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Regional History and the Regional Agenda in Romania, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia

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ABSTRACT

In east central Europe, regionality stood in a direct, but ambivalent, relationship to the nation and to ethnic-national identity. In a certain sense it was a product of the nationalization of society: only within nations, in respect of their national territories, could regions be imagined and constructed. But, on the other hand, national regionalities might perpetuate older regional traditions such as pre-modern or Enlightenment territorial patriotism, based on geographical, administrative or other units. There is, however, no general rule by which the relationship between nation and regionality might be defined. On the contrary, this relationship was variable and may change dramatically according to political, cultural, or geographical circumstances. These conditions have all influenced the beginnings and development of regional historiography as they have historical reflection on regions down to the present day – not just on the meaning of regions and regional history, but also on their perceived relevance and the way in which this changed during the 19th and 20th centuries.

PRECONDITIONS FOR A REGIONAL AGENDA IN THE NATIONAL AND MODERN CONTEXT

In the four cases discussed here – Romania, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia – we may observe quite notable similarities in regard to the major developments. The beginnings of a regional historiographical agenda were to an important extent connected to

national history as a product of changing senses of identity in the 19th century, even if they retained some traditions of estates discourse and the patriotic history of the Enlightenment. But in addition, geographical, historical and political circumstances influenced the beginnings, development and aims of the regional historical agenda from the 19th century down to the present, not least in the context of both modern nation- and state-building, of dictatorships and of political as well as cultural and environmental changes. This may be demonstrated from the specific example of Slovakia. In historical perspective, territorial organization into counties proved most stable. Originally, royal counties¹, transformed in the 13th century into aristocratic counties, were where elected representatives of the nobility participated in the administration and the judiciary. They influenced administrative structures notably in the second half of the 19th century and right until the end of the monarchy. After the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, the new Slovak-Hungarian state border divided the territory of several counties. In the Czechoslovak Republic, the counties were abolished in 1923: they did not correspond to the Czech tradition. New but artificial administrative units proved unstable and were frequently changed. In the period of real socialism, the whole of Slovakia was divided into three regions (*kraje*) containing smaller units or districts (*okresy*).

The present regional identification of inhabitants, following the frequent territorial reorganizations of the 20th century, is not very strong². In so far as it exists, it may vary between a feeling of belonging to a historic county (for instance, Orava, Liptov, Turiec, or Spiš) or to one of the bigger regions without fixed borders: Western, Middle or Eastern Slovakia. The strongest sense of regional belonging may be observed among the inhabitants of Eastern Slovakia. Another virtual region was set up in Southern Slovakia after separation from the old Kingdom of Hungary. After 1918, the Slovak authorities employed the Czech concept of a “borderland” (*pobraníče*), based on the perception of border regions as areas inhabited by members of a foreign ethnic group, with the connotation that they were intruders harbouring separatist ideas.

Slovak historians did not rank the history of Slovakia in the category of regional history. Until 1918/1920 they could not describe it as a geographical and geo-political unit because there were no exact administrative borders of the territory called Upper Hungary and officially even the name “Slovakia” appeared only sporadically. During the era of nation-building, Slovak historians deliberately ignored Hungarian history³ and constructed a separate specific territory from a nationalist perspective. The creation of a national territory did not permit of the use of the hierarchically lower concept of a region. These authors refused to join the history of Slovakia with the history of the Hungarian kingdom because “Slovaks did not possess equal rights”, but paradoxically the integration of Slovak history into Czech (“Czechoslovak”) history was accepted⁴.

In regard to Poland, its geophysical and ethnic differentiation have likewise fostered various different concepts of regionality. There were historical and physiographical lands, administrative units (provinces, districts), as well as territories and neighbourhoods

which often had no historical context⁵. The extent and boundaries of areas studied in the context of regional history were often uncertain and contested. These difficulties arose from the imprecise definitions of “region” and regional history. Apart from problems of a methodological nature, which are still of current interest, problems concerning the concept, definition and borders of a region are still common and of particular significance. The reason for these difficulties lay mainly in the administrative changes to the individual districts of a region. Some terminological difficulties also stem from the Polish language, which lacks suitably precise terms for a region as opposed to an entire country or a state⁶. The relevance of this struggle by historians and regionalists with concepts is also underlined by a comment by Józef Borzyszkowski, for whom the need to discuss the territorial shape of Polish regions remains⁷. From a historical perspective, the term “Polish historical lands” (historyczne krainy) (e.g. Małopolska, Wielkopolska, Pomerania, Mazovia, Silesia, and so on) seems to offer the most durable concept of regionality. The methodologist of history Jerzy Topolski has also referred to this notion in his definition of regional history, understood by him as

the derived meaning of the concept of a ‘historical region’ is a definite territory inhabited by a population group with a common historical connection, whether short- or long-term. This territory may be distinguished by particular stated criteria from another territory, its population, and history⁸.

At the beginning of 19th century the concept *Kresy* (“Borderlands”, “Outskirts”) appears in the *Dictionary of Polish Language* by S. Linde. In the 20th century the territorial range of the concept of *Kresy* (Eastern *Kresy*) evolved. Presently the term is defined as the eastern areas of the Second Polish Republic which were lost to the USSR as a result of the Teheran and Potsdam conferences. After the end of the Second World War the territory of Poland was partitioned anew, and the former German areas were attached. According to the propaganda of the Polish Peoples’ Republic they were defined as the “Regained Areas” but in recent historiography they are described more generally and neutrally as “the Western and Northern Areas”.

The Czech case was unlike all others, in spite of the fact that the kingdom of Bohemia still existed as a political unit within the Austrian Empire and that, unlike Slovakia, there were no divisions of existing administrative units after the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy – since the kingdom’s historic border was accepted as the border of the Czechoslovak state. But as early as in the 19th century it was necessary to internalize the territory – including the parts of Bohemia with a German-speaking majority – as a historically and “naturally” Czech land. Historiography as well as literature played an important role in this context. This development is epitomised the Czech writer of German origin, Karel Klostermann (1848-1923), whose novels and tales played a decisive role in internalizing the Mountains of the Bohemian Forest (Šumava, Böhmerwald, on the border between Bohemia, Bavaria and the Upper Austria) as a part of the Czech homeland, notwithstanding the German-speaking majority there.

As with Slovakia, there are no significant collective identities which correspond to administrative units (regions, districts) in the Czech Republic right up to the present. Both local identities, as well as identities connected with geographically specific regions like mountains or some borderland regions, may however be observed. Nevertheless, as regards the west and the north-west of Bohemia, the identification of the inhabitants with the former German-speaking regions constitutes a very difficult problem for long periods down to the present. Much stronger collective identities are connected to the historical lands in the East – Moravia and, in part, Czech Silesia, as well as to the regions which are specific from a folkloristic and dialectological point of view, especially in Moravia and Silesia again.

As far as the Romanian case is concerned, the national movement and state building of the 19th and 20th centuries were connected with the attempt to unify some geographically and historically disparate lands. The Carpathian mountains separated Transylvania from Moldavia and Wallachia, and in addition the river Milcov separated the last two countries one from another. These natural frontiers did not prevent Romanians from considering each other as having the same linguistic, cultural and religious identity. On the other hand, these lands had been divided between several great powers – the Habsburg monarchy, the Ottoman Empire, Russia in Bessarabia – which made any union between them almost impossible. The 19th century, though, brought new ideas and impulses for the national movements which not only cut across the interests of great powers in the Balkans but also tended to lay claim to all those territories inhabited by members of the same national group. Only in 1859 was a union between Moldavia and Wallachia under Ottoman suzerainty achieved⁹. In 1877, the Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (known to history as “Little Romania”, as opposed to the “Greater Romania” created in 1918) secured independence from the Ottoman empire and began to support the Romanian movement outside Romania through culture, religion and political manifestos. But the existing political borders collapsed only in 1916 when Romania entered the First World War against the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and Transylvanians were forced to fight against Romanians. 1918 thus brought the Romanians to the fulfillment of national state unity. But this in turn led to tensions and conflicts with almost all its neighbours, especially Hungary, the Soviet Union and Bulgaria, as well as the Ukrainian national movement. In 1940, Northern Transylvania, Bessarabia and Cadrilater [South Dobruđa] were ceded to Hungary, the Soviet Union and Bulgaria respectively. Bessarabia and northern Bukovina remained Soviet after the Second World War in accordance with a Romanian-Soviet convention signed in Moscow in September 1944. Whereas northern Bukovina was ceded to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Bessarabia became the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova within the USSR, and a sovereign state after the break-up of the Union in 1991. By contrast, the cession of northern Transylvania to Hungary was annulled, and this country with its considerable Hungarian minority was reunited with Romania. The Romanian

Revolution brought with it the hope of re-establishing relationships with the former Romanian territories. The “flower-bridge” in 1990 with Moldova (Bessarabia) and the economic and cultural programmes with Bukovina were just a few projects which offered at least spiritual unity for Romanians across the mental barriers.

THE ORIGINS AND GROWTH OF REGIONAL HISTORY: FROM THE 19TH CENTURY TO WORLD WAR II

The pioneer of regional historiography in the future Slovakia, the Hungarian Enlightenment’s polyhistorian, Matthias Bel (1684-1749), personified the heterogeneity of the land: born into a Slovak family, priest of the German Lutheran community, Hungarian patriot. He initiated a monumental homeland research project on the counties of the Hungarian kingdom. The first four volumes of his *Notitia Hungariae novae historico-geographica*, which included also historical, geographical and ethnographical descriptions of regions inhabited mostly by Slovaks, were published in 1735-1742¹⁰. In the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century, several mostly short-lived learned societies dealt with regional homeland and linguistic studies¹¹. Patriotic homeland and scientific associations were displaced by the more numerous regional natural-historical, archaeological, historical, museum and literary voluntary associations. Although some of their members kept on good terms, in the 19th century two polarized groups grew up. German and, from 1880s, predominantly Hungarian German-speaking societies promoted a Hungarian state-national historical narrative, while the weaker, discriminated Slovak voluntary associations¹² tried to construct a Slovak national narrative. In both cases, the focus on creating a national territory prevailed, as is demonstrated by regional sources. When it proved impossible to rely on Slovak national universities and grammar schools, a great part of the organizational and methodological work was taken over by publishing societies and by journalists in periodicals. In such conditions, those authors who promoted the nation-state concept prepared and published works of regional history on related issues¹³. The institutional basis of Slovak historiography was developed only later, in the Czechoslovak Republic and pursued most intensively in the period following the inauguration of communist totalitarianism in 1948¹⁴.

The situation in Polish historiography was not entirely dissimilar, despite the enormous differences in circumstances of the Polish, Slovak and Czech nation-building processes. The beginnings of regional history and ‘regional studies’ in Poland date back to the 19th century. At that time, in a country partitioned between three occupying powers, ‘regionality’ was one of the ways of coming to grips with and experiencing history¹⁵. Only after World War I did this situation undergo a radical change. In the Czech case, the tradition of regional historiography dates far back into the 19th century. As with Slovakian developments, the voluminous topographical, geographical and statistical descriptions were the first to highlight the variety of regions in the Czech lands. The

most important authors in Bohemia were Jaroslav Schaller (1738-1809) at the end of the 18th century¹⁶, and Johann Gottfried Sommer (1772-1848), in the second quarter of the 19th century¹⁷. Patriotic scientific interest as well as the beginning of the national movement inspired a growing interest in the specificity of regions, in regional ways of speech, customs, and so on in the parts of the multifarious homeland¹⁸. Patriotic societies and other institutions such as museums represented and supported those activities as early as the first half of the 19th century. From their very beginning regional and local history was subordinated to certain national tasks and was legitimized through the fulfilment, enhancement and specification of national history. By that means, the local was connected to the national and the regional: both were meant to supplement and, above all, to illustrate the other, thus enabling the establishment of an identity-building relationship between nation, country, region and place. It was above all a long succession of local grammar school professors and other active and interested persons who dealt with the history of their places and regions.

The history of cities and towns certainly dominated that of larger regions. The first steps to the institutionalization of local and regional history had been made in the second half of the 19th century by founding local museums, journals, so-called beautification societies (*okrasňovací spolky, Verschönerungsvereine*), and by organizing regional and local exhibitions. Around 1900 as well as in the interwar period, historical subjects took up a large part of the local and regional press, and a boom in regional literature could be observed. Against this background a regional historical perspective became established as an integral part of Czech historiography and subsequently entered the “main” institutions, achieving a particular importance furthermore in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century. From the 19th century a parallel regional history in the “classical” sense – an interest in the history of one’s own place or region – based partly on non-professional interests and underpinned institutionally by local museums as well as historical and other societies emerged.

Starting in the late 19th century, Romanian historiography tried to promote a national history in despite of political borders. Initially, this historiographical tradition took the form of memoirs, but gradually studies developed which aimed to propagate a Romanian identity among Romanians extending beyond territorial borders. In Bukovina, historical research developed too, especially after 1900¹⁹. Some of this published work²⁰ is still not considered entirely superseded by later research²¹. In regard to national consciousness among Romanians in Bukovina and the legitimization of Romanian national claims, we may cite Teodor Balan²². Also, much of the work on the problems of the different nationalities in Bukovina was polemical in nature²³. The history of Bessarabia evoked new interest²⁴. These works sought to legitimize the claims of the Romanian people to its territories, borders and rights, besides fostering a Romanian spirit.

After World War I, the conditions for regional historical research as well as historical reflection in a regional context changed dramatically. New political circumstances,

marked above all by the birth of new national states, pointed towards the exploitation of new conditions and new tasks in regional studies as well as regional policy. The relationship to the national state or the nation as a whole was a decisive factor which constituted the *raison d'être* of regionalism. This was especially the case in Poland and Romania. The socio-political reasons for the development of Polish regionalism related to the rebirth of Poland which in 1918 faced the need to unite territories separated for over 120 years. During the period of the partition, Polish people had lived in different countries with different economic and legal systems, and were subject to diverse cultural influences. Within each of the annexed territories of the partitioned country, communities of specific ethnic composition were formed. After regaining independence and reuniting these territories, this resulted in regional separatisms²⁵. Therefore, there was a need for social and cultural integration, as also for research on the specific character and the similarities of the individual regions and sub-regions, emphasizing their Polish heritage and cultural unity. The creators and propagators of regionalism at that time, under the leadership of Aleksander Patkowski, placed high hopes in education, and in regional scientific societies and museums²⁶. In the 1920s and 1930s, the first methodological discussions concerning regional history also occurred. The most important problem was the issue of defining and determining the borders of historical regions and sub-regions. In spite of the fact that the first methodological discussions only took place in the 1930s, regional history grappled with these difficulties over many years.

THE SITUATION IN THE COMMUNIST PERIOD

Under communist rule, any similarities between Poland and Czechoslovakia which may have arisen from the same political system were in fact rather superficial. The basic differences reflected the fact that Marxist Leninism lasted as the official methodological approach to history for less than one decade (till October 1956) in Poland. Even if lip service was still paid to Marxism by the bulk of historians, from the late 1950s until the end of Real Socialism Polish historians undoubtedly enjoyed much more liberal ideological and methodological conditions by comparison with their Czechoslovak, Romanian, East-German or Soviet colleagues. On the other hand, Polish regional policy and studies, including the political and cultural reflections of scientific history, faced the enormous problem of how to legitimize Poland's westward extension after 1945 and to internalize the new territories as Polish. The interest in regional history triggered in the interwar period was revived again after World War II – now motivated politically, in relation to the moving borders. The loss of territories east of the Bug (the so-called *Kresy*, meaning "Eastern borderland") to the Soviet Union, and the acquisition of the so-called Western and Northern Territories (called the Recovered Territories in socialist propaganda) required further, preferably scientific, legitimization. In this context, two series of publications should be mentioned: *Oblicze Ziemi Odzyskanych* ("The Nature of the Recovered Territories") and *Ziemia Staropolska* ("The Regions of Old Poland"), which

were a sort of an ‘inventory’ of land incorporated into Poland in 1945²⁷. Later, during the period of so-called Real Socialism, viz. the years 1949-1956, interest in regional history was abandoned, and, in keeping with the new ideology, economic problems and issues of class consciousness among the inhabitants of cities and villages became the focus²⁸. Research was renewed in 1956, when many regional societies and scientific institutions were revived²⁹. In the 1960s and 1970s the territories incorporated into Poland constituted an important and frequently confrontational area of regional history research after 1945³⁰. Although today a Polish-German “war for remembrance” is conducted, there is no denying that in the Western and Northern Territories a growing number of academic and research centres for dialogue and cooperation with German, Lithuanian, and Belarussian historians have been established in order to create syntheses and conduct regional research (on Szczecin, Poznań, Wrocław, and Olsztyn among others)³¹.

National identification and institutionalization had been strengthened in the Slovak state 1939-1945, especially with the Slovak National Uprising in 1944, but in post-war Czechoslovakia it was gradually suppressed. After 1949, communist rule also struck at some representatives of the Slovak intelligentsia (labelled “bourgeois nationalists”) and the Communist Party arrogated to itself the exclusive right to interpret the ‘historical heritage’ according to class and pro-Soviet criteria and also, in the 1950s, according to centralistic Czechoslovak principles. A moderating of state pressure and some revival of independent thought – even concerning the national agenda – ensued in the late 1950s and the 1960s. One of the signs of this was a boom in regional history, especially in eastern Slovakia. The re-established Slovak Historical Society developed regional branches and organized conferences on methodology and themes of regional history (1959, 1960, 1962)³². A new network of museums functioned as regional centres of research. They published proceedings, yearbooks³³, and monographs on cities, towns and villages. A homeland periodical “*Vlastivedný časopis*” came into being 1961. The Encyclopaedic Institute of the Academy prepared three volumes of a homeland lexicon of villages and towns (1977-1978). But the professional community of historians was not allowed to develop regional historiography without interference. The Communist Party directed and controlled all central and regional institutions. And political pressure in the 1970s became even stronger: among the preferred topics were regional and local “progressive revolutionary traditions”, the history of workers and the communist movement and anti-fascist communist resistance. To evade the Marxist-Leninist line, many authors retreated into writing positivist descriptive texts. Ethnic and religious heterogeneity became fuzzy: Germans, Hungarians, Rutheniens, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants did not appear in regional historical narratives. Censorship and auto-censorship did not allow discussions about Slovakia’s positioning in a broader context, away from the “socialist camp”. Only in the liberalized atmosphere of late 1960s could Lubomír Lipták publish an article on the country’s marginal location on the frontiers of expansive empires, on the border of Christian civilization and in the space between East

and West³⁴. “Normalization” after the Soviet occupation ended any kind of free debate about macro-regionalism.

The situation in the Czech case was very similar to the Slovak one, since the two nations shared the same political system and government. The Second Congress of Czechoslovak Historians (October 1947) took regional history into account as an important part of historiography and considered it not only in the methodological, but also in the philosophical context³⁵. But new political developments also influenced the orientation and possibilities for regional history after 1948. Attitudes to national and regional history did not generally change and they were still based on national traditions. In regional historiography, a focus on folk traditions as well as traditions of labour and socialism in regard to the communist movement were held up as a central task, but the classic positivist tradition of regional and local history was continued concurrently. At university level, general methodological problems received only sporadic attention. Specific instances were the attempts to organize international conferences of regional history attended by historians from Eastern Europe in Olomouc and Pilsen (Plzeň). Some regional centres played a specific role as places of asylum for particular historians outside the official historiography of the 1970s and 1980s, but they were also places for meeting and collaboration with those from central historical institutions, where approaches and perspectives outside the approved narratives might be discussed or elaborated. In particular, the Hussite Museum of Tábora and its yearbook *Husitský Tábora* became famous for their role in this context in the two decades after 1968. A similar role was played by the yearly conferences in Pilsen, devoted to the problems of Czech society in the long 19th century and organized by historians, art historians and literature sciences. However, in both cases these regional institutions played an important role by discussing problems of national history, rather than general or regional history³⁶.

In Romania, auto-censorship and the official censorship were almost unchallenged. A few years after they had taken power and consolidated their political position, the Romanian Communists took the first steps towards a complete subordination of culture to the party's policies. This ‘cultural revolution’ came in the shape of repression but also persuasion. One of the first steps taken in this direction was to replace the intellectual elite of the interwar period with supporters of the Communist regime even if these were usually people who were only marginally relevant in their profession. Their role was that of ideological tools in the process of implementation of the new cultural policies. The new historiography aimed to erode traditional values in Romanian consciousness and to replace them with new propagandistic themes which expressed the vision of the new power. We might mention here the celebration of Stalin and the USSR, the condemnation of ancient Rome and of the former ruling classes – the boyars and the bourgeoisie who were in thrall to the capitalist imperialists. This re-writing of Romanian history according to the new vision was obligatory. A single history manual was imposed in which Mihai Roller and those around him had created a new version of his-

tory in tune with Soviet demands. In these conditions there was obviously little place for developing regional historiography in the methodological sense.

FROM THE POLITICAL TURN OF 1989 TO THE PRESENT

In all countries the political turn of 1989 had far-reaching consequences for reflections on regional history. The most important common tendencies in east central Europe were the following: a continuity of national narratives as well as a partial denationalization of historical representations, changes in the administrative structure of territories, partial changes in collective identities with the growing importance of regionalism (the watchword of “small homelands” in Poland), accompanied by European integration with its political ideology of a “Europe of the Regions” in the 1990s, liberalization, the administrative decentralization of nation states, a new importance of regional and local self-government as well as a kind of pluralization of historical narratives and groups or persons concerned with markers of regional history. The political changes of 1989 brought to historiography, besides an omission of some previous topics, new paradigms and a discussion of the place of the countries affected in a macro-region of central Europe³⁷. This was undoubtedly the case in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In Slovakia, for example, this idea facilitates a perception of the Hungarian kingdom as a homeland of Slovaks and overcomes the negative image of a ‘plebeian’ past of a nation without its own statehood³⁸. This new appreciation of the kingdom of Hungary as an integral part of Slovak history, the relevance of which even in context of a national past is not to be denied or ignored, is similar to some Czech and Polish tendencies. Among the new topics addressed by regional historiography was the history of the German population in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. Ethnic minorities also grew to be an important topic of Polish regional and historical studies.

A very significant development in the Polish case was the untrammelled growth of interest in the 1990s in the history of ethnic groups such as the Kashubians, *Kurpie*³⁹, Lemkos, and the Mazurs. This was also a time of development in neighbourly cooperation concerning research on regional history. Despite the previously-mentioned Polish-German and Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian dialogues, from 1990 there was also a development of Polish-Czech and Polish-German-Czech cooperation (concerning Silesia). Significant cultural phenomena are the process of Europeanization and multi-culturalization of the regional historical legacies which have been observed since the 1990s. The best example is the Borussia Cultural Community Association (founded in Olsztyn in 1990) which promotes the idea of an “open regionalism”⁴⁰ through various international research projects on regional history in cooperation with Poland’s eastern neighbours. In the last two decades a growth of historical interest has also been seen in the fields of *Kresy* history⁴¹ and the more familiar Galician history. Although interest in regional history has been increasing since the 1990s, the carrot offered to a wider group of readers interested

in syntheses of the history of individual regions is still not sufficiently tempting, and new syntheses of some of the regions have not yet even been written⁴².

The years after 1989 brought new conditions for Czech regional historiography. On the one hand, a relatively strong continuity can be observed in regard to institutional, thematic or methodological matters, and also in regard to personnel, but at the same time regional historiography had increasingly to cope with financial and organizational difficulties. On the other hand, regional history gained in importance in certain fields – not least with explicit reference to its identity-building role, as can be seen especially in its attempted legitimization through arguments along those lines. This in turn increases the prospects of regional history gaining acceptance in (regional) politics as well as among the general public. The position of regional history is also complicated by the traditional hierarchization in the categories of centre and periphery which may be observed in the Czech case, reflected in another – rather tacit – hierarchization between “mainstream” (i.e. global, general, or national) and regional history. This is underpinned by the constant orientation towards a national framework in research, its popularization and in historical education/teaching. After all, even micro-history, the history of everyday life, modern cultural history and historical anthropology have occasionally been depicted as genuine and principally regional-historical methods and approaches⁴³. But this has altered the general isolation of individual regional histories in the various regions only to a limited extent⁴⁴. Only at the last historians’ congress at Pardubice in 2006 was it possible to observe stronger tendencies towards the development of regional history as a sort of general, methodologically specific approach, a kind of subdiscipline, and to integrate the historiography into a transdisciplinary regional science. However, even here, attention is chiefly directed towards the methods of local history, rather than general regionalist perspectives and subjects, for example in the context of interregional historical comparisons or of historical forms of regionalities as a scientific problem in itself⁴⁵.

With some few exceptions in Czech historiography, there is scarcely anything by way of a “general” regional history characterized as a sub-discipline defined by particular approaches, methods, questions or fields of interest. Regional history is commonly seen as the history of a particular region, being understood as a clarification or regional modification of national history. Regional history in this context refers to national history, being illustrative of and located within a national framework. Forms of publication range from popular articles in local newspapers and popular scientific journals, serious periodicals and anthologies to the production of popular books, scientific monographs and editions of sources. In the last decade biographies of important personalities, albums with old picture postcards of the respective place or region, publications about castles and palaces (so-called “castellology”), and memoirs have been the most popular genres. Certain regions display some kind of special bias towards the development of regional history, for instance southern Bohemia; but with few exceptions it is cross-border regions which attract most attention. Examples of this are the Czech-Polish region

of Upper Silesia, and since the 1990s the Polish region of Glatz/Kłodzko, and to some extent also the Bohemian-Saxon Ore Mountains (Krušnohoří, Erzgebirge). Only in part has the process of “Euro-regionalization” contributed to this: the most prominent example seems to be the vivid cooperation of historical institutions in the Czech-German-Polish triangle of the “Neiße”-Euroregion⁴⁶. To a very limited but growing extent, research interests are directed towards the history of the former German-speaking areas of Bohemia⁴⁷.

In Romania, the situation is quite similar. Despite a few attempts to tackle the regional agenda, especially for politics in the inter-war and post-war period, there are relatively few works dealing with regional identities (for instance, in Bukovina or Bessarabia), cultural aspects and religious symbiosis (for example, in Transylvania) and their impact on the Romanian cultural and historical identity. A special case for Romanian history is Moldova: on the one side, Bessarabia as a former part of inter-war Romania is shaping its own destiny⁴⁸. Concurrently, regional history and historiography offer a discursive account of identities in the construction and historical representations of museums in Transnistria. Art exhibitions consisting of old pictures of the former towns and regions, regional poetry (such as that written by Ioan Aldea Teodorovici, martyr of Romanian identity in Bessarabia) and music are also reviving long forgotten memories and evoke new meanings of events past and present.

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE REGIONAL AGENDA AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION SINCE 1989

Some significant differences and common tendencies can be drawn concerning the present situation in regional historiography as well as the regionalist agenda in Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. By way of example, two perspectives have been chosen here to illustrate the possibility of an east central-European and, then, a European comparison in regard to practitioners of a regional agenda, in history especially, and the institutionalization of regional history today. As regards the historiographical regional agenda, the situation is generally similar. In each country, mainly four groups are active in research and the corresponding transfer of knowledge, without any significant generational differences: these are, first, professional historians, usually at universities and main research institutions, doing regional analyses as part of a non-regional research interest – particularly social history, modern cultural history, and historical anthropology. Second, there are professional historians in regional or local institutions, whose main task is to research their ‘own’ regional history and to handle respective collections at museums and archives. A third group is creative artists, inspired by and active in local or regional history. Finally, there are further non-professionals, who are interested in history and partially active in local research. A personal continuity across the political turn of 1989 can be observed in all these countries. This means that there was no ex-

traordinary change in the persons involved linked to political change; but on the other hand, far more people including politicians and scientists have since become interested in regional matters. The second point, institutionalization, is characterized by variety and decentralization in all countries, by also in the last decades by a more or less significant boom of regional historical institutions, especially as regards societies and journals, and partly also museums. On the other hand, museums have had to face new problems both of financing their activities and justifying their *raison d'être* in a media society.

In the Czech Republic, regional history is partly embedded in institutions like the regional universities outside Prague. In particular, the Historical Institutes of the universities in Ústí nad Labem, Hradec Králové, Pardubice and Ostrava/Opava are renowned for their explicit and widely respected orientation towards regional history. That had already been the case with the University of Olomouc, as the local Cabinet for Regional History was probably the only instance of an institutionalization of a 'general' regional history in a methodical sense. A significant decentralization of the university landscape may be observed especially in the last decades. But there are also new museums established within the last twenty years, many of them devoted to specialized subjects. The archives, however, are mostly part of the basic network of regional and district archives administered by the Ministry of the Interior, increasingly burdened with administrative tasks, their resources only partly geared to research.

In Slovakia, a flood of amateur and professional homeland monographs on towns and villages has appeared, initiated by bodies of local self-government, regional historical societies⁴⁹, and universities. Most of them offer plenty of unknown facts mainly about ethnic minorities and church history, but conceptually they are based on academic grand narratives, both nationalist and otherwise. Methodological centres of regional research operate at the universities in Prešov and Banská Bystrica. New approaches may be seen in a study on regional anchoring of elites⁵⁰ or in studies on symbolic regions as memory sites⁵¹. Regional differentiation of the country is researched more from a historical geography and sociological perspective. For instance, *Slovakia and its regions* offers a most important and inspiring view of continuity in regional patterns of political culture⁵². Existing statistical data determined a structuring by districts (*okras*), but the ethnographic part of the book illustrated a different cultural regionalization: "natural" regionalism corresponds to the historical county system⁵³. A comparative historical study of counties and districts, besides Slovakia as a sub-region of central Europe as a historical region, with its cultural heterogeneity and hybridity, could be a topic for future research.

Among the main Polish centres of regional history are the predominant state institutions and non-governmental organizations developed mainly in the 1990s. The first group contains scientific and university centres usually located in the largest Polish cities. State institutions located in the Polish borderlands also play an important role in popularizing and disseminating regional research. One of such example is the Western Institute in Poznań, which does research on the Polish-German history of the re-

gion. The Historical Research Centre in Berlin also plays a vital role in Polish-German research on the borderlands, memory and identity. Along with museums and the regional branches of the State Archive, which are more geared to the popularization of regional history by galleries, exhibitions and conferences, local-government bodies play the major role in research. They often execute research, educational and cultural projects, in nearby regions (usually the province) quite often supported by micro-historical and oral history methods. In the field of regional research non-governmental organizations (associations, foundations) have been increasingly important since the late 1990s. The Borussia Cultural Community Association (and Foundation), founded by Robert Traba in Olsztyn, has played a leading role in research on Polish regions (Warmia, Mazuria, Eastern Prussia lands) and borderlands. The same may be said of the “Borderland” Foundation in Sejny. The web of Regional Cultural Associations also play a considerable role. Beginning in the 1990s, they have started to organize around the Movement of Regional Associations of the Republic of Poland which was founded in 2002 and includes around 190 regional organizations at present. The contribution of local branches of the Polish Historical Association (*Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne* – PTH) is also considerable, assembling representatives of the previously-mentioned scientific and cultural institutions (universities, centres, museums, archives). The Polish Historical Association undertakes a number of initiatives in order to propagate historical knowledge relating to Polish regions⁵⁴.

In Romania 1989 brought with it the urge to re-discover national history in an objective sense, “as it really was.” Many historians and passionate amateurs began to search the national and regional archives in order to bring to light hidden aspects of national history and historiography. In universities, there have been plenty of theses focusing on the peripheral territories still pertaining or no longer pertaining to Romania. Dobrudja, Bessarabia and Bukovina have filled the pages with their history, their people and the way they understood their relationship with the Romanian state. University professors, PhD students or graduates ‘dug’ into available national and international archives in order to present their theses or findings reached after months or years of study. Monographs on towns and cities or villages are also important in illustrating particular details concerning the ethos of these places, the customs and the way in which an identity or multiple identities had been formed and developed. There are not as yet many methodological centres of regional research. A very important aspect is the perpetuation of the folklore patrimony which preserves the collective memory in *doine* [improvised songs] and ballads.

In their attempt to rediscover national frontiers and identities, the mutual agreements between the states has led to the appearance of Bureaux of Trans-Frontier Cooperation between Romania and Ukraine (concerning Bukovina), Hungary and Serbia (concerning the Banat), Bulgaria (inter alia concerning the Cadrilater), programmes which aim to present the culture, the national and international identity and history of each country or region, with its similarities and differences.

NOTES

- ¹ *Comitatus* in Latin, *stolica* or *župa* in Slovak, *vármegye* in Hungarian.
- ² According to research by sociologists, there is no dominant collective identity in Slovakia. Even national identity does not present a central organizing loyalty, and regional identities are not widely accepted. V. Krivý, O. Danglová, *Svet mnohých "MY a ONI". Kolektívne identity na súčasnom Slovensku*. Bratislava 2006, p. 101.
- ³ P. Švorc, *Die slowakische Historiographie und die Regionalgeschichte: 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, in "Bohemia 44", 2003, 2, pp. 459-476, at p. 460.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 464.
- ⁵ A. Stępnik, *Historia regionalna i lokalna w Polsce 1918-1939. Badania i popularyzacja*, Warsaw 1990, p. 6.
- ⁶ The term "small homeland", coined in the 1960s and 70s, as a synonym of a region is not very precise and was a late usage. See F. Mincer, *Wpływ czynników pozanaukowych na wyniki badań regionalnych*, in A. J. Omelaniuk, *Historia w ruchu regionalnym*, Wrocław 2001, p. 39.
- ⁷ J. Borzyszkowski, *O nowy kształt badań historycznych – nie tyle regionalnych: ile dziejów regionów*, in K. A. Makowski (ed.), *O nowy model historycznych badań regionalnych*, Poznań 2007, p. 39.
- ⁸ See A. Stępnik, *Trzy modele historii regionalnej w nauczaniu szkolnym*, in "Kultura i Historia", 2002, 3, 2002.
- ⁹ See I. Agrigoroaiei, *O acțiune hotărâtoare pentru recunoașterea drepturilor naționale fundamentale, 1914-1916* [A decisive action for the recognition of fundamental national rights], in *Național și social în Istoria Românilor: Profesorului Gheorghe Platon la a 70-a aniversare*, Iași 1998, pp. 405-416; D. Berindei, *Temeiurile dreptului istoric și dreptul natural al Memorandului* [The reasons of historical law and natural law in the Memorandum], in "MSȘIA", 1992, 17, pp. 49-52; N. Bocșan, *Ideea de națiune la românii din Austro-Ungaria, 1880-1906* [The idea of nation among the Romanians of Austria-Hungary], in "Banatica", 1995, 13, 2, pp. 97-114; N. Bocșan, *The Romanians from Austria-Hungary and the Idea of Nation, 1880-1906*, in "Colloquia", 1995, 2, 1-2, pp. 98-112.
- ¹⁰ On regional historiography in the 19th century, see P. Horváth, *Slovenská regionálna historiografia v 19. storočí*, in "Historický časopis", 1981, 29, pp. 217-243.
- ¹¹ The most important were the *Erudita societas Kishontiensis* (1808-1845) in the County of Small Hont with its Latin yearbooks *Solennia*, and the Learned Society of Mine District in Banská Štiavnica (1810-1832).
- ¹² Mainly the *Tatrin* society in Liptovský Mikuláš (1844-1848) and, in Martin, the *Matica slovenská* [Slovak Foundation] (1863-1875) and the *Muzeálna Slovenska Spoločnosť* [Slovak Museum Society] (1893-1960).
- ¹³ S. Borovszky (ed.), *Magyar ország vármegyei és városai*, Budapest, s.d.; *Az osztrák-magyar monarchia irásban és képen*, 21 vols., Budapest, 1887-1901; also Hungarian historical regional journals and county monographs predominantly on medieval themes.
- ¹⁴ An overview in E. Mannová, *Historical Institutions*, in E. Mannová, D.P. Daniel (eds.), *A Guide to Historiography in Slovakia* (Studia historica Slovaca 20), Bratislava 1995, pp. 133-152.
- ¹⁵ Stępnik, *Historia regionalna* cit., p. 21.
- ¹⁶ J. Schaller, *Topographie des Königreichs Böhmen*, vols. 1-16, Prague 1782-1792.
- ¹⁷ J.G. Sommer, *Königreich Böhmen, statistisch-topographisch dargestellt*, vols. 1-16, Prague 1833-1849.
- ¹⁸ M. Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, Cambridge 1985.
- ¹⁹ There still is no satisfactory monograph on the national Romanian movement in Bukowina, but E. Prokopowitsch, *Die rumanische National-bewegung in der Bukowina und der Dako-Romanismus*, Graz 1965 is a useful guide to its main aspects. For Transylvania, see esp. a book by the French historian

- J. Nouzille, *Transilvania, zona de contacte și conflicte*, Bucharest 1995, as well as T. Pavel, *Mișcarea românilor pentru unitate națională și diplomația Puterilor Centrale*, 2 vols., Timișoara 1979-1982.
- ²⁰ Esp. the works of I. Toroutiu, *Romanii și clasa intelectuală din Bucovina*, Cernăuți 1911; *Romanii și clasa de mijloc din Bucovina*, Cernăuți 1912; *Poporiatia și clasele sociale din Bucovina*, Bucharest 1916.
- ²¹ Such as N. Iorga, *Histoire des Roumains de Bucovine a partir de l'annexion autrichienne (1775-1914)*, Iași 1917.
- ²² T. Balan, *Procesul Arboaroasei, 1875-1878*, Cernăuți 1937; Id., *Suprimarea mișcărilor naționale din Bucovina pe timpul războiului mondial, 1914-1918*, Cernăuți 1923.
- ²³ The central arguments are suggested in *Rutenizarea Bucovinei și cauzele deznaționalizării poporului român by a Bucovinean*, Bucharest 1904, and by I. Nistor, *Romanii și Rutenii în Bucovina*, Bucharest 1915.
- ²⁴ I. Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei*, Cernăuți 1923, or S. Ciobanu, *Cultura românească în Basarabia sub stăpânirea rusă*, Chișinău, 1923, which suggests vast levels of Russification. Z.C. Arbore, *Basarabia în secolul XIX*, Bucharest 1899.
- ²⁵ In various parts of Poland defensive reactions against mingling with a wider ethnic group, and dislike for and hostility towards representatives of other districts occurred due to their strangeness, primarily in terms of political views and traditions, or a conflict of interests. See T. Kulak, *U źródeł regionalizmu II Rzeczypospolitej (Wizje ruchu regionalnego Stefana Żeromskiego i Władysława Orkana)*, in *Historia w ruchu regionalnym*, compiled by A. J. Omelaniuk, Wrocław 2001, p. 8.
- ²⁶ A. Stępiński, *Kilka uwag na temat polskiej historiografii regionalnej XIX i XX wieku*, in *O nowy model historycznych badań regionalnych*, ed. K.A. Makowski, Poznań 2007, p. 47.
- ²⁷ E. Maleczyńska (ed.), *Oblicze Ziemi Odzyskanych. Dolny Śląsk*, vol. I-II, Wrocław - Warsaw 1948; Z. Wojciechowski (ed.), *Ziemia Staropolski, Dolny Śląsk* [Lower Silesia], vol. I-II, Poznań 1948. Studies on other regions were prepared later: West Pomerania (1949); Ziemia Lubuska (1950); Warmia and Masuria (1953); Suppe Silesia (1959); cited in T. Kulak, *O książkach z historii regionalnej (Uwagi o współczesnym piśmiennictwie regionalistycznym w aspekcie historycznym)*, in *Historia w ruchu regionalnym*, p. 79.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- ²⁹ F. Kiryk, *Badania regionalne w Małopolsce*, in A.J. Omelaniuk (ed.), *Historia w ruchu regionalnym*, Wrocław 2001, p. 52.
- ³⁰ At the same time, F. Kiryk emphasizes that Polish historians of the Polish People's Republic era, who criticized German science for its nationalism, very frequently could not see their own nationalism: "Today some studies by W. Sobieski or K. Piwowski concerning the history of Silesia and Pomerania are read with embarrassment. It is a paradox that the antagonists on both sides frequently had genuine local patriotism in common, and it was this patriotism which intensified the dispute", *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- ³¹ The Historical Research Centre in Berlin (HRC) [*Centrum Badań Historycznych*, PAN in Berlin], run by historian Robert Traba, plays a vital role in Polish-German research on regional history, borderland, memory and identity. The HRC gathered many historians and researchers from the main Polish academic and research centres (Warsaw, Poznań, Wrocław). Another research centre very important for regional history is the Western Institute in Poznań [*Instytut Zachodni w Poznaniu*]. The Borussia Cultural Community Association (and Foundation), founded by R. Traba, is the third and equally essential, interdisciplinary research centre of regional history situated in eastern Poland (Olsztyn). A considerable role is also played by the Polish Historical Association (and its regional branches).
- ³² J. Albery, *Regionálna história nie je iba historiografia (so zretelom na stredné Slovensko)*, in M. Pekár, P. Derfiňák (eds.), *Regionálne dejiny a dejiny regiónov* (Ročenka Katedry dejín FHPV Prešovskej univerzity 2004), Prešov 2004, pp. 93-109; M. Pekár, *Niekoľko poznámok k stavu a aktuálnym problémom výskumu regionalných dejín*, in "Historický časopis", 2005, 55, 1, pp. 96-103.

- ³³ Their overview in M. Havrila, M. Lipka, I. Michnovič, *Podiel slovenských muzeálnych zborníkov na rozvoji regionálnej historiografie v rokoch 1945-1989 (s pribliadnutím na východoslovenské múzeá)*, in “Regionálne dejiny a dejiny regiónov” (as in note 12 above), pp. 109-123.
- ³⁴ L. Lipták, *Poloha Slovenska na javisku európskych dejín*, in Id., *Storočie dlhšie ako sto rokov*, Bratislava 1999, pp. 29-42.
- ³⁵ A. Kostlán (ed.), *Druhý sjezd československých historiků (5.-11. října 1947) a jeho místo ve vývoji českého dějepísectví*, Prague 1993, pp. 136-142, 240-48.
- ³⁶ For Tábor, see esp. D. Olšáková, Z. Vybíral (eds.), *Husitský Tábor a jeho postavení v české historiografii v 70. a 80. letech 20. století* [The Husitský Tábor and its Position in Czech Historiography in the 1970s and 1980s] [= *Husitský Tábor*, Suppl. 2], Tábor 2004.
- ³⁷ A. Avenarius, *The Basic Problems of Slovak History and Historiography*, in E. Mannová (ed.), *A Concise History of Slovakia* (Studia historica Slovaca 21), Bratislava 2000, pp. 307-314.
- ³⁸ Švorc, *Die slowakische Historiographie* cit., p. 476.
- ³⁹ An inhabitant of the “Kurpie” region which is a part of the Mazovia region of Poland.
- ⁴⁰ About “Borussia” and its idea of “open regionalism”, see for instance, <http://www.borussia.pl/>. The Borussia Cultural Community Association quarterly magazine is “Borussia: culture, literature, history”, published since 1991.
- ⁴¹ The term *Kresy* (meaning “Outskirts” or “Borderlands”) was used in the 1920s and 1930s to describe Polish lands to the east of Curzon Line. After World War II they were incorporated into the Soviet Union. In Poland, after 1945, the interest of researchers (historians) in these areas was suppressed by the communist censorship. It revived soon after the fall of communism in the 1990s.
- ⁴² M. Molik, *O nowy model syntezy dziejów regionalnych na przykładzie Wielkopolski*, in K. A. Makowski (ed.), *O nowy model historycznych badań regionalnych*, Poznań 2007, p. 25.
- ⁴³ For a connection of this sort, see V. Bůžek: *Regionální dějiny v České republice. Stav a perspektivy bádání s důrazem na raný novověk* [Regional History in Czech History. Condition and Perspectives of Research with an Accent on the Early Modern Era], in J. Pešek (ed.), *VII. sjezd českých historiků*, Prague 2000, pp. 33-47.
- ⁴⁴ See *VII. sjezd českých historiků. Praha 24.-26. září 1993*, Prague 1994, pp. 183-190; *VIII. sjezd českých historiků. Hradec Králové 10.-12. října 1999*, Prague 2000, pp. 33-82.
- ⁴⁵ See J. Bartoš, J. Schulz, M. Trapl, *Regionální dějiny. Pojetí, poslání, metodika* [Regional history. Approach, Function, Methodology], Olomouc 2004; P. Vorel, *Základy historické regionalistiky. Metodika výzkumu a interpretace pramených zdrojů místních a regionálních dějin v českých zemích* [The Essentials of Historical Regional Science. Methods of Research and Interpretation of Sources of Local and Regional History in the Czech Lands], Pardubice 2005; M. Svoboda, *Regionální dějiny: Co s nimi můžeme a máme dělat na vysoké škole? Příklad „Regionalistika“* [Regional history: what can and shall we do with it at universities? The case of Regional Studies], in Z. Beneš, J. Pešek, P. Vorel, *IX. sjezd českých historiků. Pardubice 6.-8. září 2006*, vol. 1, Pardubice - Prague - Ústí nad Labem 2007, pp. 177-184.
- ⁴⁶ *Fontes Nissae* 1, 2000ff.; see also the series *Vědecká pojednání – Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen – Prace Naukowe* 1ff., Liberec 1995ff.
- ⁴⁷ The new series of the *Zprávy Společnosti pro dějiny Němců v Čechách/Mittelungen der Gesellschaft für die Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen*, edited by Kristýna Kaiserová, has been re-established in Ústí nad Labem and published since 2001. The re-established Society in Ústí nad Labem represents an indirect Czech (or Czech-German) continuation of the old German nationalist association with almost the same name (*Verein für die Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen*).

- ⁴⁸ If, in the early 1990s, Bessarabia favoured a union with Romania, or at least a more favourable relationship between the two states, now Romanian patriots, called Moldavian by the Communists in order to deny any relationship with Romania, are trying to preserve their right to a national history and not a bogus one.
- ⁴⁹ Their list is on the web-page www.dejiny.sk/Spolky/spolky.htm. Special attention was devoted to the history of Spiš (Zips), see V. Jankovič, *Spišská regionálna historiografia za posledných sto rokov 1883-1983*, in "Nové obzory", 1986, 28, pp. 99-114; Z. Kollárová, *Spišská regionálna historiografia od roku 1989, jej stav a perspektívy*, in "Historický časopis", 2002, 50, pp. 120-126.
- ⁵⁰ R. Holec, *Osobnosť a región (metodologické úvahy)*, in *Regionálne dejiny a dejiny regiónov* (as in note 12 above), pp. 38-47.
- ⁵¹ P. Macho, *Podbradlanský kraj ako topograficko-historický konštrukt v popularizačných dielach o Štefánikovi (1919-1929)*, in I. Kamenec, E. Mannová, E. Kowalská (eds.), *Historik v čase a priestore. Laudatio Lubomírovi Liptákovi*, Bratislava 2000, pp. 111-120; P. Macho, *Premena a stálosť regionálnej identity*, in "História. Revue o dejinách spoločnosti", 2001, 1, p. 22.
- ⁵² V. Krivý, V. Feglová, D. Balko, *Slovensko a jeho regióny. Sociokultúrne súvislosti volebného správania*, Bratislava 1996.
- ⁵³ O. Dangelová, J. Hampel (eds.), *Diskusia o knihe*, in "Etnologické rozpravy", 2000, 1-2, pp. 156-159.
- ⁵⁴ See, for instance, *Regionalism – traditions – challenges- perspectives. Materials from the first Regional Gathering of Malopolska Regional Associations*, Kraków 2008.

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