

PERCEPTION OF REGIONAL IDENTITY – CASE STUDY OF RIVER BASINS OF THE MORAVA RIVER (SLOVAKIA, CZECH REPUBLIC)

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Abstract

New role of the European regions within the processes of cooperation and competition highlighted their need for unique, highly profiled and strategically managed regional identity. Regional identity is one of the most important assets of any region and might serve as invaluable competitive advantage. Regional identity, its sources, background and consequences for regional development are the main focus of this contribution. Need for unique, original and plausible profile of each region, aspiring to be successful in the process of regional competition has been confirmed to be utterly urgent. Struggling for competitive advantage of the particular region is based on the strategic managerial approach toward city/regional identity. The article refers to the survey of regional identity in the river basins of the Morava river in both the Slovak and the Czech parts of the river basins covering the results of perception of various elements of regional identity: perception of landscape and river, relations to living spaces, values and image, river identity and identification with territory, recent societal development and future perspectives.

Keywords: regional identity, social cohesion, common values, regional image, river identity, river basins

INTRODUCTION

Regions and their development, perspective and social dynamics have been subjects of many researches and surveys conducted on the local, national and European level. European spatial development based on the territorially and socially cohesive regions is the process going behind pure aggregation of spaces and spatial structures.

Promoting the cohesive, unique and competitive identity of European regions became highly imperative nowadays, when regions are under the pressure of recent development, struggling to maintain their economic, demographic and social potential and perspectives. Competitive and sustainable regions fighting the social exclusion, economic degradation and continuously improving the quality of life must be anchored in

their natural predispositions and must grow up from their unique, original and natural regional identity. Regional identity is an invaluable asset, which cannot be steal or artificially built, but must be based on the historical, natural and social predispositions of any given place or region.

In our point of view and research, region is predominantly socially constructed and locally embedded entity that has no exactly delimited borders and there is supposed to be a collective shared meaning among its inhabitants and other local actors (Jekel, 2001). This approach considers region as rather conceptual and mental category going beyond pure economic or geographical delimitation of certain area of space (more in e.g. Paasi, 1986, 2003). Each identity has certain spatial representation, helping individual to differ „self“ from „others“ (Paasi, 2001). Other concepts distinguish strategic (common strategic planning, concepts, policies), functional (functional ties) and cultural dimension (van Houtum and Legendijk, 2000) of regional identity. However, all these dimensions must be related to common mental concept.

Identity of any territorial subject (city, land, region) is derived from Latin word *genius loci* (Norberg-Schulz, 1994). Concept of place attachment is based on the psychological identification with certain place, space and community living in certain territory. Existential value provided by such relation is considered as meaningful. It generates the feeling of togetherness („Wir – Gefühl“ in German language), saturates the needs of belonging and security, provides the milieu for everyday rituals, behavioural schemes and acting in various social roles. Phenomenon of regional identity is neither exclusively architectural/geographical nor cultural/social issue and must be researched and treated by highly balanced interdisciplinary approach (more in Jaššo, 2001).

Regional identity grows up from the combination of the natural characteristics of the living space (rivers, terrain, morphology) and the artificial interventions of the human being (settlements, infrastructure, culture, language). Karavathis and Ashworth (2005) distinguish three ways how people make sense of places: artificial innovations of physical space (architecture, urban design), the ways how certain places are used (behavioural patterns) and various forms of place representation (movies, pictures). However, it has been shown in recent years, that regional identity is no more the mere “track of the history”, but it is a living organism, absorbing plethora of new impulses and influences. Regional identity

must be preserved, but also actively promoted and fostered. Several new tools of strategic management (Brand Management, Corporate Identity of cities/regions) appeared in order to steer and communicate the regional identity in proper way (more in the following text, or in Jaššo, 2001).

Identity of most territorial subjects is closely related to identity of major governance, cultural or settlement units. In other cases the identity of territorial subject is carrying completely its own character. Its signs are so distinctive that they enable an independent existence without considering its relations to other subject (monolithic identity). In turn, when it is necessary to recognize the framework from which identity is outgoing, the regional identity is delegated. Following territorial subjects may create its own identity (Jaššo, 2001):

- **Municipality, Town or Residence**

Identity of this kind of subject may stand autonomous – e.g. Venice is related to Italian identity, but the town has its own unique identity setting those Italian relations to background. Identity of towns is usually focused in historical and architectural objects – town is unique organism with its life span.

- **Region**

Identity of region has its source not only in historical and architectural objects, but also in geographical, landscape and terrain related variables. Region is typical through its landscape profile and through its nature. In addition, the other variables e.g. degree of social cohesion or quality of life in general do play the important role.

- **National State**

National identity (identity of state) is usually based on immanent value contents outgoing from culture, history and development of subject. Architecture takes also part on forming this identity, but it is not so strong profiled element as by previous types of territorial subjects. National identity finds its sources also in political doctrines and in other historical and political dispositions.

All the described types territorial subjects are hierarchically arranged – a town is a part of region, a region is a part of country or state. There are many mutual bonds between these territorial subjects (cultural, economic, social, juridical).

Each regional identity is outgoing from the long-term contents. It must be connected with the perception of people, their evaluation of the past and their underlying assumptions of the future

development of the community. The following aspects might be included:

- **History** is one of the most important determinants of regional identity. History is a window to past, a framework which the authenticity of regional identity grows up from. Previous experiences, successes and failures makes the distinctions and are building up the model of regional identity which is constantly re-negotiated in daily discourse.
- **Culture** is a social superstructure of history – it is a way of perception of historical reality reflected in minds and works of inhabitants. Similar to history, the culture is also one of the fundamental structures of regional identity. The culture may be included in some fundamental values or ethic principles. Culture may be evaluated only in whole, because phenomenon of culture is overlapping the behavioural horizons of individuals. Culture is representing an inner part of identity. Within this regard, culture is penetrating all the social systems and realities making common behavioural patterns legible for insiders. The integral part of the cultural systems of region is also a planning culture – as a specific, unique as well as typical, non-casual set of approaches (based on underlying values) toward the factors playing fundamental roles in the process of spatial development within certain territory.
- **Customs and habits** are the cultural elements. They are an explicit expression of cultural influence and they are strongly influencing the social environment of region. Nowadays, globalisation process eliminates the differences among regions, therefore importance of regional customs and habits is getting lower. Habits became rather an rustic essence than a norm concept.
- Concept of **social cohesion** became popular in early 90-ties. The definitions differ (more in Jaššo 2010) but main scope of the most approaches was to determine how various social and economic variables are related in the process of construction of social reality. Social cohesion integrates the intangible goods (degree of trust and mutuality, values, perception of collective goals) and some measurable outcomes (health, education, public participation) of cohesive society. In other approaches was social cohesion defined as the absence of open/hidden conflicts among the members of community and the absence of disruptive behaviour threatening the stability of the community (in broader sense). It is obvious that regions with highly profiled

regional identity are exposed to lower risks of dissolution of social cohesion that those where the permanent struggling of various inner group is permanently under way. Most renowned concepts of social cohesion (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 997) are based upon the common values and civic culture, social order and social control, solidarity and reduction of wealth disparities, social networks and social capital and last but not least place attachment and regional identity.

- **Mentality** of inhabitants as a set of preferred collective attitudes of population influences regional identity in different ways. There is close relationship to cultural and economic development. It is relative stable in time – and territorial dimensions and there are many factors involved in process of its shaping. Mentality of population is displayed in relationship to own region, in relationship to nature, in life attitudes also in external relationships. It is an important aspect of identification with own land, region or town. Despite of inter-individual differences, we attempt to outline some traits generalised for the all population. Distinctions in identification with „domestic space“ we illustrate by matching the attitudes by an average Englishman and an average Arabian (Lawlor, 1982). Middle-class Englishman dwelling in own house with garden feels the own Ego within all this space. His Ego is overlapping his physical existence and it pretends a protective zone around. An average inhabitant of Cairo has been all his life pressed in small space. His Ego is identical with his body-shapes and he is satisfied with this situation. These spatial Ego preferences we may consider as an expression of mentality. In special cases they may become a part of territorial identity.

Strategic Management of Regional Identity

Although regional identity is growing up from certain given predispositions, it is a dynamic phenomenon which should be effectively fostered and further developed. This concept requires a precise work in product formation, its improvement and effective transmission to the receiver or the target audience. A direct participation of the inhabitants on this process is very important. The inhabitants are key players in this process – they are both co-creators of the product and also the key target group in the process of its acceptance and evaluation. In order to ensure the highest quality and effectiveness of the process, it is necessary to approach the region as a product in an interdisciplinary manner and

with maximum emphasis on mutual functional and value compatibility of individual participants and the measures proposed. One of the most important condition of the efficiency of the entire regional marketing output is the authenticity of the message. Considering the regional marketing as an overall concept of the development of the authentic traits and features of the region, Image making and image keeping, public relations, visual style of the region, behavioural preferences of the employees of the municipalities and regional structures, approach to visitors and investors, environmental policy, tourism as well as the economic development tools can be considered as partial aspects of the entire city development concept.

The general, basic idea of the regional marketing concept is to create and open a profile of a region (or any other territorial subject) as an “attractive, unique and competitive product”. The region is viewed as a product strategically entering the market and it is being developed for the market (whereby the word “market” as such should not be perceived in commercial connotations only). A specific situation of a region as a product enables to emphasise clearly some of its core features (e.g. uniqueness, openness, friendliness, hospitality), which make development of the emotional values and loyalty towards the “Brand of the region” easier (Brand Loyalty). However, on the other hand, an extremely increasing competition of the cities is an impulse for a permanent search for new expressive aspects and more sophisticated instruments in the field of the communication. Unstable and diffused exterior environment requires flexibility, innovative approach and anticipation in the process of managing the “Brand” of the Region (Brand Management). In German speaking countries, some of those concepts have affected the attention of the broad public. However, regional marketing should be perceived as a process, which is open and transparent in each of its phases, avoiding the final and definitive completion, although requiring clear target orientation.

Another strategic tool of management of the regional identity is Corporate Identity (CI). CI should be understood as a principal managerial tool, strategic management of the regional image in the various target groups. Conceptual framework of the CI of the region is inspired directly by the commercial companies – it includes a synergy effect of the communication (Corporate Communication), behavioural preferences and patterns of its representatives (Corporate Behaviour) and visual style (Corporate Design). All these

particular fields must be interlinked and logically covered by meaningful and trustworthy concept of thoughts and values – Corporate Identity. A comprehensive marketing mix then utilises this concept to fulfil its particular aims: communication the identity of the region, increasing the loyalty and positive attitudes of inhabitants and keeping the positive and highly profiled regional image.

Regions with highly profiled identities are able to gain several measurable and non-measurable assets. Regional identity became significant topic in terms of regional planning and management and its development became one of the most essential strategic processes within the European regions. The following factors play important roles (more see e.g. Jaššo, 2001):

Non-commercial effects:

- Unique, original and authentic regional identity makes easier the identification with the living space. Strong feeling of togetherness toward the region might be one of the pillars of the general identification with social frameworks of the individual. This brings many positive effects to the region: social and demographic stability of population, prevention of brain-drain, the readiness of inhabitants to help the region in difficult times and to share its vision. Balanced and stable social climate, pro-active behaviour of the community leaders, high motivation and loyalty toward the region are obvious competitive advantages.
- Strong and highly profiled identity of the given region is an important platform for its positive distinction and emphasis of the most important characteristics and traits. This is important in competition of the human capital, investments, tourism, qualified work forces etc. The awareness of the set of own competitive advantages makes easier the critical evaluation of the weaknesses and disadvantages.
- Environmental issues, quality of life and sustainability are often interlinked to the concepts of regional identity. For example, project of Corporate Identity of Austrian municipalities Weiz/Gleisdorf was externalised under the Local Agenda 21 framework.
- Active fostering of regional identity might generate new developmental impulses within the regional architecture, landscape design and planning, visual communication of the cities and municipalities within the region and in spatial planning in general. Visual language of the region, urban semiotics and imagery is the most visible field where the regional identity can be communicated. Visual language

is the most efficient platform in communication toward foreign target groups (tourism, investors).

- Strong and highly profiled identity is inseparably bound to the cultural life of the region. There is plethora of opportunities to communicate separate events, activities and projects under the umbrella of regional identity concept.

Commercial effects:

- Profiled regional identity has many positive impacts in the marketing strategy of the region (or any other territorial subject). Each region is striving to be a competitive product having favourable prospects in European competition of regions and cities. Each region, entering to many economic, social and entrepreneurial relations, should strive to be a legible and trustworthy partner. There are several marketing tools how to achieve this, Place Branding and Corporate Identity being the most frequent (see above mentioned text). Corporate Identity of the region goes far beyond pure visual appearance, being rather a coherent concept of fundamental underlying values and ideas displayed in graphics, behaviour and communication patterns than a mere logotype or colours.
- Effective support of tourism is related to profiled regional identity. Destination market is typical through high volatility, intensive competition and high sensibility to the shifts of the external conditions. If we concluded that the inhabitants are key co-creators of the regional identity, the visitors might be considered to be key feedback sources and corrective mechanisms regarding the image of the region.
- Strategic management of regional identity might indirectly generate new labour opportunities for the inhabitants within the sectors of tourism, destination marketing and management, event marketing etc. This might directly contribute to favourable development of various economic indicators (GDP growth, property price level etc.). Many other activities related to strong regional identity (cultural events, exhibitions, sport) might help to the health and sustainable economy of the region.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Case Study Morava River Basin

A river has always been considered as one of the strongest and most vital symbols in mental maps of inhabitants. Eternal dynamics of the river, constantly in motion, its vigorous character often resistant to all attempts to tame the stream and

persistent danger of uncontrolled floods have always fascinated the people living in river basins areas. Despite all the problems inflicted by repeated floods, the people never abandoned river basin areas. The rivers have always been the symbols of harvest, mutual connection, route, fortune as well as the symbol of divine and unpredictable strength of nature.

Project Border-Free River Basins (2005), led by Prof. I. Roch from IOeR Dresden was focused on the regional identity of river basins and lowlands. The general perception of the river itself, the vital characteristics of the living space by the river, as well as general perception patterns delimited by the existence of major river were the main research focuses of the project. The research teams from Germany, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia tried to find common denominators bound to the perception of the river as well as the specific characteristics of the identity of River Basins of Elbe, Morava, and Tisza. Cross-border accents of the specific river basins and lowlands were the subjects of special attention.

The research was based on survey in the Slovak and Czech parts of the Morava river (more in Petříková and Roch, 2005) and was focused on complex and multidimensional perception of this river and its environment, including social and cultural issues related to the existence of the stream. It was the part of a broader research on border-free river basins in the Central Europe. The respondents were involved in the research covering all the social, education and age groups. The main scope was the hinterland of the river Morava in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic, including the municipalities placed directly on the bank of the river in Slovakia (Devín, Devínska Nová Ves), the municipalities with moderate distance from the river (Malacky, Stupava, Zohor) as well as the municipalities with quite large distance from the bank of the river (Pernek). In the Czech part of the Morava river, the river basin has been divided into three parts: the Area of River Breakthrough, the Area of Widening of the Valley and the Area of Lowland. The municipalities there have been chosen deliberately by the Czech researchers as municipalities with distinctive features. (see more in Rohrerová and Veselý, 2009).

In the Slovak part of the Morava river basin 320 respondents were involved in the research concerning regional identity of the area delimited by river Morava landscapes. The following municipalities were represented most frequently: Devín, Devínska Nová Ves, Malacky, Stupava, Plavecký Štvrtok, Zohor, Kúty,

Lozorno, Pernek and several smaller settlements in the region Záhorie. There included both the urban as well as typical rural surroundings. This distance of the lived place of the respondents varied from immediate vicinity to river (Devín, Devínska Nová Ves) up to more than 20 km of the river (Pernek).

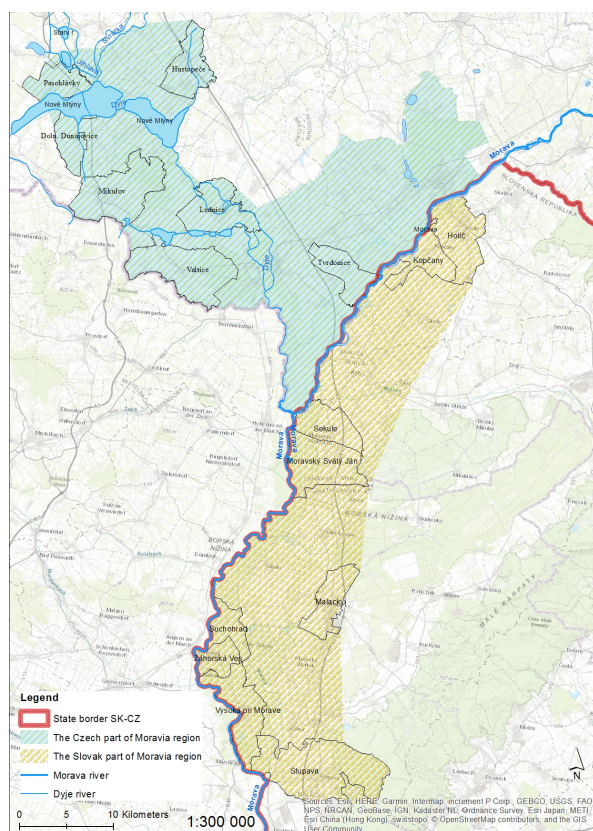
In the Czech part of the Morava river basin 300 respondents have been addressed with the questionnaire survey (see more Rohrerová, and Veselý, 2009). In the part “Area of River Breakthrough” there were the following villages included: Upland of Hustopeče, Pálava, Nové Mlýny, the part “Area of Widening of the Valley” was represented by Lednice – Valtice grounds and the “Area of Lowland” by the villages of Podluží.

RESULTS

Perception of Landscape

Initial couple of questions was mapping out the general perception of the living space. The results have shown that the principal elements connecting the respondents to the living space are the family members and social networks. 2nd placed factors of importance were the friends, neighbours, colleagues, former classmates and

other types of mate to mate relations. This clearly indicates that the basis of identification patterns of the people is saturated by emotional and social relations toward the living place. The bounds toward the social networks were always rather strong in Slovak rural areas, and this case confirmed that. Nevertheless, the other relevant factor is bond toward the landscape and natural environment. The landscape in the hinterland of the river Morava is perceived to be attractive enough to play moderate/major role in the process of territorial identification of the participating inhabitants. This was especially visible within the group of middle-aged generation (aged 35–50), larger household members and respondents having completed secondary education. The general role of the river in the minds of the respondents has been investigated separately. The river itself denotes primarily the landscape element and the area that is suitable for relax and leisure-time activities. The threat of floods has been also perceived, though with lower intensity. Only occasionally the river was perceived as a transport corridor and even less frequently as a background for livelihood. Almost never the river was considered as a barrier (e.g. in the municipalities of the Czech part of the Morava river mere 4,3% of the respondents considered



1: River Basin of Morava – Examined Area (edited by Lucia Petrikova, MSc. in ArcGIS)

the river as a barrier, in the municipalities of the Slovak part of the Morava river mere 5,6% of the respondents. (see more in Petříková and Roch, 2005). This indicates clearly the shift in the boundaries of mental maps of the inhabitants, compared to the recent past (when the river was a non-penetrable boundary). Conclusions from the questionnaire survey in the Czech Republic indicate that the local people are aware of unique character of the landscape in their surroundings, 88% of the respondents pointed out that the landscape element was the most important for them. Particularly in the widening of the valley, we can mention the pride of local inhabitants on inclusion of the Lednice-Valtice grounds into the List of cultural and natural heritage of UNESCO. Lednice-Valtice area is memorable landmark in the mental maps even for people living outside of the area, especially because unique landscape character and cultural heritage related to this area. The questioned inhabitants perceive a river as an important landscape element affecting people in its vicinity, therefore people are more active in spending their free time and have closer relationship to nature. River is, in the opinion of the respondents, one of the most important elements in their mental maps (see more in Petříková and Roch, 2005; Rohrerová and Veselý, 2009).

Relations to Living Space

Questions mapping out the relations toward the living space tried to deepen the scopes and fields protracted in the above mentioned text. The results indicate that the connections to family, friends and place are so stable and persistent, that more than 2/3 of respondents easily excluded the option to

move away at all. The most of the respondents were born at lived place or they have strong family ties regarding this region. Thus the highest number of answers in the Czech part of the Morava river was related to the family ties (91,7%) and the number of answers related to the family ties in the Slovak part of the Morava river was comparably high (79,4%). (The answer „I am fully satisfied living here“ has been also frequent and indicates the vital positive attitude to the lived place. Only a small number of respondents preferred their lived space because of other reasons (favourable geographical position of the region, the proximity to work place etc.). On the other hand, the labour/social mobility is significantly low. A conservative, a little bit „sleepy“ attitude regarding the labour mobility is typical especially for the inhabitants of the rural region Záhorie. The social climate of the region has been perceived as friendly but also as „split apart“. In addition, there have been occasional attempts to describe social climate by different adjectives than supplied by questionnaire (selfish, boring, envy, stimulating etc.).

The survey revealed that the respondents in the Czech part of the Moravia region like the landscape in their surroundings, they are proud of it and that it is a strong tie for them to their home; it is particular in the Widening of the valley. Despite of that the strongest regional tie in all the three parts of the region is represented by people (family, friends, neighbours, friends from childhood, municipal community). For the inhabitants of the Area of river breakthrough it is, a relatively strong tie to home, a possibility to spend their free time. For the inhabitants of the Widening of the valley there are also the possibilities of spending free time and in addition to a parcel



2: Lednice/Valtice area, UNESCO heritage site (Photo: M. Jaššo)

land in which they live. In a traditional folklore area of the Lowland there are for the half of the respondents within their relationship to home also local manners and traditions very important, for example in organizing the harvest celebrations, folklore events, maintaining the Easter habits, events related to production and tasting of wines and so on (more see in Rohrerová and Veselý, 2009).

River Identity

The phenomenon of river identity in its particular connotation was surveyed in separate question („What does the identity of the river mean personally for you?“). The aim of the question was the reveal and expose the individual semiotic manifestations of the phenomena of the river in the minds of the participants. However, the term „identity“ seemed to be too diffuse and complex to be answered directly. Many respondents answered, that river „does not represent any special kind of identity for them“ or refused the question with expression „I do not understand the question“. It seems, that direct inquiring of the river identity might turn to be too unintelligible (despite the fact that the answers in other thematic fields were rather complex). Analysing the other answers, tackling the river identity in more indirect and rather descriptive way, we may lean to the conclusion that the concept of river identity is frequently related to phenomena of relax, sport, fishing, nature in general etc. The river itself is being perceived as a rather important landscape element, providing many opportunities to relax and making the living environment highly valuable. It has been shown, that identity of the living space is predominantly more connected to landscape aspects than to historical and cultural determinants. Despite of the rich cultural and historical value of the examined area (especially the old towns), the regional identity of the river space is perceived more distinctively through the landscape and physical aspects of the region. Some respondents perceived the regional identity in a more dynamic manner (mutual communication, connection to entire world). Some occasional expressions even used a metaphor („Living element of the space“, „Soul of the river“). This is very valuable asset with regard to „collective memory“ of the region and its cultural identity being transferred from one generation to another. We deem extraordinary important to communicate the life stories of the famous people connected to this region, historical experiences and outstanding

natural potential of the area in order to foster the feeling of identification with lived space and thus continuously build up the distinctive profile of the Morava hinterland region.

For local people of the Moravia region the river Morava is particularly a pleasant landscape element (especially meaningful it is in the area of the Widening of the valley, where this reply was given by 94% of the respondents) and further a place suitable for leisure time activities, for example, for water sports, hiking or cycle tourism in the river 's surroundings etc. The endangerment for the inhabitants of Area of river breakthrough is represented especially by the river, on the contrary the inhabitants of the Lowland feel less endangered, who on the other hand, perceive the river, apart from other things, as a transport environment. In this connection the respondents in the Lowland evaluated positively the plan to build ferries connecting their regions to Slovakia (Rohrerová and Veselý, 2009; Roch and Petříková, 2005).

Values and Image

Image of the region is an abstract mental construction representing the subject in minds of audience. Positive image of a region means its goodwill, its good reputation or positive emotion appearing by thinking about the subject. The image is also the degree of affinity to subject manifested by significant groups of perceivers. It is very hard to win and especially to keep a positive image. Such effort needs a research of external surrounding, strategic planning, but most of all it needs a perfect teamwork. Every territorial subject is much more structured than every commercial business organisation – the target groups are more diffuse, the feedback is slower, the border-lines between the external and internal auditorium are unclear. If there are clearly defined the values which are the subject of the broad consensus among the inhabitants of the region, the image-making and image-keeping is easier. Regarding the values, it has been confirmed that the natural potential of the region appeared as the clearly dominant value of the region/lived space. The ecological and environmental values were also significantly taken into consideration („green area“, „healthy environment with plethora of greenery“). In opposite, the values connected more to economic growth appeared to be secondary (the survey was conducted before the economic crisis).

The internal image of the region has been perceived by respondents as clearly positive: 54,3% of the respondents' replies in the Czech part of



3: Municipality of Devín (Bratislava), in the river basin of the Morava and the Danube rivers. (Photo: M.Jaššo)



4: Castle Rock and Tower in the Devin municipality at the confluence of the Morava and the Danube rivers. (Photo: Lucia Petriková)

the Morava river and 46,3% in the Slovak part of the Morava river. The most of the respondents feel to be strongly identified with lived space and manifest a highly profiled attitude of pride and togetherness toward the region. The external image of the region has been considered even more positive than internal image. The respondents have considered their region to be among the top regions in Slovakia and have expresses to feel proud to be part of it (might be subjective). If we analysed the particular connotations related to the region, it has been perceived as pleasant, friendly, spacious and with good perspectives. Less apparently, the region has been pointed out also as expensive, attractive and calm. The respondents were split apart whether the region is noisy or quiet and most of them did not consider the region as extraordinary. For local people of Moravia region it is typical that in the Morava river Area of widening of the valley they consider as the main advantage of the region its natural and cultural richness which corresponds to the classification of the region into the natural and cultural heritage of UNESCO. Within the folklore region Podluží in the Lowland more than 80% of respondents consider as the main advantage of the region its cultural richness. Another advantage of the region that has been denoted by the addressed persons is its natural richness. In the opinion of more than a half of the questioned persons the image of their home functions positively in the inner direction. Even more positively according to the respondents, the image of the region is perceived by the observers from outside (68%). It is because the outside observers have a tendency to idealize the region of Southern Moravia as a fertile area with a mild climate, where good-natured and hospitable people live (see more in Rohrerová and Veselý, 2009).

Significant majority of the respondents in the Slovak part of the Morava river assumed that there was no visual symbol of the region/lived place (55,6%). This indicates that the region is not sufficiently communicated within the regional marketing strategy and there is lack in the field of regional Corporate Design or Corporate Identity. Moreover, we suppose the lack of strategic vision of further regional development which could enable visual style to be anchored on the strategic basis. Few answers referring to visual language were concentrated on the „Stupava Pub“, that according to renown legend, is still „sad“ or the Cabbage Days in Stupava. Well-known song „Išeu Macek do Mauacek“ was also mentioned several times.

However, the symbols that have been mentioned as carriers of the traditional identity, were rather verbal or musical than visual. All the traditional content of visual language heritage (heraldry, visual symbols, colours) is slightly weakened down. This means a real challenge in terms of the communication activities of the region and its municipalities (advertising, promotion).

The respondents from the Czech part of the Moravia region, especially in the area of Lowland managed to mention a symbol of their home most frequently (76% of all the addressed persons), the least frequently the inhabitants from the Widening of the valley managed to recall some symbol (39% of the addressed persons). As the symbol of the place, where they live, there are perceived mainly the visual symbols, especially municipal and town's symbols. These symbols were given mainly by the respondents from the Area of river breakthrough and Lowland. In the area of the Lowland as the symbol of the place it is often considered also the logo Microregion Podluží, local dialect and local folk costume. In the Area of river breakthrough as a symbol of the place it is further considered the logo of the leisure time area in Pasohlávky and the memorial coin for tourists, so called 1 mercury. Symbols of the area of the Widening of the valley most often connect to a significant historic sight of UNESCO – Lednice-Valtice grounds. It refers to a slogan „Lednice – A Pearl of Southern Moravia“, the abbreviation of the name of the Lednice-Valtice grounds – „LVA“ – or significant structures of the Lednice-Valtice grounds, for example, minaret, castle, castle's park etc. (more in Rohrerová and Veselý, 2009).

Recent Societal Development

There have been mentioned many positive aspects of the changes during 10 years (1995–2005) development of physical environment (new housing development, refurbishment of public places) as well as the improvement of the technical infrastructure being the most prominent issues. However, the improvement in the „soft“ fields has been perceived as less apparent. The leisure-time and relax amenities, cultural centres and especially sport playgrounds have been considered to be neglected. In several contexts, the insufficient opportunities in term of cultural, relax and sport activities have been outspoken more sensitive than the lacks in the field of technical infrastructure (sewage, water, roads). The results indicate that although the natural conditions for sport and

leisure time activities (landscape, forests, lakes) are of extraordinary good quality, the urban facilities for sport and relax are severely missing („need for urban elements“). The most of the mentioned negative impacts might be deemed as negative side-effects of political and economic transition processes during the 90s (diminishing of work places, decrease of services, less frequent public transport connections). Environmental situation and protection of nature has been singled out as another significant field of concern. Some respondents are sensible toward rising criminality rate in the region (mainly in rural region Záhorie) – drug abuse, car thefts etc. Despite the considerably high stability of the community, one might assume, that there is general passivity and rather indifferent attitude toward the regional development. The respondents have shown in their verbal expressions some involvement, though without deeper and binding commitment. (phenomena of „social desirability“ – a tendency to prefer the answers in expected way).

The respondents of the Moravia region are well aware of the impact of the border river on a further development of neighbouring relations. The inhabitants perceive the river as an important tourist attraction. Some respondents evaluate positively the improvement of the co-operation with Austria in the sphere of water purity protection and building a waste water treatment plant at the Austrian chemical plant. In the past years this factory discharged harmful substances into the Pulkava river – a tributary to the Dyje river – and was the cause of frequent dying off the fish in the territory of the Czech Republic. In connection to the river the respondents positively evaluate the opening the border area for public at the confluence of the Morava and Danube rivers with an undisturbed virgin nature. At the same time, however, some of the addressed respondents point out also possible negative consequences. After opening for public there comes deterioration of environment in this area, destroying of vegetation, making of waste dumps, and so on (Rohrerová and Veselý, 2009).

Future perspectives

Separate sample of questions mapped out the future tasks and priorities in the river basins management and spatial development. The following issues appeared to be the most prominent:

- collaboration with the coping of the common threats. The main scopes of concern covered

the rising criminality, illegal migration and prevention of the environmental catastrophes. The survey was conducted in years when the heavy floods were quite frequent and this issue appeared as one of the most important with regard to cross-border cooperation.

- synergy effect of the utilisation of the joint potentials (tourism, traffic, relax, water sports). River basins of Morava are outstanding example of the regional identity extending beyond national boundaries. Common marketing of this region (cooperation between parts belonging to Austria and Slovakia, and Czech Republic and Slovakia respectively) seems to be utmost important.
- general economic development. There is a significant effort to build up the strong and highly profiled region successful on European market. Recent crisis highlighted the economic pressure despite the fact that this region has been hit by the global crisis only in minor/moderate scale in comparison with other Slovak regions.
- in the Moravia region the important issues to be considered are the international and cross-border co-operation in the sphere of the nature protection, purity of water and air and upon determining the common rules for use of water including the common rules for fishing.
- there is also the need for developing co-operation of the non-governmental organizations to be able to organize joint meetings of citizens from the both sides of the border that will help to improve human relations and better understanding of social needs on both sides of the border river.

DISCUSSION

In the Moravia region the important issues to be considered are the international and cross-border co-operation in the sphere of the nature protection, purity of water and air and upon determining the common rules for use of water including the common rules for fishing. There is a need for developing co-operation of the non-governmental organizations to be able to organize joint meetings of citizens from the both sides of the border that will help to improve human relations and better understanding of social needs on both sides of the Morava border river. It is also important to look for the new ways of common marketing of this region in cooperation between Slovak Republic, Czech Republic and Austria (e.g. CENTROPE region initiative), at least towards Central Europe to acquaint the world with the beauties of this region, to attract tourists and to increase local economies.

CONCLUSIONS

River basins of the Morava river belong to the most manifold, versatile and precious regions in Slovakia. Heterogeneous natural conditions, vivid interactions with neighbouring countries as well as the rather deeply profiled place attachment in the mental representations of inhabitants make this region highly valuable in terms of the research of recent processes of spatial and societal development. Influenced by the immediate vicinity of the river, the highly profiled regional identity of the river basins might be one of the most significant issues in the further spatial development in this border region. The landscape in the hinterland of the river Morava is perceived to be attractive enough to play key role in the process of territorial identification of the participating inhabitants. This was especially visible within the group of middle-aged generation with higher education. In the situation when there are specific features, e.g. Lednice-Valtice area (UNESCO cultural heritage, see Fig. 2) or the Devín Castle Rock and Tower (see Figs. 3, 4) as memorable landmarks, this increases the position of the river in the mental maps of people living in the area. For local people of the Moravia region the river Morava is particularly a pleasant and dominant landscape element and a place suitable for leisure time activities.

The image of the region is perceived as clearly positive. The majority of the respondents feel to be strongly identified with lived space and feel togetherness towards the region. This feeling is strengthened by visual symbol of the region and place, which is stronger in the Czech part of the Moravia region, and supports also the external image of the region. The Morava river is perceived as an important tourist attraction. The inhabitants of the Moravia region are well aware of the impact of the border river on a further development of neighbouring relations. Local people are also more sensitive to the environment and perceive positively the improvement of the co-operation with Austria in the sphere of water purity protection and building a waste water treatment plant at the Austrian chemical plant. At the Slovak part of the Morava river the inhabitants appreciate the opening of the border area for public at the confluence of the Morava and the Danube rivers with an undisturbed virgin nature.

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