

ABSTRACT

The thesis is rooted in the new regional geography paradigm that gained strength in geographical thought since the 1980s. This approach is characterized by emphasizing the socially constructed nature of regions; thus, regions are scrutinized as a historically contingent process. A region is formed, reproduced and eventually disappears in time. The thesis works with the assumption that a plurality of regions, that exists in changing time-space contexts of different mechanisms and meanings, can be experienced de facto in any particular area. In simpler terms, it can be understood as a plurality of regional images produced on the one side by regional actors to fulfil their particular goals and on the other regional images produced by inhabitants in and outside the region in order to understand the outside world and position themselves within it. Motivation for the production of images can vary, from a simple manifestation of one position in the regional system, through the attempt to attract attention towards the region to exploitation of the regional potential in order to fulfil particular power-oriented aims. The general idea of a region can be sought throughout the synthesis of the many regional images that can be understood as somewhat layers of a region.

The thesis contributes to the discussion on the conceptualization of a region, regional identity and their mutual relation. In particular, it tries to verify the feasibility of regionalization based on the general idea of a region (regional consciousness of people, their sense of belonging and identity of a region). Thus, the key objective of this thesis is not only the delimitation and evaluation of regions, but also the very process of their formation, reproduction and disappearance in time. The thesis suggests the concept of region as a product of societal relations that is based on the constant interaction of three dimensions: practice, (re)presentation and idea of region. For analytical purposes it is possible to interlace this framework with Anssi Paasi's theory of the institutionalization of region. The region, thus, can be studied through three regional shapes: territorial, symbolic and institutional, while the fourth shape (embeddedness in regional system) is de facto substituted by the interaction of those three dimensions which gives the identity to the region.

The thesis is split into two parts: a theoretical and methodological discussion of key concepts, especially from the circle of new regional geography and a set of eight selected empirical studies. Studies are arranged in following thematic order: the general synthesizing paper; empirical papers; papers of a more applied character. It was confirmed that the proposed concept of regionalization is complex and has its place within the approaches of the new regionalism. Yet it cannot be understood as a universal answer to questions related to the conceptualization of the region. Such a universal conceptualization is neither desirable nor possible. The debate over a region, the intricate phenomenon, has to and will continue.

KEY WORDS:

new regionalism; regionalization; regional identity; institutionalization of region; societal production of region