



## THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF DECENTRALIZATION

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**Abstract.** The article analyzes the nature and significance of decentralization. Conceptions of decentralization by different authors are compared. The essence and complexity of decentralization analysis revealed of forms and types. Decentralization, as well as any other social phenomena, is characterised by positive and negative effects, which are disclosed in the article by analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of decentralization. An examination of various scientific opinions on decentralization term, its classification, we can argue that decentralization is perceived as a multifaceted phenomenon that includes progressive leeway, functions, responsibilities and the transfer of resources from the Central Government to the local government management levels.

**Keywords:** decentralization, decentralization forms, decentralization forms and types, advantages and disadvantages of decentralization.

**JEL classification:** A1, E6, H3.

### 1. Introduction

Even if there is paid a lot of attention to the problems of decentralisation in the scientific literature, we always face a problem of the use of terminology: there are given different theoretical interpretations of decentralisation in the scientific literature, especially the effects of decentralisation are considered ambiguous. This means that there is a question whether the decentralisation leads to the positive or negative changes in the management system.

*Decentralisation* – one of the most important reform directions of management systems in nowadays can be regarded as a necessary condition not only for the development of local self-government, but also of civil society. Management change in the public sector is not only a certain individual and distinctive combination of events. We should see changes as one of political problems and responses to them. (Pollitt, Bouckaert 2003).

Decentralisation involves fiscal, political and administrative changes and can significantly affect all the aspects of development. Communication structure between levels of government influences various processes – from the provision of services, social protection and poverty reduction to the development of financial sector and macroeconomic's stability. Decentralisation draws attention to such issues, as poverty, gender inequality, environment protection, health protection, education, etc. Decentralisation leads to

quantity and quality of provided services and is a condition to involve citizens in public life (Robertson 2002).

The aim of this article is to analyse the essence and substance of decentralisation, by systemizing the types and sorts of decentralisation and evaluating possible effects of it.

### 2. The origin and meaning of the word "decentralisation"

First of all, it would be useful to clarify (or better know) the origin and meaning of the word *decentralisation*. It is composed of apposition *de* and word *centralisation*. International word dictionaries provide the following information about the origin of the words *centralisation* and *centralize*:

- Centralisation (1) in German Zentralisation (<lot. Centralis – middle) – something accumulation, concentration in one place; concentration of control and management at one centre (Vaitkevičiūtė 2004).
- Centralisation (< lot. Centralis – middle) – accumulation, concentration at one centre; concentration of control, management, economic power at one centre, in a small number of central agencies. (International Word Dictionary).

Vaitkevičiūtė (2004) provides such information about a prefix *de*:

De (lot.) – prefix of a word, denoting separation, removal or elimination; downfall, descent, e.g. degradation, deemulgation.

With the use of the prefix *de* the words *centralisation* and *centralise* becomes anonymous and has an opposite meaning:

- *Decentralisation* (cf. *Decentralise*): removal or attenuation of centralisation;
- *Decentralise* (de - + *centralise*) – to remove or attenuate the centralisation.

### 3. The conception of decentralization

Over the past forty years the decentralization reforms in many countries replaced the decades-existing political, administrative and economic cent-

ralised systems. Although the decentralisation is actively explored for four decades, the researches and practitioners perceive it differently: there are given different concepts of decentralisation, also there is a disagreement on the shapes and types of decentralisation. But this is understandable, because decentralisation – the transmission of authority and responsibility from the governance to the subjects of subordinate and unsubordinated public administration or private sector – are multi-aspected phenomenon, and this is the reason why many authors define decentralisation rather abstract (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Variety of Definitions of Decentralization (source:compiled by authors)

Author	Definition
Astrauskas (2007)	It is such a METHOD OF REORGANISATION of a state management and (or) subsystems of provision of services, when the proportion of elements, divided between authorities and (or) subsystems of service provision is changed by reducing a part of authorities, which are appointed to the subjects of an upper hierarchical level (being nearer the “centre“) and respectively by increasing a part of authorities, appointed to the subjects of a lower hierarchical level (being “further“ from the centre).
Baltušnikienė (2009)	In the strict sense, decentralisation is understood as a devolution of powers and resources from the central state government to public administration entities, which have a right of self-governance. In a broad sense, as a transfer of a leeway (discretion), functions, responsibility and resources not only to public administration entities, which have a right of self-governance, but also to subjects of state governing, which function in different levels of public administration and (or) to the subject of a private sectors, non-governmental organisations.
Evdokimov, Starcev (2001)	Decentralisation – a delegation of individual power authorities from the centre to a local (regions) self-government bodies, independent public legal institutions, which are apart from the state government.
Manor (1999)	Decentralisation – a delegation of authorities and resources from the upper to lower levels of public administration.
Kaiser (2006)	A grant process of decision-making powers to control public resources, personnel management and to apply regular mechanisms, which were centralised earlier.
Word Bank (1997)	Decentralise means to move the processes of decision-making from the centre closer to the users of public services.
Raipa, Backūnaitė (2004)	a transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to its subsidiary or independent government organisations and (or) private sector.
Rado (2003)	Decentralisation means a “localisation“ of decision-making. The degree of decentralisation depends on whether the central government shares responsibility with the participants of lower levels.
Rondinelli <i>et al.</i> (1984)	A transfer of ruling powers and responsibility for public functions from the central government to its subsidiary or non-governmental organisations and (or) private sector.
Romeris (2008)	A delegation of state government (centre) to carry out some particular areas to those social combinations, which carry it through their organs.
Rushforth <i>et al.</i> (1997)	Decentralisation – a transfer of responsibility and authorities to an independent lower public authorities, giving them more government, but not necessarily financial powers.
Schuber, Klein (2006)	Decentralisation – political means, which have an aim to delegate more powers and responsibility to the lower levels of government, in order to overcome a hierarchical centralised state control and to move the decision-making processes to where the problems arise.
Welsh, McGinn (2008)	Decentralisation is associated with a change in control subjects: the transfer of power of one system link or level to another level.
Žilinskas (2001)	Decentralisation – a delegation of law-based management functions from the central public authorities to those which have a right of self-government (municipalities).

The definitions provided in Table 1 are basically compatible and they complement each other.

So, decentralisation is a complex phenomenon, involving the delegation of power not only to

local and regional municipalities, but also to different levels of local public administration, public and private sector entities. After analysing various opinions of the scientifics on the decentralisation term, it's classification, it can be stated that decentralisation is perceived as a many-sided phenomenon, involving a gradual transfer of a leeway, functions and resources from the central governance to the levels of local government. There could be drawn a conclusion that the process of decentralisation may occur in such areas, as the politics, economics, finance, public administration, etc., and this substantiates the diversity of decentralisation.

**4. Forms and types of decentralisation**

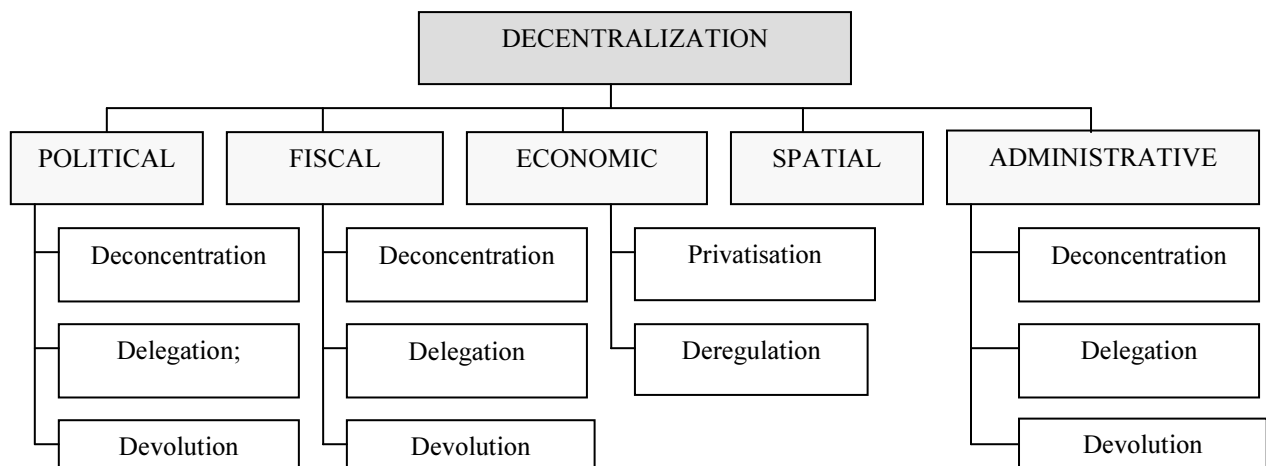
The essence and complexity of decentralisation is revealed when analysing it's forms and types. A detailed analysis of the concept of decentralisation was carried out and published only in the early eighties. Rondinelli *et al.* (1984) were the first who systematised the classification of forms and types and represented it. Decentralisation might

be analysed from an object aspect, indicating decentralised areas of public life, e.g. political, fiscal, economical, spatial and administrative decentralisation forms.

We can agree with the opinion of many scientists that the decentralisation is a multiple, many areas at the same time covering reorganisation of a social system and (or) subsystems of public service provision. According to Raipa, Backūnaitė (2004), decentralization involves fiscal, political and administrative changes and can substantially affect all the aspects of development. However, sometimes decentralisation is focused on different areas, such as finance or economics. This creates a presumption for such specific forms of decentralisation as:

- 1) fiscal decentralisation;
- 2) ekonomik decentralisation

According to Baltušnikienė (2006), the essence and complexity of decentralisation are revealed through analysing the classification of it's forms and types, therefore it is provided further (see Figure 1).



**Fig.1.** Classification of decentralisation forms and types (source:compiled by authors)

Other scientists, such as Astrauskas (2007), Raipa, Backūnaitė (2004) provide a similar, but less detailed classification of decentralisation.

We can agree with the researchers' view that in fact, there exists one type of decentralisation as there are applied several forms of decentralisation and they complement each other and allow to reach a higher efficiency in several areas of public sector, e.g. political decentralisation is usually followed by administrative and fiscal. With a reference to Baltušnikienė's (2009) classification we will describe briefly each of the form of decentralisation:

- Political decentralisation mostly perceived as a process, by which there are transmitted more power to make public decisions for

the members of territorial communities and their elected representatives. On the other hand, legislative empowerment for territorial state government subjects is also treated as the political decentralisation.

- Fiscal decentralisation – a process, by which a responsibility of decision making and their realisation of concrete levels of public government in the field of public finance is redistributed to an increase of fiscal autonomy of lower levels of government entities.
- *Market (economic) decentralisation* – “the deepest“ form of decentralisation. It is divided into two types: *privatisation* and *deregulation*. While privatising and deregulating

a part of public government skills is transferred to private companies, community organisations, cooperatives and other non-governmental organisations.

- *Spatial decentralisation* is one of the regional policy instruments. It's essence – a promotion of steady regional development in a country, allowing for smaller and economically weaker cities and localities to become the centres of education, commerce, industry and agriculture.
- *Administrative decentralisation* – a redistribution of responsibility and functions of the subjects, which function in different public government levels or state government stages.

Decentralisation of each type – political, administrative, fiscal or market – have different characteristics, components of policy and conditions for success. As it is seen from Figure 1, the market decentralisation is divided into two types:

- *privatisation*;
- *deregulation*.

Whereas political, fiscal and administrative – into three types:

- *deconcentration*;
- *delegation*;
- *devolution*.

Decentralisation may also be perceived as a process, carried out “down-top“ and “top-down“. Implementing a “top-down“ model, the local and regional municipalities carry out their competention on behalf of state government, that is giving orders and supervising government institutions. An application of the model “down-top“ allows territorial municipalities act on behalf of lower levels of government or the local population (Baltušnikienė 2009; Davulis 2006).

Further we are going to analyse the meanings of the terms *privatisation*, *deregulation*, *deconcentration*, *delegation* and *devolution*.

While *Privatising and deregulating* a part of public government competence is transferred to private companies, community organisations, cooperatives and other non-governmental organisations (Bartasevičius 2012).

Privatisation can be at various levels: from some of the goods and service provision to cooperation of public and private sectors in market conditions, cooperatively providing services or infrastructure.

*Privatisation* may include:

- a permit to private companies to do the functions that were monopolised previously;
- contracts with commercial companies for a provision of public services or infrastructure;

- financing of public sector programmes through capital market at an appropriate regulation, which lowers responsibility or lending risk;
- sale of state-owned enterprises and transfer of responsibility for service provision from public to private sector.

Deconcentration – a transfer of solutions to territorial administrative units, but the hierarchical power is left in the hand of the central government. In this case, lower units of the government are under control of the central government. In general case, the aim of deconcentration is to increase the efficiency of performed operations of the central government in a particular administrative area.

In a case of delegation, institutions of a lower level of authority become recipients of delegated government and resources, so these relationships are oftenly called agency relationships. In other words, the central government transfers responsibility and the powers to often semi-autonomous legal units of the government, but the limits of responsibility are defined clearly. These government units often have independent legal status and independent budget, but because of these delegations they have to give reports to the central government.

Devolution – the most progressive form of decentralisation, when the powers and responsibility are transferred to an authority institution of a lower level, elected by local electors. Responsibility and resources are transferred to local government, which has a sufficient autonomy in decision-making and is able to ensure an implementation of an appropriate function. Devolution is in step with political decentralisation, when the local government is liable to local electors for decision-making, which means a democracy. It should be noted, that the term of decentralisation is often used to express only devolution, which may cause at least some confusion. Also, there should be noted, that in many countries (even federal) all the three methods exist at one and the same time, complementing each other. In Scotland, for example, cantons have a considerable freedom in education (devolution), but their environmental policy is strictly limited by federal standards (delegation) (Žigienė 2012).

When the analysis of the forms and types is done, we will further go with the advantages and disadvantages of decentralisation.

### **3. Advantages and disadvantages of decentralization**

The process of decentralisation, as well as of any other social phenomenon, has both positive and negative consequences. When implementing re-

forms, it is necessary to know the potential results in advance. It allows to suppose both pessimistic and optimistic forecasts. Of course, the results of the same reform in each country can be totally different, however on the basis of theory, as well as practice of other countries, it is possible to model the results. When a power distribution of tax and expenses is adequate, the government of subnational levels may be very important in providing public services, no matter how much it is subject or accountable to the government of a higher level (Bird 2001). When the government of subnational levels has a real fiscal and political responsibility, decentralisation may promote an increase in such social objectives, as political participation and democratic accountability. Fiscal decentralisation promotes social and economical development by freeing local and regional initiative. This development meets better the needs of the population and reduces disparities of territorial development. Economic theorists the necessity of decentralisation grounds more on the basis of the effectiveness of anagement abition, relating it with public expences. Local government, being closer to the people and responding to local needs is able to make better decisions, which reflect the needs of the population than the central government. Second, people are more willing to pay for the services that meet better their priorities, especially if they are included in the service provision decision-making process. Decentralisation might increase "competitiveness" of the powers and promote innovation, by meeting the needs of the people. (Peters, Guy 2002). A greater autonomy of local authorities provides a greater mobility to the financial system and allows to deal with the economical issues of the government of subnational levels, without taking funds from the central government budget. In a flexible tax system, when the subnational government may introduce new taxes and charges, increase or reduce their tarrifes, apply tax concessions, the financial politics of subnational government levels helps to develop the national economy and to reduce a deficit of the state budget. In summary, there can be distinguished the following advantages of decentralisation:

- increased access of the subnational government to the central government *resources*;
- extended participation of citizens and the opportunity of a local government to press the *central* authority, in order to increase the national income for dealing with local issues;
- increased technical and administrative skills of the local government, creation of new local-level organisations;

- there are paid more attention to the *programmes* of regional and local-level development in the national development strategies (Robertson 2002; Litvack *et al.* 1998; Ebel, Yilmaz 2002; Basta 1999; Ebel, Febres 2000; Peteri 2002; Skačkauskienė 2013).

Rise of the degree of fiscal decentralisation, responsibility for the expenses of executive functions, by using the collected tax revenue, strict allocation between the levels of government is one of the most important conditions to promote economic increase and investment in the private and public business (Stačiokas, Rimas 2002).

The development of decentralisation and the rise of financial self-sufficiency of municipalities are closely related to the regional development policy at the municipal level. If the municipalities have more rights, together with the independency in forming local budgets, they are able to implement the regional and municipal plans of social and economic development. The higher the local government's financial dependence on the central government, the less local government's influence in forming regional policy (World Bank 2001).

However, decentralisation is not a panacea, because it also has some *disadvantages*. Decentralisation does not always guarantee the efficiency of administration, because there appear some difficulties in transferring the ruling functions of national policy, also in creating subnational institutions of various levels, in transferring ruling and administering functions to the subjects of subnational ruling level. This may provoke the provisions of regionalism, minority ignorance, problems of project financing, realisation of the concept of administrative responsibility. Also, it might not allow to consolidate the openness of public administration system. Decentralised public administrative system enables the civil servants to attribute themselves untypical function of formulating policy. They might interpret implementation of a national policy and administration of the projekts and programmes. Because of a lack of the regulation of legitimate function control, i.e. being insufficiently defined the powers, competence and control procedures of the civil servants, it is difficult to organise a control of their procedures. Political powers and fiscal decentralisation may lead to negative tendentions among the state and local officials, thus it can touch the supply (Litvack *et al.* 1998).

The division of power and responsibility between the levels of government increase institutional, ruling abilities, however, this may also determine a corruption and other phenomena of government abuse. Decentralisation is not always effective, especially for the standardised and routine services. Decentralisation may lead to the eco-

conomic disbalance, the loose of control of the central government for financial resources, the lower efficiency and effectiveness of provision of services because of weak economic and technical capacities of the local government, uneven service provision and supervision in different areas, the complexity of coordination of the state policy because of a possible concentration of functions in the hands of local elite, the lack of confidence between the public and private sectors, which might negatively affect the local-level cooperation. In addition:

- decentralisation and privatisation tend to increase inequality of the regions and communities, which have different organisational opportunities;
- unequal *opportunities* to participate in project planning and management for the local elite;
- the weakness of public or private institutions is sometimes supplemented by local government;
- the programmes are usually developed on the basis of the efficiency and administrative effectiveness, whereas evaluated according to political results.

Although the decentralisation is quite widespread, its significance, results and impacts differ in each of the countries. The current practice provides the three following lessons of decentralisation.

Firstly, decentralisation mostly affects macroeconomic stability, poverty reduction, provision of social services and government quality. A proper realisation of decentralisation may provide a lot of economic benefits, increase flexibility, accountability and efficiency in providing services, which are preferred by local population. The improperly accomplished decentralisation might have undesirable consequences: macroeconomic instability, the growth of disparities between the regions, which may cause conflicts or reduce the quality and amount of public services (Ebel, Febres 2000).

However, there is no one correct path of decentralisation, and the determination of a certain scope and type of decentralisation are political solutions, which help to avoid common mistakes (for example, it is a mistake to decentralise the incomes, without decentralising particular areas of responsibility, or to give the same incomes and responsibility areas to small as well as to big municipal units).

Secondly, because the decentralisation is ongoing and evolving process, some kind of an institutional infrastructure is needful, which could develop, verify and implement the policy of decentralisation. Institutional infrastructure includes a system of legislation, supervisory, coordinating organisations and capacity-building programmes. Experience shows a necessity to develop and publish explicit and reliable information, which includes all the actions of decentralisation. This reduces the confusion and possibility of political and bureaucratic conflicts, which are often provoked by any changes.

Finally, the reforms are successfully implemented only by the efforts of all the levels of government. As it was noted, the results of the processes of decentralisation may have both positive and negative consequences. Moreover, it could be seen the causal connections between them.

Decentralisation leads to a greater opportunities for interest groups and activity development in preparing the decisions, evaluating the abilities of public institutions to expand the role of participation of the citizens and the importance in a democratic society. And even if the decentralisation increases the opportunities of public institutions to expand the impact for organisations of the citizens, but the active participation of them promotes the development of the processes of decentralisation and responsibility of government institutions. Centralisation and decentralisation are not totally contradictory alternatives. In any countries a certain balance of centralisation and decentralisation is necessary in order the government could function effectively. Not all the functions have to or are able to be managed and funded by a decentralised structure. Even when the state government decentralises responsibility, the central government retains the important roles in policy and supervision. The central government should create or sustain particular conditions, in order the the local government units or non-governmental organisations could take more responsibility. Ministries, developing an appropriate effective state policy, regulating decentralisation, strengthening institutional capacities of the local government to take responsibility for the implementation of the new functions, play a key role in promoting and supporting decentralisation, by forming the strategic directions and tasks.

The generalised advantages and disadvantages of decentralisation are given in Table 2:

**Table 2.** Advantages and disadvantages of decentralization (source: compiled by authors)

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<b>Decentralisation and the provision of public goods</b>	
Limited development of public sector.	Without an effective control and monitoring of a system there might suffer the quality of the provision of public goods, because the civil servants assigned themselves the function of policy forming, freely interpreting the implementation of policy, projects and programmes.
The citizens are given more opportunities to make an influence on public decision-making.	The quality of service provision may suffer due to a lack of administrative capacity and resources. Participation of civil servants in forming public policy complicates the principle of adaptation of accountability for the voters.
Because of better opportunities to react to local needs and application of a principle of accountability for local people, there appears an increase in the quality of public goods.	There may be a loss of the advantages of the economies of scale.
Formation of favorable conditions for innovations and experimentations.	There might appear “tax wars“ and “tax export“, “benefit spillover“, “free rider“ effect.
Decrease of corruption.	Increase in corruption.
Growth of a variety of public goods. A competition among the providers of public goods promotes the adaptation of the best techniques of the provision of public goods and services.	Institutions of sub-national government are less attractive for the officers of a high qualification.
<b>Decentralization and redistribution of income</b>	
Decentralised redistribution of the incomes and the development of fiscal decentralisation create a presumption to strengthen the initiatives of people to control the local government.	After decentralising redistribution of the incomes, there may occur segregation and unequal redistribution of the incomes to individuals and territorial municipalities. It is more complicated to equalise fiscal power for individual subjects of sub-national government.
<b>Decentralization and macroeconomic stability</b>	
A faster growth of economy.	A lower growth of economy.
Fiscal decentralisation makes the country's financial system more flexible, allows the subject of sub-national government to deal with economic problems without using the national budget.	The opportunities of macroeconomical mobility become weaker at the national level, there may occur uneven regional development.

According to Baltušnikienė (2009) there is no single and the best model of decentralisation, because there exist a lot of various local and regional government systems, government practices, political and administrative cultures in the world. The countries carry out various reforms at different rates, priorities. In order to formulate more democratic government, based on a greater public participation, also to increase the accountability and responsibility of the government for the citizens, to guarantee a greater adequacy of public goods and the needs of the consumers and to maintain a high level of macroeconomic stability, it is necessary to find an optimal combination of centralisation and decentralisation, considering the context of concrete country.

#### 4. Conclusions

After analysing the opinions of various scientists about the term of decentralisation and its classification, it can be stated that decentralisation is perceived as a multifaceted phenomenon, involving a

gradual transfer of a leeway, functions and responsibility from the central to local government. There can be drawn a conclusion that the process of decentralisation can occur in such areas, as politics, economics, finances, public administration, etc., and this clearly substantiate a versatility of decentralisation.

Decentralisation includes fiscal, political, economical and administrative changes, which may essentially affect all the aspects of development: it makes a significant influence to the mobilisation and distribution of resources, also to the macroeconomical stability, service provision and equality. Decentralisation as a political and economical reality in many developing countries might influence the economic development, poverty reduction.

Decentralisation may lead to both positive and negative consequences. After analysing the conceptions of various researchers, it can be stated, that there is no only and the best model of decentralisation, because there exist a lot of different

local and regional government structures, practices, political and administrative cultures in the world. The countries perform different reforms at different rates and in different sectors from different starting positions and having different aims and priorities.

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