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## Abstract

This dissertation thesis is focused on the research of role of symbols, especially graphic symbols (emblems, logos), in the process of region formation and in the process of shaping of regional identities. These aspects are studied in the context of Anssi Paasi's theory of institutionalization of region. The thesis discusses the use of symbols in the development of regions of different scales. The theoretical background of symbol research in the process of a region formation, as based on literature research, is later verified on an example of the analysis of symbols of the Liberec Region and the way they are used by various regional institutions. The Liberec Region is a suitable model area since it both represents a newly constituted region (after 2000), as well as it is already fully institutionalized. This region is also very heterogeneous from the point of view of the natural and cultural heritage. Regarding the settlement perspective, there are both areas inhabited continuously (traditional, "Czech" areas) and areas resettled after the WWII.

In its first part, the thesis is devoted to evolution of regional geography. It briefly presents how regional geography responded to paradigmatic changes, and how it gradually evolved into a "new" regional geography. Next, it discusses the concept of region as a social construct. After anchoring the key concept of research, a constructivism-understood region, the aims are set to answer the question what role symbols and symbolism plays in the process of forming of a region and regional identities. The second chapter deals with the conceptualization of general theoretical framework obtained mainly on the basis of literature retrieval. It defines and discusses the basic concepts and categories (not only) regional geography works with (regional institutionalization, regional identity, region image, and region's brand). It also focuses on the definition and classification of regional symbols, their sources, types and forms, and their potential perceptions. It also refers to their role in the process of the institutionalization of a region, in building its image, as well as in the regional development. The third chapter defines particular research questions. The fourth chapter, a methodological one, introduces the selection and application of research methods. It presents each method in the context of aims and research questions identified, and it specifies them on examples from the empirical part of the research.

The second part of this dissertation thesis consists of a set of four published studies dealing with the role of symbols both in general and specific research levels: Region as concept: traditional and constructivist understanding, Importance of symbols in the process of region formation, Symbols and identity of the region: quantitative analysis of the perception of the region's symbolism, Use and perception of local characteristics of local development actors.

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The research carried out in this dissertation proved that the role of regional symbolism in the processes of region and regional identity formation is important. Generally, the thesis contributes to filling the “whitespace” in research of the role of symbols in the above-mentioned processes. In the empirical level, however, it proves that symbols are underestimated or often not fully used as building tools of regions and their identities. Therefore in the last chapter some other ideas and methods of further research on the role of regional symbols and symbolism as well as the use of their potential in the development of the region are outlined. It is important to emphasize the identification, presentation and representation functions of the symbols, their emotional loading and the ability to highlight the typical and specific elements of the region, which may influence the changes of regional identity and image of the region.

KEY WORDS: new regional geography – region – institutionalization of region – symbolic shape of region – regional identity – regional development – symbol – regional symbol – graphical symbols – emblem – logo – the Liberec Region