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Identifications and social identities The case of Upper Silesia¹

Marek S. Szczepański, Anna Śliz

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Abstract

For centuries, identity has been an important existential issue, because it organizes human relation with the world. Identity is not only one man's being in a biological sense, but the principle of social and cultural order.

The identity is the self-awareness, the result of the social actor's involvement in a variety of network connections which are forming a human being together with the biological dimension. Thus, the identity, on the one hand, is a kind of Erikson's tradition, namely the sense of being human, on the other hand, interactionist tradition, and modification of identity through a process of interaction. Contemporary world, the world of confronting cultures, raises the need for analysis of identity within many cultures, which has been shaped by continuous contact with different values, norms, and patterns of behaviour.

Upper Silesia has been our empirical reference point for the discussion on social (regional) identity. Identity of Upper Silesia is the result of a long and complicated history and present day. This identity is created by Polish, German, Czech and Jewish cultural elements.

Keywords: Identity, Regional identity, Upper Silesia

1 Upper Silesia is defined as an area consisting of Katowice and Opole parts of Silesia. It is a part of historical Silesia, the borders of which are among Górlitz in the Federal Republic of Germany, Zgorzelec, Legnica, Wrocław, Opole, Bytom, Katowice, Opava and Krnov in the Czech Republic. We do not want to discuss here about the precise delimitation of the region in the geographical or historical sense. We use extracts of the article: Szczepański Marek S., Śliz Anna: Kim jestem? Identyfikacje i tożsamości społeczne. Przypadek Górnego Śląska, „Nauka”, 1/2018, pp. 129-142 in the text.

Upper Silesia and its identity: prolegomena

The Kantian question: *Who am I? Who are we?* acquires these days a peculiar meaning in the context of global changes, which enforce re-definition of identity both individual and social one. The necessity of modifying the perception of identity confronts with the history of the term itself, which comes from the Latin *idem* (identicalness and continuity). Aristotle in “Metaphysics” wrote, [...] *identity is a certain unity of plurality of things or a unity of one thing understood as a plurality* (Golka 2010, 327). Identity is an important existential problem which has been present for centuries and today it faces subsequent challenges connected with what Ryszard Kapuściński defined as the world at the partings of the ways. Identity is not only biological existence of a human being but it also introduces a principle of social order, in which we exist together with our culture. This issue is made even deeper by the words of Manuel Castells (2008) that identity is the most important category organizing relations of a human being with the surrounding reality. Therefore, it is necessary to think about the problem of looking for harmony of an individual with the world undergoing cultural diversification.

Skipping a biological dimension of identity, we focus on the interaction of a person with the outer world. Thanks to such an interaction, an individual forms a subjectively ranged hierarchy of values, according to the degree of their importance. An interaction forms and maintains identity, because *an individual is not a structure of permanent properties, features, but a dynamic, changing actor equipped with interactively quoted autodefinitions, being [...] the basic factor of developing perspectives* (cited after Pasamonik 1999, 28). The construction of individual identity is *a permanent process and its current state seems to be temporary* (Korczyński 2019, 87).

Individual identity is understood according to Zbigniew Boksański, as *identity of a social actor that is a set of perceptions, judgments and beliefs, which the actor constructs concerning himself and when taking things in a more terse manner, as a set of autodefinitions of a social actor* (Boksański 1989, 12). However, social identity can be in the form of regional, local or cultural identity. Such identity is not *a permanent, unchangeable and brassbound shell, on the contrary, it has its own systemic autonomy, which, however, undergoes a dynamic historical process during biographic changes* (Korczyński 2019, 88). Upper Silesian identity

is regional and it is defined as a multiplied individual identity based on value systems, standards, customs, language, economy or a particular area common or close to all actors or to the majority of them. Or as something like an over individual set of autodefinitions unable to be reduced to an autodefinition of a single human being. That is why, social (regional) identity is a collective identity based on the experienced and internalized tradition, presence and definition of the future common for a group. In this sense, it is close to Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness, collective performances and perceptions (Banaszczyk 1989; Bokszański 1989, 12).

In such a context, we are talking about Upper Silesian identity, which was formed throughout a long and complicated historical process. A variety of cultural influences on its territory caused that social identity is a hallmark of a 'mosaic' composed mainly of elements of Polish, German, Czech or Jewish culture. However, a situation of Upper Silesia becomes more complicated when we realize the current division of Poland, which is different from cultural or ethnic divisions. That is why, identity of Silesia province is composed not only of the part of historical Upper Silesia, but also of Podbeskidzie and Częstochowa with neighbouring communes. Such a composition complicates a lot regional identity of Upper Silesia. That is why, we chose the main subject of this article to be a sociological perspective of defining regional identity, adopting as empirical point of reference, regional identity of Upper Silesia. The presented text is a theoretical study related to a sociological, or rather interdisciplinary, understanding of identity. It is mainly about regional identity, which is exemplified by the Upper Silesian region, using the knowledge included in various secondary sources.

Dimensions of regional identity

Regional identity and – *per analogiam* – local identity (we will refer to regional identity in the article) are special cases of social identity and also of the cultural one. It is based on regional tradition, related to a clearly defined and delimited territory, region (place), its specific social, cultural (symbolic), economic or even topographic features. These are elements highlighting a particular region. If it is understood in this way, it happens that regional identity is combined with ethnic identity (group or ethnic minority). It so happens in relation to Upper Silesians

or Kashubians. It is thus possible to state that social identity is formed on the basis of individual identity, although it is not reduced to them, cultural identity is a specific form of social identity, based on the cultural core, whereas regional identity is a variety of social identity, formed on the basis of references to a certain territory (region) and its key imponderabilia.

In relation to the above, identity of a particular region can be described by exposing ten basic perspectives:

1. Psychological perspective is an individual identification with a region, with its community and culture. Such an identification is seen as readiness to undertake altruistic actions for the sake of the community. The lack of individualized identification is an attitude of a superior isolation and identity which is out of and over regional.
2. Sociological perspective is a collective realization of a division into 'we' and 'they' as well as self-identity accompanying it. Regional identity in a sociological dimension is about relating to little homelands, private homelands. This is also a sociological and educational process which form a human axiological system also in the context of identification with a given region.
3. Economical perspective, which gains particular significance in the conditions of market economy and structural transformation. This is a community of management, cooperation and international competition in the economic dimension on the national, continental and international scale. A global character of economic cooperation, the flows of capital, people, ideas and patterns often weaken preserved forms of identity based on a regional market. Ignoring globalization processes, not only in the economic form but also in the social, cultural, political or ecological form, can signify attempts of building underdeveloped regionalism and folkloric forms of identity, remaining in relation to real transformations. This element is particularly important when a region becomes a part of an economic global system.
4. Political science perspective, that is forms of political activity. It concerns political parties leading in the region, electoral preferences of inhabitants, old and new political institutions but also

political traditions. This is also a level of regional inhabitants' participation in public (political) life, but mainly voter turnout, declared interest in actors of political life, public and backstage phenomena connected with governing. Apparently, political dimension is expressed when inhabitants of a region take part in elections of each level, starting from a local level, ending at Presidential elections as well as European elections (choosing European Parliament representatives).

5. Historical perspective is expressed by an individual and social relation with the past of the region, its heroes and historical institutions. When describing this relation, it seems to be necessary to refer to the perspective of "long lasting", the term introduced by Fernand Paul Braudel, co-creator of *Annales* historical school (Braudel 1976, 1977; Braudel 1985). Methodological imperative formulated by F.P. Braudel has to be used in research on regional identity, where researchers in the field of social sciences should describe structures and institutions resisting, to a high degree, historical fluctuations and having an influence on contemporary transformations. The author himself, analysing the process of formation of integrated Europe, referred among others to events, institutions and structures from the "long 16th century" (1450-1640).
6. Anthropologic and ethnographic perspective, where awareness of cultural heritage, understanding and reading the meanings of material and symbolic culture as well as its correlates are important determinants of regional identification. It is also an expression of identification of inhabitants of the region by means of their outfit as well as moral and customary norms. Language, dialect, cant, local and regional literature, either written or spoken as well as regional writers and artists become important elements in the creation of local and regional community.
7. Geographical perspective, that is assignment to a territory, in particular to a 'place' and 'space'. A special form of space, described by Yi-Fu Tuan (1987, 75), is a flat, whereas a house, especially family house, is a symbol of a 'place'. A flat is bought or rented, whilst a house is an element of a private homeland

for many people, sometimes for many generations. It also creates – by socialization and upbringing – one of pillars creating regional identity. An urban house is a birthplace of bourgeoisie, dead at the time of real socialism of a class, important in maintaining and preserving this identity. A flat fulfils such functions more rarely, but it is more often the space co-creating a social category of urban inhabitants than bourgeoisie. In large residential complexes, housing estates, such primary treating of a flat as private homeland, which is particularly important for durability of regional identity, is made harder but possible. It is often the construction of modest cultural features making it more difficult to identify with them more deeply. However, in many cases, it is, at the same time, a sign of civilizational and life advancement for many people. People described as ‘people without private homeland’ are most often met in large residential complexes. *Genus loci*, spirit of a place, which is always a deciding building block of a private homeland was evicted from housing estates. Thus, it can be assumed that spotting its value will be made much harder, although possible in them.

8. Urban and architectural perspective is about the existence of particular, special to an area – region – construction forms, planning scheme. It mainly concerns traditional and folk forms of construction because new and the newest urban complexes are characterised with either far going uniformization on the national scale, without clear regional differences, or particular individualization, making it impossible to form regional or even local types (Węglarz 1997, 54 and next). Each region has contemporary architecture called ‘silent’ by Manuel Castells as it is deprived of historic moments. It is symbolically connected all over the world by network ties and ducks out of history and culture of a single region or community. However, each region, at the same time, has its own, spectacular architecture with regional history and spirit of the past (Castells 2007, 418-423).
9. Worldview perspective is mainly connected with religious and ethical attitude being common for a particular cultural field. A behavioural component of such an attitude is cultivating

particular religious practices, sharing identical values. This is creating a common moral and worldview backbone of a particular community. This is affiliation to religious communities and churches. This is also about an attitude to important and contemporary problems such as an attitude to refugees or immigrants.

10. Ecological perspective that is self-awareness of parameters of natural environment. A peculiar symbiosis and a specific regional ecosystem. This is nature sensitivity, taking care of nature and increasing the number of green areas. These are pro-ecological actions such as decreasing the quantity of generated rubbish and conscious rubbish separation as well as fight with smog.

Regional symbolic universe is thus created by accumulative values of social (regional) identity understood in the perspective of above-mentioned descriptions. These are thus individual identification with regional community, sense of individuality of community, political activity and voter turnout, assignment to the space and place, awareness of cultural heritage – tradition, customs, language, relation to the history of the region, its heroes and historic institutions, managing community, visible among others in interregional competition, occurrence of construction and architectural forms characteristic to the region, in particular traditional, religious and moral community expressed by being a member of religious communities and churches as well as ecological consciousness.

Certain values, which are assigned to a private homeland but decide about regional identity can also be included in this universe. It is about a specific scent or touch connected with special or iconic places – bakery, stone or monument. These are places associated with experiences from childhood or youth, as well as important gardens of remembrance both individual and collective – a cemetery with graves of relatives, regional heroes or monuments. All these elements create an inimitable picture of the region and form its identity both the social and the individual one (identity of inhabitants).

The above ponderations relate to a traditional understanding of regional identity. At this point, we should realize that contemporaneity, brings new solutions in the context of identity, which are connected to a virtual world. Today, regional identity does not need a specific territory

unconditionally, but more and more often, it needs the virtual environment. People, who have never visited a given place physically, know it and feel a connection to it. It so happens thanks to different Internet fora, which are full of real lovers or imaginative regional systems or little homelands. Nowadays, the majority of people communicate using the Internet, but they also exist in a constant journey. This is a contemporary *homo viator*, using the term of Gabriel Honoriusz Marcel. In such a reality, it is hard to maintain a constant relation to any structural system. People are prone to create or copy more or less permanent systems while strengthening regional identity. Admittedly, it will not be the same as the traditional one, but it will create a sense of a certain attachment and rooting.

Regional identity can be understood as identification, on the one hand, with a certain territory (place, space, country), on the other hand, as a collection of spiritual and material values, characteristic to a given community, passed from generation to generation and traditionally legitimized. Tradition should be seen here in three ways: firstly, as a collection of ideas, views and images assigned to a local community and different generations; secondly, as a social transmission that is passing and receiving of values which are socially great; thirdly, as the past which is accepted and respected either unconsciously or consciously and expressed in social actions.

Understanding of regional identity can be seen in particular regions. Historicity and contemporaneity of Upper Silesian identity has been adopted by us as an empirical reference point of the above views.

Regional identity: Upper Silesia

The period of Polish transformation made people aware of the existence of so many problems connected among others with individual and social identity. In the native public discourse, more or less loud arguments concerning identity of such regions as Upper Silesia appeared. This is an important component of Polish discourse because it concerns an important area of Poland both in the historical and contemporary contexts. Upper Silesia was a scene, on which different forces forming modern Europe struggled. This is the region [...] where topographic and intellectual trails between regions and nations of Europe crossed, science became transnational fascination, religion was seen as a source of experiencing

transcendence, the basis of a huge industry was built on Silesian natural resources [...] (Sławek 2006, 28). Upper Silesia is mainly an industrial area first belonging to Prussia and then to united Germany. The contemporary Upper Silesian landscape shows a high level of infrastructure (highways, roads, transportation, telecommunication) and infostructure (information highways, optical fibre networks). However, Upper Silesia is at the same time a region of cultural borderline, located peripherally and on the borderland in relation to political and administrative centres, with clear awareness of distinctiveness in the identity of the region. Its basis is formed by its cultural, political and economic past, the characteristic feature of which is a clash of several axiological and normative systems, out of which a contemporary picture of Upper Silesia with a spectacular cultural variety appeared. Identity of Upper Silesia is regional and the main component of it is culture with regional tradition. This is also a clearly defined territory of the region (place), its specific social, cultural (symbolic), economic or topographic features distinguishing it from other regions (Szczepański 2006, 19-28). This is emotional identity that is the one experienced and based on everyday human experience but also the functional one, resulting from the game of collective interests. Upper Silesia has thus its own symbolic universe, the foundations of which are accumulated values of regional identity read in the perspective of long lasting. According to its postulate, Upper Silesian identity is a plurality of meticulously remembered facts, which formed the contemporary picture of the region throughout the history.

Identity of Upper Silesia: from the historical point of view²

The identity of Upper Silesia raise a lot of controversies, which are, to a high degree, an effect of the region's past. In order to understand it, it is necessary to look into the period of Silesian Piast dynasty when the colonization process increased the number of German people in towns and villages as well as in female and male monasteries. German language became more and more common and so was the presence of German knights and clergy. It caused dissatisfaction of Polish people, who until the 17th century were the majority of the region's inhabitants and consequently, became an oasis in [...] *German elements on the left side of the*

² Below we used extracts of the article: A. Śliz, Śląsk: *wielokulturowość czy kulturowe zróżnicowanie*, „Studia Socjologiczne”, 4(195)/2009, pp. 149-166.

Oder River (Szaraniec 2007, 7). Submission of Upper Silesian duchies to the Czech incorporated these lands into the domain of Czech and German culture, where Czech language was used until the 18th century and from the 16th century, German language accompanied it. As a result of Silesian wars in the 18th century, the majority of Upper Silesian lands were in Prussia, which did not change the cultural diversity of this land inhabited by Polish people, Germans, Moravians (Czechs) and Jews. Together with the process of industrialization of Upper Silesia, a more and more numerous group of German people employed as technical staff, teachers and merchants flowed into this territory (Szaraniec 2007, 7-8). The lives of Poles, Germans, Czechs and Jews in Upper Silesia, similarly to the whole Upper Silesian world, changed their status together with the passing centuries and years. The most tragic period in the relations of Polish, German, Czech and Jewish people was the time of the Second World War and years after its end when German people living in Upper Silesia were resettled to Germany and on the territory of Poland, there were people from the area of central and eastern Poland. Upper Silesia remained thus a cultural melting pot, [...] *in which cultural and historical experiences of local people, submitted to particular inspection by communist authorities due to belonging to different national lists from the period of war (the so-called volkslist), alluvial people coming from the central and eastern Poland, displaced people from the territory of the Second Republic of Poland incorporated to USSR in 1945 as well as repatriated people from France and Belgium [...] among others Ukrainians, admitting to be Polish as they were citizens of the Second Republic of Poland, and Jews, from eastern areas of the Republic of Poland, came to Upper Silesia together with Polish people* (Szaraniec 2007, 10).

Representatives of national and ethnic minorities inhabiting the area of Silesia were accompanied by the more and more numerous group of Poles who, on the basis of the process of industrialization, migrated from different parts and cultural worlds of Poland in order to look for a job and better life conditions. The substance of such migration processes of the 1950s and the 1960s were hotels for workers densely located on the territory of Silesia. Opole Silesia which was inhabited mainly by representatives of the German minority and repatriated people from Eastern Borderlands, was lacking this element. In the 1970s, a very significant group of indigenous people left Upper Silesia as a result

of a family reunification and settled in Germany in industrious centres of Westphalia and Northern Rhineland. Together with these people, the Jewish minority left Upper Silesia and went to Western European countries, to the USA or to Israel. The period of real socialism was known as efforts undertaken in order to integrate culturally and nationally diversified Upper Silesia by means of introducing an appropriate educational and cultural system and the media specially programmed by communist authorities. Cultivating traditions brought and maintained by national and ethnic minorities took place only in the private sphere often in the care of the church. Catholic church and clergy were the anchor and the place of externalizing national and ethnic minorities. This is the period, in which the cultural sphere of Poland is seen as axiological and normative diversity that is inhabiting a given territory by two or more groups or cultural categories, cultural disparities of which are not a visible feature of the society. They were only the domain of private worlds. The national culture of the nationalistic state (the national culture of Poland) was the public world. Only the fact of Poland choosing a path towards freedom and democratization created the atmosphere of cultural pluralism, which became a competence differentiating Upper Silesia. This phenomenon is composed mainly of national and ethnic minorities – mainly German and Silesian but also Czech, Slovak, Romanian or Jewish minorities – which openly manifest their own cultural systems.

A complicated history of Upper Silesia, as well as its contemporaneity described mainly by taking part by national and ethnic minorities in the life of the region, creates today's picture of regional identity.

Identity of Silesia: *contemporary times*

As it was mentioned earlier, the most visible and important minorities inhabiting the area of Upper Silesia are German and Silesian minorities. The other groups do not form important communities, although it is possible to enumerate representatives of Czech, Romanian and Jewish minorities. Only Upper Silesia is the region where people identifying themselves as Silesians and 91% of those declaring themselves to be members of the German minority live³. A spatial layout of inhabited areas of the Silesian and German groups shows a visible spatial

³ National and Ethnic Minorities in Poland: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mniejszości_narodowe_i_etniczne_w_Polsce (date of access: 2017.12.20)

concentration in relation to the ethnic Silesian minority as well as a considerable amount of people declaring themselves to have national German orientation. Upper Silesian landscape is mainly a cultural and social place of representatives of minorities delineated since 2005 by means of regulations on national and ethnic minorities and a regional language. The act guarantees the acceptance of cultural diversity, the carriers of which are inhabitants of Upper Silesia and they are the main guarantors of maintaining Silesian identity.

Nowadays, Upper Silesia is the region of contact of cultures which more or less openly manifest their own axiological and normative system. This is *sine qua non* of its identity. Such a situation is documented among others by means of results of the National General Census, which took place in Poland in 2002, when a declaration of belonging to Silesian nationality was noted for the first time – 173 153, including 148 500 in Silesian province and 24 200 in Opole province. In the year 2002 in the area of the Polish part of Cieszyn Silesia (Cieszyn county, Bielski country and Bielsko-Biała) the Silesian nationality was declared by 1045 people⁴. The results of the National General Census from the year 2011 showed that 817 000 people declared the Silesian nationality – 362 000 as their only one, whereas the Silesian national identification as the first one was declared by 418 000 people⁵. At the same time, in the year 2011, 109 thousand people declared affiliation to the German minority⁶. Such a picture of the region connects in itself both the surface of traditional understanding of identity as an attachment to the territory and to a strong tradition as well as being a result of contemporary global processes, which more and more clearly aim at the annulment of the territory, creating in return strong relations in the symbolic sphere. Contemporary global processes decide that identity is in a constant

⁴ The Results of the National General Census of Population and Housing 2002. The Central Statistical Office (on-line); www.stat.gov.pl (December 2010)

⁵ The National General Census of Population and Housing 2011. Report: www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/lud_raport_z_wynikow_NSP2011.pdf (2013.06.09)

⁶ To be more precise, it is necessary to add that among 809 thousand people declaring the Silesian nationality, 362 thousand showed only the Silesian identification, whereas 415 thousand showed the Silesian and Polish identity. As many as 418 thousand people showed the Silesian identity as the first one. At the same time, among 109 thousand declaring affiliation to the German minority, 49 thousand showed this choice as the first one: P. Jedlecki, K. Katka, J. Pszon, *Ponad 800 tys. Ślązaków*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 23rd March 2012, p. 4

process of creation and thus, it gets more and more clearly an inclusive character. In such view, identity of Upper Silesian region is mainly seen in the potential of inhabitants, who form the specificity of Upper Silesia by their biography. Inhabitants of the region are the ones who undertake various actions aiming at strengthening the Silesian identity. An example is a new investment in Katowice that is the Museum of Silesia, the foundation of which has raised many controversies. An important reference of the fight for Silesian regional identity are the efforts to acknowledge the Silesian community as an ethnic minority, Silesian *godka* to be a regional language, in the same way as the Kashubian language was acknowledged, as well as the political and economic activity of the Silesian Autonomy Movement aiming at acknowledging the region as autonomous within pre-war borders. However, it is necessary to remember that regional identity has Janus' countenance: it triggers both prosocial and egocentric as well as particular attitudes.

A contemporary discussion concerning Silesian identity has lasted since the 1990s and it is connected with a confrontation of a central model of society management and a model based on the acceptance of regional disparities. This tension led to the creation of many organizations, associations and social movements, the common idea of which became to care for returning to Silesian *ethnos*. Particularly strong animation can be seen among Silesians and the German minority. The Social and Cultural Association of the German Minority in Opole Silesia strengthens the social life of the German minority mainly by means of developing German language and bilingual education in the region or by the presence in regional media (Śliz 2009, 149-167). The main aim of the Association of People of Silesian Nationality (SONŚ) is to maintain tradition, language, ethnic and national elements of people identifying themselves with the Silesian nationality: [...] *thus the idea of filing a motion to the government and parliament of Poland for establishing an ethnic minority. The result of the last year's General Census, during which over 800 thousand people declared affiliation to the Silesian nationality or ethnic group, should be set down in Polish lawmaking*⁷. In this context, a loud discussion concerning acknowledging Silesians as an ethnic minority and acknowledging actions towards the autonomy of Silesia

⁷ Ślązacy, łączmy się!, „Jaskółka Śląska. Miesięcznik Górnśląskich Regionalistów”, May/2012

reappeared: *Silesians will demand autonomy stronger than they did until now*. In this context, it is necessary to mention the Association of People of Silesian Nationality (Związek Ludności Narodowości Śląskiej (ZLNŚ)) registered in the court in Katowice on 24th June 1997. However, this Act was questioned by the then Silesian voivode. The registration was abolished but the Association still tries to succeed, although the Grand Chamber in Strasbourg issued a negative opinion for activists of the Association of People of Silesian Nationality concerning this case.

The core of people identifying themselves as Silesians is taking care of culture and tradition of Upper Silesian region. The most important thing for them is to aim at acknowledging Silesian language as a regional language in accordance with provisions of the Act on national and ethnic minorities and a regional language⁸. Silesians want their *godka* to be officially recognized as a regional language as it meets criteria of the definition of a regional language provided in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) made in Strasbourg on 5th November 1992. It was accepted in the cited document that a regional language, which is traditionally used by citizens of a given country, who form a minority, is not a dialect of the official language, in this case Polish language, and is not the language of immigrants. Debates have been held in the Polish parliament for several years aiming at acknowledging Silesians as an ethnic minority, and their language as a regional language. The dispute and arguments are still in progress and engage not only politicians but also linguists, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists. It has been another time we have witnessed a lively but also highly controversial discussion about Silesian language at the end of August 2012 during the debate of the parliamentary committee on national and regional minorities. And again Silesian speech did not receive the status of a regional language.

The Silesian Autonomy Movement plays an important role in acting in favour of Silesian regional language *godka*. However, the main aim of this movement is the fight for the autonomy of Upper Silesia in imitation of the autonomy from the period of the Second Republic of Poland when Silesian province acted within the framework of the Organic Statute granted by the Legislative Parliament – it had then a

⁸ The Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and the Regional Language as of 6th January 2005 Internet System of Legal Documents; www.isao.sejm.gov.pl (2019.03.17)

separate Silesian Parliament and Silesian Treasury⁹, and its economic status was strong.

Today, the Upper Silesian region is seen by many as the one having a strong identity which connects historically inscribed national and ethnic minorities, as well as a cultural diversity, which can be seen in the language and tradition, which strongly highlight historical and contemporary regionalism of Upper Silesia. Upper Silesian identity as a regional identity is a fact. Admittedly, it adopted different shades in different periods of history and although Upper Silesia was sometimes connected and sometimes divided by linguistic, national and public communities, these have always been important elements forming regional identity. In the course of history, the region changed its territorial state affiliation, undertook attempts of building national life in the period of creating nation states in Europe, as well as underwent a difficult period of fighting with national, ethnic and religious minorities. It seems that this difficult history formed today's foundations of permanent identity of Upper Silesian region.

The end: new icons of Silesian identity?

Contemporary identity of Upper Silesia occurs both in difficult and complex historical consciousness of the region as well as in all actions, the aim of which is a contemporary manifestation of Upper-Silesian specificity in the cultural and social context as well as in the economic and political one. Therefore, we can see an effort in order to maintain a cultural variety resulting from ethnic and national minorities living in the region, including aiming at formalization of a regional dialect in the form of Silesian language. In the context of regional identity, we cannot forget about a special landscape of Upper Silesia with red 'Familoks' (houses for many families) and mine shafts, which more and more often transform themselves into symbols of shopping malls (Silesia City Centre) or museums (Muzeum Śląskie – The Museum of Silesia). An important aspect is Silesian religiousness, regional heroes and artists or traditional Silesian cuisine. However, Upper Silesia is also a strong economic region of Poland, the representatives of which aim at getting

⁹ Read more in: M. S. Szczepański, A. Śliz: *Die Bewegung für die Autonomie Schlesiens (RAS)*, „Polen-Analysen“, Deutsches Polen Institut Darmstadt und Forschungsstelle Osteurope, Bremem 112/03.07.2012

economic autonomy by this region within borders of Poland. An identity of Upper Silesia breaks down in many dimensions of life, creates a strong sense of 'we' community and a foundation distinguishing Upper Silesia from other regions of Poland.

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