

LESS DEVELOPED REGIONS OF SLOVAKIA: IDENTIFICATION AND CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract: Least developed regions are delimited in the Southern Central, the North-Eastern, and the Eastern Slovakia. These territories significantly vary according to relevant regional development attributes, socio-demographic structure, economic situation, and growth potential. Historical evolution, primary potential, demographic structure, and structure of regional economy are the four of them of greatest relevancy, briefly overviewed in this paper. Obviously, the regional development of Slovak regions has been determined by the six and half centuries of traditional territorial division, contributing to existing intraregional integrity until present. The primary regional potential consists of geographical location and environmental conditions components. Sharp interregional differentiations exist in both of them. The final section of this paper reviews a more difficult task to outline development possibilities in backward regions. Cross-border cooperation has attracted a lot of interest during the last years especially along intra-union state-borders with Hungary and Poland in case of the less developed regions of Slovakia. These regions also have a great potential to profit on the base of highly attractive locations for mountain, historical, sport, or spa resorts. The natural and the cultural-historical potential are expected to attract massive investment but only in few successful places. Several serious defects can easily disqualify otherwise attractive location. Absence of modern infrastructure connecting the area of interest to the international traffic is in the first place.

Key words: regional development, primary potential, history, demography, economy, Slovakia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Problem of regional development continues to be an attractive topic in several disciplines of Slovak research since 1989. M. Hampl (2001), comments that the interest on regional development arose from basis of a need to answer the practical questions of regional differentiation linked to every-day problems of social and economic life across the state area. Only on the second place is the interest of a researcher to ask theoretical and theoretical-methodological questions concerning regional development. Objective identification of region's development status should belong to the prominent topics. The issue should not necessarily be focused only by academic research but also by public

administration at all scales. The division of the country according to economic and social development level and the categorization of individual regions reflect further developments in our research presented including all details in P. Korec, S. Ondoš (2004), and P. Korec (2005).

Practically all of the relevant studies dealing with development of regional structure in Slovakia construct their research on the basis of the socio-demographic and the economic indices in the scale of counties, delimited for territorial state administration in the year 1996 (for example, J. Pašiak, P. Gajdoš, L. Falt'an 2001; V. Benč 2002; J. Kling 2002; P. Gajdoš 2002; M. Buček 2003; and others). However, tracking the regional development in a network of these territorial units incorporates some dangers: non-homogeneity and absenting territorial integrity at least in a number of cases. Common points of objection are the nine urban counties of the cities of Bratislava and Košice. Considering the availability of data, the counties offer a legitimate but seriously limited approach. Number of research projects reviewed by P. Korec 2005, likewise identify basic regional structure in Slovakia mostly as a result of transition process during the 1990s. Majority of these studies methodologically met at the point of identification of developed (wealthy) regions, stabilized regions with a potential to become developed, stagnating regions (less developed with development problems) and backward (lagging) regions. Four types of areas are commonly distinguished in their categorizations, indeed, variously defined. Concerning the method applied in this paper, the study of J. Tvrdoň, M. Hamalová and E. Žárska (1995) recommends to specify three categories only from the perspective of varying successfulness in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in transition: the open regions; the regions of partial adaptation and the lagging regions. Our results correspond formally to this categorization but the attention is also paid to socio-economic development studies by other authors. From several perspectives the task to identify less developed regions of Slovakia is understood as highly eligible in geographical sense. The basic development regions have to be defined contiguously, internally homogeneously apart from the socio-economic underdevelopment itself. The backward regions have to be specifically distinct from the more successful counterparts. A. Smith (1998) noted on the problem of transition limits given by historical, social and cultural regional conditions. Contemporary problems were placed within longer historical cycles and regional perspective where regions responded specifically to national policies.¹

2. A NEW (?) REGIONAL STRUCTURE OF SLOVAKIA

Our previous research confirms a consistency of observed reality and hypothetical regional structure estimated from the average value of standardized factors influencing regional growth in theory (primary potential; spatial administration of state; settlement

¹ Economic growth is increasingly concentrated in a small number of metropolitan cores. The governments have been slow to respond to this divergence by developing effective regional policies and constructing supportive institutions at the regional level. A forty-year old trend of engineered regional convergence has thus been reversed without any attempt to put in place a coherent alternative to the system of branch structure regional planning (Smith, 1998).

hierarchy; macro-location attractiveness; settlement character; demographic structure; transport infrastructure; historical marginality; regional economic specialization; neighboring foreign backward regions). The average value (macro-location attractiveness, settlement hierarchy) from our computation surprisingly well corresponds to real regional differentiation. Similarly, real differences are measured again by average level of eight commonly used socio-economic indices (average monthly income of employees; registered unemployment rate; number of socially supported persons per 100 residents; number of entrepreneurs per 100 economically active persons; number of foreign and international enterprises per 100 private enterprises; number of private enterprises per 100 residents; volume of foreign direct investments; gross domestic product per capita by purchasing parity). Identification of hypothetical and factual regional structure is based spatially on specific observation units, the functional urban regions according to the delimitation variant 91A by A. Bezák (2001). The absolute difference between socioeconomic level and average of two theoretical factors (macro-location attractiveness by location of transportation infrastructure, settlement hierarchy by population size of regional metropolises) is statistically irrelevant in majority of regions. The differences above 1.0 at the point scale <0.0-10.0> appear in fourteen of total number of forty-nine regions (29%). The key result from the comparison is that the regional differentiation in Slovakia to a decisive extent drives the factor of settlement hierarchy and the factor of macro-location attractiveness. For further details on data and method see P. Korec, S. Ondoš (2004), and P. Korec (2005).

The analysis built on the result showing the real regional differentiation of Slovakia (based in the eight socio-economic indices), corresponding to the recommendations in the study of J. Tvrdoň, M. Hamalová and E. Žárska 1995, uncovers the pattern shown in the Fig. 1a. The pattern is composed of the functional urban regions' territories categorized into the three types according to mostly economic transition successfulness. But the pattern itself can not be understood as a representation of new regional structure yet. The pattern also does not indicate the individual regions of economic transition successfulness. Functional urban region is a relatively closed unit research of which is, at least, desirable. On the other hand, a region is a unit of too limited size in population and territory for purpose of effective application of regional policy tools. Therefore, the individual regions have to be clustered in a larger unit, a basic region. These regional entities should satisfy the requirement of inner homogeneity from the perspective of economic transition successfulness, as well as other crucial attributes: historical evolution of territory; primary potential; demographic structure; economic structure; development potential (EU prospects including). A qualitative reevaluation of the pattern, shown in the Fig. 1a, linked to the five attributes results in clustering procedure of individual regions delimiting the three categories of basic development regions (see the units in the Fig. 1b). The pattern in the Fig 1b represents a new (?) regional structure of Slovakia. The structure results from the evaluation of the eight basic socio-economic regional development indices dated to the end of the year 2003. The attitudinal element in our approach to the problem is obvious; therefore, the whole identified basic regional structure of Slovakia bears the burden of subjectivity. Most sections of this paper focus on characteristics of the backward regions according to the basic regional development attributes.

Following a basis of summarized quantitative indices we propose to delimit the socio-economical backward regions in the end of the year 2003 as three large contiguous units shown in the Fig. 3. The Southern Central Slovakia consists of the functional urban

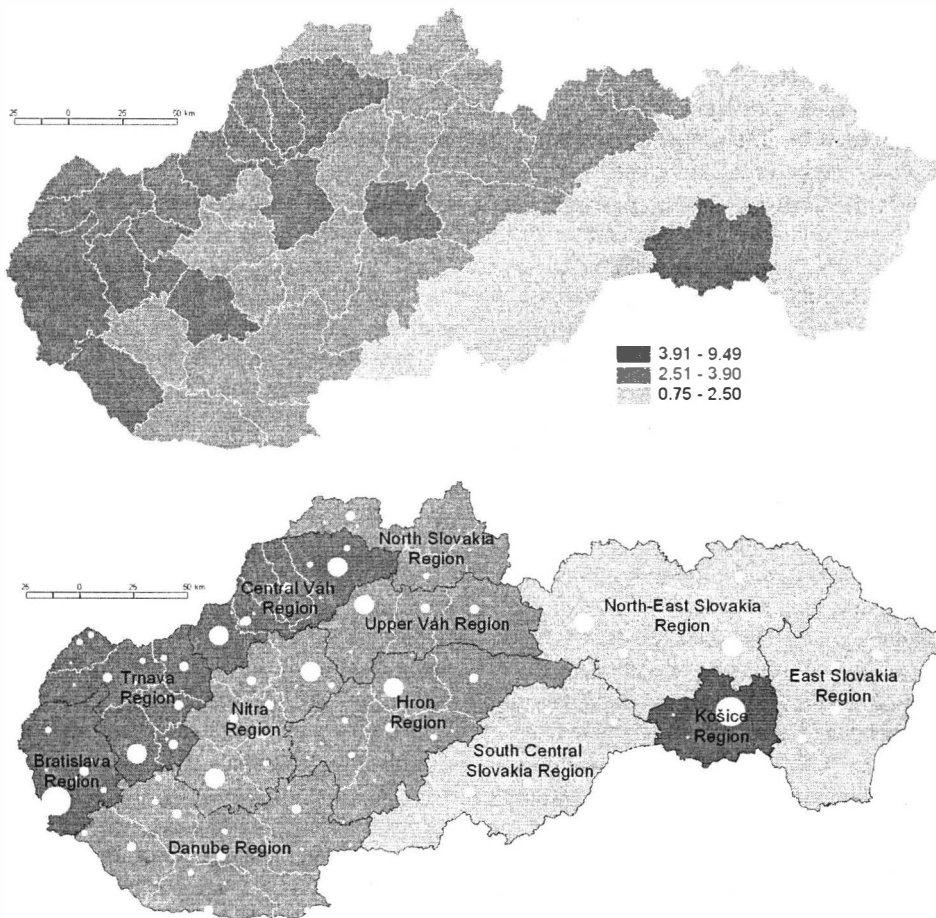


Figure 1 Average socio-economic point value in 2003 (a); Basic development regions (b): the open regions of Bratislava, Trnava, Central Váh and Košice; the lagging regions of Southern Central, North-Eastern and Eastern Slovakia; the regions of partial adaptation of Northern Slovakia, Upper Váh, Hron, Nitra and Danube

regions of Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota and Rožňava; the North-Eastern Slovakia consists of the functional regions of Poprad, Spišská Nová Ves, Stará Ľubovňa, Prešov, Bardejov and Svidník; the Eastern Slovakia consists of the regions of Trebišov, Michalovce, Vranov nad Topľou, Humenné and Snina. A legitimacy to delimit territorial units with development problems in a new scale comes from theoretical requirements of internal homogeneity and significant mutual differences, considering the five attributes of key relevancy. The individual functional urban regions within basic less developed territorial units should have:

1. common continuous historical development;
2. unique primary potential consisting of location and environmental structure;

3. specific demographic situation mirrored in the nature of demographic structures and dynamics: the regional units have their unique socio-cultural landscapes with distinct nationality and religious affiliation;
4. specific structure of regional economy inherited from the socialist growth with varying share of primary, secondary, tertiary economic sectors and their development level;²
5. various development possibilities among which the accession to the EU has brought a new quality of trans-border relations as specially attractive: one region borders to Hungary, another to Poland and the third to both of them and Ukraine.

Considering regional development globally, M. Hampl (2001), notes on the case of Czech situation that any radical change, Slovak economic transition including, must increase the regional differentiation sharply as a necessary consequence of its realization, at least temporarily. Therefore, the reality observed in post-socialist conditions must not be surprising.³

The equalization in regional structures of the CEE countries led in unusually unnatural dimensions. Sociological surveys were used to show the long-term development in income disparities in the Czech Republic. Considerable equalizations occurred in three phases: during the German occupation, in the period between 1945 and 1948 and after the socialism's defeat. The rewarding system in socialism was typical with predominance of demographic factor, decline of education and priority given to the productive branches. After the year 1989, the principle of general needs was replaced, however hesitantly, by the market principle (Večerník, 1996). An increase in differentiation was not only economically unavoidable but also socially acceptable in these societies. Territorial divergence and varying development potentials are the objective features of our reality. From a perspective of state, an effective economic development requires an appropriately differentiated regional growth. Moreover, the differences in the level and dynamics of growth necessarily represent a general precondition and primary impulse of the economic development itself.⁴ But on contrary, an appropriate limit for socio-economic regional differentiation should secure the socio-political stability of the state which could be otherwise endangered. The estimation of the risk and the acceptance of legislation procedures against it should primarily be in the responsibility of central government. The government disposes with the mechanisms that can help ease extremely growing differences: territorial administration; regional

² A. Smith (1994) analyses the uneven development in Slovakia, and examines regional dependence on a single industry production complexes. Rather than a simple transition to capitalism, the regional economies were seeing the uneven marketization of economic relations. The nature of regional change was highly contested.

³ There was a belief that transition to market economy through neo-liberal shock would lead to a quick closure of the wealth gap within the West. A decade later, neo-liberal expectations of convergence under market conditions never materialized. Instead, CEE countries have been experiencing a fragmentation and a growing disparity between the West and the East, and also within the East itself. Divergent economic trajectories should be understood in the light of structural legacies of the state-socialist, pre-socialism and the way these are exposed to and interact with international political economy (Sokol, 2001).

⁴ The capital city regions and the western-border regions in the CEE area develop dynamically. Differentiation could be a first step in transforming the definition of inequalities and interests in territorial and non-territorial forms of social inequalities. However, the relative stability of the European centre-periphery structure does not allow for the de-territorialization of social relationships. Instead, there is evidence of non-identical, path-dependent reproduction of long-established disparities (Heidenreich, 2003).

policy and other political decision-making. Local economic agglomerations, industrial clusters and region-specific successful economies have become influential in thinking about local development. There is a critical need of development in the small and medium-sized enterprises sector, replacing the formerly state-owned large industrial enterprises dominating local economies. A path towards this objective can lead through local intervention with target on the local strengths. More recently under pressure of the EU enlargement transferring policies originating in the West, clusters have found their way in discourses concerning regional development. The National Plan of Regional Development of the Slovak Republic in 2001 highlights the development of industrial clusters within the new business parks as a key aspect of the regional policy in its Regional Operational Program for the Eastern Slovakia (Smith 2003). Several authors emphasize that current period represents the beginning of a second phase of transition in the Slovak Republic which is expected to be qualitatively distinct from the previous one. The crude definition of major regional differences across the country's territory is already done with the basic pattern of the regional structure, appearing in the macro-scale, spanned between the wealthy north-west and the least wealthy south-east. It is real to expect that already the following years will bring the differentiation processes more towards the micro-scale. The role of internal regional resources with a decisive position of the human potential factor will increase in that case.

As stated above, delimitation of less developed basic regions of Slovakia is a legitimate task according to the differences in the territory. The regions differ in the five attributes of key relevancy in the evaluation of the past development, current socio-economic situation and prospects for future growth. A detailed profile in subsequent section of this paper will follow the sequence of five interest fields and will approach the most important features resulting from comparison summarized in the overview in the Tab. I in Appendix.

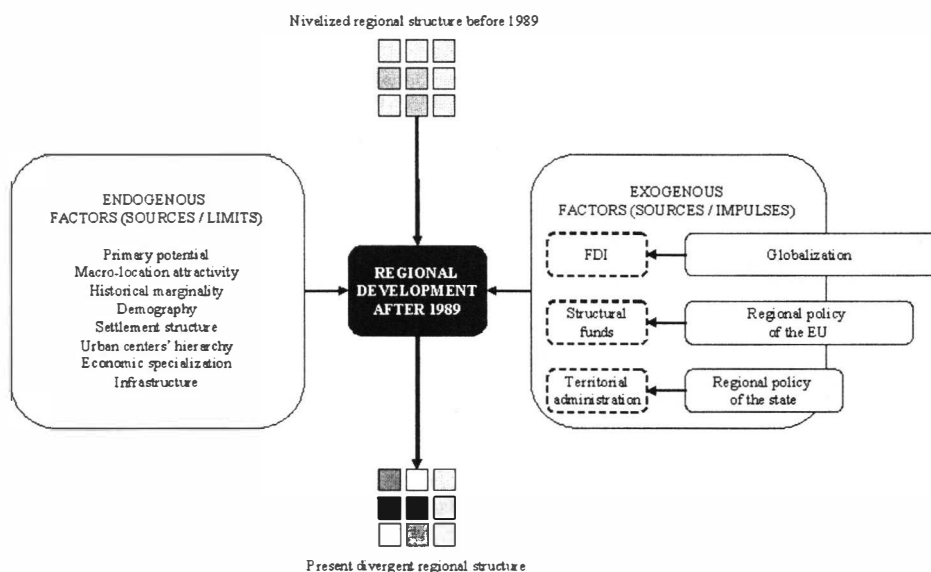


Figure 2 Regional divergence in Slovakia after the year 1989 as a complex process influenced by the internal and the external factors

The Fig. 2 displays our understanding of the regional development process in Slovakia since the year 1989. Horizontal axis is temporal, showing how the early post-socialist equalized regional structure was transformed into the currently appearing pattern of developed, moderately backward and underdeveloped regional units. Regional structure arising in this country had the possibility to evolve mostly thanks to a very weak, practically almost missing regional state policy, similarly as M. Hampl (2001) notes on the Czech case, with hardly appropriate results even until present. The influence from the right summarizes three crude levels from which the external interests find the way to the individual region, having on disposal specific resources but also the limits in a spectrum from location and environment to the human potential. A region also has its own local interests implemented through the institutions and tools available, including various legislative procedures under democratic conditions. Both sides in cooperation drive the direction of resulting process towards positive or negative side.

3. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND PRIMARY POTENTIAL

In generalized view, around 650 years between the beginning of 13th century and 1848 the region of Southern Central Slovakia, at least in the major part, belonged to the group of historical counties of Hungarian kingdom of Hont (Honth, in Hungarian), Novohrad (Nógrád) and Gemer (Gömör). In the same period, the territory of North-Eastern Slovakia was administered by the counties of Spiš (Szepes) and Šariš (Sáros). The major part of the Eastern Slovakia belonged to the county of Zemplín (Zemplén). The overlay of the historical borders of J. Žudel 1984, 1989, and the borders of current socio-economic development regions display a notable consistency. Obviously, the long period of traditional territorial division had a remarkable influence on the spatial development. It also contributes to the internal integrity of the less developed regions of Slovakia. Spatial orientation at the common political and merchant centers, individuality of the feudal authorities, specificity of the location in the Hungarian intra-state and international perspective, various prospects for the economic development and other influences have supported the increasing homogeneity of these areas. Later, in the period between 1848 and 1918, before Czechoslovakia was established after the fall of Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the changes of inter-regional relationships were not enough sufficient to redraw the preceding long-term common evolution. From the year 1923, already in the framework of Czechoslovakia, the country was delimited into the six large territorial-administration districts. A new division, cancelled five years later and all the consequent stages as well couldn't erase the powerful historically shaped internal unity of the three areas. New situation appeared in the year 1993 after disintegration of the Czechoslovak federation, the country in which the transformation from the beginning aimed to integrate it within the West and resulted in the process of internal regional fragmentation, which played a critical role in establishment of two independent states (P. Pavlínek 1995).

According to M. Lukniš (1985), primary potential of a region can be theoretically split in two relatively independent components: the geographical location and the potential of natural conditions of a region. The territory of Slovakia consists of notably contrasting areas in both partial potentials and the same counts for three less developed regions in the eastern part of the country.

Juhoslovenská kotlina, from ten to twenty-five kilometers wide basin, stretches in the central area of the Southern Central Slovakia, running almost 120 kilometers along the Hungarian state-border. The shape of the area is oriented in west-east direction, together with lowland surface-type ideally disposed for the transit infrastructure lines. This territory has already been used for the construction of long-distance oil and gas pipelines and electricity wiring. On contrary, unique combination of advantageous location between two metropolitan cores and ideally disposed geomorphology has not been exploited efficiently for modern transport infrastructure until present. Discussion on this disproportion was discussed in the studies of O. Bašovský (1996), P. Korec (2005), and other authors. The core of the Southern Central Slovakia in the lowland level has a warm climate with long vegetation period, sunshine duration, deep and heavy soil-types with medium and high fertility classes. Certain disadvantage of the area is in the low average annual water flow-rate, exceeding 40 m³ per second. In general, the basin is perfectly suitable for the intensive forms of agricultural production. The surface rises in Revúcka vrchovina in the North and in Cerová vrchovina in the South. The highest altitudes are reached on the northern edge of the first region in Stolické vrchy. The eastern part of the territory belongs to a unique geomorphological unit, the national park Slovenský kras. The Southern Central Slovakia has the richest mineral resources in Slovakia. Brown coal, ceramic clay, magnesite, quartzite, limestone, perlite, basalt, marble, tuff, polymetallic ores, copper ore, iron ore, asbestos, talc and gold belong among many of them. The mineral resources represent an important development potential to the future of the first presented region.

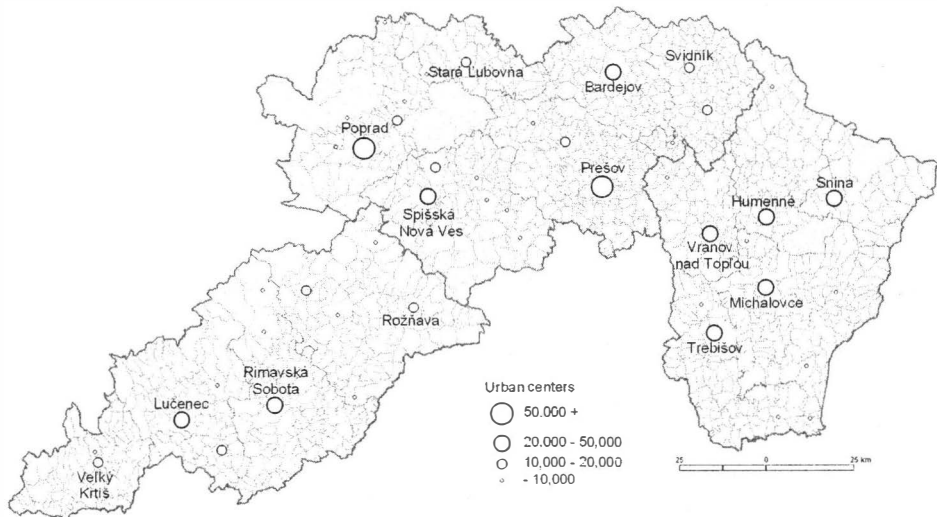


Figure 3 Less developed regions of Southern Central Slovakia, North-Eastern Slovakia and Eastern Slovakia, functional urban regions and urban centers hierarchy by the population size

Less developed region of North-Eastern Slovakia, located between the Eastern Slovakia and remaining regions of the country, has an important transit function which level of importance results from a poor state of transport infrastructure in the previously mentioned southern corridor behind the central mountain barrier. The areas of Spiš and

Šariš have their significant transport-location importance historically, playing the role of important crossing of the merchant routes connecting Hungary with Poland and Western Europe with Russia in the medieval Europe. The lead trading centers in the East (Levoča, Bardejov, Prešov, Sabinov and Košice) together with other towns, mostly in the area of Spiš, profited from the benefits of location in a busy space even from the international viewpoint. After the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the county of Spiš became an attractive location for manufacturing thanks to construction of the railway line between Košice and Bohumín. Northern half of the area consequently started to fall in isolation. In the long period of socialism between 1948 and 1989, the South-Eastern part of this region profited from its location once again, this time on the arterial line connecting Czechoslovakia to the Soviet economic space. But transport-location marginality of the Slovak North-East also was partially eased by general economic growth, catalyzed in the whole East by the redistribution of planned regime. The North-Eastern Slovakia will be connected to the intra-state and European motorway system by the two pan-European multimodal transport corridors. The potential of environment is clearly lower in comparison to the first region when observed from the perspective of agricultural production. The terrain in the area is mountainous, highly dissected and elevated. The wider basins and valleys suitable for intensive agro-production on appropriate soil types are only of a limited extent. Therefore, large areas of the region are covered by forests. Exceptional are the basins Popradská and Hornádska kotlina but even their range of altitude is a disadvantage implying a cold and wet climate. On contrary, the same area of North-Eastern Slovakia disposes with an extremely high potential for non-production activities, tourism in the first place. Economically heavily backward region, but thanks to that environmentally one of the best preserved areas in Europe, offers multitude of attractive locations, including national parks, ski and spa resorts. In the close contact with historical-monument sites and numerous medieval settlements their success is only the question of stronger market behavior.

Major disadvantage of the Eastern Slovakia lays in the location remoteness from the most economically active areas of the country and the core of the CEE region. The handicap is strengthened by inappropriate railway connection and missing continuous motorway connection to the West. Historically, during the socialist period between 1948 and 1989, location of this region was, on contrary, favorable relatively to the orientation of Czechoslovak foreign trade in the East. Socialist Czechoslovak economy absorbed a constant inflow of the Soviet mineral resources. In opposite direction, the masses of manufactured products including food were transported. The import of resources from Ukrainian and Russian mines and oil-fields is relevant until present but the export from Slovakia considerably decreased after the geopolitical rearrangement in the beginning of the 1990s. From the perspective of the Eastern Slovakia region, the negative development started after the change of political relationships between Slovakia, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Backward local economies in directly neighboring regions of Poland⁵, Ukraine and Hungary⁶ represent an important influence, too. Environmentally,

⁵ F. Barjak (2001) showed that the most capable regions of Poland were those in contact to the largest agglomerations. Two regional types could be established as problematic: rural regions, peripheral to the agglomerations and old industrial regions.

⁶ Disparities in Hungary could be characterized regionally with the dualism between Budapest and the countryside, the west-east division of the country, local crises of the broken-down industrial axis and marginal geographic settings, the hierarchy and size of settlements. Two thirds of the total foreign capital invested in Hungary and half of the joint-ventures were concentrated in the capital. Apart from Budapest, it caused a high unemployment rate and low taxable incomes (J.N. Nagy 1994).

the central area of the third less developed region, Eastern Slovakia, is located on large flat lowland Východoslovenská nížina. The terrain in the second half of the region in the North rises in four different units, the volcanic mountain Vihorlatské vrchy, mountains Laborecká vrchovina, Beskydské predhorie and Bukovské vrchy, claimed for the national park Poloniny. The South rises only locally in Zemplínske vrchy at the Hungarian state-border. Three quarters of the lowland are flat. This implies heavy clay soil types, suffering from shallow ground-water level. Despite the massive investment in melioration, pumped in the Eastern Slovakia since 1950s, the improvement of quality and fertility of the lowland soils have not been achieved. Hydrological projects included the dam Zemplínska Šírava, the protection walls along the local rivers, drain channels, pumping wells, the dry polder Beša and the ponds Senné. Thanks to continental type of climate temperatures and precipitation are less appropriate for intensive agro-production. Irregular flow-rate regimes of the regions' rivers constantly have to be adjusted by two large dams. Local water resources, inflowing from sediments in the North, are weak except those originating in fluvial sediments, although not sufficient for the regional settlement network and economy, future growth respectively.

4. DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

Sharp disproportions also exist between the less developed regions even in the simplest demographic measures, the number and the density of population. While the Southern Central Slovakia and the Eastern Slovakia differ by around 0.1 million within the area of similar size, the population of North-Eastern Slovakia exceeds the previous threefold, fourfold respectively, according to the 2001 census by ŠÚSR 2002. This difference results from historical development and location benefits of specific areas, as mentioned in the case of the North-Eastern Slovakia above. Population density in the Southern Central Slovakia is 60 per square kilometer which is, considering the primary potential, a surprisingly low level. The densest populated of the three regions, the North-East, also does not reach the state's average of 110 per square kilometer. The values in the scale of functional urban regions are balanced in the case of Southern Central Slovakia but sharp differences exist in the two remaining areas.

Differences in the regional population's age structure are of expected size. Relatively high rate of pre-productive population (23.2 %) in the North-East results from the long-term level of natural increase. The low level of the same measure (19.0 %) in the South Central region reacts, among other aspects, on the structure of religious affiliation. There are also relatively high rates of productive age groups in these populations. Other differences among these regions appear in the structure by nationality. The Southern Central Slovakia has significant Hungarian minority (29.0 %) whose size implies the bilingual character of the region. Similarly, the Eastern Slovakia also has a large Hungarian population in the South (10.1 %) while it is practically missing in the North-East (0.1 %), having the largest (91.6 %) majority. Roma is a nationality distributed, according to official 2001 census data, almost equally (from 3.9 % to 4.4 %).

The Roma nationality is in relationship with several serious social problems in contemporary Slovakia, the shape of which arises from a historical-societal specificity of this ethnic group. Long existing problem became highly visible after the Slovak Republic

begun the accession process to the EU, being focused by supra-national institutions and covered by media. Totalitarian regime before 1989 did not succeed in finding a complex solution to the problem with variety of socio-economic, socio-psychological, socio-political, and ethno-cultural aspects most of which were absolutely ignored by socialist authorities. Their approach led to insufficient and slowly appearing outcomes, rather negative from today's point of view. Political, economic, and social transition in Slovakia during the 1990s brought a surprise for majority of the Roma, a population totally unprepared for fundamental changes deeply affecting the individuals' everyday life. Basic characteristic of the Roma minority in the end of previous decade includes a lower education and qualification level, in comparison with the total population. This deficiency necessarily implied the limits for labor market mechanisms in conditions of contemporary economy and also a high dependency rate on state's social security network. The social segregation increases already high level of poverty among the Roma, and worsens already tense relationship with the majority, appearing as a consequence of seemingly unfair social policy of the central state in the hands of majority. Roma have not formed a significant political representation until present (Radičová, 2002). Liberalization in education, health care and employment services, driven increasingly towards the insurance-based system and individual's responsibility, privatization of the rental housing, cancellation of the state support and the state-run housing construction were the major changes with dramatic impact on wide strata of the Roma. With no consideration to the ethnic aspect, turbulent development of transiting post-socialist economy affected all social strata but the consequences on educationally weak population groups were, as could be expected, intensively negative. A decreasing social status started to conserve existing backwardness and poverty, indicated by extreme levels of unemployment and dependence on the state's financial support during the period of transition. Reforms in the social sector amending the policy of the state in 2004 significantly cut the extent of social support which in response escalated several days lasting protests among mostly segregated Roma communities in the East of the country. Previous treatments led to unwelcome phenomena inadequately increasing social parasitism, criminality including untenable robberies on private fields and small grocery stores, worsening state of social separation and ethnic prejudice on the both sides of the conflict. Concerning this issue, P. Korec (2005) adds that there is an objective correlation relationship between the increase of poverty risk and the Roma minority affiliation. But the poverty of the Roma themselves can hardly be objectively quantified which is a consequence of factual insufficiency and inaccuracy of statistics originated in methodology of modern censuses in 1991 and 2001. These data provide the evidence of seemingly decreasing size of minority in comparison with the early post-revolution census when the principle of nationality self-determination was applied for the first time. Last qualified estimates state the size of this ethnic group at the level of 0.38 million in 2001 (B. Vaňo 2002) while the size of the same population, according to official statistics, was only 89,920 persons (23.7 %). The data on nationality population structure are therefore undervalued and rather unusable in any approach trying to solve the crucial problems of the Roma. The mathematical puzzle, at least, implies that the willingness of free declaration to the Roma nationality has significantly diminished during the 1990s. A remarkable group, the Ruthenians, inhabits the regions of the Eastern Slovakia (2.65 %) and the North-East (1.44 %).

The unemployment rate among Roma is high, within many of the numerous segregated colonies approaching full unemployment. Accurate statistics of Roma

unemployment do not exist, hypothetical implications and further fictional derivative estimates are the only available to use. Spatial correlation supports, for example, in the scale of counties that a relationship exists between the percentage of Roma in the population and the unemployment. In the beginning of the 1990s when unemployment firstly officially appeared, the situation was highly disadvantageous, for the most of the Roma especially. Creation of a competitive environment in the labor market highly elevated demands on the potential employees. This happened not only concerning the qualification but also the work habits, discipline, behavior and others. Decreased demand for labor during a general restructuring of manufacturing, construction, and agriculture sector have affected the most intensively individuals in unqualified and less qualified employment positions. Unfortunately, those were occupied frequently by the Roma workers. Low educational level, often low work morale, unwillingness to do manual work which means the most of supplied public works, insufficient demand for labor exactly in the counties with large Roma minority and unconcern of potential employers for possibly irresponsible, risky, unmanageable employees belong among the most influential factors linked to their unemployment. The unemployment rate of the Roma could on the date of census reach 72.6 % (UNDP 2001), almost a fourfold higher level in comparison with the state's average. Further complication of their situation is that many individuals are commonly unemployed for a long and extreme long (over one and over four years) period. Among the Roma, the risk of permanent exclusion from the labor market is higher than among the majority population. First factor contributing to serious threat remains buried deep in atmosphere of suspicion between the minor and the major social group. Unemployment among the Roma is linked to other specifics, too. Long-term unemployment implies existence of the circle of poverty, a trap of unemployment. The Roma became highly dependent on public assistance what was a satisfying situation to many of the actors. Resulting voluntarily unemployed labor and inter-generational transfer of the pathological phenomenon became to appear as a common reality in many parts of this country. The number of family households with both unemployed parents and children increased.

Variation among the three less developed regions of Slovakia also appears in religious affiliation of their residing population. The Roman-Catholics dominate in the population of all three units but their weight ranges from the level of 53.2 % in the East through 55.08 % in the Southern Central Slovakia to 71.3 % in the North-East. Evangelic Church of Augsburg, according to 2001 census, reaches the largest percentage in the Southern Central Slovakia (16.36 %) where the church exceeds the national average. Its presence is low in remaining areas. Greek-Catholics, on contrary, range from 23.3 % in the Eastern Slovakia and 11.3 % in the North-East to low level of 0.5 % in Southern Central Slovakia. Among other statistically relevant affiliations, the Reformed Christians (6.68 %) and the Orthodox (5.4 %) are recorded in the Eastern Slovakia. Relative high percentage of individuals with no religious affiliation appears in the Southern Central Slovakia (17.5 %) exceeding the national average 13.0 %.

The most progressive region from the perspective of natural population dynamics is the North-East, growing annually during the year 2001 by 4.4 persons per thousand residents while the Southern Central Slovakia was losing its population at the level of 1.2 persons per thousand people. The population in the Eastern Slovakia was growing by 1.1 persons per thousand residents. When total movement of population is analyzed by its two major components, the North-Eastern Slovakia appears with a high level of live-birth rate and also low death rate. At the scale of individual regions, high natural decrease rate

was recorded in the region of Veľký Krtíš, low natural growth rate in the region of Svidník, and high natural increase in the region of Vranov nad Topľou. Migration movement in these regions displays substantial equality.

5. STRUCTURE OF ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

One of simplest and commonly used approaches to economic structure of a region leads through use of the data distributing economically active population residing in the region into various sectors of the regional economy. This approach has its well known limits although the data are easily available on a regular one-decade period basis. Census percentages have ability to support at least selected basic features of the regional economic structure. Primary sector of economy employed 9.5 % in the Southern Central Slovakia, 7.9 % in the Eastern and 5.9 % in the North-Eastern Slovakia. Agro-production measured by the size of employed labor clearly depends on the general description of environmental conditions suitability, briefly outlined above. Secondary sector, including manufacturing, construction and transport activities, reaches various rates far from balance among the three regions. The highest rate of 30.0 % is recorded in the Southern Central Slovakia, the lowest rate of 26.7 % in the North-Eastern and the rate of 27.4 % appears in the Eastern Slovakia. Detailed approach to the structure and its basic sectors uncovers a rate above average for mining and, on contrary, a low rate for construction in the Southern Central Slovakia. Again, these structural features could be expected according to environmental specificity of the region rich on mineral resources and historical marginality, causing relatively low demand for the construction activities, in result employing less labor than national average. This value also can be used as an indicator of certain stagnation in local economic development.

Tertiary sector displays almost equal distribution between the areas of interest. Services employ 40.4 % in the Southern Central Slovakia, 43.0 % in the North-Eastern and 42.0 % in the Eastern Slovakia. Services, especially their advanced sub-sector categories can be used as a simple effective measure of the regional economic development level in general. But this indicating value for wider phenomenon then the size of employed labor itself is not ideal in case of many labor-intensive service activities of current economy. The rate is, in any case, in relationship with the level of urbanization, the settlement hierarchy and agglomeration effects appearing in regional economy. The North-Eastern Slovakia, in detailed perspective, has strong position in accommodation and food services (2.8 %), wholesale and retail trade (9.2 %), other commercial services, finance and insurance. This specificity has its basis influenced by several factors. The region concentrates a number of attractive tourism locations. But the decisive role plays its regional settlement structure, including the cities of Prešov and Poprad, the third and the tenth largest urban centers within the national scale, together with twenty smaller cities and towns. Both remaining regions are structured only around thirteen, much smaller urban centers.

It is a demanding task to evaluate development prospects or potentials of a region. General consensus exists in debates on innovation-oriented regional development basis built on effective linkages between manufacturing, service and research oriented private and public institutions. Clustering continues to grow in importance within search for

success in economic performance for several types of regions. A review of a number of theoretical approaches, focusing on this topic from multitude of perspectives (the innovative milieu, the network theory, the regional innovation systems and the transaction costs theory) can be found, for example, in the work of R. Sternberg (2000). Several new prospects for Slovakia's backward areas have appeared since the year 2004. Common market enlargement, formal and informal contacts and especially diminishing formal and technical barriers make the neighboring regions of Southern Poland and Northern Hungary very attractive candidates for partnership in both cooperation and competition. Neither is expected to bring loss to involved parties. Cross-border regional units belong in evolving space inside the borders of the enlarged EU. New quality of the state-borders between the member states undoubtedly will push the limits of regional economic growth in positive direction. Special position of the Eastern Slovakia is, for example, in this perspective closely joined with the eighty kilometers long Ukrainian border, formally dividing the EU economic and political area from external, post-soviet space in Eastern Europe. Increase of trade activity, necessity to improve migration management, security and other related fields are expected to bring lot of interest concentrated at the eastern EU frontier, business including. Moreover, all three less developed regions have variety of possibilities to develop their unique potentials for tourism, environmental, cultural and historical. Development in this direction is perceived as very real. General economic activation of the North-Eastern and the Eastern Slovakia is expected as soon as the D1 motorway line will connect the area directly with wider CEE and indirectly the whole EU market. Regional economy of the Southern Central Slovakia will need a more surprising development impulse. Direct modern transport corridor joining the area with Hungary, for example, is by no means an unrealistic scenario.

6. CONCLUSION

Questions of general development level between geographical regions seem to be necessarily without a definite answer. Scientific studies and political applications concerning regional development continuously prove that it is unreal to expect construction of a perfectly objective scientific model. Patterns of regional development and underdevelopment, static or dynamic, are followed through multitude of approaches, putting in centre of attention measurement of poverty, inequality, progress, freedom, sustainability and other concepts. Specific indicators commonly used to document situation or dynamics in (and between) regions also can have many forms, including monetary or non-monetary factors, indices close or remote from quality of life of individuals. Objective of this paper is to present our attempt to divide Slovakia in basic territorial units with socio-economic development level significantly lower in comparison with other units in the same scale but having reasonably internally homogenous character.

Based on eight common socio-economic indicators, the regional structure of Slovakia was estimated in 2003. According to M. Hampl, 2001, this time horizon concludes the first, qualitatively distinct period of post-socialism in the CEE area. Territorial pattern is a result of transition causing turbulent social and economic changes

during the whole 1990s. Simply as possible, the quantitative approach through average values enabled us to categorize functional urban regions, basic units of observation, into three distinct types according to the level of successfulness in transition. A functional urban region does not represent appropriate unit for the purpose of regional development evaluation. Considering results of this approach together with influence of five regional attributes of highest relevancy (historical and primary potentials; demographic and economic structures; development potential), a logical synthesis leads to projection of estimated structure. The system composed of twelve basic territorial units is divided into three categories of successfulness: the winning open regions, the regions of partial adaptation and the problematic less developed regions (the Fig. 1b).

Identification of development regions and their composition from individual regions is necessarily a subject of further discussion we wish to open; however, presented results are with certain amount of subjective elements. Especially the final parts of methodology use the qualitative evaluation based in specific knowledge of the territories. Delimitation of less developed regions was the least problematic of the three types. The Southern Central Slovakia was created as a spatially contiguous cluster of four functional urban regions. The North-Eastern Slovakia arose as a group of six and the Eastern Slovakia as a group of five functional urban regions (the Fig. 2). In generalization implemented previously, the Southern Central Slovakia was administered in three historical counties of Hungarian kingdom, the North-Eastern Slovakia in two and Eastern Slovakia in one unit during 650 years between the 13th century and 1848 with the borders displaying a surprising correspondence.

Consideration of four other regional attributes in Slovakia supports sharply appearing internal homogeneity and external distinctiveness of the less developed regions. From the perspective of primary potential, the Southern Central Slovakia is located between metropolitan cores of Slovakia in a wide and long basin suitable for intensive agricultural production, rapid transit communications, having on disposal rich mineral resources. Focusing demographic aspects in this region, in the first place is a large Hungarian minority, then a low natural increase and education level. From the perspective of regional economy, relatively high rate of economically active population is employed in the agricultural sector (9.5 %) and manufacturing (30.0 %). Important feature of the region is permanently the highest unemployment of all development regions of Slovakia which results from low value of FDI. Development potential in the Southern Central Slovakia is commonly linked to mineral resources, cross-border partnerships and general economic activation, depending on existence of appropriate transport infrastructure in the future. North-Eastern Slovakia is a regional unit having probably the highest intraregional variation in primary potential in the country. A mosaic of contrasting landscape types, mountainous and woody to large extent, can represent a barrier for some activities but we tend to see the environment rather as a good way to future development. Besides tourism growth potential, the area can also develop agglomeration economies on its basis, in relation to its urban centers especially. This region also can be interesting for its low labor cost; however, further suffering from its seeming remoteness, perceived from the West within conditions of present poor state of transport infrastructure. Development potential of the Eastern Slovakia is seen as least connected with the environmental qualities. Location directly at the outer EU border can not leave the region's future, according to our opinion, unaffected. But development on the basis of contact between the common European market and the external post-soviet space in the east from Slovakia is a question of chance and its use. As in previous case, future of the region is expected in dependence on its accessibility.

This paper brings evaluation of three less developed regional units of Slovakia. Probably a main output besides the summarization of regional development potentials is that these problems will have to be approached in the problem-specific scale in the future. Already defined basic regional units represent this scale in case of long-term socio-economic development in Slovakia. The levels of counties and functional urban regions can not be used as the effective targets within creation and implementation of various regional policy tools.

Table 1 Three less developed regions of Slovakia in 2001, selected quantitative indices according to the census

		The region of Slovakia		
		Southern Central	North-Eastern	Eastern
a) Historical population development				
Growth rate 1869-1921	%	107.8	99.1	105.7
Growth rate 1921-1950	%	104.8	117.3	109.4
Growth rate 1950-1991	%	119.6	168.8	145.9
Growth rate 1991-2001	%	100.8	107.6	103.5
Growth rate 1869-2001	%	136.1	211.2	174.6
b) Primary potential				
Eastern central region, the core	% area	0.0	4.3	47.2
Eastern central region, the periphery	% area	1.9	49.9	52.8
Northern corridor region, the core	% area	0.0	12.0	0.0
Northern corridor region, the periphery	% area	3.8	33.6	0.0
Southern corridor region, the core	% area	41.9	0.0	0.0
Southern corridor region, the periphery	% area	52.4	0.2	0.0
c) Demographic structure and dynamics				
Population	persons	329.2	720.7	430.3
Area	sq. km	5.5	7.4	5.4
Population density	per sq. km	60.0	97.0	80.0
Pre-productive age group	%	19.0	23.2	21.0
Post-productive age group	%	19.1	15.5	17.7
Live-birth rate	per 1,000	10.6	12.7	11.0
Death rate	per 1,000	11.8	8.2	9.9
Natural increase	per 1,000	-1.2	4.4	1.1
Slovak	%	65.2	91.6	81.0
Hungarian	%	29.0	0.1	10.1
Roma	%	3.9	4.4	3.9
Czech	%	0.5	0.5	0.4
Ruthenian	%	0.0	1.4	2.7
Ukrainian	%	0.1	0.6	0.8
Roman-catholic	%	55.1	71.3	53.2
Evangelic of Augsburg	%	16.4	4.7	3.1
Greek-catholic	%	0.5	11.3	23.3
Reformed Christian	%	5.4	2.6	6.7
Orthodox	%	0.1	0.1	5.4
Without religious affiliation	%	17.5	6.9	4.6
d) Settlement structure				
Number of communities	number	361.0	535.0	394.0
Average population of community	persons	912.0	1347.0	1092.0
Urbanization	%	44.4	50.8	44.9
Largest urban center	persons	28.3	92.8	39.9
Number of urban centers	number	13.0	22.0	13.0
Urban centers, population above 50,000	number	0.0	2.0	0.0
Urban centers, population above 20,000	number	2.0	4.0	5.0

Source: FSÚ (1978), ŠÚ SR (1992, 2002)

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Menej rozvinuté regióny Slovenska: identifikácia a hodnotenie

Resume

Problematika regionálneho vývoja, resp. hodnotenia regionálnych rozdielov sa stala veľmi atraktívnou pre veľa vedeckých disciplín na Slovensku prakticky hneď po roku 1989. Ako uvádza viacero autorov veľký záujem o tieto témy bol výsledkom predovšetkým praktických denných ekonomických a sociálnych problémov jednotlivých regiónov Slovenska. Až neskôršie, možno povedať „v druhom slede“ sa objavil záujem bádatel'ov o teoretické a teoreticko-metodologické otázky spojené s regionálnym vývojom. Na otázky vo vzťahu k hodnoteniu regionálneho rozvoja štátu, prípadne k úrovni rozvoja jeho jednotlivých regiónov a stanovenia rozdielov medzi nimi je prakticky nemožné dať jednoznačnú odpoveď.

Vedecké štúdie ako aj spoločensko-politické aplikácie hodnotiace regionálny rozvoj s cieľom jeho identifikovania a následne optimalizovania ukazujú, že je nereálne očakávať konštrukciu objektívneho jediného správneho vedeckého modelu. Vzory, schémy regionálneho rozvoja, statické alebo dynamické, sú konštruované na báze širokého spektra prístupov, kladúc do centra pozornosti mieru chudoby, nezamestnanosť, nerovnosti, progresívnosť ekonomiky, trvalo udržateľný vývoj, prípadne iné. Všeobecne používané indikátory úrovne regionálneho rozvoja alebo jeho dynamiky v regiónoch, prípadne medzi regiónmi sú takisto rôzne. Cieľom predloženého príspevku je identifikácia a hodnotenie regiónov Slovenska, ktoré z hľadiska sociálno-ekonomického rozvoja signifikantne zaostávajú za ostatnými regiónmi, t.j. môžeme ich považovať za menej rozvinuté.

Odlíšnosť nášho prístupu v porovnaní s doteraz publikovanými prácami vidíme v troch skutočnostiach. Po prvé, bazovými observačnými jednotkami, z ktorých pri identifikácii menej rozvinutých regiónov (identifikujeme aj otvorené regióny a regióny parciálnej adaptácie) vychádzame sú funkčné mestské regióny v zmysle prác A. Bezáka. Po druhé, nami identifikované základné regióny podľa sociálno-ekonomického rozvoja sú svojou veľkosťou medzi okresmi, resp. funkčnými mestskými regiónmi na jednej strane a kraji, resp. regiónmi NUTS II na strane druhej. A nakoniec po tretie, definujeme päť hlavných atribútov regiónov vo vzťahu k ich rozvoju, ktoré nám v konečnom dôsledku umožňujú identifikáciu základných regiónov.

Vychádzajúc z analýzy ôsmich základných ukazovateľov sociálneho a ekonomického rozvoja môžeme identifikovať vzor základnej regionálnej štruktúry Slovenska ako výsledok transformačných procesov pôsobiacich po roku 1989 (P. Korec 2005). Táto analýza nám umožnila rozdeliť funkčné mestské regióny Slovenska do troch kategórií podľa úspešnosti ich ekonomickej transformácie (obr. 1a). Funkčné mestské regióny však nie sú vhodné jednotky na hodnotenie regionálnej diferenciácie územia Slovenska. Ak zohľadníme výsledky uvedenej analýzy ôsmich reálnych ukazovateľov a päť hlavných atribútov regiónov Slovenska vo vzťahu k ich rozvoju (historický vývoj, primárny potenciál, demografická štruktúra, ekonomická štruktúra a rozvojový potenciál) logickou analýzou môžeme identifikovať základnú regionálnu štruktúru Slovenska (P. Korec, S. Ondoš 2004, P. Korec 2005). Túto štruktúru vytvára 12 základných regiónov rozdelených do troch kategórií podľa úspešnosti ich ekonomickej transformácie: 4 otvorené regióny – bratislavský, trnavský, stredné Považie a košický, 5 regiónov parciálnej adaptácie – podunajský, nitriansky, pohronský, horné Považie a severozápadné Slovensko a 3 menej rozvinuté regióny – juh stredného Slovenska, severovýchodné Slovensko a východné Slovensko (obr. 1b).

O identifikácii 12 základných regiónov a priradení jednotlivých funkčných mestských regiónov do daného základného regiónu je možné diskutovať a polemizovať. Základné regióny sú výsledkom už naznačeného metodologického postupu, kde najmä v závere sa uplatňujú poznatky a skúsenosti autorov. Treba poznamenať že identifikovanie troch menej rozvinutých regiónov bolo najmenej problematické. Juh stredného Slovenska vytvorili funkčné mestské regióny Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota a Rožňava, severovýchodné Slovensko Poprad, Spišská Nová Ves, Stará Ľubovňa, Prešov, Bardejov a Svidník a východné Slovensko Trebišov, Michalovce, Vranov nad Topľou, Humenné a Snina (obr. 2). Rešpektujúc určitú generalizáciu, približne 750 rokov od začiatku 13. storočia až do roku 1848 územie regiónu juh stredného Slovenska, resp. jeho podstatná časť patrila k trom historickým stolicám Uhorska, Hontianskej, Novohradskej a Gemerskej. V tom samom období sa územie regiónu severovýchodné Slovensko vyvíjalo v rámci Spišskej a Šarišskej stolice. Väčšina územia regiónu východné Slovensko patrilo v spomínaných 750 rokoch k Zemplínskej župe.

Ak by sme hodnotili štyri ďalšie atribúty regiónov Slovenska zistíme, že pri každom z nich vykazuje každý menej rozvinutý región výraznú vnútornú homogenitu a vonkajšiu odlišnosť. Z hľadiska primárneho potenciálu juhu stredného Slovenska sú napríklad dôležité tri jeho momenty: poloha medzi dvomi metropolitínymi jadrami Slovenska, široká a dlhá Juhoslovenská kotlina vhodná na intenzívne poľnohospodárske využívanie a vedenie tranzitných komunikácií a bohaté zdroje nerastných surovín. Samozrejme za významný rozvojový potenciál tohto regiónu treba považovať aj prihraničnú polohu k Maďarsku. Pri hodnotení demografickej štruktúry juhu stredného Slovenska je pozoruhodné vysoké zastúpenie obyvateľov maďarskej národnosti (približne 30 % z celkovej populácie), veľmi nízky prirodzený prírastok, vlastne už dlhšie úbytok obyvateľstva prirodzeným pohybom, nižšia úroveň dosiahnutého vzdelania a ďalšie skutočnosti (veková štruktúra, náboženská štruktúra i iné). Z pohľadu ekonomiky tohto regiónu vyniká vysoký podiel ekonomicky aktívnych v poľnohospodárstve (9.52 %) a

v priemysle (29.95 %). Dôležitou črtou regiónu je permanentne najvyššia miera nezamestnanosti spomedzi základných regiónov Slovenska, čo je do značnej miery výsledkom veľmi nízkej hodnoty priamych zahraničných investícií v tomto regióne. Súčasný rozvojový potenciál juhu stredného Slovenska sa spája predovšetkým s očakávaným využitím zdrojov nerastných surovín, cezhraničnou spoluprácou a všeobecnou ekonomickou aktivizáciou regiónu po predpokladanom vybudovaní rýchlostnej cestnej komunikácie v regióne.

Severovýchodné Slovensko je regionálna jednotka pravdepodobne s najvyššou intraregionálnou variabilitou primárneho potenciálu v štáte. Pre región sú typické mozaikovo kontrastné krajinné typy. Vysoké pohoria a veľká zalesnenosť regiónu môžu predstavovať bariéru pre niektoré ekonomické aktivity, ak sa však na túto črtu regiónu pozrieme z environmentálneho hľadiska je určite dobrým rozvojovým potenciálom. Okrem cestovného ruchu, región sa môže rozvíjať aj na báze ekonomík aglomerácií, čo platí hlavne o aglomerácii Prešova a Popradu. Tento región je určite zaujímavý aj kvôli ľahkej pracovnej sile a tranzitu, ktorého význam sa zvýši po dobudovaní diaľnice D1. Rozvojový potenciál regiónu východné Slovensko je zväčša spájaný s kvalitou životného prostredia a atraktivitami pre cestovný ruch. Bolo by však chybou, keby sme pri hodnotení rozvojových možností opomenuli polohu tohto regiónu na východnej hranici Európskej únie. Samozrejme poloha na kontakte spoločného trhu Európskej únie a post-sovietskeho priestoru na východ od Slovenska je dnes otázka šancí a ich využitia. Tak ako v predchádzajúcom regióne aj v prípade východného Slovenska je budúcnosť závislá od jeho dopravného prepojenia, a to ako v západo-východnom smere, tak aj v severo-južnom.

Podrobné hodnotenie jednotlivých menej rozvinutých regiónov je urobené v príspevku. Jedným z hlavných výstupov tohto príspevku je konštatovanie, že pri úvahách o ďalšom regionálnom rozvoji Slovenska považujeme za veľmi potrebné riešiť problémy na úrovni predstavených 12 základných regiónov. Úroveň funkčného mestského regiónu prípadne úroveň okresu neumožňuje efektívne využívať nástroje regionálnej politiky štátu. Na druhej strane na úrovni krajov alebo regiónov NUTS II prichádza k veľkej generalizácii, dôsledkom ktorej je strata osobitostí jednotlivých regiónov. Nami identifikované základné regióny predstavujú z hľadiska hodnotenia regionálnej štruktúry Slovenska, možno povedať, (potrebnú) mezoúroveň medzi úrovňou okresov a funkčných mestských regiónov na jednej strane a krajinami a regiónmi NUTS II na strane druhej.