

Abstract

The Importance of Graphical Symbols in the Region Formation Process: the Case of the Liberec Region

The thesis analyzes the role of symbols and graphic symbolism in the process of regional and spatial identity formation in the context of the theory of institutionalization of regions by A. Paasi. The goal of the thesis is to contribute to a scientific discussion of this topic using the example of a specific region – the Liberec Region. In the theoretical part of the thesis, general studies of spatial identities, mainly with regard to creating the symbolic shape of region, are discussed, and the importance of symbolism in forming the region, its spatial identity and power relations is assessed. This section aims to define the key concepts, terms and also types of symbols used in this study.

In the research part of thesis, first, the selection of the studied area is justified (region with intensively changed landscape), and, second, its situational analysis is presented, focusing mainly on the social phenomena and elements which could play role of regional symbols. Next, the actual symbolism of the region, as presented in various sources and media, is evaluated. Subsequently, it is compared with the graphic symbols of regional and local institutions, classified and analyzed according to the form (emblems, logos), geographical scale (the self-government region, 19 micro-regions, 25 regional institutions, 171 municipalities), and also in terms of represented elements (nature, landscape, historical, cultural, etc.). The extent of graphic symbolism utilization by actors/subjects in the region, its importance for the regional formation from the point of view of local development actors and assessment of the degree of identification with the municipal characteristics among the local population are then evaluated, based on the results of the corresponding survey targeted at municipal representatives in the region (May–July 2014). Collected data are compared with the perception of the symbols of the Liberec Region by its inhabitants and respondents from other parts of Czechia (as measured in representative public opinion surveys; 2012, 2013).

The thesis proved that the scientific literature assigns a great importance to symbols and symbolism in the process of regional identity formation. The results also confirm, that these play an important role in the processes indeed. It may be assumed that, even in areas with intensively changed landscape, symbols may be very heterogeneous and that mainly symbols of landscape and nature remain important. Landscape and natural symbols are the primary symbolic representations of region in the perception of its inhabitants (regardless of place of their origin). Historical symbols, whose importance varies in time, are the second most often reflected symbols in the graphic symbolism. These play the role of connecting, mediating and activating factors on the regional level. In contrast, complex and close-meaning municipal symbols tend to have rather a representative function and rarely become regionally important.

Key words: new regional geography – region – institutionalization of region – symbolic shape of region – spatial identity – regional development – symbol – regional symbolism – graphical symbols – emblems, logos – the Liberec Region – Czechia