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## SETTLEMENT PROBLEMS IN THE CZECH BORDERLAND

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The paper deals with border regions of the Czech Republic. 110 micro-regions were delimited in the borderland. The urbanized part of the borderland was excluded. The following indicators were used for the analysis: the population development between the 1991 and 2001 census, age index, share of people with post-secondary education, ethnic structure, share of population employed in the primary sector, share of flats built after 1945, share of uninhabited flats, equipment with technical infrastructure and social services, unemployment rate. The qualifications of people was identified as the main problem of the Czech rural borderland. It is closely connected with the social infrastructure. Micro-regions with centres under 2,500 inhabitants are considered the most problematic.

**Key words:** borderland, micro-regions, qualification, social infrastructure, Czechia

### INTRODUCTION

A part of the border regions belongs to the marginal area of the Czech Republic. The regional disparities between the central and peripheral areas are growing theoretically wider. The risks lie in the possibility of the future dependence of some marginal regions on continuous central aid and of political consequences ensuing from the economic and social backwardness of crucial regions in the Czech borderland. Naturally, the Czech borderland is characterized by considerable differentiation. The differentiation factors are, to name the most im-

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portant ones, the nature of the particular state boundary, the settlement character near the individual stretches of the border depending on the physical-geographic conditions and other factors, such as the potential for cross-border cooperation.

Problems of peripheral regions originate in the interaction of pan-European processes with the Czech particularities. The most significant problems are the demographic development and its consequences for the periphery (ageing, relative deterioration of the population's qualification structure), transformation into a market economy and the ensuing widening social and economic gaps (e.g. lack of investment in the peripheral regions), changes in the nature of the state boundary as a result of the political processes which have been unfolding in Europe in the last twenty years. Also, in a remarkable part of the Czech borderland area an ethnic exchange of population occurred in the wake of World War II.

The objective of the paper is to delimit the borderland, its basic characterization with respect to the population development and demarcation of the most affected areas. In other words, if peripheral means "distanced" and marginal means "backward", the question is, if all the Czech borderland periphery is a margin at the same time.

## THEORY

Europe is a continent where the issue of national states and their demarcation was the reason for numerous disputes and even wars. The inauspicious experience led to international cooperation after the end of World War II which culminated in the foundation of the European Union that nowadays incorporates the majority of European states. Yet, the Balkan crisis in the wake of the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s warned about the precariousness of the issue of national states and state boundaries provided that the constellation of international politics becomes favourable to it.

The national states are, in fact, a historical product of an era which can be called the capitalism of free competition. The globalization era decreases and shifts the meaning of the word "national." The ambition of the European Union is not to become a continent of states, but to become a continent of regions. Except for the evolutionary process marked by the decrease in importance of the national states and the related changes in the nature of the state boundaries in Europe, other truly revolutionary changes occurred in the recent period: the demise of the state boundary dividing the German states, the fall of the Iron Curtain, the demise of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the accession of a number of Central and Eastern European states to the EU and the creation of the Schengen area.

The changes in the nature of the borders in Central and Eastern Europe were analysed by a number of authors from the concerned regions (e.g. Grimm 1995 and 1998, Ravbar 1999, Haase-Hudseljak 2000, Bufon 2001 and 2007, Gorzelak and Jałowiecki 2002); in the Czech Republic they included Jeřábek et al. (2004). Czech sociologists point preliminary Czech – German relations (Zich 2000, Houžvička and Novotný 2007). The currency of the research into border regions from the perspective of globalization processes and change in the meaning of borders is also emphasized in Western Europe (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999).

The political and economic significance of a state boundary disappears within the EU. What is left is the border in the sense of a psychological barrier and also *the borderland often as a marginal region* conditioned by its distance from the centres of the individual states or regions as well as by the geographical arrangement in the cases when the border is formed by a natural barrier. All the aforementioned changes elicited response also in the field of geography which started addressing the issue of state boundaries. Its focus was no longer on the issue of state boundary demarcation on the basis of diverse criteria but on the documentation of the changes in the nature of the state boundary and their impact on the social issues. The state boundary ceased to be the subject of research for political geography and it is becoming ever more the subject of study for the geography of peripheral regions (Lienau 1999). Cross-border cooperation, including the borders between recently hostile countries, remains an important problem (e.g. Schulz 1997, Haase and Wust 2002, Jurczek 2006). Not even a sea can be an obstacle to cooperation (Lundquist and Winther 2006). Less frequently, surveys dealing with cross-border cooperation at the micro-regional level appear (Breuer et al. 2007). On the other hand, Horváth (1994) remarks that a radical reconstruction of regional policy in the post-socialist countries is the basic prerequisite for the setup of the conditions of an effective cross-border cooperation.

Cross-border cooperation in Europe is ever more realized by means of associations of Euroregional cooperation. While in the Western European countries these associations have helped remove the problems of the border regions for almost 50 years, the Czech borderland (and also the borderland areas in other countries of the former socialist block) saw the establishment of the first Euroregional associations only in the early 1990s after the fall of the "Iron Curtain". Generally, the Euroregional associations are supposed to have organizational and interlinking functions (Müller and Roch 2002). The Czech publications prevalingly focus on the Euroregions falling into the areas on the Bohemian-Saxon and Bohemian-Bavarian borders (e.g. Novotná 1995, Dokoupil 2001, Jeřábek 2000, 2002a, 2002b and 2004, Husák 2005). A relatively comprehensive survey of the Slovak-Moravian cross-border cooperation was done in Slovakia (Halás 2005). The surveys published by Dočkal et al. (2005) and Slavík (2001) tackle the issues of cross-border cooperation in the Weinviertel-Pomoraví-Záhorie Euroregion. Euroregions situated on the Czech-Polish border were analysed by authors such as Šindler et al. (2001).

The Czech borderland can be hypothetically broken down into five different segments according to the nature of the state boundary. The Bavarian border, despite being an obvious physical barrier, stands for a specific course of development and potential cooperation to a great extent. Although the Saxon border used to form the border to the ex-GDR, the potential for cooperation can be limited by the present situation of the "New Lands" in Germany and their rather westward orientation with regard to cooperation. The Polish border, along the bigger part of which the ethnic exchange took place in the wake of WWII, is rather a commercial border. The Slovak border appeared only in 1993. The Austrian border – the only one which is not a physical barrier on the majority of its stretches – did not meet the expectations for cooperation due to the equally peripheral character of the regions on the Austrian side of the border.

## METHODOLOGY

The authors dealing with the definition of the borderland space included Jeřábek et al. (2004). The analysis of various definitions shows that borderland is a space with the occurrence of frequent boundary effects or also an area perceived as such by the involved population. This means that specific delimitations can differ and develop in time, too. Pragmatic demarcation of administrative units bordering on surrounding countries is often used, so that an extensive application of statistical data is possible. The function of border crossings in the sense of points enabling the implementation of concrete border effects (drives to work and shops, use of other services, meeting of the inhabitants) was emphasized.

The perception of the Czech borderland by local inhabitants is often identified with the regions where the post-war exchange of population took place. This also corresponds to the delimitations used by some social sciences. This delimitation is, to a certain degree, justified because it can be expected that there is a specific social climate in the repopulated regions.

However, a geographer usually delimits a certain territory by means of compounding regions. In some of the preceding research studies the bordering administrative districts were taken into account. The reasons were very pragmatic: the accessibility of a data bank. Nevertheless, with respect to the size and shape of the territory of the Czech Republic this means that 34 districts, i.e. 45 % of the total number, are border districts. Moreover, it can be assumed that the intrastate social differences between the districts are lower than the intra-district differences between the centres and the periphery due to the 40 years of a centrally planned economy. Only a very low polarity between the borderland and the interior can be shown on this scale (Hampel 2000).

With regard to the objectives of this paper the demarcation of the borderland by means of composition of the settlement microregions can be considered useful. The catchment areas of the so called authorized municipal offices (i.e. the offices which enact some basic functions of the state administration for the municipalities of their catchment areas) were selected to represent such microregions.

With small exceptions, the authorized municipal authorities have their seats in towns. The suggested demarcation of the borderland will be therefore constituted by a belt of catchment districts of the towns in the border regions. With respect to the peripheral nature of a bigger part of the borderland they are mostly small towns with a maximum of 15 thousand inhabitants.

In line with this paper's objective the first part focuses on the primary analysis of the social features of the borderland. This survey aims at a clearer of the definition of borderland problems, typology of border regions and delimitation of microregions for more detailed research. We are primarily using results of the Population and Housing Census 2001. Although these data are seven years old, they document the most crucial transformations of the situation in the borderland and, at the same time, make it possible to study it at the level of municipalities. The data will be further supplemented by more recent microregional analyses, especially in the sphere of the labour market, in the course of subsequent research.

## EMPIRICISM

The geographical meaning of the borderland was defined on the basis of areas of municipalities coming under an authorized municipal office (hereinafter AMO) which adjoins the state boundary of Czechia or which are logically linked to these AMOs. In all, there are 110 such AMOs.

There were 2,483,903 inhabitants living in the borderland thus defined in 2001. In comparison to 1991 the number of inhabitants grew by 0.14 % in the borderland. It is even more noteworthy that as a consequence of the downturn in the number of inhabitants in the Czech Republic as a whole the proportion of the population living in the borderland as delimited by us rose from 24.1 % in 1991 to 24.8 % in 2001. The idea of a general depopulation of the borderland as a whole is not valid when the figures for the years 1991 and 2001 are compared.

According to the age index, which compares the share of inhabitants over 65 and inhabitants with less than 15 years of age, the borderland is among the regions with a higher proportion of young inhabitants (Fig. 1). Only 16 AMOs show an age index higher than then the nationwide average. The younger population base, which is still partially reproduced, is reflected in microregions re-populated after WWII.

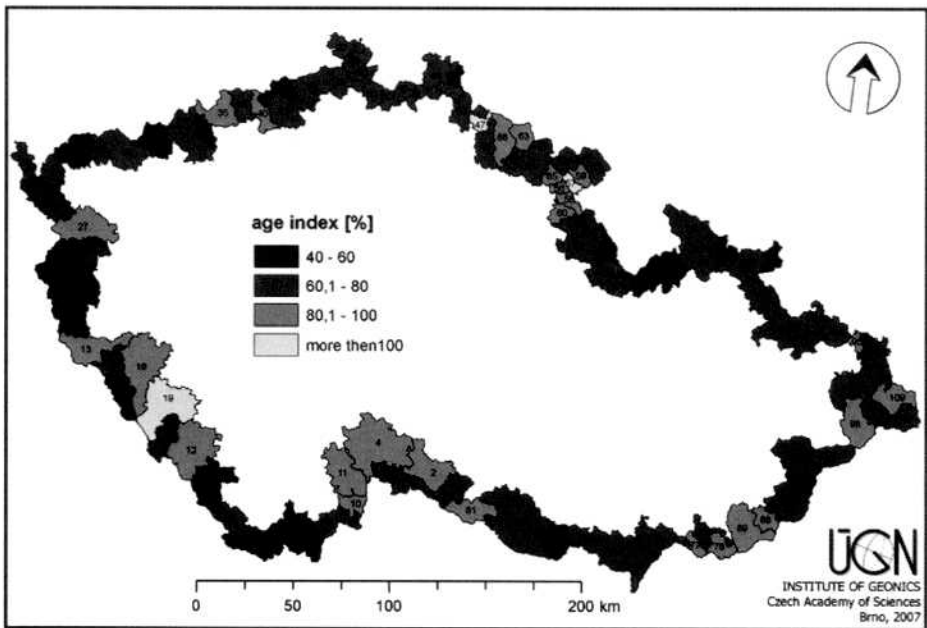


Fig. 1. Border micro-regions: Age index (population [65+] / population [0-14])

Source: Problémy českého pohraničí (research report). Ústav geoniky AV ČR Brno 2007, 69 p.

A common feature of our border regions is the low percentage of people with higher (after-secondary) education (Fig. 2). In none of the delimited AMOs does the proportion of these highly qualified people reach the Czech average.

The ethnic structure of the borderland is generally comparable to the inland regions due to the events which took place after WWII. The lowest percentage of the inhabitants of the major nationalities (Czech, Moravian and Silesian) was identified in the Těšín Region, the home of many Poles – the most concentrated minority in Czechia.

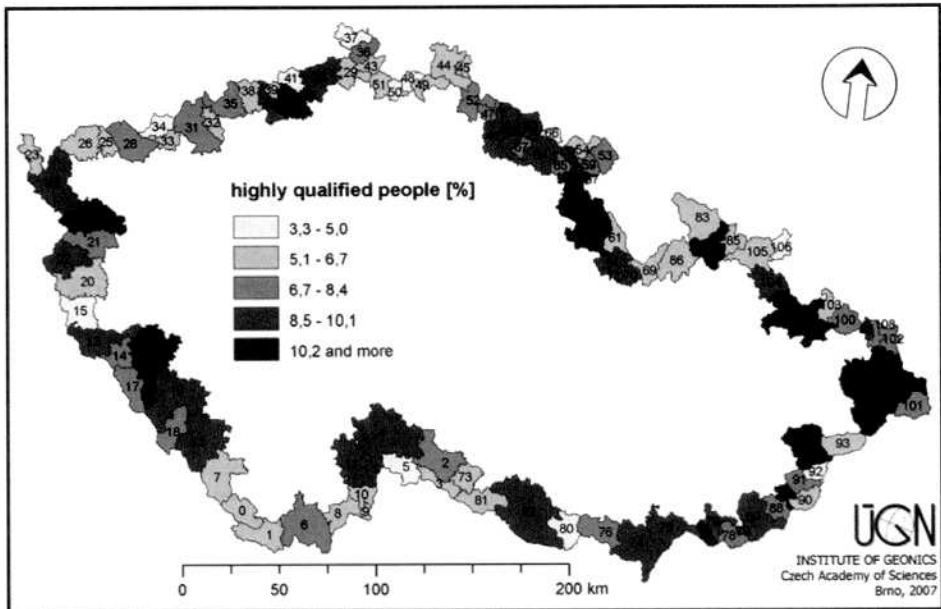


Fig. 2. Border micro-regions: Highly qualified people (post-secondary educated population / people older than 15 years)

Source: Problémy českého pohraničí (research report). Ústav geoniky AV ČR Brno 2007, 69 p.

Population growth occurred in 55 out of the delimited 110 AMOs, in 12 AMOs the number of inhabitants stagnated (within the interval of  $\pm 1$  %) and in 43 AMOs administration districts a downturn in the number of inhabitants was registered. The most significant downsizing regions are the heavily urbanized regions in Northwestern Bohemia, in the Ostrava Region and also some micro-regions near the Slovak boundary. This indicator thus reflects the general trends of counter-urbanization which is characterized by the fact that some rural regions gain population at the expense of urban regions.

The percentage of persons employed in the primary economic sector is decreasing countrywide and it remains higher only in regions with favourable agricultural conditions or in regions where the supply of other job opportunities is limited. The proportion of persons employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing ranges between 22.1 % (Vranov nad Dyjí) and 0.6 % (Karviná). Significantly better representation of people working in the primary sector well above the national Czech average was identified in AMOs in rural regions bordering on Bavaria and Austria.

A considerable share of flats built prior to 1945 can generally be regarded as an indicator of stagnation or backwardness of the area. A high proportion of old flats is characteristic for nearly all the borderland with an exception of the new border with Slovakia and in the Ostrava Region. It may be of significance that in rural districts, in which the post-war population exchange took place, the number of new settlers was much lower than the original pre-war population levels. Therefore there was no pressure developed on the construction of new flats; only later was there pressure for the exchange of housing resources due to quality.

The whole borderland, with the exception of only 7 AMO administration districts, shows a larger proportion of uninhabited flats than the national average which amounts to 12.3 %. The share of uninhabited flats in the Moravian and Silesian borderland is generally lower than in the Bohemian borderland, with the exception of Western Bohemia.

The standard of technical infrastructure is assessed on the basis of the share of flats connected to gas conduits and public sewerage systems. It can be generally stated that the relief and settlement structure, which primarily influence the economic profitability of the construction of these costly utility networks, are of essential influence. A higher rate of connection is therefore shown by AMOs with their population concentrated in the authorized municipality whereas the lowest rate can be found in AMO administration districts characterized by scattered settlement structure and lower population levels. The number of AMOs with at least the national average of connected flats is 31 (gas) and 32 (public sewerage system); figures that constitute less than 29 % of the delimited AMOs.

The level of social services (school system, health care, social welfare) in the border regions is primarily dependent on the size of the municipality and its function within the settlement system. It generally holds that the larger the size of the seat, the higher the hierarchical level and the number of these facilities. Approximately one quarter of the municipalities lack the basic services: there are no schools, facilities providing health care and establishments caring for old people. The concerned municipalities are small, most frequently with up to 200 inhabitants. The largest representation can be found along the southern Czech border. The size of the municipality is an important but not a decisive factor: the location and historical continuity of the seat's central function are of essential influence as well.

Roughly 20 % of the municipalities with an authorized municipal authority have, viewed from this perspective, rather the function of state administration centres because there are neither secondary schools nor health care facilities. The size of such AMO centres ranges between 473 inhabitants (Vranov nad Dyjí), and 3,671 inhabitants (Hrádek nad Nisou).

Unemployment rates in the border microregions as of May 2008 are considerably differentiated (Fig. 3). The highest unemployment can be generally found in the structurally affected microregions of the Ostrava Region and Northwestern Bohemia and in weakly developed microregions of the Bruntál, Jeseník and Znojmo districts; sporadically, they appear elsewhere as well. On the other side, the unemployment rate in 40 microregions in the borderland (36 %) was better than the national average. It seems therefore that high unem-

ployment rate correlates with peripheral location only partially. The structural changes in the regions with the heavy industry heritage are of primary importance.

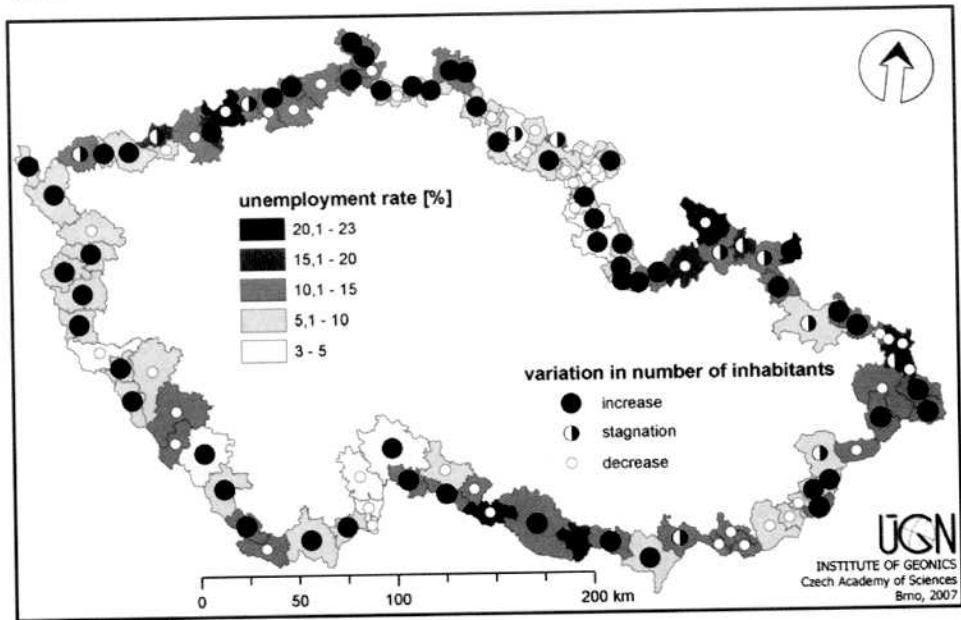


Fig. 3. Border micro-regions: unemployment rate

Source: Problémy českého pohraničí (research report). Ústav geoniky AV ČR Brno 2007, 69 p.

The borderland represents a very diverse area. The diversity of individual regions results both from different physical-geographical conditions, historical development of landscape colonization and depopulation, from historical ties to industry and its individual branches, from the way of using the landscape and from the lifestyle or priorities linked with the cultural or religious customs of the inhabitants. Last but not least, the manifold character is a consequence of the historical-political development of the borders and the border zone as a whole and the establishment of a new border with the Slovak Republic. The results are comparable with findings of Jeřábek et al. (2004) made some years ago.

## EVALUATION OF THE CZECH BORDERLAND

The established results indicate that the main problem of the borderland, which differentiates the border regions from the inland, is lower qualification of the population which results from the absence of developmental activities. This can further lead to more problems, such as unemployment, reduced purchasing power, lower general level of cultural life etc. The cultural level (e.g. language and historic skills, degree of tolerance towards partners) is important for development of cross-border cooperation.



The problem of infrastructure is the second important issue. With respect to remoteness, lower population density and apparently reduced economic possibilities the border regions lag behind the inland regions in a range of technical and social infrastructure indicators. On the other hand, depopulation ensuing from the disadvantageous age structure of the population was not demonstrated so far, at least at the turn of the millennium.

These differences will become even more distinguished if we exclude the urbanized microregions in the Ostrava Region and in Northwestern Bohemia from the borderland issue. The urbanized border regions, although they equally suffer from the remoteness problems, structural transformation and lower quality of the environment, cannot be considered marginal because they organize sufficient activities of their own, including the quaternary sector facilities. The centres of such districts are at least medium-sized towns. If the catchment areas of such centres form a territorial concentration, we regard the concerned segment of the borderland as urbanized. With regard to this fact, AMO catchment districts in the Ostrava Region (Bohumín, Český Těšín, Frýdek-Místek, Havířov, Karviná, Orlová, Třinec) and catchment districts in Northwestern Bohemia (Děčín, Chomutov, Jirkov, Litvínov, Teplice, Ústí nad Labem) have been excluded from the peripheral borderland.

Excluding these urbanized regions, there were 1,656,498 inhabitants in the remaining border regions in 2001, which means 13,187 more persons and a 0.8 % higher figure than in 1991. The share of persons with higher education in the borderland defined in this way constitutes only 8.6 %, the share of working population employed in the primary sector is 6.1 % and the share of these persons working in the industrial sector amounts to 33.4 %.

A question still remains to be asked: which of the remaining rural regions should be considered most problematic. It follows from the logic of settlement systems formation that the concerned regions must be sought among the microregions with the weakest centres (with less than 2,500 inhabitants).

## DISCUSSION

With respect to the overall shape of the Czech Republic, the borderland constitutes an important part of the country. Can rural borderland prosper? However, what can we imagine under borderland prosperity? We will most likely not be able to concentrate on economic growth for which there are usually not suitable conditions. We should rather focus on the preservation of certain values and life quality. This quality of life should provide an alternative to the global urbanized lifestyle in central regions. The borderland is not likely to be the vehicle for economic growth but it could become a part of sustainable settlement development.

What steps must be taken in order to achieve this? The first results show that the main deficit spheres are education and infrastructure. It has hardly any sense simply to decrease the educational level of local people. Educated people usually leave marginal areas. Therefore it is, necessary to invest local, regional, national and European resources into completion and quality enhancement of infrastructure with the emphasis on social (which also helps to create jobs for skilled workers) rather than technical infrastructure. Support for the local educa-

tional system, culture and social services seems to be the main direction for the solution of rural borderland problems. The problem lies in the fact that building and operating such an infrastructure is usually not considered effective from the perspective of government departments. And exactly in this point the assistance of the state is required.

Is it possible that the location near the borders could be reversed into an advantage thanks to cross-border cooperation with foreign microregions? This problem was theoretically addressed by Gorzym-Wiłkowski (2005), for example. He poses the question of whether marginality from the perspective of a national state can be replaced by cross-border cooperation to the extent that the borderland ceases to be a periphery thanks to integration and turns into a line of development. Apart from other issues, he specifies the following conditions: there is a formal border which is an open border; economic differences on both sides of the border are not great; however, there are differences to be used with advantage and the functional dialectics of cooperation and conflicts.

Cross-border cooperation development is practically at its very beginning in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It seems that it is necessary (with the exception of the Slovak border) to overcome specific psychological barriers between people first and to get used to standard neighbourly relations, and to overcome the language barrier in the case of cross-border cooperation with Germany and Austria.

The European Union offers tools for deepening of the cross-border cooperation in the field of regional policy. The programme PHARE CBC is aimed at support for economic development and competition ability, negotiation of problems and deepening of cross-border collaboration. The set of INTERREG programmes serves for promotion of supra-national collaboration with the aim of achieving a higher level of territorial integration in Europe.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusions derive from a primary analysis of statistical data. The detailed situation must be studied in selected regions. One case study at minimum will be done for each of the borders with the objective of thoroughly investigating not only on the basis of statistical data but also of field research and sociological methods in order to attempt to find answers to the questions raised in the above paragraph.

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## PROBLÉMY OSÍDLÉNIA ČESKÉHO POHRANIČIA

Európa je kontinentom, kde v ostatnom období došlo k výrazným zmenám v charaktere štátnych hraníc. V súvislosti s tým sa presúva záujem geografov od vymedzovania štátnych hraníc vzhľadom k susedným štátom ku štúdiu pohraničia ako marginálneho územia medzi strediskami susedných štátov. Aktuálnou sa stáva otázka cezhraničnej spolupráce.

Pohraničie bolo vymedzené prostredníctvom 110 obvodov obcí s poverenými obecnými úradmi (mikroregiónov) v prihraničnom pásme. V roku 2001 žilo v takto vymedzenom pohraničí 2 484 000 obyvateľov. Od roku 1991 sa podiel obyvateľov pohraničia zvýšil z 24,1 % na 24,8 % obyvateľov Česka. Pre charakterizovanie súčasných problémov českého pohraničia boli využité predovšetkým dáta zo sčítania ľudu, domov a bytov z roku 2001 a z niektorých ďalších zdrojov štatistických dát.

Ukázalo sa, že veková štruktúra obyvateľstva v pohraničí je mierne priaznivejšia ako celoštátny priemer. To je zrejme dôsledok vytvorenia mladej populačnej základne v rámci etnickej výmeny populácie po druhej svetovej vojne. Dnes je národnostná štruktúra obyvateľstva pohraničia takmer homogénna, s výnimkou Ostravska a niektorých ďalších priemyselných mikroregiónov s výraznejšou imigráciou po druhej svetovej vojne. Medzi dôsledky povojnovej výmeny obyvateľstva je možné počítať aj väčší podiel neobývaných bytov, pretože najmä rurálne pohraničné mikroregióny už nikdy nedosiahli predvojnový počet obyvateľov.

Technická a sociálna vybavenosť pohraničia je závislá predovšetkým od stupňa urbanizácie. Urbanizované (priemyselné) mikroregióny s väčšou koncentráciou obyvateľov majú pochopiteľne lepšiu infraštruktúrnú vybavenosť. Veľmi výrazným handicapom pohraničnej populácie je predovšetkým podpriemerný podiel obyvateľov s pomaturitným vzdelaním, a to vo všetkých 110 vymedzených mikroregiónoch bez výnimky.

V budúcnosti to môže vyústiť do problému nezamestnanosti. V súčasnej dobe je však nezamestnanosť vyššia v urbanizovaných mikroregiónoch štrukturálnej prestavby ekonomiky (Ostravsko, severozápadné Čechy) ako v rurálnom pohraničí.

Práve oddelením spomínaných mikroregiónov bolo vyčlenené rurálne pohraničie s 1 656 000 obyvateľmi (rast podielu na obyvateľstve Česka oproti roku 1991 o 0,8 %). Podiel obyvateľstva s pomaturitným vzdelaním dosiahol v tomto pohraničí iba 8,6 %, podiel obyvateľov zamestnaných v primárnom sektore 6,1 % a podiel obyvateľov zamestnaných v priemysle 33,4 % ekonomicky aktívnych. Za najproblematickejšie z rurálnych mikroregiónov sú považované obvody najslabších stredísk.

Je zrejmé, že budúcnosť pohraničia nespočíva v dôraze na ekonomický rozvoj. Oveľa viac ide o zachovanie a zlepšenie kvality života ako alternatívy k uponáhľanému globalizovanému životnému štýlu veľkých miest. Cestou by mohla byť podpora sociálnej infraštruktúry (miestneho školstva, kultúrnych a vzdelávacích aktivít a sociálnych služieb). Otázkou do budúcnosti je, či je možné uvažovať o prekonaní marginality z vnútroštátneho hľadiska cestou cezhraničnej spolupráce. Na to je však treba prekonať (azda s výnimkou slovenskej hranice) určité psychologické bariéry.