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How should we do the history of geographies during the period of state socialism? Historical period, space and expert knowledge in the post-war Czechoslovakia

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Abstract

A critical reflection on the current state of research into the history of the production of geographical knowledge during the period of state socialism is presented in this report. Using the example of the Czechoslovak administrative reform from 1949, several questionable aspects of current interpretations are identified. In particular, the problematic use of three crucial concepts in the study of the history of geography: time (a politics of memory); space (spatial imaginations); and geographical knowledge. Examples of approaches to each concept are presented, which can overcome the insufficiencies and contribute to a better understanding of the mutual relations between state socialism and the production of geographical knowledge. Research into the history of geography during the period of state socialism is important both to understand the current state of 'post-socialist' national geographies, and to add to the production of an inclusive history of global geography. One necessary condition is, however, to leave the current descriptive and encyclopaedic styles, which are marked with ahistoricism and presentism. In contrast, it is essential that the history of geography during the period of the state socialism become a serious issue, which is analysed through critical and reflexive approaches.

Keywords: *history of the production of geographical knowledge; state socialism; politics of memory; spatial imaginaries; Czechoslovakia*

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1. Introduction

The 'boom' of research in the history of geography is presently emphasised as part of some encyclopaedic overviews summarising the state of the art of international geography (Ferretti, 2021c; van Meeteren and Sidaway, 2020). Livingstone's (1992b) book ´The Geographical Tradition´ is considered the initial impetus of such a boom; it changed dramatically considerations of the history of geography (see e.g. Boyle et al., 2019). Considering the significance of this book, its reception can be utilised to evaluate the present state of the history of geography in various geographical traditions. The fact that is often in dispute from the view of international geography that the book focuses on Western/Northern geographical tradition (see e.g. Craggs, 2019; Sidaway, 1997, on the author's self-reflection see e.g. Hoyler et al., 2002; Livingstone, 2019). This criticism is part of a broader and long-lasting dispute on the dominant position of the Western/Northern, primarily Anglo-American geographical tradition within international geography (see e.g. Minca, 2000; Müller, 2021; Timár, 2004).

An attempt to correct this state, that is to overcome its thematic and spatial exclusiveness, can be marked as one of the significant features of the present study of the history of geography (Ferretti, 2019a, 2019b, 2021b; Keighren, 2018). The study of the geographical traditions of the Global South is emphasised mostly in this context (see e.g. Craggs and Neate, 2020; Ferretti, 2021a). Opinions have been heard recently, however, that it would be appropriate to focus also on what Müller (2020) calls Global East (generally, see e.g. Ferenčuhová, 2016; Jehlička et al., 2020; Jehlička, 2021).

If the example of some geographical tradition was used to question the unequal position of non-Anglo-American geographies within international geographies, it can also be used to question the development of the study of the history of geography in individual national and linguistic traditions. Ferretti (2019c) refers to the different and in some respects contradictory reception of Livingstone's (1992b) book in Italian-, French-, Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking geographical traditions. Such differences demonstrate that study of the history of geography follows different aims

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in different national traditions, and that it has different significance and impact. It can be stated from this point of view that the response to Livingstone's book was almost null in Czech geography. This is caused, among other factors, by the fact that the history of geography is of marginal concern in Czech geography.

In this article, I discuss the current state of research into the history of the production of geographical knowledge in Czechoslovakia during the period of state socialism. My aim, however, is not to write a 'classic' country report. Considering the almost complete absence of this type of research in Czech geography, such an attempt would lack a deeper sense. Therefore, I chose a different approach. Instead, I will use a case study, which is work on the current interpretations of the mutual relationships between geographical knowledge production and the regional reform of 1949.

I had three main reasons to select this case study. The first one is the fact that the attention of Czech (Czechoslovak) geography was traditionally dedicated to practical definitions of regions and their potential use within the territorial administrative reforms (for an overview: see Klapka, 2019). This feature is why the practical application of the concept of region can be considered a good starting point for a broader project of the critical and reflexive history of the production of Czech (Czechoslovak) geographical knowledge. Secondly, in the current dominant geographical narrative, the definition of regions within the 1949 reform is considered an example of good geographical knowledge which had been misused by the socialist regime. Therefore, the selected example will allow me to demonstrate how the narratives of the mutual relationship between geographical knowledge and state socialism are produced. The third reason is the fact that the 1949 regional reform is updated repeatedly in current public discourse. Thus, the comparison of selected aspects of the geographical and non-geographical narratives allows a researcher to demonstrate how the present geographical interpretation is situated firmly in the broader social and historical context.

The main aim of this article is to critically reflect on current interpretations of the mutual relationship between geographical knowledge and the 1949 administrative reform. Given the scope of the topic, I will primarily focus on the issues of how current interpretations utilise three significant concepts of the study of the history of geography:

i. Time (a politics of memory);
ii. Space (spatial imaginations); and
iii. Geographical knowledge.

This approach will allow me to identify the troublesome points which relate to current interpretations and, based on my own research (Daniel, 2016, 2017), to suggest procedures which could overcome these troublesome points.

Although this article only deals with one partial case study, I will attempt some 'generalisation' in the conclusions about the significance of the three above-mentioned concepts in any research of the history of geography, i.e. I will try to propose approaches which in my opinion should contribute to the production of critical and more reflexive history of geography in the period of state socialism.

Although the title was inspired by Stuart Elden's (2013) paraphrase of the famous text by Ian Hacking (1991), regarding my approach, I was inspired by some texts by Trevor Barnes (see e.g. Barnes, 2001, 2003, 2014). Like Barnes, my aim is not to present a new coherent and internally consistent approach replacing the existing interpretations. I rather try to present briefly some selected alternative approaches and outline their potential to contribute to a better understanding of the mutual and complex interconnections of politics, space and geographical knowledge production during state socialism.

This article is part of a more extensive project focused on a critical history of the production of geographical knowledge in the period of state socialism. A corpus of relevant texts and archival materials is systematically processed. The texts which were published after 1989 dealing, at least marginally, with the 1949 administrative reform, were selected from this corpus to be used for the purposes of this article. The texts were selected in the next steps which do not only provide a factual description of the basic characteristics of the reform but strive to interpret the described facts. These texts were then processed using the Atlas.ti program. My primary focus in the analysis itself was on utilising the three above-mentioned concepts, i.e. time, space and knowledge in the interpretation of the 1949 administrative reform. I also tried to 'map' the boundaries of the sayable. For this reason, I have included non-geographic interpretations in my analysis to point out that – despite their contradictory conclusions – they are based on the same assumptions, i.e. that they are situated within the same discursive limits that are delineated by the current dominant politics of memory.

First, I will briefly assess the current state of the history of geography as a sub-discipline of Czech geography. This concise section serves as a starting point for the case study itself, focused on current interpretations of the mutual relations between geographical knowledge and the 1949 regional reform. I will present the current interpretations of the 1949 regional reform following a summary of the basic facts of the reform. Then, I will investigate the question of how the current interpretations apply the concepts of time, space and geographical knowledge. Primarily, I try to point out some questionable issues related to the current applications of these concepts. Based on this critical reflection and my own research, I will attempt to outline the possible ways of surpassing these questionable issues in the following part. In the conclusions, I will try to propose "general" approaches which, in the context of applications of these concepts, might contribute to the development of a critical and more reflexive research on the history of geography in the period of state socialism.

2. History of Czech(oslovak) geography

Two fundamental features are typical for research on the history of geography in the Czech environment. The first significant feature is the fact the history of geography is hardly practised. At present, only Jiří Martínek devotes his time to this issue in the long term and with consistency. The main subject of Martínek's interest is factually rich biographical studies of geographers (see especially Martínek, 2017; from several shorter texts, see e.g. Martínek, 2010, 2012) and encyclopaedias of Czech geographers and travellers (Martínek et al., 2006; Martínek, 2008; Martínek and Martínek, 1998). Apart from biographical texts, he is also the author of several brief overview histories of geographical institutions, which are primarily based on lists of important persons, texts, and conferences (see e.g. Jeleček et al., 2006; Jeleček and Martínek, 2007; Martínek, 2014).

The second feature follows from the character of the above-mentioned works, and it can be described as focusing on description and factuality without attempts at placing

them in a wider context and theoretical framework (for the explicit claim allegiance to theorisation, see Martínek, 2017, p. 8). My ambivalent evaluation of Martínek's approach is based on this statement. On the one hand, I truly appreciate Martínek's erudition and long-term donkey work and systemic archival work, which brings much very interesting and detailed information about the history of geography (see e.g. Martínek, 2010). On the other hand, this traditional approach is associated with questions of a more general nature about the significance and position of the history of geography within 'contemporary' geography.

Encyclopaedism may be one of the reasons why the history of geography plays only a complementary or marginal role in the contemporary Czech geographical community (cf. Livingstone, 1992a). The information from the history of the field is considered interesting, but at the same time not relevant for current geographical knowledge production. For this reason, the history of geography is given more attention only in the context of commemoration acts in the case of famous anniversaries, or in lessons where the introductory courses introduce new students to the Czech geographical canon and the famous and rich history of the field.

In my, opinion research into the Czech history of geography need not only be a source of 'outdated' historical curiosities but may also make a relevant and active contribution to current geographical debates (see e.g. Barnes, 2014; Driver, 2013). To achieve this difficult goal, however, it would be appropriate to extend the current unproblematic and primarily commemorative and canonical view (Keighren et al., 2012) of the history of the field, with approaches that emphasise the critical study of history, and which will be associated with more precise theorisation and conceptualisation of the researched topics.

Although it will be critical in some respects of the state of study of the Czech history of geography in the following text, and I will base my criticism on the concepts applied in international/Anglo-American geography, I do not follow the modernisation approach as characterised by Ulrich Best (2009). With respect to that approach, it is not my aim to point out that Czech geography is backward and must be modernised by assuming the developed Western approaches. In contrast, I consider this idea of the backwardness of Czech geography to be one of several reasons having led to the current situation.

After the end of the socialist regime, a transition narrative associated with the idea that the Czech (Czechoslovak) task is to catch up with the West became an extended and fixed part of Czech (Czechoslovak) geography (Ferenčuhová, 2012; Ouředníček, 2017). A schematic and negative representation of the period of state socialism arose within this narrative as an unnatural external deformation, which is the main reason for this backwardness, both in the case of geography and in the case of society. This situation led to the fact that one of the main topics of Czech geography was 'the post-totalitarian transformation', which was referred to as 'the rectifying transformation' (Hampl et al., 2007, p. 479). Given this orientation towards the future (catching up with the West) and a clear rejection of previous developments ('mere' developmental distortions), it was considered unnecessary to deal with the developments of geography in the period of state socialism in any way, either critically or reflexively.

Regarding the absence of a deeper theoretical dispute on this issue of Czech geography (as an exception, see Pavlínek, 2003), it is possible to observe that the history of Czech geography is still at least implicitly anchored in the transitological narrative and the period of state socialism is considered strange, unnatural, and a temporary deformation of the development of Czech geography (see e.g. Jeleček, 2004). One of the reasons is the previously mentioned fact that the history of geography is marginal in present Czech geography. Following the author's research, it would be appropriate to begin to consider the research of the history of geography in the post-war Czechoslovakia as a serious research topic, which can contribute to self-reflexion of the present state of this discipline and its wider significance in the broader social context.

3. The 1949 regional reform: Current interpretations

3.1 Basic facts on the 1949 regional reform

The territorial administrative reform of 1949, which took place soon after the communist takeover in February 1948, represented a significant transformation in the functioning and territorial distribution of Czechoslovak public administration. From the point of view of functioning, the most fundamental intervention can be described as the centralisation of state power and the abolition of self-government (Illner, 1999). Although at present this step is generally considered to be completely negative, there is no consensus in the evaluation of newly created territorial units (see below).

In terms of territorial delimitation, it represented the end of the so-called 'Austrian' model of territorial administrative distribution, which had been used in the Bohemian lands with certain modifications since the establishment of modern public administration in the mid-19th century. At the regional level, discussed in more detail in this text, historical lands were abolished as territorial administrative units and a regional model of public administration was introduced in their place (Daniel, 2013, see Fig. 1).

Another territorial administrative reform occurred only eleven years later, in 1960. As part of this reform, the regional establishment was left at the regional level, but the model of the so-called medium-sized regions was replaced by the model of large regions (Střída, 1960a, 1960b, 1960c). The last regional reform was carried out after the end of the communist regime in 1989. The questions whether to keep the regional model or to renew lands as territorially administrative units was discussed at the beginning of the 1990s.[1] Finally, the medium-size region was born in 2000 (Yoder, 2003).

3.2 The 'Moravian' and the 'geographical' narrative

The 1949 reform represents a topic in Czech public debate which is still alive. As has been mentioned, the reform dissolved the historic lands as territorial administrative units and replaced them with the regional model, which is still used at present. It is quite regularly revived in the Czech public space for this reason, whether it be the periodically reoccurring debates on (non)efficiency of the regional establishment (see e.g. Babiš, 2017; Český rozhlas, 28.12.2017) or the restoration of historic lands – primarily Moravia – as territorial administrative units (see e.g. iDNES.cz, 11.02.2019).

[1] This debate is mostly linked to the so-called Moravist movement, whose aim was to restore Moravia as a territorial administrative unit (for a basic overview, see e.g. Hloušek 2015).

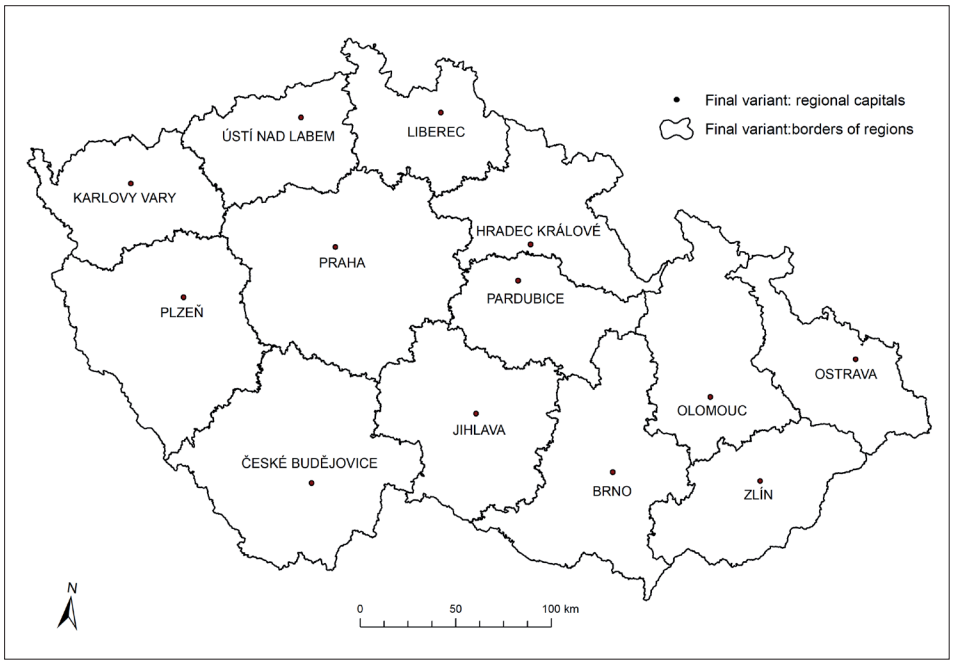


Fig. 1: 1949 Regions, as approved by Regional Act 280/1948
Source: Daniel (2013)

It is possible to identify two main antagonistic interpretations from the few academic texts which attempt at more than this brief factual description (Daniel, 2017, pp. 47–52). The first interpretation is completely negative. The primary reason of such an evaluation is the criticism of the abolition of the historical countries as territorial administrative units and their replacement with regions. Because the abolition of Moravia as a historical land is most often criticised, it is possible to simply label this narrative as 'Moravian'. Probably the most significant representative of this narrative might be historian Jiří Pernes (see e.g. Pernes, 1996, 2010).

On the other hand, the second narrative considers regions to be very well-defined units. This interpretation can be simply marked as 'geographical' regarding its spread in the geographical community. The dominant representation of this relationship can be reconstructed based on texts by Tomáš Burda, who specialises in the historical geography of territorial administrative distribution. He has a similar position in this field as Jiří Martínek in the history of geography: he is the only geographer who has consistently and for a long time dealt with this topic (see e.g. Burda, 2010, 2016). Burda is also the author of map sheets showing the development of administrative distributions in several representative and award-winning atlases (Burda and Jeleček, 2009; Burda and Jílková, 2019), and the official exhibition of the development of territorial administrative distributions, organised by the Ministry of the Interior on the occasion of the centenary of the founding of Czechoslovakia (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, 2018). His interpretation can therefore be considered authoritative in geography and, based on my experience, I dare say that it is relatively widespread (see e.g. Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, 2016).

As has been suggested above, these two interpretations are at directly opposite ends in terms of evaluating the reform. It is possible at the same time, however, which is important considering the focus of this text, to state that their production shows several shared features. If we utilise the dictionary of Livingstone (1992b), then presentism is typical for both narratives. The primary interest is not connected to placing the reform into a broader time-space context of its origin. On the contrary, the reform is interpreted from the view of how the authors evaluated our present time. The result is a simple dichotomous evaluation of good/bad regions following the author's evaluation of the present situation. If the evaluation of the present time is positive, then the 1949 reform is also evaluated positively (see e.g. Burda, 2010), and vice versa (see e.g. iDNES.cz, 11.02.2019). This 'Whig' approach suggests that the narrated story is the only correct one, the only possible one. Therefore, the conclusions are in the form of self-evident truths: i.e. it is impossible to dispute them or to present arguments to support them (for this style of narration see e.g. Burda, 2014, p. 106; Pernes, 1996, p. 179). It is important from the view of the study of the history of Geography that moral judgements used in both narratives relate to the production of spatial and historical imaginaries which predetermine what is good and what is bad.

3.3 The politics of memory I: From the communist coup…

At first sight, the issue of setting the reform in a timeframe seems relatively simple and straightforward. The opposite is true, however. The reason, from the author´s perspective, is the fact that both interpretations create historical imaginaries that can be placed in a broader stream of the politics of memory (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014). This politics of memory was formed in public discourse gradually after 1989 and its core is 'dealing with the communist past', i.e. the evaluation of the period of the communist regime (1948 to 1989) and its influence on the current development of Czech society (see e.g. Kopeček, 2013, 2021).

The 1949 regional reform originated soon after the communist coup of February 1948. This fact is essential for both described interpretations. February 1948 as a significant neuralgic point of Czechoslovak political history, became the key prism through which this reform is viewed. The interpretation of the degree of influence of

February 1948 – more generally the degree of influence of (communist) politics – on various aspects of the reform has a significant impact on value judgements of the reform.

The relationship with February 1948 within the 'Moravian' narrative is described in a clear, simple, and unambiguous manner. The reform is thus considered a direct consequence of the communist coup:

> 'February 1948 gave the Communists a free hand: in order to successfully cripple Czechoslovakia, they had to destroy Moravia and Silesia as an independent administrative and self-governing unit…' (Pernes, 1996, p. 174).

This interpretation shows it as a purely political act connected with solidifying the power of the new totalitarian regime.

The situation is rather more complicated from the view of the 'geographical' narrative. Only a very small number of texts were written after 1989 that would deal more explicitly with the history of the Czech (Czechoslovak) geography in the second half of the 20th century (Jeleček, 2004; Jeleček et al., 2006; Jeleček and Martínek, 2007; Martínek, 2014; Semotanová, 2019). All these texts share two key features with respect to our theme. The first one is the creation of clear limited periods in the development of geography, where the individual milestones of the development of the discipline are equated with the significant milestones of political history (especially 1945, 1948 and 1989).

The second one is the evaluation of the development of geography in the period of state socialism. This development is described mostly from the view of the unilateral negative influence of the communist ideology – whatever this term is supposed to mean – on the development of geography (explicitly, see Martínek, 2014, pp. 25–27). In this evaluation, the idea of two separate and completely opposite entities in terms of their values is created, geography on the one hand and communist ideology on the other. This narrative evokes the idea that in the period of state socialism, pure, objective, scientific and apolitical geography was tainted by foreign and unnatural communist ideology. From this point of view, the period of state socialism is a mere deformation or anomaly of the linear development of geography, and after the end of the communist dictatorship, geography could return to its pure, non-ideological form (see e.g. Jeleček, 2004).

Since the regional reform of 1949 is evaluated very positively, 'geographer' interpretations come into conflict with the above-mentioned schematic division into stretches of time of the development of geography, which is based on the use of milestones in political history. The reform took place only after the communist coup, thus, according to this simplistic model of interpretation, it should be evaluated negatively. This discrepancy is resolved in a simple, as well as also a simplistic way. In this interpretation, reform originated before the Second World War, when important geographers, especially Jaromír Korčák, i.e. one of the most important Czech (Czechoslovak) geographers (see e.g. Imre and Novotný, 2016), participated in its preparation (Burda, 2010, 2012, 2014; Burda and Jeleček, 2009). Its implementation was postponed due to the Nazi occupation until the post-war period, and as the result of political developments, it was implemented only after the communist coup (see e.g. Burda, 2010). Therefore, the Communists had hardly any share in this 'good' definition of the regions, as it was based on the 'good', i.e. apolitical, and professional pre-war knowledge. Thus, in the 'geographer' interpretation, this was not a communist reform, but one used/abused by communists (Burda, 2012, p. 35).

3.4 Spatial imaginaries I: From eternal container…

I understand the 'stories and ways of talking about places and spaces that transcend language as embodied performances by people in the material world' (Watkins, 2015, p. 509) as spatial imaginaries. It is possible to state from this point of view that both narratives contain the significant idea that there are natural areal units, which are good, and unnatural ones, which are bad. Using these spatial imaginaries – similarly to time – plays an important part in the moral evaluation of the 1949 regional reform.

The only natural areal unit is Moravia in the case of the 'Moravian' narrative, which is seen as the result of a thousand years of historical development (see e.g. Pernes, 2010). In extreme cases, territorial, legal, or even national continuity is derived from the so-called Great Moravia, a state unit from the early Middle Ages (see e.g. Hoskovec, 2013). According to this interpretation, the natural, and therefore correct, development was disrupted within the framework of the 1949 regional reform. The natural unit was replaced with an artificial political construct. This fact leads to an unequivocal moral rejection of the reform, which can be documented by the explicit statement of Jiří Pernes (1996, p. 179):

> 'On the first of January 1949, Moravia and Silesia really disappeared from the map of Europe after a thousand years of existence and were replaced by a number of non-natural bastardly malformations called regions.'

According to Pernes (1996, 2010), proof of this unnaturalness is the fact that these regions lasted only eleven years and were replaced by other – larger – regions in 1960. Thus, in his opinion, even the communists realised that the created regions 'lacked the preconditions for a meaningful existence' (Pernes, 2010, p. 401). The injustice was not remedied even in democratic conditions, when Moravia was not restored as a territorial administrative unit, according to the supporters of this interpretation. On the contrary, the regional model was 'only' modified, so the current situation is also assessed very negatively (see e.g. iDNES.cz, 11.02.2019).

The 'geographical' interpretation is based on the belief in the existence of a universal and natural linear developmental trajectory of territorial distribution. This belief is based on a somewhat unhistorical and teleological idea that objectively there is only one correct regional distribution of the territory (see Burda, 2014, p. 106). If a reform respected the trajectory of the natural development, it is well defined. According to Burda (2010, 2014), it is possible to utilise the positive evaluation for the regional reform of 1949 and for the current definition of the regions of 2000. This evaluation is based on the visual similarity of the course of regional borders and the fact that both variations contain the same number of regions and the same regional capitals (Burda, 2010). On the contrary, the 'bad' definition is associated with the reform of 1960, which, according to Burda, can be described as a 'kind of developmental disorder' (Burda, 2014, p. 106).

Both narratives then follow from the imagery of a linear development of natural and eternal regions which may be interrupted unnaturally because of wrong political decisions (the 1960 reform in the case of a 'geographical' narrative, the 1949 reform in the case of the 'Moravian' narrative). Such a deformation does not impact the existence of these natural regions, however. It only makes it impossible to utilise them in the administrative structure of a state. Therefore, the change is not irreversible. On the contrary, a correction may occur, as was the case of the 2000 reform

for the supporters of the 'geographical' narrative (see e.g. Burda, 2016, p. 12), or it might still be expected, as is the case of the Moravian narrative (see e.g. Hoskovec, 2013). After a correction, the development is back at its natural developmental trajectory that was neglected because of the deformation and its impact. Thus, regions have the character of stable units which exist independent of the development and social changes. They form a framework for human activities, whether be it good if the framework is respected, or bad if an unnatural deformation occurs.

3.5 Expert knowledge I: From eternal and linear geographical knowledge...

As regards the relation between geographical knowledge and reform, the situation in the 'Moravian' narrative is relatively simple. As has been mentioned above, the reform is primarily interpreted by its supporters as a product of the communist ideology (see e.g. Pernes, 1996).The regional delimitation is considered an act of political licence for this reason, and as such, the role of expert knowledge in regional delimitation is ignored.

The opposite situation prevails in the case of the 'geographical' narrative, where, on the contrary, the use of geographical knowledge is given a fundamental role. As mentioned above, administrative regions are considered a pure product of geographical knowledge that has been abused by the communist regime. Here, I will focus more closely on two aspects of this approach to geographical knowledge. Firstly, on what is considered 'good' geographical knowledge. Then, on the issue of linearity of production and reception of geographical knowledge.

The assessment saying that the 1949 delimitation of regions was 'good', is based on two basic arguments. As has been suggested above, the first one is the similarity to the present regions which are 'well' delimited. For example, Burda (2010, p. 773) states in his assessment of the 1949 reform that the regions were well delimited, and that this fact was confirmed 'after 2000, when the present regional structure basically copies the 1949–1960 delimitation'. As evidence of this 'good' delimitation, the map depicting a similar course of regional borders of 1949 and 200 is repeatedly used (see Burda, 2010, 2014; Burda and Jeleček, 2009: see Fig. 2).

This argument is troublesome for at least two reasons from the point of view of the history of production of geographical knowledge. It simplifies the complex issues of the regional concept only in its material cartographic representation. That is, it does what was in my opinion the most significant feature of post-war geographical knowledge production: it decontextualises and deconceptualises the regional concept (see below). It views the region only as borders delimited on a map. Thus, it ignores theoretical and methodological solutions used in constructing the borders, as well as the time-space context of their origin. If we want to interconnect the study of the history of geographical knowledge and the history of territorial administrative structure, I believe that it is necessary to focus primarily on conceptualisation of the region which was utilised within the reform and not on secondary phenomena, such as the delimitation of boarders.

At the same time, it is not possible to focus only on the resulting reform, but it is necessary to open the 'black box' (Latour, 1987), to put it simply, not to study the result but to focus on the process of origin. Delimiting the final form of regions cannot be seen as a straightforward process (Daniel, 2013). The approved form of regions is created in a process of very complicated negotiations with the participation of several heterogenous participants with often completely opposed interests. From this view, the resulting form of the regions may be considered a 'messy contingency' (Livingstone, 1992b) and not a rational or pure product of geographical and apolitical knowledge.

The second supporting argument in evaluating the 'good' regions is the influence of geographers on their definition. In the case of 'good' regions (1949 and 1960), there is a repeated explicit emphasis on the significant proportion of their delimitation by geographers (Burda, 2010, 2012, 2014). On the other hand, in the case of 'bad' regions (1960), the participation of geographers is not mentioned in the least. There are again two troublesome issues.

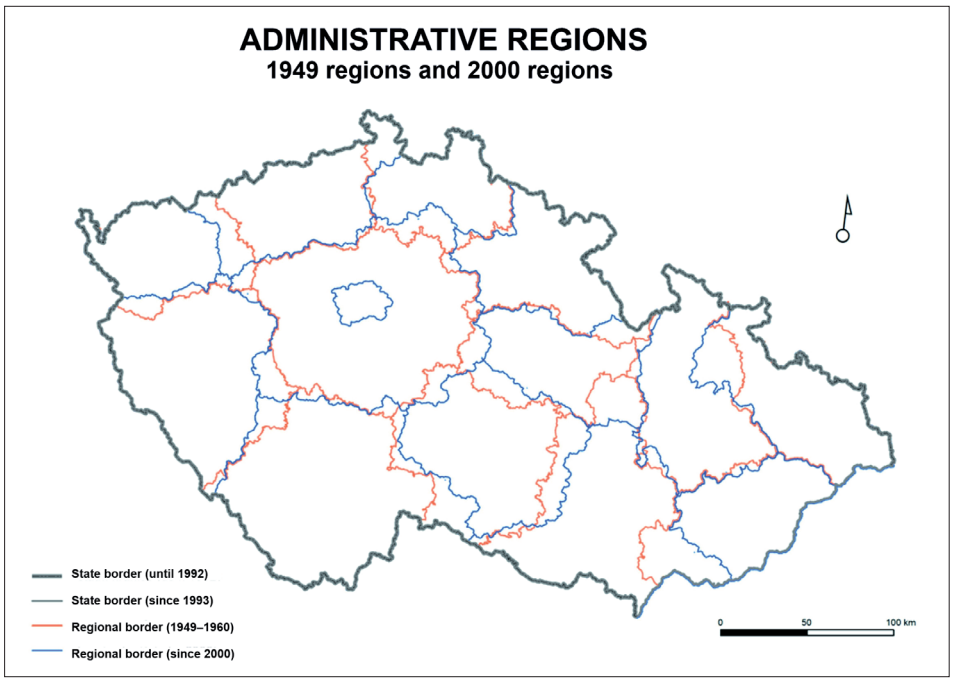


Fig. 2: Comparison of the delimitation of boarders of the 1949 regions and 2000 regions
Source: Burda (2014)

On the one hand, based on the studied materials, I believe that, in fact, the situation was the opposite to that emphasised in the geographical narrative. In the case of the 1949 regions, the influence of geographers was only mediated (see below). On the other hand, the expert 1960 delimitation of regions was fully executed by geographers (see Střída, 1960a, 1960b, 1960c). The second troublesome issue is connected to the character of geographical knowledge and the role of geographers in its 'uncovering'. The applied approach does not consider the changes in geography and considers geographical knowledge as static and permanently valid. It is interconnected in this sense with the above-mentioned spatial imaginaries about the existence of one correct and eternal regional structure. At least implicitly, it evokes the idea of geographers as the only people who can discover the hidden 'truth', embodied in a metaphysical and eternal regional structure that awaits being (re)discovered by geographers. (cf. Barnes, 2003).

The narrative of well-defined 1949 regions is based on the idea of a linear development of geographical knowledge. As has been mentioned, according to the supporters of the 'geographical' narrative, this 'good' definition was created by geographers – primarily Jaromír Korčák – before the war and subsequently used/abused by the communists in the post-war period. In the context of my research, I can repeat that I consider this version of the story of the 1949 reform to be simplistic and ahistorical. I do not make this statement to deny the influence of Korčák's (1934) regionalisation on the production of geographical knowledge in the post-war period. But I do consider the idea of a problem-free linear reception of pre-war knowledge in the post-war period to be simplistic.

The Second World War cannot in any case be considered a mere 'delay' after which the development followed linearly from the pre-war development. On the other hand, post-war development was typical for its attempts at distancing from the previous development (Brenner, 2015), which was related to the project of building a new society and new space (Daniel, 2016, see bellow). Following the author's research, it is necessary to read the reception of Korčák's regionalisation in the post-war period in this context. The experts dealing with the issues of region in the post-war period (1945 to 1949) agreed on the fact that Korčák's regionalisation represents the most significant work in this issue (see e.g. Martin, 1946a; Okrouhlý, 1947b; Šulc, 1946). At the same time, they assessed it strictly in the context of the project of building a new society and space. Regarding the fundamental significance of the planning for this project, Korčák's regionalisation was assessed primarily from the view of its suitability for the purposes of planning, whether positive (Šulc, 1946), or negative (Martin, 1946a; Řípa, 1948).

4. The 1949 regional reform: alternative approaches

4.1 The politics of memory II: …to building a new society

I would like to draw attention to two questionable issues of the current evaluation of the mutual relation of geographical knowledge and the 1949 regional reform from the viewpoint of temporality. Firstly, to complicate the idea of a linear development and its temporary deformations caused by the turns in political history (see below). Secondly, to complicate the time frame of the reform and its relation to February 1948. From the view of the focus of my interest, i.e. the mutual relation between the reform and geographical knowledge, the key period is neither the period after February 1948, as supposed in the first approach, not the pre-war period, as the second approach emphasises.

On the contrary, based on the studied sources, I can determine that from the author´s perspective it is necessary to focus the primary attention on the period 1945 to 1949. The reason is the fact that the expert proposal of regionalisation – the so-called ÚRO (Ústřední rada odborů: Central Council of Trade Unions) regionalisation – which was used to finalise the regional delimitations originated in 1946 in the context of the preparations of the two-year economic plan (Martin, 1946b; also see Daniel, 2016). If we are interested in the relationship between the regional reform and geographical knowledge, then in my opinion it is necessary to analyse how the concept of the region was conceptualised at the time of this expert proposal (for more details, see Daniel, 2017).

Furthermore – and above all – based on situating regionalisation in the contemporary space-time context, it is appropriate not to view the regional reform as a one-off act. On the contrary, I consider it more expedient to interpret it as an integral part of a larger project of state space transformation (Brenner and Elden, 2009), which was connected to the transformation of Czechoslovak society after the Second World War (see below). The ÚRO regionalisation arose for the purposes of the two-year plan and its aim was to delimit the regions which could be used for the purposes of regional planning (Okrouhlý, 1947a, 1947b, 1947c). Planning had a fundamental significance in the post-war times. It was considered a tool which would help to achieve the creation of a new and better socialist society (see e.g. Frejka, 1946). The ÚRO regionalisation was thus seen as an active tool of the creation of a new society. The unity between the planning and administrative regions was achieved using this regionalisation as a foundation for the final delimitation of regions within the 1949 reform, which was considered an important step in building the new society (see e.g. Martin, 1946b; Okrouhlý, 1947b).

The project of transformation of the society and space was not launched by February 1948 but had begun immediately after the end of World War II and continued even after the communist coup (Daniel, 2017). I do not mean to challenge the significance of the communist coup in the resulting form of the reform by this statement. This influence is indisputable and had a significant impact on the functioning of public administration. My intention is rather to expand our understanding of what is labelled as 'political' in the context of the 1949 reform. In my opinion, it is desirable to consider the very delimitation of regions as a political project that was to be used for a targetted transformation of the society and space. Thus, the regional reform was not only to end the old order connected with the then model (dissolution of lands) and functioning (dissolution of self-government and introduction of centralisation) of the territorial administrative structure, it was also supposed to contribute actively to the creation of the new space and new society using regional planning.

4.2 Spatial imaginaries II: …to politics of space

From my perspective, it would be appropriate to look beyond the idea of space as a static container which creates a passive stage of human history in the study of the mutual relation between politics, space and the geographical knowledge in post-war Czechoslovakia. On the contrary, I find it useful to begin to see space (and the region) as an active factor that is evolving and mutually interacting with the society.

Lefebvre's concept of state space (Lefebvre, 2009b, see also Brenner et al., 2003; Brenner and Elden, 2009; Elden, 2004) may seem to be one of the appropriate tools to analyse the mutual relation between space and society. This approach understands the state as 'dynamically evolving spatial entities that continually mould and reshape the geographies of the very social relations they aspire to regulate, control, and/or restructure' (Brenner et al., 2003, p. 11). Thus, the state is not only passively located in space, but it also represents one of the important tools in its attempts at controlling the social relationships (Brenner, 1997). From this point of view, the delimitation of regions can be considered part of a broader project of the politics of space (Lefebvre, 2009a), the aim of which was to transform the state space and create a new – socialist – society (for more details see Daniel, 2017).

Thus, a space in the post-war period did not represent 'a passive stage', but in contrast, it played an active part in the project of the transformation of the society. It may be stated in simple terms that the transformation of space was seen as a necessary condition for a successful transformation of the society. On the discourse level, the transformation of the state space followed from the notion that the current, i.e. the 'wrong', 'unjust' and 'chaotic' space often labelled as the detrimental heritage of capitalism, had to be replaced with the new, i.e. the 'good', 'just' and 'completely rational' socialist space (Daniel, 2017). Planning was assigned the key role in this process, like the attempts at transforming society. This fact had a significant impact on the conceptualisation of regions. A region in the post-war era was assessed only through the limited views of regional planning. A 'good' region was only that which would conform to the contemporary opinions of planning purposes (Okrouhlý, 1948; see also Daniel, 2017).

These facts are in my opinion important for considering the history of geographical knowledge in the period of state socialism. Expert knowledge played an irreplaceable and vital role. Experts produced the representation of the correct space subsequently applied in political practice. This statement is not supposed, however, to evoke the idea that the originally apolitical knowledge was subsequently abused to achieve political aims. In contrast, it is beneficial to understand the process itself of production of such a kind of expert knowledge as a political project.

Another issue I would like to question here is the simplifying evaluation whether the administrative regions are delimited 'well' or 'wrongly'. It may be said that there is no ideal administrative delimitation which could earn a positive evaluation from all the interested actors, and which would maintain its 'goodness' for eternity. It always depends on who, when, for what reason and what purposes are assessed in the given administrative regions.

From the perspective of geographical knowledge, it is important to assume that each regional administrative division is anchored in the dominant politics of space which was applied at the time of its formation. If we accept this assumption, we can avoid simplifying and ahistorical assessments. A fitting example is the question why quite shortly after the 1949 reform, the new 1960 reform was executed. The 1960 reform is not evidence of the fact that the 1949 regions were wrong as is proclaimed in the case of the Moravian narrative (Pernes, 1996). And the view of the 'geographical' narrative which considers the 1960 reform an act of replacing the 'good' non-communist regions with the 'wrong' communist regions is just as simplifying.

Based on the studied sources, I dare claim that the time closeness of both reforms was caused by a significant change in the politics of space. The 1949 reform resulted from the politics of space which was applied approximately between the end of the war and the turn of the 1940s and 1950s (Daniel, 2016). The emphasis within this politics of space was on the equalisation of economic conditions in the whole country (see e.g. Okrouhlý, 1948). Expert regionalisation, which became expert foundation for the 1949 regional division, was created and evaluated for this purpose (Okrouhlý, 1947a, 1947b, 1947c). In contrast, the 1960 regions resulted from the politics of space, which was formed, following a brief interlude of the Stalinist industrialisation, in the mid-1950s. This politics built upon completely different assumptions and was significantly impacted by the Soviet concept of economic rayons (Žůrek, 1956). Its aim was to form complex and efficient economic regions. The construction of regionalisation, which became the model for the 1960 regional division, was submitted to this aim (Střída, 1960a).

4.3 Expert knowledge II: …to materialisation of knowledge

In terms of understanding the production and reception of geographical knowledge in post-war Czechoslovakia, it is, following the author's research, necessary to focus in more detail on the issue of materialisation of geographical knowledge. The region of the post-war period was conceptualised as a fully practical tool of regional planning. Therefore, the regional concept was often simplified and used primarily in its materialised form, i.e. as a map where lines depicted the borders of the delimited regions. I believe, with respect to this fact, that it is appropriate not to perceive the concept of a region only in the traditional way, i.e. in the abstract and conceptual sense, but also to emphasise the material artefacts of regional visualisation and representation.

For this reason, it may be useful to apply the relation approaches connected with the so-called material turn in geography for the purposes of study of the history of post-war Czechoslovak geography (c.f. Anderson and Wylie, 2009), whether be it the actor-network theory (ANT) or assemblage thinking. I do not try to accomplish a more detailed analysis in this article. I will only attempt at outlining the application of these relational approaches and how they may help us understand better the complex process of the reception of pre-war geographical knowledge in post-war Czechoslovakia.

ANT – among others – emphasises the significance of the material objects in producing expert knowledge (Latour, 1986, 1987, 1999). Material objects, such as maps, books, data, machinery, etc. serve as an immutable mobile (Latour, 1987; see also Law and Mol, 2001) and may pass from one set of time-space coordinates through to others, hence they can be utilised in the production of knowledge outside of the time-space coordinates of their origin. This motion is, however, connected with the translation process during which a new network is enacted (Latour, 1987; Law, 2006, 2009). Although the change may not be visible at first sight, as stated by Law (2006, p. 144), the translation "also implies betrayal…it is both about making equivalent, and about shifting".

Although it looked visually the same in the map representation, Korčák's regionalisation in 1934 is not the same as Korčák's regionalisation in 1946. For Korčák (1933, 1934, 1936), the region was primarily a theoretical concept following from his theory of nation (Korčák, 1931). The application of regionalisation itself for the purposes

of planning contradicted his theoretical principles. Korčák (1934, p. 422) understood region deterministically as a natural area created during a thousand-year development and he himself stood unequivocally against teleological understanding of 'region' as used for planning purposes in inter-war USSR.

Furthermore, the main aim, which was in the post-war period completely practical, was to create appropriate planning regions. Therefore, all theoretical assumptions, that were fundamental for Korčák, were side-lined and all the attention was devoted only to the 'practical' aspects of his concept, i.e. most of all the cartographic representation of delimited regions or their (in)appropriate size (see e.g. Martin, 1946a; Řípa, 1948, see also Fig. 3). We can identify the above-mentioned 'betrayal', which occurred during the translation of Korčák's regionalisation to the post-war network of production of expert knowledge. The post-war practical turn led to the materialisation of the regional concept. Korčák's theoretical concept was 'de-conceptualised', it was equated with the material cartographic representation of Korčák's regionalisation.

In my opinion, it was this materialisation which allowed the positive reception of Korčák's regionalisation in the post-war period. The reason is the fact that 'de-conceptualisation' and the materialisation connected with it, also led to 'de-contextualisation'. The simplified understanding of a region as 'lines on the map' allowed Korčák's regionalisation to get rid of the context of its origin and to travel freely between various, commonly antagonistic, conceptualisations of the region in various time-space coordinates.

Other approaches, apart from ANT, may be useful in that they could emphasise other aspects of this complex process. In this view, it is possible to mention assemblage thinking (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), which is also connected in geography with renewed interest in materialism. If I tried above to suggest that ANT might help better understanding of the reception of geographical knowledge in various time-space coordinates, then assemblage thinking may be useful for example in the attempts at making the discrepancy between discursive and non-discursive practices a topic to discuss. One of the key issues which assemblage thinking deals with is the relation between the discursive (form of expression) and non-discursive (form of content) elements. Although 'the expressive dimension always comes first' (Buchanan, 2021, pp. 77–79), Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 502) emphasise that the expression does not determine the content; on the contrary, both formalisations remain autonomous.

One of the main features of post-war discourses was the rejection of pre-war development (see e.g. Abrams, 2005; Brenner, 2015). Geography was also considered descriptive in the post-war period, and as such a truly useless discipline for the needs of the project of building the new society and new space (Daniel, 2016, 2017). Despite this fact, the cartographic presentation of Korčák's regionalisation – a product of pre-war (= 'bad') geographical (= 'useless and descriptive') knowledge – was used as one of the sources for an expert proposal of the planning regions (Okrouhlý, 1947b), which were applied as a source for the final 1949 delimitation of regions (Daniel, 2017). This paradox, in my opinion, proves the intricacy and complexity of the production and reception of geographical knowledge in the post-war period.

8. Conclusions

I have used the example of the 1949 regional reform to try to demonstrate the specific issues which are connected with the study of history of the production of geographical knowledge during the period of state socialism. I also attempted at demonstrating the possibilities which might facilitate a better understanding of this specific and complex issue using brief examples. Even though, from the view of the international production I have been acquainted with, I only focused on the Czech (Czechoslovak) context, a similar situation exists in other Central European countries (for more on the approach to Hungarian geography, see Győri and Gyuris, 2013, 2015; Gyuris and Győri, 2013; on a criticism of this approach, see Ginelli, 2018). It is possible to state from this point of view that study of the history of geographical knowledge production in the inter-war period in the Central European countries is still not the subject of serious critical and reflexive research interest.



Fig. 3: Comparison of the delimitation of borders of the regionalisation of ÚRO, Korčák regions and electoral regions Source: Řípa (1948)

The study of the history of geographical knowledge production in the period of state socialism may not serve only as a collection of oddities, but if practised as a mapping of the present (Elden, 2001), it may provide essential information for understanding the current state of national geographies in the region of our interest. If, however, it is supposed to fulfil this purpose, it is necessary to approach the study of history critically, to reject the non-problematic understanding of individual concepts such as space, region, time, and geographical knowledge, and to increase sensitivity towards the used sources.

From the point of view of the issue of time within research on the history of the production of geographical knowledge, it is desirable that the period of state socialism ceases to be regarded as an artificial deformation of the linear development of geographical knowledge, after the end of which there was a return to the natural development trajectory. In other words, it would be appropriate to stop seeing the development in the period of state socialism as the period in which the apolitical and purely scientific geography was colonised by a foreign communist ideology (cf. Győri and Gyuris, 2013), but in contrast, to approach it as an integral part of a complicated and mostly non-black-and-white and ambiguous development of the Czech (Czechoslovak) geographical knowledge. Accepting this approach, in the study of history of geographical knowledge, it is necessary not to consider the period of state socialism a unified, internally coherent time unit limited by the clearly defined milestones of the history of politics (1948 and 1989). In contrast, it is vital to approach the issue of continuity and transformation sensitively, both in the relation to the development in the previous and the following periods and within state socialism itself.

A space represents another key geographical concept that is understood within the current study of the history of geographical knowledge in the period of state socialism without questions and no great attention is paid to its conceptualisation. If we want to understand better the complicated and multi-layered relationship between geographical knowledge and state socialism, it is necessary to stop seeing space as a static container and to start perceiving it as one of the fundamental actors of the described stories. Attributing a meaning and recognising the active role of space in the project of building a new socialist society is important from the view of researching the history of geography in the period of state socialism for at least two reasons. Firstly, it will show the significance of geographical knowledge, which had a great impact on the production and transformation of state space, both on the discourse and material level. It is possible to place geographical knowledge from this point of view in the wider context of expert knowledge, which earned quite a large importance within the project of building a socialist society and within socialist governance (on the concept of so-called technocratic socialism, see e.g. Sommer, 2019). Secondly, this fact is important from the view of assessment of the mutual relationship between politics and geographical knowledge. Geographical knowledge was not apolitical. In contrast, it was closely connected to politics through the wider project of the production and transformation of space.

The third important question I focused on from the view of approaching the history of geographical knowledge in the period of state socialism is the conceptualisation of knowledge itself. It is in my opinion necessary to repeatedly reject the unquestionable understanding of the production, circulation, and reception of knowledge as a simple linear process in which knowledge is discovered and subsequently spread through time-space unchanged. In contrast, following the author's research, it is necessary to approach the process of production, circulation and reception of geographical knowledge with appropriate sensitivity and an effort to uncover various levels of this complicated multi-layered process. In this regard, it is appropriate – as I tried to point out in the reception of pre-war knowledge – not to understand geographical knowledge in a traditional way, i.e. only in an abstract and conceptual sense, but to emphasise wider social and material practices.

I believe that a more sensitive conceptualisation of the above-discussed concepts in the study of the production of geographical knowledge may contribute to rethinking the study of the history of geography in the period of state socialism. At the same time, it is necessary to state that my position is modest and not offensive to different opinions. I strive to contribute to the history of geography to become a more inclusive space of open and reflexive discussion (Keighren, 2018). If I appear to be critical to some conclusions of my colleagues, it does not mean that I assert my approaches as the only correct ones. It should not be the aim of this discussion to replace one dominant approach with another one, as dominant. As Livingstone (2019, p. 462) emphasises, 'living traditions – as opposed to moribund ones – are dialogical rather than doctrinaire'.

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