

ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE NEED AND POSSIBILITY FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE-TERRITORIAL REFORM IN ESTONIA

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Abstract

The paper treats important problems of regional and local government policy, such as the possibility of and need for the administrative-territorial reform, including merging of municipalities and definition of mutual relationships between the state and local governments and their functions. The need for sustainable and strong municipalities has been emphasised also on the level of the European Union already several years ago. Possible mergers of Estonian county centres with their surrounding rural municipalities, also the possibility for having several centres of attraction in a county are discussed. Statistics on demographic changes in the Estonian population, concentration of the population above all to larger cities, and decrease in rural population are presented. Also statistics, for instance, on changes in the number of pupils in counties are presented. A few suggestions are made for the further development of the regional and local government policy, including based on the considerably more radical activities in Finland in this field.

Keywords: administrative-territorial reform, regional policy, mergers of municipalities, strong cities as centres of attraction, relocations of the population to larger centres, reorganisation of the administrative structure in Estonia, functions of the state and of local governments

JEL Classification: H7, J18, R3, R4, R5

Introduction

The issues of regional and local government policy (i.e. local policy) have been on the agenda in Estonia for a long time on the level of discussions but the practical activities in this area have certainly been inadequate. The need for the administrative-territorial reform and the need and possibility for mergers of municipalities in the course of that reform have been discussed and talked about for many years but the results are modest to say the least.²

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² At the end of the 1990s and beginning of 2000s the mergers of municipalities were such a topical issue that in some periods the Estonian media presented new proposals made and another new administrative-territorial map of municipalities every week (sometimes even every other day)!

This paper is an addition, continuation and further development of the earlier papers and presentations of the author on the same topic. (Raudjärv ...2007)^{3,4} It should be noted that this paper also partly repeats the statements published and mentioned in the earlier papers and presentations.

The objective of this paper is to discuss certain topical issues which need to be solved in the Estonian regional and local policy. The following aspects will be examined and evaluated:

- the main problems of the regional and local policy
- the need to develop the regional and local policy
- possible mergers of the Estonian county centres and surrounding rural municipalities
- certain proposals for the future in the area of regional and local policy

The current inactivity in the area of the administrative-territorial reform should be replaced as soon as possible with considerably more active measures in the interests of the development of Estonia and its regions. In the course of approximately 18 years, i.e. in 1996–2013 only 22 mergers of 51 rural municipalities with cities or towns have taken place, as a result of which the number of municipalities has decreased by 29 by now but this cannot be regarded as a serious reform. Thus, while the number of municipalities in Estonia before the mergers was 255, there were 226 municipalities (cities, towns and rural municipalities) at the beginning of 2013. The last and the only merger took place in 2009 and until now all mergers according to the legislation have been performed after local elections.

In the last months of 2012 and the first months of 2013 another active discussion of mergers has started. The next local elections will take place on 20 October 2013 and according to the legislation the municipalities wishing to merge should perform the required procedures for the merger, prepare the documentation and submit the respective application for merger to their county governor by 19 April at the latest, i.e. half a year before the elections. Due to the conservative attitude of our local government actors, the author of this paper does not believe, however, that many mergers will take place in 2013.⁵

³ Raudjärv, M. Über die Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten der Regional- und Kommunalpolitik (unter Berücksichtigung der Zusammenlegung von Verwaltungseinheiten)/ Regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poliitika arenguvõimalustest Eestis (sh haldusüksuste kontsentratsiooni aspekt). Majanduspoliitilised väitlused/ Estnische Gespräche über Wirtschaftspolitik/ Discussions on Estonian Economic Policy – 2007 (The paper in German on the CD enclosed, the Estonian summary on paper media, pp. 67–71).

⁴ Presentation of the author on the subject „Concentration of regional and local development in Estonia“ at the conference „Days of Estonian Cities, Towns and Rural Municipalities – 2008“ in Tallinn at the Viru-Sokos Hotel on 28 February 2008.

⁵ These lines of this paper have been written at the end of March 2013, i.e. ca three weeks before 19 April. At the end of the paper (written at the end of April – beginning of May) the situation has already become clear!

1. Certain more important problems in the regional and local policy

The Estonian national economy was developing relatively fast before the economic crisis. At the same time, the practical issues of regional and local development have unfortunately remained in the background and regional imbalances have even increased, and also differences between the development of the counties and the capital city have increased. Activities in different areas of the administrative-territorial reform have been going on for many years but no satisfactory solutions have been reached.

Considering the need and opportunities for administrative-territorial changes we can state that probably the interests of different political parties and specific self-interested politicians are the main obstacles to making them. For instance, local interests and interests of political parties do not often favour balanced regional development, including merging of municipalities, and this is an obstacle to the systematic and complex development of the Estonian national economy.

Only one local council and its chairman and one rural municipality mayor (or city mayor) will remain after a merger of two or more municipalities. *It is an issue of power* and current officials are not always ready to give up their positions which involve power in the local government and find other jobs (which may sometimes require retraining or further training). So why should they support merging of municipalities if they may lose their jobs!

Also, certain political parties may not always support merging of municipalities in their policy as the number of their supporters among representatives of local authorities would decrease after a merger. It may lead to a decrease in the number of supporters of some political parties above all in rural municipalities but also in small towns. This would, however, have a negative effect on the political parties which have more supporters in rural areas in the fight among Estonian political parties for electors and power. *This too is an issue of power!* On the other hand – the smaller (i.e. more fragmented) are the municipalities, the more possibilities political parties have for asserting their power in different regions!

While Estonia has been a EU Member State since 2004 and a lot of EU priorities have been talked about for many years (such as the importance of balanced regional development), very little has been done in that respect. It is the opinion of several economists and representatives of local governments in other countries that Europe needs strong cities with the involvement of their hinterlands for the further development of the regional and local policy areas (Collomb... 2005: 77–88). On the other hand they regard also the development of rural municipalities important for the development of Europe, i.e. the existence of rural municipalities is an inevitable precondition for development (Häupl ... 2005: 89–102). In other words, cities and rural municipalities should constitute a harmoniously co-existing system.

According to Gerard Collomb, the mayor of Lyon (France), the future local and regional policy can only be successful if there is a systematic dialogue between

cities, and between the hinterlands of cities on the one hand and regions on the other hand. (Collomb ... 2005: 80). Several conflicts can be pointed out in local policy, the most important of these are the following:

- a) between cities, towns and rural municipalities (on the one hand, cities should be strong, but this is an obstacle to (or at least does not favour) the development of rural municipalities and rural areas);
- b) the conflict between economic activities and ecology is increasing (Floting, Hollbach-Grömig 2005: 25);
- c) conflicts between private and municipal ownership are often amplified (in the actual economic situation, there are many shortcomings and mistakes in the competition between private service providers in municipal services, which often cause additional problems to the population). (Häupl... 2005: 96)

For instance, according to Michael Häupl, the mayor of Vienna in Austria, most services should be provided by municipal enterprises, as private ownership causes a lot of problems, which do not help to provide public services to the population according to the required standards. Liberalisation and privatisation of public services is not very topical among the population of Vienna as municipal enterprises are performing their role well. (Häupl... 2005: 96) The same should be done more boldly also in Estonia as private companies are rather profit-oriented in the provision of municipal services (and not only there), competition has not functioned enough and there is often extensive pressure on the population to increase prices. The price level required by private companies is often not affordable to the population due to low income levels.

The predominant opinion in Estonia has been that private ownership is the best form of ownership. But the economic situation has unfortunately demonstrated from time to time that this is far from being always true. The profit maximisation interests of private companies are often not in conformity with the best and flexible satisfaction of the needs and wishes of the population. We can perhaps talk about economic efficiency for a private company but not about a high level of welfare for the population. The latter objective should be more important, however, and therefore the municipal ownership form can often allow to achieve more efficient solutions.

Strengthening of cities is accompanied by the concentration of the population to cities. For instance, according to some statistics, already at the beginning of this century, 80% of the population lived in European cities (Huttenloher 2004: Figure 5; Jakoby, Schmolinsky 2005: 40). We have to note here that in other European countries the concentration of the population to cities is much higher than in Estonia. According to the last census, 67.9% of the population lives in urban areas in Estonia. (RAL: Eesti ... 2013)

If the objective for the European Union is to achieve strong cities, what are the problems and the solutions for Estonia? The Estonian population is small, the territory is not big, the population density is one of the lowest in Europe (only 30 inhabitants per km²). The population of the Republic of Estonia is small, only ca 1.3 million people (1.294 million according to the census of 2011). The population

growth rate is relatively modest – in 2011 the total birth rate was 11.0 in Estonia (9.3 in 2001; 10.7 in 2005; 12.0, the highest during the decade, in 2008)^{6,7}, in 2011 the total death rate was 11.4 (13.6 in 2001 and 12.9 in 2005)⁸. While the number of births in 2001 was 12,632, it was 14,054 in 2012 according to preliminary statistics. The maximum level in this century was 16,028 births in 2008. (Raudvere, Nutov ... 2013: 2–3) The birth rate is, however, clearly declining.

There are also few towns and cities in Estonia and the towns are generally small in comparison with European towns and therefore also weak (only the two largest cities in Estonia, Tallinn and to some extent also Tartu may be exceptions here). The relocation of the population above all to major cities and to rural municipalities surrounding the cities, i.e. to the hinterland of cities, is continuing in Estonia. A part of the population moves to cities for a while, however, before going to live in the hinterland of the city.

This is what leads to the idea that it would be necessary to strengthen cities and towns systematically also in the situation of Estonia. How to do that? Cities, towns and rural areas (hinterland of cities and towns) should probably be partly integrated. This has been the reality for a lot of people for a long time already. However, integration would need also support in the form of institutional, economic policy, administrative and administrative-territorial measures. Thus the population would be integrated also with respect to the national and municipal level, have cooperation and be more united in a specific space or location.

In autumn 2012 the Estonian Minister for Regional Affairs presented a proposal for the reform of the local government structure, consisting of *six alternatives*:

1. Estonia of rural mini-municipalities: the system of local governments will not be changed, there will be voluntary merging of municipalities on their own initiative.

(*Matti Raudjärv = M.R.*): This means that nothing particular will change (the almost twenty years on practice of voluntary mergers has shown that) and that the current vegetation, i.e. standstill, in essence, and often essentially deterioration of the situation will continue. This is not good for the development of Estonia, the survival of the nation and improvement of welfare.

2. Estonia of associations of municipalities: municipalities will continue in the current form but some of their duties will be delegated to the public entity – association of municipalities of the county – and the membership would be mandatory.

M.R.: The assessment is analogous with the first alternative: county governments will just largely be replaced by associations of municipalities. It is not a good solution as it would make no difference for municipalities.

3. Estonia with two levels: municipalities will continue in their current form but an additional elected local government level will be created within the current counties.

⁶ Sündimuse ... 2013

⁷ The crude birth rate in the European Union (27 Member States) was 10.4 in 2011; in 2001 – 10.4; in 2005 – 10.4 and it was the highest in 2008 – 10.9 (Sündimuse ... 2013)

⁸ Suremuse ... 2013

M. R.: The success will partly depend on the functions assigned to the new level. On the other hand – retaining municipalities in their current form essentially implies the continuation of the current situation and postponing solutions to a more distant future. It cannot be regarded as a good solution as there will be no significant changes in the activities of municipalities.

4. Estonia of counties: the state sets the due date by which time municipalities with the minimum population of 25,000 will be formed. The choice of partners will be voluntary and those who cannot do it by the due date will be merged with the decision of the government.

M.R.: The principle of subsidiarity will be lost which should not be underestimated in Estonia as a country with relatively small communities. This is probably not a good alternative either as the identity of communities will become considerably weaker considering the sparse settlement structure of Estonia.

5. Estonia of parishes: the state will set a due date for mergers for municipalities to create municipalities with the minimum population of 3,000. Partners for mergers will be found voluntarily. Those who do not manage to do that will be merged with the decision of the government.

M.R. Somewhat better than the three first alternatives (larger and more capable municipalities) but movements of the population are still not sufficiently taken into account.

6. Estonia of centres of attraction: the state will designate centres of attraction to select from for mergers by a definite term. Partners for mergers will be found voluntarily. Those who do not manage to do that will be merged with the decision of the government.

M. R.: Considering the mobility of people this alternative could be regarded as the best of the six alternatives suggested and this has direct parallels with the idea of strong cities presented in the European Union already approximately ten years ago.

A brief assessment: In the opinion of the author of this paper, another alternative of the administrative-territorial reform could be considered in which several models would be combined, namely:

- combining the Estonia of centres of attraction, i.e. the sixth model (not only county centres should be centres of attraction but also other cities and towns in the county) and the Estonia of parishes, i.e. the fifth model should be considered above all, i.e. a part of the existing municipalities will merge;
- in which county governments would be replaced by associations of municipalities (certainly with clear definition of their functions), i.e. certain ideas of the third model above would be included, and in which
- associations of municipalities would be the second level of local government and have a coordinating role in the county, i.e. some ideas from the fourth model would be included.

By combining the four alternatives (models) in such a manner, also decisions of the government and even mandatory measures should be used in parallel with voluntary actions (mergers of municipalities and other reorganisations) as the current voluntary process has generally not been justified (the planned reform has even

become a farce at places) and there will surely be situations in which municipalities concerned are not able and sometimes even competent to decide. It would probably also be necessary to *adjust the borders of the current rural municipalities, cities, towns and counties* to take into account the residential areas and actual movements of the population.

2. The Estonian population is actually moving to major cities and/or areas around them⁹

According to Statistics Estonia the permanent population of Estonia was 1,294,455 based on the final results of the Population and Housing Census (REL 2011)¹⁰. Compared to the previous census of 2000, the Estonian population has decreased by 75,597 persons, i.e. 5.5%. Among counties, only the populations of Harjumaa (significantly) and Tartumaa (more modestly and with relatively little changes, being mostly stable) have increased.

According to the results of the Census, concentration of the population to the surroundings of larger cities is continuing. Among municipalities, the increase in population has been most important in the municipalities surrounding Tallinn, where the population of certain municipalities has doubled in comparison with the results of the previous Census. For instance, the population of the Viimsi Rural Municipality has increased to 18,533 (7,978 inhabitants in 2000), in the Rae Rural Municipality to 15,721 inhabitants (7,979 inhabitants in 2000) and in the Harku Rural Municipality to 14,181 inhabitants (6,617 inhabitants in 2000). The population of certain rural municipalities near Tartu (in Ülenurme Rural Municipality from 4,780 to 7,751 and in Tartu Rural Municipality from 5,121 to 6,991) and near Pärnu (in Sauga Rural Municipality from 2,535 to 4,474) have also increased.

The smaller Estonian towns tend to decrease in most cases and the population is decreasing (see Tables 1 and 2 in Annex): the population of only three Estonian cities and towns (except the towns without municipal status) has increased in the period between the censuses: in Saue (11.2%), Maardu (4.7%) and Keila (4%). The population of the remaining cities and towns has decreased. We have to note here that the Census data do not always agree with those of the Ministry of the Interior. Namely, according to the statistics of the Ministry of the Interior, the population of Tallinn has considerably increased (see the data in Table 4 of the annexes).

In comparison with 2000 the population has decreased most in smaller towns (see Table 2 in Annex). In the Estonian context, such towns (marked with the asterisk (*) in Annex) as Maardu, Narva, Sillamäe and Kohtla-Järve cannot be regarded as small towns. These towns have still been presented to provide a full overview.

⁹ The source of the statistics in this part of the paper: REL: Eesti ... 2013

¹⁰ The 11th Census was carried out in Estonia from 31 December 2011 – 31 March 2012. The earlier censuses had taken place in 1881, 1897, 1922, 1934, 1941, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989 and 2000. The next Census will be performed in Estonia in 2020/2021.

The urban/rural distribution of the population has not significantly changed in the period between the censuses. 67.9% of the population lived in urban areas (incl. cities, towns without municipal status and small towns) according to the statistics of 2011. In 2000, 69.2% of the Estonian population lived in urban areas.

From the 4,438 Estonian villages, 12 have more than 1,000 inhabitants and 645 have 100–999 inhabitants. The population of most villages (3,781) is less than 100 and in 327 villages the permanent population was less than three inhabitants. In 102 villages there were no permanent inhabitants according to the census.

Large villages have appeared in areas near cities. The villages with the largest population are Peetri – 4,435 (Harjumaa), Muraste – 1,698 (Harjumaa), Randvere – 1,690 (Harjumaa), Vahi – 1,620 (Tartumaa), Alliku – 1,575 (Harjumaa), Tammiste – 1,562 (Pärnumaa), Pärnamäe – 1,556 (Harjumaa), Lohkva – 1,288 (Tartumaa), Püüsi – 1,256 (Harjumaa) and Papsaare – 1,028 (Pärnumaa) inhabitants.

The average age of the Estonian population has increased in comparison with the previous census. Its main reason is the increase in the life expectancy by ca 5.5 years during the period between the censuses. While it was 38.7 years in 2000, it is now 40.8 years. The average age of men is 37.7 years (35.9 in 2000) and of women 43.4 years (41.1 in 2000). The populations of Harjumaa and Tartumaa are younger than average – the average age, respectively, 36.3 and 38.1 years. The average age of the population is the highest in the Piirissaare (63.1) and Alajõe (53.9) rural municipalities.

The number of students is decreasing in municipal schools, except in Harjumaa and Tallinn (see Table 3 in annexes). If the inhabitants move from rural municipalities and small towns to centres of attraction, the number of students clearly decreases in many schools of rural municipalities and gradually the issue of closing the school arises as there are not enough students. Then also the remaining children may move from that area of the rural municipality with their families and this is how many hinterlands and rural areas become empty. If there is also a problem with local jobs, the situation will amplify even more. There are also other kinds of problems: rural municipalities, towns and cities are having difficulties with paying the intended salaries to teachers. „The lacking administrative reform is beginning to be felt: if the number of teachers employed by the rural municipality is higher than established with the national model of salary funds, the municipality has to raise salaries from its own budget.“ (Nutov ... 2013: 8) Therefore the changes in the school system, planned by the Estonian Ministry of Research and Education, do not conform to the actual situation and possibilities of municipalities.

3. About the development of the regional and local policy

The administrative-territorial reform and the related activities should be carried out as soon as possible in Estonia (until now it has only been talked about for about 20 years and the arguments are that it is still not quite prepared, more matters should be analysed, specified, etc.). The current voluntary mergers of administrative units

(rural municipalities, cities, towns) have, unfortunately, had modest results and have proceeded slowly. Government agencies will probably have to make a strong contribution to the reform on their own part and with mandatory measures

The current administrative-territorial reform process in Estonia should be considerably speeded up:

- to considerably reduce the number of towns and cities with municipal status and above all weak rural municipalities with low administrative capacity as a result of mergers;
- by considering the option of changing the status of most if not all Estonian towns (administrative units, towns and cities with municipal status) into towns without municipal status.¹¹ In that case also the adjustment of the borders of many rural municipalities and even cities and towns will be required. As a result of the above-mentioned changes, a county centre would be above all the centre of a rural municipality, which is the administrative unit, and on the other hand a town or city without municipal status, or, in other words – after the suggested changes the current county centre would be the centre of the rural municipality and a town or city without municipal status – the former town or city as an administrative unit would be combined with the surrounding rural municipality (or rural municipalities). Similar mergers should be performed also with other Estonian cities and towns (and have already been performed in some cases).¹²

The only *exceptions* due to their specific nature and complicated structure and location of urban areas could be the following counties:

- Harjumaa (the capital of the Republic of Estonia, Tallinn, and the ice-free port Paldiski together with the two islands near-by, and also several other towns are located in this county);
- Hiiumaa (if this second largest island of Estonia retains its status as a county also in the future, the future of the administrative units would require special evaluation); and

¹¹ some towns and cities could be afforded a dual status (considering that it is also an issue of power), i.e. a city or town would be both an administrative unit with a city status and the centre (rural municipality centre) for the surrounding rural municipality or municipalities

¹² This is not a new approach in the Estonian context as an analogous approach was proposed in the Viljandi County at the beginning of 1990s (when the merging of administrative units, particularly rural municipalities, was very topical) in the form of merging the Viljandi Town as the county centre with the four surrounding rural municipalities (Paistu, Pärsti, Saarepeedi and Viiratsi). In subsequent years and in 2005 after the most recent elections of local municipalities several cities and towns have merged with the circular rural municipalities surrounding them. With county centres such mergers have taken place twice – merging of the Rapla Town as the county centre with the surrounding rural municipality in Raplamaa (after the local government elections in 2002) and merging of the Jõhvi Town as the county centre with the surrounding rural municipality in Ida-Virumaa (after the local government elections in 2005). Both towns are towns without municipal status after the mergers and administrative centres of the new rural municipality.

- Ida-Virumaa (complicated situation due to the scattered industry and mining operations and therefore a relatively large number of small towns; would probably also require special evaluation).

The mergers mentioned above would make it possible to alleviate the situation of many administrative units (cities and towns with municipal status and rural municipalities):

- merger would make it possible to improve the financial situation and make more important and larger investments;
- since many people working in urban areas often live in the rural municipalities surrounding the cities or towns, people would have their places of residence and jobs within the same administrative units, which could facilitate the provision and availability of several services to the inhabitants (ensuring the availability of services currently often depends on the bureaucracy related to the borders of the administrative units);
- cities and towns but also the rural municipalities around them would become stronger (including have better potential for the selection of specialists and their specialisation), their services would become flexible and more active for the population; they would have also more operative cooperation with other municipalities;
- this in its turn would make the merged cities, towns and rural municipalities more attractive to investors;
- the above-mentioned measures in their turn may make the population more settled (as the region becomes more attractive), which may improve the employment situation.

Or, in other words, the Estonian cities and towns with their hinterlands (in the form of the current rural municipality or municipalities surrounding them) would become stronger and more sustainable. Also the rural municipalities and cities and towns without municipal status which remain further away from the hinterlands of cities and towns would become stronger as certain adjustments would be required at any rate considering the future developments in Estonia in terms of administrative changes and changes in the borders of administrative units.

Such mergers would create preconditions for more balanced regional development as the outflow of the population to the capital city Tallinn and other major Estonian cities and towns could decrease. Also the life in rural municipalities, small settlements and villages may become more attractive and provide more satisfactory living conditions.

NB! With the completion of the administrative-territorial reform also other measures have to be taken, such as increasing the motivation of people, raising the efficiency of the educational system, including taking more into account the local conditions, and improvement of further training and retraining, motivation of investors, improvement of the roads and movement opportunities, contribution to the solution of social issues, improved functioning of the health care and communication

systems, etc. Here we should talk about the integrated development of the whole infrastructure.

NB! The administrative-territorial reform should be accompanied also by a review and evaluation of the functions of the national and local governments and empowerment of local governments. This means also more trust and delegation of more functions to local governments.

NB! Probably the existence of more compact (concentrated) administrative units in Estonia would help to gain more control over real estate developers. Real estate agencies should take orders from municipalities and not exert pressure on municipalities with their own visions (that we constantly see and as a consequence of which we have had real estate developments in Estonia which are not satisfactory to almost anyone and are only objectionable, considering the future).

4. Possible mergers of the Estonian county centres and surrounding rural municipalities

When examining the locations of cities and towns which are the centres of Estonian counties, with respect to the rural municipalities surrounding them, the strengthening of cities and towns with perspective changes can be divided into four groups:

- (1) changes that have taken place;
- (2) easier solutions (merger of a city or town with the surrounding circular rural municipality);
- (3) more complicated solutions (merging of a city or town with several surrounding rural municipalities, or merger of several rural municipalities);
- (4) even more complicated (or should we say – very complicated) solutions, which create a number of additional issues and problems compared to other cases (there are more merging municipalities or the location is complicated, including the situations in Harjumaa, Ida-Virumaa and Hiiumaa).

Proceeding from the above-mentioned factors, the following groups can be pointed out from the analysis and comparison of the possible further developments of the 15 Estonian counties:

- (1) **changes already made** (at places with partial changes in the Ida-Viru County) by merging the county centre with the surrounding circular municipality (or municipalities): **this applies to two counties**, above all the **Rapla County** but also the **Ida-Viru County** (in the interests of the further development of the Ida-Viru County special research should be made, however, as the location and settlement structure is relatively complicated; the changes made have probably been only partial);
- (2) **easier merging solutions**, i.e. the county centre is surrounded by only one circular rural municipality: **this applies to five counties – the Jõgeva, Lääne, Põlva, Saare and Võru counties**;
- (3) **more complicated merging solutions**, i.e. the county centre is surrounded by territories of from two to four (in terms of direct impacts even five or six)

municipalities: **this applies to six counties** – the **Järva, Lääne-Viru, Pärnu, Tartu, Valga, Viljandi** counties;

- (4) **even more complicated situations** at some places compared to other counties (or solutions which require different kinds of decisions than in the above-mentioned cases), requiring additional research and then also the respective decisions: **this applied to three counties** – the **Harju, Hiiu ja Ida-Viru** counties. In the latter case the Jõhvi Town which is the county centre has already merged with the surrounding circular Jõhvi Rural Municipality (but there are several other towns in the county which are closely related to their hinterlands). The situation is probably complicated above all in the Harju and Ida-Viru (here probably not concerning the county centre) counties. In the case of the Hiiu county the solution would be relatively easier if the county were preserved and the Hiiumaa County (incl. the Hiiumaa Island) were not merged with the Lääne County.

NB! If the intention is to use the hinterlands of county centres for the development of both cities and towns and rural municipalities, also the borders of rural municipalities (why not cities and towns, if necessary) should be adjusted. The existing borders of rural municipalities largely originate from the Soviet period and should be changed if it proves necessary (and the necessity is very probable indeed in many cases!). Development of cities and towns, situation of their hinterlands, competition between administrative units or sustainability were not important enough during the Soviet period. It was command economy after all.

NB! Certainly, in addition to strengthening county centres also strengthening of other cities and towns should be considered, i.e. other cities and towns could exist not as administrative units but as just cities or towns without municipal status, being at the same time also centres of attraction for rural municipalities. It is not excluded that also a few small towns will remain centres of attraction for rural municipalities. Certain cities and towns and small towns there will surely be exceptions, often because of their location (e.g. the Võhma Town, etc.).

5. There is be a lot to do but there seems to be even more indecisiveness

Although a number of mergers of cities and towns with rural municipalities have taken place in Estonia since 1996 (also numerous mergers of rural municipalities with each other), the impact and consequences of these mergers have not been studied very thoroughly according to the information available and not sufficient generalisations have been made.¹³ That would be necessary, however. If some research has been made, no important or necessary experience has been concluded from it until now!

¹³ The author does not think that no research has been conducted at all. But the surveys have probably been somewhat fragmented and episodic and have not allowed to reach generalised and thoroughly argued positions or conclusions or to make convincing proposals.

Surveys should be prepared and conducted in several Estonian counties (mergers of cities and towns with rural municipalities have taken place there and cities and towns without municipal status have come into existence):

- Clear positions and conclusions should be brought out about the consequences of mergers of a **city or town as a county centre** with the surrounding rural municipalities, respectively:
 - **in the Rapla County:** merger of Rapla with the Rapla Rural Municipality (after the elections of local councils in 2002; the current Rapla Rural Municipality) and
 - **in the Ida-Viru County:** merger of Jõhvi with the Jõhvi Rural Municipality (after the elections of local councils in 2005; the current Jõhvi Rural Municipality).
- It would also be rational to draw clear conclusions from the results of mergers of **other cities and towns** and rural municipalities, e.g.:
 - **in the Valga County:** merger of the Otepää Town with the Pühajärve Rural Municipality (after the elections of local councils in 1999; the current Otepää Rural Municipality);
 - **in the Lääne-Viru County** (both mergers listed below took place after the elections of local councils in 2005):
 - merger of the Tapa Town, Lehtse Rural Municipality (was in the Harju County before the merger) and Saksi Rural Municipality (the current Tapa Rural Municipality), and
 - merger of the Tamsalu Town and Tamsalu Rural Municipality (the current Tamsalu Rural Municipality).
 - **in the Põlva County:** merger of the Rāpina Town with the Rāpina Rural Municipality (after the elections of local councils in 2002; the current Rāpina Rural Municipality);
 - **in the Pärnu County:** merger of the Kilingi-Nõmme Town and the Saarde Rural Municipality and the Tali Rural Municipality (after the elections of local councils in 2005; the current Saarde Rural Municipality).
- Besides, conclusions drawn from also other mergers (of above all **rural municipalities**) could be gathered, above all in order to make generalisations and solve the problems that have appeared (incl. also for making the required amendments to legislation).

It would be rational and necessary to identify:

- any positive and also negative experience gained from mergers;
- any problems that have appeared; and
- the expected prospects of municipalities involved in mergers (incl. the possible focusing on mandatory mergers instead of the current voluntary ones). How long can we wait?

On the basis of answers to these problems it would be possible to forecast other mergers by generalisation and prevent (or alleviate) controversial situations.

The problems related to Estonian municipalities demonstrate that despite the long period of discussions of this subject, no significant experience has been documented. Probably many local government actors do not wish that and neither do government agencies or political parties. Isn't it (to put it mildly) restraining of the development of Estonia and contributing to the deterioration of the living standards of the population with the indifference, carelessness and unstatesmanship?

Situations similar to the one which developed in Läänemaa from the beginning of December 2012 until the beginning of February 2013 have often been typical of the experience in Estonia. Namely, the Oru Rural Municipality made a proposal for the merger of municipalities (Mikovitš ... 2013) and the discussions reached the stage where eight rural municipalities could have been merged with the Haapsalu Town as the county centre. At the beginning of February 2013 the circular Ridala Rural Municipality surrounding Haapsalu found that there was time enough and that the merger could be put off for the future (the next local elections will take place again in 2017!); besides, so many things are still uncertain and unclear. (Karnau ... 2013) Finally, by April only three rural municipalities decided to merge (a „wonderful“ and disgraceful result!)

Almost every Estonian county has municipalities which have kept putting off the adoption of the decision from one election period to the next in a similar manner. And the Republic of Estonia has regained independence already more than 20 years ago and many things could be quite clear already!¹⁴ Such insecure actors who are afraid of making decisions clearly should not participate in local or national politics as they are often (at least) slowing down the development of their region (incl. rural municipality, city and town) and Estonia as a whole.

And the position of the author of this paper presented at the beginning came true (see the last paragraph of the introduction to this paper on page 2 and footnote 4): now, after 19 April, it is clear that there will be really very few mergers of municipalities in 2013 – 18 municipalities submitted their applications for mergers by the due date and seven new municipalities will be formed of these, which will reduce the number of municipalities in Estonia to 215 after the elections of local councils in autumn. (Raudvere ... 2013) While the mergers of municipalities will take place voluntarily in 2013, the completion of the administrative-territorial reform is planned for 2017 according to the Minister for Regional Affairs. We cannot be sure of that, however.

¹⁴ The author of this paper has supervised a number of bachelor's theses at the University of Tartu on the subject of possible mergers of municipalities, and such demagogic and unstatemanly positions have been presented in many rural municipalities and cities and towns. One typical contradiction and a reason for cancelling mergers is often the inability to agree on the name of the new, merged municipality.

For conclusion

For comparison we could examine the plan for mergers of rural municipalities, cities and towns in Finland which has been planned for a short period, with strong measures and taking into account the development needs. We unfortunately cannot state the same about Estonia.

Henna Virkkunen, the Minister for Regional Affairs of Finland, pointed out in her interview several interesting positions which have been planned and are under discussion in the legislation of the Government of Finland on the extensive merger of rural municipalities (Ideon ... 2013):

- the objective is to raise the efficiency of the activities of municipalities and to reduce their number from several hundreds to hopefully fewer than a hundred new municipalities (generally from three to five municipalities should be merged). Many current municipalities are so small that they are unable to fulfil all their duties. Larger municipalities would be required that would employ a sufficient number of professionals and specialists;
- municipalities have to perform a merger survey with their neighbours within one year; the due date for the completion of the surveys will be 1 July 2014. Municipalities will get government support for the mergers and other kinds of assistance for carrying through the changes. There are generally three criteria – a merger survey has to be conducted a) in municipalities with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants; b) if a large part of the population of the municipality works elsewhere; c) the municipality has a poor economic situation;
- the minimum population of the municipalities will be 20,000; however, regional exceptions can be applied for if distances are very long in the area (northern and eastern regions). The current median population of municipalities is 6000;
- the mergers should take place from the beginning of 2015 until the beginning of 2017 at the latest (after which time the next local elections will take place in Finland). The situation is more complicated with cities or towns which have adjoining prosperous rural municipalities. It is also planned to expand the borders of Helsinki;
- additional functions will be delegated to municipalities so the county level will probably not be needed in the future. The functions of the county will be transferred to the state and to the municipalities. The objective is to have strong municipalities and the strong state.

According to the above-mentioned description, Estonia and Finland have a relatively similar administrative structure and the related problems. It is just that in Estonia people are not able to adopt decisions and organise things as much as necessary. Therefore a lot of time is lost and the inequality within Estonia is increasing. This eventually slows down the development of whole Estonia.

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Annexes:

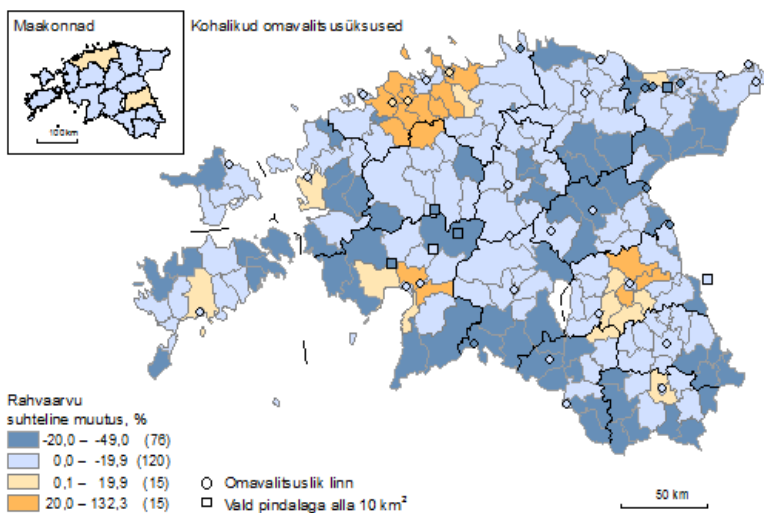


Figure 1. Relative changes in the population of municipalities in 2000–2011 (REL 2011: Eesti ... 2013).

Table 1. Decrease in the population of county centres in the comparison between two censuses (2000 and 2011) (number of inhabitants, in the order of increasing relative decreases)

No.	County centre (county)	2000	2011	Change in 2011-2000	Change in %
1	Tallinn (Harju)	400 378	393 222	-7156	-1,8
2	Tartu (Tartu)	101 169	97 600	-3569	-3,5
3	Rakvere (Lääne-Viru)	17 097	15 264	-1833	-10,7
4	Põlva (Põlva)	6467	5767	-700	-10,8
5	Kuressaare (Saare)	14 925	13 166	-1759	-11,8
6	Pärnu (Pärnu)	45 500	39 728	-5772	-12,7
7	Jõgeva (Jõgeva)	6420	5501	-919	-14,3
8	Valga (Valga)	14 323	12 261	-2062	-14,4
9	Paide (Järva)	9642	8228	-1414	-14,7
10	Võru (Võru)	14 879	12 756	-2212	-14,9
11	Haapsalu (Lääne)	12 054	10 251	-1803	-15,0
12	Viljandi (Viljandi)	20 756	17 473	-3283	-15,8
13	Kärdla (Hiiumaa)	3773	3050	-723	-19,2
14	Jõhvi (Ida-Viru)*	-	-	-	-
15	Rapla (Rapla)*	-	-	-	-

* Note: Jõhvi and Rapla as county centres are essentially and legally cities and towns without municipal status (in the Jõhvi Rural Municipality and Rapla Rural Municipality, respectively) and there was no information about them as the populations of the town and the surrounding earlier (circular) rural municipality could not be discerned.

Source: REL 2011: Eesti ... 2013

Table 2. Decrease in the population of towns in the comparison between two censuses (2000 and 2011) (number of inhabitants, in the order of decreasing (+) and increasing (-) relative changes)

Towns	2000	2011	Change in 2011–2000	Change in %
Saue	4958	5514	+556	+11,2
Maardu*	16 738	17 524	+786	+4,7
Keila	9388	9763	+375	+4,0
Sindi	4179	4076	-103	-2,5
Paldiski	4248	4085	-163	-3,8
Elva	6020	5607	-413	-6,9
Narva-Jõesuu	2983	2632	-351	-11,8
Kunda	3899	3422	-477	-12,2
Põltsamaa	4849	4188	-661	-13,6
Narva*	68 680	58 663	-10 017	-14,6
Tõrva	3201	2729	-472	-14,7
Sillamäe*	17 199	14 252	-2947	-17,1
Võhma	1596	1314	-282	-17,7
Loksa	3494	2759	-735	-21,0
Kohtla-Järve*	47 679	37 201	-10478	-22,0
Mustvee	1753	1358	-395	-22,5
Kiviõli	7405	5634	-1771	-23,9
Mõisaküla	1165	825	-340	-29,2
Kallaste	1211	852	-359	-29,6
Püssi	1872	1083	-789	-42,1

*Note: Maardu, Narva, Sillamäe and Kohtla-Järve are not small towns in Estonia but have been presented in this table to provide a better overview.

Source: REL 2011: Eesti ... 2013

Table 3. Changes in the number of students in municipal schools in Tallinn and in the counties (in the order of increasing relative changes)

No.	Tallinn and the counties	No. of students on 10.11.2011	No. of students on 10.11.2012	Change	Change in %
	Tallinn	39 517	39 588	+71	+0,2
1	Harjumaa	14 965	15 354	+389	+2,6
2	Tartumaa	16 893	16 729	-164	-1,0
3	Ida-Virumaa	13 977	13 739	-238	-1,7
4	Järvamaa	3 565	3 469	-96	-2,7
5	Lääne-Virumaa	6 644	6 399	-245	-3,7
6	Valgamaa	3 407	3 276	-131	-3,8
7	Pärnumaa	9 440	9 086	-354	-3,8
8	Raplamaa	3 972	3 810	-162	-4,1
9	Läänemaa	2 737	2 618	-119	-4,3
10	Saaremaa	3 513	3 362	-151	-4,3
11	Põlvamaa	2 884	2 751	-133	-4,6
12	Hiiumaa	976	929	-47	-4,8
13	Jõgevamaa	3663	3464	-199	-5,4
14	Viljandimaa	4 891	4 598	-293	-6,0
15	Võrumaa	4 044	3 769	-275	-6,8
	Estonia in total	135 563	132 941	-2622	-1,9

Sources: Ministry of Education and Research, *Maaleht*; calculations of the author.

Table 4. Number of inhabitants in 2009–2013 According to the statistics of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia

No.	Counties, county centres (a)	02.02.2009	02.02.2010	01.01.2011	01.01.2012	01.01.2013
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Harjumaa	...	556 283	563 103	569 036	573 199
1a	Tallinn	404 142	407 112	411 903	416 059	419 707
2	Hiiumaa	...	10 285	10 176	10 123	10 030
2a	Kärdla	3 758	3 743	3 684	3 758	3 615
3	Ida-Virumaa	...	166 350	164 093	161 997	159 222
3a	Jõhvi Rural Municipality*	13 145*	13 006*	12 932*	12 746*	12 573*
4	Jõgevamaa	...	35 220	34 776	34 325	33 610
4a	Jõgeva	5 862	5 816	5 760	5 862	5 661
5	Järvamaa	...	34 826	34 315	33 817	33 223
5a	Paide	9 114	9 108	8 981	8 866	8 710
6	Läänemaa	...	27 518	27 270	26 879	26 576
6a	Haapsalu	11 602	11 463	11 293	11 167	11 078
7	Lääne-Viru	...	66 234	65 465	64 608	63 571
7a	Rakvere	16 897	16 941	16 884	16 801	16 639
8	Põlvamaa	...	31 010	30 839	30 445	30 036
8a	Põlva	6 314	6 283	6 260	6 200	6 111
9	Pärnumaa	...	90 409	89 701	88 827	87 745
9a	Pärnu	43 465	43 545	42 937	42 433	42 034
10	Raplamaa	...	37 145	36 785	36 485	36 011
10a	Rapla Rural Municipality*	9 636*	9 678*	9 641*	9 628*	9 579*
11	Saaremaa	...	35 851	35 719	35 581	35 229
11a	Kuressaare	15 074	14 901	14 706	14 588	14 394
12	Tartumaa	...	148 886	149 252	149 426	149 494
12a	Tartu	98 475	98 407	98 548	98 522	98 480
13	Valgamaa	...	33 960	33 683	33 299	32 753
13a	Valga	14 155	14 084	13 994	13 852	13 691
14	Viljandimaa	...	53 496	52 898	52 098	51 227
14a	Viljandi	19 528	19 297	19 145	19 106	18 872
15	Võrumaa	...	37 752	37 388	37 055	36 403
15a	Võru	14 081	13 973	13 918	13 790	13 483
	Total counties	...	1 365225	1 365463	1 364001	1 358329
A		662 467	664 673	668 013	671 004	672 475
B		685 348	687 357	690 586	693 378	694 627

* Note: Jõhvi and Rapla as county centres are essentially and legally towns without municipal status (in the Jõhvi Rural Municipality and Rapla Rural Municipality,

respectively) and there was no information about them as the populations of the town and the surrounding earlier (circular) rural municipality could not be discerned. **NB!** This, however, also means that upon the merger of rural municipalities with cities and towns it will be complicated, if not impossible, to obtain the respective statistics about the city or town and the surrounding rural municipality (or municipalities).

Line A: Total county centres without the Jõhvi and Rapla rural municipalities.

Line B: Total county centres with the Jõhvi and Rapla rural municipalities.

Sources for Table 4: Elanike arv ... 2013; calculations of the author.

MÕNEDEST HALDUSTERRITORIAALSE REFORMI VAJALIKKUSE JA VÕIMALIKKUSE ASPEKTIDEST EESTIS

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Tartu Ülikool

Sissejuhatus

Regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse (ehk lokaalse) poliitika küsimused on Eesti Vabariigis olnud pikka aega päevakorras sageli vaid diskussiooni tasemel kuid praktiline tegevus selles valdkonnas on olnud kindlasti ebapiisav. Hulk aastaid on arutatud ja räägitud haldusterritoriaalse reformi vajalikkusest ning selle raames kohalike omavalitsuste liitumiste vajadusest ja võimalikkusest, tulemused on aga rohkem kui tagasihoidlikud.²

Käesolev artikkel on täienduseks, jätkuks ja edasiarenduseks autori varasematele sama valdkonna artiklitele ja esinemistele. (Raudjärv ...2007)^{3,4} Siinjuures olgu märgitud, et käesolevas kirjutises on ka eelmistes artiklites ja esinemistes avaldatu osalisi kordamisi.

Artikli eesmärgiks on mõnede Eesti regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poliitikas lahendamist vajavate aktuaalsete küsimuste käsitlemine. Uuritakse ja hinnatakse järgmiseid aspekte:

- olulisemad regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poliitika probleemid,
- regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poliitika arendamise vajadus,
- Eesti maakonnakeskuste ja ümbritsevate valdade võimalikud ühinemised,
- mõned ettepanekud edasiseks regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poliitika valdkonnas.

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² Üheksakümnendate aastate lõpus ja kahetuhandete aastate alguses oli kohalike omavalitsuste ühinemise teema nii aktuaalne, et mõnel perioodil võis igal nädalal kord (vahest isegi üle päeva) Eesti meediast teada saada, et Eestis on esitatud jälle uued ettepanekud ning valminud järjekordne kohalike omavalitsuste haldus-territoriaalne kaart!

³ Raudjärv, M. Über die Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten der Regional- und Kommunalpolitik (unter Berücksichtigung der Zusammenlegung von Verwaltungseinheiten)/ Regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poliitika arenguvõimalustest Eestis (sh haldusüksuste kontsentratsiooni aspekt). Majanduspoliitilised väitlused/ Estnische Gespräche über Wirtschaftspolitik/ Discussions on Estonian Economic Policy – 2007 (kaasasoleval CD-l saksa keelne artikkel, paberandjal eesti keelne kokkuvõte, lk.67-71).

⁴ Autori ettekanne 28. veebruaril 2008 Tallinnas Viru-Sokos hotellis konverentsil „Eesti Linnade ja Valdade päevad – 2008“ teemal „Regionaalse ja kohaliku arengu kontsentratsioon Eestis“.

Senine loid tegevus haldusterritoriaalse reformi valdkonnas tuleks Eesti ja tema piirkondade arengu huvides võimalikult kiiresti oluliselt aktiivsema tegevusega asendada. Pole ju tõsiselt võetav, et ligi 18-ne aasta jooksul ehk aastatel 1996-2013 on kokku vaid 22. korral toimunud 51. valla-linna ühinemist, mille tulemusel on omavalitsuste arv tänaseks 29 võrra vähenenud. Seega kui ühinemiste eel oli Eestis 255 kohaliku omavalitsuse üksust, siis 2013. aasta alguses oli 226 kohalikku omavalitsust (linna ja valda). Viimane ja ainuke ühinemine toimus 2009. aastal ning seni on kõik ühinemised vastavalt õigusaktidele toimunud kohalike valimiste järel.

2012. aasta lõpukuud ning 2013. aasta alguskuud on näidanud järjekordset aktiivset arutelu ühinemiste teemadel. Järjekordsed kohalikud valimised toimuvad 20. oktoobril 2013 ning vastavalt õigusaktidele tuleb ühineda soovijatel hiljemalt 19. aprilliks ehk pool aastat enne valimisi ühinemiseks vajalikud protseduurid läbi viia, dokumentatsioon ette valmistada ning vastav ühinemisavaldus oma maakonnas maavanemale esitada. Käesoleva artikli autor siiski ei usu, et ühinemisi meie omavalitsustegelaste konservatiivsuse tõttu 2013. aastal eriti palju toimub.⁵

Mõned olulisemad probleemid regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poliitikas

Eesti rahvamajanduse areng oli enne majanduskriisi suhteliselt kiire. Selle kõrval on regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse küsimused praktikas aga paraku tagaplaanile jäänud ning regionaalne tasakaalustamatus isegi suurenenud, maakondade ja pealinna vahelised arengu erisused kasvanud. Haldusterritoriaalse reformi erinevate valdkondadega on tegeletud pikki aastaid, kuid rahuldavate tulemusteni jõutud ei ole.

Arvestades vajalikke ja võimalikke haldusterritoriaalseid muutusi võib väita, et ilmselt takistavad seda meie erakondlikud huvid ning konkreetset n n „asjast huvitatud” poliitikud. Näiteks regionaalset tasakaalustatust ja sealhulgas kohalike omavalitsuste ühinemisi ei soodusta sageli kohalikud ja erakondlikud huvid, mistõttu on takistatud Eesti rahvamajanduse süsteemne ja kompleksne areng.

Eesti on küll juba aastast 2004 Euroopa Liidu liige, pikki aastaid on räägitud paljudest Euroopa Liidu prioriteetidest (näiteks regionaalse arengu tasakaalustatuse olulisusest), kuid sageli on selles osas väga vähe tehtud. Mitmed majandusteadlased ja kohaliku omavalitsuse tegelased teistes riikides on seisukohal, et edasiseks arenguks regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poliitika valdkondades vajab Euroopa Liit tugevaid linnu, kuhu on hõlmatud ka linnade tagamaad (Collomb). Samas ollakse seisukohal, et ka valdade areng on Euroopa arengus oluline, st valdade olemasolu on vältimatu arengu eeldus (Häupl). Seega – linnad ja vallad peaksid moodustama harmoonilise koosseksisteeriva süsteemi.

⁵ Käesoleva artikli need read on kirjutatud märtsi lõpus 2013, seega ca kolm nädalat enne 19. aprilli. Artikli lõpus (mis on kirjutatud aprilli lõpus-mai alguses) on juba selge, milliseks olukord kujunes!

Linnu on Eestis vähe ning need on Euroopa linnadega võrreldes üldjuhul väikesed ja seeläbi ka nõrgad (vaid Eesti kaks suuremat linna, Tallinn ja mõneti ka Tartu võivad siin ehk erandi moodustada). Eestis jätkub tendents elanike ümberasumiseks eeskätt suurematesse linnadesse ja linnu ümbritsevasse valdadesse ehk linnade tagamaale. Osa inimesi suundub enne linna tagamaale asumist siiski mõneks ajaks ka linna elama.

See panebki mõtlema sellele, et Eesti oludes on vaja samuti linnu eesmärgipäraselt tugevdada. Kuidas seda teha? Ilmselt tuleb läbi viia osaline linna ja maa (linna tagamaa) vaheline integreerumine. Tegelikuses toimib see paljude inimeste jaoks juba pikemat aega. Integratsiooni on aga vaja ka institutsionaalselt, majanduspoliitiliselt, administratiivselt ja haldusterritoriaalselt toetada. Siis on inimesed ka riigi ja kohaliku omavalitsuse tasandi suhtes integreeritud, koostöös, ühtsemad mingis konkreetses ruumis, asukohas.

2012. aasta sügisel tegi Eesti regionaalminister *kuuevariandilise* ettepaneku omavalitsussüsteemi reformimiseks, milleks oli:

1. Minivaldade Eesti
2. Omavalitsusliitude Eesti
3. Kahetasandiline Eesti
4. Maakondade Eesti
5. Kihelkondade Eesti
6. Tõmbekeskuste Eesti

Lühihinnang: artikli autori arvates võiks kaaluda sellist haldusterritoriaalse reformi varianti, kus üheaegselt arvestatakse mitmete mudelite kooskasutusega.

Erinevaid variante (mudelit) kombineerides tuleks vabatahtlikkuse (omavalitsuste liitumised ja muud ümberkorraldused) kõrval kasutada ka valitsuse otsuseid ja vajadusel isegi sundi, sest senine vabatahtlikkus ei ole end üldjuhul õigustanud (kohati on kavandatav reform isegi palaganiks muutunud) ning kindlasti tekib olukordi, kus asjaosalised omavalitsused pole suutelised ja mõnikord ka pädevad otsustama. Siinjuures oleks ilmselt vajalik tänaste *valdade-linnade ning maakondade piiride korrigeerimine* inimeste elukohti ning tegelikku liikumist arvestades.

Regionaal- ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poliitika arendamisest

Haldusterritoriaalne reform ja sellega seonduv tuleks Eestis võimalikult kiiresti läbi viia (seni on sellest vaid ligi 20 aastat räägitud ja ikka väidetakse, et ei olda veel valmis, peab veel asju analüüsima, täpsustama jms). Senine haldusüksuste (vallad, linnad) vabatahtlik ühinemine on andnud paraku tagasihoidlikke tulemusi ning olnud aeglane. Ilmselt peavad riiklikud institutsioonid siin reformile omapoolselt ja ehk isegi sunniviisiliselt üsna jõuliselt kaasa aitama.

Eestis seni toimunud haldusterritoriaalse reformi tempot tuleks oluliselt kiirendada, mille tulemusel:

- omavalitsusliku staatusega linnade ning eeskätt nõrkade ja vähese haldussuutlikkusega valdade arv väheneks nende ühinemise tulemusel oluliselt;
- tasuks kaaluda enamuse Eesti linnade (haldusüksuste, omavalitsusliku staatusega linnade) kui mitte kõigi viimist vallasisesteks linnadeks.⁶ Seejuures tekib vajadus ka paljude valdade ja isegi linnade piiride korrigeerimiseks. Eelneva alusel oleks maakonnakeskus eeskätt valla kui haldusüksuse keskus ning teisalt kui vallasisene linn ehk teisiti – tänane maakonnakeskus oleks pakutava muudatuse järel kui valla keskus ning vallasisene linn, kus on ühinenud endine haldusüksus-linn ja teda ümbritsenud vald (või vallad).

Eesti linnad oma tagamaadega (milleks on linnu ümbritsev tänane vald või ümbritsevad vallad) muutuksid tugevamateks ja jätkusuutlikumateks. Ka linnade tagamaadest kaugemale jäävad vallad ja vallasisesed linnad muutuksid tugevamateks, kuna teatud korrektsioon administratiivsete muudatuste ja haldusüksuste piiride muutmiseks tuleks Eestis tuleviku arenguid arvestades igal juhul ära teha.

Selliste liitumise tulemusel loodaks eeldused regionaalse arengu senisest paremaks tasakaalustamiseks, kuna võiks väheneda inimeste suundumine pealinna Tallinnasse ja teistesse suurematesse Eesti linnadesse. Ka elu valdades, väike-asulates ja küldes võib muutuda seejuures atraktiivsemaks ning elamiseks suuremat rahulolu pakkuvaks.

Eesti maakonnakeskuste ja ümbritsevate valdade võimalikud ühinemised

Uurides Eesti maakondade keskuste-linnade paiknemist neid ümbritsevate valdade suhtes, võib perspektiivsete muudatustega linnade tugevdamise jaotada nelja ossa:

- (1) toimunud muudatused;
- (2) lihtsamad lahendused (linna ühinemine teda ümbritseva rõngasvallaga);
- (3) keerulisemad lahendused (linna ühinemine mitme teda ümbritseva vallaga või mitme valla omavaheline ühinemine);
- (4) veelgi keerulisemad (et mitte öelda – väga keerulised) lahendused, mille puhul tekib hulk täiendavaid küsimusi-probleeme võrreldes teiste juhtudega (eelnevatega võrreldes on ühinejaid rohkem või asukoha keerukus, sh Harjumaa, Ida-Virumaa ja Hiiumaa olukord).

Kui tahetakse maakonna keskuste tagamaad nii linnade kui valdade arenguks kasutada, tuleb korrigeerida ka valdade (miks mitte vajadusel ka linnade) piire. Olemasolevad valdade piirid on suures osas pärand Nõukogude ajast, mida tuleks muuta kui see osutub vajalikuks (vajalikkus on aga paljudel juhtudel vägagi tõenäoline!).

⁶ Osa linnadele võiks anda nn kahese staatuse (sest siin on tegemist ka võimu küsimusega), st linn, mis oleks nii haldusüksus linna staatuses kui ka keskuseks (vallakeskuseks) ümbritsevale või ümbritsevatele valdadele.

Loomulikult tuleks lisaks maakondade keskuste tugevdamisele vaadata üle ka teiste linnade tugevdamised, st teised linnad võiksid eksisteerida mitte haldusüksustena vaid vallasiseste linnadena, olles samal ajal ka valdade tõmbekeskusteks.

Teha oleks palju kuid otsustamatust on vist veel rohkem

Kuigi Eestis on alates 1996. aastast toimunud hulk linnade ja valdade ühinemisi (samuti on toimunud hulgaliselt valdade omavahelisi ühinemisi), ei ole teadaolevalt eriti põhjalikult nende ühinemiste mõju ja tagajärgi uuritud ega piisavaid üldistusi tehtud.⁷ Seda oleks aga vaja. Kui kusagil on uuringuid tehtud, siis pole sellest seni midagi olulist ja vajalikku kogemust järeldatud!

Otstarbekas ja vajalik oleks selgusele jõuda:

- millised positiivsed ja ka negatiivsed kogemused on ühinemisest saadud,
- millised probleemid on tekkinud ning
- millised perspektiivid ühinemisega seotud omavalitsusi edaspidi ootavad (sh võimalus – rõhuasetuse viimine senisest vabatahtlikkusest sunniviisilisele ühinemisele). Kaua võib?

Nendele probleemidele vastuseid saades oleks võimalik üldistuste alusel prognoosida teisi ühinemisi ning ennetada (või leevendada) vastuolulisi olukordi.

Eesti omavalitsuse problemaatikast järeldub, et vaatamata pikale perioodile, kus teema on olnud arutlusel, pole mingeid olulisi kogemusi talletatud. Seda ei soovi ilmselt paljud omavalitsustegelased ise ega soovi seda ka valitsusinstiitutsioonid ega poliitilised erakonnad. Kas siin ei ole tegemist (tagasihoidlikult sõnastades) Eesti riigi arengu pidurdamisega ning rahva elujärje halvenemisele kaasaaitamisega, ükskõiksusega, hoolimatusega ning ebariigimeheliikkusega?

Täide läks käesoleva artikli autori algul toodud seisukoht (vt käesoleva artikli sissejuhatuse viimast lõiku lk 2 ning joonealust märkust 4): nüüd, pärast 19. aprilli on selge, et omavalitsuste ühinemisi on aastal 2013 tõepoolest vähe – tähtajaks esitasid ühinemisavalduse 18 kohalikku omavalitsust ning neist moodustub seitse uut ning pärast sügise kohalike omavalitsuste volikogude valimisi väheneb omavalitsuste arv Eestis 215ni. Kui 2013. aastal toimub omavalitsuste ühinemine vabatahtlikult, siis regionaalministri kava näeb ette haldusterritoriaalse reformi läbiviimise 2017. aastaks. Milles ei saa aga kindel olla.

Lõpetuseks

Kõige taustaks tuleks rõhutada, et Eesti haldus-territoriaalse reformi läbiviimisel tuleb kindlasti ka järgmiseid teemasid arvestada ja küsimusi esitada (vastasel juhul on lahendused poolikud ega anna mõistlikke tulemusi, pigem vastupidi):

- milliseks kujunevad kohalike omavalitsuste finantseerimise alused;

⁷ Autor ei arva, et uuringuid pole üldse tehtud. Küll aga seda, et need on ilmselt mõneti killustunud ja episoodilised olnud, mis pole võimaldanud üldistavaid ja põhjalikult argumenteeritud seisukohti, järeldusi ja veenvaid ettepanekuid teha.

- millised on riigi ja kohalike omavalitsuste vahelised funktsioonid arvestusega, et riik ja kohalikud omavalitsused oleksid võrdväärsed partnerid;
- milliseks kujuneb kohalike omavalitsuste omavaheline konkurents oma funktsioonide täitmisel;
- milliseks kujuneb maavalitsuste roll, kas need üldse on vajalikud ning millised institutsioonid võiksid maavalitsuste poolse koordineerimise üle võtta.

Siinkohal võiks meie püüdlustele võrdluseks tuua soomlaste valdade-linnade ühinemise kava, mis on kavandatud lühiajalisena, jõulisena ning arenguvajadusi arvestades. Mida Eesti kohta kahjuks ütelda ei saa.

Soome regionaalminister Henna Virkkunen andis oma intervjuus teada mitmeid huvitavaid Soome valitsuse seaduseelnõus kavandatud ja arutusel olevaid seisukohti valdade ulatusliku ühendamise kohta (mis küll kõikjal Soomes heakskiitu ei leidnud):

- eesmärgiks on omavalitsuste tegevuse tõhustamine ning nende arvu vähendamine mitmesajalt loodetavalt vähemaks kui sada uut valda (üldjuhul peaks ühinema kolm kuni viis valda). Paljud tänased vallad on nii väikesed, et ei suuda kõiki ülesandeid täita. On vaja suuremaid valdu, kus töötaks piisaval hulgal professionaale ja spetsialiste;
- vallad peavad ühe aasta jooksul naabritega ühinemisuuringu tegema; uuringuteks antakse aega 1. juulini 2014. Vallad saavad riigilt ühinemistoetust ja muud abi muudatuste tegemiseks. Üldiselt on kolm kriteeriumit – a) ühinemisuuring tuleb teha kui elanike arv on alla 20 000; b) kui suur osa omavalitsuse elanikest töötab mujal; c) omavalitsusel on halb majanduslik olukord;
- valla minimaalne elanike arv hakkab olema 20 000; siiski võib piirkondlikke erandeid taotleda seal kus vahemaad on väga pikad (põhja- ja idapiirkonnad). Praegu on valdade mediaansuurus 6000 elanikku;
- ühinemised peaksid toimuma 2015.aasta algusest kuni hiljemalt 2017.aasta alguseni (seejärel toimuvad Soomes järgmised kohalikud valimised). Keerukamad on olukord linnadega mille läheduses on jõukad vallad. Kavas on ka Helsinki laiendamine;
- vallad saavad juurde lisafunktsioone mistõttu tulevikus ei lähe maakonna tasandit ilmselt vaja. Maakonna funktsioonid jagunevad riigile ja valdadele. Eesmärgiks on siin tugevad vallad ja riik.

Eeltoodu näitab, et Eesti ja Soome on halduskorralduselt ja siin olevate probleemide poolest suhteliselt sarnased. Ainult Eestis ei suudeta otsustada ja asju piisavalt vajalikul määral korraldada. Seetõttu kaotatakse palju aega ning Eesti-sisene piirkondlik ebavõrdsus üha süveneb. See takistab kokkuvõttes Eesti riigi arengut ka tervikuna.⁸

⁸ Kuna käesolev kokkuvõte ja CD-1 olev inglise keelne artikkel on lõpetatud 2013. aasta mais, siis ei ole autor arvestanud neid sündmusi, mis kohalike omavalitsuste teemal on 2013. aasta teisel poolel toimunud (näiteks tõmbekeskuste teema ning kuni 60 kohaliku omavalitsuse moodustamise ideed Eestis 2017. aastaks, mis aga juba algselt augustis kohati tugeva kriitika alla langesid).