Regionalism and Sub-Regional Representation: A Guide to the County Transformation of Croatia

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The aim of the paper is to explore regionalism and the representation of sub-regional identities in a regional institutional-setting. This is especially important for Croatia as it struggles and repeatedly fails to introduce a territorial restructuring of the *meso*-level of its local government (counties) and to increase the size of its counties by transforming them into regions, in parallel with a stronger push towards decentralisation. The academic community and the general public have been advocating the transformation of 20 counties into a smaller number (mostly five) of

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larger and stronger regions, but opposition has come from interest groups connected with current county system, including local political elites. This paper focuses on the ways to overcome some of the stronger disagreements over the potential "bundling", or amalgamation, of areas with differing and idiosyncratic cultural, political, historic, and socio-economic heritages into a greater region. Therefore, a comparative analysis of sub-regional representations in selected European countries is used to show a way to resolve the impasse.

Keywords: regionalism, regionalisation, sub-regional representation, regional parliaments, counties, Croatia, local government

1. Introduction[1]

Current academic, political, and public discussions about the regionalisation of Croatia are connected with the need to redefine its current county structure. Croatia introduced counties in 1993 as part of an institutional transformation of the previous communal system (*komunalni sistem*) into a modern system of local self-government, organised on the basis of administrative and political decentralisation and the principle of subsidiarity. Instead of following contemporary trends in regional government organisation in European countries, Croatia found its inspiration in the nineteenth-century county organisation of Croatian territories. This resulted in the introduction of twenty rather small counties as the middle (regional) tier of self-government. In addition, Zagreb as the capital city was granted the special status of town and county at the same time, raising the number of counties to twenty-one in total. Prior to the constitutional reforms of 2000, the counties had the dual role of central government units and self-governing units. The county mayor was elected by the county assembly but at the same time had to be approved by the

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president of Croatia. However, their role as central government units was predominant in comparison with the role of self-government units. During the 1990s, counties constituted one of the main instruments of the centralisation of Croatia.

Following constitutional changes in 2000, and the adoption of new local self-government legislation, the role of the counties changed significantly. They became solely self-governing units and their role as central government units was – although still present – organisationally and functionally separate from their role as local government units. Despite the reforms that were promoting decentralisation, the territorial structure of counties remained intact. This probably remains the critical issue regarding the position and the role of counties in Croatia. Counties, although they are units of regional self-government, are not perceived as significant actors in the public governance system. They lack the capacity to provide a wider array of public tasks and their financial situation is not promising either.[2] For example, only four counties have a positive fiscal position (Bajo et al, 2015); Croatia has only four big urban centres with more than 100,000 inhabitants that should serve as centres of development of their wider surroundings (Šimunović, 2007; Ivanišević, 1999; Đulabić, 2015); and there is general consensus among scholars and the general public in Croatia that the county structure should be modified.[3]

Based on the situation described above, there is obviously a need to reform the Croatian county structure in order to transform it into a real regional tier of government with a smaller number of larger units that would be able to provide services to citizens and to serve as anchors of wider regional identities that exist in Croatia. There are several priorities of the much needed reform, such as: a) territorial restructuring that would decrease the number of counties from twenty plus Zagreb to four plus the Zagreb metropolitan area, b) strengthening their fiscal position and widening the counties' self-governing scope of affairs, c) strengthening their coordinating role concerning the local units within their territory with regard to providing public services to citizens, and d) orientation of counties on issues of economic and social cohesion, especially the utilisation of EU funds (Đulabić, 2011; 2017).

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[2] For the position of counties following decentralisation in 2001 see e.g. Koprić, 2001.

[3] *Stručnjaci složni: Ovako više ne ide, Hrvatska mora smanjiti broj županija, gradova i općina* http://republika.eu/novost/37192/strucnjaci-slozni-ovako-vise-ne-ide-hrvatska-mora -smanjiti-broj-zupanija-gradova-i-opcina, Županije – pozivanje na povijest radi blokiranja budućnosti http://wp.me/p2R6LY-cy

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Despite these well-known facts, pushbacks are constantly encountered – both at the national as well as the local/sub-regional level – regarding the need to reorganise the county structure. Regionalisation was mostly a taboo subject for the first 20 years of Croatian independence, and has only gained stronger public recognition – albeit weary and sceptical –in recent years. It is therefore necessary to ask why the concept of the "region" is charged with such symbolic meanings that it fundamentally defines the identity not only of a collective, but of an individual as well. One answer, provided by Agnew (2013, p. 7), states that a "region typically conjures up the idea of a homogenous block of space that has a persisting distinctiveness due to its physical and cultural characteristics. This basic assumption on the nature of a region, serves as a hurdle to the process of innovative thinking."

There have been several disputes about the uses of regions as well. First, how are regions integrated and how homogenous are they or should they be? Second, if regions are "real", in the sense of marking off distinctive bits of territory, then the notion that they are a product of social conventions and political circumstances does not hold. With that in mind, a third dispute is linked to the idea that a region is not mutable, but is fixed for a long period of time. Fourth, regions are fundamental contexts of social life as opposed to mere accounting devices. The fifth dispute is connected to the tendency to represent the character of regions by placing them along a temporal continuum ranging from backward or traditional ones to advanced or modern ones. Sixth, regions are often seen as diametrically opposed in character to the realities of population movements that form an evident part of many people's lives – i.e., regions are simple spatial containers that cannot possibly match the dynamism of mobility. Seventh, regions at subnational level are entities destined to fade in significance (Agnew, 2013, pp. 12-14). All of these disputes reflect more than mere technical questions of how to best organise a population within a specific territory. Rather, it has more to do with the identity attached to oneself, and how that identity corresponds with the region one lives in (or originates from).

With that in mind, the main research question of the paper is how large political regions should be and how various sub-regional identities should be represented in the institutional structure of these regions, mainly in representative bodies as the main democratic institutions of representative democracy. Do larger regions allow for the preservation of particular sub-regional identities or are these identities fully absorbed by a wider regional identity? How have sub-regional identities been represented in the

institutional structure of wider regions? Both the main question as well as the auxiliary questions presented here are important for several reasons. First, the constant increase of public affairs performance costs requires a stronger organisational base of self-governing units. This is the case with several current territorial reforms in some European countries, which are trying to reduce the number of regional units because of cost-saving policies.[4] Secondly, every regional identity consists of several sub-regional (local) identities, which are expressed with different intensity. These identities grow strong if the territorial organisation of a particular country supports their expression. In this case, any subsequent attempt to rationalise the territorial structure of the country is practically deemed unsuccessful. Croatia is facing this type of situation, with counties practically petrified as units of regional self-government although there is a growing number of voices in favour of their rationalisation and reduction in number (Koprić, 2015; Blažević, 2010; Đulabić, 2011). One way forward in such a situation is to examine the possibility of ensuring the representation of county identity within the institutional structure of future larger units.

The paper is divided into five parts. This introduction is followed by an analysis of the interconnectedness of the political ideology of regionalism and regionalisation as an effort to introduce regions into the institutional architecture of a particular country. Part three deals with sub-regional representation and identity formation as a particularly important issue of regionalisation, and the creation of bigger political regions comprised of several local communities, which often have stronger sub-regional political and social identity. Part four deals with the need in Croatian society, advocated by various actors (e.g. the academic community, the media, the general public, and some smaller political parties), to reform the current county structure, which is perceived as too fragmented and not suitable for the performance of tasks connected with the regional government tier. The concluding part combines the previously elaborated arguments and

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[4] France is the most prominent example of such reforms, with a decrease in the number of regions from 21 to 12 in metropolitan France (plus Corsica). The reform was introduced by Regional Boundaries Act of 16 January 2015. Only five regions retained their former boundaries, while all the others have been merged. In 2005 Denmark decided to reduce the number of counties and replace them with five regions. The reform was fully operational as of 1 January 2007, reducing number of counties (*amter*) from 14 to five and the number of basic local units from 275 to 98. Discussions about reducing the number of lower units are underway in Germany and Italy, without significant changes as yet. For details on regionalisation trends in Europe see Merloni, 2016.

sketches the main points that could lead to the potential reorganisation of the Croatian county structure.

2. Regionalism and Regionalisation – Two Sides of the Same Coin

Regionalism is a distinct political ideology that tries to make regions the centre of political and social construction of a particular society. Today it is considered a legitimate political idea despite the fact that regionalism is not, and never has been, a homogenous social and political movement. Keating (1998, p. 10, 11) distinguishes between six types of regionalism that may be observed from the nineteenth century onwards. Regionalism first developed as a conservative movement which opposed the modernisation of society and the establishment of nation states. It was inspired by the idea of preserving the existing privileges of particular interest groups, in connection with territorial control. This was followed by 'bourgeois regionalism', primarily connected with industrial and economically prosperous regions and their need to establish an institutional structure that would support further progress and advancement of economically vibrant urban regions. Modernising regionalism as the third type is described as "technocratic and depoliticised and less linked to class interest." It was "motivated by a largely depoliticised vision of development and modernisation." (Keating, 1998, p. 10). The fourth variant of regionalism is associated with the political left and could be labelled "progressive regionalism." It emphasises further democratisation of society, equality, and solidarity of the various parts of a country. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, "populist and right-wing regionalism" may be found – a version of regionalism that opposes the central state, fiscal equalisation, and financial support of the disadvantaged regions of a country. There are separatist movements in many European states which represent the sixth form of regionalism. It is directed against existing states and has a clear goal of establishing separate and independent states. This form of regionalism has gained significant momentum with referendums in Scotland and Catalonia (although not formally recognised by the Spanish government) in 2014 and the autumn of 2017 respectively.[5] Regionalism is an adaptable

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[5] A region is not a space delineated by borders from other spaces; a region is an interplay of social, political, and economic activities focused on making citizens' lives better.

and flexible set of ideas about the organisation and governing of states that could easily find its place within every major political ideology.[6] As has been stated, regionalism "... has been linked at one time or another to almost all the ideologies, from the extreme left to the extreme right, passing through liberalism, social democracy, and Christian democracy." (Keating, 1998, p. 10).[7]

There is no unified and widely accepted definition of a region[8] that could serve as the basis for a unified conception of regionalism, which would in addition be common to all (or at least most) European countries. It is

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If regions are not keen on cooperating with neighbouring regions due to the difference in the level of economic welfare, then their focus on guarding their own historical and territorial idiosyncrasies is nothing more than hidden economic chauvinism. A characteristic example is the region of Lombardy in northern Italy, which was, under *Lega norde* and *Lega Lombarda*, constructed as a space of regionalism with a reactionary political defence of its affluence against the poor Italian south (Jones & McLeod, 2004, p. 436). Regarding the Croatian example, with the electoral campaign of 2015 came calls for the amalgamation of 20 counties, current meso-level territorial units, into 5 or 6 regions. The strongest voices against this rose from the most affluent parts of Croatia (excluding the capital of Zagreb, of course) – Istria and Međimurje. It is thus necessary to consider whether the opposition to the idea of regionalisation is based on the historical idiosyncrasies of these two regions, or if it is focused on protecting their political power and their economic wealth (more so in the case of Istria than Međimurje) from their poorer neighbours. Because, as Agnew (2013, p. 8) states, "the drawing of regional differences above and below the national scale also frequently involves deploying such familiar, and often theoretically unexamined, conceptual oppositions as modern-backward, ... and core periphery."

[6] The modern language of regionalisation sees regions as products of networked flows and relations fixed in a more or less provisional manner (Allen & Cochrane, 2007, p. 1162). Hence they are malleable to change, and not fixed entities. The modern notion of a region sees attaining benefits as a much more important element of a region's formation than territorial organisation. The functional element trumps the identity-based one. According to Allen and Cochrane (2007, p. 1163), "the governance of regions, and their spatiality, now works through looser, more negotiable, set of political arrangements that take their shape from the networks of relations that stretch across and beyond given regional boundaries".

[7] The truthfulness of this statement may be clearly seen in Croatian politics, where several parties from the different poles of the political spectrum embrace and support the idea of regionalism and advocate strengthening the role of regions. One is the Istrian Democratic Assembly (*Istarski demokratski sabor* – IDS), a mainly left-wing party with a significant liberal agenda, while the other is the Croatian Democratic Assembly of Slavonia and Baranja (*Hrvatski demokratski sabor Slavonije i Baranje* – HDSSB), a nationalist party that advocates strengthening the position of Slavonia and Baranja, which are currently divided into five counties. While IDS strongly opposes any amalgamation of counties that would result in Istria becoming part of a larger region, HDSSB would support the amalgamation of five current "Slavonian counties" into one larger region.

[8] Despite the lack of a functional definition, three congruent interpretative dimensions make a region identifiable – strategic, cultural, and functional. A region will have its own identity if it is different from others in terms of its politically-induced strategic plans,

rightly stated that "it is impossible to define a basic concept of the region" despite the fact that "regionalisation is a widespread trend in the territorial organisation of European States" (Marcou, 2000, p. 22). This is the main reason some authors hesitate to define the region as a concept, but instead define different types of regionalisation (Marcou, 2000, p. 24). Marcou distinguishes between five types of regionalisation: a) administrative regionalisation; b) regionalisation through the existing local authorities; c) regional decentralisation; d) political regionalisation, or regional autonomy (institutional regionalism); and e) regionalisation through federate authorities. However, there are several types of regions that could be addressed depending on the dominant criteria of classification (see also Marcou, 2014). Bearing this in mind, it is possible to discuss political, administrative, historical, statistical, development, and economic regions (Đulabić, 2007), which are results of the different types of regionalisation as categorised by Marcou. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this research, a region is defined as a middle-level territorial unit comprising the area between local and central level of government, in which several local communities are connected by a distinct regional identity and which possesses a special institutional structure with some degree of political autonomy.

Two types of regionalism are especially interesting in this case. The first is found in regions with distinct cultures and strong identities, while the second arises from functional needs in regions in terms of strategic planning, coordination of activities, and large-scale public service delivery, and especially those regions which are facing a decline of their traditional industries and need to develop strategies of economic regeneration and promotion of their potential at home and abroad (Parks & Elcock, 2000, p. 87). A Croatian example of the former would be either Dalmatia or Slavonia – currently carved into four and five different mid-level territorial units (counties) respectively. The latter definition of regionalism is the one used to explain the need to establish mid-level territorial units even in cases when smaller units have cultural idiosyncrasies and a historically built narrative of a separate identity. In that sense, the sub-regional identities of Istria or Međimurje, could be, on mere functional elements, incorporated into larger mid-level territorial self-governing units called regions (or counties, or provinces, or something else). Functionally-based regionalism is particularly successful at keeping the central government accountable in terms of delivering economic modernisation and development.

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believed or produced cultural assets, and its functional/morphological dimensions (van Houtum & Lagendijk, 2001, p. 751).

Regionalisation has taken different forms in Europe and has been ignited by various reasons that support regionalisation processes in different European countries. On the one hand, there are administrative reasons, which have aimed to introduce regionalisation in order to effectively manage central government affairs across a whole territory. This was particularly the case in large and populous countries and was aimed at achieving a vertical integration of public governance. This was an initial stage of regionalisation in many countries and resulted in the establishment of administrative regions without self-governing capacity.[9] On the other hand, there are strong political reasons supporting the idea of regionalisation, and these are usually connected with strong regionalism movements. These political reasons were aimed at allowing the existence of separate regional identities, albeit allowing the regions in question to remain part of a larger nation state. Finally, there are economic reasons which have been perceived as an important factor of regionalisation. This was especially the case in the late 1980s and the 1990s, and has been very much connected with the evolution and strengthening of regional policy (cohesion policy in EU terms) as a separate field of public policy.

These reasons are in many cases intertwined; regions that were first introduced as administrative regions would in later stages be gradually transformed into political regions. Today such regions operate within the multi-level governance system of modern European society, which was – under the significant influence of the process of Europeanisation in the late eighties and early nineties – labelled as the "Europe of the regions." This concept was intended to describe the organisation of Europe as relying heavily on the regional level of government. However, it was not able to gain stronger roots and have a notable unifying effect due to different constitutional positions of the regional tier in various European countries and the disharmonised position of regions in different countries.

Regionalisation in Western European countries took place in a few waves. The first happened in the late 1960s and the 1970s, while the second caught Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was also to a large extent stimulated by the process of EU accession and by recognising the regional level

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[9] The main elements that constitute the self-governing capacity of any given territory are local elections, the legal personality of a territorial unit, a wide scope of local affairs, autonomy in governing local finances, the ability to regulate the local scope of affairs, narrowed supervision (control of legality and constitutionality of functioning and absence of strict hierarchical control) of the central state, the capacity to self-organise its administrative apparatus, the possibility to freely cooperate with other territorial units (domestically and across national borders), etc. (Koprić et al., 2014, pp. 252–253).

of government as one of the important factors of EU regional policy legitimisation. This was summarised in the "Europe of the regions" and in the establishment of the Committee of Regions as important elements of the EU's overall institutional setting.[10]

In contrast to this, regionalisation in Central and South Eastern Europe took a slightly different development path. Political regionalisation did not occur in the early 1990s as a general trend towards democratisation and the revival of local government values. This was mostly because the regional tier was in most former communist societies associated with the "obnoxious" earlier communist regime. The current disorganisation at the subnational level of territorial organisation is hard to disentangle and reform, as there is no rulebook to follow on how to construct the territorial division of a newly democratised state. Some of the most striking institutional variations, according to Scherpereel (2007, p. 26) occurred at the intermediate, or *meso* tier (between the local and national level) of self-government.

Regional issues in most countries (with Croatia as an example of a different development path) joined the agenda only by the end of the 1990s, largely as part of the EU accession process and the need to adapt the institutional structure of a country to manage EU structural funds effectively.

Simultaneously, regionalisation is a process which has evolved from a general trend of democratisation and decentralisation of administrative systems in the member states. Today, it is almost impossible to find a country without some form of sub-national level of government. The regionalisation of a country has a considerable impact on its system of regional policy management. However, it is also true that the requirements of regional policy management influence the processes of regionalisation.

European countries today may be grouped into several main categories with regard to the position and constitutional status of regional government units. There are federal states, where regions have the strongest role. In these countries regions have the formal status of federal units, which is at this point in history the strongest position that may be granted to a sub-

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[10] As Kettunen and Kungla (2005, p. 369) state, regional councils formed in Finland helped, for example, to implement EU structural funds. Hence, new regional assemblies might increase the absorption capacities of local and regional administrative units, especially with regard to structural and cohesion funds, and in cross-border cooperation programmes by focusing the grant-writing process as well as financially guaranteeing the obligatory parts of own funds. More is better than less in this case.

national unit (e.g. Germany, Austria). The second group of countries are formally regionalised states, with regional governments in a strong position but not as strong as that of federal units in federal countries (e.g. Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom). The next category consists of unitary decentralised states where regional units have the position of self-governing units (e.g. Poland and France). Finally, there are unitary centralised states with the regional tier of government in quite a weak position. Their position in the public governance system is seen as more administrative than political and self-governing (most of the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe). These categories are not static; instead they are dynamic and countries may gradually transition from one category to another (e.g. Belgium being the most prominent example of such institutional development).

There are several important preconditions for the effective and efficient functioning of regional institutions. "Democratic potentials of the regional self-government depend on many factors, such as the design of representative and other political institutions, on the channels of direct democratic influence of citizens, on the self-government scope of affairs, on the discretion of regional authorities, on regional human, financial, organisational and other capacities, on the overall territorial organisation of a country, etc. In spite of a similar historical and socio-political context, there are certain differences with regard to these factors, decisive to the democratic role of regional governments in the region." (Koprić & Đulabić, 2012, p. 2).

3. Formation of Regional Representative Bodies and Their Influence on Sub-Regional Representation

The processes of democratisation, integration, and Europeanisation that have engulfed European states over the last sixty years have had a significant influence on the level of federalisation, regionalisation, and decentralisation in almost all of them. Several preconditions were necessary for such transformations to occur. The democratisation of European societies put pressure on political elites to allow ever greater opportunities for the citizens to govern themselves; hence the idea of strengthening local and regional levels of government as those closest to the citizens and therefore more capable of responding to their needs. The integration of the continent into a single, although loosely connected, political system,

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required the transfer, or "pooling" (Dinan, 2010), of sovereignties to the supranational level. This political process gave birth to the counter process of requiring a similar transfer from the national level to subnational representative bodies, not only in unitary states with complex national frameworks (i.e. the United Kingdom or Spain), but in regionalised states as well (i.e. Italy). The European Union, besides the integrative element, also influenced stronger regionalisation attempts via the process of Europeanisation. Institutional reforms, like the introduction of the Committee of Regions; policy reforms, like the introduction of funds for inter-regional (cross-border) cooperation and the cohesion policy; and reforms of the political process, like the introduction of subsidiarity principle strongly influenced regional political elites, demanding more power from national capitals.

With that in mind, besides the general move to form nation states or to fight for autonomy in self-government in cases where independence is not yet possible (Catalonia) or desired (Scotland), the contemporary move towards regionalisation must be viewed in a European context.

Electing own representatives at all levels is one of the preconditions of a functioning representative democracy. Representative bodies therefore have a strong influence on how to understand, define, and interpret what a region is and how the inhabitants of a region see themselves. A council, assembly, or parliament is a practical manifestation of both the political powers of citizens and their identity (Ravlić, 2017).

However, identity preservation and political representation are not the only roles representative bodies play. In a contemporary, globalised world, the focus has increasingly been placed on the functional adaptability of a political system. Hence one needs to perceive a region not merely as a subnational territorial entity with a specific, culturally or historically built identity, but as a vessel for functional amalgamation focused on the economic and social development of a specific set of citizens.[11]

How then can the idea of regionalisation be strengthened by moving away from the territorial and symbolic, and towards functional interaction based on similarities and focused on gaining benefits for the population? As Fawcett (2004, p. 432) states, the territorial definition of a region is unlikely to take us very far, and we therefore need to refine regions to

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[11] As Agnew (2013, p. 12) states, functional ties include network/circulation linkages (i.e., transport, migration) and central-place links (settlement hierarchy) that create distinctive regions and from which their other characteristics are derived.

incorporate commonality, interaction, and the possibility of cooperation, whose members display identifiable patterns of behaviour.

Despite all boundaries being mere constructs of historical opportunities, reasonable ideas of a functional amalgamation of sub-regions may fall through due to already established local identities, especially in cases of a top-down approach to boundary formation (Parks & Elcock, 2000, p. 97). Although it could bring about positive outcomes to sub-regions like Istria, Dubrovnik, or Međimurje, the entrenched interests of local elites disguised as the idea of preserving local political and cultural identity, demarcated by a fixed (albeit unseen and unfelt) border, might spell doom for functional unification. Hence representative bodies must empower all stakeholders in the policy-making process and guarantee the notions of subsidiarity and proportionality, which would allow regional representative bodies a proactive role in all developmental matters in their region.

Subnational authority is a broad vessel which may subsume many different actors and institutions. These can be politicians, bureaucrats, employees of national government bodies and local self-governments, citizen representatives, etc. (Scherpereel, 2007, p. 26). When building a new institutional framework, the focus should not only be on what already exists, but also on what can be constructed and would help to fulfil the role the region was given.

Therefore, the examples that follow incorporate both "mainstream" ideas of institutional formation, as well as some original ways of using existing institutional variations – such as bicameralism, vested interest representation, and electoral systems – and recombining these in order to form a foundation which would be acceptable for a new regionalisation policy. With that in mind, cases of sub-regional representation in the United Kingdom (Scotland, England, and Wales), and Poland (the Polish *voivodstva*) will be analysed briefly. These examples will form a backbone to explaining the possible modalities of a regional institutional framework in the case of Croatia.

3.1. The Case of the Scottish Parliament

After the introduction of the Scotland Act, the UK government in London accepted the right of the Scottish people to elect their own representatives. Therefore, a regional representative body with legislative powers was established. The first elections to the Scottish Parliament took place in 1999, according to a specially adopted electoral law. There were sev-

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eral specific elements attached to the law that represented the peculiar Scottish position and which did not necessarily align with the position of the Westminster government. The first among these was the type of the electoral system that would be used to elect the Scottish parliament. Most people wanted to avoid using the first-past-the-post system (the relative majority system) used in the UK general elections, and wanted instead to introduce a system which would closely reflect the views of the Scottish people and produce a fairer match between the way the people voted and the number of MSPs elected from each party.[12]

Therefore, the additional member system was used, being midway between plural voting and proportional voting. All voters have two votes. The first vote is used to elect the representative of one's constituency by a simple plurality (the winner takes all), and for this the whole of Scotland was divided into 73 single-member constituencies. The second vote was cast for a party and not for an individual candidate, along the premise of proportional voting. This time the whole of Scotland was divided into eight regions with seven candidates in each region.

This way the representation of voters was more proportional, while the effectiveness of the governing party or coalition was maintained. At the same time, specific regional idiosyncrasies can be maintained and protected by boosting the representation of (sub-)region-specific political parties. In this case, no part of regional society (e.g. local communities) feels that they will be a permanent minority.

3.2. The Case of the National Assembly of Wales

Like in Scotland, the citizens of Wales were given the right to elect their own regional representation. It is, although to a lesser degree than in the case of the Scottish Parliament, autonomous from the government in London. This distinction stems partly from historical reasons; namely, the earlier submission of Wales to the rule of the crown than was the case with Scotland, as well as the difference in the ways co-optation occurred.

The members of the Welsh National Assembly are elected according to the same rules operating in Scotland – the additional member system. The first vote is cast for a local constituency member. A member is elected for each of the 40 constituencies in Wales by the first-past-the-post system,

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[12] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/visitandlearn/Education/16285.aspx

the system whereby MPs are elected to the House of Commons – i.e., the candidate with the greatest number of votes wins the seat.

The second vote is cast to elect a regional member. The voters vote for a political party. Each party must supply a list of candidates for the additional member seats in rank order. Wales has five electoral regions, and four members are elected to serve each region. The electoral regions are based on the European Parliamentary Constituencies created in 1994. Each electoral region covers between seven and nine constituencies.[13] The electoral regions are hence constructed administratively, but they encompass specific, historically idiosyncratic areas.

3.3. The Case of English Regions

The example of English regions is completely different from the previous examples of Scotland and Wales. While the Scottish and Welsh cases show the ways in which regionalisation and the subsequently formed representative bodies follow the identity matrix formed on the cultural and historical idiosyncrasies of those regions, the case of England shows the importance of a function-based approach to regional formation. Hence the representative bodies have different roles as well as sources of legitimacy.

As England is carved into several mainly non-identity based regions, their legitimacy is derived from functional, not territorial, sources. Their representative bodies also have different priorities, and are therefore formed according to different basic assumptions. The role of a representative body in this type of situation is not to preserve the identity of an area or to safeguard its peculiarities, but to help implement structural, technical, and policy reforms aimed at the economic development of a region. These new political arrangements then depend on a fragmented collection of institutions and agencies whose members come together in a series of networked relationships, fostered through involvement in formal and informal forums (Allen & Cochrane, 2007, p. 1165). This means that the coordination of activities is at least as important, if not more so, than the formalisation of the institutional structure.

For example, the South West Regional Chamber (or Assembly) comprises representatives of local authorities, as well as economic and social partners, with the main focus of lending coherence to economic development

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[13] http://www.assembly.wales/en/gethome/elections-referenda/Pages/abt-nafw-how-assembly-elected.aspx

and spatial planning in the region (Jones & MacLeod, 2004, p. 441). Similarly, Allen and Cochrane (2007, p. 1164) point out that, with regard to England, regionalised structures that have emerged serve to strengthen the position of the region precisely because of the way that regional actors have reimagined themselves as players within the changing environment. This is a practical example of regional cooperation based not on territoriality, but focused on functional interest instead. What this means in our case is that sub-regions could have the capacity to be in the driving seat of the regionalisation effort, in order to shape the new region as they see fit. As Bond and McCrone (2004) argue, with regard to the case of English regions, many have no great significance in terms of identity. This means that there need not be any link between the top-down process of forming regions and building new regional identity. Hence critics of the new regionalisation process – at national, local, and sub-regional levels – can rest assured that newly formed regions will not destroy existing (national and sub-regional/ local) identities. They are mere functional vessels for optimal cooperation leading to the greater development of a territory and its citizens.

3.4. The Case of Regional Assemblies in Poland

Poland as a unitary, newly democratic, or transitioning state is in some aspects similar to Croatia. Historically, its regions have suffered turbulent, peculiar histories unlike any others, but were incorporated into a single state after the Second World War. Hence an analysis of its regional representation is in order, and may offer some guidance in constructing a potential case for Croatian decentralisation and regional (legislative) representation.

Poland is administratively divided into municipalities (*gminy*), counties (*powiatow*) and voivodships (*wojewodztwo*), all of which are directly elected. Several counties are amalgamated into one of 16 voivodships, whose citizens are represented in a *sejmik*, or regional assembly. Members of a *sejmik* are elected by proportional representation in multi-nominal electoral districts, which are composed of a single county or a subsection of a larger county. Electoral districts are established according to the "natural" boundaries of counties, if the entire county constitutes one electoral district, or by special decision of the *sejmik* if the county is split due to a large population. Then in each electoral district between five and 15 candidates are elected.

The most important article of the electoral law is article 164, which states that no county, if kept intact, can elect three fifths or more members of

the electoral parliament.[14] By means of this provision the legislator has tried to prevent any possibility of larger counties overpowering smaller counties in the regional parliament, maintaining the powers of the citizens of smaller counties to influence the legislation and other activities in *sejmiks*.

4. Territorial Reorganisation of Croatia and Sub-Regional Representation

The idea of amalgamating many fragmented local (or in our case sub-regional) self-governing systems is not new, nor is it specific to Croatia. Failures of such reform ideas are usually the same regardless of the country or system. As Kettunen and Kungla (2005, p. 363) describe, the attempt to transform Finland's 250 units of local government into 15+5 failed because central government politicians were afraid that they would lose support in the localities concerned. As was shown earlier, the same fear is blocking the reform of the Croatian self-governing system at the local and (sub-)regional level.

Still, the reform of the administrative territorial division was subject to the interests of political elites, who almost completely monopolised the narrative of the subnational administrative division. In that regard Croatia was similar to the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, where regions became top-heavy, subservient, and penetrated by party interests, as well as guarded by local party organs that kept a close watch on local administrative bodies (Scherpereel, 2007, p. 25).

The inclusion of various currently autonomous, or merely existent, sub-regional entities into a larger mid- (or meso-) level territorial-functional entity may be focused on showcasing and strengthening the best and most competitive elements of each in an interconnected manner focused on further regional development. But that "interconnectivity provides a variation on the theme of meso-level capacity, under which local, regional (and even national) authorities need to develop efficient horizontal and vertical relationships – or at least to avoid damaging zero-sum disputes" (Cole, 2006, p. 40). One needs to take into account, in this process of formation

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[14] http://pkw.gov.pl/ustawy-wyborcze/ustawa-z-dnia-16-lipca-1998-r-ordynacja-wyborcza-do-rad-gmin-rad-powiatow-i-sejmikow-wojewodztw.html

of a new, regional representative body, the ways to avoid a zero-sum game in which one region wins at the expense of (an)other region(s).[15]

In recent years there have been several attempts to depart from the existing county structure and to introduce different – at least administrative, if not political – regionalisation but these attempts have faced rather severe opposition from several political actors and have not been implemented. Following several proposals from the academic community (e.g. Koprić, 2015; Blažević, 2010; Đulabić, 2011, etc.), who advocated a reduction in the number of counties and their transformation into larger regions, the media, the general public, and several smaller political parties accepted the idea that the reform of the county structure is needed.

Although some administrative fields have already departed from following the existing county structure as a basis for the organisation of their fields (e.g. the organisation of the judiciary and the court system in Croatia does not follow the current county structure), several attempts to follow suit in other administrative areas have failed. Three examples support this statement. In 2014 the Croatian Parliament (*Hrvatski sabor*) adopted the new Regional Development Act (RDA). During the debate that preceded its formal adoption by the Croatian Parliament, the draft RDA introduced the concept of five "planning area" (*planska područja*). These areas were based on existing counties and were mainly introduced for the purpose of more efficient regional policy management. Despite the fact that planning areas were envisaged as purely administrative entities and would not have any impact on county structure, this part of the draft RDA was strongly opposed during public debate. The final result of the debate was that the adopted version of the RDA does not contain any provisions regarding the planning areas.

More or less in parallel with the draft RDA, which had been proposed by the Ministry of Regional Development, the Ministry of Public Administration proposed amendments to the State Administration Act (SAA), with the idea of reducing the number of its deconcentrated offices from 20 – one located in every county – to five in order to reduce operating costs and to increase the efficiency of these offices. Similar to the situation with the draft RDA, the draft SAA was criticised for the same reasons

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[15] That does not, however, entail the often false assumption that in any territorial or functional amalgamation of an authority, poorer sub-regions gain by draining the richer. Every region, no matter how small or large, poor or rich, remote or centrally located, has enough comparative advantages to offer as long as the functionally-built region is based on logical notions of amalgamation.

as the draft RDA. The result was that the Ministry of Public Administration withdrew the draft SAA from parliamentary procedure and did not pursue the adoption of other amendments either.

The main opposition to these drafts came from the Croatian Association of Counties (*Hrvatska zajednica županija*), an interest group representing the counties and controlled by county mayors who are mostly Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) members. In addition, these two draft laws came under severe criticism from the IDS, a regionalist political party that is in power in Istria County and was also in power at the national level as part of the ruling coalition during the deliberation of these two acts. Its main argument was that the introduction of planning areas and the reduction of state offices in counties would gradually lead to the abolishment of the existing county structure and an amalgamation of counties into bigger regions, as a consequence of which Istria would probably lose its status of a separate county. On top of this, several counties adopted declarations of particular features of these counties.[16] These declarations as political documents served as an additional political pressure tool on the central government to withdraw the draft laws and abandon the proposed changes. All this pressure was successful and resulted in the proposed changes being abandoned despite the support for the reforms that was coming from the academic community, the business community, and the mainstream media.

Finally, in the context of the presidential elections held in December 2014 in Croatia, former Croatian president Ivo Josipović advocated constitutional changes as one of the important elements of his political programme for another term in office. One of the changes he proposed – among other changes to the Constitution – was the political regionalisation of Croatia and the introduction of several larger regions (he advocated the introduction of five to eight regions[17]). All these attempts have failed, mainly due to political pressure from actors who would like to preserve the current county structure.

Considering the current political situation, as well as the state of academic and public debate regarding the regionalisation of Croatia, the main question is: what is to be done in order to move the process forward? It seems that one of the solutions is to propose the regionalisation of Cro-

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[16] As far as the authors are aware, five such declarations have been adopted by county assemblies and partnership councils. Declarations were adopted for the counties of Istria, Lika-Senj, Virovitica-Podravina, and the Partnership Council of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County. In addition, the small municipality of Saborsko adopted its own declaration.

[17] See https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/sedam-josipovicevih-izmjena-ustava-procitajte-konacni-prijedlog-s-pantovcaka/700087/

atia and the introduction of five political regions[18] and at the same time ensure institutional guarantees according to which the sub-regions (i.e. the existing counties) will have adequate representation of their identity and political interests.

The Croatian population lacks trust in political institutions at all levels (Sekulić & Šporer, 2010). How then, can the introduction of a new institutional framework be legitimised in such an environment? New regional entities require new institutions to handle new levels of administrative and policy complexity. If their reach is focused and strictly enumerated in a way that allows for a more coherent spatial logic of regulation (Albrechts, Healy & Kunzmann, 2003, p. 113), then the new institutional framework can acquire legitimacy and acceptance.

With that in mind, a multifaceted approach to regional representative bodies shows different levels of development, the historical idiosyncrasies of a (sub-)region, and contemporary socio-political divergences. Hence it would be reasonable to believe that different sub-regions of Croatia might be administratively and politically amalgamated into one meso-region (e.g. Slavonia, or Central Croatia), or into several regions (in the case of Dalmatia, for example, into Northern Dalmatia and Southern Dalmatia), and some could even remain separate, non-attached regions as they are now (e.g. Istria or Međimurje). Therefore, different representative bodies with different levels of autonomy and transferred powers could be established. To take an example from the United Kingdom, Jones and MacLeod (2004, p. 433) posit that the process of devolution brought the geography of "new regionalism" to the UK, which was represented by different kinds of regional representative bodies, varying in power, size, scope, nature of member election (direct or indirect), etc. Therefore, one can observe the Parliament of Scotland, the National Assembly of Wales, the Assemblies of Northern Ireland and London, as well as Regional Developmental Agencies, and Regional Chambers in English regions.

However, because the process of regionalisation is a top-down process in Croatia (i.e. it is led by national elites), it may be argued that uniformity and homogeneity would be preferred to allowing divergence in the practical manifestations of representative institutional frameworks. The top-down process of regionalisation is mostly inspired by the ideas of the plan-

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[18] An elaboration of the introduction of five regions may be found elsewhere in the literature, so there is no need to discuss it in greater detail here. See works of Koprić, 2015; Đulabić, 2011; Blažević, 2010, etc.

ning era in the second half of the 20th century, when many governments developed policy capacities at the regional and local levels. In England or Finland, for example, regional planning authorities were established, designed to play a key role in setting up regional development plans and to provide better coordination of state policies at the regional level. These ideas have gained further momentum with a renewed focus on democratisation and participation (Kettunen & Kungla, 2005, p. 354).

Taking into account previous examples, an institutional framework can be constructed in such a way as to preserve the sub-regional identities of specific sub-regions (some of them currently established as counties), helping to pave the way for their amalgamation into larger regions. Among the most important elements of such an electoral framework are two votes, used in the additional member system, splitting the votes to be cast for an individual representative in a single-member electoral district, and for a party list in multi-member electoral districts, and establishing an upper threshold, according to which no single sub-region could elect more than a certain number (three fifths, two thirds, or any other previously agreed upon number) of members into the regional assembly (Hennl & Kaiser, 2008).

Future regional representative bodies in Croatia could be formed as bicameral legislatures, with the representatives of one chamber elected by an adapted additional member system of combined (plural and proportional) elections. As may be seen in the cases of Scotland and Wales, the additional member system allows all citizens to have two votes. With the first vote all of them have an equal say (equal weight of the vote) in the election of, e.g., two thirds of a regional parliament through single-member electoral districts. Having plural elections and electing specific candidates would allow the citizens to hold their representatives accountable for fulfilling the promises they made during the elections (or failing to do so). That right is especially important for local and regional levels of government, because they deal with policy issues which affect citizens the most and which are closest to an average member of the public.

The rest of the assembly members are then elected by the second votes. Citizens cast their second votes for party lists in multi-member electoral districts. These multi-member districts can be designed in such a way as to follow the "natural" boundaries of a specific sub-region, allowing for the voters of each region to "pool" their votes by using their second vote for sub-region-specific policies. The number of representatives elected in an electoral district may either vary due to the difference in the population size of each sub-region represented by an electoral district, or it may

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be the same despite the difference in size. These representatives can be elected into the second chamber of a bicameral body.

Second chambers could also consist of representatives of distinctive sub-regions, but also of representatives of local civil society organisations, interest groups, and any other actor important for the region as a whole or a part of it. In our case it could serve as an example of extending the idea of new regions and its benefits to all the stakeholders. In the first chamber of a potential bicameral regional assembly one could represent the interests of the citizens of the region, while in the second chamber one could allow for the representation of sub-regional interests, with different historical or socio-political regions maintaining a level of influence and sharing it with the sectoral and functional interests[19] of dominant stakeholders from the regions – be it farmer groups in Slavonia, tourist boards in Istria and Dalmatia, or exporter groups in central and northern Croatia.

Each decision has its advantages and disadvantages. The major disadvantage of the former is the inequality it creates between the citizens, because the votes of citizens from smaller sub-regions would be worth more than the equivalent votes of citizens from larger sub-regions. The advantage of such a proposal would be to prevent the citizens of larger sub-regions from outvoting those from smaller sub-regions every single time. That is also a disadvantage of the latter decision, because with a variable number of representatives elected in each electoral districts smaller sub-regions (even if they are homogenous enough) would not be able to have their idiosyncrasies represented in a regional parliament in a manner that would safeguard said idiosyncrasies. The advantage of that proposal is, of course, the maintenance of equality among citizens (one citizen – one vote).

Even if we accept the necessity of maintaining equality among citizens by safeguarding the equal weight of each vote – which does not have to be a given, as cases of election of second chambers in many countries provide examples of functional representative bodies even when equality in voting is abandoned – this does not necessarily mean that smaller sub-regions

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[19] Reform of regional self-government can, and often does, herald impulses of the future development of a region. It is therefore of continual interest for the central government. The central government does not, or at least should not, focus solely on controlling sub-regional entities, but should establish a more constructivist view of helping enhance the internal qualities of local areas as well as regions as a whole, including their visions of the future (Crone, 2006, p. 39). In that regard, it is worth contemplating the idea of including some representatives of the central government in regional representative bodies, at least in a non-voting, advisory capacity. Thereby one gains an opportunity to present the central government as an interested party; i.e.; a stakeholder in seeing a region transform and develop.

would be overpowered by larger ones. The example of elections for the representative bodies of Polish regions gives us a clue how to avoid this. By stipulating an upper threshold of mandates a certain sub-region can claim in a regional parliament, one avoids the trap of larger sub-regions marginalising smaller ones, while at the same time reducing as much as possible the inequality of votes among the citizens of a specific region. The upper threshold is arbitrary and depends on an a priori agreement between sub-regions, or on a decision of a national legislative body. It can be, and in a similar situation usually is, linked to specific majorities needed to enact special, important legislation. Therefore, they can vary from less than 50 per cent of all mandates taken by a single sub-region in a regional parliament to three fifths (as is the case in the Polish example), two thirds, or even three fourths, although that would probably be too high a threshold that would allow for the complete dominance of the largest sub-region.

5. Conclusion

If nations are "imagined communities" (Anderson, 2006) and states are practical manifestations of the political desires of respective nations, then territorial delineation is nothing more than a project led (or forced) by a certain collective. States are nothing more than visual representations of a group of people calling themselves a nation, maintaining a power over a part of physical territory. They are social constructs. Similarly, Agnew (2013, p. 8) insists that regions are mere inventions of an observer whose definition of what their region is says more about the political and social position of the observer than the phenomena the regions purport to classify. Or, stating it differently, a region is a social construct and not a natural or historic (in a Manifest Destiny sort of way) phenomenon. Hence it can be changed and reformed in an active manner – when the citizens of a territory might benefit from the reform – and not only passively, when wars, revolutions, or natural powers exert their force of change.

Hence the transformation of existing counties in Croatia into stronger political regions should be placed in the wider context of regionalism and the regionalisation of European countries over the last fifty years. Regions have become a legitimate tier of organisation of European countries, with the tendency of strengthening and gaining additional powers in national political and administrative systems. Even countries such as France, a paradigm of the unitary state (Cole, 2006, p. 33), deem the idea of regionalisation worthwhile in order for a more prosperous society to emerge. It

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seems that the debate regarding the position of counties in Croatia and the introduction of regions should enter a new phase.

This paper offers a proposal on how to take the process of the regionalisation of Croatia a step further and at the same time ensure that current county identities are preserved and not absorbed by the wider regions that would replace existing counties.

However, at the same time it needs to be shown that new regional units in Croatia have the potential to become the focal points of developmental planning, taking into account the meso-level of territorial differentiation. Compared to similar processes in other countries, new regions have the potential to "become major regional planning bodies whose mission [it is] to give a substance to the idea of a 'Europe of the regions', where regional identity [is] an important category" (Paasi, 2013, p. 1211).

According to Cole (2006, p. 51), decentralisation (and regionalisation) must be read as a process, not a single event, in which political arrangement must be understood within the context of local, sub-regional, and sometimes regional political traditions, social dynamics, and economic change. What this means is that a new institutional structure can be formed, reformed, changed, and adapted to new realities, particularly if the structure is not optimal.

A new region does not ask that new loyalties be formed, or new centres of power be built, but enables the construction of a partnership area for cooperation between local, (sub-)regional, and national governments. As Allen and Cochrane (2007, p. 1172) state, "it is 'lodging' of a wide range of political actors drawn from the national as much as the local domain that gives a regional presence to the new governance arrangements. The political assemblage is 'regional' because that is what its capabilities speak to, not because its authority is defined by territorial parameters." As has been noted earlier, when taking regionalisation into account, one needs to have functionality and not (only) territoriality in mind.

As Jones and MacLeod (2004, p. 435) state, we need to differentiate between *regional spaces* and *spaces of regionalism* when we speak about regionalisation processes. While regional spaces define ways of cooperation focused on economic development, based on similarities between adjacent sub-regions, local units, and smaller territorial communities, spaces of regionalism define processes in which subnational territorial units assert claims to citizenship, or insurgent forms of political and cultural mobilisation and expression with a focus on the formation of new contours of territorial government. In the case of Croatian regionalism, the discus-

sion, especially among the critics of the policy, is focused on the latter definition. Critics of the new regionalisation of Croatia see the process of regionalisation as a space for the irredentist feelings of peripheral territories to run unchecked by the centralising tendencies of the nation-state, which can bring about the dissolution of the state as a final consequence.

This paper has tried to show that by employing innovative institutional changes and focusing sub-regional differences in a regional representative body, on can move towards the *regional spaces* definition of regionalisation, where sub-regions such as Istria or Rijeka might see commonalities with one another and with neighbouring sub-regions, which would then make logical the idea of the amalgamation of sub-regions into a larger and more successful meso-region.

The search for bounded territories, within which electoral accountability may be constructed or state authority mobilised, has actively understated the emergence of different types of politics and forms of governance. In practice, it has proved impossible to construct institutional arrangements that can be captured by existing regional boundaries (Allen & Cochrane 2007, p. 1166). What this means is that the topic of conversation should not be where the boundaries of a (sub-)region lie, but how to construct an optimal level of cooperation between different neighbouring areas focused on new models of policy activities.

As Allen and Cochrane (2007, p. 1171) conclude, "it would seem that there is little to be gained by talking about regional governance as a territorial arrangement when a number of political elements assembled are not particularly regional in any traditional sense, even if they draw on what might be called the "spatial grammar" of regionalism." Or, to put it simply, although one should stop linking regionalisation with territorial delineation and focus more on the developmental potentials of regionalisation, it is clear that in Croatia this is not currently possible. Hence this paper shows the ways how it could be made possible.

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REGIONALISM AND SUB-REGIONAL REPRESENTATION: A GUIDE TO THE COUNTY TRANSFORMATION OF CROATIA

Summary

The aim of the paper is to explore regionalism and the representation of sub-regional identities in a regional institutional-setting. The main research question is how large political regions should be and how various sub-regional identities should be represented in the institutional structure of these regions, mainly in representative bodies as the main democratic institutions of representative democracy. Do larger regions allow the preservation of particular sub-regional identities or are these identities completely absorbed by a wider regional identity? How have sub-regional identities been represented in the institutional structure of wider regions? This is especially important for Croatia as it struggles and repeatedly fails to introduce a territorial restructuring of the meso-level of its local government (counties) and to increase the size of its counties by transforming them into regions, in parallel with a stronger push towards decentralisation. The academic community and the general public have been advocating the transformation of 20 counties into a smaller number (mostly five) of larger and stronger regions, but opposition has come from interest groups connected with the current county system, including local political elites. The paper focuses on ways to overcome some of the stronger disagreements over the potential "bundling", or amalgamation, of areas with differing and idiosyncratic cultural, political, historic, and socio-economic heritages into a greater region. Therefore, a comparative analysis of sub-regional representations in selected European countries is used to show a way to resolve the impasse. The analysis covers parliaments and sub-regional representation in Scotland, Wales, England, and Poland. The paper is divided into five parts. The introduction is followed by an analysis of the interconnectedness of the political ideology of regionalism and regionalisation as an effort to introduce regions into the institutional architecture of a particular country. Part three deals with sub-regional representation and identity formation as a particularly important issue of regionalisation, and creating bigger political regions comprised of several local communities, which often have a stronger sub-regional political and social identity. Part four deals with the need in Croatian socie-

ty, advocated by various actors (e.g. the academic community, the media, the general public, and some smaller political parties), to reform the current county structure, which is perceived as too fragmented and not suitable for the performance of tasks connected with the regional government tier. The concluding part combines the previously elaborated arguments and sketches the main points that could lead to the potential reorganisation of the Croatian county structure. The paper shows that by employing innovative institutional changes and focusing sub-regional differences in a regional representative body, there can be a move towards the regional spaces definition of regionalisation, where sub-regions, such as Istria or Rijeka might see commonalities with one another and with neighbouring sub-regions. This would then make logical the idea of the amalgamation of sub-regions into a larger and more successful meso-region.

Keywords: regionalism, regionalisation, sub-regional representation, regional parliaments, counties, Croatia, local government

REGIONALIZAM I ZASTUPANJE PODREGIJA: VODIČ ZA PREUSTROJ ŽUPANIJA U HRVATSKOJ

Sažetak

U radu se istražuje pojam regionalizma i zastupanje podregionalnih identiteta u regional institutional-setting. Glavno je istraživačko pitanje usmjereno na otkrivanje idealne veličine političkih regija te kako bi unutar institucionalnog ustroja pojedinih regija valjalo zastupati različite podregionalne identitete. To se uglavnom odnosi na zastupnička tijela kao glavne demokratske institucije zastupničke demokracije. Je li moguće očuvati zaseban podregionalni identitet unutar veće regije ili će se on u potpunosti uklopiti u širi regionalni identitet? Na koji su način podregionalni identiteti dosad bili zastupljeni u institucionalnom ustroju širih regija? Za Hrvatsku su ova pitanja od posebne važnosti s obzirom na opetovane i neuspjele pokušaje provođenja teritorijalnoga preustroja mezo razine lokalne samouprave (županija), te pokušaja okrupnjivanja županija njihovim preustrojem u regije i popraćenih većim stupnjem decentralizacije. Znanstvena zajednica i šira javnost zalažu se za preustroj 20 županija u manji broj (uglavnom pet) većih i snažnijih regija, no tome se protive interesne skupine povezane s postojećim županijskim ustrojem, uključujući lokalnu političku elitu. U radu se nastoji objasniti kako odgovoriti na neka snažnija protivljenja potencijalnom spajanju, tj. amalgamaciji područja različitih i idiosinkrastičkih kulturnih, političkih, povijesnih i društveno-ekonomskih baština u jednu veću

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regiju. Usporedno se analizira zastupanje podregija u odabranim europskim zemljama kako bi se predložilo moguće rješenje, a analiziraju se parlamenti i zastupanje podregija u Škotskoj, Walesu, Engleskoj i Poljskoj. Rad se sastoji od pet cjelina. Uvod slijedi analiza međusobne povezanosti regionalizma kao političke ideologije i regionalizacije kao pokušaja uvođenja regija u institucionalni ustroj države. Treći se dio bavi zastupanjem podregija i stvaranjem identiteta kao važnim aspektom regionalizacije, te stvaranjem krupnijih političkih regija koje sadrže veći broj lokalnih zajednica s često izraženijim podregionalnim političkim i društvenim identitetom. U četvrtome se dijelu opisuje nastojanje hrvatskoga društva uz potporu brojnih društvenih aktera (npr. znanstvene zajednice, medija, šire javnosti i pojedinih manjih političkih stranaka) da se provede preustroj sadašnjeg sustava županija jer ga se drži previše fragmentiranim i neprikladnim za obavljanje zadataka na razini regionalne samouprave. Završni dio povezuje argumente razrađene u prethodnim dijelovima te opisuje glavne korake koji bi mogli dovesti do preustroja županija u Hrvatskoj. Opisuje se kako inovativne promjene u institucijama i usmjeravanje razlika među podregijama u regionalno zastupničko tijelo mogu dovesti do pomaka prema definiciji regionalizacije kao regionalnih prostora. Prema toj definiciji podregije poput Istre ili Rijeke spoznati će međusobne sličnosti kao i sličnosti sa susjednim regijama. Time bi ideja amalgamacije podregija u veću i uspješniju mezo regiju postala logičnom.

Ključne riječi: *regionalizam, regionalizacija, zastupanje podregija, regionalni parlamenti, županije, Hrvatska, lokalna samouprava*