

REGIONALIZATION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL SPACE OF BULGARIA THROUGH THE PRISM OF ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND GEODEMOGRAPHIC CONDITION

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Abstract

The research tries to explain the significance and nature of regionalization and regions. It discusses the works of some prominent scientists connected with the formation of the term region and its meaning. It makes a short retrospective analysis of the division of Bulgaria into different types of regions through the years and tries to reveal the significance of regionalization for the social-economic development of the country. Attention is paid to the demographic problems and their connection with the settlement network. One important aspect of regionalization - regional effectiveness, is also discussed and an algorithm for its quantitative assessment is provided. The research finishes with some conclusions about the problems of the regions in the state and suggestion for a new type of division based on cultural-civilizational and natural criteria.

Key words: regionalization, formation of regions, regional effectiveness, socio-economic region, cultural-civilizational approach.

Resumo

No presente capítulo tenta-se analisar o significado e a essência da regionalização e das regiões. São discutidos os trabalhos mais relevantes dos cientistas ligados ao conceito de região e ao seu significado. É concretizada uma análise retrospectiva da divisão da Bulgária em diferentes regiões e do significado da regionalização para o desenvolvimento socioeconómico do país. São ressaltados os problemas demográficos existentes e a sua relação com o povoamento existente. O capítulo termina com algumas conclusões sobre os problemas das regiões e com sugestões para um novo tipo de divisão usando critérios culturais, civilizacionais e naturais.

Palavras-chave: regionalização, formação de regiões, eficiência regional, região socioeconómica, enfoque cultural e civilizacional.

1. Regionalization in Bulgaria

The regionalization of the earth space is a research method for scientific explanation of earth reality. Its purpose is to reveal and explain the nature of two objective and irrevocable characteristics of the Earth – the existing reality and the dynamical regionalization.

The question that arises is: “What is the content of the categories reality and regionalization?”

In 1929 a group of philosophers from the Vienna University published “The Scientific Conception of the World” (H. Hahn, O. Neurath, R. Carnap), in which they define the knowledge about reality as an integral, complete category with natural-social content and consider that it should be accepted as a space-time synthesis.

The regionalization of the geospace is a general scientific method for analysis of the spatial organization and functions of the natural-social integrities of the planet. It is impossible to explain the variety of the planet without using and applying of regionalization (zoning). In ancient times Epicurus in his treatise "On Nature" wrote that the task of science, or the comprehension of nature, on one side, and the human fate, on the other, are inextricably bound.

It should be added that reality is a dynamic and multivalent category, which is modeled under the influence of internal and external factors, and its development is non-linear in space and time. Therefore the study of the natural-social unity of reality requires the application of new approaches and methods for analysis and assessment.

Main elements of the structure of contemporary geographical knowledge are earth reality and regionalization. There is no even distribution of territory by objects, processes and phenomena in the world. Because of that, basic characteristic of geographical reality is regionalization.

According to E. B. Alaev (1983: pg. 108) it is a "high display of the structure of the landscape shell or discretization of the geographical space in the form of regions".

The formation of areas is an objective factor for arrangement of the Geoversum, and the regions appear to be basic concrete objects of geographical studies. It follows that the regionalization of the earth reality is an objective geographical process, that regions are concrete result of the geographical scientific analysis.

The question about the content of the categories reality and regionalization is connected with the philosophical approach to its interpretation, as well as with the chronological review of the regionalization of Bulgaria. Regionalization (zoning) of Bulgaria in settlement-cultural aspect was proposed in 1884 by the minister of education the Czech Konstantin Irechek. Its purpose is to reveal and explain the old Geography of the Bulgarian lands. Irechek (1974: pg. 1033) separates 4 macrostructures on the territory of the country: "On both sides of the Balkan", "Sredna Gora and the Rhodopes", "Western Bulgaria" and "Black Seaside".

Theobald Fischer (1893), Otto Maul (1929), Herbert Wilhelmy (1932) and others (e.g., Dimov, 2000) travelled and made some observations on the territory of Bulgaria and published scientific works, in which predominate the division of the national territory in accordance with the natural and historical-geographical regions. The approaches and methods that were used are completely in the traditions of the German geographical school.

In 1916 K. Popov in his book "The Economy of Bulgaria" suggests 5 economic zones.

The scientific bases of the economic and natural regionalization were put by Anastas Beshkov (1934) and Ivan Batakliiev in 1934. The first one published his monograph "Economic-geographical Division of Bulgaria", in which he stresses on the aspiration that it should be "transformed on economic base" (1934: pg. 11). He tries to prove that the division of the national territory should be based on economy, and zoning is the scientific base of the administrative-territorial division (Figure 1).

The significance of Anastas Beshkov's zoning can be assessed in three directions: the first one – as a method for studying of the economy, the second one – as a precondition for a

planned and expedient economic policy, and the third one – as a basis for implementation of administrative division of the territory of the country.



Figure 1. The first economic zoning of the country from 1934 by A. Beshkov

He considers the economic regions granted. They are not objects of creation. Their existence is a result of the influence of too elaborate complex of economic-geographical preconditions and “the purpose of their study is not to be worked out or created, but to be found and distinguished” (Beshkov, 1934: pg. 18).

In other words the economic region is an objective category, and the territorial demarcation of the regions – a systematic research process.

In 1934 a geographical research of the formed natural complexes in Bulgaria makes Ivan Batakiev. He made the first landscape division of the country and outlined 5 landscapes – Macedonian, Middle Bulgarian, Balkan, Danubian and Black Sea. The author emphasizes that the landscape division differs from the political and the administrative division of the national territory.

Ivan Batakiev includes the influence of the anthropogenic factor in the analysis of structure of separate landscape units. So his division can be distinguished by its natural-social content.

After the 1950's more than 10 spatial models of economic and socio-economic regionalization of Bulgaria were proposed – by Ignat Penkov and Todor Hristov, Tyanko Yordanov, Emil Valev, Hristo Marinov, Krastyu Krastev, Hristo Karakashev, Doncho Donchev, Radka Naydenova, Fidan Nikolov, Marina Yordanova, Veselin Boyadzhiev, Neno Dimov, Boris Kolev and others. The common in them is the territorial distribution of settlements and human resources, economic activities and natural resources.

In 1989 the following definition about a socio-economic region was adopted: “(...) proportionally developing combination of the branches of material production and the non-

production sphere on a particular territory, which are combined in such a way and create such an interconnection among them that they form a territorial-economic complex with own economic profile and particular functions within the national economy, contributing for the increase of its economic, social and ecological effectiveness.” (Mishev, K., R. Naydenova, D. Donchev, 1989: pg. 240).

Most thorough review and scientific geographical comment on the problems of regionalism and zoning of Bulgaria makes Neno Dimov (2012). On the basis of researches, comparisons and application of theoretical-practical approaches he suggests the following definition about the natural-social region category: “The natural-social region (including natural and socio-economic) is a dynamic and probable system with stable type of territorial organization, signs and functions by which it differs from the neighboring regions and has high extent of concentration of competitive and effective activities and policies” (Dimov, 2012: pg. 58).

The contemporary grounds of the discussed problem of zoning are as follows:

- During the last two decades scientific researches in the sphere of zoning of the Bulgarian national space haven't been made;
- The socio-economic zoning is evaluated as political instrument for government of the territory;
- Statistical regions (NUTS 2) are used in planning practice, which proves the necessity of scientific zoning.

Main, qualitative indicator for each natural-social region is the regional effectiveness. It is “an integral characteristic of the structure, organization and the functions of the formed regions – socio-economic, ethno-confessional, cultural-ecological and geopolitical” (Dimov, 2012: pg. 76).). The scientific approaches in Bulgaria determine and present the effectiveness of the socio-economic region as complementing, not as a basic qualitative characteristic of its development, which from our point of view is not substantiated (Figure 2).

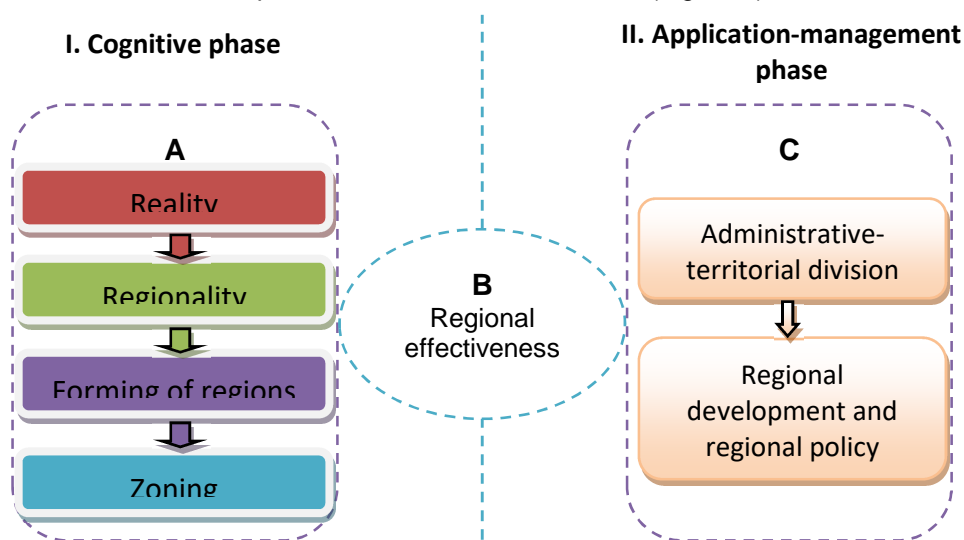


Figure 2. Structural model for planning and regional management of the national space

Source: Own elaboration.

The effectiveness of the socio-economic region is accepted and presented as supplementing but not as basic qualitative characteristic of its development.

After 2000 in Bulgaria are used statistical regions, whose borders were determined according to one indicator – number of population. With order RD 07-24/17.01.2013 and on the basis of Regulation 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and Regulation 31/2011 of the European Statistical Committee, the chairman of the National Statistical Institute determined 2 statistical zones (NUTS 1), 6 statistical regions (NUTS 2) and 28 districts (NUTS 3) in Bulgaria (SG, 13/08.02.2013).

As a result from the used horizontal network of statistical regions in Bulgaria and from the governmental policy after 1990 the situation in 2012 is as follows: for the period 1990-2012 the population of Bulgaria decreased with 1,7 million people. For the period 2007-2012 the human capital of Bulgaria decreases annually average with 59 281 people.

The dynamics of the used horizontal net of statistical regions in the country is distinguished for territorial widening of the North-Western Statistical Region to the East and of the Southern Statistical Region to the West (Figure 3).



Figure 3. NUTS 2 regions of Bulgaria with their population (31.13.2005)

Source: Own elaboration

In 2012 in 9 municipalities of the country live 40.0% of its population, and in 62 municipalities live only 3.0%. 10 municipalities have just one settlement, and the municipalities with the largest number of settlements are: Gabrovo – 134; Elena – 124; Kardzhaly – 118. In 2012, 697 settlements don't have land belonging to them (Figure 4).

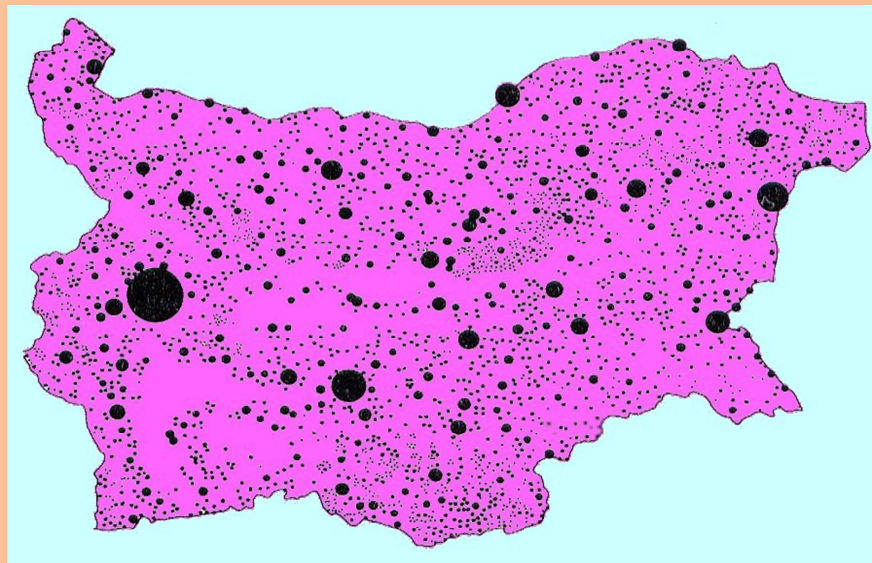


Figure 4. Settlement network of Bulgaria

Source: Own elaboration

The number of settlements decreases:

- 1992 – 5 340, including 240 towns;
- 2012 – 5 302, including 257 towns;
- 2013 (on 30.09.) – 5 267, including 257 towns;
- 2011 – 183 settlements don't have permanent residents;
- 2011 – 86.0% of the settlements have less than 1000 residents.

The social picture is extremely disturbing: 4000 settlements have no pharmacies; 3200 settlements have no health centers; over 4200 settlements have no schools; more than 3200 settlements have no representatives in the local governments (town councils).

The regionalization and zoning of the national space take place with different pace and are characterized by a particular functional hierarchy. These processes have direct and indirect influence on the territorial distribution of the newly created value (or the added value). Their analysis lead to the adoption of the following definition for natural-social region: "Dynamical and probable system with stable hierarchical structure and borders, with particular type of horizontal and vertical organization, signs and functions by which it can be differentiated from neighboring geospaces, and with high extent of concentration of resources, within the range of which are planned, coordinated and managed competitive and effective activities and policies" (Dimov, 2012: pg. 58).

The regional (territorial) effectiveness is a connective category between the cognitive and the applied phase of regionalization.

P. Hagget wrote that the whole surface of the Earth is lined by borders and geographers should explain these territorial limits with the creation of more fair, efficient and stable system of territorial organization.

The borders of the regions influence their effectiveness. It exerts spatial influence on the surface of the formed natural-social systems.

The regional development and regional policy of Bulgaria presumes the realization of an adequate demographic program, containing: emigrant policy – attraction of traditional Bulgarian communities, living on the Balkans and all over Europe; policy for decreasing of the death-rate and improving of the health of people; policy for stimulation of the birth-rate; policy in the social sphere; administrative economic planning for overcoming of the depopulation; policy for overcoming of the demographical centralism.

We suggest an algorithm for quantitative assessment of the regional effectiveness (Figure 5):

$$RE_{i,t} = \frac{E_{i,t} - E_{i,t-1}}{E_{i,t-1}} - dGDP_t$$

Figure 5.

where

- ▶ **RE_{i,t}** is the value of the measure of regional effectiveness of the i-th region for the t-th period;
- ▶ **E_{i,t}** is the value of the measure of economic, social and ecological effectiveness of the i-th region for the t-th period;
- ▶ **E_{i,t-1}** is the value of the measure of economic, social and ecological effectiveness of the i-th region for the t-1-th period;
- ▶ **dGDP_t** – growth of the GDP of the country for the t-th period.

The contemporary regional development is connected with some conclusions:

- ▶ The regional effectiveness decreases for the period 2007-2012 in the Seaside, the Western and the Northern Region, and increases in the Southern Region.
- ▶ The usage of regional effectiveness as an instrument for planning and management of the territory becomes more and more necessary.
- ▶ The regionalization of the national space is a basic and irrevocable research activity for increasing of the effectiveness and decreasing of the expenditures in the process of governing of the territory.
- ▶ The scientifically substantiated regionalization is the base for changes in the administrative-territorial organization.
- ▶ New innovative regional studies are necessary.

Perspective direction is the development of rural regions in Bulgaria; about half of the financial resource for the country for the period 2014-2020 will be directed to rural regions.

Conclusions directed to the experts on regional planning and regional government: the scientifically substantiated regionalization of Bulgaria is an underestimated research activity; the regionalization of the territory of the country is an intensive method for enhancement of the end results from a unit of agricultural land with 25-30%.

In our opinion the regionalization of the geographical space of Bulgaria presumes application of cultural-civilizational approach:

► On the base of the cultural-civilizational approach in Bulgaria exist objective possibilities for recognition of 4 large regions, whose names are used for designation of historical-geographical affiliation, namely – Thracia, Macedonia, Moesia and Dobrudzha.

► The usage of these names will lead to the increasing of territorial range of NUTS 2 regions, and to decreasing of their number from six to four.

► This will guarantee their stability regarding the threshold levels of population, and also will respond to the geographical and historical conditions.

► In a wider sense we could differentiate them as follows: Thracia and the Rhodopes; Sofia, Kraishte and Macedonia; Dobrudzha and Ludogorie; Moesia and ForeBalkan.

In conclusion we suggest a system variant, corresponding to the contemporary national, euroregional and dynamic processes, expressed in the following (Figure 6).

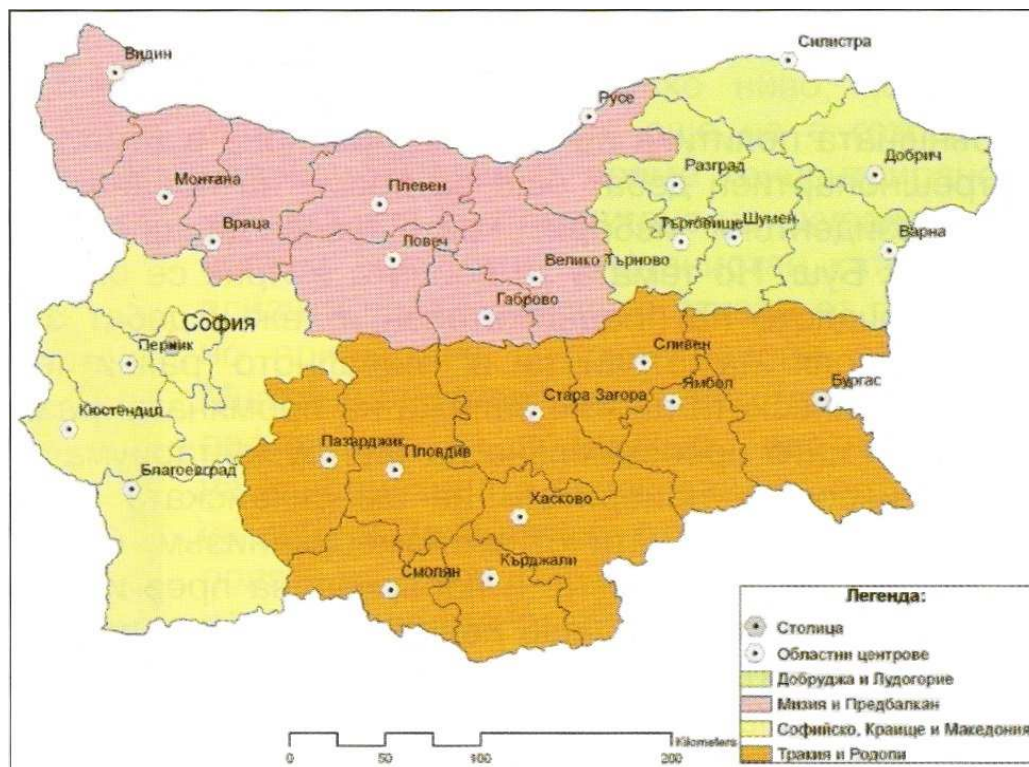


Figure 6. Natural, socio-economic and cultural-civilizational regions in Bulgaria (borders of the regions (NUTS 2) on the base of cultural-civilizational and natural criteria)

Source: Karastoyanov, S., K. Stoychev. (2009).

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