

## **Regional identity, activation of territorial communities and the potential of the development of peripheral regions**

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### **Abstract**

The article informs about the extension of the space polarisation research in Czechia – the approaches of “new” regional geography i.e. of cultural-historical, historic-geographical and politics dimensions and suitability of the combination of extensive and intensive research forms. The author also pays attention to the dichotomy of the consequences of space polarisation during activation of territorial communities; as in the negative sense of the word (“the struggle” against the centre) as in the positive sense – in the sphere of regional development and controlled management of the territory using local, regional specifics. In conclusion two dimensions of the research of regional identity of inhabitants in Czechia are presented. The first one expresses differences among perception of individual hierarchical levels of regions, the second one then regional differences of regional identity index as a complex indicator showing the relation of inhabitants to the territory they are living and working in.

**Key words:** new regional geography, regional identity, peripheral region, core-periphery, new regionalism

### **Introduction**

Terms, definitions and paradigm of individual scientific disciplines are in progress; as in time as in the relation to social context and are of great importance to the identity of the subject among other scientific disciplines and branches. These terms actually play two roles in social science. They form and operate the approaches aimed at analysing of theoretically and empirically based frames of the society from the concerned discipline point of view, further on they are important in the relation to the society itself (e.g. in politics, culture and so on).

The term region (or alterations to the terms space or place) is one of the fundamental terms in geography. This term is also distinctive to the discipline perceived as “the queen of geography” – regional geography, the discipline gaining in importance again (overcome persistently criticised descriptiveness, under the influence of the development of thought in social science and increasing interdisciplinary prospects in social science generally).

The aim of this contribution is not to give a complete overview of new trends in regional geography, which is offered as by domestic (inland) as by foreign references (Allen 1998; Blažek, Uhlíř 2002; Claval 1987, 1998; Kasala 1997a, 1997b, 1999; Paasi

1986; 2001; Pred 1986). The aim is to draw attention to aspects to which the attention has not been paid adequately in Czech geography and which are coming out from existing knowledge of component disciplines predominantly historical and cultural geography (Graham 1998; Graham, Nash 2000; Hesper, Kearns 2002; Chromý 2003a, 2004a). The matter in hand is emphasising the interest in the aspects of the development of regions (the process of their forming) as the opposite to form, the stress on the uniqueness of place/region originating from the history of the territory, the interest in culture forming or rather everyday life and last but not least in regional identity and the process of its forming. The interest in problematic regions – economically weak, rural, structurally affected regions, border regions etc., is evident from territorial delimitation point of view.

New trends in regional geography also spread to the research of space polarisation and borderlands in Czechia realised by geographical research institutions in Prague, Plzeň and Ústí nad Labem (Jančák et al 2003–2005; Jeřábek, Dokoupil, Havlíček et al 2004). Existing research of peripheral regions has been carried out predominantly on the basis of evaluating of socio-economic and physic-geographical indicators; e.g. Marada's extensive research (2001, 2003). These approaches can be evaluated relevant in the connection with identification and delimitation of problematic regions. Causes and consequences of space polarisation necessarily don't have to be related only to natural or social conditions in the territory. They reflect general and specific developmental processes but also the "quality" of human potential and "activity" of the inhabitants in a region. The inhabitants of problematic regions can resign (be passive) however they can make themselves active. Reactions to deepening regional differences can be heightening necessity of inhabitants to identify themselves with the region they are living in. Defining against the others (more successful, centres, "administrating" units) leads often to mobilisation of periphery inhabitants who are "unsuccessful", "problematic", controlled. Identification and emphasizing of regional uniqueness (specifics) – defining against neighbours, possibly centres – can be perceived as chances of possible development of economic activities in regions (e.g. on the basis of the development of services, tourism, recreation etc.). These "soft" factors then open a space for carrying out of intensive research (Blažek, Uhlíř 2002; Sayer 1984, 1992). Research in regional identity of inhabitants is a topical and so far not sufficiently handled theme in Czechia. Regional consequences of globalisation, integrating and transforming processes are studied predominantly with the stress on social and economic aspects – mostly analyses of "hard" and relatively easy available data in Czechia (see e.g. Hampl et al 1996; Hampl et al 2001). Aspects of socio-cultural character ("soft" factors – identity, attitudes of inhabitants, civic society, culture and so on) are on the margin of interest on the contrary to e.g. Anglo-Saxon world. And even in spite of the fact that connections of development of mainly problematic regions with "human" potential of the region (relation of inhabitants to the territory, solidarity with the region and regional communities, the process of image making of regions – both from outside and inside, the role of culture and so on) have been clearly proved. In Czech geography the identity of inhabitants in the relation to regions is dealt with particularly by geographers in Ostrava and Brno (thus historical Moravia and Silesia lands). Identities with lower territorial units, natural cultural regions are dealt with by

e.g. Vencálek (1988), with historic land Daněk (1993, 2002) and Siwek (1996, 1999), Siwek and Kaňok (2000) and in discussion also Chromý (1997, 2004b), Řehák (1998), Vaishar (2004) and others. Research of regional identity of inhabitants has got markedly interdisciplinary character. Even Czech sociology is not comprehensively engaged in the issue of human identity or group identity except only e.g. Havelka et al (2002) and Zich ed. (2003).

### **New regionalism and broader connections of spatial polarization**

The development of the world and especially Europe could be characterised by deepening of a number of opposed global and regional processes for the last twenty years. On one hand we witness strengthening of globalisation tendencies, which are de facto supported or enforced by the processes of integration predominantly at supranational level. On the other hand globalisation brings the loss of orientation, uncertainty, rejection of centralisation and consequently also an emphasis of uniqueness and following activation of the tendencies to fragmentation e.g. by strengthening of regional and local self-government. This all, raised by a break up/disintegration of the whole systems (often accompanied by politic-military violence), by a process of society transformations and so on, leads to such changes, which Europe on the continental scale and with similar intensity have not gone through for minimum two centuries.

New European regionalism can be evaluated as up-to-date forward-looking principle/concept. In relation to peripheral regions it emphasises that their development cannot be reached only through state support and developing programmes (by activities "from above") but predominantly by effort and activity of regions themselves (by activities "from below"). Similarly to old regionalism marked out by provincialism, nearly non-critical patriotism and by the defence of the "right to roots" also new regionalism is finding its critics. For example Süßner (2002) doesn't agree even with the forming regions concept itself and identity forming, argues over the role of culture and last but not least he refutes the existence of regional mentalities. He assumes that today's regions are "creations" of regionalists likewise national states have been "creations" of nationalists.

National state has probably already fulfilled its function however it still is the main agent of integrating process. On one hand pushing of national/state interests that weakens the power of regions has become an inseparable part of integrating processes; on the other hand integrating processes are accompanied logically also by proceeding regionalism. The process of regionalism no doubt opens the space to become an active part of a greater whole however its consequences are unambiguous. The dispute documented by discussions about different forms of identity of people can stand as an illustration. Collective European identity of people is more talked about than becoming an integral part of everyday life. Identity of inhabitants with regions they are living in is then perceived like folklore matter or even a threat splitting the power of national states.

Although the position of national states is getting weaker in the sphere of economy, they don't want to cope with the loss of political power. Independent national state, defined by space (territory), economy (national market), language, cultural and historic roots, is nowadays forced to participate in handling issues exceeding its borders and

thus reducing its sovereignty (competition of international market, environmental issues, migration, control of technological developments etc.).

It can be judged, indubitably, that the future of Europe is in mutual combination of internationalism with regionalism. The process of “awakening” of regions and its filling by e.g. forming of the conception of Europe of regions is characteristic by dis-integrating sense; yet after thirty years it has got also clearly pro-integrating content. It is no longer evaluated as a nostalgic return to the Middle Ages but still it is perceived as a process endangering the nations – their state integrity.

Regionalism is an important principle strengthening the development of democracy and liberty. The life of Europe formed “from below”, one of the fundamental features of which is an immediate participation of people in forming their “home” and workaday living (everydayness), accompanies also cultural autonomy of regions efforts and at the same time represents a stimulation for self-determination of their inhabitants.

The people’s affinity to the region, living in and belonging to the given region can never associate all people. Nevertheless it associates certain social groups in the region itself and on the basis of these relations we can define the demarcation/delimitation of local and regional communities against other (neighbouring). The content of regional identity is variable, too – beside other in the connection with changes of social, political and cultural conditions in regions. Last but not least the people’s belonging to the region can react to economic (un)success of the region and identity is often formed also under the influence of historical connections (e.g. nostalgia for former coexistence in one territorial unit), or might be burdened and formed on the basis of historical experience (“we” versus “they”).

### **Regional identity**

Identity is the way which either individual or the group of individuals define themselves, feel their existence (uniqueness) and which support their consciousness in the relation to others. Identity can have a number of forms mutually overlapping or complementing. The spatial (geographical) aspect is one of the aspects represented in the identity forming process. The people’s relation to their region is a natural part of their lives. Particular territory with specific social, economic or developmental conditions (with specific historical development) serves as a base for forming of territorial/regional identity. Natural conditions as well as the landscape resulting from the interaction of man and nature can also play key role in forming of the regional identity (Black, Butlin 2001; Graham, Nash eds. 2000; Tuan 2001).

The “sense” of place has been and often is attributed to the space (on different hierarchical levels: place/locality – micro-region – region). Leaving out the meaning of the state territory and borders for forming national and state identity, regional/territorial identity and the relation to the place can play a role even in regional development of smaller territorial units – administrative, cultural, border regions etc.

Several principles of identity, thus ways people use places for own identity forming, can be distinguished at once (Gustafson 2001). 1) First, also from importance point of view, is the principle of differentiation of ourselves from others on the basis of the place we are living at (a separate problem is the borders delimitation of this place/territory).

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2) The consciousness of our own life continuity that we have lived through at the same place for a long time or we have moved from a similar place contributes to defining of ourselves. 3) The principle of self-esteem when we have feeling of the pride of the place we are living at. 4) The place through its qualities can to some extent contribute to self-efficacy. These principles concern individual identity and also individual space category – place. Besides individual/local identity we can speak as about the above mentioned collective (regional) identity as also about identity of regions.

### **Dimensions of regional identity**

Regional identity can be structured (Chromý 2003a; Paasi 1986, 2001). On one hand we speak about the identity of region on the other hand about regional identity of its population. Identity can belong to different hierarchical levels of regions (localities, micro-regions, regions, macro-regions etc.). Thus we distinguish dual boundary building: territorial and social and also the forming of territorially and socially defined affiliations and identity assignment (being aware of the existence of overarching, shared identities). So for example the awareness of affiliation to national state can be higher than to administrative units they are living in or to supranational formations (e.g. the European Union).

Identity of regions can be perceived on two levels: subjective and objective. Subjective level involves images of inhabitants and individuals living out of region (we speak also about regional consciousness). Objective level reflects the classifications created in frame of different scientific disciplines on the basis of division of labour, commute, physic-geographical conditions and so on.

Identity of an individual comprises more “identifications” characterised (typical) by hierarchical structure. The structure of identifications transforms more or less during the life. Those remaining forms sort of a core of that “whom a human is” (Zich 2003, s. 19). Regional identity is formed, developed and changed. Changed are the developmental aspects of its forming (boundary, identities and affiliations are not given for ever) which are influenced by both outer and inner conditions.

The significance of regional identity in the process of institutionalisation of regions – gelling their spatial forms, forming of symbolic contours, development of institutions, embedding of region as a part of regional system and regional consciousness of the society is evident (Paasi 1986).

The process of regional identity forming is based on certain identity mobilisation that is one of the means of the demarcation of power and territory. Sufficiently different regional identity can justify the claim for forming own (separate) community, or rather politic-territorial system.

The significance of identity mobilisation is evident particularly in the frame of relation (or conflict) centre – periphery and/or identity mobilisation of peripheral communities. With the aim to enforce their own goals (interests) not only social groups (religious minorities, women, homosexuals and others – that are the objective of interest of mainly sociological studies) but also national or ethnic minorities, the inhabitants of problematic regions – i.e. structurally affected and economically weak regions, which are the object of political and cultural geographies.

Besides existing concepts of centre – periphery in geography (see e.g. Havlíček, Chromý 2001), centre can be perceived in accord with political scientists Barša and Strmiska (1999) as a privileged spot in the space, where decisive tools and sources of “operating” power and control (the seat of central political, economical, cultural and other institutions) are concentrated. The most important decisions are taken here, the interaction of dominant officials is the most frequent here, identity is improved by relevant ceremonies and represented by various “central” monuments here. Periphery then is the opposite of the centre – power and politically non-privileged area, of which key importance characters are distance, difference and dependence. Periphery is administrated (subordinated) by the centre (or to several centres) and controlled by it (them).

The relation centre – periphery is not unidirectional and one-dimensional. Forming of centres and peripheries is logical and natural result of structure-functional differentiation of space. Forming and reproduction of peripheries and centres represent the complex process with specific dynamics. This process is necessary to investigate in relevant geopolitical, geo-economical, geo-cultural and geo-historical contexts. It is necessary to take into consideration qualitatively different conditions and factors influencing these processes, primarily different rate of social and political mobilisation, circumstances and timing of building tight relations between central and local elites.

None territorial identity can be defined solely on the basis of economical structure and mostly neither on the basis of class social structure of periphery. Above all culture-historical and culture-linguistics dimensions should be taken into account.

Identity mobilisation of a peripheral group can evoke contra mobilisation of the relevant central establishment. Each periphery has certain minimal different identity (at least as a non-centre) to its disposal in a given context. The rate and character of this different, and potentially separable, identity condition the character of centre-periphery interactions and participate in forming of power-political consequences of these interactions.

Peripheries having sufficiently strong and own identity to their disposal can take advantage of this circumstance as to escalating or rising to a higher degree the resistance to the centre through the effective delegitimation of the frame of given political system (socio-cultural and politic-territorial bordering), as to strengthening of inner integration of the territory and pragmatic use of the specifics of development, such as phase delay of the process of modernisation.

In the process of modernisation the centre has acted as its main booster propagator, peripheral regions have inclined to conservative attitudes and the defence of old-fashioned things order. The process of transition of traditional society into modern one has appeared later in this way and perceived peripheries and traditional society has been preserved in the series of cultural and economical relicts and in the landscape as well.

The process of growing activity of territorial communities brings benefit as local/regional as general when the second benefit is conditioned by the first benefit).

The region, which people affiliated them to, can be delimited in various ways. Mostly it is represented by a certain historically originated territorial whole characterised by relative demarcation (sense of borders), its own history, partly by specific culture and last but not least by social structure of the population. Each of these and other characters (economic standard, transport accessibility, environment, landscape type, aesthetic appearance and so on) can represent another partial dimension of regional identity or at least can influence it. Region is usually named. The name used in everyday communication mostly doesn't correspond to the area of administrative units. In spite of it people understand and use it just as a tool of identification (Zich 2003, p. 22).

Identity of a man thus cannot be perceived in a static way as forever given and stabilised structure (Zich 2003). Yet still several types of regional identity – regions to those regional sense of the people is connected, can be distinguished from the development point of view.

- a) Regions that have gained sovereignty and identity forming have followed. Vysočina or Moravskoslezský (Moravian-Silesian) regions can stand as examples among new regions – both territories are separated by traditional identity with historical lands and historic-geographical borders are still perceptible in the minds of inhabitants (Siwek 1996, 1999; Chromý 2000; Siwek, Kaňok 2001; Zeman 2001 and others).
- b) Regions with traditional regional sense (regional identity) that have not gained full sovereignty and institutional system of which has not been completed. For example, traditional cultural regions in Czechia – Chodsko, Valašsko, Slovácko and others (Vencálek 1998).
- c) Regions with “lost” identity that can be divided into three groups. The first – areas markedly affected by industrialisation (the process of society modernisation started already in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The second – the areas formed on the basis of national consciousness in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Podřipsko) that have lost their dominant ideological function. The third group comprises areas of borderlands with transferred inhabitants after World War II (by the transfer of the Czechoslovak Germans to Germany), which have lost identity holder (local people). The identity of Czech borderlands (till the year 1945) remarkably lives on abroad. Regional identity of present inhabitants of these borderlands thus gets into the imaginary “conflict” with the original identity of transferred inhabitants. For example the inhabitants of Czech-Austrian borderland in Česká Kanada region at Jindřichohradecko consider themselves South-Bohemians but the Germans who lived here till the half of the 1940s are still identifying themselves with the South-Moravian Germans (Chromý 2003b). Regions of Novobystřicko, Slavonicko, Znojemsko and Mikulovsko are still regarding like “their” region from their point of view. Somewhat “schizophrenic” identity situation of the inhabitants of historical region of Southwest Moravia – Dačicko and Slavonicko – where a part of inhabitants, mainly those who came to the region during the resettlement or after the abolition of the establishment based on historical lands as territorial-administrative units, feel themselves like the South-Bohemians while “native” population express (e.g. in elections) their identity with historical land – Moravia (Chromý 2004b; Vaishar 2004; Zeman 2001) worth mentioning here.



d) Regions “seeking” identity, partly or purposely institutionalised. Those are mainly the areas with existing purpose micro-regional associations of municipalities using predominantly in names traditional regional consciousness (Český Merán, Podblanicko, Horácko), today however in a different state than they used to have in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Higher self-governing units delimitation of those by most of their borders copy the delimitation of historical administrative units – e.g. Jihočeský and Jihomoravský regions respectively South Bohemia and South Moravia could be also included into this group. Separate type of regions being at the beginnings of the process of regional identity forming form then the areas of Euroregions, with names mostly expressing the relation to the landscape or elements of the landscape the Nisa, the Labe, Krušnohoří, Praděd, Silva Nortica and others.

### The differentiation of regional identity in Czechia

The research of regional identity of inhabitants in Czechia has been carried out in the frame of the grant project of the Grant Agency of Charles University “Methodological approaches in geographical research of cultural regions of Czechia” (Chromý, Marada 2002–2003). The aim of the investigation there was to find out territorial differentiations of perceiving specifics of individual regions of Czechia by inhabitants of regions and through that also perceiving of specific features of socio-cultural surroundings. The results of questionnaire inquiry contribute to answering of the question whether the relation of inhabitants to the territory differs in various parts of the country and whether core and peripheral areas can be identified from regional identity point of view. It is assumed that affiliation of inhabitants to the area they are living in is stronger in peripheral (rural, economically weaker) regions while regional identity of inhabitants in core areas (industrial, or possibly structurally affected areas) is weaker.

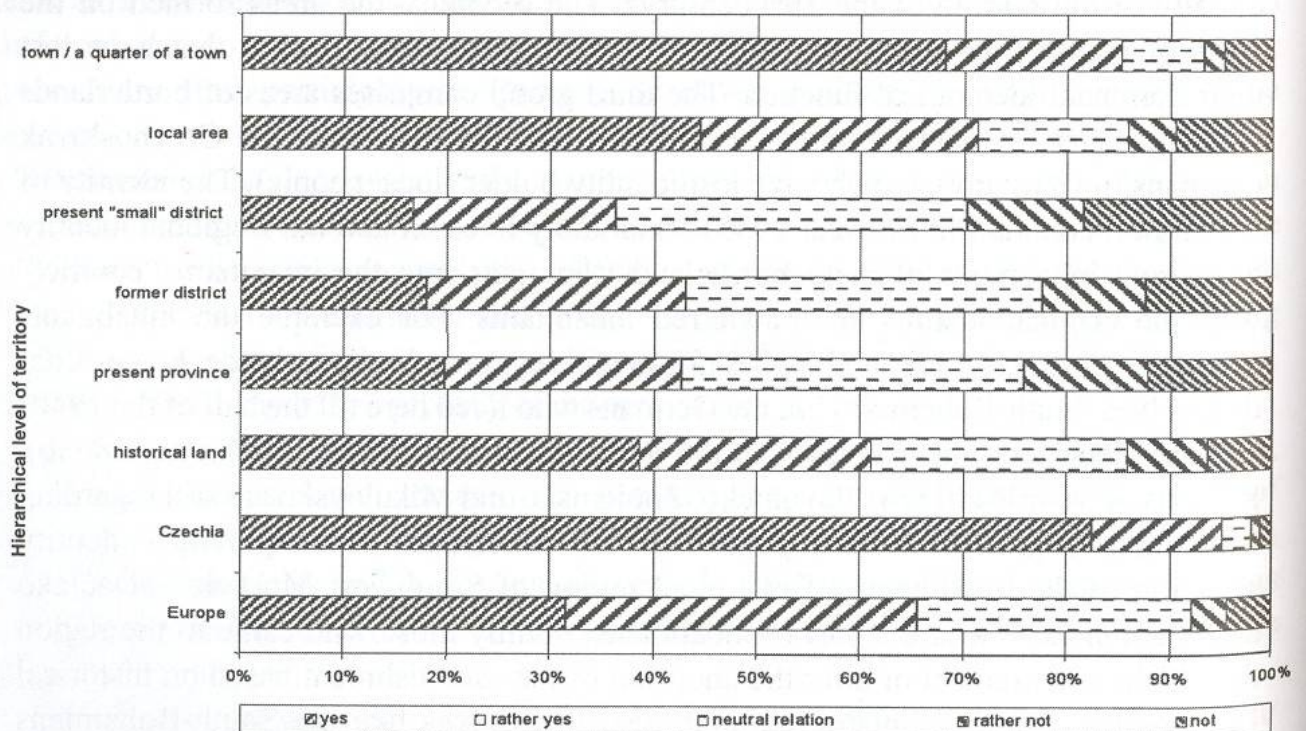


Fig. 1 I feel myself above all the inhabitant of: . . .

Source: Chromý, Marada (2003)

Respondents to the questionnaire inquiry have been 459 geography, history and social science basis teachers at secondary schools. Thus individuals who, through their activities, participate in forming of socio-cultural surroundings in individual regions and take part in passing the “patterns” of behaviour in the frame of education on.

The structure of respondents has been balanced both as regionally (all 14 provinces of Czechia) as according to basic demographic features. Besides other the research has proved the following facts:

Similarly to other parts of the world the inhabitants of Czechia identify themselves with different regions (territorial/administrative units). They feel the relation to place (a town, a part of town), to local area, to administrative unit, to historical land, to national state, to supranational territorial units. Naturally significant differences in the rate of identification with individual levels of regions can be observed.

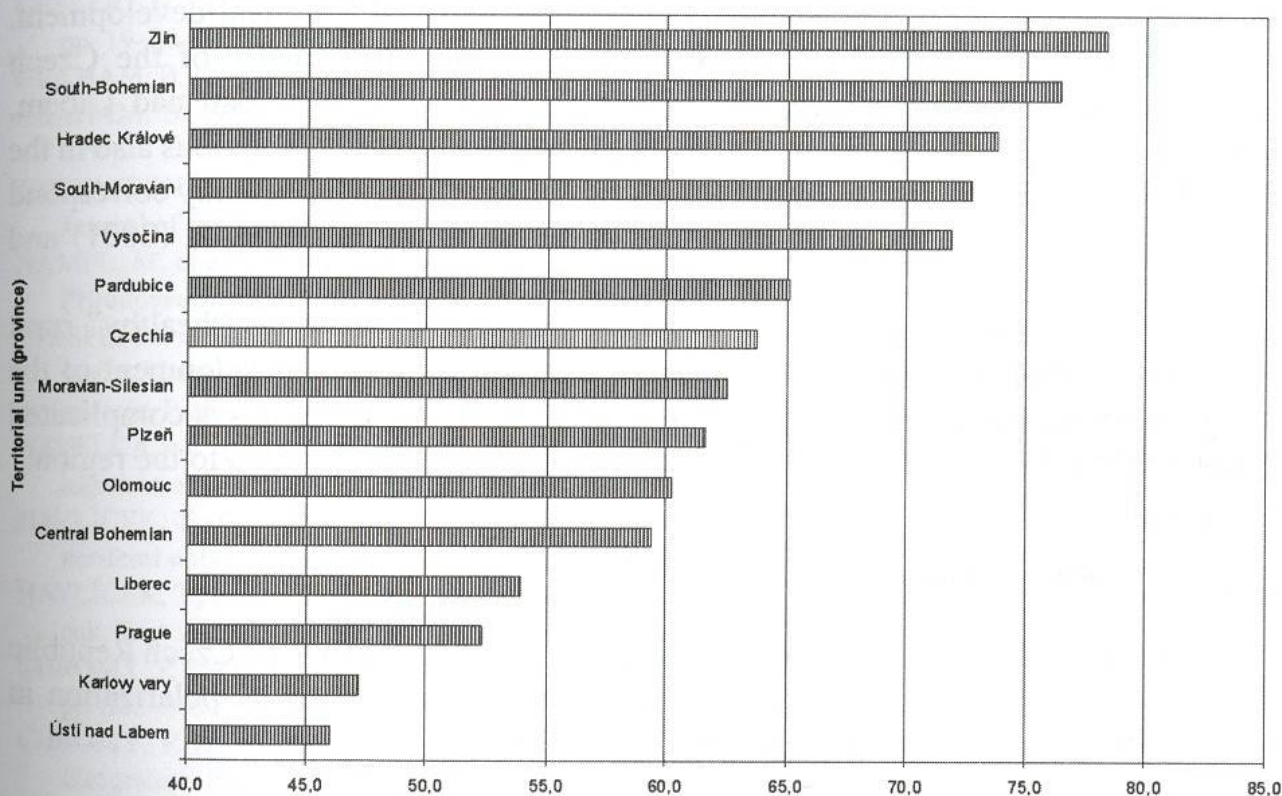


Fig. 2 The index of regional identity of secondary teachers in individual regions of Czechia

Source: Chromý, Marada (2003)

Human identity has got many dimensions and complex/complicated structure of various things and values (Zich 2003). The sense of affiliation to area has got a complex character and it is formed by a relation to the clean environment, to the landscape and the beauties of the nature, to the history of a region, pride at personalities who the area has given to mother land or the “world”, pride at customs, traditions and their preserving, but also the evaluating of qualities of local people, sport activities and successes, business activities (craftsmanship/workmanship, diligence) of local people etc. Complex indicator expressing average value of positive attitude of the respondents to the items given above is called the index of regional identity.

Space polarisation – in the sense of core and peripheral areas – demonstrate itself not only in social and economic development of these areas but also in thought of people and their relation to the areas they are living in. The results of the realised questionnaire inquiry cannot be overestimated. In spite of that there is evident very strong relation of Czech inhabitants to Czechia, a town/a part of town and local area from the analysis. On the contrary weak relation to administrative units – current “small” districts (new administrative units implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2003), districts and provinces has been proved. The relation of Czech inhabitants to Europe can be evaluated rather positive.

Higher rate of regional identity is demonstrated by inhabitants of mostly rural, economically rather weaker regions. On the contrary the lowest rate of regional identity can be recorded in areas that have experienced complicated historical development. The areas that were resettled after World War II after the transfer of the Czech Germans and the regions structurally affected – particularly then Ústí nad Labem, Karlovy Vary and Liberec provinces. Low rate of regional identity is obvious also in the capital – Prague. In this sense territorial differentiations of regional identity correspond to delimitation of core and peripheral regions as carried out by Marada (2001) and Havlíček, Marada (2004).

While the management of territory can use potential of relatively “healthy” rural environment and positive relation to the region in the process of development of the first group of regions, the development of structurally affected regions is complicated by not only physic state of their landscapes but also by the non-relation to the region.

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