government. It is important to emphasise though that they did not succeed in their efforts to create a homogenous society, some minority groups prevailed. France and Italy are nation states, with a small overall number of minorities on their territories which tend to live in an easily definable geographical area. In Italy these areas during regionalisation were granted the opportunity of a low level of self-government based on the system of special status regions. In France, on the other hand, the constitution does not recognise the presence of national minorities in the country. Spain is different in this regard given the fact that there are vast Spanish territories where a minority is actually in a majority, therefore, we might categorise it as a multi-national state.²¹

Territorial diversity in European nation states is a natural and an integral element. Minorities are present in states of unitary, federal or union structures as well. While the forces introduced by the French Revolution and the Jacobin traditions pointed towards centralisation, this model now has to be reviewed given the fact that there are too many factors destabilising it.

Regionalisation of Spain

During the Franco dictatorship Spain had become one of the most centralised states in Europe, despite the relatively big number of citizens belonging to minority groups in the country. I argue that it was exactly this over-centralisation that led to the very vehement new concept being introduced by the 1978 constitution, where Spanish national elites created a regionalised structure from scratch, inspired by Spanish history, where the

20 BRUNNER-KÜPPER 2001: 11–36.

21 GYÓRI SZABÓ 2006: 45–46.

nationalities have always benefitted from at least some sort of an autonomy. In the case of Spain, the concept of assimilation almost became synonymous with dictatorship, while minority protection was something that characterised the democratic transition of the early 1980s, which resulted in the establishment of a quasi-federalised monarchy.²² The paradox of the Spanish model is that it was the different nationalisms within the territory that in the end managed to build a stable, democratic state. History did not allow though to see what would have happened with the Spanish nationalities if the tradition of Francoist centralism continued, but we can safely presume that regionalising the Spanish state contributed to the prevention of secessionist movements emerging, as examples show that when the autonomies of a minority are threatened there is an immediate surge of secessionism.

Regionalisation in Spain was based on a widespread regionalist movement that swept through the country right after Franco's death and affected not only territories where linguistic minorities resided but also those territories where there was a Castilian-speaking majority. Most regionalist claims referred back to those historical times when regions and their populations benefitted from the so-called *fueros*, which were special rights based on a territorial concept. What is also striking about Spain is that in the new, democratic political establishment regional forces played essential roles, and became pillars of the party system.²³

Spain realised the model of political regionalisation. The reason behind this was that after democratisation they wanted to restore the rights of the historical regions that were abolished during the Franco era. The 17 autonomous communities became politically independent in a way that they have the authority to determine their organisation and capacities within the framework allowed by the constitution and their autonomy statutes as well. These, however, are far from being homogenous as they are based on the respective cultural identities, aspirations, social cohesion and development of the autonomous communities.²⁴ The new constitution adopted in 1978 aimed to provide a midway between two historical trends: federalism and centralism. Therefore, it named the Spanish community as the fundamental element that constitutes the nation, but it also recognised the right of the nationalities to gain their autonomies within the state. This solution provided a unique way to settle tensions deriving from the presence of huge minority groups, the Catalans, the Basques and the Galician community, on a national territory, by allowing autonomy to them. This territorial autonomy is what I consider regions in this model, as they are territorially defined and they provide a level of administration and governance between the national and the local levels. It is worth highlighting here that though there are 17 autonomous communities their capacities and status are different based on the strength of the regional identities experienced in them, respectively. This results in an asymmetric model, where there are simple regions that are not based on ethnic

22 CONVERSI 2002: 223–244.

23 HUEGLIN 1986.

24 JÓZSA 2006: 175–176.

or linguistic differences, which possess fewer rights than the ones with a prominent presence of ethnic and linguistic minorities. The most important right granted to communities where minorities live is the ability to decide on language policy, which on the national level creates linguistic pluralism, meaning that language-related regulations are territorially based without total multilingualism present on the whole of the territory. This model is a new concept, where the necessity of one nation-one language is questioned and overcome; all the while maintaining the unitary structure of Spain.²⁵

Let us take a look now at how regionalisation affected minorities in Spain. Spain is a country, where a fairly big proportion of the population belongs to other ethnic groups than the Castilian majority; moreover, they occupy easily definable territories by the border regions of the state. Diversity was first recognised in the 1978 constitution which in addition to establishing regionalised units further differentiated between autonomous communities as it allowed 6 out of 17 to grant co-official status for the minority language spoken by the population there. Decentralisation in Spain shows several disparities, as every autonomous community has different decision-making capacities that are enshrined in their autonomy statutes. This is a disproportionate regionalisation where the regional level of governance varies in terms of the authority they gained.

One of the main reasons why the newly reinstated Spanish monarchy felt that they should give concessions to linguistic minorities was that these were the groups that were the most discriminated against during the Franco era, despite their very strong identities and common will of survival. While the constitution states that Castilian is the official language of the Spanish nation it allows the regions, hence the autonomous communities to introduce their own official language on their own territory, in addition to giving them authority over language policy within the limits allowed by the constitution.²⁶ In this system the protection of minority languages is in the centre of attention. The Spanish constitution recognises the value of the country's linguistic diversity, the protection of which is, however, a task assigned to the regions. Not surprisingly for Spanish national minorities, language is the most important element of their identities that differentiates them from the majority. The autonomy statute of Catalonia states for example that the Catalan language enjoys the same status as the Castilian, furthermore, the public administration in the region is also conducted predominantly in Catalan, but residents can opt for Castilian in their dealings with the authorities. Additionally, the Autonomy Statute gives all powers regarding education to the region, where schools favour the use of Catalan with the purpose of inspiring complete bilingualism by the end of compulsory education.²⁷

This very widespread presence and the quick surge in popularity of Spanish regional languages is no doubt the result of regionalisation, as before we could see

25 CONVERSI 2002: 223–244.

26 SIPOS 1993: 91–93.

27 GYÓRI SZABÓ 2006: 189–191.

no initiative from Madrid to take care of the minority languages, although this might have been a side effect of the Franco era, yet once decentralisation started the minority languages started to strive parallelly. Moreover, concessions to minorities managed to keep the state together by avoiding secession, yet as a consequence of the 2017 upheaval in Catalonia they could witness what happens when cooperation between the majority and a strong minority fails.

Italy, the model of regionalisation

Italy is what we call the prototype of a regionalised state. Today, we can find two types of regions the authorities and rooms for manoeuvre of which are different. There are regions with a special status, which is only granted to territories where a significant number of people belonging to autochthonous minorities live. Here regional governments have more decision-making and executive powers than in the regions of ordinary status, which is the majority of them. As a result, in addition to the whole national territory being divided into 20 regions, 5 of these are governed according to special statutes of autonomy. Not surprisingly, these are regions where minorities reside such as Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Valle d'Aosta, Sardinia and Sicily.²⁸ Let us take a closer look at the region Trentino-Alto Adige, where the government had to create an institutionalised framework for the protection and the preservation of the German minority, in addition to the marginal number of Ladin population also residing in the same area. As a result, the region was further divided into 2 autonomous provinces with their respective autonomy statutes and the distinctive capacities and authorities assigned to them. All this decentralisation started after that the Italian leadership realised that assimilation after unification was not able to deliver the expected results after all. Especially when it came to territories, which both ethnically and linguistically differed from the rest of the country. Once the central government realised the benefits of regionalisation, the development of the process accelerated.²⁹

In Italy the option for the establishment of regional governments was first provided by the 1946 constitution, yet it was not put into practice until a lot later. The need for it only arose, when due to rapid economic development and disparities in demography called for a more regionalised type of administration by the 1970s. Let us keep in mind that with every wave of decentralisation the main goal was to make administration and governance more effective while maintaining the most important central prerogatives. This is why regions did not emerge right away as the second most relevant level of public administration, as in Italy the role of provinces and local municipalities remained strong.³⁰ The decisive moment for the status of regions did

28 VIZI 2011: 361–377.

29 SIPOS 1993: 110–136.

30 KEATING 1998: 61–62.

not come until 1999–2001, when a complex constitutional reform extended the role of the regions and established Italy the regionalised unitary state it is today.³¹

Even though Italy can be considered homogenous at first sight, it is not. In fact, it has a huge linguistic diversity let alone the various dialects and variations of Italian that are spoken on its territory. What is striking about this country, is that there are very strong regional identities. Just like in the case of the Spanish autonomous communities, Italy also differentiates between its regions, also based on the vitality of minority languages. These differences are indicated in the constitution as regions with a special status that enjoy more extensive rights than those with ordinary statutes, which are protected by separate pieces of legislation. In South Tyrol, for instance, both the German and the Ladin language groups experienced aggressive Italianisation during Mussolini's fascist regime. But here, too, regionalism appeared which resulted in the Italian state reconsidering its stance on minorities in the regions. Furthermore, granting autonomy to South Tyrol was also a demand of the winners of the Second World War. Introducing regionalisation ensured that the German-speaking population's identity is properly respected, they are provided equal opportunities and compulsory education in their mother tongue. We must note however, that the right to give and to take away these capacities still remained in Rome's hands, yet they undeniably benefitted the minority population. In 1972, when the new autonomy statute was announced, the number of areas where the province had decision-making authority doubled. The most important of them were minority policy, education and a wide-range administrative independence, where complete bilingualism is required.

France, centralisation in disguise

While Italy can be considered the ultimate model of a regionalised state, France is said to be the perfect example of an overly centralised state. Heavy centralisation used to be considered necessary, because when the French monarchy was expanding, or after the revolution new nationalist elites wanted to consolidate the results of the regime. This was the only way to forge and to keep the vast territory and the very heterogeneous population together. I believe France is the country where the power of language to be used as a homogenising tool was discovered, and used for various purposes in several situations. People all over the territory were constrained to do their business in French if they wanted access to social mobility. In spite of all this, when Paris realised it was time to loosen the grip, they first started to delegate administrative authorities to the provincial level, which in France we call *départements*. This sort of territorial management instead of strengthening regional identities disrupted them, as provincial borders were drawn in a way that they cut regional communities in half, this way making it impossible for them to formulate a common ground for action.

31 Vizi 2011: 361–377.

The introduction of administrative regions in France was based on economic driving forces, and served effectivity purposes.³²

France gave a totally different response to regionalism, which is more easily understandable if we keep in mind the Jacobine tradition the Republic was built upon. France is one of the best European examples of heavy assimilation and centralising homogenisation, yet even the French experienced a regionalist surge in the second half of the 20th century. Just when it appeared that regional minorities and identities in addition to regional languages and dialects disappeared there started a genuine social movement in order to preserve them, not to mention the other push factors coming from the international, and especially the European community urging France to decentralise. Nevertheless, regionalism in France always remained at the cultural level, it never really affected the political landscape of the state and it certainly was not strong enough to be able to alter the constitution in a way that it would recognise the presence of minorities on the national territory. Therefore France uses the concept of regionalisation as a tool of deconcentration instead of decentralisation. The farthest regional movements could get was the revival of regional languages and the establishment of a private school system where children coming from these groups can learn them.³³

French regionalisation is associated with the Fifth Republic. The main reason behind it, as mentioned before, was economic, and the government had no interest in allowing more room for minority movements. In France, minority issues have no place in the public sphere, they belong to the civil sphere simply because the constitution does not recognise the presence of minorities on French national territory, as they define minorities as a group of people that are discriminated against, which the constitution explicitly forbids. The only territories where special concessions to regional communities were given are the territorial communities, mostly France's overseas territories, in addition to the island of Corsica, where decades long violence prompted Paris to change its previous conduct.³⁴ With regards to the island, it was the so-called Matignon process that resulted in additional capacities and authorities being granted to the regional level,³⁵ yet we cannot say that this practice was ever meant to be generally used in the relations with the continental regions.

France carried out what we can call a regional decentralisation. This allowed them to create bigger administrative units without having to raise their status in the hierarchy. The prefect is the functionary that represents the central state in the region and makes sure that the administration on the territory is carried out in line with Paris's requirements.³⁶ They are also charged with executing those minimal administrative and legislative powers that were granted to the regions. In France, regionalisation was

32 SIPOS 1993: 136–155.

33 HUEGLIN 1986.

34 SIPOS 1993: 156–184.

35 DAFTARY 2008: 273–312.

36 JÓZSA 2006: 173–174.

based entirely on functional and political considerations. Here creating regions did not have the objective of improving minority statuses, but of enhancing the effectivity of the highly centralised and sometimes completely inadequate administrative structure. Regions were not given additional capacities, they remained absolutely under national control, and just like in Italy, sometimes, the provincial level seemed to be a lot more competent in a variety of issues.³⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion I think that applying the theory of regionalisation in minority studies can prove to be very effective in enhancing our capacity to better assess the situation of linguistic minorities within a state, and eventually it might contribute to the improvement of minority group rights advocacy. It is a theory that can be empirically examined, the results of its implementation can be assessed by analysing certain countries where governments have already introduced this decentralised structure into public administration. Regionalisation can be realised within a complex administrative structure, where the overall territory of the state is divided into smaller units. The most important one of them, which benefits from the widest range of authorities is the region. Minorities can highly benefit from this model if regions are created in a way that blocks of minorities remain within the same unit, and when certain administrative, executive or even legislative powers are attributed to them. It should be noted, however, that regionalisation is not necessarily the same as federalisation but it is very similar to the concept of granting territorial autonomy to areas dominantly inhabited by minorities.

The cases of Spain, Italy and France all show different kinds of regionalisation based on different motivations and historical as well as social and economic experiences. They are similar and different at the same time, but exploring the nuances between these three models can help in order to better understand the influence of regional decentralisation on minorities. Further empirical and comparative research is needed in this field especially if we expect regional elements to gain in relevance in the future. As far as this paper could go, minorities certainly benefit from the establishment of a strong regional level of administration, but further research will absolutely be necessary in order to be able to fully understand why this is the case and how successful models could be exported to other countries as well.

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³⁷ KEATING 1998: 62–64.

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