



## Challenges of balanced development of regions in the context of centralisation, the case of Ireland

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■ **Abstract.** The relevance of this article topic lies in assessing the impact of centralization of governance powers on ensuring balanced regional development, which is crucial for shaping effective regional policy and reducing socio-economic disparities. The aim of this research was to analyze the challenges of achieving balanced regional development in the context of centralization of authority, using Ireland as a case study. During the study, regulatory acts, official materials of government bodies, results of sociological research, and scientific publications were analyzed using historical, comparative, and predictive methods of inquiry with an interdisciplinary approach. Analysis of sources from different historical periods allowed elucidating the evolution of phenomena and concepts under investigation.

The concepts of balanced development of regions, development of metropolises, and sectoral development of the economy are contrasted in the article. The negative effects of strong centralisation, as well as its advantages for the development of the country are unpacked. The impact of the European Union's policy on the socio-economic growth of Ireland, aimed at reducing the level of centralization of decision-making, building local self-government, and reducing regional disparities, is highlighted. Based on these researches the possible impact of centralisation in Ukraine on post-war recovery and development was analysed and conclusions about the advantages, disadvantages and possibilities of applying the Irish experience in Ukraine in the context of conflict and post-war reconstruction is made. The possible development of public administration and local self-government in Ukraine is projected, taking into account the experience of Ireland. The approaches to regional development, which assume that the country's socio-economic development can be better ensured by reducing regional disparities, and approaches to the development of agglomerations and metropolises as a basis for the prosperity of the national economy is analysed. The findings of the study can be valuable for substantiating further development of decentralisation and reducing the level of forced centralisation that has emerged due to martial law, as well as for defining a conceptual vision for the reconstruction of the territory and regions of Ukraine

■ **Keywords:** decentralisation; public administration; regional development; metropolises; the European Union; disparities; recovery

### ■ Introduction

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine the Government of Ukraine faces a number of challenges: fighting Russian aggression; combating the economic crisis caused by the war; restoring and developing the affected territories; overcoming the socio-demographic crisis; and implementing its EU and NATO integration

policy. However, sustained European integration requires Ukraine to continue implementing reforms aimed at ensuring the principles of democratic governance. In these circumstances, there is a need to research cases of other democratic countries that have faced challenges similar to Ukraine's, especially those that have liberated themselves

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from authoritarian rule or faced threats to the national security and territorial integrity. It is reasonable to explore the experience of countries that, at the time of accession to the EU, were in a political, social, and economic situation similar to the current situation in Ukraine. The study offers the experience of the Republic of Ireland, which is not widely studied in Ukraine, unlike the experience of Poland, Germany, or other Central and Eastern European countries. The paper examines the centralisation of power in Ireland and the ongoing attempts to maintain it despite the EU's efforts to reduce the level of centralisation, empower local authorities, and balance the development of Ireland's regions. The experience of one of the EU's most successful economies can be useful for Ukraine in obtaining European assistance, implementing reforms and developing a conceptual vision of the country's post-war reconstruction.

The issue of the balance of powers between central and local governments, as well as approaches to regional development, is widely studied in the world. This study provides an analysis of European, mainly Irish and Ukrainian experts. In Ireland, the topic of centralisation and balanced regional development is of interest to many researchers. M. MacCarthy *et al.* (2023) offer an analysis of the strong executive dominance and power accumulation in the Irish central government and examine the economic protectionism of the Irish government. J. O'Brennan (2021) highlighted the arguments in favour of the impact of European integration policy and EU institutions on the formation of a new paradigm of governance in Ireland, emphasising the problems of the functioning of central executive authorities, inconsistency of their actions, a high level of centralization and the resilience of centralization to change, etc. In addition, reveal the essence of the centralised government in Ireland and its search for new instruments of interaction with regions and local authorities. N. Moore-Cherry *et al.* (2023) thoroughly investigate balanced regional development, the evolution of local government and its impact on regional prosperity, identify the features of metropolitan development and management, understand the role of metropolitan areas in the country's economic growth, the dynamics between state control and the ability to manage a metropolitan area, etc.

F. O'Leary (2023) examined the development and functioning of local authorities in Ireland, their competences, problems of coordination between local and central authorities, inadequate distribution of functions, results and prospects of local government reform. P. Idczak *et al.* (2024) proposed to apply the place-based planning methodology for the development of infrastructure, local economy, local entrepreneurship and services in the regions. R.J. Paulsen *et al.* (2024) provided arguments for the feasibility of moving from balanced regional development to the development of urban agglomerations. R. Belderbos *et al.* (2024) investigated the advantages and disadvantages of agglomeration for the country's economic development and problems of interaction between central authorities and agglomerations, and also the impact of the spatial planning policy of Ireland, implemented

by the central authorities, on the balanced development of regions. W. Disch & R. Slaymaker (2023) studied the government's housing policy in comparison with the needs of society, as well as the housing crisis in Ireland

Problems related to the decentralisation of power and regional development are widely studied by Ukrainian researchers. Specifically, the issues of governance, a new dimension of development and intensification of decentralisation processes, state regional policy, problems of balanced development of territorial communities and regions of Ukraine are revealed. O. Muzyka-Stefanchuk *et al.* (2021) focus on analysing the security and financial challenges of decentralisation in Ukraine and some other European post-communist countries. The authors conclude that the decentralisation reform should be treated with caution, as they believe that the principles and achievements of the reform are populism that has not brought real results, and that the reform was implemented only to redistribute financial flows and remove some actors from the budget. The researchers stress that it is necessary to further identify the negative consequences that decentralisation may bring to Ukraine. N. Kulchytska & L. Dermanska (2024) analyse the impact of the war on financial decentralisation in Ukraine, ensuring the smooth functioning of the population and the state in the context of reorientation of local and state budgets towards military purposes. The authors conclude that local self-government is capable of meeting all challenges, including those in the financial sector. The authors stress that each region should choose its own development paradigm and that regional development strategy should be revised to take into account the consequences of the war. O. Keudel & O. Huss (2024) analyse decentralised governance in Ukraine during the war, its ability to respond to crises and to meet the challenges of war, in particular by disseminating knowledge, attracting innovation and expanding networks. The authors conclude that despite ambivalence about the effectiveness of decentralised states in responding to crises, Ukrainian local authorities proved quite resilient during the war. Therefore, in a situation of protracted and extreme crisis, a polycentric system of governance can contribute to resilience. O. Podzizei & T. Shmatkovska (2023) unpack the issues of restoration and development of regions and local authorities in the wartime and postwar period. They conclude that each community should develop its own development strategies based on competitiveness models. The researchers support the broad involvement of businesses and communities in restoring community competitiveness and emphasise the need to coordinate this process with various areas of government, local authorities and other stakeholders. The following aspects remain under-researched: the consequences of the restoration and strengthening of centralisation after the war on the balanced development of Ukraine's regions, understanding the further development of decentralisation reform, taking into account a different range of issues of balanced development on the one hand and security and defence on the other.

The aim of the study is to analyse the impact of the centralisation in Ireland on the balanced development of the regions in order to identify the advantages and disadvantages that increased centralisation may bring to Ukraine, especially during the post-war recovery. The study is intended to help define a conceptual vision for the further evolution of central and local authorities in Ukraine in order to ensure balanced post-war development of all territories, taking into account their specific needs, and to avoid the restoration of strong centralisation.

### ■ Materials and Methods

The method of comparison was applied for the study to match the state of socio-economic development of Ireland in different periods of its independency, as well as to identify similarities in different areas of the development of Ukraine and Ireland at the stage of EU membership. The method of comparison was imposed to compare the impact of theories of regional development and the development of metropolitan areas and agglomerations and their influence on the balanced regional development, on the provision of public services to citizens. The application of the analytical method allowed to explore the effects of centralised authority on the development of the country's economy in terms of balanced regional development and overall enrichment of the state.

The overlay of Ireland's experience on the situation in Ukraine, especially with regard to the likelihood and grounds for maintaining and strengthening centralisation in Ukraine after the war was made using the projection method. Forecasting further development of Ireland and Ukraine in case of increased centralisation or the extension of local self-government, identification of possible risks of centralisation in Ukraine was supplied.

Method of historical interpretation was used to describe the ways of evolving and transforming centralised government in Ireland as well gradual introduction of the development and empowerment of local authorities under the influence of the EU. The method of logical argumentation was applied to determine the issues of regional development in light of centralised government and due to the prioritisation of metropolitan expansion in spite of the balanced regional development. The interdisciplinary approach is used to explore various areas of the regions' life influenced by the centralisation, including social services, standard of living, migration, rural development, electoral preferences, etc.

The analysis method was used to study the peculiarities of centralization and balanced regional development and individual elements of these phenomena in various facets of its existence: development of the institutional system to ensure the functioning of the state and achieve the government's goals, decision-making processes, addressing the needs of citizens, impact on the economic development of the state as a whole and individual territories, etc. Using the method of synthesis, the general conclusions regarding the impact of centralisation on regional development are

presented at the end of the paper, and the problem areas arising from centralisation are highlighted.

Information sources, including theoretical materials, researches, planning documents, legal acts were examined in the preparation of the study:

- the materials on the Parliament and Government of the Republic of Ireland official webpages: Planning and Development Act (Law of Ireland..., 2000); National Development Plan, 2000-2006 (Ireland & Ireland..., 1999); National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020: People, places and potential (Ahern & Cullen, 2002); Local Government Reform Act, 2014 (Law of Ireland, 2014); National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040 our plan (NPF) (2018) (2020); National Development Plan 2021-2030 (Government launches the renewed..., 2021); Government launches Housing for all – a new housing plan for Ireland (2021); Planning and Development Bill (Law of Ireland..., 2024);

- statistical materials: Population and Labour Force Projections (Central Statistics Office, 2018), EU Commission (Communication from the Commission..., 2022);

- reports and studies of international organisations: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): Towards balanced regional attractiveness in Ireland (OECD, 2023); Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy (OECD, 2022); Regional Outlook, (OECD, 2019);

- research of Irish academic institutions: University College Cork on Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity (Glynn *et al.*, 2013), Institute of Public Administration (O'Malley, 2011; Boyle *et al.*, 2020), research on Ireland's regional imbalance by AONTU (Regional Development, n.d.). The sources of different periods were examined in order to show the dynamics of the development of phenomena and the opinions of researchers regarding them.

Ukrainian resources were also examined, including the Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on approval of the concept of reforming local self-government and territorial organisation of power in Ukraine (2014), sociological study – Citizens' assessment of the situation in the country and the actions of the authorities by Razumkov Centre (2024).

### ■ Results and Discussion

On the eve of joining the EU, Ireland was in a similar situation to the current and predicted post-war situation in Ukraine, in particular: due to the ongoing threat to security and territorial integrity, the country's power was highly centralised, and local authorities were severely limited in their powers, especially in terms of influencing the formation of national and regional policies; there was a high level of social tension, the risk of social conflicts and unrest; the population emigrated en masse, in particular, citizens of working age; the level of corruption remained high; there were significant disparities in the development of different regions of the country; the economy was exhausted by the long wars for the independence of the state, there was a lack of external investment; the agricultural sector was in decline; the country was under



strong economic and political external influence, in particular, of Great Britain; the traditionally strong rural identity of the Irish population remained stable; support for EU membership among the population was over 80%; etc.

An in-depth analysis of the Europeanisation of the Irish public administration system, conducted by E. O'Malley (2011) shows that preparation for membership in the European Communities played a crucial role in reforming the public authorities and decision-making system in Ireland. Changes in the public administration system were made to ensure the proper functioning of Ireland within the EU institutional system. It was Ireland's accession to the EU in 1973 that prompted the government to undertake public administration reforms. Prior to that, Ireland's institutional system and administrative procedures were staid outdated, overly centralised, and inflexible (Rees *et al.*, 2010). After gaining independence in 1949, Ireland established a system of government based on the existing system according to the traditions and law of Great Britain (Kenny & Casey, 2021). In fact, Ireland essentially left the old system of government based on a strong centralised authority and political structure as opposed to local democracy. In the Westminster/Whitehall administrative tradition, the primary actor for managing these endeavours is the ministerial 'department', which acts as the central organisational entity for formulating and coordinating public policy measures, and accounting for their implementation. Power was concentrated in the hands of the central government and the prime minister, who played a key role in policy making, implementation and funding. As N. Moore-Cherry *et al.* (2021) have pointed out, the 1937 Constitution of Ireland did not mention local self-government at all. It was only in 1999 that the Constitution was amended to provide for the constitutional recognition of local self-government and the granting of appropriate powers to it. The 2014 Act on Local Government Reform (Law of Ireland..., 2014) created 95 municipal districts instead of the previous 80, from which councillors are elected to 31 local councils. The number of local councillors was also reduced from 1,627 to 949. Municipal districts are the smallest local authorities. From an administrative point of view, Ireland has 26 counties, which belong to 4 provinces.

According to the above-mentioned law, the powers of local authorities include: adopting an annual budget with democratic accountability for all local government expenditures; appointing, removing or dismissing their governing bodies, supervising and controlling their work; adopting integrated local economic and community development plans and service delivery plans; participating in decision-making on the development of local and community plans; participation in decision-making on local business and community development; performing delegated functions on: roads, traffic, housing, environmental services, recreation, amenities and community development; general representative and oversight role; citizen and community engagement. Institutional reform in Ireland continues. In view of the future goals of the local government

reform, the powers of local authorities are planned to be expanded thanks to ongoing interaction and discussions with relevant government departments.

Ireland remains one of the most centralised system with extremely limited local government powers among OECD countries (OECD, 2023). Despite a number of attempts to reform the system of governance and transfer to the regions more autonomy in financial and decision-making areas, power has been concentrated in the central government of Ireland. The first attempts to partially decentralise authority and devolve planning powers to the regions were made in 1968 and 1973, when Ireland was preparing to join the EU, as E. O'Malley (2011) identified. These attempts did not bring real results. According to N. Rees *et al.* (2010), their greatest achievement was to outline the problems of regional development in Ireland in a memorandum and to raise the debate on their development to the level of the European Communities. The strong centralised government focused on shaping national development policy as opposed to encouraging regional development. According to N. Cussen (2011), in the 80s and 90s, discussions intensified about identification and consideration of the needs of the regions to plan the spatial development of the republic. Later, the National Development Plan (Ireland & Ireland..., 1999) and the National Spatial Strategy (Ahern & Cullen, 2002) aimed to implement balanced regional development, but they were not implemented. These documents have been heavily criticized. As B. Hughes & L. Sirr (2015) pointed out, they were inflexible, did not meet the requirements of rapid agglomeration development, and their approach to rationalising local government powers on the principle of "people first" did not have a legislative basis for implementation in practice. The policy was formally cancelled in 2013, and three new functional regional assemblies were created in 2015 to replace the eight regional bodies (Boyle *et al.*, 2020). The new regional division was better aligned with the principles of EU regional policy and the NUTS system, and provided for the involvement of local authorities in the elaboration of regional development strategies. At the same time, the newly created assemblies became responsible for formulating strategies for the economic and social development of the territories in line with EU programmes, and for overseeing local authorities. Thus, the level of centralisation remained quite high.

Unlike Ireland, Ukraine actively implemented the decentralisation reform until 2022 (Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2014), and its results are considered to be the most fruitful. According to the EU Commission (Communication from the Commission..., 2022), "This is one of the most effective and successful reforms implemented in the country. It has become a decisive factor in social and economic development". This reform was implemented in the context of the European integration policy and took into account the EU's system of regional divisions (NUTS). However, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the central government was strengthened through the use of political and legal instruments: military administrations

were introduced, local authorities in many areas, including the war zone, frontline areas cannot perform their functions at all or perform them to a very limited extent, etc (Horlo, 2023). As S. Yehorycheva & A. Berezna (2023) show, martial law had a significant impact on local authorities, where decentralisation policy lost its delegated powers and the issue of centralising financial flows became a priority. The centralisation has helped to make decisions faster and provided tools for their quick implementation, which is extremely important in times of war and contributes to the country's security and defence capability, as well as enhances the efficiency of public administration and helps to allocate resources more effectively in a crisis. It can be predicted that a centralised system of government will also facilitate rapid planning and coordination of the country's reconstruction and development after the war, but it also carries dangers, including the monopoly of the central government, increased corruption and non-transparent distribution of funds, and failure to consider the needs of the regions. According to sociological research presented in 2024 by Razumkov Centre (2024), Ukrainian citizens trust local authorities more than central authorities (with the exception of the President and defence authorities in times of war). In particular, the level of distrust in the state apparatus (officials) reaches 75%, and in the Government of Ukraine – 64%. While trust is expressed more often than distrust to the head of the settlement where the respondents live (49% and 43% respectively), trust and distrust are expressed to a similar extent in the local council where the respondents live (43% and 45% respectively). According to research by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (Hrushetskyi, 2023), over the period 2022-2023, there has been a decline in trust in central government institutions: from 91% to 76%, there was fewer people who trusted the President, from 74% to 39% - the Government, and trusted in local authorities has not changed: both in 2022 and 2023, 50% trusted them, and 46% did not trust them. Therefore, it can be stated that Ukrainians trust local authorities equally before and during the war. Most Ukrainian researchers note the effective performance of Ukraine's local authorities when faced with a full-scale war. They also highlight many of the emerging risks of decentralisation, as well as dangerous trends that could lead to a reversal of reform and decentralisation (Krusian, 2023; Keudel & Huss, 2024). Since the polls are still favourable to central government, if centralisation increases and central government takes steps to discredit local government, the scales of trust could quickly tip against local government. There is therefore a risk that public opinion will not protect local authorities from possible recentralisation and curtailment of decentralisation.

Following the example of Ireland, the achievement of centralised power during the war may lead to its further strengthening and maintenance. The reasons for this in Ukraine may be: the need to restore state power in all territories of the state, and especially in those under Russian occupation, where hostilities were conducted and the local

government system was destroyed; elimination of risks to national security and threats to national defence, including the emergence of separatist action, the fight against the sabotage and reconnaissance groups (SRGs), etc. The expediency of maintaining the centralisation can also be justified by the complexity of administration the post-war reconstruction, including technical, administrative and financial management, and the lack of qualified local staff.

However, Ireland's experience shows (Walsh *et al.*, 2010) that under conditions of centralisation, state development focuses on the growth of capital cities and large towns (urban agglomerations, megapolises) as opposed to balanced regional development. In Ireland, resources have been and continue to be allocated to certain regions or cities, while other regions do not receive the necessary support. This allocation of resources is based on an industrial rather than regional economic development approach. This has resulted in the emergence of large, developed industrial centres while the situation in remote regions has deteriorated.

As J.A. Walsh (2019) emphasised, for a long time the Irish government's development strategies envisaged reducing regional disparities by developing industry (as opposed to agriculture and fishing), balancing regional development, reducing illegal migration, and even banning the spending of resources on the development of the Dublin region. As G. Mullally (2004) identified, the EU's requirement to receive funds was to prepare a detailed and clear governmental action plan, including a regional development plan, which are the basis for providing resources and monitoring their use. Since the late 1980s, the Irish government has been developing planning documents in cooperation with the EU. However, as researchers N. Rees *et al.* (2010) point out, the goals were formulated solely with the pragmatic aim of obtaining maximum resources from EU funds, but the goals were never achieved, and the peculiarity of the Irish regional development policy is its pragmatic use of EU regional policy instruments and their adaptation to domestic conditions. For some time the European Union has been satisfied with the general data submitted by the government to receive funds from the Structural Funds, but with each new report, monitoring and evaluation of the results of the use of funds was more thorough, and more detailed and more diversified evidence is required for further funding (O'Donnell, 2020). Thus, the problem of control over the government's activities in a centralised environment was appeared. The problem was that Ireland did not have reliable and disaggregated data reflecting the situation in each region of the country. Due to excessive centralization, until the early 2000s, data were generated at the national level, and therefore no system of data collection and verification was established at the regional level. As noted by F. O'Leary (2023), local authorities lack information on the detailed distribution of local economic indicators. A more specific set of indicators will provide local authorities with a detailed understanding of how well individual parts of the local economy are functioning, and



will allow them to better see and take into account the specific needs of regions and make targeted decisions.

Ireland's regional policy at the governmental level is set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF) (2018) (2020), supported by a ten-year public investment strategy until 2027, and the National Development Plan (NDP) of 2020 updated on 2023 (Government launches the renewed..., 2021). Together, the NPF and the NDP constitute the overall strategy "Ireland 2040" (Project Ireland 2040, 2018), aimed at developing Ireland's regions, cities and rural areas in accordance with ten common goals. It is important that the basis of the Ireland 2040 strategy is investment planning. The main purpose of these documents is to overcome the existing problems of regional development in Ireland, in particular, it is noted that balanced development of regions, reducing imbalances, bringing the development of the Northern, Western and Southern regions of Ireland to the level of economic development of the Eastern and Central regions are the priorities of the strategy.

However, an in-depth analysis of the documents, in particular their main objectives, reveals opposing objectives and shows that the documents aim to develop prosperous territories without ensuring balanced regional development. More specifically, these objectives include:

- creating conditions for strategic planning for the future and optimising investments by concentrating them in a small number of prosperity centres;
- coordinating efforts at the international, national and regional levels to build strong settlements;
- achieving compact prosperity within urban centres;
- aligning spatial planning with capital investment and infrastructure development;
- realising the growth potential of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, and strengthening Dublin's role as a unique international metropolitan city;
- targeted compact, consistent and sustainable development of large urban areas along the Dublin-Belfast economic and transport corridor, which includes settlements with a significant population, such as Dundalk and Drogheda;
- development of logistics and road infrastructure on key routes to major centres in the regions to facilitate their self-sufficient economic development;
- emphasis on consolidating the development of places that have grown rapidly over the last decade due to large-scale housing development orientated towards commuter trains etc.

These planning documents were developed in accordance with the Planning and Development Act (Law of Ireland..., 2000), which defines the basic planning rules and planning authorities (county council, council of a territorial unit with a special status, city district council), and establishes ministerial oversight of local planning. However, at the beginning of 2024, the Irish Parliament received a Bill of the new Planning and Development Act (Law of Ireland..., 2024). The document introduces many changes. The Bill defines new planning authorities – state and local authorities, strengthens the role of ministers in determining

at what level and who will carry out planning, introduces the position of a planning commissioner, and defines a new list and hierarchy of planning documents:

- National Planning Framework,
- National Planning Statement,
- Regional spatial and economic strategy,
- Development Plans,
- Urban Area Plans, Priority Area Plans and Coordinated Area Plans.

The Housing Strategy is being implemented as a specific type of planning document. Under the Bill, local authorities can choose from a range of new area-based plans tailored to different contexts, such as Urban Area Plans for more densely populated areas and Coordinated Area Plans for towns and locations that straddle more than one local authority. This document has passed the lower house and is expected to be adopted by the end of 2024. The Bill does not diminish the influence of the central government on regional development at the planning stage, but even strengthens the role of ministers, introducing new central-level positions to ensure and coordinate regional development planning. And by defining new types of local development plans (urban, priority), the government keeps the leverage to support the development of specific territories rather than the balanced development of all regions. However, the Bill recognises the achievements of the previous Act allowing the involvement of regional assemblies in the formation of the Ireland 2040 strategy.

Regional assemblies have been involved in the preparation of the Ireland 2040 strategy, developing regional spatial and economic strategies and spatial plans for metropolitan areas that are aligned with the strategy. This involvement is aimed not only at taking into account the needs of the regions, but also at increasing the level of implementation of the strategy on the local level. However, as N. Moore-Cherry *et al.* (2021) underlined, a survey among local authorities conducted three years after the launch of the strategy showed that most respondents were unable to determine whether the new strategy contributes to the implementation of local needs and whether it serves to promote cooperation between different regions. At the same time, respondents expressed concern about the lack of mechanisms to support and develop Ireland's rural areas, the central government's lack of understanding of rural needs, inadequate infrastructure and funding for non-metropolitan areas, and the fact that the biggest beneficiaries remain metropolitan areas. According to OECD research (OECD, 2019), the government's current strategy, Ireland 2040, aims to strengthen the development of four regions of Ireland, in addition to Dublin – Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford – as metropolitan cities. At the same time, it supports Dublin's continued role as the main driver of national growth. The strategy also identifies five smaller regional and cross-border development programmes, which are also aimed at developing the areas around the five cities.

The centralisation in Ireland leads to the development of a country of megapolises, and this is the concept behind

the Ireland 2040 strategy. For example, the Dublin region receives 48% of all infrastructure spending, such as roads, including motorways, railways and utilities. Therefore, economic activity, investment, infrastructure and population are concentrated in the Greater Dublin area, while the western and northern regions remain the least developed areas. Infrastructure management is identified as a priority area, but it focuses on developing the capacity of metropolitan areas to develop cities and regions efficiently and livably. Centralisation detains the ability of regions and communities to promote enterprise and plan sustainable development based on their needs and strengths. Decisions on revenues and investments are almost entirely in the hands of the central government.

According to expert research (Heydon, 2024), rural areas are degenerating, only 37% of farmers are independently economically sustainable, and assistance is distributed in a way that favours large farmers. In addition, the volume of construction in cities is growing. For example, in 2022, 84.1% of all new homes were built in urban areas, with the rest in rural areas. For comparison, at the beginning of 2011, 38% were in cities and 62% in rural areas.

As AONTU (Regional Development, n.d.) identifies, hundreds of post offices providing delivery services and social assistance in rural areas have been closed; more than a hundred Garda stations (police stations) have been closed; rural businesses have declined; banking institutions have been liquidated; shops and entertainment venues in rural areas have been closed; educational institutions, including schools, have been closed, etc. Poor telecommunication infrastructure in many regions and lack of acceleration of the Broadband delivery in the government's plans for the coming years seriously hinder economic progress in the regions.

As P. Breathnach *et al.* (2021) indicated, until the early 2000s, Ireland positioned itself as a single region in the European Structural Funds, and despite recommendations, the government refused to divide the country into several regions to address their specific development challenges. The situation changed when it became apparent that the economic and social development of the central and other regions was twofold, which led to the Dublin region no longer being eligible for the funds. Under pressure from the EU Commission, the Irish government formed three functional regions depending on their development needs: Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), Southern Regional Assembly (SRA), and Northern Western Regional Assembly (NWRA).

However, one of the main conceptual changes compared to previous approaches is the new emphasis on balanced growth rather than balanced regional development. The National Planning Framework Ireland-2040 (2020) provides for 50% of investments to be allocated to the development of EMRA, and the remaining 50% of investments to be distributed to the other regions/provinces (Southern Region – SRA, Northern and Western Region – NWRA) combined. Moreover, the aforementioned Bill (Law of Ireland..., 2024) introduces Urban Development Zones

(UDZs) in place of Strategic Development Zones, which were a feature of the 2000 Act. These areas will be the focus of State investment in key enabling infrastructure. This provides even more opportunities for the growth of developed urban settlements as opposed to blended regional development. Thus, it is clear that the Irish government is focusing on the development of metropolitan areas. But this strategy requires a new approach to metropolitan management from the central government.

Currently, there is a debate in Ireland around two approaches, one of which involves the introduction of a system of metropolitan authorities with appropriate powers of strategic planning and spatial development planning, and the other proposes that city authorities apply a place-based planning approach that focuses on taking into account the characteristics and forecast of local development (Duran-ton & Venables, 2018; Idczak *et al.*, 2024). Since 2010, the EU has been discussing the feasibility of balanced development of regions, and opposing the development of agglomerations and metropolises. Some experts, including B. Hughes & L. Sirr (2015), consider it more appropriate to ensure the effective development and functioning of urban agglomerations as opposed to a balanced regional development. Other proponents of the Irish metropolisation and agglomeration concepts (Belderbos *et al.*, 2024; Paulsen *et al.* 2024) use as their main argument the existence of much greater opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship in metropolises and agglomerations, which brings revenues to local and state budgets, and thus contributes to the development of the country, and the second argument is the existence of better conditions for human life and functioning in metropolises and agglomerations, thus justifying the principle of “people first” of the concept of rationalisation of local self-government (O’Leary, 2023). However, they do not answer the question of providing citizens in peripheral regions with social, medical, educational and other services, as well as the development of peripheral regions in general. Therefore, their approach is somewhat one-sided and needs to be improved in terms of ensuring the development of the entire territory of the state, the implementation of specific functions of the state, including ensuring security and defence of the territory, and providing all citizens with equal opportunities to exercise their rights.

As N. Moore-Cherry *et al.* (2023) elaborated, the search for new approaches to governance in Ireland has arisen due to the shortcomings in the regulation of relations between the authorities of cities, regions and the government, due to the current challenges of economic development of metropolitan areas. The development of metropolitan areas involves cooperation and collaboration between authorities at different levels, the consolidation and distribution of powers and resources, as well as a territorial policy focused on collective provision. H. Tolkki & A. Haveri (2020) emphasise the strong central control of the national government in solving local and metropolitan problems, which has provoked the need of local and

metropolitan authorities to seek new ways of cooperation. First of all, it is about the relationship between the various levels of government in matters of land management and spatial planning. These issues were problematic due to the unclear responsibilities of different levels of government in this area. To ease tensions, the government created the Land Development Agency (LDA), which is responsible for managing complex land and development agreements (infrastructure, housing, etc.).

To ensure that the country's development is coordinated with the development of metropolitan areas, the National Planning Framework introduced Metropolitan Area Spatial Plans (MASPs) (National Planning Framework..., 2020), which are a new level of planning in Ireland and are aimed at ensuring that development is coordinated at the metropolitan level. MASPs have been prepared for each metropolitan area: Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway. The purpose of large-scale metropolitan planning is to provide an instrument for effective land management and infrastructure development, as well as to create a structure for attracting investment and coordinating work between administrative units.

Despite the proclaimed goals of regional development and the change in the planning system, there is a resilience of the central government through the creation of the Office of the Planning Regulator, responsible for coordinating local development plans with central plans, the Land Development Agency, the Industrial Development Authority, government commissions and a number of other agencies and organisations at the central level to implement Ireland's strategic development documents at the central and local levels. Moore-Cherry *et al.* (2021) noted that despite the fact that these agencies participate in regional meetings and meetings on the implementation of MASP, they do not have the same statutory powers, there is a lack of coherence in their activities in remote regions, in particular the north-west and south-west.

P. Breathnach (2023) indicated, that in Ireland the system of public administration in the late 70s and early 80s was characterised by excessive administrative and political influence, as well as the creation of regional development organisations that received neither funding nor authority. For example, the government created various organisations tasked with coordinating and harmonising regional development at the national and local levels. However, the drawback was that such organisations were never given the necessary powers and funding to carry out their activities. In most cases, these organisations had no or few regional representatives. Their proposals had no legal force. Nevertheless, the Irish government continues the practice of creating special bodies at the central level to administer policies. As M. MacCarthaigh *et al.* (2023) identified, these institutions and organisations require increasingly complex technologies to coordinate their internal functions and multiple policy objectives, as well as to engage with agencies under their remit and other peer departments. The above-mentioned factors had a negative

impact on various sectors of regional development, which still remain problematic.

The analysis of the sources showed for example that insufficient consideration of the needs of the regions had a negative impact on the migration situation within Ireland. The lack of regional development, in particular the lack of jobs in remote areas, has been one of the key reasons for the mass emigration of the Irish population for a long time (Glynn *et al.*, 2013; Whelan, 2020). According to Ireland's experience, the high level of GDP and high rates of economic development did not lead to a decrease in emigration, but the social, economic and infrastructure development of the regions contributes to positive changes in the lives of residents and motivates them to stay in the country.

Another aspect of the migration situation in Ireland has been the increase in internal migration from rural areas to large cities and the influx of foreign migrants and refugees. The government's inconsistent and ill-conceived migration policy, which did not take into account the ability of regions to receive migrants and their needs in human resources, led to oversaturation of migrants in undeveloped areas that did not have enough resources (housing, jobs) to absorb them. This led to a catastrophic lack of housing and rising prices (Lima, 2021; Brown *et al.*, 2022). According to the Central Statistics Office (2018) the Irish government predicts that the country's population will grow by 1 million people by 2050, which is about 20% of the current population. By 2040, the highest growth rates of population and jobs per capita are expected in Dublin (almost 40% of the total growth) and four surrounding counties, as well as in Cork and Galway. Therefore, increasing housing problems, rising living costs, and infrastructure overload will be among the key issues in the next 20 years.

The Irish government seeks to integrate migrants into its society, and the availability of housing is considered one of the keys to success in this regard (Gilmartin & Dagg, 2022). In 2022, Ireland launched a national housing and homelessness programme (Government launches housing..., 2021). The Programme aims to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year by the end of 2030. The plan provides for a mix of social, affordable and private housing for sale and rent. The plan is based on four pathways, leading to a more sustainable housing system: support home ownership and increase affordability; eradicate homelessness, increase social housing delivery and support social inclusion; increase new housing supply; address vacancy and make efficient use of existing stock. One of the main initiative is to implement the largest ever social housing build programme – over 90,000 social homes by the end of 2030. These measures are supported by over €4 billion in guaranteed State funding every year, the highest ever level of government investment in building social and affordable housing. Nevertheless, the problem remains unresolved, and as of early 2024, the housing market crisis is deepening.

Also a negative consequence of the centralisation of regional development planning in Ireland has been the extremely poor development of transport infrastructure,

especially as P. Carroll *et al.* (2021) indicated, in remote regions and rural areas. In some regions, such as the northern county of Donegal, the railway infrastructure was completely lifted till the 1960s (Patterson, 1962), while other transport infrastructure, such as roads, has not undergone significant changes and there are still no modern motorways. The development of roads is mainly aimed at resurfacing existing roads, which remain narrow, winding, passing through settlements and laid in mountainous terrain. This makes it extremely difficult to develop logistics and communication, and thus the economic development of the regions. In such regions, public transport is inadequately developed, sometimes absent altogether, even in large settlements, which, among other things, complicates access to social and medical services, especially for people in difficult life circumstances, access to educational services, especially for children, etc. According to N. Rees *et al.* (2010), this is due to the fact that the needs of different territories were not explored when designing the urban transport development strategy.

Discussions about identifying and taking into account the needs of regions and involving their representatives in shaping regional development policy were initiated in Ireland under the influence of the European Union (Breathnach *et al.*, 2021). To confirm the EU's influence on the balanced development of Ireland's regions, the example of EU mediation between the government of Ireland and executives of Northern Ireland to promote the development of Ireland's north-western territories and establish cross-border interaction and cooperation between border regions can be used. The north-western region of Ireland were almost cut off from the rest of the country as a result of the establishment of Northern Ireland. This led to the degradation of the region, as local authorities did not have sufficient sources, and the central government did not take the needs of the region into account in its development plans, focusing on the metropolitan regions, as shown above. Due to the implementation of EU cross-border cooperation programs and the EU cohesion policy, a road highway was built between the southern and northern parts of Ireland, which passes through the territory of Northern Ireland, as detailed by K. Hayward & A. Winer (2008). Such a connection significantly reduced the time and length of the journey from Dublin to the settlements of Co. Donegal, which had a positive effect on the development of the economy of the north-western region of Ireland and helped the region reach the level of a transitional economy. M. Adshead & B. Quinn (1998) argue that the changes have resulted from structural funding reforms at the European Union level and the growth of public initiatives at the sub-national level.

Since 2018, county development plans have been coordinated by ministries with the regional level for the first time, with the involvement of key stakeholders in line with the new strategic planning approach stemming from the National Planning Framework (NPF) (2020). However, the institutional relationship between central, regional

and local governments and governance in general remained unclear and blurred.

This has led to increased sectoral influence on policy-making as opposed to regions. The systematic limitation of regional influence on policy-making was accompanied by an expansion of the influence of representatives of certain sectors. As a result, funding was not allocated evenly to the socio-economic development of the territories, including rural areas, but was targeted at the development of certain industrial facilities and large agricultural entities. This has led to a lack of adequate funding for social, medical and educational services, and the development of human infrastructure in the regions, especially in rural areas. The EU institutions were also dominated by representatives of Irish industrial and agriculture groups, rather than the regions, which had a negative impact on the allocation of funds for regional development. In other words, the sectoral lobby prevailed over the regional lobby.

The high centralization of power in Ireland had not only economic but also political consequences. As noted by researchers J. Schulte-Cloos & P. Bauer (2023), it caused the phenomenon of local elections. Localism is considered to be the main feature of Irish politics in which politicians focus exclusively on the problems and needs of one ("own") region, which does not contribute to the development of the region itself and to the coordinated planning of different regions of the country, the achievement of national strategic goals. Researchers believe that it is the large gap in regional development, the presence of backward or depressed areas (for example, former mining villages, seaside resorts and mill towns) that have led to changes in the electoral preferences of the population. As the experience of Ireland shows, regions that have been excluded from the economic growth experienced in the capitals and instead show multiple forms of relative social deprivation (the Midlands, North and West) vote for isolationist, populist, nationalist policies (Lüders *et al.*, 2021; Turner & Ryan, 2022).

To summarise, the following negative impacts of centralised governance in Ireland can be identified: unfair distribution of resources and their uneven impact on the regions; inadequate coordination of economic development and spatial planning at the national and regional levels; focus on the development of megapolises, which leads to uncoordinated development of rural and urban areas, increasing urban-rural divisions; lack of coordination at the vertical and horizontal levels; disruption of horizontal links and reduced involvement of local authorities in identifying and overcoming local problems, implementing the plans developed; inadequate resource provision for overcoming chronic problems of the regions; planning of dummy goals; localisation of electoral processes; lack of reliable data diversified by region; complication of the migration situation.

However, centralisation has a number of advantages, especially in the face of threats to national security and public order. In addition, it is believed that the advantage of a



strong centralised government with a small administration and the use of informal policy-making rules in Ireland was its ability to quickly adapt to the European political process.

The analysis of the consequences of the centralization of power in Ireland is quite useful for the formation of the regional policy of Ukraine, since in certain aspects both countries have similar problems. In particular, for Ukraine, the problem of sectoral lobbying against regional development may also become typical after the war, as it is much more difficult for central government to plan sustainable, coordinated development of individual regions and territories than to plan and organise support for particular sectors of the economy that have suffered the most. This is due to the fact that regional development is a more complex and comprehensive phenomenon that should cover the development of a wide range of social relations, economy, services, etc. The process of regional development planning is also complex and involves several levels and a large number of stakeholders. As V. Tertychka (2023) points out, the government is only one of the organisations directly involved in the process of governance, and the key actors of governance are markets, power hierarchies and networks. These factors slow down the planning process. Whereas sectoral development engages a smaller number of stakeholders: business entities in a particular sector and the central government; as well as sectoral forecasting and planning are simpler. The disadvantage of sectoral development is that this approach does not consider the specifics of the development of different territories, localities, regions, unlike the place-based planning approach, which focuses not only on studying the geographical characteristics of the region, but also on identifying external influences on its development, internal trends, including cultural, educational, climatic, political, etc.

The Ukrainian government has no vision of post-war rebuilding the country, and experts mostly focus on what not to do, including suggesting that settlements that are completely destroyed and where residents will not return should not be rebuilt. However, they do not propose a solution – what should be done. The plans and expert proposals by O. Podzizei & T. Shmatkovska (2023), I. Myroniuk & H. Slabkyi (2023), V. Erfan & Y. Koltsov (2023) set out the main areas, specific elements, and objects of reconstruction, by which it is proposed to allocate resources, but are not tied to the needs of individual territories or regions of the state. Therefore, the conceptual vision of spatial development, metropolises and agglomerations growth, and balanced development of regions remains unclear. Such uncertainty can lead to unbalanced and unsystematic development of territories, non-transparent allocation of funds, lack of understanding of the needs of regions in the future, difficulties in assessing and monitoring the results of recovery, and low impact on the state's economy of investments in recovery. Nevertheless the issue of regional development in the wartime and post-war periods is widely studied in Ukraine. As noted by N. Kulchytska & L. Dermanska (2024), each region must choose its own paradigm

and development model to ensure the region's competitiveness and realise its potential. Insufficient consideration of regional needs and forecasting of future socio-demographic changes focuses recovery efforts on the destroyed and affected areas, but diverts attention from the need to develop the regions of the country where people and businesses have moved. Such regions need additional development of logistics, infrastructure, and public services no less than the affected regions, and this can bring additional benefits to the state's economy in the long run. Therefore, recovery should be aimed not only at rebuilding and developing the affected areas, but also in leveraging the advantages and prospects of the regions that have not suffered significant damage, have not been affected by hostilities, where a significant part of the country's population has moved, and where economic growth has been positive. Strategies for the balanced development of large cities and regions need to be defined. As M. Melnyk & I. Leshchuk (2023) aptly pointed out, conceptual approaches to the formation of regional development policy need to be revised and updated to achieve the effect of synergy between stakeholders and use the opportunities of intersectoral, intraregional and interregional partnerships. As V. Tertychka (2023) indicated, it is possible to achieve sustainable diversity in interaction during the post-war reconstruction of the country through the transformation of power structures. Government should be transformed from a highly hierarchical superstructure into a guiding mechanism for all governance actors. The role of the central government as a policy maker should be reduced. The central government should play a major role in building national security and defending the country's interests in the international arena. While, representatives of the regions, metropolises and megalopolises, local authorities, civil society and business should become the main actors in governance.

## ■ Conclusions

The Irish government has managed to maintain maximum centralisation of executive authority. However, under pressure from the EU, it has introduced a participatory approach to public policy making and expanded the network and powers of local authorities. It was the retention of centralised decision-making on regional development issues that did not allow Ireland to eliminate disparities and disproportions in regional development, cultivate the most backward regions, build modern transport infrastructure across the country, and solve social problems. Conversely, the strong centralisation has led to the accumulation of resources in the capital region, and thus the development of this particular region, and has put the solution of socio-economic problems in different regions of the country on the back burner. Regional disparity is one of the key features of Ireland, and the ways and feasibility of overcoming it have been discussed over the past fifty years. However, the accelerated growth of regional disparities and their impact on the political preferences of the country's population proves that the approaches used are not effective.

The centralised government has a number of advantages, especially in the face of threats to national security, public order, rapid adaptation to membership in international organisations, prompt planning and coordination of the country's reconstruction and development. However, it also carries dangers, including the monopoly of the central government, growing corruption and non-transparent distribution of funds, failure to take into account the needs of the regions, development of large cities and focus on sectoral economic development as opposed to regional development. The difficulty of weakening centralised management of regional development is primarily due to the fact that Ireland, at the time of its accession to the EU, had developed its own clear centralised management system with its own political culture, which was not sensitive to local needs and, in principle, the authorities did not seek to change it.

The situation in Ukraine is different, as the country is in the process of developing a new system of decentralised governance in line with EU requirements and principles. Ukraine's recovery requires rethinking and setting new concepts and approaches to the formation and development of a new state, including maintaining a balance in the enhancement of megapolises and regions. Therefore,

strategies need to be defined to ensure that metropolitan and regional areas develop in a balanced way. The social, economic and infrastructural development of the regions is the main key to the country's successful post-war recovery. Ukraine should make a move to preserve the achievements of the decentralisation reform, to regain all rights and powers of local governments and to strengthen the capacity of local authorities in the post-war period. The experience of Ireland should be considered in order to avoid the negative effects of centralisation and to ensure balanced regional development during the country's reconstruction.

Prospects for further research would be to investigate various decentralisation models that could be useful for Ukraine. Studying the international experience of decentralization will help to develop recommendations for the creation and implementation of own models that are most effective for Ukraine, which will contribute to a more balanced development of regions.

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### ■ Conflict of Interest

None.

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## Виклики збалансованого розвитку регіонів в умовах централізації влади на прикладі Ірландії

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■ **Анотація.** Актуальність теми статті полягає в оцінці впливу централізації владних повноважень на забезпечення збалансованого регіонального розвитку, що є важливим для формування ефективної регіональної політики та зменшення соціально-економічних нерівностей. Метою цього дослідження був аналіз викликів досягнення збалансованого регіонального розвитку в умовах централізації влади на прикладі Ірландії. Під час роботи були проаналізовані нормативно-правові акти, офіційні матеріали органів влади, результати соціологічних опитувань та наукові публікації за допомогою історичного, порівняльного, прогностичного методів пізнання із застосуванням міждисциплінарного підходу. Аналіз джерел різних історичних періодів дав можливість висвітлити еволюцію явищ і концепцій, що стали предметом вивчення. У статті протиставлено концепції збалансованого розвитку регіонів, розвитку метрополій та секторального розвитку економіки. Розкрито негативні наслідки сильної централізації, а також її переваги для розвитку країни. Висвітлено вплив на соціально-економічне зростання Ірландії політики Європейського Союзу, спрямованої на зниження рівня централізації прийняття рішень, розбудову місцевого самоврядування, зменшення регіональних диспропорцій. На основі цих досліджень проаналізовано можливий вплив централізації в Україні на повоєнне відновлення та розвиток. Зроблено висновки про переваги, недоліки та можливості застосування ірландського досвіду в Україні в умовах конфлікту та повоєнної відбудови. Спрогнозовано можливий розвиток державного управління та місцевого самоврядування в Україні з урахуванням досвіду Ірландії. Розкрито підходи до регіонального розвитку, які передбачають, що соціально-економічний розвиток країни може бути краще забезпечений шляхом зменшення регіональних диспропорцій та розвитку агломерацій і мегаполісів як основи процвітання національної економіки. Результати дослідження є важливими для обґрунтування подальшого розвитку децентралізації та зниження рівня вимушеної централізації, що виникла внаслідок воєнного стану, а також для визначення концептуального бачення відновлення території та регіонів України

■ **Ключові слова:** децентралізація; державне управління; регіональний розвиток; метрополії; Європейський Союз; диспропорції; відновлення