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## THE SILESIAN IDENTITY OUTSIDE OF POLAND

### 1. The Silesian part of the Czech territory

Silesia is an important region of modern south-western Poland, but it does not belong to Poland entirely. It is a typically border region, which for centuries remained continuously under the Polish, Czech, Austrian and German supremacy. It was populated from the Middle Ages predominantly by the Germans, though its ethnic structure was never homogenous. The southernmost margin of this area belongs to Czechia (4,423 sq km = 1,708 sq mi, approximately 10% of the whole area), while the westernmost part of this territory belongs to Germany (only 2–3% of the whole area).<sup>1</sup> The Czech Silesia is almost the same area as former Austrian Silesia (1742–1918). The German bit of the land is the relict of former German Silesia (which existed at the same time as Austrian Silesia). This paper deals with the Silesian identity in the Czech part of Silesia. The identity is considered not in a political sense as national identity [Smith, 1993, 227], but also as regional identity [Vencálek, 1998, 207].

The Austrian Silesia consisted of two different parts. The former Opavia Duchy with fragments of counties of Krnov (Jägerndorf) and Nisa (Neisse) was situated in the west and it was populated predominantly by the Germans till 1945, like the German Silesia at that time. The former Teschen Duchy was situated in the east and it was populated predominantly by the Poles [for more details see Hannan, 1996]. The Czech population increased significantly after incorporating a substan-

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<sup>1</sup>The Silesian area means the area of former Austrian Silesia divided in 1742 between Austria and Germany (including a part of Lusatia incorporated in 1815) within the administrative borders valid at least till World War II.

tial part of former Austrian Silesia by Czechoslovakia in 1918. The main population change was connected with the expelling of the German Silesians to Germany after World War II (35% of the population residing in the Czechoslovak Silesia before the war). New immigrants from the Czech and Slovak interior replaced the German population. A significant portion of the today's inhabitants of the Czech Silesia consists of immigrants or immigrants' descendants. Native Silesians are a minority in Silesia not only due to the war consequences, but also as a result of intensive development of heavy industry connected with a huge immigration wave. The eastern part of Czech Silesia is the most industrialised area of the Czech Republic with coal mines, ironworks and heavy industry in general.

A specific historical destiny of Silesia evoked a specific feeling of identity among its native inhabitants. There was not a complex identity of the national type, but it was only a territorial identity, a component of a higher national identity. The Silesians, having mostly territorial identity, were hard to classify from the national or ethnic point of view. They have been labelled all the time during the censuses as German, Polish or Czech, contrary to their own identifications as the German Silesians, the Polish Silesians and the Czech Silesians or as the Silesians only. Their identity – Silesianness – is hard to define (see difficulty defining the Germanness by Diana Forsythe) [Eriksen, 1993, 179]. The Silesian territorial identity had never been supported by the other identity components as a common language and religion. A number of Silesians speak their own dialects. The most specific Silesian dialect is typical of the Polish Silesians. Their dialect is basically Polish, but it is influenced by Czech and partly also by the German language. Because the Czech and German Silesians did not speak specific "Silesian" dialects, the Polish Silesians seem to be the most original component of the Silesian population. (For more details on Polish Silesians in the former Duchy of Teschen see Siwek, 1992, 1995 and Hannan, 1996.) The Silesians have been, since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, religiously divided into Roman Catholics and Lutheran Protestants in all the three ethnic components: German, Polish and Czech. So the Silesian territorial identity of Silesian people was based from the past until the recent time only on the specific history and administrative status of this region. The inhabitants of this province could still identify themselves as Silesians regardless of their language [Hannan, 1996, 280].

Newly established Czechoslovakia in 1918 gained the territory of Austrian Silesia and renamed it to Silesia only (unofficial Czechoslovak Silesia) in 1918. Several years later, in 1927, the Czechoslovak government connected Silesia with Moravia to form the Moravian-Silesian

Province. The Silesian border survived as the district border till 1949. During the communist rule Silesia's name disappeared from the administrative map of Czechoslovakia. The Czech Silesia became till 1990 a part of the North Moravia Region, with its capital in Ostrava, the most industrialised Czechoslovak city with heavy industry. After the collapse of communism in 1989 and splitting of Czechoslovakia in 1993 a new administrative division of the Czechia was adopted in 2000. Almost the whole of Czech Silesia is now a part of Moravian-Silesian Region with the capital of Ostrava. 69% of its area is originally the historical Silesian territory and 31% of its area belongs to the historical Moravian territory. The small rest of the Czech Silesia (former district of Jeseník) belongs to Olomouc Region with the capital of Olomouc.

## **2. The Czech Silesians by the censuses in 1991 and 2001**

Nationality in the Central and Eastern Europe has not meant citizenship. This term means an ethnic or cultural identity. In some cases the regional identity can be considered to be nationality in this part of Europe. The Silesian identity is a typical regional identity that is stronger than nationality in political meanings among some Silesians. These people declared themselves as Silesians in the Czech Silesia during Czechoslovak censuses between the World Wars. 47,314 Silesians were counted during the first Czechoslovak census in 1921 (their "ethnic" orientations were: 24,299 Czechoslovak, 21,607 Polish and 1,408 German). In the second Czechoslovak census in 1930 the number of Silesians diminished to 24,697 [Gawrecki, 1992, 85]. In both cases the Silesians were attached to Czechoslovaks, Poles and Germans in the final results of censuses.

When the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939, they organized a quasi census in the area annexed to Germany. This action was called "fingerabdruck" (finger-print) and its circumstances were not regular. The Nazis preferred a pure group of inhabitants as they intended to publicise the structure of local people as scattered into many relatively small different groups. So they preferred the Silesians in Silesia, the Kashubs in Pommerania, the Goralen (the Highlanders) in the Carpathian Mountains etc. Declaration of the Polish nationality could cause strong discrimination and therefore many Silesians declared their regional identity as nationality. For example, among the population of the former Czech part of Teschen Silesia incorporated by force to Nazi Germany in 1939 more than the third part of inhabitants (78,3 thousand, 36,6% of the total number of the population) [Zahradnik, 1991].

declared themselves as Silesians – mostly in villages in the Beskydy Mountains in the south of the region [Siwek, 1992, 131–141; Siwek, 1995, 46–53]. During the communist regime no declaration of the Silesian nationality was allowed.

The first legal occasion to declare the Silesian identity as “nationality” was the last Czechoslovak census in 1991. For the first time this census had allowed declaring the Silesian identity as a nationality in the ethnic sense. The declaration of the Silesian nationality in modern times was a consequence of political activities rather than traditions. It was a result of the pressure of the above-mentioned Movement for Autonomous Democracy – Society for Moravia and Silesia, which was very influential at that time [Siwek, 1992; Siwek, 1995; Siwek, 2001]. Still, contrary to the Moravians (almost 1.4 mil. declarations), the Silesian “nationality” was declared only by 44,4 thousand inhabitants (0.4% of the total Czech population and 5% of the population of the historical Silesian territory) [Ščítání lidu,... 1991]. The census of 1991 showed demographic characteristics of the declared Silesians being very similar to the rest of the Czech population. There were three main differences: 1) the number of the Silesian men was slightly higher than the number of Silesian women; 2) the education of the Silesians was a little bit lower than that of people from the other parts of the state; 3) the Silesians were more religious than the rest of the population in the Czech Republic. The third difference was the most significant (Table 1).

**Table 1.** The Silesians in Czechia by religious denomination compared with the total population

Denomination	The Silesians		Total Czech population [%]
	Total	[%]	
Roman Catholic	23,976	53.9	39.1
Silesian Evangelical	1,371	3.1	0.3
Czech Brethren	986	2.2	2.0
Czechoslovak Hussite	345	0.8	1.7
Other denominations	345	0.8	0.7
Undenominational people	11,786	26.5	39.9
Not answered	5,637	12.7	16.1
Total	44,446	100	100

Source: Czechoslovak census 1991.

The next Czech census in 2001 brought quite different results. The tendency to emphasize their identity was, among the Czech population,

significantly lower than ten years before. The census forms were changed and the statement of nationality (in the ethnic sense) was turned into voluntary ones. All minorities in Czechia owing to these factors have diminished. Most of them diminished the regional identities: Moravian and Silesian. The number of "the others", most of them did not declare any nationality, grew ten times: from the 30 thousand in 1991 to 300 thousand in 2001. The number of declared Silesians diminished from 44,446 (1991) to 10,878 (2001) [*Sčítání lidu...* 2001]. It is 0,1% of the total population of Czechia and 1% of the population of the historical area of Czech Silesia.

### **3. The Silesian identity in Czechia by an investigation in 1998**

The statistical data from censuses characterise only a small group of the population of Czech Silesia, considering itself as "a Silesian nation". This group of population can be considered as a core of the whole population of the historic Silesian territory in the Czech state. Many of them have regional identity. The number of the Silesians in a regional sense is smaller than the total population number of the region but this number is bigger than the Silesians declared themselves during the censuses. This number can not be unambiguous but it has to be fuzzy. The difference between the results of the censuses of 1991 and 2001 is a convincing piece of evidence of it.

The degree of the Silesian identity among the population living in the Czech part of Silesia was a subject of an investigation organized by the University of Ostrava in 1998 [Siwek and Kaňok, 2000, 98]. In order to receive representative data comparable with the census data we initiated interviewing of a representative sample of the population living in the historic area of Czech Silesia. 920 inhabitants of Czech Silesia were interviewed in November/December 1998 (exactly between 27.11. and 3.12.1998). The historic area of Czech Silesia was considered the area of former Land of Silesia (an administrative unit of the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy joined to Czechoslovakia after World War I, including the district of Hlučín, until 1920 part of Germany). Such an area consists of 241 municipalities and it is populated by 938 thousand inhabitants.

Inhabitants over 15 years of age were considered for the research as a sample of the whole Silesian population. The respondents were selected by the mixed, multilevel method, the first step being selection of municipalities. Silesian municipalities were divided into categories according to their population. Then they were selected by random

sampling. The second step was sampling of respondents. They were selected by purposive quota sampling according to sex, age and level of education.

There are two outputs of this investigation: the numeral characteristics of the residents in the historic territory of Silesia and the recent cognitive map of their own region. A mental map of imagination of the Silesian area was the main output (For the theory of mental maps – see Gould and White (1974) in USA. Examples of mental maps and perception of territories in central European countries published in the following: Słodczyk (1985), Bartnicka (1989) and Libura (1990) in Poland, Siwek, Drbohlav (1991) in Czechia, Nižnanský (1994, 1995) in Slovakia). Our mental map of Czech Silesia is a map of respondents' image of their region [Lynch, 1960, 194].

Apart from the map the respondents were asked about their connections with the territory of historic Silesia and about their identity labelled as nationality (their identity was compared with their identity declared during the census in 1991). They were also asked about their attitude towards the supposed form, name and capital of the new administrative unit which would contain most of the territory of the Czech Silesia. Furthermore, they were asked if their own town belonged to Silesia or not and to draw a map of Silesia (Table 2).

Table 2. The origin of the respondents and their parents

Birthplace of	Respondents [%]	Respondents' fathers [%]	Respondents' mothers [%]
Czech Silesia	76.7	58.3	61.2
Moravia	17.1	23.6	23.0
Bohemia	2.5	4.3	3.7
Other countries	3.7	10.6	9.5
Whole life spent in other regions	—	3.2	2.6

Source: own investigation.

The Silesians involved in this research usually showed strong connections with the territory of Silesia. 76.7% of the respondents were born in Czech Silesia and at least 58.3% of the respondents' parents were also born here. A clear majority of respondents can be considered long-term settlers. It appears that the tremendous consequences of the great migration after World War II have been overcome. A relatively significant migration from other countries was caused by migrations from Slovakia.

It seemed that the information on the new administrative structure being prepared at that time was not well known by the people. The structure of respondents suggesting the name for their new administrative region is interesting (Table 3). It must be explained that the new administrative unit – Region of Ostrava includes almost 70% of the area of Czech Silesia.

**Table 3.** Proposed name of the administrative unit, now Moravian-Silesian Region, forming at the time

Proposed name of the region	%	%
Combine Moravia and Silesia	34.2	
Including: Moravian-Silesian		23.8
Silesian-Moravian		6.0
North Moravian-Silesian		5.9
Only North Moravian	27.9	
Only Silesian	9.0	
Other	0.9	
No answer	26.5	

Source: own investigation.

The above table shows that the Silesian identity is quite weak. It is a consequence of the long-term marginalisation of the name of Silesia during the communist period. The number of respondents preferring a geographically wrong name North Moravian Region was three times higher than the number of respondents preferring the name of Silesia, which is geographically wrong as well. Geographically correct names combining words Moravian and Silesian were preferred by one third of the respondents, but the majority of them put the name Moravian (or North Moravian) in the first place. Approximately one fourth of the respondents did not answer this question – it is evidence of their lack of interest. The regional authorities adopted the name Moravian-Silesian Region in 2001.

One of the main questions of our questionnaire was dealing with the respondent's place of living: whether it was situated in the historical area of Silesia or not. The historical area of Silesia was considered the area of former Austrian or Czechoslovak Silesia, limited by the district borders valid at least from 1850 (the first Austrian district structure) to 1949 (when the historical lands were abolished by communists). All the respondents were residents of the historical area of Czech Silesia. 81.4% of them regarded their own town as a part of historical Silesia. 12.8% of

the respondents did not consider their own town a part of Silesia and 5.8% of the respondents did not answer this question.

We tried to analyse the structure of the respondents. Their age was not found to be important. Only 78.2% of the youngest respondents classified their own town as a Silesian town, contrary to 90.8% of the respondents between 60–64 years. Surprisingly, only 83.6% of the oldest respondents called their place of living – Silesian. Respondents' education was not significant either. Only 76.1% of the educated people with a university degree situated their own town in the territory of Silesia, fewer than the other, less educated respondents, 81–83% of whom did so. It means that for educated people the question of localisation of their town is not so important. Job is also not significant in this case: surprisingly, unemployed people (85.9%) ranked highest, whereas students and people with university education achieved worse results (73.2% and 73.9%).

Respondents' territorial origin was more decisive. The best results were achieved by people born in Silesia as well as by respondents of Silesian parents and, strangely enough, by respondents born in relatively far Bohemia, as well as by those whose parents came from Bohemia. The worst results were obtained by the Moravians and by the respondents who had Moravian and Slovak parents. It means that the Moravians either do not differentiate between Silesia and Moravia or that they consider Silesia as a Moravian sub-region. The relatively correct localisation of Silesia by the Czech coming from Bohemia could be a result of their subconscious tendency to limit the influence of their possible rivals – the Moravians.

Inner Silesian regions are significant as well. The Teschen Silesians were able to locate their area with more precision than the Opava Silesians (Table 4). All the respondents lived in Czech Silesia and correct answers would be in 100% positive. It is evidence that the population of Teschen Silesia is more often original in this area than Opavian population in their region. The Opavian Silesia is evidently handicapped by forced migration after World War II.

Table 4. Knowledge of the location of own place

Answer	Respondents from Teschen part of Silesia (%)	Respondents from Opavian part of Silesia (%)
My town is situated in Czech Silesia	86.9	75.2
My town is not situated in Czech Silesia	9.2	16.9
I do not know	3.9	7.9

Source: own investigation.



This table is significantly different from the results of the census of 1991, because the census shows the stronger Silesian identity of the inhabitants of Opavian Silesia. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that most of the Poles living in Teschen Silesia have a strong Silesian identity [Siwek, 1997, 353–3650].

#### 4. The mental map of Czech Silesia

At the end of the paper we drew a complex cognitive map of Czech Silesia. Every respondent was asked to draw their own imagined map of the Silesian region. On the basis of particular respondents' maps the general mental map was drawn. Every municipality in Czech Silesia and its surroundings were classified according to the frequency with which they were regarded as a part of Silesia or not. Then the municipalities were given into intervals according to the theory of scales [Kaňok, 1999, 75–86]. The final map was drawn with using of the programmes ARC/INFO and ArcView. The mental map of Silesia is presented below in Fig. 1.

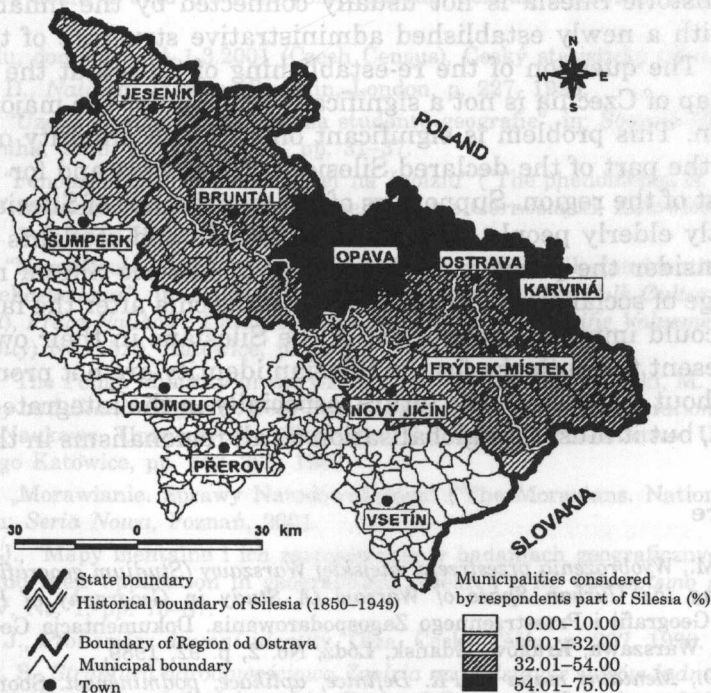


Fig. 1. The mental map of Silesia in the area of former North Moravian Region

Source: Elaborated by Jaromír Kaňok, University of Ostrava, 2001

According to the respondents the core of Silesian region comprises predominantly the districts of Opava and Karviná and partly the city of Ostrava and Frýdek-Místek. The district of Bruntál, part of the district of Nový Jičín and quite a peripheral district of Jeseník were considered a part of Silesia only exceptionally. The map shows the core, domain and peripheral area of the Czech Silesia in the mind of its inhabitants.

The analysis of the sample of respondents did not uncover any significant differences. The older respondents drew a Silesian area a little bit more precisely than the younger ones. The educated respondents did not draw a Silesian area better than uneducated people. Similarly, neither respondents' job nor their gender was significant. Territorial origin of respondents could be more important. We know that the respondents from Teschen and Opavian part of Silesia drew Silesian area at the same level of correctness but we did not analyse the kind of mistakes.

## 5. Conclusions

Czech Silesia exists in the mind of their inhabitants only to a limited extent. Historic Silesia is not usually connected by the inhabitants of Silesia with a newly established administrative structure of the Czech Republic. The question of the re-establishing of Silesia at the administrative map of Czechia is not a significant problem for the majority of its population. This problem is significant only for the minority of old settlers, for the part of the declared Silesians in the west and for the Poles in the east of the region. Supporters of the significance of Silesia are predominantly elderly people. The educated people and students from the region consider the problem of the revival of historic Silesia marginal. The change of social and cultural climate in Czechia after the fall of communism could improve the interest of the Silesians in their own region but at present the outlooks for the Silesian identity are not promising. It is not without a chance in the future, especially in the integrated Europe of regions, but it must face globalisation as all regionalisms in the world.

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