

Received: 03/08/2021

Accepted: 03/17/2022

FROM TOP-DOWN TO BOTTOM-UP DECENTRALIZATION: REGIONAL DISPOSITIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHILE

DE LA DESCENTRALIZACIÓN TOP DOWN A LA BOTTOM-UP: DISPOSICIONES Y ACTITUDES REGIONALES PARA EL DESARROLLO TERRITORIAL EN CHILE

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Abstract

Decentralization processes have become a focus of study to understand regional and local development. In this regard, the effects of decentralization would vary in all regions, depending on the type of regional society that each territory has established. Based on a survey with regional representativeness applied in 2019, this article analyzes the current socio-territorial conditions in the regions of Chile, namely the perceptions, attitudes, and preconditions of the territorial actors where the decentralization process will take place; this, in order to characterize them and estimate the possible outcomes of the decentralization process in each of them. It is concluded that the prevailing expectation is skeptical and that the information regarding the process is scarce. However, the analyzed regions show significant differences in terms of levels of participation, making it possible to predict that in the face of regionalization each will behave differently. Combining the variables, a typology of three categories of regions is established: those that tend to reinforce the decentralizing process with stronger regional societies; those where the *top-down* impulse and *bottom-up* demand differ; and those that largely depend on the political management of the process.

Keywords: Regional society Decentralization. Subnational reform.

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Resumen

Los procesos de descentralización se han convertido en foco de estudio para comprender el desarrollo regional y local. Asimismo, los efectos de la descentralización no serían iguales en todas las regiones, dando relevancia al tipo de sociedad regional que se configura en cada territorio. A partir de una encuesta con representatividad regional aplicada el 2019, este artículo analiza las condiciones socioterritoriales existentes en las regiones de Chile, entendiéndose por ello percepciones, actitudes y precondiciones de los actores territoriales donde se desarrollará el proceso de descentralización, a fin de caracterizarlas y de estimar los posibles desenlaces del proceso de descentralización en cada una de ellas. Se concluye que la expectativa predominante es más bien escéptica y la información existente sobre el proceso es escasa. Sin embargo existen diferencias marcadas entre las regiones estudiadas en cuanto a niveles de participación las que hacen prever comportamientos disímiles de cada una de ellas frente al proceso de regionalización. Combinando las variables se establece una tipología de tres categorías de regiones: aquellas que tienden a reforzar el proceso descentralizador con sociedades regionales más fuertes; aquellas donde impulso *top down* y demanda *bottom up* difieren y las que dependen en gran medida de la gestión política del proceso.

Palabras clave: Sociedades regionales. Descentralización. Reforma subnacional.

Introduction: The role of regional societies in the face of decentralization

In recent years, decentralization has become one of the ways to explain the processes of regional development, citizen participation, and territorial governance, among others. Chile is a unitary and centralized country in the political, administrative, and fiscal spheres. It has a highly centralized public expenditure compared to other unitary countries, with subnational governments executing 14.5% of total expenditure, against the OECD average of 27.4%. A similar pattern may be seen in tax collection, with 16.5% at the subnational level compared to the OECD average of 28.9%. Centralism in Chile can also be observed in the political sphere, since until 2020, together with Turkey, it was the only OECD country that did not elect its intermediate or regional authorities. In the Chilean case, the main regional authority, called the Intendant, was appointed by the President of the Republic, had political and fiscal attributions, was responsible for fiscal expenditure, and was in charge of the political coordination at the regional level (MONTECINOS, 2020). In 2021, the regional authorities, now called Regional Governors, were elected for the first time in Chile's political record, marking the most important decentralization milestone in the regional history of the country. There are no precedents for this type of event; thus, it is important to address the multiple needs and objectives set in regions, such as increasing participation in public management, reducing territorial inequalities, and boosting territorial competitiveness. All these objectives can be grouped into the idea that decentralization should result in new regional development processes. None of them, however, can be achieved without the active participation of what we may call "regional society."

In this way, the function of territories and regions is crucial in any decentralization process: regions that have achieved a common social construction provide better conditions for decentralization and regional development processes. That is, in order to promote these processes, regions need to assume institutional and social practices that help empower themselves with greater regional autonomy. Therefore, not all regions will respond in the same way to decentralization processes; thus, studying the specificities of each place/region becomes relevant, especially in countries that are transitioning from centralized states to more decentralized models.

At the end of the eighties, it was suggested that regional development should take place with the active participation of regional actors (BOISIER, 1988). The action of the State in a region, at best, generates favorable conditions for economic growth. Nevertheless, the transition from growth to regional development depends more on what the region itself can do — on its *capacity for social organization*- than on the State's action through sectoral public investment or the attraction of investment with the private sector. In this context, this article seeks to examine and analyze the particularities of the regions concerning the attitude to participate and their expectations towards spaces of greater decision and autonomy at the territorial level. This, in view of the unprecedented process in Chile with the first elections for regional authorities. Then, establishing these differences

is presented as a first step to determine if all territories will have the same results in the face of this process of political decentralization.

The following section discusses the concept of regional society and the influence it can have on decentralization processes. Then the methodology and the results of the study are discussed, and finally, the conclusions close the article.

Participation of Regional Societies in the face of development and decentralization

Socially building a region means enhancing its capacity for self-organization. That is, to transform a community often segmented by sectoral interests and unaware of their territorial identity- i.e., passive as a result of secular centralism- into a more cohesive and participatory one, that is able to be mobilized in pursuit of collective political projects. Namely, a region that can become the *subject* of its own development. Here we postulate a development that presupposes a regional society organized under the sign of the articulation of actors and social participation. The social construction of regions can only be done with and from the regional community, even if it is incipient and unclear at first (AHMAD, 2015). Without this process, territorial development processes are often not provoked, and it is observed that no matter the amount of public resources that the central State invests in a region, it will not achieve its development if it lacks a *regional* society with genuinely regional institutions, a political class, a business class, grassroots social organizations, own political projects capable of being collectively concerted. One of the fundamental factors for this to happen is political decentralization, that is, the empowerment of a territory with the ability to decide its leaders and influence the fate of its development. Therefore, for this process to acquire a democratic character, the regional recipient of political power must be more than a formal organizational structure, an elected single-member authority, or a hegemonic social group.

Then, the self-organization of a region and transformation into a cohesive community requires a container with social and identity content, which cannot be other than the organized regional society or community, with a social critical mass, regional political elite, and civil society willing to take the lead and actively participate in their own development. The central issue is that decentralization processes will not have a positive impact if the territories do not become the main responsible ones for activating the mechanisms that operate as causal factors of their own growth and development. (ANDREWS, 2007). Quoting the 2000 Human Development Report of the UNDP in Chile: “Without conversations, public and private, aimed at society, there will be no collective aspirations. At the same time, in order for society itself to be the object of aspirations, the conviction must be strengthened that society is an object under permanent construction and that its architects are concrete subjects.” The step from conversation to action will then consist in the preparation and execution of a political change project for the territory in question (BOISIER, 2004). The foregoing makes it possible to state that territories are not a factor of competitiveness in themselves if they do not have potentialities, which may or may not be exploited, depending on the political decisions adopted in the territory (ÁLVAREZ, et al 2010). Regional societies then emerge as a defining factor when territories pursue their own development, and thus, they are also relevant in facing the decentralization processes. One of the variables that is considered key to making decentralization possible “from below” is the existence of a “regional critical mass,” understood as regional actors that influence the public definition of territorial development strategies and policies (DELAMAZA, 2012). But not only the presence of a critical mass and a regional society is sufficient but the participation of its actors is a key aspect to understand the dynamics of the process in the territory. There is varied literature that shows the importance of the involvement of regional societies in public affairs at the subnational or territorial level through governance spaces in various matters relevant to the development of a region (VAN DEN BRANDELER, 2014; WEVER, 2012). In the same vein, more decentralized government systems provide greater opportunities for participation and increase the commitment of citizens to public affairs (SPINA, 2014).

Citizen participation is a critical component in a modern democracy (GANUZA, 2017), some research shows that decentralization processes fail due to the low participation and low involvement of citizens (ABEDI, 2020). Also, coordinated citizen action, social cohesion, and committed authorities are emphasized as conditions that must exist in the territory to implement the decentralization process (DAUTI, 2017; MENTOR, 2014). In this sense, the management of local actors (public and private) to promote decentralization processes and with a strong component of citizen participation; also depends on their collective actions in the territory. (ANDERSON, 2000; PASTOR; 2012).

In summary, regional societies are not indifferent to processes of participation and decentralization, generating expectations among their actors. Thus, decentralization processes can cause expectations in citizens, mainly as a possible development factor that can influence better well-being and quality of life in a more decentralized public institution (TSELIOS, 2020). For example, in decentralized countries, citizens feel that their involvement can cause positive changes in public management; while in centralized countries, citizens perceive that their voting and participation in public affairs will not have a greater impact on their quality of life (STOYAN, 2018). These expectations are not going to be the same in the face of all public affairs that could be decentralized at the subnational level. For example, for some regions and their citizens, not all areas such as health, education, transport, environment, etc., should be decentralized, even some of them could eventually be better managed from the central level. Therefore, expectations towards decentralization processes may differ depending on which public issues are most sensitive for the inhabitants of a certain territory. Then, it is vitally important to know what citizens expect from a reform that transfers power to the regions, moreover, it is important to know the possible differences that could exist between the different regions of the country. These findings will allow us to identify the socio-political characteristics of the territories and establish how regional communities face the implementation of reforms that grant greater powers to subnational governments.

Material and method

Methodological approach and analysis plan

Due to the nature of the article, which seeks to establish general trends and differentiate between regions, the method used consisted of investigating the perceptions and expectations of the population concerning the ongoing process, their own dynamics of participation, and the links established within the region. The above is operationalized in face-to-face perception surveys applied to representative samples of the regional population between June and August 2019.⁵ The survey was applied in nine regions, out of a total of sixteen regions in the country. This covers the vast majority of the country's population (95.4%); in addition, the three most populous regions are included in the sample. For strictly practical reasons, the sample did not include the four extreme regions of Chile (Arica and Parinacota, Tarapacá, Aysén, and Magallanes), thus strictly speaking it should be considered representative of central Chile, in geographical terms. The approach is quantitative, with a mainly descriptive and comparative statistical treatment between the units of analysis, which in this scenario we define as the regions individually considered.

For the analysis of the data, descriptive statistics on the three dimensions of interest are presented first: participation, information, and expectations, seeking to establish patterns of similarity and difference between regions according. This first analysis seeks to verify whether the conclusion of the literature that not all regions face decentralization processes in the same way, holds true in Chile. Secondly, four analyses of composite categories are made to visualize the possible relationships between the dimensions of interest, namely: (a) a comparison of the data by dimension between the different regions to determine similarities and differences; (b) a comparison between the behavior of the most and the least informed segment of the population in terms of expectations and participation in general, given the assumption that information is a major component of the participatory process; (c) an examination by policy area and region of the expectations of centralization/decentralization in order to verify whether the demand for decentralization is transversal to all public policy sectors; (d) and finally, in the light of the preceding analysis, we combine the variables as a way of developing typologies of regions that allow predicting which may be their willingness and attitudes in the first stage of the implementation of political decentralization.

Operationalization of variables

The first variable to be operationalized corresponds to that of “regional critical mass,” which we refer to as “Participation.” Although measuring the existence of a regional “critical mass”

⁵ The sample included people aged 18 years and over, residing in nine regions of the country according to the 2017 Census. Its application was face-to-face, without replacement, in homes. Number of cases: 4,205 in total. Maximum sampling error (total): 1.5% with a confidence level of 95%. It had a stratified three-stage design, the strata being the intersection of regional capital and other communes, and urban/rural area. The data were then corrected according to a “no response” factor, based on age, gender, geographical location. Sampling Dates: 26 April - 29 July 2019.

involves considering multiple factors, since participation is considered one of the key dimensions of regional societies, this aspect is used as a *proxy*. We have operationalized it into four dichotomized sub-variables that are synthesized in an index with three categories, which allows us to sort the regions. The assumption is that the greater the dynamics of regional society's participation, the greater the critical mass capable of being a direct interlocutor of the political decentralization process that is being initiated. According to the above, the variables considered are synthesized in the following table:

Table No. 1: Variables and response categories to measure participation

Variable	Response Categories	
Community collective action	Yes: At least in one activity in the last 5 years. 1 point.	No
Collective action in the public space	Yes: At least in one activity in the last 5 years. 1 point	No
Virtual public participation	Yes: He or she he has used social networks for campaigns or complaints. 1 point	No
Participation in formal organizations	Yes. 1 point	No

Then, the participation index looks like this: High Participation: 3 and 4 points; Medium: 2 points; Low: 1 and 0 points.

The second variable to be operationalized corresponds to “Information on Decentralization.” Here we start from the assumption that knowledge is scarce because this is an unprecedented reform with limited reach, as previously noted, it is limited to the institutional political sphere. In addition, the debate at the level of political actors is usually restricted to which of the powers of the current regional authorities will pass to the new authority. Therefore, to operationalize this variable, it was decided to distinguish between those who have not heard about the current decentralization process and those who at least know that regional governor elections will be held or that there will be a process of transfer of competencies. The results, as detailed below, supported the initial assumption that there is minimal information, although the analysis did allow for the separation of two segments in the population. In this sense, the individual who answers that he or she has heard about one of the two processes is considered informed.

The third variable to be operationalized corresponds to “Expectations about the decentralizing process.” Since the process had not yet been implemented at the time of the survey, the instrument was focused on expectations rather than concrete results. For the above, a general question was designed with three graded alternatives: positive expectation, neutral expectation, and bad expectations. In light of the results, these options then became a dichotomy: 1. People with positive expectations who consider that the decentralization process “will be a boost to the regions”; and 2. People with skeptical expectations who think that the process “will leave things more or less the same as now” or that “it will bring more problems for the development of the region.”

Finally, the fourth and last variable to be operationalized corresponds to “Public policy areas of interest for regionalization.” For the analysis of this area, respondents were asked which areas or services of State competence should be managed at the national, regional, and communal levels. The areas for which this question was asked are those that the community considers of greatest interest, namely: 1. public health, currently with administration at the three levels of government in Chile; 2. elementary and secondary public education, with national financing but communal administration; 3. the administration of public transport, financed and partially administered by the national government with a strong component of private financing and administration; 4. housing and urban development, with administration at all three levels of government and a strong private component; 5. environmental protection, of national government competence; 6. the construction of large public works (such as hospitals, bridges, and roads), of national competence; 7. the location of large companies and industries, of mainly national competence.

Results

Participation is heterogeneous between regions, in scope and intensity

Participation in formal organizations reaches 35% of respondents, this result is consistent with other previous regional and national surveys, even though the total number of organizations continues to increase (Sociedad en Acción, 2020: 22). As indicated in the methodology, our definition of participation goes beyond formal organizations and points to an index that includes diverse types of collective actions and the use of social networks on the internet. Our definition significantly expands participation by considering various modalities, also establishing a certain measure of intensity. If we only consider it in dichotomous terms, it is obtained that almost two-thirds of the respondents report some form of participation. If we raise the standard to those who have participated in at least two types of activities, the percentage reaches 42%. The details by region can be found in Table 2.

Table No. 2: Percentage of the population that participates in collective activities

Regions	Low		Medium	High
	Has not participated	Has participated in one type of activity	Has participated in two types of activities	Has participated in three or four types of activities
Antofagasta	53%	19%	14%	14%
Coquimbo	35%	22%	15%	28%
Metropolitan	31%	26%	16%	26%
O'Higgins	32%	25%	17%	26%
Ñuble	19%	20%	22%	39%
Bío Bio	48%	24%	14%	14%
Araucanía	32%	12%	20%	36%
Los Ríos	32%	22%	20%	26%
Los Lagos	34%	30%	16%	19%
Average	35%	22%	17%	25%

Source: own elaboration with data from *Barómetro Regional* survey 2019.

It can be observed that the regional differences are significant. While Antofagasta and Bío Bío have the lowest percentages of participants; the Metropolitan Region (MR), O'Higgins, Araucanía, and Los Ríos reach almost 70% of participants, considering all modalities. Making a more specific analysis of participation as an aggregated category by region, Ñuble and Araucanía stand out with a greater intensity in forms of participatory action. In these regions, those who show high participation, exceed 35% of the sample. On the contrary, Antofagasta, followed by Bío Bío, is at the other extreme, with the highest percentage of people who do not participate in any of the surveyed modalities (about 50%) and with the lowest percentage of people in high participation, where neither of these two regions reaches 15%.

For its part, considering the different modes, pointing to the internal structure of the regional participation, the variable of action "in the public space" has the highest average percentage (45%), followed by the "community" action (39%), while participation "in organizations" reaches 35% and the virtual "social networks" for 33%. These data suggest that collective action has been acquiring a greater dynamic than that of participation in organized groups, a contemporary trend that has also been observed in other analyses, especially since 2011. The participatory profile of each region differs internally, which is also a relevant point to observe. If we take only the extreme data in each category, Ñuble offers the highest value in three categories (community, public space, and organizations), while the Metropolitan region has it in social networks. The lowest percentages are Bío Bío (community and public space) and Antofagasta in social networks and organizations.

Information on the decentralization process is low in all regions.

The average number of people who have some information about the most basic decentralization processes reaches almost a quarter of respondents.⁶ While 16% have heard of one

⁶ The current decentralization process in Chile contemplates two dimensions: political and administrative. The first is realized through the direct election of the new Regional Governor, which was initially to be held in October 2020 and was postponed until April 2021 because of the pandemic; and the second, the transfer of competencies from the central to the regional level.

of the two processes (election of regional governor and transfer of competencies), those who have heard of both only reach 9% of respondents. There is a clear challenge in socializing this important innovation in the political process. Table 3 presents the details by region.

Table No. 3: Level of knowledge about the decentralization process in Chile

Region	I have heard of some of the decentralization processes
Antofagasta	17%
Coquimbo	25%
Metropolitan Region	25%
O'Higgins	28%
Ñuble	28%
Bío Bio	21%
Araucanía	23%
Los Ríos	29%
Los Lagos	25%
Average	24%

Source: Own elaboration based on the *Barómetro Regional* survey 2019.

Despite the visible differences between the regions, these are not truly relevant, since none of the regions studied reaches 30% of people who have heard of any of these decentralization processes. In the upper section, the two most recently formed and smaller regions stand out (Ñuble and Los Ríos), but also O'Higgins, where, according to our knowledge, there is no particular process of decentralizing pressure. Antofagasta appears as the most “uninformed” region, followed by Bío Bío.

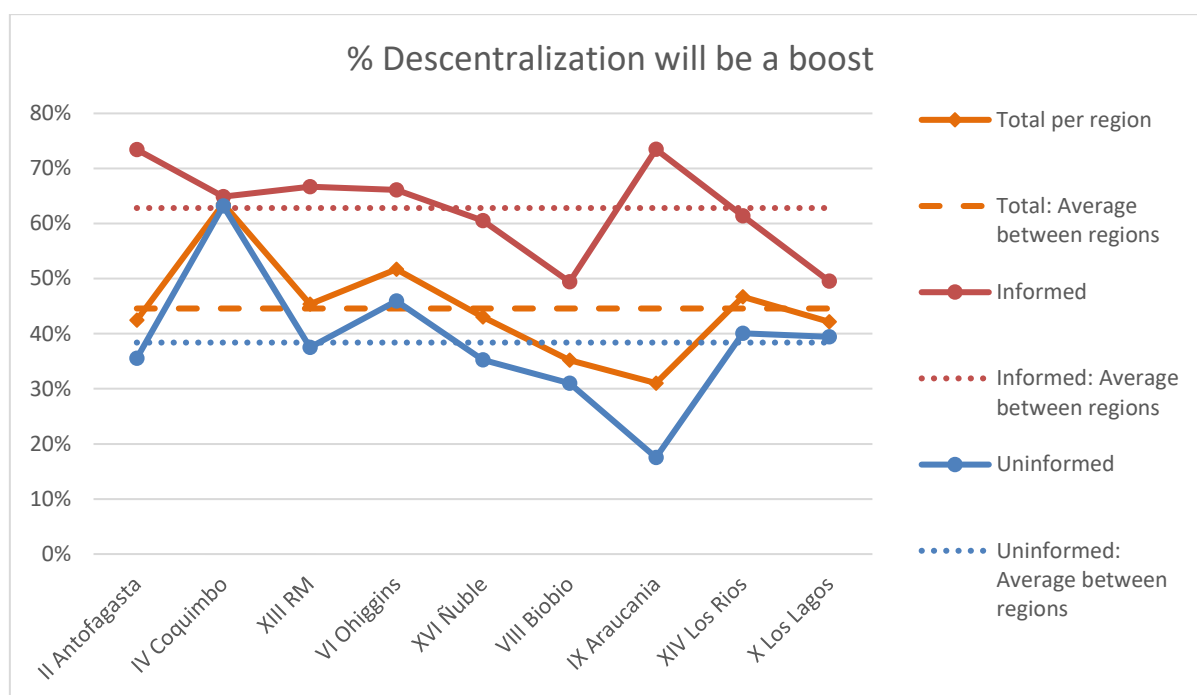
Expectations are mostly skeptical, except among those who are informed of the decentralization process

In general terms, there is no positive expectation regarding these decentralizing processes. Forty-five percent of the responses consider that it will be a boost to the regions, but an almost equivalent 43% believe that things will not change much, which could be due to both the lack of information and the widespread distrust in the political-institutional processes in the country. This distrust is compounded by those who believe that the process “will bring more problems to the region” (12%), which configures a skeptical majority about the process. Figure 1 shows the detail by region while disaggregating the expectation according to whether the person is informed or not.

The mostly positive expectation is only present in two regions (Coquimbo and O'Higgins), while at the other extreme, the most skeptical are Araucanía and Bío Bío. It is not possible to draw conclusions from these data, but a conjectural interpretation could be suggested for the case of Coquimbo and a more structural one for the case of the “skeptical” regions. The situation of Coquimbo could be explained by the fact that the authority that led to the reforms, was the Undersecretary of Regional Development Ricardo Cifuentes (2014 - 2018), who had previously been mayor of the Region of Coquimbo (2006 - 2010), being the first time that a former mayor was appointed in charge of the portfolio responsible for these issues. However, Cifuentes was later defeated in his candidacy for regional governor in Coquimbo. In the case of Araucanía and Bío Bío, these are the regions with the highest percentage of Mapuche population, where there is a historic demand for Indigenous territorial and cultural rights, as well as Indigenous autonomy, and representation, which has sometimes led to serious conflicts and acts of violence. It could be thought that the proposed political reforms, which do not include any of these matters, do not adequately respond to the more complex requirements that arise in the regional debate.

As mentioned in the methodology, we will analyze if the expectations vary according to the level of information, since this is expected to establish if it is a socialization of information problem or if we are in the presence of other phenomena. In this regard, the results indicate that on average the positive expectations about the decentralization process are substantially higher among the people informed about it, reaffirming the challenge of making this process much better known among the inhabitants of the country. Figure 1 shows a regional overview.

Figure No. 1: Positive expectations about the political decentralization process by region, according to the level of information



Source: Own elaboration based on the *Barómetro Regional* survey 2019.

The graph helps to visualize particular situations. Two regions strongly contrast; in one (Coquimbo), being informed would have no influence on expectations, while in the other (Araucanía), this would have greater importance. In this way, in Coquimbo, the expectations of the informed are close to the national average and coincide with those of the uninformed, while in La Araucanía the opposite happens. In the latter region, the informed have the most “positive” expectations, while the uninformed have the most “skeptical and negative” expectations in the country. As indicated before, Coquimbo is the region with the highest percentage of people who have positive expectations, while Araucanía is the region with the lowest percentage of these people.

We could say that in general, the support for decentralization is exclusive to a small group of informed people, except for Coquimbo, and with Araucanía and Antofagasta as the most acute examples. If we continue with the line of political interpretation outlined above, we could mention the fact that in both regions there are actors strongly committed to the decentralization process, and who have probably played a relevant role in their respective territories. In the case of Antofagasta, there a senator strongly committed to decentralization exists who serves as leader of the regionalist Congressional Caucus, a former presidential candidate, and who has an important media presence at the national level. In the case of La Araucanía, this region is the headquarters and engine of various initiatives in the field of decentralization, we refer to the *Chile Descentralizado Foundation*, which under the leadership of a former dean of the Universidad de la Frontera has played a fundamental role in promoting reforms in the matter. In both cases, in Antofagasta and La Araucanía, we would be in the presence of an “elitist” adherence or circumscribed to certain circles of regional actors, while in Coquimbo, as an exceptional case, the adherence would be more expanded.

Transversally to all public services, the decentralizing demand is limited

The following shows the interest of the regions in decentralizing a series of public services associated with social policies of territorial interest. A general view indicates that the decentralizing pressure is not expressed as a reduction in the functions of the central government. Rather, there is an inclination to consider that some services and areas of public action should be predominantly managed by the central government. On average, the allocation of such functions is substantially higher than those assigned to regional and local governments. These perceptions can be interpreted both as the inertia of current centralism as well as a “modest” or “self-limited” expectation regarding decentralization. The national panorama by sector is expressed in the following table.

Table No. 4: Desired levels of government by political area; the percentage of people who chose each level is indicated

Policy Area	Central Government	Regional Government	Local Government
Public Health	55%	30%	16%
Elementary and Secondary Public Education	58%	35%	15%
Public Transport Administration	38%	42%	20%
Housing and Urban Development	40%	38%	22%
Environmental Protection	49%	32%	19%
Construction of Major Public Works	56%	33%	11%
Location of Large Companies and Industries	46%	40%	14%
Average	47,7%	35,7%	16,7%

Source: Own elaboration based on the *Barómetro Regional* survey 2019.

Firstly, it is observed that the division of functions between “central government” and “regional and local governments” divides citizen opinion into two halves, although with a clear predominance of the regional at the subnational level. In all areas, the central/national government reaches preference levels above 40%. A second finding is that the policy areas where a “centralizing” provision predominates refer, on the one hand, to traditional functions of the central government such as the construction of large public infrastructure. On the other hand, and immediately after in priority, appear those services that began decentralization in the eighties: health and public education, which are currently under municipal administration. It is possible to think that the latter underlies a critical balance of the municipalization process conducted by the military dictatorship within the framework of a neoliberal policy and a vindication of the traditional roles of the Chilean state in the social area. In all, but these three sectors, the number of people who prefer subnational levels is higher than those who prefer central administration. Transport and Housing lead the decentralizing demand, both with a preference for the regional level. At the regional level, the administration of public transport and the location of large companies and industries are especially preferred. Although the municipal level is not the most preferred in any sector, the greatest demand to decentralize to this level occurs in housing matters. All of these are precisely areas where there have been significant conflicts between the territories and the central administration. On the other hand, this is not the situation with environmental protection, which has also been a cause of conflicts, but where the demand is evenly split between the national and sub-national levels. In any case, these are sectors of public action that are currently very strongly centralized, especially the first two. Additionally, an analysis by region can be proposed. For each region, the average between the services is calculated and defined as “Intensity”. Table N°5 shows differences in the preferences of each region and the intensity of interest, the intensity is noted in the last column of the table. Ñuble and Araucanía mark the highest intensity, understood as the average, between services, of the percentage of people who want to decentralize. To these is added Coquimbo, which however shows substantive differences between the different sectors or policy areas. In the Metropolitan Region, on the other hand, the intensity of decentralizing demand in the public services studied is much lower.

Table No. 5: Percentage of the population indicating the service should be under the management of a regional or communal authority

Service/ Region	Health	Education	Transport	Housing	Environment	Public Works	Location of Industries	Avg. Between Services or Intensity
Antofagasta	35%	43%	58%	55%	38%	46%	46%	46%
Coquimbo	48%	61%	67%	60%	54%	46%	46%	55%
Metropolita n	24%	26%	30%	35%	25%	27%	35%	29%
O'higgins	41%	41%	66%	60%	40%	40%	51%	48%
Ñuble	73%	73%	82%	84%	72%	67%	75%	75%
Bío Bio	35%	42%	58%	49%	52%	30%	48%	45%
Araucanía	62%	65%	72%	81%	68%	51%	68%	67%
Los Ríos	41%	42%	59%	57%	50%	38%	57%	49%
Los Lagos	39%	51%	58%	55%	50%	41%	52%	49%
Avg. Between Regions	44%	49%	61%	60%	50%	43%	53%	

Source: Own elaboration based on the *Barómetro Regional* survey 2019.

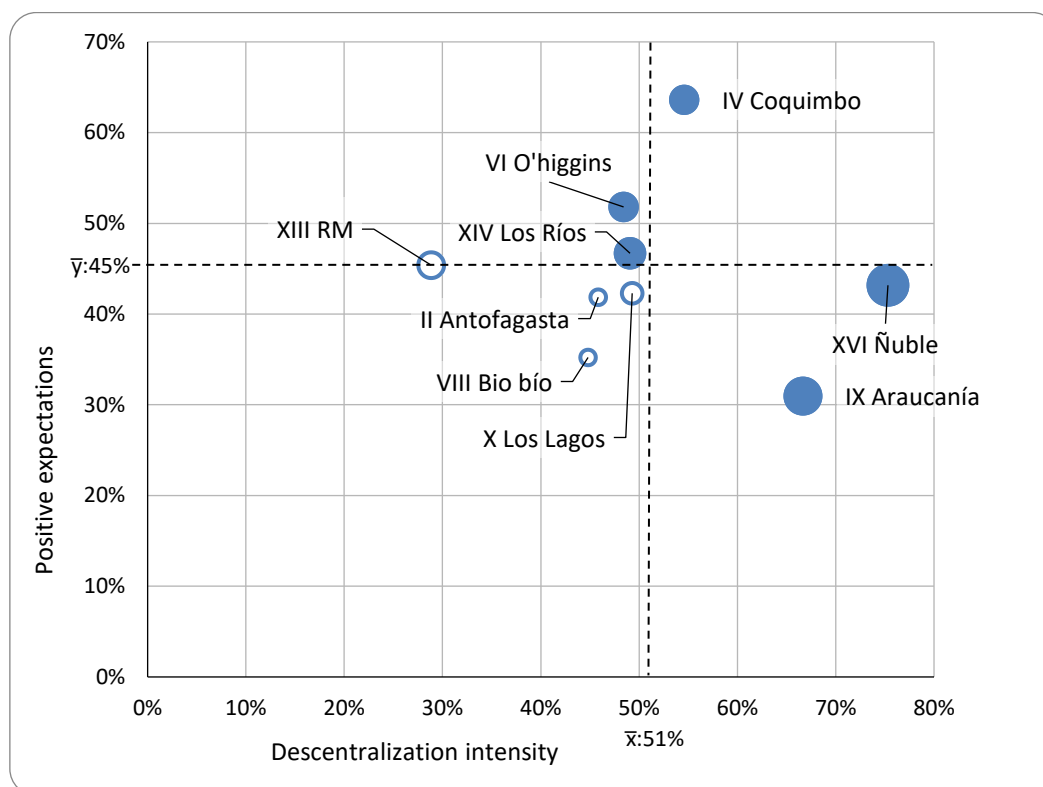
In terms of sectors, in all non-metropolitan regions, except for Araucanía, the decentralization of public transport is demanded as a priority, which can be understood as a result of the injection of large resources in the capital as a consequence of the transport system crisis in Santiago since this injection has been used in the public debate as an endorsement for the decentralization process.

Towards a typology of regions

The analysis makes it possible to group the regions into categories according to their general disposition to the initiated decentralization process, and they already show very differentiated patterns of disposition and expectation. This would also suggest that a differentiated decentralization process will be implemented, taking into account the expectation, intensity of demand, and the regional “critical mass”. It is possible that regions with a stronger regional “critical mass” will be active counterparts of the process. But depending on their expectation, positive versus skeptical, and above all on how strong their demand for decentralization is, their readiness at the first stage of the process of installing regional governments may vary. According to the above, the possible combinations between the three selected variables are eight according to the values a. have/do not have “higher critical mass”, those regions in which those who participate in two or more types of activities are located above/below the average between regions, b. positive/skeptical expectations, higher than average, and c. high/low intensity of decentralizing demand, that is, the average of people who want the policy areas entrusted to the subnational level is higher/lower than the average between regions. The eight possible combinations are detailed in Figure 2, where the relative position of the different regions concerning these three variables is illustrated. To show three variables in a two-dimensional graph, the size and color of the dots/bubbles have also been used as

an indicator. In this way, the size of the bubbles is proportional to the number of people with high or medium participation, those of color are above average, while empty ones are below average in that indicator. The vertical axis indicates the percentage of people with positive expectations, while the horizontal axis shows the percentage according to the intensity of decentralizing demand, in both axes the average between regions is shown.

Figure No. 2: Distribution of regions according to 1. participation (size and color of the point); 2. expectations (vertical axis); and 3. intensity of decentralizing demand (horizontal axis)



Source: own elaboration based on *Barómetro Regional* survey data 2019.

Three categories are observed: “passive” in the lower-left corner, “active but with limited demand” in the upper-left corner, and “active with high demand” on the right side. According to the graph, it seems to us that the eight logical types can give rise to three large categories of regions and anticipate their possible behavior concerning the process at this initial stage of reform implementation.

Type 1: Regions with passive societies, low intensity decentralizing process, or potentially co-opted. These are regions whose presence and disposition of their regional actors are less protagonist; in all of them there is a more skeptical expectation and at the same time the demand is less intense. In them, a rather passive behavior is expected and dependent on the action of the elected authority. This may translate into a slower process, or to the co-optation of the region by clientelist or “elitist” leaderships, with low citizen involvement. This is the case of Antofagasta, Bío Bío and to a lesser extent Los Lagos.

Type 2: Regions with active societies but less intense demand, well-articulated decentralizing process: These are regions with a greater presence of regional actors or participatory citizens, who have a positive expectation of the decentralization process, but whose demand is relatively low. In these cases, clear support for the process is expected, with a lower level of conflicts regarding the speed of the process and the margins of autonomy. The regional leadership should have active and cooperative social counterparts in the process. This is the case of O'Higgins and Los Ríos.

Type 3: Regions with active societies and intense demand, decentralizing process with strong pressures for autonomy. Unlike the previous ones, these regions have a high critical mass and a greater demand, which can be channeled into more autonomous leaderships. This type groups more “skeptical” regions (Ñuble and Araucanía) and a region with positive expectations (Coquimbo).

In the former, greater conflict and dispute over the pace and scope of the process are to be expected, with strong pressures on the regional leadership. In Coquimbo, frustration can occur if high expectations are not met, but a greater agreement between the regional leadership and society of Coquimbo is to be expected.

Conclusions

This research aimed to establish some basic conditions that can be recognized in the citizenship of the regions of Chile, at the start of the decentralization process. As we anticipated, the panorama between the regions is not homogeneous and the differences found between regions reinforce the need for research at the subnational level, not so much in terms of “how politics is implemented,” but rather of how a regional public sphere and a process of redistribution of political power are constructed.

The general expectation regarding the decentralization process is predominantly skeptical, to which is added very low information regarding it. Therefore, in general terms, there is a need to establish debate and deliberation on the prospects of the process, based on much more information about its meaning. On the other hand, the decentralizing demand is not homogeneous and the same happens with regional capacities or “critical mass” that also differ between regions. This means that the decentralization process will not be implemented in the same manner in all regions; therefore, we will be facing asymmetric decentralization. While in some regions we can expect a social dynamism and a positive attitude towards decentralization, in others we can anticipate a greater level of conflict and the intensification of autonomous demands. Combining the mentioned different factors, a difficult implementation of the process in its first stage is to be expected. Our data suggest that the active support will be scarce, and that, either the rather passive and authority-dependent behavior, or the strengthening of autonomous demands in regions with greater critical mass will predominate.

However, the suggested typology of regions allows us to observe the differential behavior between them and delve into the traits that determine their attitude towards the process. Additionally, it will be necessary to observe the evolution of regional leadership and the modes of relationship with the “presidential delegates,” which is also a new figure in the regional panorama. One aspect to highlight is the importance that collective action is acquiring as a participatory tool to influence public affairs at the subnational level. In the future, when there is a greater installation of the decentralization process in Chile, it would be interesting to analyze how social movements or collective instances, are assuming or not a leading role in the orientation and design of public policies at the territorial level.

A challenge for countries, especially for those that are promoting decentralization processes, is to demonstrate and sensitize citizens about the importance of these types of reforms for the well-being and quality of life of the population. Regional communities should understand and value that a more decentralized state can lead to improved democracy and more timely public management in the face of regional or local issues or public affairs.

Acknowledgments

This publication, part of its elaboration and design, was funded through the research project Fondecyt 1180496; by the National Agency for Research and Development (ANID). Chile.

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