

APPROACHES TO DELIMITATION OF REGIONS: ADMINISTRATIVE VERSUS FUNCTIONAL REGIONS

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Abstract

The paper deals with an important part of economic policy that is regional development. To use inner potential of regions fully, it is of crucial importance to delimit them meaningfully. Two types of regions can be recognized: administrative and functional. The former are fundamental for execution of both state administration and territorial self-government whereas the latter ones are delimited based on functional relations between the core of a region and its background. These links are necessary for socio-economic analyses, structural studies of local labour markets and estimates of regional disparities. As the comparison of Austria and Hungary cases demonstrates, approaches to the delimitation of administrative and functional regions can differ even in two largely comparable countries.

Introduction

One of the most important tasks of each country is a steady development of the whole territory and all regions in order to fully exploit their inner potential. Enhancing competitiveness and employment at regional level is also extremely important for the European Union, which among other things, is in accordance with the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. For 2007-2013, the EU's cohesion policy is calculated on the amount of CZK 336 billion, which is almost a third of its budget.

This paper first discusses the definition of the notion of the region and the relationship between the administrative and functional regions. The following text explains the approaches to defining functional regions based on the labour market and a brief overview of methods applied in selected OECD countries is created. The practical meaning and application of the definition of functional regions is then demonstrated on the basis of comparison approach to defining functional regions in two largely comparable countries, namely Austria, and Hungary.

1 Delimitation of Regions: Different Points of View

The basic concept of regional policy is a region. Mostly, the region is delimited as a territorial unit that is possible to single out from broader area using one or more identifiable criteria. Usually, with these characters, it is delimited for a particular purpose, or it has a particular function in the arrangement of an area.

Encyclopedia of Diderot defines the region as a territory with the same type of geographical features, and on this basis defines two basic types of regions: a) *physical geographical*, based

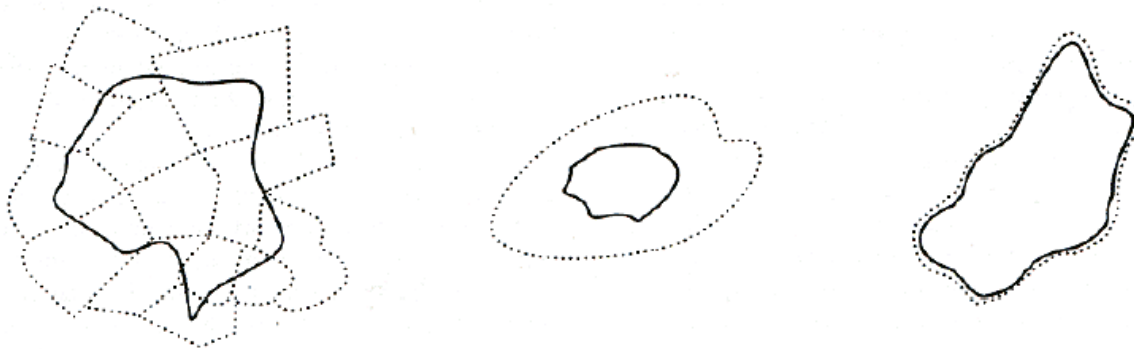
on physical-geographical characters (relief, climate, soils, waters, etc.) and characterized by a high degree of homogeneity b) *social-geographic* (nodal), defined on the basis of relatively closed spatial relationships (especially commuting) and characterized by determining relationship of the centre – background. [7, p. 657]. *The economic definitions* of the region reflect common patterns of production, market relations, the direction of economic dependence or nature of the labour market. *Functional definitions* emphasize social relationships and interactions, such as ways of recreation, travel or leisure time. According to the functional approach regions are evaluated based on cultural and language criteria or by means of social communication. From the *institutional point of view* regions can be regarded as institutional structures constituted either historically or created artificially with a specific role in relation to the administration of a higher unit [6].

Regionalization means an activity directed at the delimitation of regions. To address problems of regional development, it is particularly important to have a relationship between a functional structure and an administrative definition of the region. **Functional regions** are defined based on functional relationships between the core of a functional region and its background – they are therefore internally heterogeneous in nature. They consist of a nodal center (nucleus) and the background (periphery), which is bound to the core by different paths and flows. This classification is based on the hierarchical structure and territorial relations of space. The core is usually characterized by concentration of functions that are missing in the background, which creates a typical gravitational gradient for functions that integrates the whole region. Examples of functional regions are regions of the catchment area from which people go shopping to a certain area – nodus. The concept of functional (nodal) regions is not new, its origins can be applied to the theory of central places, which was elaborated by W. Christaller in [8]. The boundaries of nodal region are areas where the boundaries are set between the gravitational influences of neighbouring centres. For assigning municipalities to regions, commuting to work is decisive. We can say that although the functional regions are characterized by a hierarchical structure, their size is very uneven. **Administrative** regions are delimited for the purposes of state administration and territorial self-government. Among their various levels, there are two basic relationships: *compositional*, which means that the region of a higher level consists of several lower-level units, *subordination or superiority*, expressing binding of standards adopted at a higher level for the lower level regions. They need certain time stability. This regional division is created in order to achieve their maximum balance. It is obvious that the most effective area for the support of the economic development is the functional region, however, for logical reasons, the solution is carried out within the administrative regions.

Functional and administrative regions show some common features, but also some differences. In administrative regions, there is usually one centre, similarly to the functional regions, from which the power is provided by public authorities also to the wider background (administrative district). Similarly, administrative regions can be classified also in terms of their hierarchical level (e.g. local, regional and central levels of public administration). Usually, these levels are created in such a way that the principle of territorial composition is applied according to which an administrative unit of a higher level is to be constituted by a lower level administrative units. Some opposition between functional (nodal) and administrative regions arises primarily from the fact that functional regions are dynamic entities, continually evolving over time (for example, regions created on the basis of commuting to work or to schools based on data from two time subsequent censuses can significantly vary), while administrative regions are more static in nature, since for them the changes are only “jumps” in the period of reforms of the administrative division.

Reforms in many cases respond to the fact that there are so many differences between the functional and administrative regions formed by a natural development (e.g. the change of commuting habits, the increase or decrease in the importance of a centre), which have already significantly and negatively started to reflect in the functioning of public administration. In these regions, the spatial discrepancy may occur, for example, some residents and businesses from one administrative unit use public services of another administrative unit without any proper financial compensation. The aim of most of the regional public administration reforms is the effort to achieve maximum possible approximation of an administrative structure of the state to the structure of the settlement since achievement of a full identity of administrative and functional regions is usually difficult to reach in practice.

R. J. Bennett in [2] distinguishes three basic options for possible administrative and territorial delimitation of functional regions (Fig. 1).



1. Poorly delimited region 2. Excessively delimited region 3. Identically delimited region

Note: The functional region is indicated by a solid line, administrative districts by dotted line
Source: Bennet, J.R. *Administrative systems and economic spaces*, 1997, p. 326

Fig. 1: *Administrative Regions versus functional regions*

Achieving the ideal state of a complete congruence of administrative and functional regions in the real environment is almost impossible because of the following facts [2, pp. 326-327]:

- 1) **There is not only one option for the solution** – for different population groups (e.g. pupils, students, economically active population, pensioners), there can be defined different functional regions.
- 2) **Statistical problems in defining functional regions** – a matter of choosing the most appropriate statistical characteristics and the choice of optimal threshold for defining the functional background of the region.
- 3) **The hierarchy of different activities** – in the public sphere and the private sector there is a huge range of different activities and one can naturally ask practical question of what specific activities should be considered decisive in setting the boundaries of administrative units.
- 4) **The variability of functional regions** – if the local public administration reforms followed after each change in functional regions, then it would mean permanent reforms and consequent volatility of administrative system whose proper functioning requires a certain degree of stability.
- 5) **The problem of resistance, particularly from small villages in rural areas** – small rural villages merging into larger administrative units often meant closing schools and cultural facilities in small settlements as there was a preference to concentrate investments in larger settlements, which were supposed to serve its background in accordance with the Christallerian theory of central places. This approach did not offer to a small rural

community virtually any future, for it meant not only undermining their viability, but also the increase of their dependence and the loss of autonomy with regard to urban centers. No wonder small municipalities started the process of regaining independence in the period after the fall of totalitarian dictatorships.

These reasons suggest that the goal of most local public administration reform is the effort to achieve maximum possible administrative structure of the state approach to the residential structure [12], because achieving full identity of administrative and functional regions is usually difficult to reach in practice. It can be documented on some partial studies of other countries.

2 Typology of Regions

Based on a wide range of different points of view, there can be distinguished several general types of delimited regions, here are at least some as examples:

Geographical approach

Geographic principles in delimiting regions can be summarized in several points:

- the principle of maximum integrity (relative closeness of relationship typical for a given level)
- determining the subordination according to the dominant slope
- territorial continuity
- minimum (critical) size of the region – the minimum size and the background is a prerequisite for qualitative regional autonomy
- composition of regions (preference of the strongest, i.e. the micro-regional relationships)

Special purpose point of view

Special-purpose regions are delimited in order to solve certain issues, such as solutions to economic underdevelopment, environmental problems and nature conservation. They often have limited time validity. Most often these are special economic zones, such as duty-free zone, science and technology parks, business incubator, technopolis (region with a strong concentration of scientific, technological and production potential, as well as production services and amenities). Further, there are “programme” regions formulated only for a specific development plan or strategy.

According to the economic potential (Harrop, 1996)

Based on the economic potential, regions can be divided into the following groups:

- underdeveloped peripheral regions
- declining and old industrial regions
- central regions
- fast-growing regions

According to the EU's needs – NUTS regions (Nomenclature des Unites La territoriales Statistiques)

EU regional policy, which primarily seeks to balance economic, social and other differences between the regions uses for the assessment and evaluation of a needed support for particular region from the EU financial funds special methodology of NUTS. It is a system of a uniform structure of territorial units in the EU for a comparison of a social and economic situation. In

the EU legislation, these units have been used since 1988. The EU has identified six levels of NUTS.

- NUTS 0 (country level)
- NUTS (level country, in the case of small states category NUTS 0 and NUTS 1 blend)
- NUTS II (higher territorial units, such as the cohesion regions of CZ)
- NUTS III (regions in the CZ 14)
- NUTS IV – from 1 Jan 2008 LAU 1 (former districts, in CZ 77)
- NUTS V - 1 Jan 2008 LAU 2 (municipalities, in CZ 6249 in 2008)

3 Basic Methods of Delimiting Functional Regions Based on the Labour Market

Basically, there are three ways how the functional region can be delimited. These approaches are mainly discussed in the works of Cövers, Hensen and Bongaerts (2009), Andersen (2002), Coombes et. al. (1986), Casado-Diaz (2000), Eurostat (1992), Killian and Tolbert (1993), OECD (2002). In most OECD countries the main criterion for delimiting functional regions based on the labour market is one-way commuting (OECD, 2002). Especially in the UK, the approach TTWA (Travel-to-Work-Areas) is applied (Coombes et al., 1986, 2007), which can be to some extent compared to commuting zones according to Karlsson and Olsson (2006, OECD, 2002). The last of the three basic ways of delimiting functional regions involves works of, for example, Karlsson and Olsson (2006) and is based on the accessibility approach. The first alternative for delimitation is a) the local labour market, which is based on a one-way flow of commuting. The region is delimited in this way in several successive steps. First, self-sufficiency criteria of the region are set, according to them the region is considered to be self-sufficient when out of the municipality leaves less than 20% of the working population while travelling to a particular municipality does not exceed 7.5% of working population (Karlsson, Olsson, 2006, p. 6). The next step is to assign municipalities that are not strongly self-sufficient to the municipality to which most commuters commute. This conventional approach focusing primarily on the situation of workers has an alternative view in the industrial life perspective, according to which self-sufficiency is defined as the proportion of jobs in the municipality occupied by workers from the given municipality.

b) Killian and Tolbert (1993) created an approach focused on the definition of commuting zones that is less focused on the urban core and builds more on the interdependence of municipalities. It is an approach that measures commuting in both directions. In practice this means that the two municipalities with a strong one-way flow of commuting may not form a functional region.

c) The last approach to delimiting functional regions is based on the concept of accessibility (accessibility approach), and even here there are two possible options – one examines employers' access to workers and the second access of workers to jobs. The result of an application of the sophisticated methods of Karlsson and Olsson (2006) is a list of the most significant sites from the perspective of employers and perspective of employees.

3.1 Overview of approaches within the OECD countries

A survey was carried out in 2002 within the OECD countries on the basis of which information on how to define functional regions in 22 member states was collected. The study shows a number of interesting conclusions (OECD, 2002). Only five of the participating countries stated that they did not use the labour market approach (this was Japan, Mexico,

Korea, Spain and Turkey). Other countries use in some way modified method of the labour market to delimit functional regions, whether on the official or unofficial level.

In 12 cases, the method for the identification of a functional region around the centre was applied, while the remaining 10 countries use algorithm or a cluster analysis, or based on a combination of factors of the distance, proximity, the threshold of commuting, travel time etc. (OECD, 2002).

Concerning the relationship of functional and administrative regions, the survey showed incompatibility with the administrative units in 14 of 22 cases, while the remaining 8 countries adapted the borders of functional regions in such a way they corresponded with the borders on the territorial or regional level. In this regard we can, therefore, find substantial differences between the countries. Evidently, this is the example of France, where functional regions at NUTS II show compatibility, however, not at the level NUTS III. In contrast, Finland is a country with a perfect harmony between the various functional and administrative regions.

Differences can also be traced in the purpose and the use of functional regions. Most countries use the delimited functional areas for the needs of *socio-economic analysis, structural studies* of local labour markets and to *estimate regional disparities*. The exceptions in this respect are only Denmark, Hungary, Portugal and the Czech Republic. Some countries, then, use the given concept in practice as an analytical tool to *identify disadvantaged regions* requiring assistance. These are especially Finland, France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain. However, this support is usually not addressed directly to delimited functional regions because they lack official units necessary for the administration of funds. Functional regions in Austria, Canada, Denmark and Switzerland are used as a direct tool for the implementation of policies related primarily to the labour market and transport. In contrast, in Portugal, Sweden, USA and the Czech Republic functional regions play no role in the implementation of policies.

Many of the responses show that the labour market is only one possible way of delimitation of functional regions. It is uncertain whether this type of delimitation was suitable, regarding, for example, the industrial development. In this case, criteria for delimiting would have to include relationships between businesses and the movement of goods, services and information. The question remains whether this would then correspond with the delimited functional regions.

3.2 Comparison of Selected Countries: Austria vs. Hungary

There was chosen the comparison of the two countries which show a number of common features: share a common history of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, located in the heart of Europe, and relatively similar geographic characteristics (see Table 1).

Tab. 1: Comparison of countries according to selected indicators

| | Austria | Hungary |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Area (km ²) | 83,871 | 93,030 |
| No. of inhabitants (mil.) | 8.4 | 9.96 |
| Density of population (inh. / km ²) | 98 | 109 |

Source: www.mzv.cz, own processing

Both selected countries are to some extent counterparts in terms of access to functional regions. In the following text, there will be analyzed closer links between the official administrative units and functional regions in Hungary and Austria, as identified for a research in the OECD countries.

From the administrative point of view, Hungary consists of three parts of the state (Országrés) at the NUTS I level, which are further divided into 7 regions according to the nomenclature of the relevant EU NUTS II level and 19 counties and the capital city, representing the NUTS III level. On the lower unit there are 168 districts (kistérségek, the literal translation means “small area”) and 23 large cities with parish powers (cities with higher number of inhabitants that have the same or similar rights as the county in which it is located).

In Hungary, there were delimited 148 functional regions in the form of local labour markets, which are called regional labour centres / regional unemployment office. The area of offices more or less covers small NUTS IV, yet there are differences. The boundaries of unemployment offices do not always correspond with the border of NUTS III regions and some differences can also be found at NUTS II level. As the data indicate, the functional regions play no role in the implementation of economic-policy measures of the labour market, thus held no responsibility and are not used for analytical purposes either. The exception is the Balaton region, which was created to control the protection of landscape, natural environment and quality of settlement on the border of three regions and is considered the official territorial unit. Therefore it can apply directly for a support from local policies. Nevertheless, labour market funds flow directly from the functional regions, however, they are managed from the NUTS III level (i.e. from counties). In addition to regional employment centers, in Hungary, there are associations of local authorities (NUTS level V), which are not administrative units and are formed for a clearly defined purpose and a specific period.

Administrative division of Austria distinguishes nine provinces at the NUTS II level, which are further divided into groups of political districts at NUTS III level (35) and 99 political districts with 2,359 villages at NUTS IV level. In terms of functional regions in Austria, there are legally delimited a total of 85 so-called local labour market districts, which corresponds to the delimitation of political districts listed on the NUTS IV level in the nomenclature of the EU.

It is obvious that in Austria, there is a much stronger link between the official administrative units and functional regions. Both are defined by law and a different number of labour and political districts is caused by the fact that one labour district is created by connection of the city district with its own status and a surrounding political district. There is therefore 100 % compatibility with the delimitation of NUTS I and II, then exceptions can be found at NUTS III level, where in some places local labour market districts cross borders of NUTS.

Compared to Hungary, local labour market districts also serve as an analytical unit for the research of disparities in regional labour market and the analysis for regional development needs. It is obvious that on the regional level, there are available all regional statistics (demographic and economic) and monthly data on labour market developments are processed. It also shows that the regional labour offices implement the Austrian employment policy on this regional level, which entails appropriate financial resources from the federal budget.

Table 2 gives a summary of a comparison between the two countries.

The comparison shows that although both countries show certain similarities, there are visible differences in terms of defining the methods, purposes, and the link between the functional and administrative regions. To evaluate the importance of delimiting functional regions, it would be useful to further analyze the effectiveness of measures of relevant policies (especially unemployment policies) and their impacts in terms of elimination of excessive regional disparities. At the same time, it is clear that the proposed analysis is complicated due to the fact that only in Austria the statistical data is collected at the given functional regions, while in Hungary such statistics are only partial.

Tab. 2: Comparison of Hungary and Austria

| | | Hungary | Austria |
|--|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Administrative regions | NUTS II | 7 planning statistic regions (Ø area of 13,300 km ² , Ø inhab. in thousands. 1,438) | 9 provinces (Ø area of 9,300 km ² , Ø inhab. in thousands. 899) |
| | NUTS III | 20 counties (Ø area of 4,900 km ² , Ø inhab. in thousands. 503) | 35 groups of political districts (Ø area of 2,400 km ² , Ø inhab. in thousands. 231) |
| Functional regions | Characteristics | 148 regional working centers (Ø area of 600 km ² , Ø inhab. in thousands. 68) | 85 working districts (Ø area of 1,000 km ² , Ø inhab. in thousands. 95) |
| | Compatibility with admin. units | Except the Balaton Region they are not compatible | Fully compatible on NUTS I and II, slight overlaps at NUTS III |
| Purpose of creation/responsible institution | | No analytical role/Ministry of economy | Following regional labour market and regional development / defined by law |
| Responsibility for implementation of Economic policy / financial resources | | No / yes | Policy of employment / regional offices financed from the federal budget |

Source: OECD, 2002, pp. 5 – 14, own processing

Conclusion

In recent decades regional development has remained at the forefront of interest of national governments, international organizations and integration groupings. It is clear that many interrelated processes are involved in that trend, such as deepening of the formal and informal links between regions and between countries, creating networks or needs of regional policy in a situation of very tense public resources. A prerequisite for the correct setting of regional development policy is primarily a meaningful delimitation of regions which would represent a compact unit and allow maximizing the impact of implemented measures. Regions can generally be identified on the basis of various criteria and the essential question is the relationship between administrative-regulatory regions and regions which show the same functional characteristics. When delimiting functional regions, there are usually used approaches based on the labour market, as also shown by the OECD study. However, even here there are many differences between countries, especially in terms of utilization of functional regions for analytical purposes, identifying disadvantaged regions, estimates of regional disparities as an official unit or implementing policies related to the labour market. As shown by comparison of Austria and Hungary, these differences are apparent even in otherwise relatively comparable countries. While in Austria, the link between the official administrative units is rather strong, in Hungary you can find a discrepancy especially at the NUTS II and NUTS III levels and only at the NUTS IV level there is more or less an overlap with the area of unemployment offices. The very definition of the purpose and a method in both countries is also fundamentally different. Compared to local labour market districts defined by law in Austria, which are directly used for the implementation of employment policy measures, in Hungary the functional regions do not play any role in this respect. The question remains, how a given fact influences the efficiency of implemented measures of economic policy, whether it is an employment policy or policies aimed at reducing inter-regional differences. To answer this question, it is fundamental to have an access to reliable

statistical data at all regional levels, including functional, which is currently not commonplace in all countries.

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PŘÍSTUPY K VYMEZENÍ REGIONŮ: ADMINISTRATIVNĚ-SPRÁVNÍ VERSUS FUNKČNÍ

Článek se zabývá důležitou součástí hospodářské politiky, rozvojem regionů. Aby mohly regiony využít veškerý svůj vnitřní potenciál, je důležité jejich smysluplné vymezení. Z tohoto pohledu rozlišujeme regiony správní (administrativní), které jsou rozhodující pro potřeby výkonu státní správy a územní samosprávy, a regiony funkční, které jsou vymezovány na základě funkčních vztahů mezi jádrem funkčního regionu a jeho zázemím. Tyto vazby jsou nezbytné zejména pro potřeby socioekonomické územní analýzy, strukturální studie místních trhů práce a k odhadu regionálních disparit. Jak naznačila následně provedená komparativní analýza situace v Rakousku a Maďarsku, přístupy k vymezení správních a funkčních regionů mohou být různé i v relativně stejně velkých ekonomikách.

ANSÄTZE ZU EINER DEFINITION DER REGIONEN: ADMINISTRATIV VERSUS FUNKTIONELL

Der Artikel beschäftigt sich mit einem wichtigen Bestandteil der Wirtschaftspolitik, nämlich der Entwicklung der Regionen. Damit die Regionen ihr gesamtes inneres Potenzial nutzen können, ist es wichtig, sie sinnvoll zu definieren. In dieser Hinsicht unterscheiden wir zwischen administrativen Regionen, die für die Bedürfnisse der Erledigung der staatlichen Verwaltung und der Gebietselbsterwaltung entscheidend sind, und funktionellen Regionen, welche sich auf Grundlage funktioneller Beziehungen zwischen dem Kern der funktionellen Region und deren Umfeld definieren. Diese Bindungen sind unerlässlich besonders für die Bedürfnisse einer sozioökonomischen Gebietsanalyse, strukturelle Studien der örtlichen Arbeitsmärkte und zur Einschätzung regionaler Ungleichheiten. Wie die anschließend durchgeführte komparative Analyse der Situation in Österreich und Ungarn andeutete, können die Ansätze zur Definition administrativer und funktionaler Regionen auch in relativ gleichgroßen Ökonomien unterschiedlich sein.

PODEJŚCIA DO WYZNACZANIA REGIONÓW: ADMINISTRACYJNE VERSUS FUNKCJONALNE

Artykuł poświęcono ważnemu elementowi polityki gospodarczej, jakim jest rozwój regionów. By regiony mogły wykorzystać swój wewnętrzny potencjał, ważne jest ich prawidłowe wyznaczenie. Pod tym względem rozróżniamy regiony administracyjne, które są istotne z punktu widzenia realizacji zadań administracji państwowej i samorządowej, oraz regiony funkcjonalne, które są wyznaczane w oparciu o powiązania funkcjonalne pomiędzy centrum regionu funkcjonalnego a jego zapleczem. Powiązania te są niezbędne w szczególności dla terytorialnej analizy społeczno-ekonomicznej, strukturalnego badania lokalnych rynków pracy oraz do określania różnic pomiędzy regionami. Jak wynika z przeprowadzonej analizy porównującej sytuację w Austrii i na Węgrzech, podejścia do wyznaczania regionów administracyjnych i funkcjonalnych mogą się różnić również w gospodarkach o stosunkowo podobnej wielkości.