

# Jaroslav Vencálek

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## Perception of the human phenomenon as a crucial problem of the development of Central-European space

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JAROSLAV VENCÁLEK

UNIVERSITY OF OSTRAVA

**PERCEPTION OF THE HUMAN PHENOMENON  
AS A CRUCIAL PROBLEM OF THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF CENTRAL-EUROPEAN SPACE**

**ABSTRACT.** Socio-geographical research in population has been focused for a long time on the location of the population in the landscape, on studying the structure of existing sets of the population and the development of their dynamics. Postmodern perception of reality leads towards the necessity to perceive the population in the landscape. Above all, it concerns the search of forces of inner social cohesion of regions on the basis of tolerance of diversity as well as the studies of outer cohesive relations both among individual regions, and between them and the whole on the basis of a forced accord. Studies of values, culture and institutions seem to be the most decisive phenomenon for the perception of reality, which most markedly influences interests of partial components of cultural landscape in the integrating central-European space.

**KEY WORDS:** image of landscape, social cohesion, cultural diversity

**INTRODUCTION**

A famous Czech writer Milan Kundera (1929), a French citizen since 1981, in reaction on the social transformation of central-European space at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century says: “the time of ideology has changed into the time of imageology” (from French “image” = a mental picture).

How does this knowledge contribute to the scientific studies of the phenomenon of the population in the landscape? I assume that above all it is the necessity of a fundamental change in perception and social science approach towards the studies of population transformation, and economic and functionally-

-spatial relations in the period of European integration processes. Even if particular elements in the picture of our reality (not only those of density) have been described hundreds of times, it is necessary to search for (to analyse) their new – changing in time – concretisation.

If we reject Francis Fukuyama's theory of a unified, i.e. not differentiated world, where the result is a universal concept of western liberal democracy as a final form of social life, decisive considerations will be orientated towards the search of the most significant differentiation phenomena which determines different interests of a population living in a different part of (not only) central-European space.

The question is, however, whether social science is able to create reflective and attractive enough pictures of our reality as those of our artists?

From the minimal interest of the public concerning social science analytic pictures of reality it can be assumed that what must be changed in these scientific approaches is primarily perception of reality.

What causes an up-to-date delay in creating the pictures of our reality? I put forward the two main reasons for this state.

The first reason is the fact that a scientific approach is closely tied to working with objective facts. Current development of a territory is less and less often determined by causal relations between objectively existing phenomena in the landscape. By contrast, it is more and more markedly influenced by developmental determinants that are subjective. The other reason is the fact that spatial closeness as a decisive phenomenon in the development has lost its importance and the degree of spatial openness of a territory and the network of relations operating in it has become a crucial developmental stimulus.

The aim of this contribution is to show where lies the core of the necessity to change up-to-date scientific approaches towards the studies of demographic reality of the landscape lies in.

## THE PERCEPTION OF HUMAN PHENOMENON IN THE LANDSCAPE

There is no sense in talking about partial components of the landscape or regions, if we are not interested in the processes of inner social cohesion which determine these spaces.

In order to understand these processes, it is necessary to understand people who live in a particular space.

Consciousness as a principal ability of people's spiritual life includes their thinking, perception, feelings, longings, decisiveness, imagination etc. Common consciousness is understood as an immediate reflection of a person's being in his intellect. All the forms of social consciousness (e.g. morals, arts, politics) are reflected in behaviour and activities of inhabitants living in a particular space.

To search determinants of inner social cohesion means to approach the study of the population living in partial components of the landscape otherwise than in accordance with the concept of classical geography, which focuses mainly on the analysis of location, structure and dynamics of the population in a territory.

Nevertheless, it cannot be claimed that for instance studies of settlement density, density characteristics or concentration (resp. dispersity of the population) in the landscape would not be necessary. With certainty, however, it can be claimed that no matter how quantitatively complex our knowledge of reality is (eg. utilizing GIS), we cannot find fundamental determinants of inner social cohesion of a territory of the landscape. These will be revealed only after we develop approaches that are qualitatively more complex.

If individual phenomena of inner social cohesion of a territory are formed from the spatially lowest structures, they can be functionally independent of the hierarchical structure of territorial units.

The forces of inner social cohesion exist on the basis of tolerance of diversity, i.e. on the basis of discord.

In this way, the discord as a manifestation of territorial reality is interlinked with the character of processes of inner social cohesion.

Therefore, social processes of inner cohesion are dependent on the level of perception of heritage, dynamics, functionality, morphogenesis and evolution of preceding developmental structures, hence on understanding genius loci of a particular territory, i.e. on perception of existence of people in a territory, which is more or less difficult to grasp, but truly perceived (or felt).

If we talk about partial components of the landscape, resp. about regions, we perceive them as typically differing in degrees of integration. In the post-modern (information) society knowledge of these degrees of integration belongs to the basic conditions of further development.

Individual regions in integrated space are defined with the help of the following criteria:

- a) mutual relation,
- b) its relation to the unit.

In the "Declaration of the European Union for the New Millennium" it says: "citizens of the European union are mutually tied by shared values such as freedom, tolerance, equality, solidarity and cultural diversity".

A post-modern principle of qualitatively complex studies of reality is hence connected with the studies of values, on whose basis it is just integration processes that can be developed.

I assume that here we are at the very beginning, because to perceive studies of regions as studies of its links with other regions and with the whole (in our case especially its links with the European Union) is for the time being – at least in the Czech geographical community – represented minimally.

Forces of outer social cohesion, however, can realise purely on the basis of forced accord. Forced accord is apparently the most fundamental attribute of processes of outer social cohesion in integrating (not only) central-European space.

The transition from non-coherent to coherent behaviour of population should belong to the most striking manifestation of social cohesion.

But do we deal with these problems in our treatises?

Coherent behaviour of population of particular regions is a basic attribute of the territorial self-organization of the space.

Do these processes develop in our countries? To what degree do we consider them as crucial? Or is it the image to perceive the change as a process of mechanical accommodation to a new European reality that is dominating in our intellect?

### VALUES, CULTURE AND INSTITUTION AS PHENOMENA INFLUENCING CITIZEN'S PERCEPTION OF REALITY

Whilst in a modern society geographically viewed information about the population used to be of great importance, i.e. the character of its location in the landscape, the structure of the population according to demographic (sex, age) and socio-economic characteristics (economic activity, language affiliation etc.), in a post-modern society other characteristics become of greater importance such as those mapping human capital or socio-economic potential of the landscape.

It is not knowledge of immediate (i.e. the state relevant to the current situation) what is fundamental, but it is knowledge of those characteristics which can inform about a possible utilization of a human phenomenon (in particular conditions, in particular period of time).

Those who do not share certain values cannot be regarded as a disposable element for realisation of particular goals. Then it does not matter whether for instance demographic characteristics of a particular set of the population have progressive or regressive character. Hence the potential is more and more understood as a set of supplies and sources that are at disposal and which can be counted to achieve certain goals or solutions of certain tasks.

Presupposing that human perception of own identity develops and as a consequence changes (Vencálek, 1998), we must admit that it leads to changes in dispensability with human sources in time.

It is not only time as such what changes, but above all it is the way of perception of time by people themselves. What is changing is not only the way people approach the changes of their surroundings, but also the way they approach changes of themselves. In the context of post-modern perception of development of a territory words of Paulo Coelho, a Brazil writer, are inspiring:

“Time is not something what passes in the same tempo. Tempo is something we set ourselves.” (Coelho, 2002).

Hence by socio-cultural potential we can understand not only existing objects (e.g. a population set) or phenomena (population policy), but also those, which are potential, i.e. those which can come into existence and work.

The key task when searching for the socio-cultural potential of (not only) central-European space is an ability and willingness of people to reveal differences between ‘existing’ (hence what is topical) and ‘possible’ i.e. what can with the help of the man come into existence and be creatively effective.

The dimensions of the search between existing and possible is in my opinion a dimension that belongs to the scope of scientific interest.

If it is so we must admit that socio-cultural transformations of the landscape are connected with the changes of a wide range of phenomena which are of both rational and objective character and whose irrationality and subjectivity is significant (Vencálek, 2001).

In words of a world’s writer Paulo Coelho “to share other people’s values” means “to enjoy the speed we are not used to.”

It is a view that differs from the one presented mainly by the mass media of developed countries when under the guise of a slick declarations it is “own speed of the most developed” that is put forward as the only correct.

## CONCLUSION

Michel Foucault, a philosopher, has viewed as the most decisive phenomenon for the contemporary world the phenomenon of ‘location’, which is defined via the relations of closeness (Foucault, 1996).

Accepted by post-modernism, lateral thinking, i.e. thinking in jumps, is obviously directed towards the relations of closeness through the phenomenon called “sharing values, but also sharing culture or institutions”. This developmental trajectory is viable only if we approach the problems of the development of a territory not only on the basis of logical deductions issuing from generally accepted facts, but if we strive for a deeper insight into other people’s experiences.

In Karel Čapek’s words, through intimacy of experience we will not be indifferent even to the distant and we will feel being a part of the development of (not only) central-European space.

To share someone else’s experiences means above all to empathise with them and their life situations, to be tolerant and as a consequence socially more close.

To share other’s spiritual values together with developing the feelings of solidarity means to strengthen the atmosphere of closeness and mutual trust.

To investigate the human phenomenon in sense whether it approaches this picture or just the contrary definitely should be one of the goals of scientific efforts.

*Translation: Sirma Wilamová*

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## CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Jaroslav Vencálek  
Department of Social Geography and Regional Development  
Faculty of Science, University of Ostrava  
Chittussiho 10, 710 00 Slezská Ostrava, Czech Republic  
[e-mail: Jaroslav.Vencalek@osu.cz]