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THE REGION AS A CONCEPT: TRADITIONAL AND CONSTRUCTIVIST VIEW

KAROL KASALA[1],[*], MIROSLAV ŠIFTA[2]

[1] Department of Regional Geography, Protection and Planning of the Landscape, Faculty of Natural Science, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia
[2] Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Faculty of Science, Charles University, Czechia
* Corresponding autor: karolkasala@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The main goal of this article is to assess and compare the various understandings of the concept of the region. The aim is to characterize the concept of a region as well as how its meaning has changed through geographical history, to mention the most important personalities and how they understood the concept of region. The article presents two different ways of looking at a region: 1) the region in the sense of traditional regional geography; 2) the region in the new regional geography (region understood as a social construct). The article then compares the two approaches and outlines both their advantages and their disadvantages. The first section presents a brief overview of how the understanding of the concept of region developed. The following part focuses on development of the concept of region as a social construct, especially in the context of the development of new regional geography, cultural turn and new regionalism. Finally, the article emphasizes the essential complementarity of the two approaches and briefly proposes a more complex scheme of analysis of a region.

Keywords: region; traditional regional geography; new regional geography; region as a social construct

1. Introduction

"*Geography changes as society changes.*" (Livingstone 1992: 347)

According to its advocates, regional geography is the core and heart of geography, the highest art of a geographer and the reason for its existence, and the advocates call for "back to the basics" (Whittlesey 1954; Hart 1982; Watson 1983; Lewis 1985). According to spatial scientists, regional geography is not exact, it does not search for laws and regularities, and its lack of a theoretical and methodological framework excludes it from the portfolio of exact sciences (Fred K. Schaeffer [1953] and other advocates of geography as a spatial science). Due to its philosophic-paradigmatic background there are also different views of the conceptual shape of regional geography, its idiographic or idiographic-nomothetic character, its focus on explanation or understanding and so on.

Many authors have participated in the discussion about the character of regional geography (Hartshorne 1939; Whittlesey 1954; Hart 1982; Johnston, Hauer, Hoekveld 1990; Entrikin, Brunn 1989; Nir 1990; Wood 1999; Claval 2007). On one hand there are the ever-strengthening positions of the advocates of "traditional regional geography" who emphasize a "return to the basics", "heart of geography", "nature of geography" (Hartshorne 1939), and a return to Hartshorne (Entrikin, Brunn 1989). Many of them stress the uniqueness of locations: "Hartshorne is correct about the uniqueness of locations" (Bunge 1979: 173). Their arguments are also supported by an emphasis on the importance of local

scale in postmodern geography (Duncan 1996). On the other hand, there is a new (reconstituted, transformed, reconstructed) regional geography (Gilbert 1988) which started the exactization process of regional geography. This has meant there is a visible shift of approach in regional geography, mostly a more significant orientation towards processes and contexts (Tomaney 2009).

The difference between traditional regional geography and new regional geography (social-constructivist approaches in regional geography) has kept increasing gradually (Paasi 2009). The division of regional geography into two different approaches brought about several discrepancies. As a consequence, it influenced regional geographical practice and the way a region was understood, i.e.: what is a region (a complex unit or a social construct); what isn't a region (the social-constructivist new regional geography does not take nature sufficiently into account); how to investigate a region (social-constructivist approaches emphasize that contexts and underlying processes are important, whereas traditional regional geography is rather a descriptive science). Traditional regional geography uses traditional methods (statistical analysis, fieldwork, regionalization etc.), whereas new regional geography uses qualitative and contextual methods. Traditional regional geography attempts to "see the region objectively", whereas new approaches see the region more subjectively. This has led to our decision to focus on the meaning of the concept of region, and to focus on how this meaning developed over time. We also wanted to provide a comparison of basic approaches.

In this article, we focus on the changes in understanding the concept of region as follows: its complexity; its synthetic character; its unity; the role of man, nature and society in the formation of region; the interconnections of its individual parts; uniqueness; dynamic vs. static character; region as a result of development vs. region as a process. The difference between the traditional concept of a region and a region as a social construct (as understood in new regional geography) is as follows:

Traditional concept of a region	A region as a social construct
Complex	Predominantly social
Static	Dynamic
As a consequence of development	As a consequence of process
Understanding	Explanation and understanding
Actors: man/society and nature	Actors: society
Geographical spheres: physical-geographical; economic; social; cultural; political	Geographical spheres: predominantly social and political
Unique, as a consequence of unique combination of phenomena	Unique, as a consequence of factors and processes

As well as the term region, we also use the terms landscape (landscape, according to Carl Ortwin Sauer can similarly be understood as a region) and place ("Even for many new regional geographers, the meanings of region and place are more or less similar or overlapping"; Paasi 2009: 224).

This article was written by two authors. One is a regional geographer and presents his view of a region from the point of view of traditional regional geography. The other is a social geographer and represents the approach of social constructivism in new regional geography.

The resulting article focuses on how the understanding of the concept of a region developed throughout the history of geography. The main goal is to assess the various understandings of the concept of the region and to present the most appropriate conceptual framework for a region and understanding it. The authors attempt to find answers to the (following) research questions: How has the meaning (understanding) of the concept of region developed over time? How was the concept of region perceived by significant geographers? What were the weaknesses and strengths of the main approaches? What are the main contributions of the main approaches? How can the positive aspects (those bringing some benefits) of both approaches be used when characterizing a region? In the conclusion, we offer a proposal for an analysis (and of synthesis) of a region, using the methodological contributions of both traditional and social-constructivist understandings of a region. The article takes the form of a discussion between the supporters of the traditional meaning vs. supporters of the region as a social construct (Hart 1982; Hartshorne 1939; Johnston, Hauer, Hoekveld

1990; Murphy 1991; Paasi 1986; Sauer 1925; Semian 2016; Whittlesey 1954 etc.). This provides an analysis of the concept of a region in individual approaches, as well as an analysis of the concept of the region by different geographers. The comparison of different approaches (traditional vs. new regional geography) is based on an analysis of the strengths (primarily) and weaknesses. The strengths and weaknesses of these approaches (to the region) relate to the theoretical-methodological area (complex vs partial understanding of a region; static vs dynamic region; description vs contextual and processual understanding) and to applications (used in particular in regional development).

2. The concept of a region in traditional regional geography

Throughout the history of geography, the region was, and is, its most important topic, its main concept, and its main object of study. However, the concept of the region was understood differently throughout the history: a region was understood as a pure intellectual construction (Hartshorne 1939); as a concept or method (Whittlesey 1954); as a system (Nir 1990); as a total and complex unit (Paul Vidal de la Blache); or it was understood in the sense that a region is no more than a sum of its components (Hartshorne 1939), etc. During the 20th century, geography gradually split into two disciplines: human and physical (e.g. Hartshorne 1939). This was due to the following: 1) the importance of nature in the process of formation and development of the region kept decreasing; and 2) differences between the methodologies of natural and social sciences. As a consequence a region is understood as a social construct.

2.1 Origins of modern geography

Carl Ritter is the father of modern regional geography. He is the originator of new scientific geography, which is based on an organic unity between man and nature (Martin 2005: 125). "Ritter's … regional geography is conceived as *unity in diversity*; not an inventory, but an attempt to understand the *interconnections* and *interrelations* that make the area a mutual (*zusammenhängig*) association" (Nir 1990: 34). For Ritter, the earth and its inhabitants are in a close relation; the human and physical worlds are inseparable (Cresswell 2013: 40). In 1859, Darwin published his work *On the Origin of Species.* The subsequent approaches – social Darwinism and environmental determinism – explain regional differences as a result of the geographical environment. Such an approach had a decisive influence on geography at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (e.g. the determinist approaches of Friedrich Ratzel and other German authors, Ellen Semple, Ellsworth Huntington were prevailing).

2.2 Paradigm of regional geography

Starting from Vidalian geography we can notice a shift in the understanding of nature: man as an actor is being emphasized, and nature is perceived as a "product of the culture". Paul Vidal de la Blache is known as a representative of possibilism. As opposed to determinism, possibilism understands nature to be the possibility for regional differentiation. Vidalian geography and the whole of French regional geography were holistic and complex (*Géographie Universelle* as well as excellent local studies and regional monographs). Vidalian region is holistic and descriptive unit, with strong personality (Archer 1993: 499). Regional differences and *pays*, however, occurred mainly due to *genre de vie*. Man and human group can never escape the restrictions of the *milieu*, the natural surroundings upon which they depend (Mercier 2009: 148). It is necessary to add that *milieu* is not only the natural environment; Vidal makes a distinction between *milieu externe* (physical, not only natural world) and *milieu interne* (values, habits, customs).

Carl Ortwin Sauer, an influential American geographer, laid stress on culture in the landscape genesis, and he is thus a follower of the possibilist Vidal de la Blache. Carl Ortwin Sauer, however, includes nature in his view of landscape (region): "geography is based on the reality of the union of physical and natural elements of the landscape" (Sauer 1925: 325). He emphasized the division of forms into natural and cultural. The first part of his formal morphology includes both the reconstruction and the understanding of the natural landscape (ibid, from p. 333). It consists of geognostic and climatic factors, which are expressed in part through vegetation. Natural factors transform the natural landscape over time into forms (climate, land, sea and coast, vegetation), while creating a natural landscape. The second part of the morphologic analysis includes an analysis of the cultural landscape. Carl Ortwin Sauer argued that culture is the main agent in shaping the cultural landscape: culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, and the cultural landscape is the result (Sauer 1925: 321 and figure, p. 343).

Both Alfred Hettner and Richard Hartshorne influenced the character of geography from the 1930s. William M. Davis described the landscape as a result of processes (such as erosion cycle etc.). His approach significantly influenced Hartshorne (Harvey 2009: 22), who wrote *The Nature of Geography* (Hartshorne 1939). The Hettnerian-Hartshornian chorology studied areal differentiation, and explained it by causal connections between phenomena. Hartshorne's chorology understands the region as a unique area and as a mental construct. In his diagram (Hartshorne 1939: 147, fig. 1). Richard Hartshorne placed an emphasis on regional geography, which in the physical-geographical and human-geographical point of view has a strong character of unity; physical geography is an essential part of geography (Butzer 1989). For Hartshorne, the region is the central organizing concept in geography (Smith 1989: 103). Regions are unique because they are unique combinations of phenomena. Hartshorne's approach is not problem-oriented; he wrote: "the interest of the geographer is not in the phenomena themselves, their origins and processes, but in the relations which they have to other geographic features (i.e. features significant in areal differentiation)" (Hartshorne 1939: 425–426).

2.3 Regional concept from the 1950s

American geography: inventory and prospect gives a deep insight into the perspectives of American geography. The main area of interest in geography covers areal differentiation; geography focuses on interregional similarities and differences, interconnections and movements and on the order found in space (Whittlesey 1954: 21). The region in Whittlesey's sense is a kind of a formal region. The region is a tool used by the regional method. Regions can be single, multiple or total. Complex regions are called total regions, *compages*: "Such a region is an association of inter-related natural and societal features chosen from a still more complex totality because they are believed to be relevant to geographic study." (Whittlesey 1954: 35–36). Geography as a spatial science continues to understand a region in such a formalized way (Whittlesey 1954). This approach was dominant in 1960s and is typical for emphasizing the formal side of a region – spatial pattern, interactions, regularities etc. Spatial science is based on the philosophy of neopositivism and places an emphasis on formulating regularities. As spatial science does not deal with unique regions and their specifities, in this article we provide an analysis only of the traditional region and the region as a social construct.

The development of geography was further influenced by its division into physical and human geography and by its further fragmentation. The ongoing process of the loss of unity was associated with developments in geography (environmental determinism → possibilism → probabilism; from 1980s postmodern and post-structuralist geographies). The emerging new regional geography and cultural turn in the 1980s changed the perception of the region into a region as a social construct. New regional geography turned regional geographers into systematic geographers (Wei 2006: 1397). The understanding of a region as a social construct (in Marxist approaches, a region is produced) is obvious and some authors characterize it as "social (cultural) determinism" (Graham 1999). Due to shift to social constructivism, several articles about the social construction of nature (Demeritt 2002; Evans 2008) and the social construction of scale (Marston 2000) were published. However, Gerard A. Hoekveld identified a new conceptual framework for regional geography, including 8 key concepts, of which only the seventh is nature, with a note: "In regional geography nowadays [nature] is still conceived in a more limited way." (Hoekveld 1990: 27)

And finally, the "more traditional" Israeli regional geographer Dov Nir wrote: "Regional geography deals with the *challenges posed* to a certain *society* at a certain *place* on the globe and with the *responses made by that society*. Its focus is the study of differentiation between societies …" (Nir 1990: 2). A divided geography, however, is "weaker", its competitiveness and reputation fades (e.g. Matthews, Herbert 2004; Castree, Rogers, Sherman 2005).

3. The region as a social construct

3.1 From traditional to new regional geography

Regional geography primarily studies the relationship between humans and the environment they inhabit. "Traditional" regional geography encompasses distinct notions of that relationship, i.e. what is the character of the relationship between man and his environment (deterministic – seen from one direction [Ratzel, Semple] or from the opposite one [Durkheim], and possibilistic [Vidal de la Blache]). Regional geography distinguishes geography from the other "big" fields of science because it is interested "in everything", although within a specific region, or, more precisely, because it studies and explains the differentiation between territories (regions). From the point of view of practical applicability, it abounds with great potential (regionalization, regional development).

Regions are not a purely geographical domain but are also used in many other fields – either as a method (a methodological approach to regionalization, e.g. comparing various regions in geopolitics), or as a tool/ purpose (a pragmatic approach to regionalization – creating regions in order to establish, for example, electoral districts). Regionalization as a method has in fact "endured" even the harsh criticism of regional geography by so-called 'spatial science' in the period following the Second World War.

During the next paradigmatic turn and in the face of criticism from spatial science (which is unable to explain the differentiation of regional development, the way a particular regional organization was established, and the like) the dualistic concept gained strength in geography, which was by then splitting into human geography and physical geography. Regional geography, however, has the advantage of being able to work with knowledge from both these geographical disciplines which sometimes are separated in an overly artificial, dichotomous manner. That is where we see a great "strength" of regional geography.

From the 1960s, roughly, and then during the 1970s and 1980s – after positivistic spatial science encountered sharp criticism for its detachment from the reality of social and political affairs, the "dehumanization" of human geography – human-geographical paradigms have been fragmented into many various directions responding to the diverse problems faced by society: radical geography, humanistic geography, feminist geography, etc.

Regional geography was not the only field to have undergone this change in thought, focused on the influence of culture and society, as it also occurred in other branches of social and human sciences and which is generally referred to as the "social" or "cultural turn" (Barnett 1998, 2009). Another response of regional geography to the cultural turn is, besides the aforementioned multi-paradigmality, its multi-disciplinarity, i.e. adopting and applying methods and knowledge from other branches of social sciences and humanities (e.g. sociology, economy, psychology, historiography and many others).

In relation to regional geography (which has often been regarded as "dead", namely by the adherents of spatial science; Gregory 1978), humanistic geography in particular is understood as a "return" toward the idiographic approaches of traditional schools of regional geography. It is not only about a simple return toward an idiographic conception of space; even though humanistic geography is once more concerned with the uniqueness of specific places or regions but primarily from the perspective of the essence of such uniquenesses, from the perspective of subjective meanings that a person (both the one in the studied environment and the one studying a given environment) attributes to a particular place/region, influencing the given place/region by her/his perception – here we see one of the roots of the so-called new regional geography. In today's post-structuralist new regional geography, a region is perceived as a social construct continually endowed with subjective meaning and – just as in the case of an individual – characterized by a multi-layered identity (region as home, region as a political entity, region as an administrative unit, etc.).

3.2 The region as a social construct

Region specificity and incommutability had already been emphasised by Richard Hartshorne who claimed that a region was an arbitrarily delimitable territory, i.e. a sovereignly subjective matter. Even despite the prevailing systematization characterizing his approach (wherein chorology [regional geography] should involve "knowing everything" about a given territory [based, among others, on traditional German regional geography coined by Alfred Hettner]), his book titled *The Nature of Geography: A Critical Survey of Current Thought in the Light of the Past* (1939) can be understood, owing to the idea of the region as a social construct, as a "bridge" between traditional approaches to regional geography and the new regional geography. The concept of a region as a social construct later became the key concept within the new regional geography (Thrift 1983; Paasi 1986; Gilbert 1988; Murphy 1991; Schmitt-Egner 2002; Claval 2007).

Obviously, the concept of region as a social construct involves an enormous influence of culture and identity,

or, more precisely, that of the cultural, historical and geographical context which plays a cardinal role in the formation of regions (other crucial concepts/key terms of both the new regional geography and the new cultural geography).

Traditional regional geography understood regions as a consequence of the interactions between society and its environment. From the point of view of the new regional geography, research into the interactions between man and nature, or rather, between society and environment, is being replaced with a study of the interrelationship between individual and society. The new regional geography no longer asks merely about "what", "where" and "when" but is interested primarily in the formation process of the region, in the way regions come to existence, for what reason and for what purpose they arise.

Various forms of the concept of a region can be found (not only) in geographical research. All the approaches mentioned above, regions created for the purpose of determining statistical or administrative units, "natural" regions as results of synthetizing analyses generated by traditional regional geographers are always, in a sense, a man-made construct. The region defined in this way is articulated from above by researchers, politicians and other actors; it is a secondary outcome of that particular activity in the course of which the region was established. This is the essential distinction from understanding a region as a social construct within the realm of the new regional geography. Here, regions are not approached as objects of study but rather as subjective constructs, a socio-spatial process. Regions arise from regional, social interactions that take place among individuals, groups and institutions in regional areas. Allen, Massey, Cochrane (1998: 50) suggest that a region is "the product of the networks, interactions, juxtapositions and articulations of the myriad of connections through which all social phenomena are lived out". Regions arise from interactions occurring at different hierarchical and scale levels of the society, i.e. through the actions among individuals, groups, institutions both within and outside a given region (Paasi 1986). As part of region formation, these relationships (all of them) are seen as reciprocal; constituting a condition for these interactions while being their result. It is not of substance whether or not a given individual considers a region to hold an important place in his/her everyday life, yet it is always produced and reproduced via ordinary activities. Kaj Zimmerbauer states that "at the core of social constructionism is the idea of region as a socially produced entity in which the regional consciousness of its inhabitants creates the whole idea" (Zimmerbauer 2011: 255). Individuals, groups and institutions active outside the region are of equal importance in the region-building process, regardless of whether or not they have the power to influence that process, and whether or not they do so deliberately (Paasi 2010).

Leaving aside all actors, their networks and mutual interactions, region formation is closely linked to the physical environment wherein a region is being constructed. A particular landscape and a specific natural environment markedly predetermines and affects both the material and the symbolic aspects of the region forming process, both its material form and its image (Šifta, Chromý 2014; Šifta, Chromý 2017). Many new regional geographers no longer pay much attention to the importance of the physical environment for regional formation. We do not suggest any return to Vidalian possibilism but '*pays*' and '*genre de vie*' cannot be entirely separated from the '*milieu*' (the physical environment) wherein they get their shape and which they obviously influence and transform (Claval 2007; Paasi 2010).

This understanding of the concept of the region as a socio-spatial process has not, however, been unanimous. In the past three decades during which the region as social construct was establishing itself within the new regional geography (Thrift 1983; Pred 1984; Paasi 1986; Gilbert 1988; Murphy 1991), the understanding of this and the approach to it naturally differed in terms of both space and time. Following this initial stage of theoretical and conceptual development of the social constructivist approach toward the region, a wave of (neo-)regionalism could be observed in the 1990s.

Regions as a result of (neo-)regionalistic tendencies

In Europe, (neo-)regionalism manifested itself (in connection to the building of a 'Europe of the regions' within the EU) through an approach to regions from a political and economic perspective (Hettne 2005). We can distinguish two basic types of regionalism: one bottom-up and one top-down. The first one developed mainly owing to voluntary initiatives of citizens living in each particular region or those of local subjects (e.g. microregions, transborder Euroregions and consensual associations of municipalities, etc.). In the second type of regionalism, the development of regions is initiated (taking the example of Europe) by the EU's central institutions with the aim of enhancing regional competiveness and reducing socioeconomic gaps between the developed and the less developed regions (Bristow 2010). Thus new regionalists, by supporting not only socioeconomic, but also sociocultural development of regions (the forming of regional identity including its impact on regional development), respond to the deepening processes of globalization and unification (Chromý 2009; Paasi 2012). They emphasize and take as a basis regional diversity as well as the specific material and cultural values of the given region (Keating 1998; Chromý 2009; Paasi 2012; Jones, Paasi 2013).

Similar manifestations of (neo-)regionalism were also observed in the United States (e.g. Wheeler 2002) and in those Eastern European countries that are not (or were not) EU members (e.g. McMaster 2006).

The region as a brand

The economic or marketing concept of regions represents another approach to regions as social constructs, which was well-marked especially in the first decade of the new millennium. Place marketing and place branding researchers point to the fact that regions are treated as commodities in order to make profit (either by attracting investors, encouraging new inhabitants to move in, or by increasing the turnout of tourism). However, the majority of regions "operate" with place branding and place marketing strictly at the level of "selling" a region as merchandise, using its brands with the aim of commodifying and commercializing it without taking into consideration that the two concepts must be seen as a long-term strategic, synthetic and integral, complex process. This process, which makes part of an overall strategy of the given region for preserving and enhancing its competitive ability, is supposed to satisfy all target groups (Anholt 2003; Hospers 2011; Zimmerbauer 2011; Pike 2009, 2011).

Overlapping regions

Another possible generalizing stream of working with the region as a social construct is constituted by "regional conflict" research projects, which we expect to grow in number in the near future. As is evident from the above, there are increasingly more regions of diverse character (administrative, economic and cultural; numerous tourist regions are emerging, NUTS system regions, transborder regions, all of them of various scale levels, etc.). Many of these more or less spatially delimited units overlap. Along with the changing context, many of them see their meaning change over time. Thus, conflicts of interest between different actors in regional initiatives become more frequent and regional identity becomes internally more fragmented. In addition, outward regional identity becomes ambiguous (Kašková, Chromý 2014).

4. Comparison of approaches: traditional and/or reconstructed region

4.1 The view presented by new regional geography

Owing to the revival of interest in regions within regional geography and beyond, research is becoming increasingly idiographic. When studying specific regions, new regional geographers, however, strive to reveal details on the functioning of regions, trying to make sense of the mechanisms of their formation, transformation and vanishing. Their objective is to interpret this idiographic knowledge, as it seems at first sight, by nomothetic means. The results of such efforts include, for example, Anssi Paasi's theory of institutionalization (Paasi 1986) as well as plentiful attempts to put this into practice (testing the region institutionalization process on specific regions). It is thus a combination of idiographic and nomothetic approaches.

We can, however, ask whether the existence of regional geography is legitimate and necessary. The pieces of knowledge that we learn about a region (as the main research topic) can be simply extracted from all the other systematic subdisciplines of geography, or from other scientific fields as a whole. For example, Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones (2001) claim that priority is no longer given to only one discipline (regional geography), as regions are consistently studied in the whole field of geography. Regional geography is thus not necessary, but regions are what is needed in geography (MacLeod, Jones 2001). Regional geography can still be substituted by using regions as a delimitation of where other disciplines should be applied. The strength of regional geography, however, is in its complexity of synthetizing such pieces of knowledge, analysing them through a perceptive approach and allowing for the historic-geographical context of development in the studied region. Nobody but "complex" regional geographers can adopt such an approach which is crucial to not only understanding the formation process, existence and functioning of a region, but also to applying it, for example, in regional development.

When perceiving the region as a social construct, the strengths of such an approach include the following:
- The nomothetic character of such an approach, which is achieved by providing an explanation of processes and contexts; this is a significant methodological contribution. Contexts and processes enable a better understanding of functioning of regions and thus predict their future changes.
- Focus is given to those social topics, the significance of which within the region is growing constantly.
- A greater emphasis is put on those concepts which were neglected in regional geography in the past: political power and the whole of politics; social differences and social changes; global and local scale etc. That enables a better understanding of the current state of a region.

It is necessary to point out that weaknesses include, in particular, the following:
- Nature is missing; there is a non-complex character;
- Too much emphasis is given to social problems.
- Weaknesses relate to, in particular, the somehow reduced character of a region (the region is not so complex).
- Solutions to problems in a particular region created and suggested within new regional geography research cannot be fully transferable to solutions of similar problems elsewhere (due to specific conditions and time-space context).

4.2 The view presented by traditional regional geography

Understanding a region as a social construct has some weaknesses. It is obvious that the importance of society is growing – and as a result the region as a social construct is becoming more and more important. Despite that, the

role of nature cannot be ignored (global warming, natural hazards, etc.). Within regional differentiation, nature is still the real power. The division of Canada into heartland and hinterland cannot be explained only by communication connections and economic advances, as they themselves are a result of climatic conditions.

A different understanding of the concept of the region is questionable. The increasing influence of reductionism in regional geography may be subject to criticism. Not only is the complexity of the region reduced, also the social component itself (the role of excluded minorities and different social communities is overvalued). Social sciences and geography still reflect social reality and now anticipate it, and they bring their own moral criteria to this. The identity of a region and region formation, as a theme, has been overestimated. Geography rejects tradition, it is "revolutionized". A positivist "epistemological turn" led to the formalization of the region; since the 1990s, an "ontological turn" has led to, it seems, growing vagueness and "mistiness" of geographical texts (see the increasing incomprehensibility of the fourth and fifth edition of *The Dictionary of Human Geography*). The traditional regional-geographical characteristics provide a more balanced, more complex, more usable (for planning etc.) and more vivid image of a region.

As to the traditional approach (the region in the sense of traditional geography), its strengths include the following:
– a complex approach; well-balanced characteristics of individual spheres and topics; a systematic approach
– focus is given to central (main) topics;
– it is "demanded" by the public (a growing demand for regional information);.

The weaknesses of traditional regional geography include the following:
– its descriptive character;
– little emphasis is given to society and to social topics;
– static characteristics of the region.

4.3 Towards a more complex regional geography

The development of knowledge may be perceived as evolution, as a gradual addition of new ideas, contributions, methodologies, and procedures. Regional geography and the concept of the region may thus include contributions from spatial science as well as humanistic and radical geographies. They may also accept contributions from social constructivism. It is easier to understand a region when accepting humanistic-geographic concepts of topophilia, topophobia (Tuan 1974), the sense of place, and placelessness (Relph 1976); Marxists' concepts of social justice in the city and in rural areas (Harvey 1973); as well as the impacts of globalization and postmodern cultures on local environments and communities (Savage, Bagnall, Longhurst 2005), etc.

There are strong examples of "good regional geography" (more balanced and complex, more aimed at the most important phenomena) in the history of geography: Jordan's *Texas* emphasized the confluence of cultures (Jordan, Bean, Holmes 1984); Harm de Blij presented his deep understanding of the world by applying geographical concepts to world regions (de Blij, Muller 2010). Such regional geography can provide more complex studies of society, as well as studies focusing better on central problems and explanation.

Dov Nir's conception of regional geography (Nir 1990) is based on systems theory. "Society and its physical environment is not a dichotomy: each is part of a whole, a *system*." (Nir 1990: 8). Dov Nir introduces the concept of the region as a holon, "when viewed from the inside it is something closed, something final and defined, but when viewed from the outside appearing as part of something larger" (Nir 1990: 25). Dov Nir introduces the region as a system with phenomena that are components of a whole, with relationships between components, and relationships between components and their environment; system is more than the sum of its components. And Nir's model of a systemic region is a way to study "hidden factors" (ibid. p. 103). Instead of providing an exhaustive characterization of all the elements, a focus on the central issue is proposed (Nir 1990: 39; Baranskij 1953).

The authors present several proposals that are aimed towards better characteristics of regions:
1. Regions are complex and holistic in the sense of physical-geographical – human-geographical unity.
2. A region is an open system with its own structure and relations between its parts and components as well as relations between the region and its environment.
3. Emphasis should be laid not only on a detail description of the region, but also on the central issue and on the most important phenomena.
4. Regional analysis includes all the basic geographical spheres (natural, economic, cultural, social and political system); sub-spheres are not a must. Social sciences and new regional geography stress the importance of social factors and processes; social factors and processes (and relevant processes and actors) should be incorporated into regional-geographical research.
5. Characteristics of a region can be made "more exact" by including the processes, contexts and transformation, and by formulating research questions that would lead to explanation and understanding (Kasala 2014).
6. Regional geography must be more relevant, more practice-oriented, should fulfil public expectations and provide vivid descriptions.

Regional-geographical characteristics may be identified by analyzing several "layers" gradually. Older approaches, which focus on the process of transformation, are of "Vidalian style" (i.e. they see the country-and-town symbiosis in the phases of historical succession [Wooldridge, East 1967: 158–159]) or they are in the form of Whittlesey's concept of sequent occupance. Sequent occupance of Southern California means the gradual

transformation of the landscape in four stages: aboriginal – Spanish – American – international era. Niko Lipsanen's Master's thesis (Lipsanen 2001) offers three levels of analysis: the naturalistic analysis of Roseau (position, structure, function, texture); existential analysis (visiting, dwelling, changing); and synthesis (districts of Roseau, Roseau as a place). A triple model of place (Matlovič 2007) is composed of place as the filling of a part of time-space (physical and technical sphere components); as an arena, process – social construction (social sphere components); and as meaning, identity (noosphere and cyber sphere). John Agnew (2005: 89) presents an idea of three components of place: place as a location or a site; place as a locale (a setting for everyday activities); and place as a sense of a place (a place of identification).

"The ultimate goal of a regional descriptive synthesis was achieved through a thematic "layering" of subject matter, extending from the physical environment through several layers of human intervention." (Pudup 1987: 1) In conclusion we would like to propose a scheme of layers of regional-geographical analysis. The analytical part of our research consists of three layers of analysis. The first layer is the "objective region". This layer provides an insight (detailed information) and broad understanding (comparative, processual and contextual). The second layer focuses on the personality of the region – by identifying its specificities, its central phenomena. And the third layer deals with subjective experience, sense of place, identity. Those three layers enable a synthesis and provide a deep understanding of the region. They can be a good basis for regional development and other applications.

5. Conclusion

"*Regional geography cannot divorce itself from the empirical world. If it did, it would be likely to become a bloodless Platonic Universe of Ideas, merely producing theories for their own sake.*" (Wood 1999: 205)
"*The highest form of the geographer's art is producing good regional geography – evocative descriptions that facilitate an understanding and an appreciation of places, areas and regions.*" (Hart 1982: 2)

One of the contributions of regional geography is that it defines regional differentiation and explains it. Changes within any scientific discipline are necessary; yet changes do not necessarily mean certain progress. Growth of knowledge is an evolutionary process. Our current knowledge is based on contributions which we "achieved" in previous periods. Traditional as well as new regional geography – both of them have advantages and disadvantages. Each of them can benefit from the other.

A comparison of these two basic approaches to the concept of region is one of the contributions of this article. By comparing the two approaches the authors present a brief proposal of a more complex approach in regional geography, showing that these two approaches are complementary, which is a benefit. Traditional regional geography is more complex, as it allows a better understanding of a region. On the other hand, new regional geography (as an example of socio-constructivist approach) is a contribution to geographical methodology, because it facilitates explanation by using contexts and processes.

In the introduction, the authors formulated several research questions. The 1st research question was: "How has the meaning (understanding) of the concept of the region developed over time?" The most typical changes in the meaning of the concept of the region included a loss of complexity as well as shift to a more social understanding. Regional geography gradually "split" into two main directions: traditional geography and new regional geography. The 2nd research question was: "How was the concept of region perceived by significant geographers?" The article focuses on key personalities – geographers and on their understanding of region. Carl Ritter looked for unity within diversity, interconnections and interrelations; for Ritter, human and physical worlds are inseparable. Starting with Paul Vidal de la Blache, nature is perceived as a "product of the culture". Vidalian French regional geography was holistic and complex. Carl Ortwin Sauer researched the landscape (i.e., region) by applying a morphological analysis which was composed of both analyses: analysis of the natural landscape and analysis of the cultural landscape. Richard Hartshorne understands the region as a unique area and as a mental construct. Hartshorne's chorology is typical of his strong character of unity.

The traditional understanding of the region underwent changes in its meaning in mid-twentieth century. Derwent Whittlesey (1954) understands a region as a formal region; and geography, as a spatial science, leaving the idea of a unique region completely behind, and investigating regional patterns, regularities, and interactions. Anssi Paasi and other representatives of the new regional geography understand the region as a social construct. The concept of the region presented by the Israeli geographer Dov Nir (1990) is based on systems theory. The authors identify the most important strengths and weaknesses (research question No. 3: What were the weaknesses and strengths of the main approaches?). The region as a social construct has advantages: a nomothetic approach with explanation based on processes and contexts; a strong emphasis on political and social themes; weaknesses (disadvantages) are the problem of transferability of solutions from one region to others; a non-complex character due to leaving out nature. The strengths of the traditional concept of a region are its complex and systematic approach; focus is given to central (main) topics, while the weaknesses of this traditional understanding of a region are its descriptive character and the static characteristics of the region with little emphasis placed on society. The 4th research question was: "What are the main contributions of the main approaches?" The main advantages as and contributions of the traditional concept

of a region include complexity and a focus on the main phenomena and specifities of region. The main contributions of new regional geography (the region understood as a social construct) include a greater emphasis given to social topics and methodological contributions (processes, contexts). The answer to the last research question ("How can the positive aspects of the two approaches be used when characterizing a region?") leads us to an attempt to find more optimal characteristics of a region.

As analyzed in the last part of the article, a more complex regional geography is based on systems theory (Nir 1990), a holistic complex understanding of a region (Nir 1990) as well as a socially produced and reproduced region (Gilbert 1988; Paasi 1986), and thus uses also new methodologies focused on processes and contexts (Johnston, Sidaway 2004). "Layering" of the research (see also Lipsanen 2001; Matlovič 2007; Agnew 2005; Pudup 1987, 1988) provides a deeper understanding of a region. The authors present "a model" with three layers of analysis, which include three ways of understanding (*verstehen*): 1) an "objective" region with comparative, processual and contextual understanding; 2) the personality of a region understood through its specifities, central phenomena; 3) the subjective meaning of a region understood through its identity, sense of place and subjective experience.
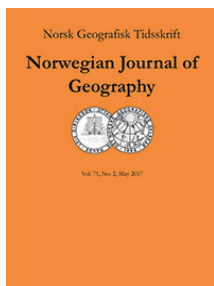
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The importance of symbols in the region formation process

Miroslav Šifta & Pavel Chromý

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Miroslav Šifta & Pavel Chromý

Miroslav Šifta & Pavel Chromý, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Charles University, Albertov 6, Prague 2, CZ-12843, Czechia

ABSTRACT
The aim in the article is to conceptualize the general foundations of research on the importance of regional symbolism in the process of region and regional identity formation. The article is founded on a critical analysis of works pertaining not only to the field of the new regional geography, but also to the field of regional marketing and/or branding, sociology, and semiology. The authors focus on meanings attributed to symbols and symbolism in literature, and observe which elements are viewed as regional symbols and how these symbols contribute to the process of regional development and institutionalization, especially in the formation of its symbolic shape. They examine the thematic and theoretical grounds, looking at identity, regional identity, and regional institutionalization. Next, regional symbols are defined and classified according to their types and forms, and their importance in the process of regional formation and institutionalization is discussed. The results show that symbols of any type can play an important role in a region's marketing, and become the key image associated with a region. The authors conclude that regional symbols are a significant feature of the formation of a region and its identity, both outwardly (the external image of a region) and inwardly (concerning the inhabitants' relationships with their region).

Introduction

In recent decades we have witnessed dynamic transformations of the regional system. Globalization has been changing the nature of regions as locally bound, visible, static, and clearly delimited entities (Pred 1986; Massey 1995; Allen et al. 1998), and these transformations have become the focus of research interests in the field of the new regional geography[1] (Thrift 1983; Knight 1984; Paasi 1986; Gilbert 1988; Murphy 1991; Beynon & Hudson 1993; MacLeod 1998; Schmitt-Egner 2002; Claval 2007). A 'region' (on any hierarchical-scale level) can be defined as a socio-spatial process, a socially formed entity, and a social construction based primarily on people's relationship to the environment (natural, material and social); it can also be defined as the quality of the regional milieu (Murphy 1991; Paasi 2002; Paasi 2010; Semian 2016). It is therefore logical that solving problems concerning regions and regional identity formation is becoming an integral part of regional development strategies (van Houtum & Lagendijk 2001; Raagmaa 2002; Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones 2006;

Smith 2006; Paasi 2013; Semian & Chromý 2014). Practitioners of the new regional geography have become increasingly interested in regional identities (including their extent, form, mechanism of formation, transformation, and regional identity bearers) and in a region's image, as well as the related presentation and representation of regions (Paasi 1986; Zimmerbauer & Paasi 2013).

The formation, reproduction and decline of regions (Zimmerbauer 2011; Messely et al. 2014; Paül & Haslam McKenzie 2015) are frequently discussed in the context of institutionalization of region theory (Paasi 1986). In studies of the separate phases of the institutionalization of regions, emphasis has so far been predominantly placed on their delimitation (Frisvoll & Rye 2009; Semian 2012), on the role of institutions (Paasi & Zimmerbauer 2012) or on research into awareness about a region, both internally and externally (Paasi 2009; Šifta & Chromý 2014). The formation of the symbolic shape of regions, especially their names (Sörlin 1999; Simon et al. 2010; Jordan 2012; Semian et al. 2016), has thus far been only partially explored (Fornäs 2012). There

has been limited attention paid to other symbols (Šifta & Chromý 2014; Šifta 2016). The scope of the research studies includes, for example, commodification of symbols or, more precisely, the use of symbolism in applied regional marketing and/or branding (Hospers 2011; Kašková & Chromý 2014; Medway & Warnaby 2014).

Research into symbolism and its role in the process of region formation is still at its initial stage. In connection with the emancipation of regions of various sizes or with the emergence of brand new regions, we can observe the production of new symbolism, especially the graphic symbolism (e.g. emblems, coats of arms, flags, and logos). Often, the new symbolism does not take full advantage of the potential of existing symbols, nor does it reflect the symbols that a region's communities consider as their own (Šifta 2016). Therefore, we cannot unequivocally know what the role of symbolism is in the process of formation of regional awareness and regions, what sort of meanings are attributed to it, or to what extent it serves the actors in region formation as a tool for the exercise of control or their relationships of power.

In this article, we aim to conceptualize the general foundations of research on the importance of regional symbolism in the process of region and regional identity formation in the context of Anssi Paasi's theory of the institutionalization of regions (Paasi 1986; 2003; 2010). We discuss the role of symbolism in the formation and transformation of both regional identities and identities of a region. We focus on the classification of symbols and aim to comprehend their functions in regional development. Specifically, we seek answers to the following questions:

1. What meanings does literature (especially from the field of new regional geography, regional marketing and branding, and sociology) attribute to symbols and symbolism in relation to the process of region and regional identity formation?
2. What elements are viewed as regional symbols?
3. To what extent does regional symbolism contribute to the process of regional institutionalization, and mainly to the formation of its symbolic shape?
4. Can regional symbolism be regarded as an activating agent in regional and local development?

This article is founded on a critical analysis of works pertaining not only to the field of the new regional geography, but also to that of regional marketing and branding as well as sociology. It provides a review and examination of a multidisciplinary set of literature dealing with concepts that take regional symbolism into account (Fig. 1). We analyse, compare and discuss key findings from the selected studies of the role of symbolism in the region formation process.
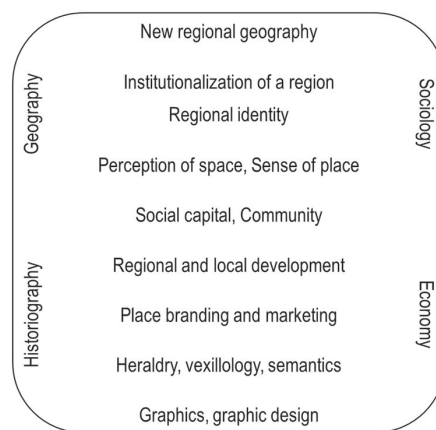

Fig. 1. Key concepts of research on regional symbols

Identity, regional identity and regional institutionalization

Identity

Many academic disciplines have focused on identity in the sense of sameness, identification or accordance, and belonging together (Burke & Stets 2009). Largely under the influence of empiricism, identity became a philosophical-psychological category through which the issues of an individual's level of self-awareness, the emancipation of mankind, and the individualization of society began to be discussed in the social sciences (e.g. by Dubow 2009). In connection with the formation of modern nations in the 19th century, the concept of identity was first widened within politics, and later within sociology, religious studies, anthropology and ethics (Dubow 2009). Researchers from various scientific disciplines have looked into the different roles of identity in the process of formation and transformation of both the individual and society (Keating 1998; Riukulehto 2015). If an individual identifies with a certain institution, a social role or a space in which they live, it will reinforce their conviction about the meaningfulness of the object they identify with, but also their subjective feelings of belonging, and will develop their self-concept (Raagmaa 2002).

One of the reasons why specialized discussions about identity and identification are often divided is that the aims of the above-mentioned social science disciplines are very different. The concept of identity has been become pluralized due to globalization and the spread of multicultural societies. Excessive use of the term can be observed, partly related to the obscuration or misapprehension of its meaning (Brunner 1987). However, the necessity to perceive identity as a phenomenon that is significantly involved in the transformation of society

has increased (Kohli 2000). This is why we can note an abundance of various concepts as well as approaches to its study, many of which are efficiently employed even in the new regional geography (Gilbert 1988; Murphy 1991; Henderson 2009).

The new regional geography works primarily on the premise that identity is an ever-changing social process that is continuously confronted with diverse social actors (Paasi 1986; 2010), and is one of the sources of both human knowledge and action, having a strong emotional charge interconnecting an individual's interior life and the discursive exterior. Besides individual identity manifested through inclusion of a person in the world they live in, collective identity is also of great importance for the development of both society and the individual. Collective identity addresses a sense of collective self-awareness of a group, emphasizing the similitudes and shared attributes through which the group's members become united. Those attributes are related to culture, ethnicity, religion, and spatiality (Hidalgo & Hernández 2001; Jordan 2012).

For the individual identity and the collective identity, the context of the time and space in which they arise and form is essential. The individual and the collective identities are identical and not interchangeable; they 'connect' inwardly and 'divide' outwardly (Chromý et al. 2009). Identity, both individual and collective alike, is dynamic and changing, influenced by the environment in which we are born, formed and transformed by our education, the mass media, and our life experience (Tomaney 2007; Paasi 2013). All its manifestations and forms intertwine, and mutually affect and complement one another, but also exclude or contradict one another (Paasi 2009; Semian 2015).

Academic interest in identities increased particularly after the 'cultural turn' in the early 1970s (Berger & Luckmann 1967, Barnett 1998; 2009; Crang 1998; Castells 2004). 'Humanistic geographers' placed man at the centre of geographic perception, studying the earth as the home of people (Tuan 1990). The issues of identity, meanings and symbols thus became the main focus of cultural geography (Valentine 2001). Identities, including the mechanism of their formation and transformation, are also constituted by the geographical position of a region or perspectives on its development (Raagmaa 2001; Paasi 2013).

In a spatial context, people's relationship with the region they inhabit is the key aspect forming both individual and collective identity. An individual will naturally have a close connection to the space in which they live, and will experience an affiliation with a particular region or a regional community (Coates 2015). As the sphere of a person's ordinary life, space is defined as a place (Paasi 1986; 2002), a 'home', and as a dynamic individual category with a specific meaning. In the absence of any delimitations, such a space is based on personal experience and relationships, and may include various levels of hierarchy or scale. By contrast, space defined as an administrative, ethnic, cultural, or otherwise delimited territorial unit is usually denoted either as a region or as a micro-region and locality (Zimmerbauer & Paasi 2013).

Region is a general category, both objective and collective, and comprises, for example, geographical, historical, cultural, linguistic, and social aspects. Region is presented through specific and unifying aspects. Its existence, which is long-standing in contrast to the category of 'place', is closely related to the influence of society. It is perceived as a partial geographical system with a 'collective dimension'. Every region is a social construct, and therefore it cannot only be constructed or reconstructed by society, but also deconstructed by it (Paasi 2002; 2010).

Regional identity

The space in which an individual's everyday life takes place, along with its specific natural and/or cultural conditions, economic conditions and historical development, and along with the differentiation between 'we' and the 'others' thus serves as a foundation for the formation of 'regional identity'. According to Castells (2010), three basic 'principles' are used in the construction of a regional identity: legitimizing identity, resistance identity, and project identity. *Legitimizing identity* helps to form a civil society, *resistance identity* contributes to the development of civil communities, and *project identity* contributes to the formation of subjects who endeavour to transform social structures (Castells 2010). Both place and region, as well as time, can thus be described as the pillars of regional identity, expressing the degree of people's sense of belonging to the region they live in (Paasi 2010). Regional identity is the image of a region in the minds of citizens residing inside and outside that particular region, and of a comprehensively conceived spatial and temporal continuity of changes within the region (Semian 2012). It tends to be associated with the 'sense of place' concept, meaning people's perceptions of places (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977), or with the perception of landscapes (Tuan 1990).

Collective regional identity

Regional identity, presented as ideas about the region and its image, as well as collective awareness of that region (i.e. a set of experiences, feelings and visions shared by a regional community), influences the development of society.

It encourages social and economic development of the region and its communities (and is constituted by them), playing the primary role in the formation of both individual and collective awareness. Furthermore, regional identity simultaneously serves as a tool for gaining political power and a kind of a 'defence' against globalization (Meyer & Geschiere 1999; Paasi 2013). In addition, as a motivating factor, regional identity fosters the integration of regions into vaster structures without exposing them to the risk of losing the particularities of their identification.

Regions that can present themselves through their natural and cultural richness, social stability, and strong collective awareness, have all the prerequisites necessary for a dynamic development and their way is paved for economic and social success (Süssner 2002). Regional identity is therefore used not only in everyday practices of regional management, administration, presentation, and in regional marketing and branding (Karavatzis & Ashworth 2005; Kašková & Chromý 2014; Semian & Chromý 2014), but also for the purpose of surmounting socio-economic and sociocultural problems. It concurrently affects the political thinking of citizens, their social positions, and their activities (Keating 1998; Raagmaa 2002). A prospering region makes use of social capital in order to encourage local inhabitants to become involved in local events, thereby mobilizing and strengthening their identities while weakening others (Bourdieu 1980; 1989; 1991). This process either takes place in a completely natural way or it can be led as a targeted action through the mediation of power relationships (e.g. when removing the source of a 'negative identity'). Participation in development and planning processes strengthens the sense of 'we' and 'ours', motivating people to assume responsibility for their region (Putnam 1993). Various levels of regional identity compete with one another on a number of counts (e.g. local identity versus European identity) and often even exclude one another. Despite this fact or because of it, we can witness the reinforcement of regional identities.

The concept of regional identity can be described through several dimensions (essence versus construct, objective versus subjective, being versus becoming, sameness versus difference, or static versus dynamic) (van 't Klooster et al. 2002). According to Keating (1998), the following three dimensions can be distinguished:

1. cognitive – the way people are aware of a particular region and its limits as a necessity to distinguish it from others
2. emotional – the way people perceive their region and the extent to which it provides a framework for a shared identity

3. instrumental – the way a region is used to mobilize common action in order to achieve political and other objectives.

Individual regional identity

The second dimension is constituted by an individual's regional identity, an expression of an individual's identification with a particular region, an individual's relationship to the region they inhabit, and a reflection of that region in their mind and memory that is primarily grounded in subjective experience and feelings. Individual regional identity is founded upon four basic principles that people use to create their identity: (1) self–other differentiation on the basis of the space in which people live; (2) awareness of the continuity of their lives in a particular region; (3) pride in the region where they live their lives; and (4) satisfaction of people's needs in and through the region (Gustafson 2001). People delimit the space they inhabit depending on their requirements, but in addition to a region, a person also needs a society. As time passes by, a person thus identifies themself in relation to both the region and the community that inhabits it (Terlouw 2012; Vainikka 2012; 2015).

The resultant regional awareness and individual identity is made up of the regional identity of the inhabitants, reflecting their experience of communality on the one hand, and their individual viewing of their region's specificities and distinctions on the other hand. What is of relevance to this latter identity, is its shaping through time, considering that the past matters more than the present. Regional identity is conserved within the collective memory of groups, a complex social construction governed by the rhythm of large-scale social and historical processes (Truc 2011; Šerý 2014; Semian 2015) and part of collective awareness.

Image of a region

The external image of a region (i.e. how it is perceived by those who live outside it) is designated as the image of the region, or less frequently as the 'external identity of a region' (Paasi 2000). It arises from the external and internal, objective and subjective image of the region, and is equally influenced by regional awareness and identity (Paasi 1986). The external image of a region is a representation of the region in the minds of its inhabitants, but primarily of those who either visit it regularly or know it indirectly. The image of a region is formed under the influence of general and specific processes delimited in space and time, and varies within generations (Chromý et al. 2009; Šerý & Šimáček 2012). The image of a region is directly contingent upon changes

in the region's significance for society and for the region's communities and individuals.

As social constructs shared by a broad public (Zimmerbauer 2011), both regional identity and the identity of a region have a collective dimension, so it is necessary to understand and consider them, even though a region's objective (i.e. physical and material) structure exists, regardless of the way the region is represented, depicted, expressed or experienced (Popper 1972). Regional identity – a regional brand or a regional image – can be generated by an initiative from the inside towards the outside, as well as from the outside towards the inside of a region, although it is a complex two-way, long-term process that is not easy to accomplish successfully (Zimmerbauer 2011). From this perspective, the formation of regional identity and identity of a region are virtually identical processes, in the course of which regional boundaries, symbols and institutions are established (Paasi 2003). Regions are thus formed primarily through their representations and the symbolization of their specifics, singularities that strengthen their inner unity and distinguish them from the 'outside' (Duncan & Ley 1993; Simon et al. 2010). While regional identity is concrete, based on community and relationships within it, the identity of a region, based on the region's presentation, is abstract and symbolic. Nevertheless, regional identity and identity of a region overlap (Zimmerbauer 2011).

The main features of regional identity and identity of a region are opinions and views concerning the notion and vision of a particular region. People's conviction of a region's value and importance is expressed also by their evaluation of the region and regional symbolism. The specific characteristics attributed to it by both the inhabitants and visitors are mostly assessed positively by the region's residents. The latter make efforts to formulate, develop, preserve, strengthen, cultivate, and use their vision of their region in order to distinguish it, as well as for its benefit.

If a change occurs in the conditions under which regional identity and identity of a region have thus far been forming, the character and intensity of regional identity and identity of a region will change too. If, for example, the bearers of historical memory disappear (due to demographic transformations, the weakening of traditions, or adoption of foreign cultural patterns), identity will be redefined or will weaken or vanish. There may even be an imaginary conflict of identities when a region's identity is reflective of specific imprints of the original inhabitants (Conzen 2014) and symbols (Cosgrove & Daniels 1988), to which newcomers ascribe different meanings. In the 'we' versus 'others' dichotomy, newcomers do not identify themselves with the symbols,

nor do they interpret them in a different manner or even condemn them (Moore & Whelan 2012).

Regional institutionalization

The formation of regional identity is closely tied to the process of institutionalization of a region (Paasi 1986), during which the region is formed as a unit that is clearly identifiable in different spatial and social spheres (Paasi 2000). Four phases of regional institutionalization can be distinguished that may be synchronized, but need not be completed or directly follow one another (Paasi 1986; Frisvoll & Rye 2009; Messely et al. 2014). At first, the region acquires a spatial shape and its frontiers are delimited (e.g. on the basis of historical lands and ethnological and cultural bonds) both administratively and perceptually (Semian 2012). The region's symbolic shape, presented through its name, symbolism and the image building process, is formed during the second phase of regional institutionalization (Paasi 1986; Sörlin 1999; Šifta 2016). Regional institutions and organizations, such as self-governments, media, schools, museums, information centres, development agencies, and micro-regional and regional associations of municipalities, are founded during the third phase of institutionalization (Paasi 1986; Kašková & Chromý 2014; Semian et al. 2016). In the fourth and final phase, the region is solidly anchored in both space and people's awareness alike, and its role is clearly defined even in broader socio-spatial structures, such as within the framework of a hierarchically superior unit, a state or the EU (Paasi 1986; 2009).

Some geographers have broadened Paasi's theory with what they call the 'fifth phase', reflecting the situation of a region once the institutionalization process is over (Raagmaa 2002; Zimmerbauer 2011). Their outline of the possible further development of regions shows that no region remains unchanged, even after it has 'permanently' entered people's awareness. On the one hand, the region continues to renew, renovate, and physically and symbolically transform itself, depending on changing conditions (economic, social, cultural and others). On the other hand, 'deinstitutionalization' occurs, producing new circumstances (e.g. changes in local administration) under which the region vanishes, disappearing from the regional structure (Paasi 1991; Paasi & Zimmerbauer 2012). Nevertheless, the region exists in people's minds, as do its frontiers, whether relict or historical-geographical (Chromý et al. 2009). Because identity (in all forms) varies over time, it, too, is confronted with deinstitutionalization, chiefly induced by external influences (e.g. decisions by higher regional structures). Sooner or later, all regions have to adapt, restructure,

or transform their identity (both internal and external) according to current social conditions (Zimmerbauer 2011).

The nature of formation of a region's symbolic shape: regional symbols and symbolism

One of the phases of regional institutionalization is the formation of its 'symbolic shape'. Within this phase, the region acquires a name and its regional symbolism is created. The formation of regional symbolism is mainly grounded in the region's historical memory and present reality, but also in misapprehensions or prejudices (Paasi 1986). The region acquires its 'symbolic shape', and becomes identifiable not only through its spatial demarcation, but also through its official or vernacular name (Semian et al. 2016), and by having its singularities (historical roots, particularities and traditions) put on record. The process of symbolic shape formation permits the effect of a number of cultural, social, political, economic, objective, and subjective factors, most of which take on a symbolic form (Paasi 1986). For the purpose of analysing a region's symbolic shape, it is therefore necessary to define what symbols may represent it (after having defined 'symbol'), what the types of regional symbols are, and what role they play in forming regional identity.

Symbol

A symbol can be perceived as a graphic sign with a rich meaning or tradition that often has a strong emotional charge and a 'force' to maintain the social cohesion of a group, evoking its exclusiveness and common origins. It presents itself as a graphic, pictorial or verbal indication of an idea, expressing a phenomenon in a figurative sense. In contrast to a sign that directly represents the meaning of a message, a symbol expresses an indirect representation (O'Connell et al. 2007). A symbol fulfils the role of an identification sign, bearing a hidden sense that is evident to the group of its users and connects its members (Bourdieu 1989). All symbols and their use are permeated with their principal function: they are means of uniting, communicating, and presenting human experience or impression. A symbol is a material, visual object that represents what is intangible and invisible; it symbolizes a particular value (Monnet 2011).

Every region has its own 'content' that can be expressed through symbols, depending on the sense the content will acquire during the historical and social development wherein symbolic meaning is formed (e.g. a factory can temporarily symbolize progress, production and employment, but also exploitation or environmental

pollution, joblessness and economic decline). It is, however, always true that every region has its specific symbolic dimension (Monnet 2011). When any particular component of a region (such as a statue, building, river, or name) is endowed with a meaning, it becomes a bearer or mediator of an idea, feeling or value; it may also acquire value as a regional symbol (i.e. typical of the region). If such a symbol is shared by the majority of members of the regional community, it will remain recognizable to the inhabitants both within the community and outside it, since it is rooted in tangible reality – a concrete object usually independent of the meaning assigned to it by society.

Most symbols are based on the region's traditions, reflecting its singularities and particularities, and emphasizing the importance and sovereignty of the region they represent (Semian et al. 2016; Šifta 2016). Regional symbols allow people to identify themselves with the space in which they live more easily, while serving as an external representation of the region they inhabit. Symbols are of greater importance to those who live in close neighbourhoods (e.g. in case of spatial symbols) and of less importance to people who live in remoter areas. The only exception are those symbols with a significance that goes beyond the boundaries of the region they represent, granting them a higher importance (e.g. at the national level), or symbols that are comprehensible to those who no longer live in that region. Emotional engagement and the ability to comprehend a symbol are differentiated, too (Monnet 2011). For an individual, a rationally accepted symbol is less important than one that epitomizes their inner feelings and enhances the subjective impression of the region in where they grew up, started a family, made friends, and took root, or the locality of which they are proud, despite being aware of its imperfections (Tuan 1990).

Regional symbols, just as identity, can be individual and collective, social (symbolizing a community) and spatial (regional symbols and regional community). Their aggregate, defined as symbolism (of a region, or regional), cannot arise ex nihilo but always originates from the elements that are available in a particular region, thereby delimiting and distinguishing itself from other regions through its symbolism (Bourdieu 1991). As well as its ability to bring people together, regional symbolism can also strengthen or weaken regional identity and identity of a region (Monnet 2011).

Symbols and symbolism: potential for the formation of regional identity

Symbols and symbolism play an important role during the process of regional identity formation. Since they

represent both the physical and social environment, they allow and facilitate an understanding of the reality and interaction of actors (Burke 2004). Additionally, symbols serve to mediate the relations between space, power, and identity (Paasi 2013). Given the disparate experience and knowledge of the region, they can be viewed differently by people living inside and outside the region. Symbols may contain phenomena that are current but have not yet acquired the character of a symbol. The inner structure of symbolism at various scales varies too. Whereas regional (i.e. county or microregional) symbolism tends to be simpler, clearer and more legible (thereby uniting and enhancing internal communality of a region's inhabitants) than local symbolism, the latter is mainly constituted by a multifarious mosaic of unique elements (Šifta 2016). It is more complex, often less easily comprehensible, and burdened with tradition, prejudices or just divergent views of things, reflecting, for example, generational, ethnic, political or social divides.

Symbols can be interpreted in many distinctive ways when it comes to the divergent stances held by people living within and outside a particular region (Paasi 2013). The interpretation of regional symbolism also depends on the distance from which people perceive the region (including in senses other than physical distance). In these terms, Rijnks & Strijker (2013) examined perceptions of regional image (which is closely related to regional symbolism). They discuss processes of 'othering', through which people distinguish themselves from each other (based on a particular level of self-regional identity of them, and on their consciousness with the region) and 'stereotyping' based on the level of people's knowledge about the region or their direct experience of the region, related to and limited by, for example, media and school education (Šifta & Chromý 2014).

The way regional symbols are perceived changes, as does the values orientation of society (e.g. a castle or dam are symbols with meanings that vary depending on the viewpoint of the person considering their position within a definite historical context). Some symbols that refer to the past may be interpreted inconsistently when their meaning shifts or alters in new social contexts (Šifta 2016). Any regional symbol can become the object of conflict between various interest groups (such as a dispute over divergent interpretations of symbols in recolonized areas, or the ambivalent relation to symbolism representing diverse totalitarian regimes). For these reasons, 'universal' elements (e.g. accentuation of landscape heritage) with the potential for integrating a region's communities while bolstering their identity tend to be applied more broadly in newly formed symbolisms (Šifta & Chromý 2014; Šifta 2016).

A region's symbolism, as well as regional identity discourse (Paasi, 2013), is part of the relationships of power in any given region, which are influenced or modified by various regional actors (Frisvoll & Rye 2009). Through their diverse activities (political, economic, cultural), but also by way of interventions into public spaces (e.g. construction of buildings; cf. flagship buildings described by Andersson 2014a), regional actors compose the 'symbolic capital' of their region, either when striving to accentuate and 'improve' it, or when they frequently manipulate a regional symbol while strengthening their position (Bourdieu 1980; Monnet 2011). Simon et al. (2010) and other scholars (e.g. Frisvoll & Rye 2009; Paasi 2013; Šifta 2016) discuss the strong position of regional development actors in the creation of regional symbolism and thus also of the regional identity and regional image. Additionally, Messely et al. (2014) stress the role of 'ordinary people' in the process of regional identity formation.

It can be argued that regional symbolism is formed on a similar principle as regional identity and regional institutionalization. In other words, regional symbolism is both formed by and forms regional identity as well as regional institutionalization, which are reciprocal processes (Zimmerbauer 2011). Some interventions into 'traditional' symbolism have a positive impact on a region's identity and image, and on local life, whereas others, regardless of whether they are purposeful or unintentional, have a negative effect (Šifta 2016).

Types and forms of regional symbols

Regional symbols can be viewed from the perspective of syntax (relations among symbols), pragmatics (relation between a symbol and its user) and semantics (linguistic and factual meaning of symbols); we can study the causality of their formation, transformations of their content and meaning, and the relationship of actors to them. Symbols of regions are described, depicted, classified, and presented in many different ways, and in terms of their content and nature (Fig. 2), such symbols can be classified as identifying (regional name), natural, landscape, historical, socio-economic, or sociocultural (Šifta & Chromý 2014; Semian et al. 2016; Šifta 2016).

The name of a region often acquires the value of a symbol, fulfilling several functions: it provides the region with an individual character (thereby guaranteeing its identification), determines its historical continuity independently of the changes of its spatial demarcation, delimits its region, and connects it to the past. Due to its name, a region is identified, concretized, and acquires a 'face' (Simon et al. 2010). In possessing a significant emotional charge, it is a synonym for 'home', for local people.
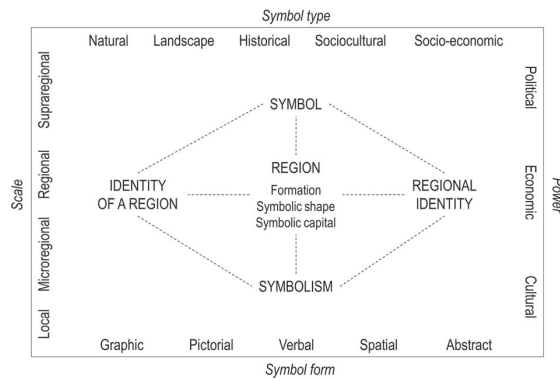
Fig. 2. Types and forms of regional symbols

Knowledge of the etymology of the name of a region will evoke its historical heritage as well as its symbolic predetermination.

In addition to names, the other dominant symbols include those related to nature and landscape, which reflect the physical environment with a social content (Šifta & Chromý 2014). Often, the highest summits or significant peaks, rock formations, caves, bodies of water or watercourses become the symbols of a region (Fig. 3). Since they have great potential for forming regional identity, landmarks are frequently known beyond the boundaries of a particular region (e.g. a tourist destination representing an area), and are linked to local traditions, legends or songs, which themselves constitute other symbols (immaterial and/or intangible).

A region can also be symbolized by its geographical position (e.g. borderland or peripheral) and climatic conditions (e.g. mountain climate). Symbolic meaning is often given to concrete natural heritage and richness, specific fauna and flora, forests, and even geological elements. We have examined perceptions of symbols of nature and landscape symbols, and their role in regional identity formation in an earlier publication (Šifta & Chromý 2014). Sörlin (1999) describes landscape as symbolic and mental categories created by society, and understanding of landscape as a key element for an articulation of a region and its identity (i.e. its image). Establishing new regional development initiatives (e.g. geoparks) can help to create a new regional symbol. The establishment of such an institution assumes the activity of local people (with initiatives 'from below') and through the institution the relationship of local people to the region (and in this case its landscape) is formed and strengthened (Čtveráková et al. 2016). Closely related to a region's natural potential is economic symbolism (e.g. traditional agriculture or specific local crafts).

Another major group of symbols comprises cultural and historical symbols grounded in social and cultural activities and human action, such as performances at festivals, concerts, and exhibitions (Crang 1999; Shin 2004). They may include architectural features, tourism destinations, cultural heritage, diverse manifestations of human activity, and even the general atmosphere of a region, its security situation, ethnic composition, or belonging to a certain ethnographic area. People's awareness of their historical belonging to the region they inhabit or their collective memory of a region is helpful for the formation of a symbolic shape (Paasi 1986; Tomaney & Ward 2000; Paasi 2013; Šifta 2016). This part of memory preserves the social phenomena through which a region has been formed.

People can sense the spiritual values of the landscape in which they live, be aware of its past, and be proud of their region's traditions. With the use of symbols referring to its history (e.g. commemorations of important events, personalities, habits, or oral culture), they may strive to revive and preserve the values and traditions, and thereby reinforce their bonds to the space they inhabit, boost their awareness of historical continuity, and develop historical cognizance.

In terms of form, regional symbols can be divided into graphic (ideograms, labels, mathematical symbols, logos, emblems, and flags), verbal (greetings, phrasal idioms, names and gesticulation), pictorial (photographs), spatial (mountains, heritage trees, monument, but also gestures), or abstract (e.g. ethnicity, religion, ideological movement, legends, and myths) (Fig. 2). Regional symbols can also be distinguished according to the degree of their extension in space or their anchoring in people's awareness. Some symbols have an established and widespread meaning, whereas others have more meanings, depending on the way they are interpreted (i.e. time and space context, historical context, and discourse) (De Cillia et al. 1999). Moreover, some symbols are unambiguous and clearly 'legible', whereas others are less lucid.

Graphic regional symbols

We use the term 'graphic regional symbol' to designate simplified, visually designed symbols of a region or its part, such as emblems, coats of arms, flags, or logos. Graphic symbols reflect a region's characteristics, and accentuate the importance and independency of the region they represent (Šifta 2016). By using a schematic representation of a region's typical features, graphic symbols are intended to offer an as accurate and convincing image of the region as possible. Therefore, graphic symbols have a high informational value, which unfortunately, is somewhat neglected.
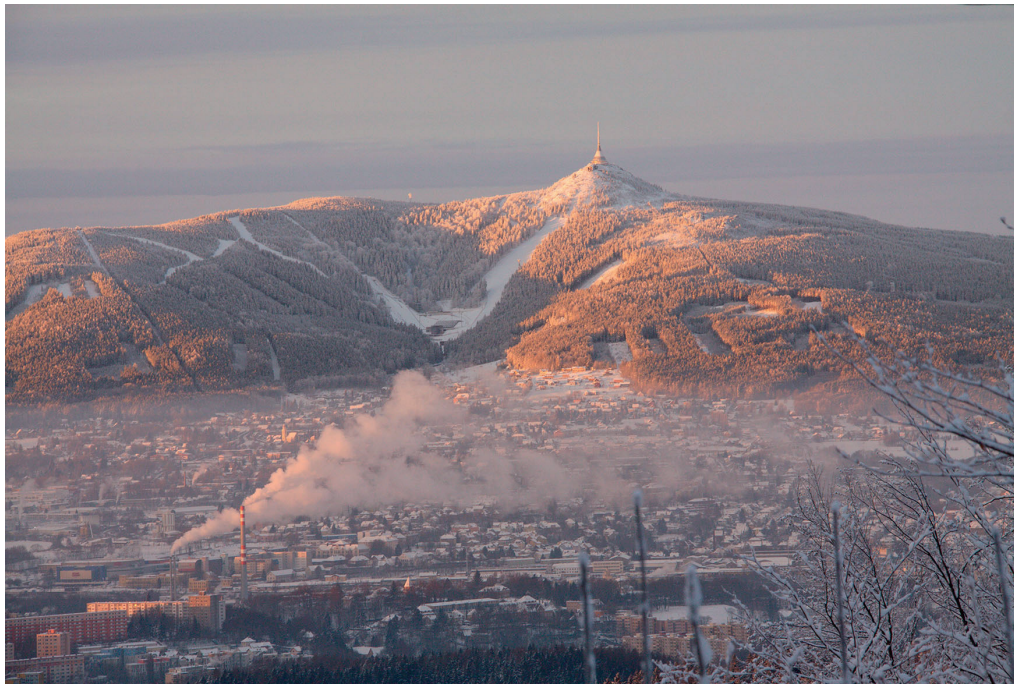
Fig. 3. Hotel and transmitter Ještěd on the top of the same-named hill above the Liberec city (Source: Public Opinion Research Center, Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences 2012) (Photo: Josef Porkert, 7 January 2017)

The aggregate of graphic regional symbols (i.e. graphic symbolism) can be based on tradition and simple reproduction of symbols, or it can be endowed with a meaning reflecting the present. Actors of local and regional development (e.g. marketing and/or branding, tourism, development agencies, media, and education) may interpret graphic symbols 'merely' as the key component of the presentation of their own activity, or as a representation of a particular region (e.g. municipality, microregional organization, and self-government region), not as a symbol of the whole region (Fig. 4). A case study of local actors in the Liberec Region, Czechia, shows that municipal councillors viewed graphic symbols primarily as a tool for reinforcing local identity, while microregional and regional graphic symbolism was – besides its 'unifying' and regional community-forming role – a 'bearer of tidings' beyond a region's frontiers (i.e. marketing, branding, good brand, and positive image) (Šifta 2016).

Individual types of graphic symbols differ in their function (e.g. they are representative of regions, or serve as sale labels or identifiers of institutions), significance (e.g. reinforce the region's image or regional marketing and branding – see the next section, under the heading 'Regional symbolism in regional marketing and branding') and design (e.g. a logo, emblem

or flag). The point of creating new graphic symbols of regions is to express schematically the aspect of valuable elements that serve to present and represent a region by accentuating its most distinctive characteristics, specifics and singularities, and thereby emphasize its uniqueness and distinguish it from other regions (Simon et al. 2010; Zimmerbauer 2011). Nevertheless, the information capacities of graphic symbols are frequently limited by a person's knowledge and their ability to interpret the primary meaning of the symbol used in a graphic design, such as when a landmark symbolizes a region, its graphic depiction in an emblem or logo will most likely be perceived in a positive way provided that it is easily comprehensible and transparent. For example, Ještěd is perceived as the most significant symbol of the Liberec Region (a self-government region in Czechia, level NUTS 3 (Eurostat n.d.)) (Fig. 3), Therefore, the viability and power of graphic regional symbols are directly tied to the ways in which a society forms, perceives and shares them (Šifta 2016).

A graphic symbol that is aesthetic and has a content value will be acceptable to a region's inhabitants, and will thus fulfils its function. It can usefully represent a particular region, considerably conducing to the formation of its symbolic shape.
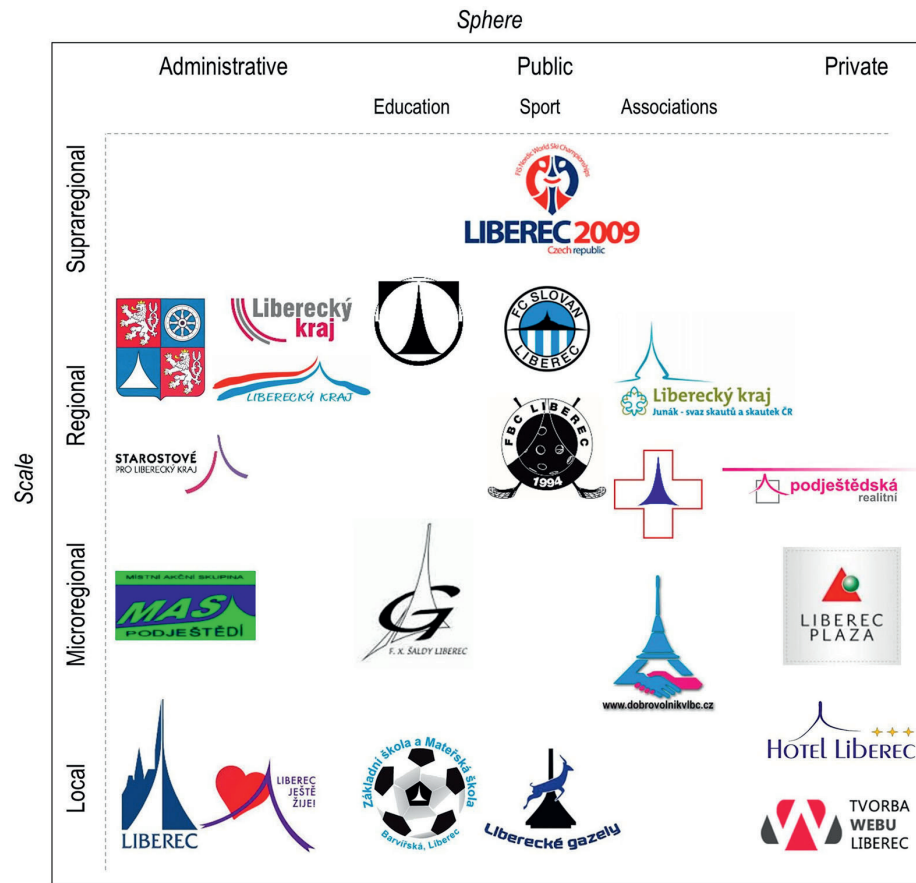
Fig. 4. Examples of graphic symbols of regional and local institutions using the Ještěd symbol, most significant symbol of the Liberec Region, Czechia (see Fig. 3) (Source: official webpages of the respective institutions)

Symbols and symbolism of a region in the process of its institutionalization and regional development

Region, regional identity, symbols and symbolism are social constructions generated and transformed by those who represent a region or regional community, namely actors and representatives of public power systems or public, corporate and private spheres (Frisvoll & Rye 2009; Paasi 2013). Regional actors not only have their own motivation or vision, but also their tools and possibilities to exert influence on a given region and public opinion, and thereby contribute to the formation of a sense of community, belonging, unity or consensus in the region of their activity and to the region's image. As bearers of power, regional actors are in the position of those who can form a society and its identity while manipulating its objective structure (Bourdieu 1991). Their involvement in the process of regional institutionalization is therefore non-negligible (Paasi 2013).

Regional symbolism formation

Regional development actors take part in the formation of a region's symbolic shape as active users, promoters and 'makers' of regional symbolism. Although regional symbolism can, from a developmental point of view, be a legacy from past generations, individual symbols are transformed and variously reproduced over time, in view of the present needs and stances of society. Regional development is also instigated by the creation of new symbols, whether goal-directed (e.g. contemporary municipal symbols) or conditional on new facts having an effect on it and making it visible (e.g. a change in population structure, environmental burden, or a new product).

Actors in the field of symbolism formation, reproduction and application predominantly include heads of institutions that represent a particular region (Paasi 2013; Šifta 2016). The endowment of different components with a symbolic value can be observed in various spheres of social practice, both within and outside

particular regions. Regional symbolism can be produced 'from above' (made to order), 'from the outside' (a region's image beyond its borders presented by constituents that acquire the significance of symbols), or 'from below' (within a region).

The motivation of regional actors to form and use regional symbolism can be as equally diverse as their enumeration (Šifta 2016). Some use and even create symbols out of tradition or sentiment, whereas others (e.g. municipal councillors) may do so in the public interest. While some actors pursue economic profit or personal success, some seek political objectives (e.g. unification of a community, gaining trust through targeted engagement, or winning the support of voters), and others try to put the region they inhabit on the map (Hospers 2011).

Regional symbolism in regional marketing and branding

Regional symbolism is deliberately used in the area of public administration and regional development. Positively accepted symbols are often supported and interpreted in order to reinforce regional awareness and regional image. This is why they are mostly used by those who intend to influence these social constructions. In the domain of public administration, they comprise representatives of local self-governments, elected representatives, representative bodies, nature and landscape protection, or historic preservation officials; in the field of regional development and economy, they include representatives of development and travel agencies, and heads of companies.

Regional symbolism is often used by actors during even the phase of regional institutionalization (institutional shape formation) (i.e. the third phase) and in the fourth and final phase (the established role of a region) (Paasi 2013). In both phases, regional institutions and organizations are formed. They, too, identify themselves and make themselves visible through symbols that also serve to present their region's cultural and economic particularities. In the final phase, the region is anchored in spatial structures, permeating awareness of people from both within and outside the region (Paasi 1986). In this context, symbols, which are essential for the creation of a region's image, are frequently used in regional marketing and branding (Papadoupoulos 2004; Pike 2009; 2011; Andersson 2014b).

The term regional marketing (in the same sense as 'place marketing', which is a more frequent term in the literature) designates overall management of a region. However, the majority of regions employ marketing only on the level of 'sale', as if their region was a commodity (Anholt 2003). Symbols are used to commodify or commercialize the region without allowing for the fact that regional marketing has to be understood as a long-lasting strategic, synthetic and integral process that is part of a region's overall strategy to preserve and boost its competitiveness while satisfying all target groups (Anholt 2003; Hospers 2011). Regional marketing ought not to be merely 'fractional' politics that is ensured, for example, by an institution charged with tourism development or a communication company; it should also be an umbrella activity involving all local political initiatives from the perspective of investors, local populations and visiting tourists (Hospers 2011).

Regional marketing cannot be compared with the sale of a particular clearly defined product because it has a multilayered nature; it is based not merely on a 'trademark', but primarily on what are termed 'soft factors' (Frisvoll & Rye 2009). On the one hand, regional marketing is targeted at people who wish to live, work or relax in a particular region; on the other hand, it is oriented toward the outside, to companies in search of business premises and a labour market, and last, but not least, to visitors and tourists who come there to spend their leisure time.

Most marketing specialists strive to present different localities in order to attract visitors, potential residents and firms (i.e. persons who are not permanently settled there). Such a marketing strategy is called 'cold regional marketing' (originally called 'place marketing' by Hospers, 2011). It is characterized by a certain one-sidedness and stereotyped perspective (exclusive presentation of a locality via its tourism destinations). By contrast, 'warm regional marketing', in addition to socio-economic bonds, focuses on the emotional aspect or relations to existing companies and residents. The latter constitute the most valuable and profitable segment, with a determining degree of satisfaction of inhabitants in a region as well for overall regional marketing strategy. A 'warm regional marketing' subtype known as 'relationship marketing' strives to reinforce the existing bonds and transform the unbiased stances of both firms and residents, which strategically are most important actors for the marketing of a region (Hospers 2011).

Regional marketing should present a given region as a multifarious aggregate of various values, possibilities, images and visions that can influence an individual more easily than a commercial product. Thus, simple, clear regional brand (regional branding) is not essential to complex regional marketing. Usually, regional branding is grounded in regional symbolism and identity, and serves as a means of commodification of regions, mainly for the purpose of their external promotion (Anholt 2003). However, it should not neglect the stances of local populations, especially their sense of belonging to

the region they live in and their share in creating and reproducing its image. Regional branding should thus be part of a broader process of developing and managing regions and regional marketing activities (Semian 2012; Kašková & Chromý 2014).

Incomprehension of this philosophy leads to inappropriate handling of symbols in the field of regional branding. Symbols are often created 'artificially' or incorrectly employed in a new context. Conversely, a considered use of symbolism in regional marketing and branding, its success in interregional competitions, and its successful 'sale' to tourists, investors or new residents can help to reinforce the image of regions, as well as the regional awareness of their inhabitants (Zimmerbauer 2011; Paasi 2013).

Regional symbolism transformation and regional development

If regional symbolism in the process of regional institutionalization is to be efficiently exploitable, it must be as continual as possible. Symbols with a continuous, unchanging meaning have a constant value, being an integral part of regional awareness and an important component in the formation of a region's image. If the social atmosphere alters, symbols can be revitalized, and enable regional communities to carry on already forgotten (or deliberately suppressed) values from the past. The discontinuity of the significance of symbolism when the representation of its individual components remains unchanged while their meaning changes (i.e. the components are interpreted in different contexts and may express different values) should not be neglected (Šifta 2016). Then, symbols can be reinterpreted, newly interpreted and misinterpreted. They will express new values that are of relevance to the majority of the population in a given region and time. If society accepts the symbols with a 'new meaning', it will preserve the symbol's functionality. However, if the interpretation and acceptance of symbols engender clashes and misinterpretation, their usefulness for the formation of regional identity will weaken (Paasi 2013; Šifta 2016).

Symbols may hold a charge of a potential tension or conflict (e.g. a dispute over authenticity, interpretation, or ownership) among various groups within society (e.g. professional, generational or interest differences) and regional communities (e.g. uncritical local or regional patriotism, boosterism). At the core of most disputes are different preferences, value orientations of actors, notions about the use of symbols, and interpretations of their meaning.

Other threats related to the production of symbolism may weaken its importance in the process of regional institutionalization. One of the threats is the disunited focus of regional symbolism when the multiplicity of components and symbols results in a fragmented and contradictory regional image. Another threat is the insufficiently coordinated creation of graphic symbolism, as a consequence of which symbols have opposite effects, and provoke a 'clash' of brands, logos, emblems and their interpretations (Kašková & Chromý 2014). Newly created symbols with false or misleading content have a negative impact, too, as they not only lead a community to identify itself with a 'mistake', but also sometimes to establish 'fallacious' traditions. In order for regional symbolism to contribute to regional development, the symbolism has to be an expression of the consensus of those whom it represents. This is the necessary condition for its acceptance and use. If the symbolism's meaning has a representative and promotional quality, it will bolsters a region's positive image, and make the values adopted and shared by society more visible.

Conclusions

Previous theoretical studies and subsequent case interpretations have affirmed the importance of regional symbolism for the process of region and regional identity formation (Simon et al. 2010; Messely et al. 2014). We have primarily emphasized the identification, presentational and representational function of symbols, their emotional charge, and their capacity to accentuate typical and specific elements of a region that have a positive (or even negative) effect on regional identity and the identity of the region.

Understanding the importance of regional symbolism and especially its efficient use in the regional institutionalization process necessitates a clear specification of the types and forms of regional symbols. Their precise classification together with an apt depiction of their influence on regional identity can considerably conduce to a positive transformation of regions or attenuate the negative impact of inadequately used symbols. It is necessary to bear in mind that regional symbolism is composed of an array of symbols of various types. However, from the point of identification, presentation and regional awareness, the name of a region is unique. In addition, particular and abstract symbols related to nature and landscape, reflecting the physical environment with a social content (in the sense of interactions between individuals and society and between landscape and/or nature) are significant, as well as historical, sociocultural and socio-economic symbols (historical and cultural heritage, belonging to a historical area, and the milieu of a region). In terms of form, graphic symbols can be highlighted; in particular, the new graphic

symbolism created in accordance with the positive, subjectively unencumbered effort for regional development and publicity. This symbolism schematically reflects features that regional communities regard as the symbols with which they identify themselves. These symbols reinforce a region's internal integrity, and precisely these symbols are found worth using for external presentation with emphasis on the region's uniqueness and particularities by regional actors (Šifta 2016). Any symbol (of any nature) that reflects a region's specifics and accentuates its importance will be comprehensible and positively perceived by its inhabitants, as well as by those who observe it 'from the outside'. By substantially contributing to the formation of the region's symbolic shape, such a symbol will influence the process of its institutionalization, have the potential to form the regional identity and image, and will be conducive to its development (Paasi 2013).

However, perceptions of regional symbolism change, as do regions; symbols can be interpreted in many different ways, their meaning may vary under new social circumstances, and a symbol that once united and reinforced may even become an enfeeblement factor. In order to reinforce a region and make it more visible, it is therefore necessary to use primarily symbols with an established, widespread and timeless meaning. This rule should particularly be observed by regional development actors, for it is they who most commonly use symbols, regardless of the way they are created (whether from above or below, by adopting traditional symbols, or via semantic transformation), for the purpose of mediating relations between space, power and identity.

As an integral part of the relationships of power, regional symbolism is purposefully exploited in regional administration and development. By way of symbolism, actors of regional development not only pursue their own interests, but are also capable, with forethought, of using it to promote their region and boost regional awareness. Adequately employed and generally accepted symbols can play an important role in a region's marketing, and become the key image associated with the region (regional branding).

For the reasons presented above, it is advisable to take account of the unchallenged and broad significance of regional symbolism when researching the process of regional institutionalization and formation of regional identities. Analysis of regional symbolism (and the meaning assigned thereto) cannot only help assess its role in the process of forming people's regional awareness, regional image and regions as such, but can also prove to what extent symbolism is used as a tool of power relationships in a particular region. It can even help to explain the difficulties encountered in the development of regions of different sizes and types. Theoretical resources are not yet sufficiently verified by casuistic studies that could confirm their validity. The findings about functional use of symbols and symbolism in the regional development process are not adequately 'popularized' and thus are unknown for regional development actors.

Notes

1. A subfield of human geography with a focus on the social and cultural construction of regions, their meanings for individual and social identities, their symbolism and the power relations involved in region building processes.

Acknowledgement

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SYMBOLY A IDENTITA REGIONU: ANALÝZA VNÍMÁNÍ PŘÍRODNÍCH SYMBOLŮ OBLASTÍ S INTENZIVNĚ PŘEMĚNĚNOU KRAJINOU V ČESKU

Miroslav Šifta, Pavel Chromý*

* Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Přírodovědecká fakulta, Katedra sociální geografie a regionálního rozvoje, Albertov 6, 128 43 Praha 2, Česko, miroslav.sifta@natur.cuni.cz, pavel.chromy@natur.cuni.cz

Symbols and identity of a region: analysis of perception of natural symbols in areas with profoundly changed landscape in Czechia

This paper deals with the natural potential for the formation of territorial identity in the Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem, and Liberec regions of Czechia (regional self-governing units). The main objective is to contribute to the discussion about the importance of nature and landscape (natural symbols) in forming the sense of belonging to regions on various levels, specifically to assess the differentiation of natural symbolism of the regions in perception of a representative sample of the Czech population (the survey conducted by Public Opinion Research Centre – CVVM). The obtained data are compared with the analysis of inclusion of specific landscape elements in the formation of the spatial and symbolic shape of regions. Simultaneously, utilization of natural localities in creating the external image of the region at regional and national levels are monitored in a positive sense (the use of natural resources to increase interest in the region, compared to the intensity of nature and landscape conservation by the regional institutions) and also in a negative sense (the impact of nature and landscape damage on the perception of the regions). The survey confirmed that the natural potential plays an important role in the process of forming territorial identity in the studied areas. The data demonstrate territorial differentiation in perception of the natural heritage and landscape that is positive as well as negative. However, the difference in perception of regions regarding spatial proximity was not identified.

Key words: territorial identity, natural symbols, regional development, profoundly changed landscape, north-western Bohemia

ÚVOD

V posledních desetiletích došlo v Česku v souvislosti se společenskými změnami k obnovení „přirozených" regionálních disparit (Blažek a Csank 2007 a Hampl 2007). Předmětem výzkumného zájmu geografů se stalo řešení otázek spojených s polarizací prostoru, resp. vývojem a rozvojem problémových periferních a příhraničních oblastí (Jeřábek et al. 2004 a Havlíček et al. 2008). Z dosavadních výzkumů je zřejmé, že pozornost si zasluhují jak oblasti hospodářsky dlouhodobě slabé, tak strukturálně postižené, zejména pak regiony s intenzivně přeměněnou krajinou. Ty v Česku nalezneme hlavně v oblastech industrializovaných a přeměněných v důsledku specifického vývoje po 2. světové válce (obr. 1), v územích potýkajících se s historicky podmíněnými problémy omezeného potenciálu rozvoje i s horší kvalitou lidského a sociálního kapitálu (Jančák et al. 2008 a 2010), s nízkou mírou zakořeněnosti lidí a regionální identity a s rozporuplným obrazem – image (Chromý a Janů 2003).

Důraz na kvalitu regionálního milieu a endogenních zdrojů rozvoje je také podstatou institucionálních přístupů v regionálním rozvoji (Blažek 2012).

V tomto směru koresponduje s přístupy „nové" regionální geografie (Claval 2007), zejména s proměnou konceptů regionu (Pred 1984 a Paasi 1986 a 2010) a zájmem o roli regionální identity v procesu utváření a reprodukce regionu (Zimmerbauer a Paasi 2013). Formování regionálních identit se pak stává nedílnou součástí strategií rozvoje regionů (Raagmaa 2002 a Zimmerbauer 2011). Regionální identifikace je často spjata s neekonomickými faktory sociokulturní povahy. Z nich k nejdůležitějším patří vztah obyvatel k území, v němž žijí nebo do kterého přicházejí, či existence a reprodukce dědictví krajiny (Kučera a Kučerová 2009). Krajinný ráz – vzhled krajiny (Matless 1998 a Löw a Míchal 2003) a přírodní symboly jsou složkami procesu utváření jak regionálního vědomí obyvatel, tak vnějšího obrazu regionu a ve formování regionální identity mají nezastupitelnou roli (MacLeod 1998). Jejich význam však dosud nebyl dostatečně probádán.

Předložený příspěvek sleduje vliv přírodního dědictví na formování územní identity oblastí s intenzivně přeměněnou krajinou, tvořených územím, v němž došlo ve 20. století vlivem společenských a politických zvratů k výrazným proměnám, které se odrazily i v přetváření územních identit (Chromý 2000 a 2003). Za reprezentativní bylo zvoleno území tří krajů severozápadních (dále jen SZ) Čech: Karlovarského, Ústeckého a Libereckého.
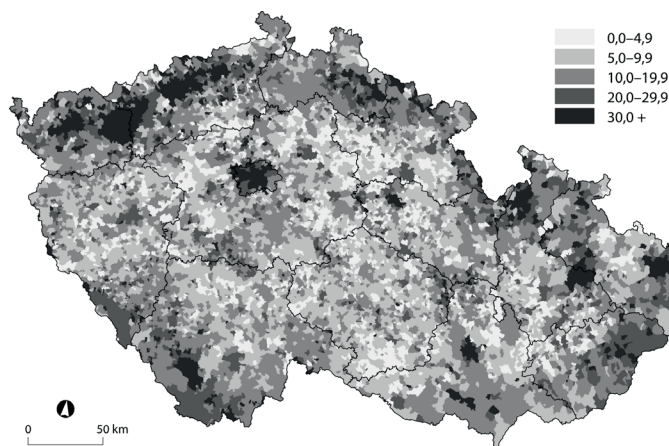
Obr. 1. Intenzita krajinných změn hodnocená na bázi indexu změny využití ploch v Česku (1948-1990)

Index změny využití ploch ve srovnatelných územních jednotkách v Česku (1948-1990)

Zdroj: Databáze LUCC Czechia, UK v Praze, PřF (Bičík et al. 2001).

Poznámka: Index změny je agregátní ukazatel, hodnotící v dané jednotce a období jedním číslem celkovou intenzitu vývoje využití ploch (bez ohledu na strukturu). Udává, na kolika procentech území tzv. srovnatelných územních jednotek (SÚJ) došlo ve sledovaném období ke změně využití ploch (blíže viz Bičík et al. 2010, p. 35).

Cíle příspěvku lze definovat ve dvou rovinách. Zaprvé diskutovat obecná východiska studia územních identit a upozornit na význam formování regionální identity i utváření image regionu a význam přírodní symboliky v tomto pro-

cesu. Druhým cílem je ověřit teoretická východiska na konkrétních příkladech v jednotlivých krajích (analýza diferenciace přírodní symboliky krajů, posouzení významu jejich přírodního dědictví v utváření regionálního vědomí a image). Cílem empirické části příspěvku je identifikovat přírodní symboly krajů na základě prezentace v sekundárních zdrojích (internet) a s využitím výsledků výzkumu percepce mezi obyvateli Česka analyzovat přírodní symboly krajů tak, jak je vnímá populace a porovnat vnímání přírodních symbolů respondenty ze SZ Čech a jiných částí Česka. Závěr příspěvku shrnuje výsledky hodnocení a posuzuje míru shody zjištěných informací s výchozím předpokladem, že přírodní symbolika tvoří nedílnou součást regionálního vědomí ve sledovaných krajích a odráží jejich image.

V příspěvku hledáme odpovědi na otázky: Jak přispívá přírodní symbolika k utváření symbolického tvaru regionů (ve smyslu teorie institucionalizace – Paasi 1986)? Jak se liší vnímání symbolů jednotlivých krajů? Které přírodní prvky jsou obyvateli Česka vnímány jako přírodní symboly a skýtají potenciál k formování územní identity? Předpokládáme, že u zájmových regionů hraje přírodní potenciál v procesu formování územní identity i v budování jejich image nezanedbatelnou roli, že obyvatelé Česka mají kraje spojeny s významnými turistickými cíli a místy rekreace, a že mnohé přírodní symboly znají také díky prezentaci krajů v médiích, turistických průvodcích či na internetu. Současně je pravděpodobné, že se mezi symboly území objeví i takové, které přispívají k negativnímu vnímání krajů (např. krajina zdevastovaná těžbou uhlí).

OBECNÁ VÝCHODISKA STUDIA ÚZEMNÍCH IDENTIT

Územní identita je součástí sociální identity (Paasi 2010) a vyjadřuje míru sounáležitosti lidí s prostorem. Je obrazem regionu v myslích jeho obyvatel, ale i těch, kteří region navštěvují anebo jej znají pouze zprostředkovaně. Její formování úzce souvisí s regionální identitou, jež se utváří v procesu institucionalizace regionu (Paasi 1986). V jeho průběhu lze rozlišit čtyři stádia. Nejprve region získává prostorový tvar, jsou vymezeny jeho hranice, na základě hranic historických zemí, etnologicko-kulturních vazeb, administrativně i percepčně (Šerý a Šimáček 2012). Ve druhé fázi institucionalizace se vytváří symbolický tvar regionu – název a symboly (Semian 2012), ve třetí vznikají regionální instituce (Kašková 2013) a ve čtvrté již je region pevně zakotven jak v prostoru, tak ve vědomí obyvatel a má jasně vymezenou roli i ve vyšších socio-prostorových strukturách (Šifta 2012).

V souvislosti s procesem institucionalizace regionu a s ohledem k historickému vývoji lze rozlišit několik základních typů regionální identity, jež jsou v čase a prostoru proměnlivé, mohou se prolínat i lišit, např. v souvislosti s aktuální ekonomickou či politickou pozicí regionu, intenzitou míry sounáležitosti lidí s regiony různých měřítek (Paasi 2004). Významným mechanismem formování identity je rozlišování „my" a „oni", geografická poloha regionu (např. příslušnost k jádrovým a periferním oblastem, vnitrozemí či pohraničí) i perspektiva rozvoje. Regionální identita se utváří pod vlivem působení obecných i specifických (místních, regionálních, časově omezených) procesů (Chromý et al. 2009), je i generačně rozdílná (Zich 2003). Má dvě základní dimenze: regionální vědomí, tvořené identifikací obyvatel s regionem a územní

komunitou, a identitu regionu. Z hlediska prezentace území lze rozlišit identitu objektivní a subjektivní, tzv. image regionu (asociace, zkušenosti, prožitky a postoje). Intenzita regionální identity a její proměny v čase se odrážejí v postavení území v rámci vyšších socio-prostorových struktur a přímo ovlivňují image a percepci regionu, uvnitř i vně (Siwek 2011).

Hlavními prvky regionálního vědomí a identity jsou názory a pohledy týkající se ideje a vize regionu, jeho hodnocení i symboliky (Bucher 2012). Idea vyjadřuje přesvědčení o hodnotě a významu regionu. Jsou mu přisuzovány specifické vlastnosti, obyvateli regionu většinou pozitivně hodnocené. Ti se snaží svou vizi o regionu zachovat, posilovat a rozvíjet. Využívají k tomu také vyjádření specifik území v jeho symbolice. Změní-li se podmínky, v nichž se regionální identita dosud utvářela, mění se i její charakter a intenzita. U socio-ekonomických a socio-kulturních podmíněností je proměnlivost přirozená a odpovídá aktuální pozici společenství v procesu společenských transformací (vliv generační proměny, reflexe integračních a globalizačních tendencí ap.). Dojde-li ale např. ke ztrátě historické paměti (v souvislosti s demografickými proměnami, oslabením tradic nebo přejímáním cizích kulturních vzorů), identita se redefinuje, slábne nebo mizí (Chromý 2003). Může docházet i k pomyslnému konfliktu identit, kdy identita regionu vypovídá o specifických projevech původních obyvatel (Conzen 1990) a symbolech (Cosgrove a Daniels 1988), jimž nově příchozí obyvatelstvo přisuzuje jiné významy. V dichotomii „my“ a „oni“ se s nimi neidentifikuje, interpretuje je jinak nebo je zatracuje (Moore a Whelan 2007). To lze doložit ve všech přesídlených oblastech. Přestože je formování regionální identity podmíněné řadou objektivních skutečností relativně stabilní, jsou při jejím utváření podstatné i podmíněnosti přírodního charakteru (specifika krajiny). Proto i nově kolonizované oblasti jsou si podobné v tom, že první, s čím se noví osídlenci identifikují, je právě fyzické prostředí. Až následně se v utváření regionální identity uplatňují společenské prvky (prostředí získává sociální obsah).

V souladu s Paasiho teorií institucionalizace regionu se zde zaměřujeme na formování prostorového a symbolického tvaru regionů. Současné správní hranice, které region vymezují, nezřídka vycházejí z jeho geomorfologického tvaru, jsou spjaty s reliéfem, krajinným rázem, vodními toky i přírodním bohatstvím a skýtají potenciál pro budování symbolického tvaru. V jeho případě se obvykle klade důraz na název území. Ten plní několik funkcí: dává regionu individuální charakter a zaručuje jeho identifikaci, určuje jeho historickou kontinuitu nezávisle na změnách prostorového vymezení, vyčleňuje území regionu (Bucher 2012). Symboly regionů mohou mít různorodou povahu, jsou to v podstatě všechny prvky, které mají nějaký význam pro územní společenství (Šifta 2013). Vedle názvu patří k dominantním symboly přírodní, krajinné i společenské povahy. K nim lze řadit architektonické prvky, turistické cíle, kulturní dědictví, rozličné lidské aktivity, atmosféru, etnické složení, příslušnost k etnografické oblasti atd. Symbolem regionu může být jeho geografická poloha (pohraniční, pomezní, horská a periferní) i vědomí historické regionální příslušnosti (Siwek a Bogdová 2007 a Heřmanová et al. 2009). Při jeho formování hrají nezanedbatelnou roli i grafické symboly (loga, znaky, vlajky atd.), vycházející z tradic regionu, odrážející jeho jedinečnosti a specifika a zdůrazňující význam a suverenitu oblasti, kterou reprezentují. S jejich pomocí se lidé s regionem snáze identifikují, současně symboly slouží k jeho vnější prezentaci (MacLeod 1998).

METODOLOGIE VÝZKUMU A ZDŮVODNĚNÍ VÝBĚRU ZÁJMOVÉHO ÚZEMÍ

Míru vnímání přírodní symboliky krajů jejich obyvateli i respondenty z jiných částí Česka zjišťoval dotazníkový průzkum realizovaný v rámci grantového projektu „Formování územních identit v oblastech s intenzivně přeměněnou krajinou: příklad SZ Čech" agenturou CVVM v prosinci 2012. Jednotlivé otázky byly zaměřeny na subjektivní hodnocení vybraných krajů (územních samosprávních celků), s důrazem na zjištění názorů respondentů na kvalitu života v nich a volbu jejich charakteristického symbolu. Osobního rozhovoru s tazatelem (metoda PAPI) se zúčastnilo 1 047 respondentů z Česka. Kvótní výběr respondentů umožňuje databázi odpovědí analyzovat z různých hledisek (pohlaví, věk, vzdělání, velikost místa bydliště respondenta ap.), i hodnocení územní diferenciace Česka podle krajů, příp. nadmořské výšky místa bydliště respondentů (obyvatelé nížin, vrchovin a hor). Zde hodnotíme územní diferenciaci z pohledu obyvatel Čech, Moravy a sledovaných krajů. Ty byly zastoupeny 152 respondenty (14,5 % z celkového počtu), poměr dotazovaných odpovídal poměru obyvatel krajů v populaci Česka (30 obyv. Karlovarského kraje – později KV, tj. 2,9 % všech dotázaných, 35 obyv. Libereckého kraje – LB, 4,2 % a 87 Ústeckého kraje – ÚST, 7,9 %). Při vyhodnocení šetření nás zajímalo, zda má prostorová blízkost přímý vztah k bezprostřední znalosti sledovaných regionů (obr. 2). České kraje byly zastoupeny 629 respondenty (60 %), moravské (vč. kraje Vysočina, který byl pro zjednodušení zařazen mezi moravské kraje, protože většina území kraje spadá na Moravu) 418 (40 %). Uvedený podíl dotázaných dovoluje posuzovat jak odraz vnitřní, tak i vnější identity regionů.

Obr. 2. Kraje Česka a vymezení zájmového území severozápadních Čech (2012)

Poznámka: Předmětem výzkumu je analýza vnímání přírodních symbolů oblastí s intenzivně přeměněnou krajinou v Česku, resp. krajů SZ Čech (zájmové území). Percepce symboliky obyvateli Česka byla porovnána v krajích zájmového území, českých krajích a moravských krajích (vč. Vysočiny).

Analýza výsledků šetření se opírala o výběr „nejcharakterističtějšího symbolu" krajů a dále pracovala s přírodní symbolikou. Jsme si vědomi, že vnímání symbolů může být diferencované, že lidé různých věkových či vzdělanostních skupin chápou symboliku různě, stejně jako se liší pohledy mužů a žen. I odpovědi uvnitř zájmového území jsou rozdílné (jim bude věnována až další část výzkumu). Pro výzkum je relevantní porovnání názorů obyvatel z kontinuálně se vyvíjejícího vnitrozemí s názory lidí žijících v krajích s intenzivně přeměněnou krajinou. Tento pohled je cenný nejen pro geografy, ale i sociology či etnology, neboť zájmové území je v mnoha ohledech specifickým prostorem.

Po kvantitativním zpracování odpovědí, vztahujících se k jednotlivým krajům, jsme výsledky porovnali a zhodnotili výběr přírodních symbolů v kontextu představ respondentů o kraji. Posuzovali jsme pozitivní a negativní vnímání krajiny a jeho vliv na postoj obyvatel Česka ke kraji. Závěry také měly přinést odpověď na otázku, zda a jak je přírodní potenciál krajů využitelný pro posílení jejich image.

Pohraniční oblasti Česka (s výjimkou východních) mají vzhledem k historickým proměnám specifický ráz (Semotanová a Chromý 2012). Do roku 1938 byly přímo spjaty s jazykem a kulturou sousedních německých oblastí. Ve vnitřním pohraničí se prolínaly české a německé kulturní vlivy, vnější, nesprávně ztotožňované s termínem Sudety, bylo ekonomicky vyspělou, jazykově i kulturně svébytnou oblastí. V poválečném období se však situace změnila v souvislosti s rozsáhlou etnickou a sociální směnou obyvatelstva. Po odsunu Němců se zde usazovali osídlenci přicházející z různých částí státu i ze zahraničí, se vzájemně odlišnými, nesourodými kulturními i historickými kořeny (Daněk 1993 a Čapka et al. 2005). Od 50. let nepříznivou sociální situaci v území zhoršovaly centralizační a ekonomické zásahy komunistického režimu. Začaly se zde kumulovat problémy politické, socio-ekonomické, socio-demografické, socio-kulturní i ekologické povahy. S nimi souvisel i zhoršující se image regionu, který dále prohluboval odlišnost území, neboť i v době posttotalitní transformace „brzdil" jeho rozvoj. Dnes lze sledovat snahu o jeho zlepšení. Kraje SZ Čech a jejich obyvatelé se snaží překonat negativní obraz svého regionu zviditelněním jeho hodnot. Posiluje se význam cestovního ruchu, aktivizují se regionální instituce, marketing oblastí, oživují a utvářejí se tradice, vytváří nová symbolika. K tomu bezesporu přispívá i existence samosprávných krajů.

Dnes se pohraničí od vnitrozemí odlišuje nejen přírodními podmínkami a periferní polohou, ale také strukturou osídlení (Kuldová 2005 a Kučera 2007). Dříve kompaktní oblasti byly demograficky i ekonomicky přetvořeny, jejich původní tradice zmizely, územní identita i image regionu byly „transformovány". V přesídlených částech českého pohraničí je obecně nižší míra regionální identity. Ta vykazuje řadu specifik a podílí se na polarizaci prostoru ve smyslu dichotomie: dosídlené pohraničí, kontinuálně se vyvíjející vnitrozemí (Heřmanová et al. 2009).

KRAJINNÝ RÁZ A PŘÍRODNÍ DĚDICTVÍ SEVEROZÁPADNÍCH ČECH

Přírodní dědictví bývá obyvateli vnímáno jako symbol. Krajinný ráz (odrážející samozřejmě nejen přírodní, ale i kulturní dědictví regionu) je důležitý

i pro formování prostorového tvaru regionu. Z hlediska jeho utváření vykazují sledované kraje shodné rysy: vnější hranice tvoří pohoří a pahorkatiny (např. Krušné hory, Labské pískovce, Lužické hory, Jizerské hory a Krkonoše), vůči vnitrozemí pak přirozené předěly (např. Český les, Doupovské hory, České středohoří nebo Kozákovský hřbet). Pro kraje je typický členitý reliéf i vysoký rozdíl v nadmořské výšce jednotlivých míst. Zejména nejvyšší hory nebo význačné vrcholy mohou být symbolem kraje a tvořit potenciál pro formování územní identity. Krušné hory, Jizerské hory i Krkonoše jsou proslulé daleko za rámec regionu svými sportovními středisky, turistickými cíli i přírodním dědictvím. Jsou středem zájmu ekologických iniciativ i pojícím prvkem národních i regionálních institucí. Jejich jména se odrážejí v názvech regionálních sdružení (MAS Podještědí, MAS Podřipsko atd.) nebo produktů (Regionální produkt Jizerské hory, Regionální produkt Krušnohoří ap.).

Četné hory a skalní útvary byly již v dávné minulosti spjaty s lidovými pověstmi a legendami. Tvořily význačné, dnes často vyhaslé symboly kraje. Mnohé krajinné dominanty se ale dosud mohou pochlubit přeživšími tradicemi. Například postava bájného Krakonoše (Rübezahla) je symbolem Krkonoš již po staletí, pojí se s ním stále živé pověsti i řada lokálních pojmenování (produkty, instituce) a aktivit (Setkání s Krakonošem v Harrachově a Sněhový Krakonoš v Jilemnici). Pro Jizerské hory je tradiční bájnou postavou doktor Kittel. Slavkovský les má svou mytickou figuru, jež časem překročila hranice regionu, Permona (Permoníka). Význam Řípu, spjatého s bájnými počátky českých dějin, je rovněž obecně znám. S legendami a pověstmi se pojí i další hory v krajích: Vladař na Karlovarsku, Milešovka či Střekov na Ústecku, Trosky a Bezděz na Liberecku. Specifické postavení má Ještěd, jenž se stal, v souvislosti s vrcholovou stavbou horského hotelu, vedle místa opředeného starými pověstmi o čertech i novodobým symbolem kraje. Příklady dokládají, že v dosídlených krajích zůstaly zachovány mnohé prvky, tvořící součást historické paměti regionu.

Výrazným symbolem krajů jsou i vodní toky. Labe je největší českou řekou a nejvýznamnější vodní cestou, Ohře proslula svými nádržemi (Nechranice a Skalka) a spolu s Jizerou je tokem vyhledávaným vodáky. Zároveň jsou (spolu s přítoky) proslulé i záplavami (negativní potenciál pro formování územních identit). Řekám chybí role národních symbolů, jakou má např. Vltava, přesto i ony svou symbolikou přispívají k formování identity regionů. Jejich jména se odrážejí v názvech regionálních institucí (např. Euroregion Nisa a Rádio Jizera) či aktivit (např. Folková Ohře a Elbe – Labe Cup), pojí se s nimi „oživená" vlastivědná produkce s německými kořeny (např. pověsti o víle Ohři a o princezně Izeríně) i novodobé tradice (odemykání řek atd.).

Člověk se identifikuje s krajinným rázem, aniž by musel mít odborné znalosti o jejím vývoji. Důležitější jsou pro něj praktické aspekty života v krajině, např. klimatické vlivy (drsnější podmínky v horských oblastech), hospodářská využitelnost krajiny. Přírodní bohatství krajů spočívá ve zdrojích termálních, minerálních i léčivých vod (Karlovarsko a Teplicko), v těžbě hnědého uhlí (Sokolovsko a Mostecko) i rud barevných kovů (Jáchymovsko a Božídarsko), uranové rudy (Jáchymovsko a Podještědí) i kamene (děčínská a liberecká žula). Níže položené lokality jsou centry tradiční zemědělské produkce, vedle pěstování zeleniny a ovoce na Litoměřicku a v Českém ráji je typickou plodinou oblasti např. chmel (Žatecko a Lounsko).

Přestože rostoucí tlak průmyslové výroby spolu s nepříznivým stavem zne-čištění ovzduší ve druhé polovině 20. století působil na zhoršování místních ekosystémů, zachovalo se ve sledovaných krajích mnoho přírodních hodnot podléhajících dnes právní ochraně. Typické jsou rozsáhlé lesní komplexy, na-lezneme zde četná chráněná území, národní parky (Krkonoše a České Švýcar-sko), CHKO (Slavkovský les, Labské pískovce, České středohoří, Lužické hory, Kokořínsko, Jizerské hory a Český ráj), rašeliniště a slatiniště s vývěry minerál-ních vod a plynů (SOOS na Chebsku) a další přírodní dědictví (Tiské stěny, Labská soutěska, Hruboskalsko či Bozkovské dolomitové jeskyně atd.), národní přírodní památky, přírodní rezervace apod.

PERCEPCE SYMBOLŮ KARLOVARSKA, ÚSTECKA A LIBERECKA OBYVATELI ČESKA

Pro analýzu vnímání přírodní symboliky krajů obyvateli Česka využíváme odpovědí na otevřenou otázku *„Zamyslete se a pokuste se jedním nebo několika slovy vyjádřit, co je nejcharakterističtějším symbolem následujících krajů."* Re-spondenti (u KV 1 039, u ÚST a LB 1 040) uváděli symboly společenské, eko-nomické i krajinné povahy (obr. 3). Výsledky šetření jsou zpracovány tak, že nejčetnějším shodným odpovědím byl přidělen číselný kód, ostatní jsou zahrnu-ty do jednoho vnitřně diferencovaného souboru.
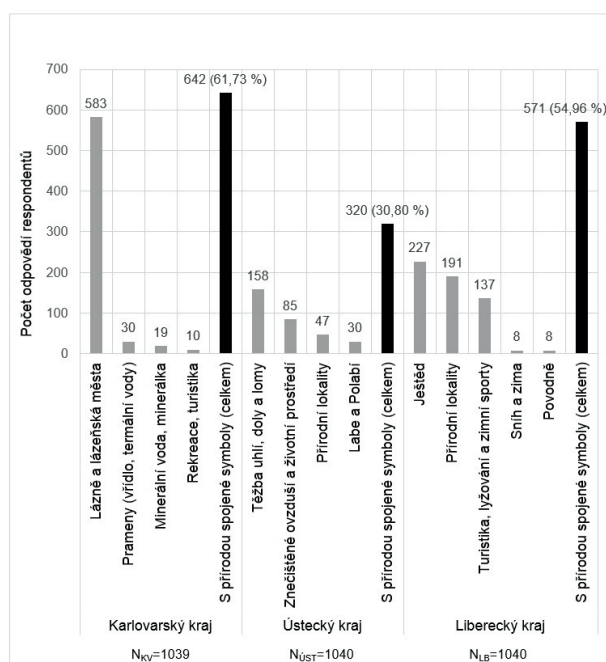
Obr. 3. Vnímání přírodních a krajinných symbolů krajů SZ Čech obyvateli Česka (2012)

Zdroj: CVVM (2012).

V Karlovarském kraji vnímá většina respondentů jako charakteristický symbol 12 různých lokalit nebo jevů (lázně a lázeňská města, filmový festival, Rusové – v různých souvislostech, hotely, minerální vody, porcelán a sklo, Becherovka, prameny, oplatky, rekreace a turistika, kriminalita a Karlovy Vary), z nich čtyři vycházejí z krajinného rázu a přírodních specifik. Nejčetnější zastoupení má symbol lázní a lázeňských měst, který za typický považuje 583 respondentů (56,1 % dotázaných). S tímto údajem korespondují i dva další: minerální voda (minerálka), již uvádí 19 dotázaných (1,8 %), a prameny (vřídlo a termální vody), zvolené 30 respondenty (2,9 %). K lázním a pramenům nejspíš směřovala i úvaha dalších 10 odpovídajících (1,0 %), kteří zvolili jako symbol rekreaci a turistiku. Ojedinělé jsou ještě odpovědi „čistý vzduch, hory, lesy, příroda, krásná krajina, těžba uranu a znečištěné prostředí", jež uvedlo celkem 8 dotázaných (0,7 %). Potenciál lázeňství je významný pro obyvatele kraje, z 30 oslovených považuje lázně za symbol 23 dotázaných (76,7 %), prameny 1 (3,3 %), rekreaci a turistiku 3 respondenti (10,0 %). Při porovnání názorů respondentů z českých a moravských krajů je zřejmé, že bez ohledu na místo, kde žijí, vnímají lázně, prameny i s nimi spojenou turistiku jako nejvýraznější přírodní symboly Karlovarska. V Čechách tyto varianty zvolilo celkem 61,4 %, na Moravě 60,7 % dotázaných. Pro formování regionálního vědomí i image regionu mají tedy lázně nepochybně klíčový význam.

V Ústeckém kraji volili respondenti četněji 8 symbolů (těžba uhlí, znečištěné životní prostředí, průmysl, Romové – v různých souvislostech, nezaměstnanost a chudoba, Labe, Polabí, přírodní lokality a kriminalita), z nich čtyři lze vnímat jako přírodní. Nejčastěji je zmiňována těžba uhlí, doly a lomy, ty vnímá jako symbol kraje 158 respondentů (15,2 %), 85 odpovídajících (8,2 %) považuje za symbol znečištěné ovzduší a životní prostředí. Četnost odpovědí se neliší s místem bydliště respondentů. Patnáct obyvatel regionu (z 87 oslovených) vnímá jako nejvýraznější symbol těžbu (17,2 %), 7 znečištěné ovzduší (8,0 %). Téměř identický je podíl stejných odpovědí v případě ostatních respondentů, 14,3 % z Čech a 16,5 % z Moravy vnímá jako symbol Ústecka těžbu, 8,3 % českých a 8,0 % moravských respondentů volí jako typickou ekologickou zátěž. Pro 47 dotázaných (4,5 % z celku) je symbolem kraje příroda (Českosaské Švýcarsko, Boží Dar, Pravčická brána, Říp a Krušné hory), pro 30 (2,9 %) Labe a Polabí. Pouze čtyři respondenti (0,4 %) uvádějí jako symbol kraje lázně (Teplice), 3 (0,3 %) povodně, 1 (0,1 %) pláně a holiny. Sami obyvatelé Ústecka tyto symboly nepreferují, uvádí je 6 dotázaných (6,9 %). Zajímavý je mírný rozdíl v názorech respondentů z Čech a Moravy, kdy čeští volí přírodní symbol méně často (3,5 %) než moravští (5,3 %). Také na Ústecku se potvrzuje, že přírodní potenciál je srovnatelně významný pro formování vnitřní i vnější regionální identity. Rozdílnou (negativní dimenzi) vykazuje vliv těžby a ekologické zátěže, považovaný za symbol kraje nejvyšším počtem dotázaných, bez ohledu na to, zda jsou či nejsou obyvateli kraje. Zarážející je relativně nízké zastoupení přírodní dominanty Říp. Zde by bylo důvodné se domnívat, že především pro obyvatele Čech bude tento symbol vzhledem k jeho významu výraznější. Je pravděpodobné, že mnozí respondenti, včetně obyvatel regionu, si horu Říp s Ústeckem nespojují (vnímají ji spíše jako symbol středních Čech).

U Libereckého kraje respondenti uváděli 13 typických symbolů (hory a příroda, nezaměstnanost, zimní sporty, turistika, univerzita, bižuterie a sklo, textil,

Romové, ZOO, Ještěd, kultura, aquapark a Liberec), z toho tři přímo souvisejí s krajinným rázem. Nejčastěji volili hory a přírodu (Krkonoše, Jizerské hory a Český ráj). Ty považuje za symbol 191 dotázaných (17,5 %), lyžování a zimní sporty 156 (15,0 %), turistiku 22 (2,1 %), sníh a zimu 8 (0,8 %). Pro dalších 8 respondentů jsou typickým přírodním symbolem kraje povodně, pro 2 lázně (0,2 %), jednotlivci zvolili jako symbol faunu a flóru, zeleň, těžbu uhlí a uranu, znečištěné ovzduší a inverzi – 6 odpovědí (0,6 %). Ze srovnání odpovědí z Čech a Moravy plyne, že krkonošská a jizerskohorská střediska, stejně jako turisticky atraktivní Český ráj jsou výrazným symbolem Liberecka jak pro české (18,0 %), tak pro moravské (17,2 %) respondenty. Shoda panuje i u volby zimních sportů (15,6 % a 15,3 %). Turistiku jako symbol kraje zvolilo více respondentů z Čech (3,3 % proti 1,7 % na Moravě). Zatímco v otázce lyžování se s celorepublikovou volbou zhruba shoduje i procentuální zastoupení respondentů z Liberecka (17,1 %), turistiku jako symbol kraje nezvolil žádný z nich. Specifické postavení mezi symboly Liberecka má Ještěd. Respondenti volili tuto dominantu především jako architektonický fenomén, nelze ale opominout fakt, že budova horského hotelu a vysílače je spjata se stejnojmennou horou a lze ji tudíž rovněž vnímat jako krajinný symbol. Ještěd za symbol Liberecka považuje celkem 227 respondentů (21,7 %), přičemž se od sebe významně neliší zastoupení odpovědí z Čech (23,6 %) a Liberecka (25,7 %), poněkud nižší je vnímání Ještědu jako symbolu kraje na Moravě (18,4 %). Šetření CVVM v případě Liberecka potvrdilo podobnou skutečnost jako u předchozích sledovaných regionů: vybrané přírodní symboly a jejich potenciál pro formování regionálního vědomí i spoluutváření image regionu jsou srovnatelně stejně významné pro obyvatele kraje jako pro ostatní obyvatele Česka. Snad jen turistika je pro regionální vědomí zdánlivě méně významná, ale vzhledem k formulaci odpovědi nelze tento závěr považovat za relevantní.

ZÁVĚR

Fakt, že územní identita je v rámci formování prostorového i symbolického tvaru regionu výrazně ovlivňována i jeho přírodním a krajinným rázem, je nepopiratelný. Z šetření vyplývá, že krajinný ráz a přírodní bohatství krajů SZ Čech nejsou pro respondenty tak významné jako výraznější ekonomické, sociální či kulturní rysy. Přesto je celkový počet zvolených přírodních symbolů vysoký, uvážíme-li, že respondenti volili pouze jeden symbol kraje.

Na Karlovarsku zvolily přírodní symbol téměř 2/3 respondentů – nejvyšší podíl mají odpovědi „lázně a lázeňská města". Jejich existence sice z přírodního bohatství vychází, ale většina respondentů je nevnímá jako součást přírody, v obecném povědomí stojí spíše na pozici léčebných, kulturních a turistických center. Krajinná symbolika regionu je nečetná, zmiňovány jsou opět především prameny a minerální vody, ostatní přírodní unikáty zůstávají nepovšimnuty. Lze konstatovat, že přírodní potenciál kraje je vnímán pozitivně (až na dva negativní prvky: těžba uranu a znečištěné ovzduší). Na Ústecku je přírodní symbolika zastoupena nejméně a její vnímání je opačné. Krajinný symbol zvolila necelá 1/3 dotázaných, odpovědi dokládají negativní image regionu. Proti Karlovarsku zde ovšem nalezneme více konkrétních přírodních lokalit (Labe, Polabí, Českosaské Švýcarsko, Boží Dar, Pravčická brána, Říp a Krušné hory). Přírodní sym-

bol Liberecka preferovaly téměř 2/5 respondentů, spolu s Ještědem dokonce skoro 60 %. Proti dvěma předchozím krajům zde převládají krajinné dominanty (Ještěd, oblast Českého ráje, Krkonoše i Jizerské hory a s nimi spjaté sportovní aktivity či klimatické fenomény – sníh a zima). Zdejší přírodní symboly jsou vnímány pozitivně, negativní jsou uváděny ojediněle (povodně, těžba uranu a znečištěné ovzduší).

Výsledky šetření prokázaly, že obyvatelé Česka mají povědomí o krajinném rázu sledovaných regionů, i když většinou jen v rovině nejvýraznějších přírodních symbolů. Ze spektra zvolených příkladů je patrné, že kraje SZ Čech jsou v povědomí lidí spjaty s významnými turistickými cíli a místy rekreace (hory a horská střediska, lázně a unikátní přírodní lokality), ale také se společensky a mediálně diskutovanými ekologickými a hospodářskými jevy (těžba nerostných surovin, devastace krajiny a ekologická zátěž, ničivé povodně), jež přispívají spíše k negativnímu vnímání regionu (převládá u Ústecka). V definování přírodních symbolů není rozdíl mezi vnějším a vnitřním obrazem, obyvatelé zájmových území se téměř bezezbytku ztotožňují s pohledem respondentů z jiných krajů, neliší se ani pohled obyvatel „sousedních" regionů. Důvodem ne příliš rozmanitého výběru symbolů je možná školní vzdělávání, mediální obraz v celostátních sdělovacích prostředcích, nedostatečná propagace přírodních hodnot krajů. Skutečnost, že se v odpovědích respondentů ze zájmových území neobjevují jiné příklady přírodního dědictví, poukazuje na nižší schopnost obyvatel vnímat specifika a hodnoty území, v němž žijí. Pozoruhodné je, že respondenti nepovažují za symbolickou příhraniční polohu krajů, přestože je prokazatelné, že je pro formování symbolického tvaru regionu určující. Stejně „nepovšimnuta" zůstává většina chráněných přírodních lokalit. Ve vnějším vnímání regionů je zanedbatelná i role tradic a vlastivědného potenciálu (včetně celonárodně známého odkazu Řípu či postavy Krakonoše). Přitom příslušné regiony ji ke své prezentaci poměrně hojně využívají.

Ze sledování přírodních symbolů krajů vyplývá, že výrazný potenciál pro formování územní identity tvoří především krajinný reliéf území spolu s intenzivní, aktivně prezentovanou a ekologickými problémy překrytou ochranou přírody. Z kvantitativního hlediska lze přírodní potenciál formování územní identity vybraných krajů hodnotit jako poměrně silný. Pozitivní je především skutečnost, že dotazovaní vidí v regionech přírodní potenciál využitelný pro rozvoj cestovního ruchu a tím i pro posílení územní identity.

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Miroslav Š i f t a, Pavel C h r o m ý

SYMBOLS AND IDENTITY OF A REGION: ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION OF NATURAL SYMBOLS IN AREAS WITH PROFOUNDLY CHANGED LANDSCAPE IN CZECHIA

Nowadays, in the context of solving the development issues of regions on various scales, the cognition of not only the outer frames, but also the inner conditions for the development of regions, the assessment of the regional milieu, environmental quality including the perception of the territorial units (regions) outside and inside are emphasized. The paper deals with the symbolic shape of a region in the sense of the Finnish geographer A. Paasi's theory of institutionalization of regions. The main objective is to contribute to the discussion on the importance of natural symbols in the process of formation of inner regional identity (sense of belonging to the lived space) in three Czech regions – Karlovy Vary, Liberec, and Ústí nad Labem (regional self-governing units). They are regions with profoundly transformed landscape in areas resettled after World War II, massively industrialized and today – in the post-totalitarian period – fighting with problems in regional development. At the same time, the role of the natural symbols of regions in the formation of their outer image both in the positive (symbols expressing positive values) and negative senses (symbols expressing negative features of the environment) is assessed. Specifically, it concerns the assessment of differences in the natural symbolism of individual regions in the awareness of a representative sample of population of Czechia (the questionnaire survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre – CVVM in December 2012; 1047 respondents) and the answer to the question of what is the potential of symbols for the formation of regional identity. Perception of symbolism of interest areas in variation with the position proximity is compared as well. Respondents quoted one symbol, which, in their opinion, represented the given region.

In the Karlovy Vary region 650 of respondents (62.5%) chose a natural symbol, but the answer "spas and spa towns" was most frequent. Though they are originally natural wealth, most respondents do not perceive them anymore as part of nature; in general awareness they are rather perceived as curative, cultural and tourist centres. The landscape symbolism of the region is not frequent, but again primarily springs and mineral waters are mentioned, while other unique natural objects remained unnoticed. It seems that the natural potential of the region is perceived, although to a limited extent, positively with the exception of two negative elements: uranium mining and air pollution.

In the Ústí region the natural symbolism is least represented and its perception is opposite. A landscape symbol was selected by 328 respondents, amounting to 31.6%, although the negative image of the region prevails – coal mining, mines, stone pits, plains, polluted air and environment or the impact of floods. Contrary to the Karlovy Vary region, more specific natural elements that make the potential for the formation of the territorial identity of the Ústí nad Labem region were mentioned, namely the River Elbe (Labe), the Polabí region, Czech-Saxon Switzerland (Českosaské Švýcarsko), village Boží Dar, The Pravčice Gate, Říp Mountain, and the Krušné hory Mountains.

The natural symbol of the Liberec region was preferred by 393 respondents (37.80%), together with the Ještěd hill it was even 620 respondents (59.7%). In contrast to the two preceding regions landscape dominants predominate here; the Ještěd hill

topped by a cone-shaped hotel and a transmitter, the area of Český ráj, the Krkonoše and Jizerské Mountains with the related activities (skiing and hiking) or the climatic phenomena (snow and winter). Local natural symbols are perceived positively and like in the Karlovy Vary region, the negative symbols are rather isolated (floods, uranium mining and polluted air).

The concluding comparison shows that the character of landscape and natural wealth of regions are not as important for respondents as the more substantial economic, social or cultural characteristis of regions. In spite of this the total number of selected natural symbols is high considering the fact that respondents chose one symbol of the region without any more detailed specification. However, the fact that in the Ústí nad Labem region symbols related to the landscape and environmental devastation prevailed is not satisfactory. It has been confirmed that the natural symbolism plays an important role in the process of the formation of territorial identity in the observed regions. More significant territorial differentiation in positive and negative perception of natural symbols in the Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem and Liberec regions cannot be substantiated from the obtained data. There are only very small differences betveen the answers of respondents from the north-west Bohemian region (interest regions) and the Bohemian and Moravian Regions; location distance plays no significant role in the selection of symbols. Presumably, perception of regions is strongly influenced by the media and education. However, this hypothesis requires further research. The relatively less differentiated file of answers also indicates that people probably cannot define natural assets of the territory except those generally known.

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Graphic symbols and local identity: the case of use and perception of municipal emblems in the Liberec Region (Czechia)

Miroslav Šifta

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Graphic symbols and local identity: the case of use and perception of municipal emblems in the Liberec Region (Czechia)

Miroslav Šifta

Faculty of Science, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Charles University in Prague, Prague, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT
This paper analyses the role of graphic symbols in local representation and in the process of local identity formation. The extent of graphic symbols utilization by local development actors in the region, its importance for image formation of the locality (municipality) from the point of view of the local development actors and an assessment of the degree of identification with the municipal emblems among the local population are evaluated, based on the results of a corresponding survey targeted at municipal representatives. Municipal emblems tend to (and also should) have a local representative function. These should emphasize local specificity, uniqueness. Municipal emblems have a potential to play the role of connecting, mediating and activating factors also on a higher as well as a local level. Municipal emblems are still not used enough and in the right way by actors of municipality representations. These are often misunderstood and deemed unimportant for local development.

Introduction

Regional system transformations, the concept of region as a social construction in space (Paasi, 2003a, 2010) and regional identity have been at the forefront of the "new" regional geography over a long period of time (Allen, Massey, & Cochrane, 1998; Claval, 1987, 2007; Gilbert, 1988; Murphy, 1991; Paasi, 1986). By analysing the process of formation of different sized regions, this discipline can make a significant contribution to their development (Paasi, 2002, 2003b; Raagmaa, 2002; Smith, 2006). That is why it focuses its attention on research projects related to the process of institutionalization of region and, in connection therewith, on the regional consciousness of inhabitants and its potential. In the context of regional/local development, it also studies regional/local identity and both the presentation and representation of areas, including their image (Süssner, 2002; Zimmerbauer, 2011).

In this respect, the symbolic shape of regions has so far been studied only partially, even though its formation is defined as one of the "key" phases of institutionalization (Paasi, 1986). During this process, region acquires its symbolic shape and becomes identifiable among other shapes, not only by way of spatial delimitation, but also through, for example, its name (Semian, Chromý, & Kučera, in press), historical roots (Chromý, Kučerová, & Kučera, 2009; Semian, 2015), as well as natural and cultural singularities or traditions (Semian & Chromý, 2014). All elements involved

in the formation of a region's symbolic shape are manifested themselves in symbolism, which affects not only the perception of geographical space (MacLeod, 1998; Šifta & Chromý, 2014), but also both outward and inward (two-way) reproduction of the region, and regional/place marketing and branding (Andersson, 2014; Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013; Karavatzis & Ashworth, 2005; Kašková & Chromý, 2014; Papadoupoulos, 2004; Pike, 2009, 2011; Zimmerbauer, 2011). Analysing regional symbolism helps us to evaluate the role of symbols during the formation of regions, their identities and images. Additionally, it can reveal the significance of regional/local symbolism in the drawing-up of strategies of regional/local development.

The aims of the paper

The present paper, too, aims to establish the importance of regional symbolism. Its introductory part discusses, at a general level, the functions and relevance of symbolism in the process of formation of regions and regional identities. The pivotal part deals with the role of graphic symbols in those processes. On the basis of an inquiry into the opinions of actors of local development, it assesses the role and importance of a particular graphic symbol (a municipality emblem) in the process of locality formation and local development, strengthening of local identity and

Figure 1. The location of the studied area.
Source: Europe Basemap Geodatabase, ESRI 2005.

image building. The objective of this paper is to ascertain (on the basis of opinions of 97 municipal representatives of the Liberec Region – self-governing region in Czechia, NUTS 3 level; Figure 1) the frequency and type of use of the basic graphic symbol of municipalities which is perceived as their main representative and to find out the connotations of their utilization, that is for what purpose municipalities use their emblem. However, it concurrently seeks to provide responses to questions about the extent to which a particular graphic symbol fulfils the role of a representing, uniting, mediating and activating factor of local/regional development and about the meaning that local actors attribute to it. What is also assessed is the meaning of municipal emblems as a means of identification of inhabitants with the locality they live in. The degree of understanding of a symbol and its adoption by the inhabitants is studied in connection therewith. The findings are not only summarized, but also classified in the context of specified research questions and compared both mutually and in relation to general starting point of the research.

Territorial symbols and symbolism

A regional symbol can be identified either as a concrete sign (graphic, pictorial, or a feature in space) or as an abstract phenomenon (cultural, societal, linguistic) having a close connection with a particular area and bearing – apart from its primary sense – a figurative meaning and an emotional charge shared by the inhabitants. It is an expression of tradition and a vehicle of values of a region (Monnet, 2011). Even though the unique symbol

of a region is constituted by its name (Paasi, 2002; Simon, Huigen, & Groote, 2010), the other important elements encompass its natural, landscape, cultural and historical characteristics reflecting not only the physical environment with a social content (such symbols may, for example, include geographical position of a particular area, mountain ranges or distinctive peaks, streams and bodies of water, rock massifs, caves, etc. (Debarbieux, 2004), and related local legends, songs and traditions (Clifton, 2011), typical fauna and flora, including symbols referring to the region's economic traditions, but also social activities and human imprints (e.g. architectonic dominants, habits, ethnic composition, people's allegiance to a given historical territory, religiosity, etc.). Regional symbols are primarily shaped by those features that are distinctive to each region and distinguish it from all other regions. They often fulfil the role of recognition signs, bear a hidden sense, support togetherness of a group of individuals, and evoke its exceptionality (Bourdieu, 1991). They are a symbolic expression of each region's "content" (Monnet, 2011), allowing and facilitating both the understanding of reality and the interaction among all actors, mediating relationships between space and power (Hospers, 2011).

The symbolism of a region, an essential part of the forming of the region's symbolic shape and one of the main factors that codetermine its outer image and inner atmosphere, is constituted by a set of diverse regional symbols. Throughout the process of formation of a region, its symbolism fulfils a number of functions: it codetermines its identity and image; lends it a particular value and meaning and is involved in building a positive relationship of its

inhabitants to the region they live in. Additionally, it has a formative role, integrates the region, makes it visible, presents and represents it. Its part in region formation may, however, prove to be negative. Any symbolism that encounters public disapproval or negative public perception may considerably weaken the inhabitants' identity, disintegrate the region (environmental stress, economic instability, ethnic problems, etc.), harm or deform its image, and destabilize it (Zimmerbauer, 2011).

Should regional symbolism be fully functional, it has to be "rooted" in reality. It can never arise "ex nihilo"; its fundaments are made of those elements that are available in each area. Regional particularities and unique features are thus used to make a region more visible and help develop its self-definition, become distinct from the symbols of other, particularly adjacent regions (Bourdieu, 1991).

The functions of regional symbolism are affected by the attitudes that its originators, users, and actors of regional/local development hold towards it. It depends on the interpretation of symbols, whether and how regional symbols will express the continuity of a region over time, what emphasis will be laid upon historical elements, the reading of the past, rendering it visible, upon the way they relate the past to the present (Šifta & Chromý, 2014) and upon how it contributes to the strengthening (or weakening) of a region in interregional competition (e.g. by enticing tourists or potential new residents/investors). Regional symbolism constitutes an integral part of power relationships in any given area, and, in connection therewith, is directly influenced or modified by various actors (such as public administration, non-governmental organizations, commercial sphere, etc.) both within and outside the region (Pike, 2011). The motivations of different actors during the formation and utilization of regional symbols are as multifarious as would be their enumeration. Some tend to use (and create) symbols in reverence to tradition or for sentimental reasons; others (such as municipal representatives) may do so in the public interest (but also in their own interest). Some of them seek economic profit, others pursue political goals and yet others strive to make their region more visible (Hospers, 2011). This proves the crucial importance of symbolism in the forming of the region's image, primarily in view of marketing and branding, and different tools for commodification of a region (Anholt, 2003; Hospers, 2011; Ikuta, Yukawa, & Hamasaki, 2007; Papadoupoulos, 2004).

In order that regional symbolism can fulfil the role of an integrating factor, it primarily has to be an expression of the consensus of those whom it is supposed to represent. That is a necessary condition for its adoption and use. If symbols have a representative and promotional importance, they strengthen the region's positive image, bringing the values adopted and shared by the community to the foreground regardless of whether they are historical/

traditional, or newly created "from the above" (made to order), "from the outside", or "bottom-up". Therefore, the purpose of the recent formation of regional symbols is a schematic expression of those elements that are worth considering and ought to present (and represent) a region by emphasizing their most distinct assets, specificities and unique features the way they are perceived by modern society.

Closely connected with the functions (and the functionality) of regional symbolism is the "potency" and intelligibility of the meaning of all its components. Continually used symbols with a constant, unchanging significance have the longest lasting relevance. Nevertheless, the meaning of some symbols can be revitalized if the social climate changes. It is through their agency that regional communities can continue the already forgotten values or those that had been repressed in the past. Equally significant is the discontinuity of a symbol's meaning: individual components continue to get "captured", but their meanings alter, that is they are interpreted in different contexts and may reflect different values. It can be observed in the case of many symbols. Symbols of regions, which are very susceptible to changes, are abovementioned names. Many studies, which have dealt with name as a symbol of a region, show how quickly name can be completely changed and its symbolic meaning transformed, newly created or even lost. Causes of these processes are commonly sociocultural and political turns such as colonization (Bigon, 2009) or political coups (Azaryahu, 1997; Gill, 2005; Stiperski et al., 2011). Graphic symbols, on which this paper is mainly focused, are more stable over time and its meanings are more resistant to change. Therefore, they have a potential to play a crucial role in the formation of the symbolic shape of a region.

When speaking of the efficacy of the existence and meaning of symbols, we should not omit the threats related to their production, for example unequal use of symbolism resulting in a fragmented, inconsistent image of the given area that is due to a large number of elements and symbols. Equally problematic is the lack of coordination in the creation of new symbols, primarily the graphic ones, as a result of which symbols and their interpretations act in opposite directions. A negative impact is also observed in the case of newly created symbols with a false or erroneous content due to which communities may not only identify themselves with an "error", but sometimes also establish "misleading" traditions and distort regional symbolism. It is evident (and undeniable when related to the essence of identities) that individual symbols may be loaded with potential tension or conflict (e.g. disputes for authenticity, interpretation and ownership rights) and become a subject of controversy among different groups within each community (professional and generational

divides, differences in people's interests) and regional communities (patriotism, boosterism), thereby weakening the above-described role of regional symbolism. Its incorrect or inadequate usage or conflicts and misapprehensions arising from its misleading interpretation, considerably reduce the possibility of its employment in the formation of the symbolic shape of a region.

Graphic regional symbols

Graphic symbols (emblems, flags, coats of arms, logos, brands, marks) constitute an essential component of regional symbolism. They are mostly based on the traditions of a region, reflecting its characteristic features and emphasizing the importance of a region that they represent. Various regional symbols of natural, landscape, cultural, historical and economic character may constitute their grounds. Graphic symbols have a high emotional charge, strengthen the inhabitants' sense of belonging to the area they live in and facilitate people's self-identification with the area they inhabit. Serving as an external presentation of the given area they become an important element in the process of identity deepening (Burke, 2004; Monnet, 2011). Symbols are endowed with a high (though rather neglected) informational value because their purpose is to create an image of a particular area that is as precise and as convincing as possible, using a schematic, simplified expression of its typical, emblematic features.

Individual types of graphic symbols differ in their function, significance and form. Some are related to a region of a higher scale level, others only to a locality. Although basic municipal graphic symbols (emblems, flags) are key for research, an important role in the formation of the symbolic shape of a locality (municipality) is also played by (further unstudied) logos and marks, graphic designations of companies, institutions, associations and clubs (copyright-protected work). Usually placed on products, documents or promotional materials, they serve for identification and presentation. As they are supposed to boost awareness of the existence of an organization and its scope of activity they often refer to a locality. Their "lifespan" is closely tied to the existence of the institution they represent; they arise and perish along with it. Brands/labels that mostly serve to label typical regional/local products (Kašková & Chromý, 2014; Underwood, 2003) or places that themselves symbolize a region or a locality (tourist destinations – touristic labels; Lim & Weaver, 2014) can be characterized in a similar way.

Municipal emblems: the case of Czechia

As mentioned earlier, emblems and flags are the fundamental graphic symbols of a region. Self-governing Czech regions have disposed of their emblems and flags since their post-2000 constitution. Municipalities (with the exception of those historical cities that have been continually using their historical signs since the thirteenth century) have had the right to use these graphic symbols since 1990 (after the fall of the communist regime), and that is why most of these municipal symbols did not originate until recent years. New municipal symbols are approved by the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament on the basis of proposals submitted by individual applicants (municipalities). Municipal authorities have a legal obligation to place the approved emblem on the city hall and incorporate it into their official stamp. Under the influence of this directive, many municipal representations perceive the emblem (and the flag) as the "highest symbol" and treat it with so much respect that they often limit its use (e.g. by a municipal regulation), considerably weakening its potential for strengthening the municipality's image and the inhabitants' sense of belonging to it.

The shape and the graphic form of emblems and flags stem from heraldic and vexillological rules, but the newly created ones (and the historical ones alike) have to respect and emphasize their semantic relationship to the locality they represent. They frequently pick up the threads of historical sealing and stamping symbolism of the municipality in question so as to preserve its continuity. Many municipalities also tend to prefer "talking symbols" related to their names and symbols referring to "strong and sustained" traditions (e.g. a patron of the local church, significant events, legends, "coats of arms" of former aristocratic families) or the municipality's character in terms of surrounding landscape, ethnicity, religion, natural heritage and richness, traditional economic activities, administrative division and the like (Figure 2).

Municipal emblems and flags ought to be as simple as possible, and should, above all, capture only those features that are perceived within the municipality as the strongest symbols of the locality. The reason is that they can be endowed with a meaning only when their form (colour, figure, parts of the emblem) is connected to a particular mental association. While flags mostly fulfil this condition/requirement, the iconography of emblems is, in some cases, "nonunderstandable". Proponents often tend to "over-dimension" the symbolism they suggest, choose deformed, erroneous or long forgotten symbols. Sometimes local development actors project their own ambitions or subjective opinions and efforts to become more visible into the emblem. Unclear or anaesthetic emblems are not, by consequence, accepted positively by the inhabitants and are frequently replaced by a simpler, "legible" municipal logo with which people can identify themselves more easily.

Therefore, it is not always true that a municipal emblem is shared by the local community in the long term and

(A) **(B)** **(C)** **(D)**

(E) **(F)** **(G)** **(H)**

(I) **(J)** **(K)** **(L)**

Figure 2. Examples of symbols used in selected municipal emblems. A – Volfartice (The wolf is a so-called talking symbol. It corresponds with the name of the municipality. The emblem and the name refer to the original German name of the municipality – Wolfersdorf.); B – Pěnčín (The apple symbolizes orchards which are traditional in the locality.); C – Turnov (The two-tailed lion, the symbol of Czech lands, is a symbol of the city because it was the Royal City in mediaeval times.); D – Bezděz (The combination of abovementioned two-tailed lion and the ramparts refer to the Royal Castle which still stands in the locality.); E – Dolní Řasnice (The horseshoe and the blacksmith tongs symbolize an important historical figure. The blacksmith Ondřej Stelzig, according to a legend, 'took from the rich and gave to the poor'.); F – Karlovice (The red cross, an attribute of St. George, symbolizes him as a patron of the local church.); G – Nové Město pod Smrkem (The rasp and hammer refer to the former economic activity in the locality – a mining of ferrous metals. The second figure, the wheel, is a symbol for the aristocratic family which was important in the development of the locality and also for wider territory within the region.); H – Slaná (The four white roses are a symbol of an administrative character. It shows that the municipality is divided into four parts.); I – Lázně Libverda (The figure of the cockerel and the water spring symbolizes a local legend about the cockerel who found a local medicinal spring.); J – Albrechtice v Jizerských horách (The spruce trees and the mountain in the background refer to a forested and mountainous area, where the municipality is located.); K – Liberec (The city gate – traditional symbol of cities in general.); L – Přepeře (The blue wavy lines refer to the Jizera River, an important watercourse within the entire Liberec Region.)

Source: The official register of municipal emblems, The Parliament of the Czech Republic, The Chamber of Deputies. Author's study of the meaning of symbols used in the municipal emblems.

represents the given area regardless of its development and transformation. Some emblems may lose their symbolic meaning because their symbolism is unfamiliar to the inhabitants; others may lose their symbolic value after a certain time and become "burnt-out". Such emblems may nonetheless remain part of local symbolism as is the case, for example, of historical emblems that are not always understood by modern society. Still other graphic symbols, formerly bearing a clear meaning for the community, acquire a new content and function through development, and new

generations transform them into a "new quality" (e.g. aristocratic blazes as part of local symbolism). Enunciation potentials of a heraldic sign are thus often limited by the knowledge and the ability to interpret its meaning.

Use and perception of municipal emblems in the Liberec Region

The research of graphic symbols, especially the newly created ones, provides (in connection with the dynamic transformation of the regional system and emancipation or establishment of new regions and municipalities) answers to questions about what elements local communities regard as symbols of "their" locality, with which they can identify themselves, which strengthen the internal integrity of their locality and help build its image. In this sense, municipal emblems that are legislatively approved and relatively unified "representatives of municipalities" in terms of heraldic and graphic design undoubtedly ought to range among basic symbols. That is the reason why exactly such emblems became the centre of the following analysis of their functions, importance and use. For the purpose of the research work, municipal emblems of municipalities in the Liberec Region were chosen, wherein both modern and historical emblems of cities and rural municipalities are found. Furthermore, in this area, which is rather specific within Czechia, municipal emblems "meet" with markedly different geographical, historical and societal roots.

The Liberec Region can be characterized as an internally differentiated area composed of specific areas delimited by their geographical position (mountainous, foothills, borderline; the Liberec Region is situated in Northern Bohemia along the border with Poland and Germany; Figure 1) and by the character of their landscape (protected nature areas and landscapes attractive for tourism – e.g., Bohemian Paradise in contrast to structurally afflicted areas – recently ended uranium extraction and the Ralsko military area; Seidl & Chromý, 2010). It ranges among borderline regions with intensively changed landscape, consisting of both continually settled and recolonized areas (Chromý et al., 2009). After 1945, following the expulsion of German-speaking inhabitants, roughly 70% of area of the Region was recolonized. The insufficient resettlement of unfavourable locations, intensified with the concentration of people in cities, resulted in a considerable differentiation in the settlement structure and important economic divergences between the Liberec Region inland and its peripheral parts. As a consequence of this demographic (and socialist industrial) transformation, a large part of the region became a area with a "lost identity", for it not only lost its original inhabitants with their historical roots, but it also lost economic stability. Today, the Region has about 440.000 inhabitants. Of the 215 municipalities, 36

have city status. The Liberec Region is highly differentiated from the demographic, cultural and economic point of view; all of its parts vary in terms of settlement types, population density and regional polarization. Therefore, regional symbolism is affected by a broad range of aspects that are often markedly distinct in terms of their content and significance which is granted to them by regional and local development actors.

In 2014, 171 out of 215 municipalities of the Region were taking advantage of their right to own a municipal emblem and flag; four municipalities were using their original municipal seal instead of an emblem. Merely 36 municipal emblems can be viewed as historical, that is, dating back to the pre-1989 period; the remaining ones (135) had not been created until 1990. With regard to the fact that the utilization of a municipal emblem is a right and not an obligation of each municipality, the high number of newly adopted emblems in the Region suggests that municipal representatives must attribute a relatively great importance to their existence if they are so numerous to strive for their granting. The majority of emblems in the Region have a high informational value, contain symbols related to history, religion, administration, economy and society as well as to landscape and nature, frequently adverting to motifs with a specific significance (e.g. an eminent native or an important event) and referring to the particularities of each given municipality. The iconography of municipal emblems is inaccurate or incorrect (according to general rules and principles of heraldry) only exceptionally (in eight cases). It can thus be presumed that emblems, with regard to their quality and numerousness, constitute the key symbols of municipalities and are perceived and used in harmony with their meaning.

A corresponding survey was conducted among members of municipal councils (mayors, councillors, clerks) in the Region to find out about the ways in which local development actors employ municipal emblems and how they perceive its meaning for the development of their locality and for the improvement of its image. The relationship of inhabitants to their municipal emblem was equally monitored. In May 2014 (and again in July 2014 to get more answers), all municipal authorities within the Region (215) were addressed by e-mail with three open questions concerning the function and meaning of municipal emblems in each particular municipality, on the relation of local development actors to their municipal emblem, and on the monitoring of the extent and forms of its use with regard to the supposition that the municipal emblem fulfils the role of an activating factor in both local and (possible) higher scale level regional development, being primarily employed to present and represent the municipality. The following questions were formulated in concordance with the set objectives:

(1) *How does your municipality use municipal symbols (beyond the placement of the emblem or flag on the municipal building)?* (2) *What is your opinion about the importance of your municipality's emblem for local life?* (3) *Do you think that the local inhabitants understand the meaning of their municipal emblem?* (It is important to note that this question had only been resolved at the level of municipal representatives' opinions).

Out of 215 addressed municipal representatives, the questions were answered by 77 surveyed members of those municipal authorities that use a municipal emblem, and surprisingly also by 20 representatives of municipalities that did not have any municipal emblem at that time but had already been considering or even discussing to adopt one (the total number of respondents is 97). The latter ones were thus reflecting upon its function and importance. The personality structure of the respondents cannot be characterized in more detail, for the questions focused on municipal authorities at the general level and that is why no personal data (age, sex) was required. Yet because all the answers were signed it is known that among the responding mayors, municipal councillors and clerks, the share of men was rather important (55%) as well as that of city councillors (51% out of their total number in the Region) – the main reason may be that they have (in connection with administrative tasks and tourism) more experience in promoting their locality.

Although individual responses differed in their extent and quality, all of them (255 – not all respondents answered all questions) were analysed with the exception of two (that did not match the asked questions). Seven respondents answered merely the first question; all the other answers were complete. Fourteen answers were very brief (maximally one sentence per question) whereas eight answers were extremely long (more than 150 words). Eighteen answers were supplemented by illustration material or references thereto. The acquired documents served to create what is called "word nests" (repeating words with identical or similar meanings, e.g., objects designed to present the locality and promote it as a tourism destination, labelling of files and official documents, and letterhead paper), that is, certain semantically identical "groups" of answers and, assigned to them, data on their frequency. Non-recurring statements were counted as separate units.

Function and use of municipal emblems by local development actors

The answers to the question "How does your municipality use municipal symbols?" indicate that the majority of municipalities use the approved emblem and flag beyond the scope of their legislative obligation. All the respondents (regardless of whether they were city or rural municipality representatives) affirmed that they had been using their municipal emblem in various forms, understanding it as a "graphic label used by their municipality for both inner and outer communication" (a representative of municipality I) and that it had become an inevitable part of their municipality's presentation at the local, regional, state and international level (Table 1).

Table 1. Forms of municipal emblems utilization by municipal authorities.

Form of the municipal emblem use	Specification of the form of the municipal emblem use	Number of answers
Written contacts, documents	Headed paper, postcards, municipal contract labelling, municipal stamps, business cards of local councillors, commemorative sheets, diplomas, professional ID cards	44
Promotion, tourism	Tourist guides, local maps, postcards, promotional items and souvenirs (e.g. imprinted pencils, shopping bags etc.)	43
Communication with domestic and foreign partners		11
Local activities and events	Display of emblems on the occasion of locally organised cultural, social and sports events or an official visit	22
	Poster information about planned events in the locality	7
Publicity	Websites (the real number is much higher)	6
	Local periodical	12
	Communication with the media	3
Labelling of communal property	Stickers on municipal vehicels, designations of local public spaces and enterprises administered by the municipality, municipal movables, and drainage inlets	7
Labelling of communal or local organizations and institutions	Emblems on cloth badges of municipal police as well as on firemen's uniforms, and on fire brigade vehicles	7
	Sports kit	4
	Logo of local groups of volunteer firemen	4
	Logo of local citizens' associations, sport clubs	6
	Logo of local museums	2
	Offer of use the emblem to all local organizations and businesses set up or managed by municipality	2
Other forms of municipal emblem use	Depictions of the emblem on school facade	1
	Year-long flying of municipal flag on local football pitch	1
	Year-long flying of municipal flag on a viewing tower	1
	Permanent placement of the municipal flag in a local church	1

Source: Author's own survey.

Several municipal representatives state that they give the right to use the municipal emblem to all local organizations and enterprises established or administered by the municipality. Respect for municipal symbols is documented by information about sanctification of the emblem and flag, as well as by "festive symbols" destined exclusively for exceptional events (e.g. a festive embroidered velvet emblem or emblems made of textile/wood or glass). Respondents from some cities agree that a historical emblem of the city ought to be reserved for festive occasions, whereas a municipal logo should serve the purpose of property labelling, promotional items etc. The representative of municipality II, who shares this opinion, accompanied his answers with a manual specifying the rules of using municipal emblem and logo.

Even though merely 45 % representatives of all municipalities of the Liberec Region use municipal emblems (i.e. 77 out of 171), it can be stated that municipal emblems mostly fulfil their function as full-blown symbols, representatives of their municipality, and as important elements strengthening the local identity and the image of each particular municipality. It stems from the comparison of the respondents' answers that local development actors have different approaches toward the reasonability of using municipal emblems. While rural municipalities tend to predominantly use their emblems for self-identification purposes, or possibly also for emphasizing the position of the local representatives (and hence for boosting relationships of power) and more rarely for strengthening the inhabitants' sense of belonging to a place, in the cities more emphasis is given to the representative role of emblems (and to the self-governing institutions related to them). Additionally, emblems tend to be used to a greater extent by those municipalities that have more experience with tourism and the associated promotional activities (cities, landscape protected areas, tourism/sport centres in the mountains). A few representatives of several small municipalities have a more marked, closer, locally patriotic relationship to their municipal emblem (embroidery, consecration).

In most municipalities, however, the municipal emblem remains only a formal graphic representation of the locality or representatives (e.g. sign on a wall of a municipal office, an official document, a business card, etc.). Or, the municipal emblem is viewed as a "desirable" symbol with which local representatives have not identified themselves or consider it too "ceremonial" to use for common functional purposes. It is not unusual that, for example, local associations, institutions and sports clubs must not use the municipal emblem for presentation purposes without the consent of the local authority; in order to avoid needless paperwork related to the use of the emblem, they prefer to distance themselves from it and adopt their own logo which they go along with. Municipal representatives understand emblems as a tool to strengthen local identities, the sense of community and the image of the locality, but their relationship towards symbolism rarely reaches beyond its mere reproduction without any emphasis being put on how to efficiently exploit place branding for the purpose of place marketing.

The importance of municipal emblems for community life

The outcomes stemming from the analysis of respondents' answers to the question "What is your opinion about the importance of your municipality's emblem for the local life?" are evidence of above-mentioned findings. This question shifts the perception of municipal symbols from the level of their practical utilization to the emotional and relational level with emphasis on subjective experiencing of the symbolism of emblems by municipal representatives (Table 2).

Analysis of the opinions of individual respondents shows that the majority of them perceive the municipal emblem as the fundamental symbol of their community telling of its history and contemporary life, and mediating preservation of this information for the future. An emblem is a symbol of the municipality's sovereignty; it is its representative. It is also a symbol with which inhabitants can identify themselves. Owing to its graphic form it is "more acceptable". That is the reason why it has a high informational value (provided that the inhabitants accept it as "their own") for both locals and visitors. However, it is quite astounding that one-sixth of municipal officials do not consider a municipal emblem important for the community life, which indicates that the representatives themselves are likely not to have identified themselves with their municipality's symbols.

The role of municipal emblems as an activating factor for local (and subsequently for higher scale level regional development) is limited by the persistent view that there is possible only "formal, official use" of them (provable especially in the cities using historical municipal emblems).

Perhaps that is why municipal representatives underestimate activities that would strengthen the dwellers' relationship to the municipal emblem, e.g., by rendering its utilization "available" (e.g. on sports kit, school accessories, etc.), but also by adopting an active analysis of its content (thematic competitions, school work, etc.) or by encouraging its more frequent use in campaigns promoting the municipality (beyond production of postcards and promotional printed pencils).

Table 2. Importance of the municipal emblems for community life.

Importance of the municipal emblems for community life	Number of answers
Great importance	10
Intellectual property and value	4
Identifier through which inhabitants associate everything "local" with the locality they live in	8
Element boosting the inhabitants' sense of belonging to the community, local identity, local patriotism, pride on locality they live in	23
Reference to historical, cultural and economic values of the municipality	12
Symbol of their municipality's autonomy and sovereignty, the external representation thereof, and a "positive image and publicity"	16
Connecting element of specific initiatives (association of municipalities with a similar symbol used in the municipal emblem)	2
No importance	11

Source: Author's own survey.

Understanding of municipal emblems

When speaking of the determination of significance of an emblem for local life and its presentation beyond municipal boundaries, a question arises as to *whether the dwellers really understand their emblem.* Relevant responses can only be brought about by more extensive research. Nevertheless, opinions collected from 77 representatives of the Region's municipalities are sufficient in the first stage. Even though their statements vary a lot, we cannot conclude that they are influenced by the character of the community and settlement they come from (city or rural municipalities), or by the period of time during which a municipality has been using its emblem (Table 3).

The majority of the local representatives inquired are conscious that inhabitants should make sense of the emblem and understand its meaning. Many believe, or rather hope, that is how things are, while others realize (also in connection with the corresponding survey) that the observed phenomenon is far from obvious and that municipal authorities have the potency to increase awareness among local dwellers about communal symbols (a municipality III councillor: "They do not understand. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of public enlightenment.").

A public inquiry held only in one city revealed that the inhabitants were able to identify the emblem but "had a hard time really understanding its meaning" (representative of municipality IV). The answer given by the mayor of municipality V, and a nearly identical one provided by the representative of municipality VI, proved to be absolutely exceptional among all the other responses:

> When we bring pre-school children to the city hall to meet the mayor we already discuss the emblem, reflecting on what it represents, and later on we tell elementary school pupils about its origin and the circumstances of its granting.

The councillor of municipality VII is the only one to claim what particular steps his municipality has been making to ensure that the inhabitants understand the emblem (e.g. annual celebrations, exhibitions in the city hall, etc.).

Sometimes, though, municipal authorities themselves are not sure about the semantic iconography of the emblem (councillor of municipality VIII: "Inhabitants may comprehend the emblem but I do not know whether its interpretation is correct."), other times they do not identify

Table 3. Degree of understanding of municipal emblems by inhabitants.

Degree of understanding of municipal emblem by inhabitants	Number of answers	Comment
Inhabitants of municipality understand the emblem or, rather, that they ought to understand it	29	The answers are supported by referring to a recent debate on the proposals for a new emblem, an introduction to the iconography by the media or information on the websites, or with the fact that the emblem is simple, and hence well "intelligible" and comprehensible
Most of the population comprehend the meaning of the emblem	15	Not everybody fully understands the emblem but there are beliefs that most of the population comprehend its iconographic meaning
Older generation comprehends the meaning of the emblem	4	Older dwellers apprehend the meaning of the municipal symbol whereas the younger ones either show no interest in its "content" or do not know the history and traditions of the place they live in
Emblem can only be understood by those who are interested in it	6	
Inhabitants know and understand only few parts of the emblem (figures/symbols)	2	
Hardly anybody knows the meaning of the emblem	6	
Willingness of mayors to explain the iconography of the emblem to anyone interested	2	
Inhabitants don't understand the emblem	4	Inhabitants are able to identify the emblem but they don't comprehend the meaning of it at all
Cannot be assessed	5	

Source: Author's own survey.

themselves with the emblem (representative of municipality IX: "The attributes of our emblem are somewhat coded in heraldry, which is little known to nowadays people. That's why I proposed my own logo with a chapel."), or they doubt the sense of explaining the meaning of municipal symbols to inhabitants (representative of municipality X: "Unfortunately, I suppose that inhabitants do not understand the emblem, and I'm afraid that they give a damn about this kind of symbolism.").

The respondents' opinions affirm the assumption that although the majority of emblems remain the symbol of a concrete location, they are not always accepted as a symbol.

The results of the research also indicate that not everybody understands the iconography of the emblem, not everybody has accepted it (maybe because of its incomprehensible heraldic portrayal) and few are those who really want to understand it (according to few respondents, generation gaps also play an important role here). Even though only mediated conclusions can be drawn therefrom, it seems that, according to statements made by municipal representatives, in the eyes of some inhabitants, emblems are not worth a symbol which would bolster their pride of the locality they live in, and which would amplify the sense of belonging to the locality and one's identification with it.

Conclusion

Regional symbolism constitutes a key component in the perception of geographical space. It is indispensable not only in the process of region formation (Paasi, 1986), but also in regional/place marketing and branding (Pike, 2011). Its analysis, so far rather neglected, is conducive to research into reproduction and development of regions of different sizes, or into assertion and application of power relationships among actors both within and between regions (Zimmerbauer, 2011). What also matters is the evaluation of its importance in the formation and transformation of regional identity.

A unique position among the diverse symbols that constitute regional symbolism is occupied by graphic symbols. Evaluating their forms, content and significance offers (in relation to the dynamic transformation of the regional system) answers to the questions about which of those symbols regional communities regard as their symbols with which they identify themselves, which foster the region's internal identity, and which regional/local development actors consider worth representing their region and community externally. In this respect, municipal emblems, widely perceived as the fundamental symbols representing a locality, play an exclusive role within the range of graphic symbols.

The monitored opinions of the representatives of 97 municipalities of the Liberec Region (self-governing region in Czechia) concerning the function and significance of municipal emblems helped us formulate answers to the set of research questions. The very number of municipal emblems used in the studied area proves that they (not only the historical ones, but also the modern ones) hold an important position therein, even though – as shown by the conducted inquiry – the actors of local development themselves sporadically doubt their role and significance in the forming of a symbolic shape or an image of a locality (municipality).

In the Liberec Region, the approaches of local authorities towards municipal emblems and their role do not differ in any marked way. There are both big and small municipalities with an active, creative, as well as a formal or rejecting stance on emblems. A similar characterization applies to the variability of the relation to emblems in repopulated and continuously inhabited municipalities alike. Everything suggests that people's interest in their emblem and its utilization in local development depend, above all, on the approach of municipal representatives and the other actors furthering local development. As evidence thereof we can mention localities that are attractive to tourists and where a more intensive exploitation of the emblem has been observed, at least in terms of presentation and representation of the locality concerned. In this regard, it needs to be positively highlighted that, at the local level, nearly no commodification of graphic symbols occurs in the studied area for the purpose of merely "selling" the locality.

However, most of the municipalities use their emblem in an active manner for the purpose of self-presentation; local development actors understand it as one of their municipality's essential symbols, a proof of its sovereignty and a phenomenon enhancing the community's image as well as the identity of the dwellers. Yet the modern emblems (created in the post-communist era) do not always comply with this characteristic. Some actors of local development initiate the creation of municipal emblems merely as part of place branding, striving to be a match for the neighbouring communities or supporting their own position without trying to find out about the degree of the population's identification with the new graphic symbol of the locality Thus, municipal emblems serve as a sort of a "shield" for municipal representatives and their use has only a formal character.

The possible reason for this is the often problematic "legibility" and interpretation of some contemporary emblems. Their graphics are usually complex, hard to grasp, and therefore, they are less accepted and seldom exploited in the process of local development. Moreover, emblems are often burdened with references to the past and heraldic features which can either be (and are)

interpreted inconsistently or their symbolic meaning has shifted in relation to the changing societal context and the experiences of dwellers.

Despite the fact that municipal emblems have not yet been used to their full extent, on the basis of the research conducted in the Liberec Region it can be assumed that they fulfil, at least partially, the role of linking, mediating and activating factors of local development, taking part in the formation of the symbolic shape of locality. They also hold the potential for influencing the symbolic shape of regions on a higher-than-local scale. Nevertheless, further research would be needed to verify this hypothesis. A more extensive survey charting the relation of local dwellers to their municipal emblem would also deserve attention. The conclusions of such research could then serve to conceive a strategy that would help municipal authorities use municipal emblems more efficiently to enhance local identity and boost the image of their locality and community. The importance of the conducted survey and the interest of its participants in it are proved by the fact that three more municipalities have created and established the new municipal emblem since the survey was conducted.

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Miroslav Šifta is a PhD student at the Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague. His research interests focus on regional identities and symbolism of regions.

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