

ON THE SOCIO-GEOGRAPHIC EXAMINATION OF SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE CULTIVATED LANDSCAPE

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Abstract: The paper provides an interpretation of a methodological procedure, of which would support decision making sphere in optimal decisions about development of a region with respect to natural and social potential and landscape carrying capacity. Principal output of the paper will be a standardized methodical procedure, which will point to finding an optimum socioeconomic development of locations, with regard to social needs and requirements for sustainable development.

Key words: social potential of territory, social structures, cultural landscape, assessing methods, regional and local policy

Since 1989, economic development in the Czech Republic has been diversified, the landscape is becoming more heterogeneous, mosaic-like and textured; differentiations within social structures have increased. Undoubtedly, these changes have had their geographic dimension (there being certain regularities in the spatial distribution); for example, the intensity of positive socioeconomic development has been considerably weaker in rural, peripheral, mountainous and sub-mountainous areas and in areas with long-term overburdening, whether social or environmental. On the contrary, urban and suburban areas have often undergone unplanned development. On the whole, the amplitude of differences in the socioeconomic environment has risen. Areas from which there was an outflow of population and economic activity must now – in relation to the country's accession to the EU (and the availability of its funds) – seek appropriate options for their economic development respecting their current conditions (natural and environmental potentials, including natural resources, the set abiotic, ecological, social, cultural and legislative limits to the economic development) and respecting the sustainability of such development. For the areas, this translates into reviving the socioeconomic environment, improving social, economic and demographical characteristics, and directing the economic development of peripheral, rural and devastated areas.

The transformation of post-totalitarian societies is the subject of study of several disciplines of social science in these countries as well as abroad. Geography can play an irreplaceable role in this respect, enabling us to evaluate not only relations between social and natural systems on the one hand, but also to frame the topic in broader functional and spatial contexts on the other hand. Present-day studies deal overwhelmingly with geopolitical concepts of the evaluation, or geo-economic aspects; the micro-regional angle and evaluation comprising aspects of natural systems are left out of the scope of interest.

A certain imbalance in the topic (or orientation of the research subject) can also be seen within the **course of geographical thought**. One can observe a trend of growing disintegration of science in general as well as the duality between natural and social sciences. The dependence of society on natural preconditions (adaptive relationship in respect of external conditions), called geographical determinism, was the starting point for a number of 19th century geographers (especially for Von Humboldt and Ratzel). Early in the 20th century, this one-sided reduction of objective reality was replaced with the concept of the so-called French school, highlighting human activity in relation to the natural environment (Vidal de la Blache, for instance).

The progress of **industrial society** brought about a decrease in the importance of natural preconditions, and even a harnessing effect on nature could often be observed (cumulating environmental problems). The following period was marked by reinforcing the duality between natural and social sciences. Attempts at linking the natural with the social have partially succeeded only in the modern period, in connection with the issues of globalisation (Hampl, 1998). The environmental point of view, with its widening interest in social impacts, has been central to modern physical geography. Similarly, social geography has taken great interest in environmental issues. This can be seen as overcoming the powerful duality between the natural and the social, and a gradual interaction between society and nature, culminating in an effort to establish a higher level of relationship between society and nature, one of co-operation (the sustainability principle). In this context, English geographer P. Haggett's definition of geography is worth mentioning. He views the Earth as man's environment; an environment affecting the lives and organisation of human beings, who in turn have an influence on the environment (Haggett, 1975). Other American and British authors' ideas play to a similar key, dominated by a strong anthropocentric view. In addition, they highlight the physical-geographical aspects of landscape quality as the human-determined bottom line not only for man's present, but predominantly for our future (Balej, 2004).

With the evolution of geographical thought the **position of geography within the scientific system** changes. In the 1950s and 1960s, the so-called dualistic concept of geography was formed in the Soviet Union, leading to the division of the originally undifferentiated science into two disciplines: physical and economic (socio-economic or, currently, human) geography, e.g. in P. M. Alampiev or V. V. Pokshishevski. Physical geography was originally associated with natural science, and economic geography with social science (Mičian, 1996). Later on, this approach was pushed to the background and the idea of the "monistic" concept of geography now prevails. The majority of geographers take the view that the position of geography needs to be sought at the intersection of natural and social science – see, for instance, M. Hampl 1971, 1996 and 1998. In addition, P. Haggett (1965) points out the importance of technical and geometrical disciplines, and demonstrates the position of geography using mathematical

sets. In his view, geography occupies the space of the intersection of geo-science, social science, and geometrical science (or technical disciplines).

The outlined facts result in an **imbalance in the topical structure of the research**. It is easier to examine a less complicated reality, less complex and evolutionarily simpler truths (i.e. elements as opposed to complex structures). In landscape evaluation, procedures to evaluate natural systems are much better developed than those for social systems (Balej, Anděl, Jeřábek et al., 2004); efforts to evaluate the complex systems formed by combining natural and social systems (so-called environmental systems) have been limited. P. Haggett (1975) points out this fact, and differentiates **three types of analysis**:

1. spatial analysis explores regularities in the distribution of predominantly socio-geographical phenomena (e.g. population intensity);
2. ecological analysis explores the interactions between human beings and environmental variability; land use is used as an example (or its cycles);
3. complex regional analysis is the combined result of spatial and ecological analyses.

Social evaluation of the landscape (or spatial units) faces general problems related to the high level of complexity of objective reality (the often difficult connection with superior levels of hierarchy), as well as to the vagueness of implementation and ambiguity of results. Many evaluation systems are purpose-built to various degrees, only serving unilateral aims, and often the systems are auxiliary, merely representing by-products of research. The Hessen method may serve as an example of economic evaluation of the landscape. It was constructed by German ecologists in early 1980s using point-scale evaluation. An aggregated approach combining the Hessen method with the land-cover methodology (use of satellite photographs) allows the evaluation of environmental functions of any location in the Czech Republic. Among its applications, it is worth mentioning the price map of economic functions of the Czech Republic, and among the locations, the motorway corridor between Lovosice and Řehlovice (Seják 2001). Other examples include environmental assessments, including social aspects (e.g. Poštolka 1996a, 1996b); attempts have been conducted to evaluate social burdens (J. Anděl). The problems regarding the "grasp" of the methodology are not only related to the complexity of the evaluated reality, but above all to the high level of vagueness. At the low-grade (micro-regional) level, data-related problems and the issue of representation of relatively statistically infrequent aggregates come into play.

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K socio-geografickému hodnocení vybraných aspektů kultivované krajiny

Resume

Článek nastiňuje metody, kterými je možné podchytit a odhalovat vzájemné vztahy mezi přírodními a sociálními subsystemy. Procesu hodnocení krajiny náleží nezastupitelná role geografii, jež umožňuje posoudit nejen vztahy mezi sociálními a přírodními subsystemy, ale zasadit sledované téma i do širších funkčních a prostorových souvislostí na straně druhé. Další důležitým momentem procesu hledání je optimalizace socioekonomického vývoje v daném územním průměru.