

# Marginal regions in Slovakia and their developmental disposabilities

## *Marginálne regióny na Slovensku a ich rozvojové disponibility*

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**Abstract:** The study deals with the problems of territorial marginality in Slovakia. It illustrates the content structure of regional marginality, its factor saturation, as well as its spatial (territorial) localization. The historical-spatial context of marginal territories in Slovakia and their position in the transformation period are pointed out. The stress is laid on social-spatial marginality of the regions, representing its central component. The study suggests the possibilities of solving the problems of marginal regions, their developmental disposabilities, as well as the necessity of application of certain demarginalization activities, as a component part of modernization processes and their dynamization in the respective territories. The existing contradictions between the intentions of the regional policy of the Slovak Republic and the actual situation in solving the problems of marginal regions have been pointed out as well.

**Key words:** territorial marginality, social marginality, regional disparity, demarginalization, regional policy

**Abstrakt:** Štúdia sa orientuje na problematiku marginality území na Slovensku. Približuje obsahovú náplň marginality regiónov, jej faktorové sýtenie ako aj jej priestorovú (územnú) lokalizáciu. Poukazuje na historicko-priestorový kontext marginálnych území na Slovensku ako aj ich pozíciu v transformačnom období. Dôraz je položený na sociálno-priestorovú marginalitu regiónov, ktorá sa stáva jej ťažiskovou zložkou. Práca naznačuje možnosti riešenia problémov marginálnych regiónov, ich rozvojové disponibility ako i potreby aplikácie istých demarginalizačných aktivít, ako súčasti modernizačných procesov a ich dynamizácie v týchto územiach. Poukazuje na isté rozpory medzi zámermi regionálnej politiky SR a reálnou situáciou v riešení problémov marginálnych regiónov.

**Kľúčové slová:** marginalita území, sociálna marginalita, regionálne disparity, demarginalizácia, regionálna politika

## INTRODUCTION

The problem spectrum of territorial marginality is very broad and it concerns besides the economic and geographical aspects of the society and territory also the cultural and social aspects, as well as the historical and political ones. It is not then (or not only) the marginality in the sense of a peripheral spatial position of the territory or settlement, but a multidimensional spectrum of marginality creating (producing) problems. The territorial marginality expresses the specific potential and social-spatial characteristics of the territories or localities that besides their economic and civilization problems have

the kind of a social character making them marginal in the social development trends.

The territorial marginality is usually very close to the social one. The communities in the respective territories get into hard social situations under the influence of *economic problems*, connected with high unemployment, low economic (investment) attractiveness for the capital inputs and the overall conditions of the economic development, *social-demographic problems*, connected with unnatural social-demographic structures and lower qualitative level of their social potentials, but also *civilization problems*, due to lower infrastructure qualities in the living conditions of the regions and their settle-

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The paper forms part of the research and development task titled Regional Differentiation, Regional Development in the Slovak Republic in the context of integration impact 2003SP51/028 0600/02806 02-2003. The project was the state order supported by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic.

ments, i.e. the possibilities and the dynamics of the modernization process. A specific role is also played by the *geographic location*, since often they are the territories located in marginal spatial positions, both on the macro-level of the state, as well as within the regions, or subregions. For the most part, both of the above types of marginality are found in the same territories, regions, or settlements.

As it is presumed, “the social marginality” and “the social-spatial marginality” often connected with it represent the core of the complex problems of marginal territories (settlements, microregions, regions). It is there where the historical, economic, geographical, environmental and civilization conditions of the life of people and territorial communities living in the respective territories are reflected in a specific way. And, besides, they are the actual or latent potentials and development resources that the territories dispose of within the developmental process that are reflected there as well.

The present study deals with the social-spatial aspect of marginality of Slovak territories mainly. We do realize, however, that the problem is much broader and it is connected with economic, geographical, culturological, urbanistic, environmentalistic, ethnographic, historical and political aspects of the Slovak society and the territory of Slovakia.

## **TERRITORIAL MARGINALITY IN SLOVAKIA – HISTORICAL-SPATIAL CONTEXT**

The marginal territories reflect the existing regional differentiation of Slovakia, with the problem territories, regions, or settlements not representing a novel phenomenon. In every historical stage of the society, development the marginality of the territories or settlements got changed, with the changes reflected in its manifestations, its territorial scope, but also in its economic, social, social-cultural and civilization contents. The historical view of the territory of Slovakia shows that there have been territories with “a long-time burden” of problems, and these are the bearers of some “historical marginality”. In the initial period of industrialization of Slovakia, these territories were just marginally touched by the industrialization processes, or in a secondary manner only, i.e. there were no greater investment activities localized there that might have led to any expressive changes in their economic and civilization character, or in the corresponding social structure (reflected into the quality of the social potential) and this must have found its reflection also in the existing living conditions and living standards of the respective communities.

Already in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, many of the Slovak regions (e.g. Kysuce, Orava, northern Spiš, Šariš, Zemplín, southern parts of Gemer, Hont and Novohrad) were left without any more significant investments, or with the industrial activities of the kind of primary raw material processing mostly, aiming at exploitation of the labour power of a lower qualification level mainly. In the second half of the 20th century, the belated and considerably deformed processes of the “socialist industrialization and urbanization” have overcome the marginality of certain territories, but at the same time conditions (actual or latent) have been provided for its formation in other territories, or its deepening in the already existing problem territories. They were the processes in which the present problems of marginal and potentially marginal territories have already been rooted, and transferred as the residua into the social and economic transformation after 1989, which many a time has made them still broader and deeper.

The problem of marginality (social and territorial) has become more expressive again in Slovakia in the transformation period after the year 1989. The problems of “marginal territories” and “problem regions and districts” reappeared. They were brought to the forefront of attention not only by the economic, but the social problems mainly, due to the high unemployment rate, the long-lasting unemployment, the social welfare dependence, and the growing poverty. There is a whole series of further social, demographic and civilization problems cumulated in these regions and their settlements.

The contemporary growth of regional differences follows from the extensive transformation processes in the society and the transition of economy to the market principle. The deepening of interregional disparities represents one of the most complex social-economic problems of the present transformation situation of the Slovak Republic. The problem regions constitute marked and live problems of an economic, social, but also political character. In spite of that, the development tendency leads to further growth in the number of marginal territories, with the increasing social, economic and civilization problems and the growing costs for their resolution.

The marginal territories of Slovakia are considerably differentiated as to their geographical positions, social-demographic composition and the extent of their problems. They are the problems so far not having been solved in Slovakia in a systematic way and therefore without any desirable effects. The slow pace of solving the problems of regional marginality was also influenced by the problems of formation of

regional self-administrations. They were established only 10 years after the establishment of municipalities. The regionalization processes thus got belated and the accumulated problems inherited by regional self-administrations got most expressively reflected in regional differences and disparities.

### THE PROBLEMS OF IDENTIFICATION AND SPECIFICATION OF TERRITORIAL MARGINALITY

The territorial marginality has its social and spatial contexts. The origin and existence of marginal regions may be conceived as a spatial analogy of opening the income scissors, in this case between the poorest and the richest regions of the state. In the macromeasure, the existence of marginal regions may be conceived as an expression of imperfectly functioning economy, the failure of the function of the market, similarly as inflation, unemployment, etc. It may be considered as a spatial expression of ineffective utilization of social resources and inequality in dividing (Cudlinová, Těšitel 2000).

The identification of regional disparities as a methodical procedure appears to be more complex than it might seem at the first sight. The point is that the regional sphere has a rich structure, containing natural, economic, demographic, social, cultural, technical, infrastructure, territorial, settlement components, etc. It means, it is a multidimensional sphere. The indication coverage concerning the character of this sphere should also correspond to it. In the investigation and indication of territorial marginality, attention has been focused on clarification of the contents and extent of regional disparities. There are several authors who agree that it is very important to determine the kind of a spatial, territorial unit that is providing the most evidentiary indices of regional disparities. Finka (2000) has pointed out that in the European space, there is a rather distinct tendency towards analyses of spatial units of a lower level than the regions are, since the higher levels level out the spatial disparities.

The specification of *the resources of regional disparities* is relatively a complicated one. In the course of the development, the functional dominance of the region, that in a certain stage of its historical development formed the basis of its developmental impulses, may get changed (e.g. the former mining towns, industrial, agricultural regions, etc.). The change in the dominant functions of the regions is as a rule accompanied (for a shorter or longer period) by the change in their developmental trends

in the direction of stagnation, or regression. The functional change is one of those due to which the differences may arise, as well as the economic, social, demographic, civilization, infrastructure disparities connected with them, nowadays called the *regional disparities*. However, the regional disparities may arise also as a consequence of historical civilization changes, demanding of the regional communities as quick an adjustment to the new trends as possible. Since this change is of a substantial character, it gives rise to a whole series of further functional changes. Depending on the capability of the regions to start this new trajectory, the regions are differentiated into *the developing and the lagging behind ones*.

Finding the proper way of specification of marginal territories, the proper instrument of their identification and determination of the character of marginality is very important, since it is almost never the marginality in the absolute sense of the word that is the case, nor the marginality of the whole territories. On the basis of the evaluation criterion chosen, various types of marginality may be distinguished, namely the branch marginality, economic, social-cultural, demographic, civilization marginality, etc. As a matter of fact, the spatial (territorial) marginality represents the cumulating of one or several types of marginality in a certain territory or locality. It means that the economic marginality may then be accompanied by the social-cultural and civilization marginality also. Thus to specify the marginal territories, the criteria used include besides the economic criteria also the social, demographic, infrastructure ones, etc.

With respect to the multidimensional character of marginality of the regions, their specification is rather complicated. In the European Union (the term marginal region is not in use there) a block of indicators (*negative migration balance, lower living standard, aging of the population, lower number of employment opportunities, lower educational level, lower investments into the territory*) has been employed to specify the problem territories entitled to subsidies from the structural funds. The positions of individual regions are then measured on the basis of their comparison with the EU average.

In the Czech Republic, a method for the specification of problem territories has been developed, namely a block of indicators (*average monthly payment of the workers in the district, unemployment rate, population increase due to migration, inhabitants in the post-productive age, number of inhabitants, material investments in all*) meeting the EU criteria, but at the same time taking into consideration the accessibility of the data within the conditions of the Czech Republic (Cudlinová, Těšitel 2000). The centre of

gravity of the method lies in its application on the district level and the specification of positions in relation to the national average.

Our method of specification of marginal territories in Slovakia (Faltán et al. 1995) is based on application of a multidimensional social-spatial analysis, with its effects being based on a more complex survey of the social-spatial situation in the Slovak Republic and a more complex specification of the positions of individual regions on a development continuum developed – marginal.<sup>1</sup> The analysis provides the indication of problems both on the regional, as well as district and municipal levels.

### DEEPENING OF TERRITORIAL POLARIZATION IN SLOVAKIA

During the transformation period, the development of individual regions, differing in their natural, or primary and positional potentials, in the degree of their utilization, in their ability to react on novel conditions of the market economy and heterogeneity of social processes, was differentiated. The striking regional disparities, still getting deeper, produce the growing extent of problem regions, with accumulated economic and social problems significantly influencing their attractiveness. A high regional differentiation gets manifested in economic and human potentials, in a considerably differentiated educational level, in the unemployment rate, dislocation of labour positions, but also in the housing capacities (insufficient especially in economic centres, while in problem regions and in rural districts there are lots of vacant apartments). There is a territorial differentiation in the unbalance between the labour demand and supply. The bad transport accessibility of certain regions or microregions, connected with their economic backwardness, or economic decline, signals the tendency towards their total collapse and depopulation.

In recent years, there has been a tendency for the big regional differences, logically manifested in the economic power of the regions, to get still deeper. The economic globalization processes are increasingly preferred by the regions with favourable developmental dispositions and human potentials of a good quality, which gets repeatedly reflected in the growth

of interregional disparities. The comparison of social-economic characteristics of territories and regions (...) has shown considerable differences in majority of the indices between Bratislava, or the Bratislava region, and the rest of the Slovak territory. During all the transformation period, these differences are getting deeper. The transformation processes in Slovakia have heightened the competition of municipalities and regions also, especially in relation to their own economic activities and in relation to attracting the economic activities to their own territories. This fact has resulted in polarization on both local and regional levels, deepening of disparities on the level of regions and their parts, with a due reflection in the deepening of social disparities. Their consequences have become evident in the limited economic possibilities of the state and municipalities to be active and especially to take preventive steps in this field.

High regional differentiation becomes most evident in the territorial allocation of unemployment and in the dislocation of labour positions. Territorially the prevailing proportion of the unemployed is allocated in southern and eastern regions of the state. In 2004, about 60% of the regions close to the borders had the unemployment rates higher than the average of the Slovak Republic. The similar situation can be found with the long-lasting unemployment as well. The regions with high unemployment rates have been economically disadvantaged mainly and the peripheral regions (close to the borders) have been negatively influenced not only by structural changes, but also by lower educational structures, low incomes, and marked social marginalization. They are characteristic for their environments even, creating a specific ethnical culture and causing social isolation from social networks of the mainstream of the society. Migration for employment purposes (with daily returns) decreases and the territorial migration is hindered by transportation costs, liquidation of railway lines and further limitations.

As a result the relatively large social groups of inhabitants of the problem regions, there are frequently found in the position of social exclusion, characteristic for the unstable job career, low social status, deformed consumer preferences, reduced individual and group aspirations, hindered access to education, limited social contacts, etc. By Buchta (2003), their behaviour mostly takes the form of a restrained ap-

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<sup>1</sup> Dimensions rendered as relevant for specification of a more complexly conceived marginality: social, demographic, economic, civilization, infrastructure, ecological, urbanization, and settlement-spatial ones. The analysis makes it possible to identify the problems in each of these dimensions, as well as the global (synthetic) social-spatial status of the region, as a projection of the regional status in all the dimensions and its placement in the developmental – marginal continuum.

proach to social activities and to the development of one's abilities (e.g. education), but also the form of lost motivation to participate in activities of the broader society and enclosure in one's own subculture. Very often this state has a character of social isolation that may appear as a tension between social goals and values and the impossibility of reaching them in a legal way and consequently even the resignation to the activities and values of the majority society. And from the social point of view, this situation cannot be in the long term sustainable.

### SPATIAL AND CONTENTS SPECIFICATION OF MARGINAL REGIONS

The trend of formation of marginal regions, lagging behind the other regions in almost all the spheres, was started under the changed political, social and economic conditions of the transformation and in recent years it has got deepened. It is the manifestation of a high and deepening regional differentiation caused by multiple factors. The differentiation factors include big regional differences in the unemployment, in sector employment, in educational structure of the population, in regional business activities and their diversification, but the role is played by the geographical position also, with regard to the centres of the economic growth, the ethnical structure, etc. Great regional differences appear also in social, technical, information and civilization infrastructures. The characteristics of marginal regions include low economic efficiency, low incomes of the economically active population, minimum investment influx, high unemployment rate, growing numbers of the long-term unemployed and socially dependent inhabitants with a high degree of dependence on social incomes, low

level of industrial development and social services, lower quality of transport communications and traffic channels to main communication routes, low degree of modern infrastructure (especially communication and information ones), low interest of the foreign capital, etc. (Table 1). The existing branch policies and their insufficient coordination contribute to the *weakening of attractiveness and competitiveness of marginal regions*, thus aggravating their problems and also increasing the exigency of revitalization activities. The non-systemic approaches and solutions have not contributed with any desirable effects, in spite of the volumes of the resources spent. On the contrary, some problem territories have assumed the character of poverty regions.

The impacts of marginality are not just of the economic or civilization concerning character. Marginality has a significant social and social-cultural impact, since it concerns a certain number of social spaces and social subjects living in the respective territories. The number of marginal social groups is growing, their social problems are increasing, and the disorganization of the communities occurs much more easily. The changes in social-cultural conditions, in the value system and in social structures are unfavourable. There is a growth in social aggression, as well as criminality and social pathological phenomena. In the final effect it means that in marginal territories the social problems of a personal or group (structural) character get transformed into social problems of certain spaces and territories and they attain the spatial and territorial character and the spatial and territorial problem situation arises. The problem social situation is connected not only with the problems of a quantitative character, but a series of qualitative indices of social and civilization character even.

Table 1. Slovakia – Selected regions indicators of the most incidence of problem districts (in 2004)

Region (NUTS 3)	Regional GDP in 2002 (share in SR in %)	Unemployment rate (in %)	Average monthly wage of employees (index SR =100)	Natural increase/decrease per 1000 inhabitants	Material need benefit taker <sup>1</sup> in 3. Q. 2004
Nitra	83.1	15.3	83.7	-2.36	6.9
Banská Bystrica	85.9	19.4	84.1	-1.01	10.5
Prešov	61.3	17.5	79.2	4.05	9.6
Košice	90.5	19.7	97.6	2.19	12.4
SR total	100.0	13.1	100.0	0.35	6,8

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava 2003, 2005

<sup>1</sup> Source: Report of actual situation of social-economical level in regions of the SR. Government of the Slovak Republic, 2005

Marginality is frequently connected with rural areas mainly. The problems of rural areas follow not only from the insufficiently developed economic infrastructure and recession in agriculture, but also from the population situation, the low degree of the human capital, connected first of all with education. The problems connected with restrictions in the public transport and generally in the availability of transport communications to the employment centres constitute the specific problem of rural regions, while commutation is the characteristic feature in these municipalities.

The settlement influences are also markedly expressed in marginality. The rather densely settled western part of the country, with a great number of larger cities and the prevailing urban character, has a more favourable social-economic situation than the regions with the disintegrated settlement structure, based on small rural villages, especially in the southern part of the Central Slovakia and in the East Slovakia.

The trends of regional development in Slovakia produce a broader spectrum of regional types, yet the basic line of division to the powerful and the weak ones becomes more and more relevant. The development results in deepening of the interregional disparities and consequently the clearer profile of the group of problem regions. The analysis of spatial localization of problem territories in Slovakia shows that they are localized in the frontier positions mostly and majority of them bear the signs of historical marginality (Figure 1). In the course of development, the problems of marginal regions, especially those near the frontiers, get complicated, both from the interregional, national

and international (cross-border co-operation) points of view. The insufficient line-up of these territories to the Trans-European communication lines and the capital persists, which is one of the factors of the disinterest of investors, especially the foreign ones, in these territories.

Another specific feature of these regions, not to be neglected, is their *mixed ethnical character*, contributing to the specific political significance of this ethnical-cultural dimension. These problems come into the forefront of attention also from the point of view of formation of international interregional groupings (Euroregions, cross-border regions...), that might represent one of the effective forms of solving the problems of marginal regions in frontier zones.

The typological differentiation of regions in Slovakia is a considerable one and it concerns the specific category of the problem regions even (Faltan, Pašiak 2004). An expressive role is played by the spatial effect of localization of the problem region, or the problems are specific with respect to the individual parts of Slovakia. It means that some problem regions are found just in certain parts of Slovakia and the problems are satiated by specific factors. The problem types of the regions (districts) are differentiated by the extent of the problems, and their specific features, as well as their disposabilities (strong and weak points), specified on the basis of the position of the type in the face of the Slovak average. The following is the brief characterization of the types.

**The stagnated type** (10 districts) is comprised of the districts in the West Slovakia mainly, especially those of the Nitra region, and some districts from the south of Slovakia even. Most of the districts are

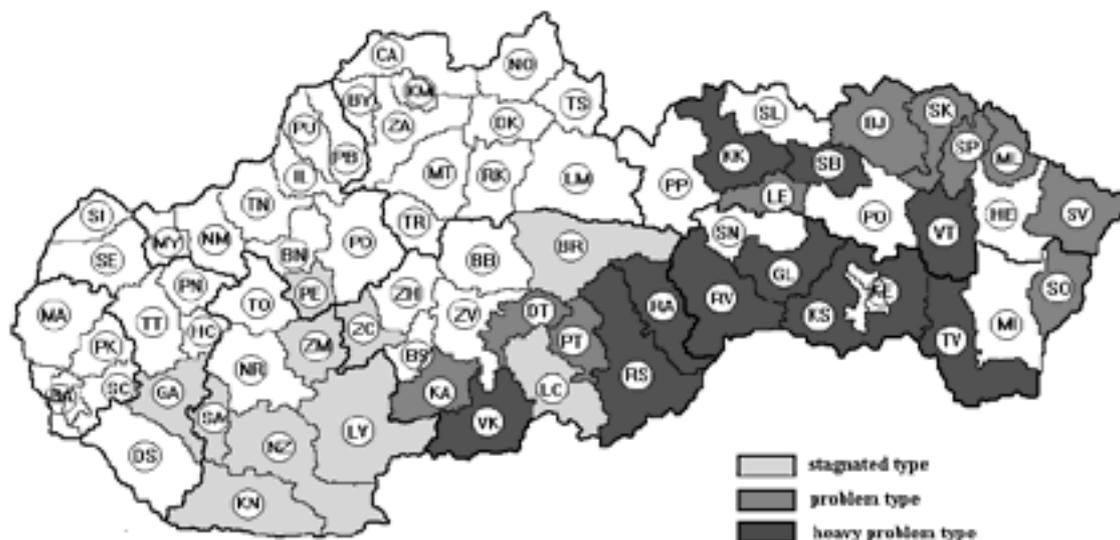


Figure 1. Slovak Republic – Typological differentiation of regions by specific category of marginality

small, with small urban centres. Half of them represent the newly established districts.<sup>2</sup> There are no districts of this type in the east of Slovakia. The characteristics of this type include the adverse economic and social situations, as well as the problems with the human potential. The population problem is especially severe in these districts. The weaker points of these districts also include the environmental infrastructure, educational level, employment, and the economic productivity efficiency. As for technical services, information structure, and spatial mobility of the inhabitants, the situation is on the average level. The stronger points of these districts include the character of their settlement, but especially their landscape and ecological situation.

**The problem type** (10 districts) is comprised of the districts in the East Slovakia mainly (70%) and some districts in the Central Slovakia. Most of them are small and many of them are newly established. It has two expressive characteristics. One of them is the only strong point, namely the very good landscape and ecological situation. The other one is the expressively negative situation as to the economic productivity efficiency, employment and social situation. The other weak points of this type include the character of the settlement and the spatial mobility of the inhabitants. The unfavourable situation concerns the educational level, technical services and information infrastructures as well. The sphere of environmental infrastructures is on the average level, with a slight tendency towards unfavourable situation.

**The heavy problem type** (10 districts) is comprised of the districts in the East Slovakia mostly (70%) and some districts in the Central Slovakia. Most of them are located near the frontiers. The districts are connected in one rather large territory. This type has no strong point (positive characteristic) common for all. The weakest point of this type concerns the employment sphere. It results in the unfavourable social situation and unfavourable economic productivity efficiency. Another extremely weak point concerns the low levels of education, urbanization and technical services and information infrastructures. The settlement and the environmental infrastructure are on the average level, with a slight tendency towards negative the evaluation.

Even the above data prove that *the differentiation of the Slovak territory assumes a clearer spatial di-*

*mension* – it has a clear spatial outline. A group of regions with a considerable prevalence of developed or transient types is comprised of the regions in the West Slovakia and the northern part of the Central Slovakia. The other regions, i.e. the south of the Central Slovakia and the East Slovakia, are comprised of problem regions with differing intensity of the problems. It has been also shown in the dislocation of the above types of regions. From among the total number (30 districts) of problem regions, there are 23% of them in the West Slovakia, 30% in the Central Slovakia and almost 47% in the East Slovakia. The situation appears to be more dramatic when the regions are differentiated on the basis of differing intensity of their problems. In the West Slovakia, there are just the problem regions, in the Central Slovakia all the problem types are equally represented and in the East Slovakia there are no mild problem types and just the extreme and heavy problem types are represented.

#### SOLUTION POSSIBILITIES IN MARGINAL TERRITORIES OF SLOVAKIA

There is no guaranteed prescription for solving or at least reduction of big interregional differences. Some experts point at the substantial importance of investments, others at the necessity of building the infrastructure or the cardinal importance of good-quality human potentials and still others demand governmental interventions. It is illusory to presume that there is a chance for a complete levelling of interregional differences. In spite of that, it is necessary to look for effective ways of solving this problem.

The present economic and social-cultural transformation of the society may be included among the processes substantially and extensively influencing also the spatial and territorial transformation of Slovakia. The effects of the transformation in solving the disparities and conflicts of the territory have been considerably problematic so far. It is evident that some territories really manage to get from the margin of the social-economic development into its centre, but other ones get pushed out to the margin, or their marginality gets still more deepened. This period is characteristic for mutual overlapping of the structural, spatial and territorial transformations of the society, with the simultaneous effect of both the

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<sup>2</sup> The newly established districts constitute the products of the new territorial-administrative structure of the Slovak Republic, implemented in 1996, when within 8 regions the number of districts grew from the original 38 to 79. The splitting up of the original districts to smaller territorial units and the formation of a group of newly established districts have considerably contributed to the increased number of marginal, or problem districts.

endogenous social factors and the exogenous, international ones. Thus in a relatively small territory of the Slovak Republic, a great number of changes gets accumulated, creating big social pressure and requiring high capabilities of social, as well as economic adaptation to new developmental trends, and in this respect the marginal regions are the ones considerably lagging behind.

The complex character of the contemporary situation lies in the existence of several grave risks, making the process of solving the regional disparities hard and exacting. The basic framework is given by the existence of strongly marginalized regions and subregions of Slovakia. The risks connected with it include e.g. the risks of deeper regional disparities from the point of view of the quality of the human potential, the risk of growing amounts of regional and subregional disparities from the point of view of the quality of the residential environment, but also the infrastructure qualities, as well as the risk of deeper differentiation as to the readiness (human and professional) to implementation of regional policies, both internal and cross-border ones, etc.

To solve the present unfavourable situation in interregional differences in the Slovak Republic, it is necessary to apply the targeted process, consisting of the measures aiming at moderation of the marked economic and social differences between the regions, that have resulted from historical development and transformation influences in the society. The reduction of differences will require not only the effective regional policy, but also the individualized approach to the respective regions, so that the concrete conditions creating the unfavourable marginalization of the region would be considered and the specific approaches, corresponding to the character of the marginality, would be applied.

The clear and effective regional policy of the state and the reinforcement of competencies and abilities of regional and municipal self-administrations form the foundations of the process. It has been shown, however, that in the process of such a global social transformation the restricted possibilities of active regulation on the part of municipalities and the state may lead to the enforcement of the already present trends of social segregation, with all its consequences, starting from the unjustifiable migration, through social isolation of certain groups of inhabitants, criminality, up to the devastation of the environment. Therefore, the question of the systematic, effective planning policy on all the levels comes to the fore in this context.

Though one of the declared objectives of regional development is the conception of a systematic national regional policy, contributing to the reduction

of substantial differences in regional development and supporting "the dynamic and universal development of regions, with the maximum utilization of their geographic, human and economic potentials" (*Národný plan regionálneho rozvoja SR/National Plan of Regional Development of the Slovak Republic/2002*), the results of several analyses on the contrary indicate (Faltán et al. 1995; Gajdoš 2001, Tvrdoň 2002, Šikula 2003...) the deepening of interregional disparities and the increasing number of the so-called "marginal regions and territories".

The present effects of the regional policy are rather poor, though with respect to its character it might have been expected. It is of a presentation and declarative character rather than effectively practicable, little reflecting the resources of regional disparities and with little effective instruments for their resolution. Its important drawback lies in its still present sector, or branch character and the absence of the integrated approach to solving the regional disparities and problems of underdeveloped regions. *It has been shown that even with the state support, solving the problems of marginal regions will constitute an exacting process, both as to time and investments, but also the social-cultural aspects and it will require a clear conception and clearly stated priorities.*

By Pašiak (2004), from the point of view of sustainable development of the society, it is necessary for these regions to implement the so-called *demarginalization*, by what he means the process of elimination of marked differences in social and economic development. It includes the creation of such developmental conditions that will make it possible to mobilize and exploit their own human, social, and cultural capital, making them capable of getting incorporated in the development stream together with the rest of the regions. Demarginalization requires the individualized approach to particular regions (no uniform solutions), taking into consideration the concrete conditions contributing to the substance of their marginalization.

## CONCLUSION

Solving the problems of marginal regions and opening the scissors between the more developed and marginal regions may be done in a complex way only, systematically, and on the basis of a professionally sound regional policy, with the application of a systemic approach. Elaboration and application of such an approach requires a close co-operation from below, from the municipalities and regions, and from above, from the governmental agencies. It

requires the mobilization of regional resources and potentials, participation of regional communities, municipalities, the business sphere and non-governmental organizations, self-administration bodies, up to the state authorities.

It is necessary to respect the fact that even the Slovak regions are considerably differentiated in their potentials and they are facing their own specific problems, requiring specific approaches and solutions. To solve the disparities, specific conditions must be created, especially in the regions missing “the escape adaptation space”, by means of which the problems might be solved and the economic heterogeneity of their economic bases supported, making them more resistant to shocks. In this context, it will be necessary to lay a greater stress on the effective utilization of regional particularities, as well as the cross-border and international co-operation, as an instrument of local and regional economic development.

However, the regional disparities must not be conceived in connection with the economic development only. In a much higher degree, the elimination of disparities should be conceived in connection with preservation of equivalent living conditions, even for future generations in partial territories.

Another important sphere, not to be overlooked in connection with the marginal territories, is represented by the activities aiming at preservation of the settlement diversity in these territories (lowlands, uplands, mountains). This settlement forms a component part of the national history and it may play an important role even in the further development of the settlement, the country, in preservation of the diversity and variety of the settlement communities, their “genia loci”, as well as their cultural values.

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Arrived on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2005

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