

Regional Education in Polish, Czech and Slovakian Borderline after 1945

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The policy of the Central and Eastern European countries disabled growth of regional movement. Changes that have been taking place since 1990s made it possible to reveal the cultural, spiritual and material abundance of given nations living in this part of Europe. The idea of Euroregion became a chance for many borderland regions, as thanks to them international cooperation in borderlands became possible. At the same time, regional education became crucial not only at schools but also while accomplished by local associations, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, publishing houses, periodicals etc. There are various initiatives undertaken within this range under auspices of the eight Euroregions on the Polish-Czech-Slovakian borderlands. Moreover, diversification and intensification of such activities is indispensable for the development of the borderland areas in Poland, Czech and Slovakia.

Key words: *Region; regionalism; Euroregion; regional education*

Nowadays, the issue of regionalism is a crucial aspect of the education of contemporary societies, not only in case of Poland, Czech or Slovakian, but generally in European Union. There number of local – regional initiatives, and associations supporting the process of shaping identities in, so called, little homelands is also rising. Focusing on life, development and getting to know own ethnic region does not imply isolation from the rest of the world, as regionalism should be understood as “searching for cultural and integrative values”, providing knowledge on local societies, regional groups and national communities.¹ It should be associated with abundance and diversity, as well as with spiritual and cultural differences that inspire the others, teach tolerance and make national and European cultural heritage richer.² Each region is shaped and strengthened both by ethno-cultural sphere of social awareness and material correlations, and their appearance and range sometimes vary in different areas.

¹ Damrosz, J. (1998): Obszary etnokulturowe a granice państw i regionów. In *Czym jest regionalizm*. Wrocław – Ciechanów, pp. 16–17.

² Borzyszkowski, J. (1998): Regionalizm a świat uniwersalnych wartości. In *Czym jest regionalizm*. Wrocław – Ciechanów, p. 9.

The factors distinguishing the regions may concern various phenomena and elements, but in most cases they refer to geographical – environmental, physiographical – landscape, spatial, functional (economic), administrative, social and a cultural model.³ The geographical-environmental regions in given physiographically distinguished area share common features of natural environment. Regionalism in such dimension is basically concentrated on empowering environmental protection of values of given area, plants and animals protection from the industry, agriculture and the automotive industry. It enables establishment of protection areas not only within the frontiers, but also between the neighbouring countries.

The physiographical and landscape regions are distinguished as far as the unique landscape values are concerned, significantly influencing the emotional identification of a human with the place and surrounding. Sustaining such uniqueness is possible thanks to activities aiming at protection of natural and cultural landscape, restoration of landscapes deteriorated by human economy, as well as conservation of valuable landscapes.

The space and functional regions are referred to as settlement and economical ones, and are connected with social as well as economic growth of the country. In such regions, it is common for a bigger city to become the centre point, as it connects within many smaller towns and villages by a network of relations. Administrative regions usually correspond to previous, historically shaped political, administrative and settlement division, unless they become disturbed by governmental decisions, such as the one made in Poland in 1975, when artificial division of Poland into 49 voivodships was introduced.

The social and cultural regions are established on the basis of the four above-mentioned elements, where – over the years – specific traditions, customs, linguistic differences, folk art, local architecture, religious life and ways of managing have been shaped.

Until 1990s, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe had been denied to cultivate local differences. The example of Yugoslavia and Soviet Union confirm the fact that there were no opportunities to emphasize and develop unique ethnic and national values. *In theory, the right of each nation to develop own culture, language, customs and folk art was recognized, but in practice there was a restriction of the concession for cultural activity. In fact, very often regulations enabling or restricting, or even prohibiting to cultivate*

³ Turowski, J. (1998): Regiony – regionalizm – lokalizm. In *Czym jest regionalizm*. Wrocław – Ciechanów, p. 100.

*local, regional traditions were issued.*⁴ Such actions were the reflection of the national propaganda of that time, promoting the ideas of equality of rights of all nations, at the same time strengthening the position of the dominating nations in a given country as far as political, economic and cultural factors are concerned, therefore the policy exercised in such way made it impossible to develop local movements.

In the united Europe, regionalism is the basis for functioning of each and every country, with little homelands becoming territorial and administrative units, different in cultural (folk culture) or linguistic matters. Nevertheless, the growing sense of bonds with the ethno-cultural regions does not exclude the process of shaping European awareness.

Regionalism and the process of inspiring the sense of identity in regions such as Kashubia, Upper Silesia or Podhale, were evolving in different cultural circumstances and have been deeply rooted in the tradition referring to the historical background. It has been far more difficult to establish regional activities in the area of western and northern regions settled after 1945 by those re-settled from Eastern marches. One of the obstacles of shaping ethnic identities there, was the prohibition of cultivating tradition and handing it down from generation to generation, which was in force practically until 1980s. The Polish coming to Lower Silesia brought with them *enormous fund of own life experiences, different cultural contents, opinions, and behavioural patterns shaped in the area of their previous manifestation. The people were different in physical sense and very frequently, it was only in Lower Silesia that various regional groups were getting to know each other. Only then, they groups became aware of the existence of another ones upon confronting the cultural heritage, assessing their developmental level, noticing differences and similarities between them, emphasizing the diversity of community of ethnic, as well as cultural origin.*⁵

New, culturally and naturally different environment, became a problem for the settlers, hence to facilitate the process of their adaptation the activities of social and cultural unification were introduced in the so called Regained Territories.

The frontier between Sudeten region of Poland and Czechoslovakia of that time excluded free communication on all levels, including touristic

⁴ Dąbrowski, S. (1998): Uwagi o współczesnym regionalizmie europejskim. In *Czym jest regionalizm*. Wrocław – Ciechanów, p. 32.

⁵ Nowosielska – Sobel, J. (2006): „Na barkach nieśli krajobraz” – z problemów osvajania zastanej przez osadników przestrzeni na przykładzie powiatu jeleniogórskiego drugiej połowy lat 40. In *Trudne dziedzictwo. Tradycje dawnych i obecnych mieszkańców Dolnego Śląska*. Ed. J. Nowosielska – Sobel, G. Strauchold. Wrocław, p. 110.

movement (difficulties in crossing the country frontiers, eliminating communication routes, lack of Polish touristic maps, disabling any kinds of regional initiatives), which had established the ground for economic and cultural growth in Sudeten region before the Second World War. Therefore, the Sudeten landscape was subject to “domestication”, but only within the borders of Polish state. Hence, the efforts were made to erase its German background, starting from polonizing geographical names, ending up with the legends (the legends of Lower Silesia present an example of old, German stories saturated with anti-German propaganda).⁶

The Euroregions became a chance for the areas divided and separated by countries frontiers, nevertheless still linked with common history, ethnic or cultural features, environmental values or economic activities.⁷ They integrate borderland areas belonging to different countries, that – despite the country divisions – share given common elements such as the history, environmental and landscape values, or similar ethnic cultures.

Shifts in countries frontiers influenced the ethnic regions located in their direct neighbourhood and it referred to legal and geopolitical aspects of the culture (e.g. change in the way of perceiving the historical facts determined by the government and its ideology). Changes on the map of Europe that took place in the 20th century were of paramount importance for the ethno-cultural regions. The rebirth of independent Poland and dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy after the First World War may set an example, similarly as new order of the borders after Jalta deal (when Poland lost 70 sq km of territory, Germany lost part of its territory, Finland lost the eastern region, Moldovan part of USSR was established, formerly Czechoslovakian Carpathian Ruthenia and Romanian Bukovina were incorporated into Ukrainian SSR), as well as changes of the borders and politics in Europe after 1989, resulting in the rise of independent countries such as Czech Republik, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

⁶ Ibidem, p. 118 and others.

⁷ Euroregion is an isolated unit on the territory of two or more countries, a kind of trans-frontier cooperation between the regions of the EU membership countries, the members-to-be and the neighbouring regions, the representative of local and regional authorities' initiate and act within its structure, whereas the activities are regulated by international conventions of the Council of Europe and EU, for instance The European Framework Convention of Trans-frontier cooperation between the Communities and Territorial Authorities (The Madrid Convention dated May 21 1980), European Card of Local Self-government, European Card of Regional Self-government and European Card of Borderland and Trans-frontier Regions. <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euroregion>, 16. 11. 2012.

strengthening the position of united Germany, concurrently weakening the position of Russia.⁸ Still, it must be remembered that *change of any border means that the historically shaped ethno-cultural area becomes subject to influence of different state structures, another political pressures, and the dominating nation suddenly becomes the minority whereas the ethnic minority may reach the status of dominating nation, etc. It also implies sudden elimination of long-term shaped infrastructure, communication links and other connections (.....)*.⁹

There are common, international projects and activities taking place within the framework of 8 Euro-regions along the frontiers of Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia, including: Lusatian Neisse (established in 1993, joining Poland, Czech Republic and Germany), Carpathian Euroregion (established in 1993, joining Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary and Romania), Tatra (established in 1994, joining Poland and Slovakia), Glacensis (established in 1996, joining Poland and Czech Republic), Praděd (established in 1997 joining Poland and Czech Republic), Cieszyn Silesia (established in 1998, joining Poland and Czech Republic), Silesia (established in 1998, joining Poland and Czech Republic), and Beskids (established in 2000, joining Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia).

The essential principles on which the Euroregions function refer to the partnership, equality of all sides, protection of the national, state, local and regional identity, total freedom of membership in the relation, as well as in actions, initiatives and programmes; equal number of members and votes of each member in the status committee, equal participation in the costs within the enterprises, consensus of the parties in passing the law and regulations, and last but not least – rotation of the authorities¹⁰. Euroregions undertake and accomplish tasks in various areas, e.g. landscape architecture projects, spatial development, public utilities, industry, agriculture, environmental protection, communication and transport, cross-frontier transport and passenger traffic, trade and services, education and science, health, culture and art, youth contact and exchange, tourism, recreation and sport, crime prevention, mutual support in case of emergencies and natural disasters, etc.¹¹

Regional education, theoretically acknowledged in Poland in 1996 in the inter-departmental Programme of Regional Education, plays particularly important role in shaping and developing the regional identity,

⁸ Damrosz, J.: op. cit., p. 22.

⁹ Ibidem, pp. 25–26.

¹⁰ *Tatry i Podtatrze. Monografia dla szkół* (2004). Ed. W. Skupień. Zakopane, p. 252.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 252.

as a goal to be accomplished at schools and in the system of extra-curricular activities carried out by so called "subjects of cultural and educational nature".¹²

It facilitates the acquisition of knowledge on the region, its past, tradition, encountering the material, spiritual, intellectual, moral and religious values. It is of paramount importance for establishing own identity, shaping attitudes of tolerance and acceptance towards other cultures. (...) *it meets human expectations, shaping the ability to coexist, cooperate and the ancillary engagement in the "little homelands". It enables cultural continuity of a group and the most permanent communities of family and local origin, protecting the cultural canon, shaping the awareness of the cultural abundance, sense of security, pride of values and group belonging,*¹³ with its essential goal to *shape the respect for own cultural heritage, system of values, language, tradition, customs and habits.*¹⁴

However, its role is even more valuable in the borderland areas, where it becomes a source of new knowledge and continuous, mutual enrichment, open-mindedness and tolerance towards the Other and the Unknown one.

The borderland area is a source of new, inspiring cognitive opportunities, teaching to cooperate, co-work, to be open and friendly, referring to interactions, mutual interest, tolerance, recognition, dimension of interspersion and merging, constituting an area rich in negotiating and revealing, dialogue and compromise, at the same time enabling the protection and security of own, prime values, sense of rootedness while experiencing closeness, as well as the value of local patriotism.¹⁵

The frontiers joining nowadays the three countries – Poland, Czech and Slovakia determine on given section the quality of work and regional education. In the Euroregion Neisse or Glacensis, taking into consideration historical aspect, activities of different nature have to be undertaken as the cultural roots had been established there before 1945 by the Germans, and have been unfamiliar to the contemporary settlers in this area. On the other hand, the Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia functions differently, as its administrative border divided homogenous, ethno-cultural region, i.e. Beskids and Tatra, whose inhabitants have been for

¹² Bukraba-Rylska, I. (2001): Czy regionalizm jest dla młodzieży? In *Edukacja regionalna młodzieży w rodzinie, szkole i środowisku*. Wrocław, p. 77.

¹³ *Edukacja regionalna*. Ed. A. W. Brzezińska, A. Hulewska, J. Słomska. Warszawa 2006, p. 103.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 106.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 92.

centuries creating own, separate, but in many ways interspersing, culture. In the case of the two first Euroregions the significant role is played by the interactive borderland, not requiring borrowings, community, linguistic nor tradition similarities, nor even common experiences and fate, as the basis for such borderland is the willingness to be noticed, get to known and understand, manifesting the readiness for dialogue and the willingness to integrate, despite the differences.

In case of the above-mentioned Euroregion Beskids and Tatra, we may refer to these as to territorial borderlands (on a given area there might be various ethno-graphic, linguistic, confessional and national groups existing) and cultural contents (customs, habits, rituals, values, rules and principles of traditional importance enabling one to notice one another, get to know to each other and co-exist).

The base of regional education is nowadays the combination of regional, national, European and even global culture, hence the key role should be played by the school using reading texts in a local language, course books providing knowledge on little homelands, revealing the spiritual as well as material heritage of the ethno-culture. *The culture of a region shall become more and more understood and beloved by all the inhabitants, as it is impossible to live among this, what is not understood and disliked, in consequence making it impossible to pass it over and develop.*¹⁶ Knowledge about the region, its natural resources, monuments, history, distinguished dwellers, as well as recent development passed on to another generations makes the region alive, grow and become intriguing not only for the local ones, but also for “others”, who will become attracted to the difference and diversity of given region, enriching their identities with new experiences.

Especially dedicated publications are helpful in education on the region, such as *Dolny Śląsk. Edukacja regionalna* (Siedmioróg Publishing House, Wrocław 2008), as they are becoming an indispensable resource for the teachers. In the first part of this book there are legends and folk tales from the region commented by an ethnologist, whereas the second part presents the poetry of Polish and German poets expressing attitudes towards the region and its values. The third part refers to the stories, memories and reportages tackling mainly the issues of historical events taking place in Lower Silesia. Literature, selected in such way, presents the history of the region to the Polish and German young generation. However, to depict the entire picture of the history of this part of Europe, there is still

¹⁶ Dyczewski, L. (1998): Kultura w całościowym planie rozwoju regionu. In *Czym jest regionalizm*. Wrocław – Ciechanów, p. 45.

missing a wider perspective embracing also the culture and the history of the Czech and German communities, living on the other, southern side of Sudeten. An ideal example of such study, considering entire area of Euroregion is the publication *Tatry i Podtatrze. Monografia dla szkół* edited by Władysław Skupień and published in Zakopane in 2004.

It was prepared by a team of Polish and Slovakian researchers specializing in various academic areas. The monograph consists of five chapters. The first one presents the nature of Euroregion Tatra dividing it into inanimate nature, fauna and flora of Tatra and Tatra foothills. The second one contains basic information on the history of Slovakian and Polish Tatra foothills, as well as recent news regarding administrative division, people, economy and communication in Tatra and Tatra foothills. The third chapter is dedicated to the culture and art, presenting specific and unique architecture of the Polish and Slovakian borderland of Tatra, fine arts, literature, theatre, music and the culture influencing the life of the highlanders. The fourth chapter gathers mainly practical information useful for Polish students and teachers, i.e. information on Slovakian language with a theme Slovakian-Polish dictionary, as well as descriptions of the landscape journeys considering the landmarks of this Euroregion. The last chapter consists of helpful indexes and lists. This book is not only a text book for the regional education addressed to teachers and pupils, but it also constitutes a source of knowledge for the inhabitants of Polish and Slovakian Tatra foothills, as well as for those studying for the Tatra's mountains guide exam, or simply Tatra, Podhale, Liptov, Spiš and Orava lovers. Working out similar studies shall become a priority in all Euroregions as they could become a compendium and valuable assistance, particularly for the teachers of regional education in the borderland areas. Another example of education from Euroregion Tatra is a quarterly "Tatry" published by Tatra National Park TANAP. The periodical tackles issues related not only to the nature and activities of TANAP, but also presents the history and culture of Podhale, Spiš, Liptov and Orava. It is prepared thanks to cooperation of Polish and Slovakian team of natural environment scientists, geographers, historians, ethnographers, art historians, guides, museologist and other experts. Special edition of the quarterly of the same title ("Tatry") is especially valuable, as it is published both in Polish and Slovakian. Publishing similar quarterlies tackling issues of given region provide undoubtedly excellent source of information, not only for the inhabitants of these areas.

The results of carried out research unfortunately proved that the youth often grow *in the circumstances of "cultural vacuum", where local heritage (but also national) is supplanted by the contents of European*

*culture, mostly the global one. (...) It may bring about disturbance of the intergeneration transmission and disable the cultural continuity in the local community, as well as in the entire nation.*¹⁷

Managing the regional education not only at the school level, but within broadly understood cultural and educational activity, shall become one of the leading goals for teams working and operating within the structures of given Euroregions, as it is similarly done in the above-mentioned Euroregion Tatra, gathering Polish and Slovakian regionalists, ethnographers, environmentalists, geographers, historians, literary scholars and many others, thanks to which such model works (supporting the education of young Polish and Slovakian generation) are published.

In contemporarily integrating Europe, the process of shaping and sustaining awareness and national identity determines the undisputable role of organizations and regional associations, hence consideration for protection, enrichment and continuous growth of ethno-cultural heritage among the local inhabitants is of paramount importance. Integration does not lead to the loss of the right to difference, and still enables the process of shaping distinguished, regional as well as national identity. Features and elements operating as any kinds of obstacles in the process of integration should be eliminated, in favour of differentiating ethno-cultural features still facilitating the process of integrating regional groups.¹⁸ The borders between given areas, functioning as a division of the territories, shall also join, not separate.

Therefore, it is essential to strive for further development of different forms of regional education in all Euroregions joining Czech, Poland and Slovakia. Its basis shall be constituted by the contents related to the landscapes, nature, and history, embracing knowledge on the events and figures distinguished for given area, architecture, material and spiritual monuments, language (dialects), folk art, verbal heritage – legends, tales as well as social customs, interpersonal and intergenerational relations.

Transferring this kind of knowledge shall also move beyond the school buildings and reach widest possible circles of the Euroregion inhabitants, offering to them various forms of activities, e.g. meetings, book publications, periodicals, trips, common celebrations, establishing museums, cultural heritage chambers, regional theme exhibitions, games, competitions (literary, singing, or those promoting knowledge on the region), and last but not least – common works for the sake of the closest surrounding.

¹⁷ Bukraba-Rylska, I.: op. cit., p. 77.

¹⁸ Damrosz, J.: op. cit., p. 29.