

The Foundations of the RA Territorial Development Policy

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ՀՀ տարածքային զարգացման քաղաքականության հիմքերը

Բադադյան Գագիկ Չ.

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Անփոփագիր. ՀՀ տարածքային զարգացման քաղաքականությունը պայմանավորում է ՀՀ տարածքային զարգացման անհամաչափությունների հաղթահարման ամբողջ գործընթացը: Այս մասով ՀՀ-ում գործում են եռամակարդակ ռազմավարական պլաններ՝ ՀՀ տարածքային զարգացման ռազմավարությունը, մարզերի զարգացման ռազմավարությունները և համայնքների զարգացման ծրագրերը: Հոդվածը ուղղված է ՀՀ տարածքային քաղաքականության հիմնական բնութագրիչների և այդ երեք մակարդակների ուսումնասիրությանը:

Հանգուցարաններ՝ Տարածքային զարգացում, տարածքային քաղաքականություն, տարածքային միավորներ, ռազմավարական կառավարում

Основы политики территориального развития РА

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Аннотация. Политика территориального развития Республики Армения предусматривает весь процесс преодоления асимметрии территориального развития Республики Армения. В связи с этим в РА существуют трехуровневые стратегические планы: стратегия территориального развития РА, стратегии развития регионов и программы развития общин. Целью статьи является изучение основных характеристик территориальной политики РА и трех уровней стратегических планов.

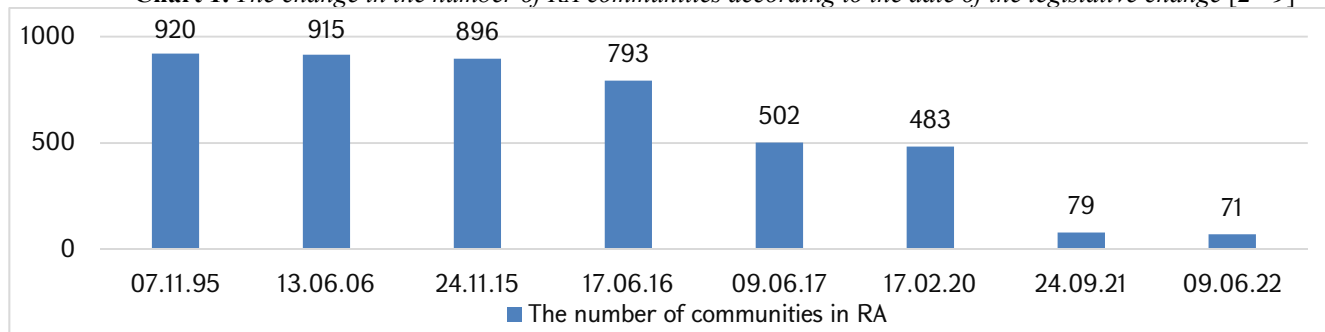
Ключевые слова: территориальное развитие, стратегия, территориальная политика, территориальные единицы, стратегическое управление

The foundations of the territorial development policy in the Republic of Armenia are defined by the Constitution of RA, according to which, one of the main policy objectives in the economic, social and cultural spheres of the country is territorial proportional development [1, article 86]. Territorial policy in the Republic of Armenia is based on such principles of territorial administration, as the harmonization of state and community interests, cooperation and mutual agreement of actions between governors, other bodies of the state administration system, their territorial subdivisions and local self-government bodies, as well as balanced and sustainable territorial development [10, article 3]. It is obvious that overcoming the disparities of territorial development in RA is a priority both in the country's constitution and in the most important legislative act regulating the sector.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, the administrative territorial units of the

Republic of Armenia are regions and communities [1, article 121], and their divisions are fully defined by the RA Law "On The Administrative Territorial Division of the Republic of Armenia". The territory of the Republic of Armenia is divided into ten regions [2, article 2]. Regions include smaller territorial units - communities. A community is a legal entity under public law, a group of residents of one or more settlements and an administrative territorial unit [11, article 4]. Communities can include one or more settlements [2, article 1]. The number of communities in RA is 71, and the number of settlements included in them is 1,000 (including Yerevan). The number of communities in RA has undergone significant changes since 1995: with a slight change in the number of settlements, the number of communities decreased from 920 to 71. The dynamics of changes in the number of communities is shown in chart 1.

Chart 1. The change in the number of RA communities according to the date of the legislative change [2 - 9]



By looking at Chart 1, it is obvious that the start of significant changes in the number of communities in RA was given by the amendment of the RA Law "On The Administrative Territorial Division of the Republic of Armenia" of November 24, 2015, by which some communities of Lori, Syunik and Tavush regions were united. The further enlargement of communities continued, as a result of which the number of communities in RA became 71 with the amendment of the law on June 9, 2022.

The enlargement of communities in the Republic of Armenia is based on the "Concept of enlargement of communities and the formation of inter-community associations", according to which the enlarged community has sufficient natural resources to effectively and affordably implement the powers and services assigned to local self-government bodies, as well as to ensure the socio-economic sustainable development of the community, it is a group of settlements with human and financial resources and necessary infrastructure, where one of the settlements is or can be formed as a local center of the resettlement system [12, point 7]. The process of enlargement of communities, according to the discussed concept, also contributes to territorial balanced development, because territorial balanced development is impossible to imagine in the case of weak and fragmented communities and unresolved problems at the level of local self-government. In this context, the enlargement of communities is seen as an element of the concept of polycentric development (poles of development) [12, point 7.1].

The criteria of enlargement are also defined by the concept, which include both demographic, spatial and socio-economic characteristics necessary for the enlargement of communities. It is interesting that these standards were defined only on the basis of (experimental) studies conducted in Aragatsotn, Vayots Dzor and Syunik regions, but it is stated that they are applicable throughout the territory of RA, which in practice may lead to problems in other regions [12, point 7.3].

As mentioned, the enlargement of communities in the context of territorial development is seen as a

tool for the formation of development poles. "The concept of development of territorial growth poles" was developed for the formation of territorial poles. According to the concept, the formation and development of territorial growth poles in RA regions will allow a transition from a unipolar, capital-centered economy to a multipolar, stable, proportionally developing economy [14, point 10].

The pole of territorial growth is a certain territory of the state, which, compared to the average indicator of the country, can provide more accelerated development, gradually giving new momentum to the underdeveloped sectors, territories, entities of the country's economy and acting as a locomotive for them. The Poles first provide progressive development within their internal system, after which the results gradually spread to include wider scales [14, points 16 and 20].

The selection of regional growth poles is based on criteria such as geographic potential, natural resource potential, demographic potential, social-economic potential, programs implemented in the community, infrastructures, health care, science and education [14, point 28].

It should be noted that the concept proposes a phased approach for the formation of development poles to avoid financial and managerial complications, and public-private partnership is seen as the main mechanism. It should also be noted that Gyumri, Vanadzor, Dilijan, Jermuk, Alaverdi, Ararat, Yeghegnadzor, Artashat, Sevan, Metsamor, Kajaran, Ashtarak, Agarak, Akhtala and Tsaghkadzor are being considered as possible variants of development poles [14, points 49, 50, 53].

The main instrument of territorial policy in RA is the "Territorial Development Strategy of the Republic of Armenia for 2016-2025". The mission of the current territorial strategy is to provide a series of interrelated motives to all regions in order to increase competitiveness based on potentials and guarantee socio-economic symmetry between all regions, and according to the vision, growth will be

activated in all regions of the country, symmetry and stability will be ensured [13, point 5].

However, the performed analyzes show that the situation characterizing the performance of the RA territorial development strategy is not the most effective, and there are problems in both content and formal requirements [26].

In this case, it is important to understand what the situation is in the case of regional strategies as well. There are ten development strategies planned for 2017-2025 for ten regions of the Republic of Armenia. The purpose of those strategies is the localization of the RA territorial development strategy. Table 1 presents the main objectives of these strategies by region.

Table 1. The main goals defined by the development strategy of RA regions

Main goals of regional development strategies
Aragatsotn - The general goal of the regional development policy is to promote the social-economic, territorial proportional and sustainable development of all areas / communities of the region, taking into account the needs and resources of individual areas/communities [15, point 5.1].
Ararat - To have a region with a stable, proportionately developing, competitive economy, a high level of employment, which has completely overcome extreme poverty [16, point 5.1].
Armavir - in 2025, to have a stable, proportionately developing, competitive economy, a high level of employment and a region that has completely overcome extreme poverty [17, point 5.1].
Gegharkunik - In 2025, the population and economies of Gegharkunik will have diversified sources of income, it will overcome disparities between the areas of the region, the stable development of the region will be ensured, and decision-making will be decentralized. [18, point 5.1].
Lori - in 2025, Lori region will have multi-branch, developed industry, modernized agriculture, IT sector and developed tourism [19, point 5.1].
Kotayk - The general goal of the development policy of the region is to promote the economic and social, territorial balanced and sustainable development of the region, taking into account the needs and resources of individual communities. [20, point 5.1].
Shirak - To be a leading region of RA, to provide stable socio-economic opportunities in communities, to have a competitive economy and a high level of employment [21, point 5.1].
Syunik - The general goal of the territorial development policy of Syunik, RA is to promote the economic and social, territorially proportional and sustainable development of all areas/communities of the region, taking into account the needs and resources of individual areas/communities. [22, point 5.1].
Vayots Dzor - In 2025, Vayots Dzor region will become a well-known tourist attraction, a moderately developed region with competitive industry and agriculture. [23, point 5.1].
Tavush - The general goal of the territorial development policy is to promote the social-economic, territorially proportionate and sustainable development of all areas (communities) of the region, taking into account the needs and resources of individual areas (communities). [24, point 5.1].

Studying the set goals, it becomes obvious that the main goals defined by the development strategies of Aragatsotn, Kotayk, Syunik and Tavush regions coincide almost word for word, the same situation is also the case with Ararat and Armavir marzes. In terms of content, the main goals of the development strategies of Lori and Vayots Dzor regions are also quite close.

Such a situation cannot speak of high efficiency, because in practice, the main goals of competently and effectively developed strategies cannot coincide in that way and literally. And finally, for example, how can the development goals of 4 out of 10 regions be exactly the same? this may indicate that the regions reflect the strategies of other regions, which is naturally a negative

phenomenon, and the strategies developed in this way cannot contribute to the realization of the goal of ensuring balanced territorial development of the RA territorial development strategy. It is also notable that it is difficult to extract from the goals presented in table 1 such provisions that are directly related to the goal of ensuring balanced territorial development of the RA territorial development strategy.

Within the framework of the study of territorial development strategies of regions, we consider it necessary to refer also to the priorities of the development strategies of regions, the latter are presented in table 2 (the numbering of priorities is conditional, because in this way it is possible to ensure their comparability).

Table 2. *The priorities defined by the development strategies of the RA regions*

<i>The regions</i>	<i>The priorities</i>
<i>Aragatsotn</i>	1. Development of modern industry 2. Increasing the efficiency of agriculture 3. Promotion of tourism, increasing recognition of the region and development of infrastructures [15, point 5.2]
<i>Ararat</i>	1. Industrial growth, particularly in the supply or processing sectors of agriculture, with an emphasis on the development of small and medium-sized businesses. 2. Development of intensive agriculture, especially in the field of horticulture [16, point 5.2]
<i>Armavir</i>	1. Industrial growth with emphasis on small and medium business development. In particular, establishment/expansion of processing industrial organizations 2. Development of intensive agriculture, especially in Baghramyan area 3. Development of tourism with emphasis on spiritual, cultural, rural and agro tourism [17, point 5.2]
<i>Gegharkunik</i>	1. Renewable energy production and efficiency improvement 2. Modernization of agriculture 3. Preservation of the Lake Sevan ecosystem and development of tourism with an emphasis on rural tourism [18, point 5.2]
<i>Lori</i>	1. Development of export-oriented industries, in particular, mineral industry, light industry, food industry and IT sector 2. Development of intensive agriculture 3. Development of cultural, rural tourism, including development of winter tourism and ecotourism [19, point 5.2]
<i>Kotayk</i>	1. Development of diversified industry 2. Modernization and development of agriculture: production of organic agricultural products 3. Development of different types of tourism [20, point 5.2]
<i>Shirak</i>	1. Encouragement and support of activities of small and medium industrial organizations, development of tourism 2. Modernization of agricultural technologies and development of rural areas 3. Development of ICTs [21, point 5.2]
<i>Syunik</i>	1. Development of modern and diversified industry and tourism 2. Modernization of agriculture and rural areas combined with environmental protection 3. Development and diversification of transport infrastructure [22, point 5.2]
<i>Vayots Dzor</i>	1. Development of processing industry 2. Modernization of agriculture and rural areas using new technologies, production of organic agricultural products 3. Development of tourism / historical and cultural tourism, ecotourism, scientific tourism, natural tourism, adventure tourism, cave tourism, rural tourism/ [23, point 5.2]
<i>Tavush</i>	1. Development of industry based on processing of natural resources and agricultural products 2. Development of modern agriculture and improvement of rural areas 3. Sustainable tourism development [24, point 5.2]

The situation regarding the priorities defined by the development strategies of the regions is not better, because in general, the priorities of the development strategies of all the regions coincide in terms of content: all regions aim to develop agriculture, industry and tourism. Certain deviations were recorded only in a few regions: in particular, Ararat region does not aim to develop tourism, Gegharkunik region makes it more clear which sectors of industry and tourism it aims to develop, Shirak region aims to develop the ICT sector in addition to these three, and Syunik region also aims

to develop transport infrastructures. Moreover, there are cases when these three priorities are formulated in a rather contradictory way, for example, Lori region aims to develop mining and ecotourism at the same time, which is practically impossible or at least unrealistic.

As a result, it turns out that the main goals and priorities of regional development strategies in RA are close enough in terms of content. In this case, the meaning of the existence of these strategies is objectively questioned, because if all regions have the same goals, then they could only be included in

the general RA territorial development strategy. However, doing so would violate the principle of strategic hierarchy. At the same time, the current situation is also not acceptable, because only the presence of strategies within the framework of a formal requirement does not indicate effectiveness, moreover, the existing strategies violate the goal of forming growth poles, because, as mentioned, the main approach to overcoming territorial disparities in RA is the development of locomotives.

Taking into account the already recorded problems, there is a need to make an observation of strategies one level below, community development

programs. For this purpose, the visions and main goals of development programs of all regional communities of RA (70, excluding Yerevan) were studied. The programs published as of October 1, 2023 were studied. Within the framework of the study, it became clear that these programs are quite incomplete even in terms of formulating visions. The basis for such a conclusion is the fact that very often the visions of community development are even repeated verbatim. In total, 9 visions were identified, which are included in the programs of 48 communities. These groups are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Groups of communities whose development visions have similar content [25]

Communities with a similar development vision	The number of them
Ashtarak, Masis, Vedi, Araks, Armavir, Baghramyan, Ferik, Abovyan, Arzni, Hrazdan, Tatev, Yeghegis, Vayk	13
Alagyaz, Arevut, Tsaghkahovit, Verin Dvin, Vanadzor, Akunk, Amasia	7
Talin, Lori Berd, Garni, Berd, Dilijan	5
Khoi, Metsamor, Parakar, Chambarak, Gyulagarak	5
Spitak, Ashotsk, Gyumri, Tegh, Ijevan	5
Martuni, Vardenis, Kapan, Sisian	4
Tsaghkadzor, Nairi, Nor Hachn, Jrvezh	4
Gavar, Ani, Artik	3
Tumanyan, Pambak	2
Total	48

By studying the data in Table 3, we can record that there are also problems with development programs at the level of community development. 69% of communities have a problem because in so many cases the community does not have a vision that is unique and not replicated in any other community development program. The degree of negativity of the situation increases even more when, in addition to content matches, there are even almost complete word matches. This means that instead of projecting their own vision and developing a development plan based on it, community governing bodies prefer to copy key elements of other communities' development plans. Such a situation is far from effective, because the programs developed in this way cannot ensure the effective implementation of regional development strategies, and the regional development strategies implemented in this way cannot lead to the full implementation of the state territorial development strategy and the achievement of established standards. And it is due to such circumstances that the process of ensuring the standards defined by the territorial development strategy of the Republic of Armenia mostly does not ensure high performance.

Thus, the foundations of territorial development policy in RA are defined by the

Constitution of RA, and many important legal documents have been developed to regulate the sphere, and many programs have been implemented. Moreover, territorial policy in RA is based on the principles of strategic management. However, the regional development strategy in RA has both content deficiencies and issues of ensuring standards. The problem is exacerbated by examining regional development strategies and community development plans, which, by and large, have many unacceptable overlaps. In other words, there is an approach and goal setting to ensure the desired result, but there is no systematic regulation and process management. In this case, policy improvement is simply a necessity, otherwise not only will it not be possible to ensure the territorial symmetry, but also existing disparities will only expand.

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