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Governing decentralised States during the Covid-19 pandemic: challenges of intergovernmental coordination and cooperation in Chile, Italy, and the Netherlands
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Propositions relating to the dissertation

Governing Decentralised States during the Covid-19 pandemic: challenges of intergovernmental coordination and cooperation in Chile, Italy, and the Netherlands

by Esteban Szmulewicz Ramírez

1. In most countries two or three levels of government are involved in the different stages of the policy process, rendering the concept of decentralisation a key variable in the “real world” of the forms of State, beyond the “unitary-federal” debate.
2. The use of executive powers during the pandemic often sidelined parliaments and local governments, raising concerns about accountability and democratic legitimacy.
3. In cases of unstructured and constantly changing executive-driven intergovernmental relations, the blurring of lines of responsibility represents a serious concern for constitutionalism.
4. The diverse legal and public administration traditions influenced the way intergovernmental relations worked in practice, confirming the discrepancy between the actual practices of governance and the constitutional design of political life, and the need for empirical and interdisciplinary research on these topics.
5. Subnational authorities have increased their activities to face crises, yet this has not been coupled with institutional reforms that incorporate the subnational level in the decision-making processes.
6. In Italy, weak intergovernmental relations and unequal regional governments’ capacities can explain the challenges of coordination and cooperation during the governance of the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. In the Netherlands, the extensive application of the Safety Regions, the large scope of the measures enacted, and the concentration of powers on the executives during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic raised questions regarding accountability and democratic legitimacy.

8. At the same time, the college of the Chairpersons of the Safety Regions, or so-called Safety Council, has emerged as a new institution for intergovernmental relations.

9. Centralization was further exacerbated during the crisis management of COVID-19 because of the application of states of constitutional exception, especially the prolonged state of emergency in Chile.

10. Generally speaking, during the crisis, more “competitive” relations between national and regional authorities were prevalent in Italy and Chile, whereas more “consensual” or “cooperative” relations were observed in the Netherlands, albeit conflicting with local autonomy.

11. Decentralised structures can be more effective than centralized policy processes, provided intergovernmental relations can provide pathways for resolving tensions and subnational governments have the capacity and mandate to negotiate with the centre.

12. Comparative constitutional studies are not only about analysing the differences and similarities between jurisdictions but also about learning something new about oneself in the process.