Social and cultural logic of regionalism

Sociální a kulturní logika regionalizace

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Abstract: Research into the globalisation processes leads to establishing the set of concepts with the relative heuristic, methodological, and theoretical effectiveness as well as consequent practical effectiveness. Yet, a simple analysis shows this set of concepts as dependent on certain political programmes and projects. Scientific research is not a prirori limited by any other language – except its own, i.e. scientific language. To accept the language of non-scientific discourse means (mostly) to accept the non-scientific logic, too. Scientific establishment of region, community or similar social unit is a matter of logic different from the logic of political programmes or projects. Scientific research seeks logic of a subject (region, e.g.) from outside as well as from inside. That is why ideas and principles of social constructivism would have to play an important role among the scientific research tools. These principles and ideas are not a part of simple language and logic of political programmes and projects. Substitution of scientific language and scientific logic by political ones could lead to a fatal error. A region is the result of social construction, yet the scientific construct of a region is only one dimension of this complex process. This process can be called a social and cultural cartography process and could be based on parallel or complementary research methodologies – on standard methodology (working by means of standard descriptive and analytical quantitative research tools) and on social constructivism methodology (social and cultural cartography). Such complementary research is capable of overcoming relatively naive language and logic of political programmes and projects as well as limited heuristic possibilities of a standard scientific approach.

Key words: regionalism , social cartography , simulations, social construction of region

Abstrakt: Zkoumání procesů globalizace prozatím vedlo k ustálení pojmů a pojmových seskupení, od nichž se očekává heuristická, metodologická a teoretická efektivita, případně též následná účinnost praktická. Již jednoduchá analýza ukazuje, že tento pojmový instrumentář, který zakládá i limituje výzkumné metody, pochází z politických programů a projektů; odborná a vědecká práce jej téměř nezpochybňuje. Vědecký výzkum přitom není a priori vázán žádným jazykem, vyjma jeho vlastního. Je překvapivé, s jakou mírou kognitivní naivity se setkáváme ve zkoumáních problémů globalizace a s jak pevným metanarativním ukotvením tohoto fenoménu se pracuje. Nejde samozřejmě o pouhé výrazy (například region, regionalizace aj.), ale o jejich „denotáty“: získání jejich rozsahu a obsahu je vlastním úkolem vědeckého bádání, stejně jako nalezení jejich statusu a funkcí v konkrétním „textu“ či v „intertextových“ strukturách a procesech sociální skutečnosti. Konstituování regionu, komunity či jiné podobné sociální jednotky vědeckou prací je něco jiného, nežli určení regionu, komunity apod. politickým programem či projektem, například Evropské unie. V prvém případě je součástí takového konstituování nalezení sociální a kulturní logiky (SL) zkoumaného objektu, která současně emickým (K. Pike) způsobem vymezuje jeho hranice; v druhém případě je konstitutivním základem logika politického programu (PL), nikoliv zkoumaného objektu, která jej vymezuje způsobem etickým. Důsledky záměny této dvojí logiky se ukazují hned při prvním výzkumném kroku: SL je konsekvencí konkrétního zkoumání (konstruktem) předběžně zadaného „regionu“, kdežto v případě druhém je již první výzkumný krok v regionu konsekvencí PL. Netřeba nijak zdůrazňovat, kde se tu z odborné práce stává vědecký výzkum – tam, kde se hledá a zkoumá SL. Konstrukce SL regionu vzniká deskripcí a vztahovou analýzou komplexního sociálního jednání určitých aktérů, jež je specificky určováno kulturními kódy zkoumaného objektu (skupin populace). Nasazení systémového přístupu je zde sporné. Vzhledem k neexistenci univerzálního kódu (J.-F. Lyotard) platného pro více zkoumaných objektů je nezbytné přisoudit výzkumu sociálních vzorců jednání a způsobů jejich kulturního zakódování primární důležitost, jinak zůstává výzkumná cesta k SL zablokována buďto etickou deskripcí anebo PL. Z tohoto důvodu se ekonomické zkoumání regionů a procesů regionalizace jeví jako sekundární a samotná ekonomická (a další) problematika regionů jako problematika dvojího kódování – jednak sociálními vzorci a kulturními kódy globalizace, jednak SL regionu. Smysl vědeckého zkoumání regionů a regionalizace v procesech globalizace bývá oprávněně ztotožňován s cílem rozvoje regionů. Takové tvrzení je konsekvencí PL – reálný rozvoj je možný jen jako konsekvence SL. Odtud strategický požadavek primárního zkoumání a konstruování sociální logiky regionů a regionalizace pomocí metodologií sociálního konstruktivismu a sociální a kulturní kartografie.

Klíčová slova: regionalizace, sociální kartografie, simulace, sociální konstrukce regionu

INTRODUCTION

The theme introduced has its serious methodological aspect implying several problems at a time. This methodological aspect is the perspective of constructing a social reality called a region (possibly also globalisation). It is surprising how extensively scientific research takes up the logic and interpretation codes of political and bureaucratic sphere without even examining this logic and interpretation codes in respect to the logic of the matter or at least from the scientific research logic point of view. Scientific work should not find itself in a situation when only supplying matter for forms prefabricated by non-scientific activities. However, operations with such phenomena (or abstractions) as a region often show such features. In my opinion, it is a consequence of a particular approach which could be named a bureaucratic positivist approach and, from the paradigmatic point of view, it represents an approach ignoring many good results of discussions on scientific research and constructing social reality arising from postmodernism discourse.

Especially, findings on communicative construction of social reality and its plural foundations, findings on heuristic capabilities of qualitative (emic) research into social reality, findings on cognitive capabilities of de-constructive "reading" of social constructs or findings on simulation nature of these constructs prevent relatively naive handling of the term and problem of a region – the fact of which, however, we witness in scientific work. These and other findings do not fit into prevailing notions of scientific work even though their cognitive power is beyond a doubt nowadays (comp. Hubík 1999: Ch. 8, 9).

A region is the outcome of either political cartography or a specific social and cultural cartography (Paulston, Liebman 1994). And every cartography, social and cultural cartography being no exception, is a matter of aesthetics in its original sense, i.e. a matter of perception. This may concern not only a region but also a state (Konopásek 1998). A bureaucratic-positivist approach to objects of social and cultural cartography eliminates the aesthetic dimension as a cognitive presupposition; however, this may be functional only in particular, strictly defined aspects but not in scientific ones. In the following notes, I will focus on the outlined dual logic of the approach to problems of regionalism and I will attempt to point out methodological (and consequently heuristic and, finally, also practical) advantages and capabilities of "post-modern social and cultural cartography".

METHODS

Nevertheless, pointing out methodological advantages and capabilities of "post-modern social and cultural cartography" cannot be sufficient.

The aim is to demonstrate both theoretical and practical advantages of parallel (as K. Pike says: both etic and emic) inquiry into and construction of a region with obvious dominance of emic approach seeking and respecting the logic and interpretation codes not of a political or bureaucratic submitter of the research but especially of an actor in regional life. Plainly speaking, the aim of the paper is to point out advantages of participative construction of social reality called a region and connect its conclusions with the issue of practical regionalism about the factuality and necessity of which I have no doubt.

The general methodological starting point of my analyses is – as already apparent from my introductory remarks – postmodernism discourse, especially its part inspired by post-structuralists.

The specific methodological starting point is then the concept of *social cartography* formulated by Paulston and Liebman in the mid '90s (Paulston, Liebman 1994). This concept represents a new interpretation of social reality descriptions, including the cartographic ones, taking into consideration the already mentioned aesthetic nature of social cartography (given by subjective perceptions and constructions of pieces of knowledge) and power interest in its elaborating and desirable interpretation connected with it (which, for example, shows itself in the above mentioned bureaucratic-positivist approach). For better specification I use the terms social and cultural in a complementary way changing thus the original formulation into the form of social and cultural cartography. The aesthetics of social and cultural cartography has at its disposal its own methodology based on findings on cognitive "mapping" of social reality which, at last, is a simulation of iconological nature (Baudrillard 1989; Mitchell 1988). The reason for this mapping is to recognise and create co-ordinates of spatial behaviour. Paulson and Liebman build here especially upon the work of Harley, Downs, and Stea (Harley 1988, Downs, Stea 1973). The concept of social cartography is then the starting and inspiring moment which, for the two already mentioned reasons, proves good in analyses of discussions on regions and regionalism: it is based on

– post-modern understanding of social constructivism and
– criticism of power supervisory approach to regionalism.

At this place, in connection with the second given reason, it is worth mentioning that the topic of one of the key papers at the international conference Rural Development in Central and Eastern Europe (Podbanské 1999) was a theme specified by a sub-heading The Actual Governance of the Territory (Esposti, Sotte 1999).

RESULTS

The concept of social and cultural cartography answers the question: 'What is a region?' in the following way: there are two pure interpretation possibilities: (1) the map displays the placement of various objects, e.g. regions, and (2) the map displays what its designer assumes to know about the placement of various objects. Where? Of course, in space; however, in our case it concerns social and cultural space, i.e. a space which is the result of practical socio-cultural (i.e. including economic) production and reproduction of a particular group of people. In this case, we may quote a statement concern-

ing point (2) according to which "a map portraits the designer's perception of social world" (Paulston, Liebman 1994: 223), at the same time, displaying through him or her also the influence of various intellectual and cultural communities. Thus, the social and cultural cartography saturated with postmodernism must come to a conclusion according to which a map is not an objective and true realisation of the spatial situation but only a "cultural portrait" (ibid.).

This pure social-constructivist approach respecting the principles of empirical research into reality gains the post-modern dimension in the moment when a researcher takes into account the Lyotardian conclusions concerning incredulity of present science towards great meta-narrative systems ("grand narratives") and rehabilitation of "small narratives", especially of those which bear the socio-cultural codes of a community, and completes the whole concept by Foucaultian view of power. To make clear what this means we will apply these theses on the theme of our conference:

– from the point of social and cultural cartography based on the theses of social constructivism and emic-oriented research, social cartography maps, e.g. maps of regions, are the result of one specific partial – definitely not universal – perception of social and cultural reality; which partial approach it is must be subject to further examination; on a preliminary base however, it is possible to say that it is the power approach being materialised in the above mentioned bureaucratic-positivist view of the matter;

– from the point of social and cultural cartography drawing from postmodernism discourse, social cartography maps, e.g. maps of regions, are legitimised in the last instance by a specific great meta-narrative system; yes indeed, the meta-narrative bearers in this case are the grand narratives of Europe and even grander narratives of globalisation; we need to mention that these grand narratives have primarily nothing in common with science: they are non-scientific legitimisation systems, especially ideological; however, accepting these interpretation and simulation games based on meta-narratives of Europe and globalisation are of a good exchange rate nowadays;

– from the point of social and cultural cartography drawing from postmodernism discourse, social cartography maps, e.g. maps of regions, are the result of power and panoptical attempts to gain control over the social space in the Foucaultian sense; their counterpart are the attempts for an alternative social cartography which may be based only on small community narratives or on narratives of other similar types;

– thus, from the point of social and cultural cartography, it is necessary to respect all of the above mentioned possibilities of designing maps of social and cultural reality; at the same time, preferring social cartography guided by theses of social constructivism and postmodernism appears to be very useful. Why?

The answer relates to the aim of the process of regionalism: plainly speaking, development, proper development of a region is the aim. Of course, this is dependent upon many internal and external factors. In my opinion, it is much more difficult to grasp the internal region factors, especially social and cultural ones. And right here, examination from the standpoints and with the help of social constructivism methodology has its irreplaceable role. In brief, it is to recognise various methodologies on which the local social construction of a space called region stands.

A space belongs to a particular social context and the actors of this context create their own social and cultural cartography (Paulston, Liebman 1994: 228) based on their socio-cultural constructions of social reality, their own small narratives, with the help of their unique non-universal cultural literacy (Fulková 1993). (In this place, an equivalent to the Fayerabendian methodological impetus "Anything goes" could be a statement "Everybody has right to his or her own narrative"…) The logic of this social cartography design of reality "from inside" is different from the logic of social cartography design of reality "from outside". This reality comprises of regions, of assigning and subordinating of activities and/or processes such as regionalism to them. Human sciences and social sciences are able to consider pros and cons of a particular way of research. I beg leave to state that social cartography of sciences dealing with the issue of regions not only omits the methodology tools originally based on emic research and later based on sophisticated argumentation of social constructivism and postmodernism but also omits its own – i.e. substantially scientific cognitive tools and yields to the logic of bureaucratic positivist approach.

However, an objection may arise at this place: well, the whole process of regionalism and the whole concept of a region opposes standard modern universalisation ("panopticalisation") – may we call it globalisation or Europeisation…

We may answer this objection in the following way: yes, but only in case that social and cultural cartographers do not yield to the logic of bureaucratic-positivist approach, to the logic of grand meta-narratives and to the logic of power perception of social and cultural space. A large social and political project, emancipational if possible – or at least pro futuro, is a substantial sign of modern rationality. According to J. Habermas, the whole modern reality is a project – unfinished yet. According to evil (postmodernist) tongues, grand Europe is also the last project of modern European rationality. P. Sloterdijk even thinks that this project has not found its sense yet (Sloterdijk 1996). – In this perspective, regionalism may be a source of such sense – if it is an alternative to a modern project and a region is a result of social and cultural cartography of (not exclusively) alternative type.

Esposti and Sotte are concerned with various actors of region territory social life. "The main difference between the generic terms "region" and "territory" lays in the fact that the second one defines genetic qualities of the first one. A territory is a complete set of geographic, natural, cultural, and socio-economic features of a region. This set is unique and constitutes a complex system of individual and group strategies, aims, and interactions which

finally define the genetic development of the region's prospects (Esposti, Sotte 1999: 37). What is important – "local actors may choose between alternative strategic attempts; an individual's choice interacts positively or negatively with the other's choice according to the actor's aspirations. This interaction spontaneously gives way to formation of local institutional organisation which finally becomes dominant..." (ibid.: 43). The identification of a region as well as the process of regionalism are not only the matter of political cartography: it is a matter of social and cultural cartography substantially (but not exclusively) based on concepts of social constructivism and methodological postmodernism. It is not only a matter of territorial demarcation but also, above all, a matter of social and cultural specification. Moreover, this social and cultural topology may not be formed without alternative social cartographers working on a complementary base.

DISCUSSION

A standard scientific approach to research into the issue of regions and regionalism based on the use of quantitative descriptive, analytic, and functional methods is sufficient neither in respect to physical, economic, and social topology nor in respect to relatively more complicated socio-cultural topology. This standard approach, the logic of which is very often bound to the submitting bureaucratic positivist logic and/or to the logic of politics, should be not only balanced in a complementary way but "overweighed" by an approach based on social constructivism theses and postmodernism discussions. A region is an abstraction; it is a fictional social unit which may take up a concrete shape only if it is filled up with a meaningful content fully reflecting the fact that a region is "half way through" between globalisation-type or Europeisation-type *macro-processes and micro-processes* of local or community importance (comp. Hubík 2001). In the first (pre-scientific) stage, both macro- and micro-processes are grasped narratively by the means of meta-narratives of globalisation and Europeisation and/ or by the means of local community narratives. Meta-narratives are the product of political ideologies and/or simulation medialisations; analogically then, local narratives are the product of community worldviews and/or communicated experience. Present standard scientific approach prefers proceeding from meta-narratives "down" to a region and finds it mostly sufficient; roughly speaking, in accordance with the statement "it is necessary to bring into harmony regional policies with European policies (or with globalisation processes)". However, standard scientific approach deals with the alternative proceeding, i.e. proceeding from the "bottom"

up to a region, from local potentials, interests, and "natural policies" much less. This is probably because it is a standard approach. An alternative approach requires the above mentioned methodologies.

In my opinion, the whole problem becomes complicated in one crucial point, i.e. perception of a region and regionalism: this perception is either of *political power* (bureaucratic positivist, in a weaker form) or developmental. These two points of view are incompatible. Thus, the resulting social and cultural cartography of a region is consequent upon the prevailing point of view. *And this is probably a principal point for discussion.*

CONCLUSIONS

Regional research from positions of social and cultural cartography represents a very effective cognitive tool. It is a heuristics not included in standard social research methodologies usually (not very precisely) labelled as quantitative research methodologies. Especially, the issue of region development implies questions which cannot be answered by the means of standard research. These are the questions concerning social symbolic interaction and culture denotation structures of actors factually forming the respective region. At this point, post-modern social and cultural cartography research takes up.

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