
Historical-geographical determinants of the west-east territorial disparities in the Central European countries

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Abstract: It cannot pass unnoticed that the inner territorial disparities of Central European states, unlike other European countries, show a certain west-east orientation. As the main cause of this phenomenon this contribution presents the fact that the area of Central Europe historically fulfils the function of a transition zone between the West and East, the two sub-regions in Europe. Based on the chosen economic, social and political indicators the article attempts to generalize the dominant spatial gradient of the regional disparities within their territories and to define what determines this state and also which (historical) causes have led to its development.

Keywords: Central Europe, territorial disparities, regional development, West-East duality, historical geography.

Introduction

The development period in the Central Europe after the year 1989 can be seen as a very dynamic one in terms of regional development. The fall of the Iron Curtain which until then had been tightly separating the Central-European area into two economically, socially, politically and culturally different parts made it possible to renew the natural territorial bonds and relations. Crucial political and subsequently economic changes led to a deep transformation in the post-communist countries. The differences between the Western (West Germany, Austria) and Eastern (the German Democratic Republic, Poland, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Hungary and some other ones) countries of this region that have been rather substantial before had gradually weakened in some respects which means that Central Europe is a continuous area again as a sort of transition zone between the West and East. This transition brought the renewal of the natural mechanisms of the territorial differentiation especially for the territories of post-communist countries: concentration and polarization. An increase in spatial disparities within each of these countries not only at the level of the core – periphery relation (regional centre – hinterland, or rather the metropolitan region – other areas), but also in the differences in socio-economic development between regions of each country can be observed.

The task of geography in this domain consists not only in monitoring and describing the current regional differences. Unlike other fields of science this one has a better potential to look into the issues in a more complex manner through the wider space-time connections, to find certain spatial regularities in them and to see a deeper historical causes and determinants of the current situation. A number of authors (e.g. Krivý et al. 1996; Hampl et al. 1996; Michalski 2005; Mládek, Kusendová, Marenčáková et al. 2006) who deal with the issues of regional development and spatial disparities of the Central European countries point out that within their territories many indicators regarding their values show a certain west-eastern gradient. These indicators include, but are not limited to, regional gross domestic product (GDP), unemployment rate, sometimes quality of the infrastructure, automobilization, urbanization rate, share of labour force employed in agriculture, traditionalism, share of practicing believers, the election results of the political parties etc. The fact that this is not a phenomenon that is coincidental and time-restricted but a continuous and historically permanently present one in the Central Europe is proven by many scientific studies dealing especially with socio-economic development of this region (Bérend, Ránki 1975; Good 1984; Aldcroft, Morewood 1995; Wandycz 2004; Křen 2005) or thematically focused monographs regarding the individual countries (Kováč 1996; Veber 2002; Davies 2003; Müller 2004). In this context the Central Europe is quite often referred to as a “transition zone” (Jordan 1996; Křen 2005), i.e. an area where the West and East, the two historical sub-regions of Europe and European civilization, meet and their features mutually blend (Halecki 2000; Szücs 2001). The most recent approach to the concept of the Europe “duality” and to the related differences between the western and eastern regions of the individual Central-European countries was also introduced by the author of this contribution in his monograph: *The Duality of Europe: Historical-Geographical Analysis* (Nováček 2012a – orig.: *Dualita Evropy: historickogeografická analýza*). Therefore, many approaches and findings which are dealt with this article are therefore influenced by this concept and they are based on the author’s long-lasting research of the aspects of the Europe’s duality.¹

Detection of territorial disparities

The existence of the territorial disparities can be considered a natural part of the regional differentiation in each country. As our study focuses on the observation of interregional differences, due to its topic, within the individual Central-European countries which could show a certain spatial gradient (e.g. the west-east one), it was necessary to select the appropriate indicators so that they would fit this requirement. At the same time, they should represent more aspects of the complex social-geographical reality, i.e. socio-economic, cultural and political. Based on these input methodological requirements the following indicators were chosen.

Firstly, there are indicators that could show differences in the economic development of the regions such as *regional gross domestic product per capita* and *share of labour force employed in agriculture* (or rather primary sector). Whereas the former shows the efficiency of the economics and the living standard in the region, the latter gives the information on the progressiveness of the structure and the development of the economics. On the other hand the *unemployment rate* can be seen

¹ Currently this research is being carried out under a grant project for the support of the excellence in the basic research GA ČR No. P410/12/G113 “Výzkumné centrum historické geografie – Historical Geography Research Centre” and grant project FRVŠ No. 1200/2013/B5/b “Zavedení nového předmětu Střední Evropa mezi Východem a Západem – Introduction of a new subject Central Europe between the East and West”.

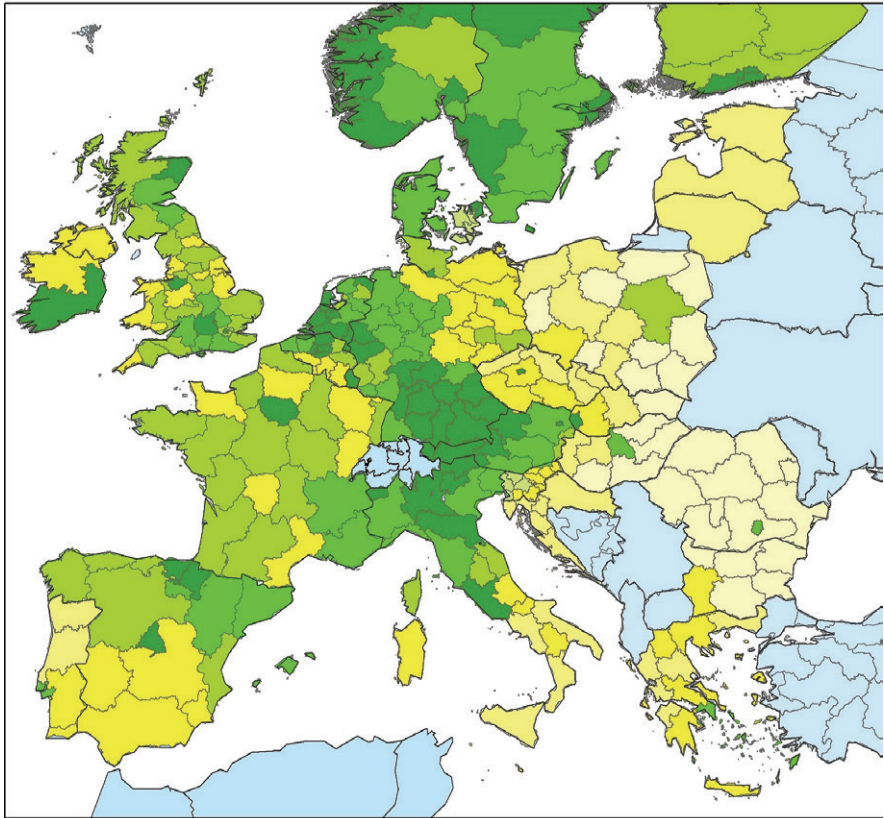
as an indicator of the economic shape, or rather of the extent of problems within the region, although it significantly overlaps with the social level. The potential differences in settlement patterns of the inhabitants and the settlement structure in a country were observed using other common indicators – *population density* and *urbanization rate*. To a certain extent the areas with lower population density can be considered peripheries of their own type, while the areas with a higher urbanization rate may represent regions with a higher level of the settlement system development and higher population density. Other indicators which have a potential to demonstrate certain territorial differences were rather chosen as supplementary ones. They include *railway network density* and *automobilization rate* (number of cars per ten inhabitants). They are not ideal information carriers as far as the facilities and quality of the traffic infrastructure.² Their purpose is different. The railway network density can be understood as a detector of the position of a particular territory in the recent past, especially in the industrial development period of the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. On the contrary, the automobilization rate can provide evidence of the interregional differences in living standard, purchasing power and lifestyle. The cultural and political aspects of the territorial differentiation are represented by the *religiousness rate* (the share of the believers in the population of region) and the *results of the parliamentary elections*. In this case there can be a link with the differences in the lifestyle (e.g. the impact on the divorce rate), inclination to various values, or, more precisely, traditions or the way of thinking (more conservative versus more liberal).

We excluded those indicators which usually show only insignificant differences between the regions within one country (namely: life expectancy, educational structure) or usually do not show any spatial gradient (north-south or west-east) and they represent rather differences between the core and periphery at the country level or inside a particular region. The data for most of the given indicators were obtained from the public databases of Eurostat (2013), statistical offices of the Central-European countries (ČSÚ, DESTATIS, GUS, KSH, STAT, ŠÚ SR), or other statistical sources.

To what extent is the phenomenon of the certain west-east gradient of the territorial disparities a specific feature of the Central-European countries? Figs. 1 & 2 provide the answer to this question. The range of economic indicators (GDP per capita, unemployment rate) chosen in order to be compared at the regional level is justified here because they reflect the economic aspect which can be at the same time also considered a key determinant or indicator of other demonstrations of the disparities (social, cultural, political) in the countries. If we attempt, based on the chosen economic indicators, to look for and generalize in certain European countries the regularities in the layout of their inner territorial disparities, we may distinguish the following four cases:³

² From this point of view it would be more suitable, for the current time, to follow the density of the motorway network. This, however, does not show any considerable gradient within the areas of Central-European countries.

³ We speak about certain, artificially set ideal types which nearly mingle in practice. For this reason the inclusion of some of the given countries cannot be considered as fully unambiguous, the countries, therefore, can be on the borderland of two or even more of these groups.



Regional GDP (in Euros)

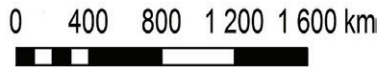
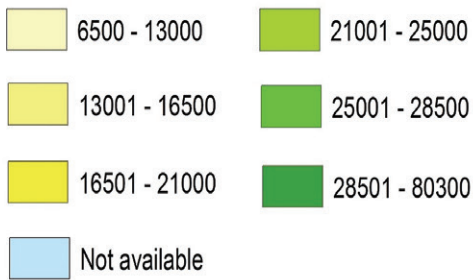


Figure 1. Regional gross domestic product (PPS per inhabitant) by NUTS 2 regions, 2010 in Euro
Source: Eurostat 2013. Authors: Nováček, Vácha; ArcGIS 10.2, WGS-84.

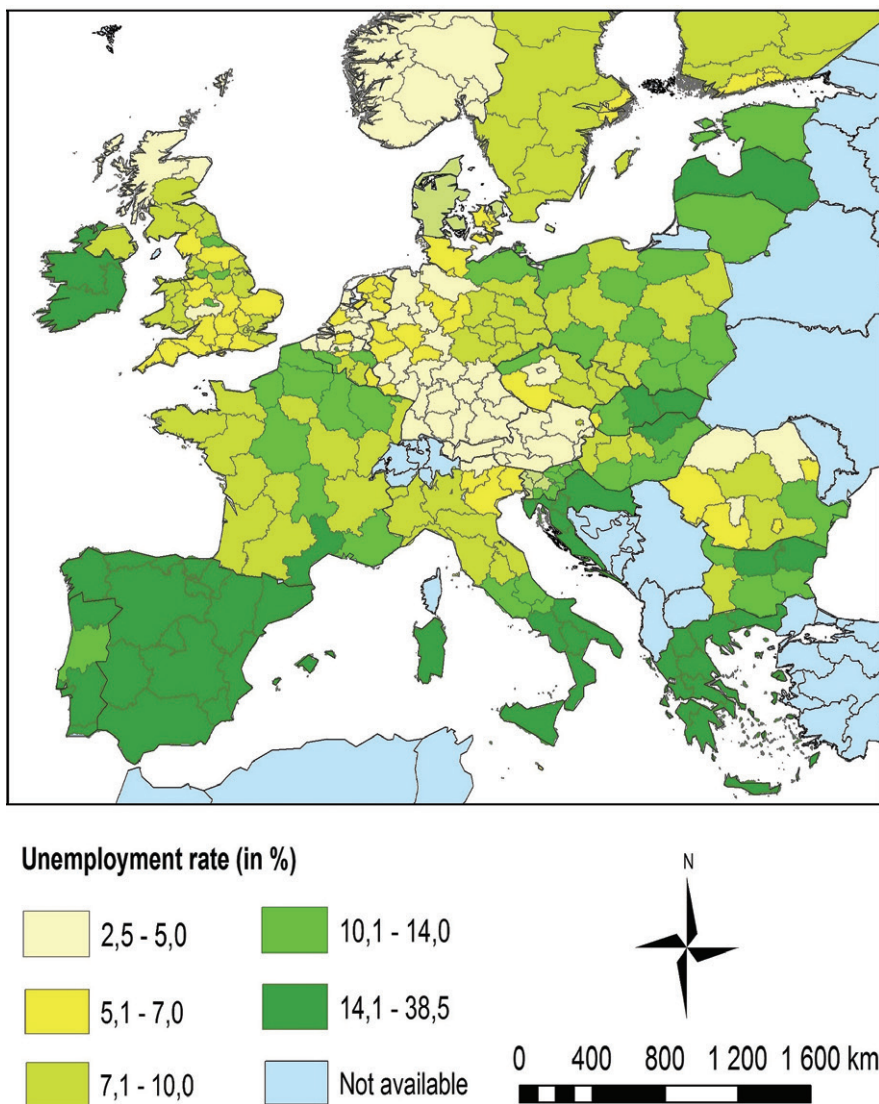


Figure 2. Unemployment rate by NUTS 2 regions, 2012 in %
 Source: Eurostat 2013. Authors: Nováček, Vácha; ArcGIS 10.2, WGS-84.

The first case is associated with an obvious dominance of the *core – periphery polarization*, where one of the metropolitan regions shows a significantly different parameters whereas the disparities among the remaining regions are either minimal or do not show any other regularities, or, more precisely, any spatial gradient. Such typical countries include those with relatively low population density and a considerable concentration of population and economic activities in one area or along a narrow belt of the coast. These are mainly the Nordic countries: Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland and a few Eastern Europe countries: Russia and partially the Baltic states. In both instances this layout

is strongly determined by the natural conditions and, therefore, a strongly disproportional settlement pattern. However, the significant polarization between the metropolitan region and other regions of the country can also be found in most European states, maybe with the exception of Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy and partially also Spain.

Apart from that, there are other regularities in the layout of the territorial disparities in some countries. The states where their interregional disparities show a certain spatial gradient – north-south, west-east or their combination, are ideal examples. *The north-south gradient* of the territorial polarization cannot be overlooked especially in the countries of the western Mediterranean region, in Italy and Spain. Their regions that are situated a little bit more to the north usually show a higher rate of development than the ones in the south, according to the majority of socio-economic indicators. This polarization can be due to the closer location of the northern areas of these countries to the most developed area in Europe, so called “Blue Banana” (Brunet 2002), the most important concentration area stretching from southern England across Benelux, Rhineland and the Alps to the northern Italy. In different configurations this area has fulfilled the function of the main European core already since the Middle Ages. Apart from the contacts with more developed neighbours which besides other things contributed to a faster and more intensive transfer of innovations (including the industrial revolution; Purš 1973; Pollard 1981), the northern areas of Italy and Spain offer also other advantages such as better conditions for agriculture, mineral resources for the industry, or more active and more enterprising mentality of the local population. These were the things that the dry and not really fertile areas located more to the south, being on the edge of Europe and European civilization, lacked for their development. Among the countries situated outside the Mediterranean region it is Belgium and, alternatively, also Germany which are close to the model of north-east disparities nowadays. In the case of Belgium this is associated with the language (cultural) and also with the present political division of the country into richer Flemish Region and relatively poorer Walloon Region where which is struggling with the consequences of deindustrialization of the old industrial areas of the mining and heavy industry. Germany where we can find both north-south and west-east polarities will be given more attention in the following chapters as it is a Central European country.

Except for the specific case of Germany mentioned above the presence of *the west-east gradient* of the territorial polarization can be observed using the chosen economic indicators, such as GDP per capita and unemployment rate (Figs. 1 & 2), also in other Central-European countries: Austria, Poland, Slovakia, and also in Czech and Hungary, though to a lesser extent. Their territories are primary interest for us and more consideration will be given to them further in this article. Looking at it from a certain distance the regularities of this kind could be also expected in the case of Slovenia, Croatia and maybe also Romania, though the presented maps do not show it clearly. In all listed countries their regions situated more to the west show “better” results on the average. On the other hand, we can mention Ukraine as an example of the “inverted west-east polarization”. Although the values of the economic indicators of the Kiev metropolitan region exceed the country average, there is an obvious difference, especially between the industrially developed eastern regions, rich in natural resources and inhabited by a numerous Russian minority (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, and possibly Crimea) on the one hand and the poorer and more agriculturally oriented rest of the country on the other hand. Therefore, we may conclude that Ukraine which is more situated in Eastern Europe does not show the same development mechanisms which can be expected in Central-European countries and which constitute the historical transition zone between the West and the East. The key determinants of the inversed west-east polarization

of Ukraine still consist of the natural resources, heavy industry and better exposition of the eastern regions to the economically stronger Russia.

The last group is represented by the European countries which do not show any regularities that could be generalized by means of a spatial gradient. They cannot even be included into the first of the groups specified. Among such countries *without obvious regularity* in the layout of the regional disparities can be listed for example Great Britain and France, and possibly Greece. The location of some regions close to Blue Banana, i.e. in the south of England or in the east of France, does positively impact on the values of the observed economic indicators, but it does not allow any deduction as far as any obvious spatial regularity for the whole areas of these countries.

West-east territorial disparities in the states of Central Europe

As already mentioned in the introduction, in some respects we can consider Central Europe as a transition zone which has been historically separating two sub-regions of Europe - the West and the East. Therefore, this was a natural area where the features and characteristics typical for both of these parts of Europe overlapped and it has remained like this until now. The perception of Europe as an area divided into two between the West and the East became especially prevailing after the Second World War - not only in the geopolitical concepts of the professional literature but also among the general public. At least until 1989 both sub-regions were perceived and defined as two contrasting territories: the capitalist and democratic West vs. socialist and totalitarian East. However, even after 1989, when the sharp post-war bipolarity lost its strict and "clear" form, the dual perception of Europe still persists (even though the parallel conceptual alternatives do exist). The reason for this lies in the immediate historical experience and also in the fact that the phenomenon of Europe duality can be traced back to the distant past; it probably existed already in the ancient times. Therefore, the division of Europe into the West and the East remains in a lot of professional and popularizing theses, as well as in the media and people's thoughts automatically or naturally. This is also obvious from many socio-economic and other points of view.

From the point of view of the territorial disparities and their spatial gradient Central Europe can be seen clearly as continuous area. This fact is, among others, evident from Figs. 1 & 2 – differences in regional gross domestic product per capita and partially also in unemployment rate. In both cases more developed western areas of the whole region show significantly better values than the eastern areas. As shown a similar regularity in the layout of spatial disparities at the level of the whole region may be found only on the Apennine and Pyrenean Peninsulas in south-western Europe. Other European regions – North, North-West, North-East (the states of the former Soviet Union) or South-East of Europe (Balkan States) do not show such clear spatial gradient, be it west-east or north-south. From this point of view the concept of Central Europe as a relatively sharp distinct "border" transition zone between the West and the East is tenable. On the other hand, it offers also a different explanation of the west-east differences within this region based on the core – periphery concept. The areas which are part of the main European core – concentration zone of Blue Banana - or more precisely, closely related to this zone, may benefit from their position to a greater extent than the more remote areas in the east regarding their development. Both of these explanations of the reasons for west-east disparities in our region cannot be understood as competing with each other after all. Mutual connections and interdependence between the core – periphery concept in Europe

and its separation into the more developed West and rather lagging behind East are indisputable. As a consequence of the continuity of the west-east disparities in the Central-European space all countries in the region border in the west with more developed and in the east with less developed and poorer countries. Naturally, this affects the regional development of the particular bordering areas of each country.

Although the mentioned general causes of the west-east disparities are applicable without exception for all Central-European States, they did not emerge with the same intensity and in the same indicators which were observed for this purpose. Apart from the given general causes for each state there is a whole range of other development determinants of their regions. These are various determinants of natural, socio-economic, cultural or political character. Their effect usually has a long-term character in the space and very often there are deep historical roots. In each individual state there are some differences or specificities both in the regularity of their inner territorial differentiation and in the causes and determinants of the development which led to the formation of these disparities.

First we will focus on **Germany** which represents the strongest state in terms of the population, area, economy and political power within the region for a long time. The single federal states are highly autonomous and also influence the politics of their regional development. Germany has been existed in its current borders for more than two decades (since the reunion in 1990), however, even today there is still a significant difference between the old (former West Germany – FRG) and the new federal states (former German Democratic Republic – GDR), no matter how many investments have been made there. This was proved by the observed indicators especially at the economic level (regional GDP per capita, unemployment rate). On the average, the automobilization rate, density of population or religiousness in the new federal states are also lower. As for the further less significant differences this is for instance the election behaviour of the population which gives priority to the smaller parties. In the new federal states it is the left wing (Die Linke) and extreme right wing that are more successful owing to a more complicated social situation and post-communist past, whereas the voting results of liberally oriented parties (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen und FDP) are below the average.

In the case of the east of Germany the different development of both parts of Germany in the years 1945-1989/90 has a stronger influence than the exposition towards the European core. Besides the socialist system of centrally planned economy and autocratic communist regime a negative impact in this period on the development of East Germany had e.g. the post-war reparatory politics of the USSR, economic cooperation with the countries from the Eastern Bloc (Comecon) which were less developed on the average, large expenditures on the army, emphasis on heavy industry, mass migration of people to the West etc. Therefore, we must be aware that the development differences for the territories of both states were insignificant before the Second World War (Maddison 2002). Unlike other countries in Central Europe whose capitals are also situated in the eastern part of the area (Poland – Warsaw, Austria – Vienna) Berlin for the same reasons does not exceed the countrywide average of the values of most of indicators. Therefore, we may say that the location and position of this metropolis does not really interfere the observed west-east polarization of the local territorial disparities.

On the contrary, a certain influence can be attributed to certain aspects of the north-south differentiation of German area. Besides the already mentioned indicators (regional GDP per capita, unemployment rate) this tendency is currently quite significant - e.g. higher importance of agriculture in northern areas or religious division of the country into mainly Protestant North and mainly Catholic and more religious South (Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate).

Keeping in mind the historical determinants of this state we could also speak about different natural conditions between the northern and southern areas or about historical disunity of the German territory, in particular in the times of reformation and the resulting religious wars. In this respect it is also necessary to point out that the current higher level of the development and industrialization of the South is a relatively new issue. At least until the Second World War these areas were rather less developed and had agricultural background in Germany. This also resulted from the lack of local mineral fuels, more conservative mentality of the Catholic inhabitants and smaller support for the innovations during the Industrial Revolution (Weber 1934; Pollard 1981). However, in the old industrial areas focused on mining and heavy industry (Rhineland and Ruhr) a partial deindustrialization took place with the launch of post-industrial period, while the South industrialized a little later and provided with newer and more modern industrial capacities (automobile and electro technical industry) was not affected that much. In Germany, we can, therefore, observe nowadays overlapping of the dominant west-east differentiation with its north-south tension. As a consequence from the point of view of spatial orientation of the territorial disparities in the result we can see rather their southwest-northeast gradient.

Austria was a different example of a “buffer state” between Western Europe and the states of the Eastern Bloc after the Second World War. At the beginning this country was also divided into several occupation zones. Unlike Germany it did keep its unity, even though it was at the cost of a strict neutrality of the renewed state. Apart from its Central-European location we may assume that its west-east oriented disparities are so clear also owing to elongated shape of its territory, which implies relatively long distances between its westernmost and easternmost regions. The analysis of the values of the chosen indicators showed a significant polarity between the western and eastern parts in terms of regional GDP per capita (with the exception of Vienna it is higher on average in the western regions of the country), population density and density of the railway network (both indicators higher in lowland areas in the north and east). Also the election results show a long-term popularity of Social Democratic Party of Austria (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs – SPÖ) in the east of the country (Vienna, Styria, Burgenland), whereas the developed federal states in the west and Upper and Lower Austria as well are the stronghold of the more conservative and hardworking Austrian People’s Party (Österreichische Volkspartei – ÖVP).

Besides the general causes of these differences (the expositions toward European core and more developed neighbouring countries, the effect of the transition zone between European West and East) regarding Austria we can also speak mainly about different natural conditions of its western and eastern (or rather northern) parts, especially the topographic features. In the past the mountainous character of the Alpine regions had had a negative impact on the development of human settlement, economy and infrastructure for a long time. Until the mid-20th century these regions may be considered rather lagging behind peripheries. The proportion between the development of the eastern and northern regions, until that time more developed, on the one hand, and that of the peripheries of the mountainous areas on the other hand has changed much since the Second World War. This change can also be compared to a similar process which took place in the 20th century in Germany where it came to a change in development between the northern and southern federal states. The old industrial areas in the east and north including the capital of Austria were affected the most by the war. Another stroke came in the years 1945-1955 as a reparatory politics of the USSR which controlled in its occupation zones besides part of Vienna and Upper Austria also whole Lower Austria and Burgenland. A negative impact was also caused by the fact that there were limited possibilities to cooperate with the countries of the Eastern Bloc which were isolated by the Iron Curtain. On the

contrary, at the same time the Alpine areas went through a rapid economic growth due to the investments, construction of the infrastructure and capacities of modern industrial branches, development of the services and tourism.

If we look at the values of the observed indicators which showed a certain west-east polarity between the federal states in Austria, we can include Vorarlberg, Tyrol, Salzburg into the “Western” states and Upper and Lower Austria, Styria, Burgenland and Carinthia into the “Eastern” states. Vienna is a specific case. Its location puts it among the eastern regions, although the values of some indicators (e.g. GDP per capita) do not correspond with that because of the character of the capital. As in the case of Poland, this provides a certain deviation from the presented west-east territorial polarization of the state.

It is also necessary to look for the causes of the west-east territorial disparities of another Central-European state, **Poland**, in its past, in particular in the period following immediately the Second World War. It was the territory of Poland that in that time was subject to the biggest changes which consisted in a factual move of the whole state territory towards the west. The poor agricultural areas in the east (so called Kresy - Borderlands) which were mostly inhabited by the Orthodox inhabitants – Belarusians and Ukrainians were passed on the USSR as spoils of war. Poland was compensated for this loss with former German areas to the east from the Lusatian Neisse and the Oder: Silesia, Pomerania, Gdansk and Eastern-Prussian Masuria. This shift in newly gained regions was followed by a mass change of German inhabitants with Poles coming especially from eastern regions which were given to the USSR. Such a fundamental discontinuity in the development of settlement caused that former German areas of the state differ a lot from the eastern regions until today, after nearly 70 years.

If we skip the specific exception of the Masovian metropolitan Region which lies in the eastern part of Poland but shows significantly different values (the highest regional GDP per capita, the lowest unemployment rate etc.) because of the presence of Warsaw, most of the observed indicators proved a clear west-east polarity among the regions. The western regions of Poland have on the average, similarly as the Czech Sudetenland to which we can compare their historical fate, a denser railway network, higher urbanization rate and lower share of labour force employed in agriculture, are less traditional, which is manifested for example by a lower share of the practising believers. In this characterization it is very important that the settlers after the war settled mainly in towns and they were primarily employed by industrial companies. Already in the times of Prussia there were effective large farms which were mostly turned into the state farms and cooperatives. That is why until today the number of small family farms demanding in labour force is smaller on the average than in the other regions of Poland. Similarly, in the western regions we can also see a cause of reduced traditionalism and religiousness of their inhabitants. The answer lies also in the process of post-war settlement which aimed primarily the towns and in many cases it led to breaking old roots and relations with the people’s distant birthplaces (including areas taken by the Soviet Union). The location of more developed Germany and Czechia in the neighbourhood can be assumed, apart from the higher urbanization and industrialization rate, as one of the reasons for higher GDP per capita in these regions.

The post-war incorporation of the more developed western areas was preceded by historical developments which started with the division of Poland among the three neighbouring states: Prussia, Austria and Russia at the end of the 18th century. This situation, which lasted until the First World War, intensified the differences among these parts. The areas controlled by Russia and Austria remained rather poor and lagging behind. The western territories controlled by Prussia/Germany

(including Province of Posen and West Pomerania), as a result of an union with the more developed unit managed to modernize to such degree that until the Second World War they can be considered a part of the West unlike the rest of Poland. The last 2011 parliamentary elections in Poland may be considered a surprisingly exact detector of the differences between the western (earlier Prussian) and eastern (Russian and Austrian) parts of Poland - the winning more liberal Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska – PO) prevailed in the north and west, whereas the nationally conservative party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) collected more votes in the eastern regions. If we try to divide current Poland into “Western” and “Eastern” parts (detailed list of regions see Tab. 1) based on the observed indicators, we may use the border of the German Empire from before the First World War as an approximate dividing line, to a certain extent.

Czechia is a less convincing case of the west-east disparities. We can determine rather the differences between the core, i.e. Prague and other regions, as a dominant element. When it comes to statistics, in the capital which is considered an individual region the GDP per capita is twice as high as and unemployment rate is less than half of the average in all other regions. On the contrary, the differences among other regions are quite small. Some indication of the differentiation between the western and eastern part of the state, if we divide it into the Bohemian and Moravian regions, are still obvious. Based on the analysed indicators we can observe only a slightly higher degree of automobilization in Bohemia or a higher degree of the believers and higher traditionalism in Moravia situated more to the east. Actually, these facts correspond with what is also clearly visible in the west-east polarization of Central Europe as a whole. Very often it is said that higher religiousness and traditionalism in Moravia is caused by the distance from Prague and delayed industrialization of some of Moravia’s areas. Unlike in Bohemia, in the 17th century in Moravia there was not such an intensive conversion to Catholicism, therefore, Bohemia inhabitants (until the Thirty Years’ War there were various non-Catholic religions) partially gained certain distrust of the Catholic Church. Partial socio-economic differences between Bohemia and Moravia reflect also the differences in the voting behaviour of the local population. We can actually say that while Bohemia prefers relatively more the right wing political subjects (Civic Democratic Party – ODS, TOP09), Moravia inclines above average to the left wing (Czech Social Democratic Party – ČSSD, Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia – KSČM) and conservative-Christian centre (Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party – KDU-ČSL).

This little distinct west-east gradient of territorial disparities is also complicated in Czechia, because certain differences among the regions show rather a north-south orientation. For instance the higher density of the railway network and population density, and also higher unemployment rate in the northern half of the republic. The original division of the Czech land into the developed industrial north and poorer agricultural and rural southern areas which took place during the industrial revolution is currently a thing of the past. The industrial revolution of the 19th century spread in the north faster because of the locally available natural resources (especially coal) and the proximity of a quickly developing industrial Saxony and Prussian Silesia. After the fall of the Eastern Bloc these old industrial areas where heavy industry prevailed were affected by the necessary transformation (Northwest Region and Moravian-Silesian Region) most painfully. As there are little distinct disparities among the regions in Czechia (with the exception of Prague) and overlapping of the aspects of both west-east and north-south differentiation based on the chosen indicators it cannot be clearly stated which of these polarities is prevails.

On the contrary, the territorial disparities between its western and eastern regions of **Slovakia** can be considered distinct and obvious. So oriented gradient of the degree of regional development

is even more emphasised by the fact that the capital and core (Bratislava) is situated on the western state border close to the developed Austria and its capital, Vienna. Differences in the development level between the western and eastern regions of Slovakia are also really distinct regardless of the extreme case of Bratislava and its region. They can be clearly observed using the chosen indicators such as economic indicators (regional GDP per capita, unemployment rate) as well as population density, or rather the automobilization rate as the indicator of buying power and the lifestyle of the inhabitants. Other observed indicators did not show such significant spatial regularities. From this point of view more developed “Western” regions include Bratislava Region, Trnava Region, Trenčín Region and Žilina Region, and the lagging behind “Eastern” regions include Nitra Region, Banská Bystrica Region, Košice Region⁴ and Prešov Region.

As the main causes and determinants of this polarity in Slovakia we could also clearly indicate better exposition of western Slovakia towards the more developed countries and towards the Central-European axes of the development: Munich-Vienna-Bratislava-Budapest or Berlin-Prague-Bрно-Vienna as well. Historically, the development of Slovakia western regions was due to a closer contact with more developed areas of the Habsburg Monarchy but especially to the subsequent merging of Slovakia and more industrially developed Czech lands into one state (1918-1992). Despite the industrialization process which took place in Slovakia especially after the Second World War, the remote areas of eastern Slovakia remained rather peripheral in Czechoslovakia. Compared to other countries of Central Europe the present Slovakia represents an ideal case of west-east gradient of territorial disparities.

The last country which our contribution attempts to examine for spatial regularities in the structure of territorial disparities and infer their causes is **Hungary**. We can state that the differences among its regions are close to the case of Czechia. In Hungary also there is a distinct and strong core position of the capital, Budapest. The values of most observed indicators regarding the Central Hungary metropolitan region differ significantly from other regions. Because of its core location and high concentration of the inhabitants and economic activities, compared to the average of other regions the regional GDP per capita is two times higher and the population density is five times higher, the density of the transport networks or the urbanisation rate is significantly higher while religiousness and share of labour force employed in agriculture are much lower. If we skip this specific case, we can also observe certain leanings towards the north-south as well as west-east polarization among other regions. Unlike Czechia where both directions of the regional differentiation are observed, in Hungary both of these regularities can be applied to the polarity developed – lagging behind. It is therefore possible, as in the case of Germany, to combine them so that the final gradient in the direction of northwest-southeast (it is opposite in Germany - southwest-northeast) is generated. The north-western regions are distinctly better developed, especially in respect of the chosen economic indicators. As opposed to the regions in the south and east of the country, these areas are more industrialized on average with higher GDP per capita and lower unemployment rate. The differences evaluated using other indicators than strictly economic ones are not so significant and are limited mainly to a polarity between the metropolitan region on the one hand and other regions on the other hand.

⁴ Košice Region is a specific case to certain extent because the values of certain indicators are for this region closer to the “Western” part. The reason is that the region has a relative strong centre – the city of Košice with about 240 000 inhabitants is the second largest city in Slovakia.

Regarding more successful regional development of the north-western regions what appears really positively is the location in the neighbourhood of the more developed states and also the fact that it lies on the connecting line of three strong development cores: Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest. To the more developed, in particular so called “Western” part we can beside Central Hungary also count (NUTS 2) the regions of Western Transdanubia and Central Transdanubia. The roots of a higher development of these regions compared to the rest of Hungary go back to a distant past. The local rolling hilly ground provided people with better refuge than the open puszta in the south and east of the country. Even in the Middle Age this was obvious thanks to a denser network of economically strong towns in the north and west of the country. In the times of the war between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th century both of the parts were separated by a front line and each of them represented the most remote promontory of two different “worlds” – European West on the one hand and the Orient on the other hand. Even later, in the 19th and 20th century the north and west of the country had, thanks to their advantageous location, the presence of city-settlements, social elites, capital and also mineral resources better conditions for industrialization and modernization than the agricultural areas of sparsely populated puszta.

Conclusion

Central Europe represents a transition zone between two historical European sub-regions. The spatial continuity of this transition appears not only at the level of the whole region, when its states situated more to the west (Germany and Austria) show in general higher degree of the development than the states situated more to the east, but also inside these countries. The fact that at this level the west-east gradient prevails is in this contribution put into connection with the long term and permanent existence of such oriented duality of Europe. Apart from that among the general causes and determinants of the west-east differences we can also count the better expositions of the regions situated more to the west in each state towards the main European core (Blue Banana), or possibly to other axes of the development. Its own role in the successful development of western regions was played by the until today fact that they have always lain in the neighbourhood of a more developed state. This has been obvious because of the impulses of their development for a long time: participation in neighbouring market, investments, border contacts, cooperation in projects etc. In regional development within each state, however, a whole range of specific determinants also appeared from this point of view. In Austria and partially in Hungary and Germany we also have to speak mainly about the natural factors (terrain) which influenced the origin of current differences among their regions. The changes of political allegiance connected to the shift of the borders can, on the contrary, be seen as an important determinant of the current west-east differences among the regions in Germany or in Poland.

The carried out analysis of the chosen indicators proved the presupposition of the prevailing orientation of the territorial disparities in the directions west-east in most countries of Central Europe. In the territories of Germany, Hungary and Czechia this issue is also influenced by the accent of a certain north-south differentiation. This is by the two former states a cause for the fact that the final gradient of the regional disparities deviates rather in the direction southwest-northeast (for Germany), or rather northwest-southeast (for Hungary). In Czechia, on the contrary, such generalization seems to be very difficult, its regional differences are not, if we ignore Prague itself, so clear and in addition they cannot be clearly understood in the sense of polarization developed – lagging behind.

If we tried to compare the degree of the differences which appear between the more developed so called “Western” and rather lagging behind so called “Eastern” parts of the single countries, we would come to the conclusion that such differentiation is clearest in Germany (south-western vs. north-eastern regions) and in Slovakia. Whereas in Germany its capitol situated more to the east does not weaken this regularity too much, in Slovakia Bratislava situated more to the west has got an explicitly supporting effect. These inner differences are a little bit less observable in cases of Austria and Poland, in many aspects, not only in plainly economic ones. In both cases this generalized west-east differentiation is weakened by the fact that their capitols show high values of development, are always situated in the east. In Hungary such differentiation is, in particular between north-western and south-eastern regions clear more or less only at the level of economic differences. On the contrary in Czechia where the west-east differences between the regions are in general less significant, the role of an imaginary dividing line is played by different aspects. Similarly as in Hungary, in Czechia these regularities are in the shadow of the polarity between the metropolitan region and other regions of the country.

In conclusion it is necessary to point out that the presented findings have a rather general character. Because of the frame character of the analysis and restricted choice of the indicators from which the regularities of the regional disparities were concluded, it is suitable to consider the whole contribution as a certain outline of a more complex issue whose individual aspects and parts deserve a deeper and detailed analysis.

Appendix

Table 1. West-east territorial disparities of the countries in Central Europe

Country	Aspect of the influence of the capital location	
GERMANY		
<i>Territorial disparities</i> ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Their prevailing axis:</i> SW–NE – <i>Significant polarity:</i> GDP per capita, unemployment rate, population density, automobilization, religiousness, traditionalism and many other – <i>Less significant polarity</i> election results, relatively more industrial W and S x more agricultural regions N and NE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Berlin even though situated in the east does not significantly weaken the dominant axis of the disparities.
<i>Model of territ. differentiation into two parts</i> ⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Western“ part: old federal states (former West Germany) – “Eastern“ part: new federal states (former German Democratic Republic) 	

⁵ Prevailing axis of the territorial disparities is the direction in which the territorial polarity is presented in the group of chosen aspect s. Note: W = west, E = east, N = north, S = south.

⁶ Model of territorial differentiation expresses a simplified way in which the area of the state can be divided based on the given significant indicators into two parts: “Western” part – area which could be possibly seen within the particular state as relatively more developed and “Eastern” part – area which could be possibly seen within the particular state as relatively less developed. Regions in the brackets are included in the particular part because of generalization (i.e. division of the state into two parts without the enclaves), although the values of some indicators would be for this region closer to the second part.

Country		Aspect of the influence of the capital location
AUSTRIA		
<i>Territorial disparities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Their prevailing axis:</i> W–E – <i>Significant polarity:</i> GDP per capita (except for Vienna), density of the railway network (higher in the N and E!), population density (higher in the N and E!), election results, topographic features – <i>Less significant polarity:</i> unemployment rate, relatively more industrial W and relatively more agricultural E 	– Vienna in consequence of its eastern location partially weakens the dominant axis of the disparities.
<i>Model of territ. differentiation into two parts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “<i>Western</i>“ <i>part:</i> Vorarlberg, Tyrol, Salzburg – “<i>Eastern</i>“ <i>part:</i> Upper and Lower Austria, (Vienna), Styria, Burgenland, Carinthia 	
POLAND		
<i>Territorial disparities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Their prevailing axis:</i> W–E – <i>Significant polarity:</i> GDP per capita (except for Masovian), density of the railway network, elections results – <i>Less significant polarity:</i> unemployment rate, urbanisation rate, share of labour force employed in agriculture (relatively more industrial W – more agricultural E), religiousness and traditionalism 	– Warsaw in consequence of its eastern location partially weakens the dominant axis of the disparities.
<i>Model of territ. differentiation into two parts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “<i>Western</i>“ <i>part:</i> Voivodeships Pomeranian, West Pomeranian, Greater Poland, Lubusz, Lower Silesian, (Opole), Silesian, Lesser Poland – “<i>Eastern</i>“ <i>part:</i> Subcarpatian, Swietokrzyskie, Łódź, Lublin, (Masovian), Podlaskie, Kuyavian-Pomeranian, Warmian-Masurian 	
CZECHIA		
<i>Territorial disparities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Their prevailing axis:</i> W–E? or N–S?⁷ – <i>Significant polarity:</i> automobilization, religiousness and traditionalism – <i>Less significant polarity:</i> unemployment rate, election results 	– Prague in consequence of its central location contributes to the unclarity of the dominant axis of the disparities.
<i>Model of territ. differentiation into two parts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “<i>Western</i>“ <i>part:</i> Bohemia – “<i>Eastern</i>“ <i>part:</i> Moravia and the Czech part of Silesia 	
SLOVAKIA		
<i>Territorial disparities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Their prevailing axis:</i> W–E – <i>Significant polarity:</i> GDP per capita, unemployment rate, population density, automobilization – <i>Less significant polarity:</i> 	– Bratislava in consequence of its western location significantly strengthens the dominant axis of the disparities.
<i>Model of territ. differentiation into two parts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “<i>Western</i>“ <i>part:</i> Bratislava Region, Trnava Region, Trenčín Region, Žilina Region – “<i>Eastern</i>“ <i>part:</i> Nitra Region, Banská Bystrica Region, (Košice Region), Prešov Region 	

⁷ Cannot be, on the observed indicators clearly set whether it is the west-east or north-south axis of the territorial disparities that is more significant.

Country		Aspect of the influence of the capital location
HUNGARY		
<i>Territorial disparities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Their prevailing axis:</i> NW–SE – <i>Significant polarity:</i> GDP per capita, unemployment rate – <i>Less significant polarity:</i> relatively more industrial NW and relatively more agricultural SE, population density 	– Budapest in consequence of its northern location contributes to the deviation from the dominant axis of the disparities into the direction NW – SE.
<i>Model of territ. differentiation into two parts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “<i>Western</i>“ part: Western Transdanubia, Central Transdanubia, Central Hungary – “<i>Eastern</i>“ part: Northern Hungary, Northern Great Plain, Southern Great Plain, Southern Transdanubia 	

Source: author's own suggestion; besides other things based on the statistic data from Eurostat (2013) and web sites of the statistic offices of the single countries in Central Europe (ČSÚ 2013, DESTATIS 2013, GUS 2013, KSH 2013, STAT 2013, ŠÚ SR 2013).

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