Chapter 14
The Municipal Map in Portugal:
Such a Different Reality From France and Spain

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ABSTRACT

The municipality is the basic territorial organization for almost all the Member States of the European Union and has approximately the same attributions in all these. Even so, the territorial structure of municipalities differs in each of the Member States, and it is possible to group them into two large groups: those that have implemented reforms with a consequent reduction in the number of these entities and those with a high number of municipalities. Although Spain is a neighbor of Portugal and Portugal gets some influences from France, in fact the territorial organization of municipalities corresponds to very different realities. Through this research you can see that Portugal did reform its municipalities while France and Spain failed to do so. However, they all recognize that there is a need to reform the territorial structure of municipalities.

INTRODUCTION

The territorial structure of municipalities differs in each of the Member States and can be grouped into two main groups: on the one hand Member States of European Union which have implemented reforms with a consequent reduction in the number of such entities, such as Portugal, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands; and from other Member States with many municipalities, such as France and Spain.

Portugal pioneered this reform. Like this, in the nineteenth century, PASSOS MANUEL implemented a reform that reduced in Portugal more than 800 municipalities to about 351. The author considers that this reform served as a foundation for the current territorial organization of municipalities in Portugal because currently there are 308 municipalities in Portugal distributed between the mainland and the archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores. Most of them obtained the configuration and territorial structure approximated to the current one from this reform (Oliveira, 2013).

Thus, a hundred years after Portuguese reform, West Germany has reduced from about 24,500 to just over 8,000 counties, although, after reunification with East Germany, the number of counties has increased to over 16,000. Belgium, which for historical reasons, including its annexation to France by Napoleon Bonaparte which lasted until the Battle of Waterloo, had 2,586 municipalities, after the reform begun in the 1980s, merged the municipalities, reducing them to 589. The same happened in the Netherlands, which reduced the number of municipalities from 1,200 to 500. Also, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have significantly reduced the number of municipalities, currently counting some 300 municipalities. Also, Greece about 15 years ago has reduced from 6,000 municipalities to just over 1,000 (Jesus, 2018).

Differently, this was not the case in France and Spain. Attempts to reduce the number of municipalities have failed in these countries, but they have tried alternative solutions of cooperation and association.

However, the European Union has recently tried to reduce public spending and debt in the Member States, imposing either directly (in the case of Portugal and Greece in 2011) or indirectly the rationalization of the administrative apparatus. Besides that the theme of the reform and reduction of municipalities has been debated over time, for more than a century, in France and Spain, without success.

In this chapter it is essential to verify the reason why there are 308 municipalities in Portugal for a population of 10.561.614 habitants, while in Spain there are 8.000 municipalities for a population of 40.847.371 habitants, and in France there are 36.000 municipalities for 61.465.709 habitants.

The author intends to know the historical evolution of the municipal plan in Portugal with special emphasis on the reforms implemented by Passos Manuel and intends also to demonstrate why France and Spain have so many municipalities even if they recognize that it is necessary to change this reality.

The objective of this study is to demonstrate that without population and territory, municipalities are not able to perform the role assigned to them, so it is necessary to reform. To discuss such a complex issue, it is necessary to reflect before taking any restructuring measures. Portugal maybe an example to follow.

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