

František Zich (ed.): Regionální identita obyvatel pohraničí. Sborník příspěvků z konference Evropská, národní či regionální identita? Regional Identity of Inhabitants in Borderlands. Collection of contributions from the conference “European, National or Regional Identity?”
Institute for Sociology, Academy of Sciences, Prague 2003, 262 pages.

The Sociological Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences published a collection of contributions for the conference, “European, national or regional identity?” that took place in Prague on the 3rd of October 2003. The editor of the collection was František Zich. The contributions are divided into two topic sections. The first section, called *Biographic and regional identity of inhabitants from the Nisa region*, contained findings from long-term research of biographic and regional identity. The research of the regional identity of inhabitants from the Czech, German, Polish sides of the Euroregion Nisa was realised in 2002 – 2003.

This research followed the previous international research project of biographical identity (1999-2002). Its goal was to uncover the way people “experience space” and to determine whether it represents any identification value. The second section, *National and regional identity and the processes of European integration*, deals with the broader problem of national and European identity formation and especially with the creation of a relation between them. While in the first part of the conference the projects were presented, in the second part space was provided for researchers of other projects related to the topic.

The introductory presentation by F. Zich *Regional identity of inhabitants from the Euroregion Nisa* could be considered to be the most significant – judging by its scope. It contains a brief historic excursus into problems of human identity, and defines detailed aspects of the term “regional identity”. He focuses on the possibility of identifying inhabitants with different territorial levels and he highlights the crucial connection between the physical and social aspects of identity that provide for the natural identifying space of an individual. Therefore I am not surprised that according to the research findings, the individual parts of the Euroregion Nisa (Czech, German and Polish) represent separated mental areas without any connection. The author suggests the hypothesis that identification at a regional level could be possible through processes of co-operation at a local level and through gradual European integration.

The contributions of B. Spalová, O. Roubal and M. Kováčová examine specific rather than general problems. The first one is an investigation into regional, i.e. the local identity of young people in the Czech part of Euroregion Nisa. These young people represent local “culture elites”. The author used “three-generation” analysis. O. Roubal’s work is focused on the ethnic identity of Sorbs. He points out the very strong influence of the socio-cultural environment on the transmission of ethnic identity. M. Kováčová’s contribution is based on the findings of her research on space identification of university students. She distinguishes individual types of university students living abroad: pragmatics, tourists, assimilating pioneers, “reflectives”. The last two types are those who achieve cross-cultural cooperation.

Atheit’s *Biography and mentality: A new approach of international research* belongs among the most interesting contributions. Its subject is not only Czech society but also German and Polish. In the introduction, he discusses the possibilities of interpreting what is commonly referred to as mentality. A significant portion of space is devoted to Bourdieu’s concept of the social field with variously placed social milieus, which is used (also by other authors) as one of the central terms during the research. One particularly interesting idea is the model of intergenerational configuration and related mental profiles which result from different ties between characteristic generation relations. He identifies three types of intergeneration configuration: persistent, modernisational and disruptive. On the basis of generation configuration distributions he formulates three “profiles of mentalities” which he assigns to each of the societies he has studied. The profile of “civil modernisation” to the Czech society, the profile of “improvising modernisation” to Polish society and he suggests “blocked modernisation” as a dominant profile for a part of German society. These are surprising findings, especially about German society, which he interprets in terms of the different experience of Eastern Germans who were, in a sense, “colonised” by the West-German system and their own elites were annihilated and replaced by West-Germans.

The next contributions follow the concept of basic types of social environment. P. Drauschke’s contribution notes that the research subject was only the generation of grandparents and grandchildren. The generation of parents was missing although it could be very important in the ability to use the generation patterns of grandparents.

I. Szlachcicova in *European, national or regional identity* takes on Euroregions as such. She points out that Euroregions are an artificial creation and the main reason for their establishment were based on functional and political reasons, rather than history or the common experience of inhabitants. Since the beginning, the motto “partner co-operation” as motto of the establishment of Euroregions has brought an intrinsic danger connected with a co-operation which was carried out according to a “strong-weak”

dichotomy. As the Polish author says, the German partners in the co-operation always represented initiative while the Polish partners were focused mainly on expectations concerning financial aid. An evident economic asymmetry can thus complicate expectations of cross-border co-operation within a Euroregional perspective.

A more detailed view of the Polish modernisation is provided by M. Domecka and A. Mrozowicky in their *Continuous change – the mentality of borderland inhabitants and “Polish modernity”*. They point out that one of the significant aspects of Polish modernisation is an increase in spatial and social mobility. In Polish conditions, modernization is related to the pragmatism of social consciousness that is grounded in knowledge about possibilities and principles, which along with an appropriate strategy of activities provide for multiplication of capital, especially material. Alongside this, there is a visible attempt to obtain a cultural capital in the form of education and civilisation competencies that facilitate the achievement of higher social positions.

The second section *National and regional identity and processes of European integration* of the reviewed collection contains contributions from Czech, Polish, German and Slovak authors. Although these authors did not directly participate in the project, they are interested in the topic of identity and deal with it and related issues within other research projects. Also included in this group is the only contribution from Slovakia by L. Macháček *Young Bratislava and Prague people: national and supranational identity* about the research of youth in Prague and Bratislava realised ten years after the division of the common Czechoslovak state. Notwithstanding the historically short period, in the case of the young generation there is an indication for an incipient differentiation in their “mental equipment”. The differences are related to expectations regarding membership in the European Union. The expectations of the youth from Bratislava are much higher than those of Prague’s youth. Membership in the European Union means more for Bratislava’s young people and they perceive it also as a formal confirmation of affiliation to Europe.

The topic of this reviewed collection is current indeed. The creation of Euroregions is one of the important tools of European integration and perhaps also of an effective formation and promotion of European identity. As the individual contributions make evident, it is not a simple but very complex and often ambiguous process. And at the very end many Slovak readers might find out that despite cultural, historical and territorial closeness, there is not so much they know about their neighbours.

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