

# Collective Memory and Collective Identity of Hlučín Region Inhabitants in the 20th Century\*

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Kolektivní paměť a kolektivní identita obyvatel Hlučínska ve 20. století

**Abstract:** The Hlučín Region is a small border area in the Moravia-Silesia Region. Its history is specific. Over 25 years in the 20th century, its border shifted three times and its inhabitants' nationality also changed three times. The region was annexed by the German Reich in 1938 and its inhabitants gained the rights of citizens of the Reich, with the obligation to enlist in the Wehrmacht, the armed forces of Germany. These historical turning points and their consequences after the Second World War are part of the cultural and communicative memory of most of the local people. The purpose of the article is to show the communicative memory of Hlučín Region inhabitants and the common knowledge of 20th century historical events to be one of the important integral parts of regional identity, which is a source of regional consciousness. Hlučín Region inhabitants identify themselves strongly with their region and society. This identification results from specific culture finding its expression in shared values, faith and traditions, and from the awareness of their own specificity. As a consequence of the predominant regional endogamy, this culture is handed down from one generation to another. Strong regional consciousness based on this identification, has a positive influence on the rich communal life and possibilities of stabilization and further development of the region.

**Keywords:** regional consciousness; communicative memory; border; Hlučín Region; history; community

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## Introduction

This article aims to highlight one of the major sources of building and maintaining regional identity of Hlučín Region inhabitants, which is the collective and communicative memory and shared knowledge of the historical events of the 20th century. As Assmann says, building and maintaining collective identity is based on shared memory and knowledge. The knowledge of past events and the interpretations of such events are a major source of the identity of a particular group [Assmann 2001]. Šubrt and Pfeiferová maintain that collective memory means an inner skeleton of identity, while forgetting means its loss [Šubrt – Pfeiferová 2010]. The article also focuses on how the strong regional identity is manifested in social conduct, i.e. in the rich communal and public life.

Collective identity and collective memory were not originally subjects of our qualitative research into changes in the way of life in the Hlučín Region. This issue only surfaced

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in the course of the research. In the first year of collecting data by means of conducting unstructured interviews conducted in the field, we thought that the respondents talked about the history of their region because historians had been in the area before us and had “taught” the local people to talk about history. Only after several stays in the region did we realise that the respondents talked about the history contained in their communicative memory because they wanted to explain and justify why they had done or had not done certain things, or because they wanted to point out the source of their uniqueness (of which they were justly proud). That is why we had to include regional identity and communicative memory of Hlučín region inhabitants in our research in retrospect.<sup>1</sup>

Regional identity of Hlučín Region inhabitants is considered as the regional consciousness of Hlučín Region inhabitants consisting in their identification with the region as a unique entity and with the regional society. Besides unified culture and mentality, the specific history of the Hlučín Region is one of the important sources of their identification. Regional consciousness of Hlučín Region inhabitants perceived as belonging to the region is one of the two dimensions of regional culture. The other dimension is regional identity, which we take, in keeping with Passi, for the image of the region in the eyes of the regional society [Passi 1986]. According to Nikischer, regional identity is also a source and product of people’s consciousness and vice versa. This mutual relationship is reflected in processes of institutionalization of the region [Nikischer 2015]. Passi distinguishes four phases of regional institutionalization: spatial shape of the region, symbolic shape, characterised mainly by its name/title, but also by cultural and/or historical specificity, institutional shape, containing both the formal and informal institutions, and the formal status [Passi 1986].

The Hlučín Region has a history that is distinctive in comparison with the Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic, there is no other border region whose border moved three times over 25 years, which was annexed to the German Reich in 1938 (and therefore was not part of the Sudetenland), and whose residents had the rights of the Reich citizens with the obligation to enlist in the German armed forces, the Wehrmacht.

The Hlučín Region covers a relatively small area of approximately 316 km<sup>2</sup>. It lies between the Rivers Oder and Opava and is defined by the borders of eastern Opava and western Ostrava; it borders with Poland in the north. At present, the region’s population is about 70,000 [according to the *Database of demographic data for the Czech municipalities*]. It is neither a region from which residents would migrate in large numbers, nor a region to which many people would move from other regions. The majority of the Hlučín Region population still comprises the native inhabitants.

The Hlučín Region was a separate district with Hlučín as its district town until 1960, when it was annexed to the Opava District; therefore, it does not constitute a separate administrative unit. That is why we define the region according to the historical territory of the Hlučín Region; this is a territory that fell to Prussia in 1742 after the Austro-Prussian War and that was annexed to Czechoslovakia in 1920. Today, the territory corresponds to 27 municipalities which are grouped in the *Association of Municipalities of the Hlučín*

<sup>1</sup> Communicative memory of Hlučín Region inhabitants as a source of regional consciousness of Hlučín Region inhabitants have been dealt with in our monographis based on several years’ qualitative research into intergenerational changes of the way of life, only marginally [Kubátová et al. 2015].

*Region*. Two thirds of the municipalities have less than 2,000 inhabitants. It is therefore a predominantly rural region.

The residents of the Hlučín Region are often called the “Preußens”. This term is derived from the German name for Prussia – Preußen – and it is an expression of a deeply rooted memory of the time when the territory was part of Prussia. Some residents consider the term “Preußen” to be offensive; however, most of them call themselves “Preußens” and are proud of the name.

The regional identity of Hlučín Region inhabitants had been studied already in the past. Towards the end of the 90s of the 20th century, it was studied by Premusová who compared permanent autochthonous Hlučín Region as against the Osoblažsko region of settlers. Based on this comparison Premusová finds out that the main identifying element for Hlučín Region inhabitants is their relationship to land [Premusová 1999]. In 2013, a diploma work was defended at the Science Faculty UP, where electoral participation analysis of the results of the local election was used to study the regional identity of Hlučín region inhabitants. In comparison with the Czech Republic, participation in the election to local government of Hlučín Region inhabitants was found by 11% higher. This may be suggestive of strong regional consciousness of Hlučín Region inhabitants [Petříková 2013]. Discursive formation of social identities in the Hlučín Region was studied at the beginning of the 21st century by Marcel Mečiar. He considered social identity as a type of identity formed by discourse which typifies an individual as an element of a certain collective identity. The regional identity of Hlučín Region inhabitants he then took for a source of social identity. He claimed that though the community of Hlučín Region inhabitants is changing, their regional identity is still meaningful [Mečiar 2008]. Our study is specific in that it specifically focuses on the relationship between the content of communicative memory of Hlučín Region inhabitants and their regional consciousness.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the article consists of three parts. The first part is devoted to the methodology of the research on the basis of which the information for this paper was obtained. The second part is devoted to the reconstruction of the content of the of the communicative memory of Hlučín Region inhabitants with regard to the shifting border during the first half of the 20th century and to the destiny of the Hlučín region after the Second World War. The third part deals with the identity of the inhabitants of the Hlučín Region and with its community life.

## Research Methodology

We collected data over the period between 2011 and 2014. We based the data collection on a qualitative research strategy which combined open narrative interviews with semi-structured interviews. Our respondents were members of two generations of residents of Hlučín. The first generation consisted of people born just before, during, or immediately after the Second World War; the second generation consisted of their children, i.e. people born in the 1960s and 1970s. In line with the objective of the research (to study the relationship of the communicative memory and regional identity of Hlučín Region inhabitants) we chose our respondents in all 27 municipalities of the region from among the natives, i.e. people who lived in the same municipality in which their mothers lived at the time of their birth. There are a lot of such people in the Hlučín region. The

overwhelming majority of the population of the Hlučín Region can be defined as “Hlučín natives”, i.e. people who were born in the Hlučín Region and still have their permanent place of residence in the Hlučín Region. Given the theoretical/methodology of selection of the sample, we are aware of the fact that our conclusions concerning the identity of Hlučín Region inhabitants are not valid of all people living in the Hlučín Region at present, but only the natives.<sup>2</sup>

We started collecting data by piloting the field, with the aim of gaining a theoretical sensitivity that would allow us to understand the field [*Glaser 1978*] and obtaining contact information on potential respondents. On the basis of the piloting, we found that the region was largely autochthonous, or in other words, that it was a region with prevalent regional endogamy. The people know each other, are often related, and entire extended families live in the region. That is why we chose the quasi-snowball method as an additional method of gathering respondents. As similar people are generally packed on the snowball, there is a risk of the homogenisation of the sample. In order to prevent this, we established several independent snowballs.

The interview usually took place in the respondent’s home, so the interviewer could see the environment and make contact with other family members, as multi-generational housing prevails in the region. After an informed consent had been obtained from the respondent, the interview was recorded and then transcribed word for word. Nevertheless, the transcripts were stylistically edited (omission of redundant words, modification of sentence structures), since we focused on the content, not on an analysis of the conversation. Furthermore, we removed dialectal expressions to facilitate the translation of the published excerpts into English.

When analysing the data, we followed the grounded theory method. Its advantage is flexibility; it can be modified according to the needs and subject of research, which is recommended by the authors of this method themselves [*Strauss – Corbin 1999*]. The data analysis was carried out simultaneously with the data collection process. We assumed that data in a qualitative research study was produced throughout the research process. On the basis of the analysis and interpretation of the data during the data collection process, we decided on the future direction of the research, other relevant topics, and other potential research methods [cf. e.g. *Hammersley – Atkinson 1995; Ezzy 2002; Charmaz 2003*]. The interpreted data therefore served to provide orientation for our work in the field.

In order to be able to analyse the data simultaneously with its collection, or to achieve a situation in which the data would help us to direct the research further, we divided the fieldwork into several stages. In each stage, we began the data analysis with a careful and repeated reading of the interview transcripts. This was followed by data encoding, through which we created terms that were then grouped into individual categories. On the basis of the encoding and categorisation, we modified further research procedures and decided on the future direction of creating a sample of respondents.

In the following parts of the article, we will include excerpts from the interviews. What role do they play? The basic unit with which we worked when analysing qualitative data does not lie in the data; it lies in the concepts with which we described the phenomena

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<sup>2</sup> Within the framework of the representative quantitative questionnaire research in the Hlučín Region, carried out in 2014, it has been found out that 76% of Hlučín Region inhabitants were natives.

(events, activities, evaluation) about which the respondents spoke. Therefore, the excerpts are in fact empirical indicators of the concepts. Each indicator is saturated with many excerpts that were identified in the same way, only we could not publish them all. The published excerpts are examples of typical repeated statements on the basis of which the content of each concept was created. At the end of each excerpt, there is basic information about the respondent in parentheses: gender, education, and year of birth; the last symbol in the parentheses is an anonymous designation of the respondent. The questions of the interviewer are marked in italics.

The data collection was completed when we achieved theoretical saturation, i.e. when we ceased to discover new categories despite the fact that further cases were added to the sample. At that moment, we considered the categories to be full with regard to the possibilities of the empirical material. In total, we conducted 98 interviews with members of the two generations defined by us.<sup>3</sup>

We validated the results of our analyses and interpretations of the qualitative data in two workshops held in the field with the participation of Hlučín Region inhabitants in 2013 and 2014. Several dozen people attended the workshops and very actively discussed our findings that had been presented to them to verify the accuracy of the findings. The second workshop in November 2014 was solely focused on the issue of collective memory and the locations of memory so that we could observe the communicative memory of the “in action”. The atmosphere of the workshop clearly showed that the past was still alive for Hlučín Region inhabitants and that they shared not only common knowledge about their past but also the majority of interpretations and evaluations of key historical events.

### **The Shifting Border between 1920 and 1945 in the Communicative Memory of Hlučín Region Inhabitants and the Post-war Destiny of the Region**

The earliest historical events that are of importance to the Hlučín region inhabitants were conveyed even to the oldest respondents through their parents and grandparent’s narratives; they did not experience these events themselves. Still, the narratives represent living experience handed down from one generation to another in the process of socialization. Jan Assmann uses the concept of communicative memory for memories of this type; communicative memory is part of everyday interaction and its task is to create and maintain shared meanings, and thus a sense of continuity in a certain community or society. Via communicative memory, the community’s identity is created and maintained, because communicative memory fosters the sense of continuity and of shared meaning. Another type of collective memory is cultural memory. While communicative memory builds up from down upwards, including memories of 3 to 4 consecutive generations and is handed down from one generation to another through communication, cultural memory is built from above downwards by force, with the past unchanging and recorded, and transformed into symbolic figures [Assmann 2001; Assmann 2008].

We are currently witnessing the transformation of communicative memory into cultural memory. The Museum of the Hlučín region in Hlučín has organised an exhibition entitled “Who Are the People in the Hlučín region?” with the assistance of the residents

<sup>3</sup> For the results of qualitative data analyses as related to different lifestyle aspects see [Kubátová et. al 2015].

themselves, who have provided the Museum with family photos, memories, and various objects related to the past of the region. It can be seen from the example of the Hlučín Region that cultural memory may also be formed in a bottom-up manner, through communicative memory.

We reconstructed the content of the communicative memory of Hlučín region inhabitants pertaining to the shifts of border between 1920 and 1945 by combining texts on key historical events and the results of the analysis of the interviews with members of the first and second generations.

### 1920 – The first shift of the border

The year 1920 plays an important role in the communicative memory of the residents of the Hlučín region, both of the first and of the second generation. Until that year, the Hlučín Region was part of Germany, or Prussia, from as early as 1742, when the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa lost most of Silesia in the Austro-Prussian Wars. In 1920, one of the key events in the history of the Hlučín Region took place, namely the annexation of the region to Czechoslovakia, which was established in 1918 as one of the consequences of the First World War. The state border on the River Opava, which, until then, had separated Austria (from 1918 Czechoslovakia) and Germany, of which the Hlučín Region was part, *shifted for the first time*, to the north (see the picture: border A shifted to the line labelled B). While until then the Hlučín Region was the border area of southern Germany, suddenly it became the northern border area of Czechoslovakia.

Plaček says that the political argument for the region having become part of Czechoslovakia was the fact that the inhabitants were of Slavic origin and that the region had belonged to the Lands of the Bohemian Crown until 1742 [Plaček 2007].

The people in the region were not particularly happy about the annexation to Czechoslovakia; in their opinion, Germany, unlike Austria/Czechoslovakia, had a good social policy; what was also noticeable was the criticism of the low level of religiousness on the Austrian/Czechoslovak side. According to the treaty with Germany, the people who had lived in the Hlučín Region prior to the annexation could decide whether to keep their German nationality by the end of 1922. In the end, 13% of the population opted for Germany. The relatively high percentage of those who chose Germany was due, among other things, to pressure from the Czech authorities (e.g. school instruction only in Czech). However, those who opted for German nationality had to move to Germany within 12 months. This significantly reduced the proportion of Germans in the Hlučín Region [Plaček 2000].

### *Divided families*

By opting for Germany and moving there and through the division of Silesia by the shifting of the border to the north, many families in the Hlučín Region were split.

*In 1920, when Silesia (or Preußen) was divided, we as a family fell to Czechoslovakia, but the siblings of my father and mother remained on the German side.* (Male, apprenticed, 1967, 6/713)

*In 1920, politicians simply took a ruler, drew a line, and thus cut a barn in half if they had to; they did not respect anything. As we say here: a barn in Czechoslovakia, a goat in Germany.* (Male, apprenticed, 1959, 42/713)

Members of both generations are aware that the people who live on the other side of the border today are similar both in their mentality and way of life, as they all lived together in the German district of Racibórz until 1920.

*The villages that are on the Polish side were once German ... when I talk to those old natives working in the field, I find that we have the same views. – With those Poles there? – Yes, but only with the natives; there are also Poles there who moved from the interior of Poland, and those are different. Nevertheless, the natives share with us the same or similar values, views on life, and so on.* (Male, apprenticed, 1959, 42/713)

*These Poles who are our neighbours are like us. In fact, they are also Preußens, so they are like us.* (Female, secondary education, 1961, 7/713)

### **Breaking the economic ties with Germany**

The annexation of the Hlučín Region to Czechoslovakia broke many economic ties; many inhabitants of the region had worked as peddlers and seasonal workers in Germany, which they could not do so easily after the annexation. Nevertheless, they went to work in Germany even then, especially to the industrial areas of the Rhineland. According to the communicative memory of our respondents, the reason was that the residents of the Hlučín Region had difficulty in obtaining employment in Czechoslovakia; they were stigmatised because of their former German nationality.

*We were put aside, nobody gave us employment in Ostrava at times of crisis because they said we were Germans; we worked mainly in Germany because there were those German roots, the German language, and the Preußen drill and thoroughness; that was why they accepted us in Germany.* (Male, secondary education, 1941, 23/713)

*Before 1920, we belonged to Germany, to Prussia, then to Czechoslovakia; after all, the people did have ties to Germany, so they worked there.* (Male, apprenticed, 1959, 42/713)

*The people here worked as peddlers. My grandmother also worked as a peddler; she started at the age of 14 when she finished school. She went with her grandfather to Pomerania. They stayed there all summer; they left in the spring and only came back home in the autumn.* (Female, secondary education, 1948, 6/0711)

*There were hard-working people here, mostly masons; there were masons who had travelled across Europe even in the century before last; they had built Vienna and Berlin, those people were used to working hard.* (Female, secondary education, 1950, 6/0711)

### **Language**

According to Plaček, another argument for annexing the Hlučín region to Czechoslovakia was the fact that its inhabitants spoke Moravian [Plaček 2007]. According to Šrámek, Moravian was a Czech dialect that was spoken at home in the Hlučín Region in the period when the region belonged to Prussia/Germany; however, there was no written (standard) form. The official language was German; the mass and school instructions were in German. The people spoke Moravian but could only write in German. The continuity of a conscious relationship between the dialect and the naturally superior written form of Czech was completely disintegrated. After the Hlučín region was annexed to Czechoslovakia, the residents saw Czech as a foreign language that had to be laboriously learned [Šrámek 1997].

German was suppressed and Czech was preferred by schools, which was resented. According to Šrámek, it was so difficult to establish Czech education and administration

in the Hlučín Region because there was no sense of belonging to the Czech nation. However, there was no sense of belonging to the German nation either: many people continued to call themselves Moravians and spoke Moravian. The Moravian dialect became the basis for teaching Czech in schools; the children who left school in the late 1920s were the first generation of residents of the Hlučín Region who mastered the modern standard Czech language [Šrámek 1997].

However, language issues persisted in the Hlučín Region in the period between the two world wars with regard to the older generations, whose members could only speak German and Moravian. The language education of adults was not very successful.

*After the First World War, approximately in 1920, the great powers decided that this region would be annexed to Czechoslovakia. And the problem was that nobody ensured that the people who lived here learned Czech. This means that the spoken language was still German. The authorities were Czech, but the people ... could not speak Czech. And Czech officials were installed here to ensure that the nation became Czech. (Male, elementary education, 1937, 30/713)*

### 1938 – The second shift of the border

This situation lasted until 1938, when there was the second key historical event: the state border *shifted for the second time*, this time to the south, and returned to the River Opava, to the place where it had been until 1920: As a result of the acceptance of the Munich Dictate by the Czechoslovak government, the Hlučín region became part of the German Reich (see the picture: border B shifted to the line labelled A). According to Plaček, the situation of the residents of the Hlučín region was addressed in the treaty between Czechoslovakia and Germany on issues of citizenship and options dated 20 November 1938. The treaty stipulated that people who had been born in the Hlučín region before 1910 and had had permanent residence there until 10 October 1938 would automatically gain German nationality with the rights of citizens of the Reich under Act No. 300. This also applied to their children and grandchildren [Plaček 2000]. The German language returned to schools and offices, while the use of Czech was suppressed and severely punished during the Second World War.

In this period, the oldest members of the first generation of residents of the Hlučín Region who were monitored were born; their lives were significantly affected by the Second World War and the post-war events.

### *Conflicting interpretations of the annexation*

According to Plaček, the people in the Hlučín Region largely welcomed the German occupation, as they expected the return of the economic prosperity that had existed before the First World War [Plaček 2000]. However, there are conflicting interpretations of this event in the collective memory of the residents. Most of our respondents see the annexation as positive; in particular, they emphasise the good social policy in the German Reich:

*I can say that old people reminisce about Germany in a good way, about how Hitler maintained the economy. ... But I cannot say this aloud because they would say I support fascism. Old people do not want to hear anything bad about Germany; it is true that the economy was good. (Female, secondary education, 1952, 7/0712)*

*And then there was the precision of the German nation. That pedantry is rooted in me as well, which is a consequence of Germanness; it had nothing to do with the Austrians. And the disorder! It was the Germans who introduced order! It was Hitler who introduced the first ever social contributions, nobody else! (Male, apprenticed, 79 years old, 1934, 19/713)*

Other respondents view the annexation to the German Reich in a different way:

*Do you think that Hitler invaded the Hlučín Region? – Of course he did. I never heard anything else at home. – It is said that Hitler wanted the Hlučín Region back and that it was the right thing. – No, no. The only thing I ever heard at home was that Hitler was ... the worst swine in the world. Hitler was our arch-enemy ... (Male, secondary education, 1951, 11/713)*

These contradictory interpretations of the re-annexation to Germany have persisted in the communicative memory of the population of the Hlučín region to this day. Many people there tend towards Germany and remember the positive features of having belonged to Germany, while others remind us of the disaster of the Second World War that followed soon after the annexation and that adversely affected the lives of all Hlučín region inhabitants. The interpretation apparently depends on whether due to re-annexation to Germany the given family suffered or gained. An important role played also the fact what the respondents' demobilized fathers spoke about and also the way they spoke about it.

### ***The first flight to the interior – the fear of war***

The re-annexation to Germany brought about the reunion of families that had been split in 1920, which is positively evaluated in the communicative memory of the population of the Hlučín region. On the other hand, panic spread across the Hlučín Region because of fear of a possible war, so many people, especially women and children, fled into the German interior.

*In 1938, at the time of the conclusion of the Munich Agreement, I was one year and four months old. Everybody was worried about the future, that there would be a war ... My uncle advised my mother to go to my father, who worked in Germany. So we fled to Germany. (Male, apprenticed, 1937, 46/713)*

*And this is a picture from 1938, when it seemed that there would be a war; many women and children were fleeing to the Baltic Sea, and this is a picture of them. It was horrible. (Female, secondary education, 1948, 6/0711)*

### ***The Second World War***

The fact that the residents of the Hlučín region acquired the rights of citizens of the Reich later meant that the men were obliged to enlist in the Wehrmacht. According to Binar, a total of 11,500 men were enlisted, which was approximately 22% of the then population of the region [Binar 2014]. About a quarter of the soldiers from the Hlučín Region never returned home and approximately 5,000 of them were maimed or wounded. At the end of the war, many soldiers ended up in captivity and it took several years before they could return home.

*My father entered the forces in Norway and was there during the war and then he was captured in France as they were fleeing from Norway. He was in captivity for two years before he could come home. (Male, 1955, 11/713)*

*My father spent virtually the entire war in Russia. So he experienced all the difficulties there ... those terrible years and winters ... And he said that many had died there, especially*

*in the winter ... they had frozen to death. At the end of the war ... my father was captured by the Americans in Pilsen. He was taken to Germany. He was there until Christmas. At Christmas, my sister went there for him so at least he was able to get back.* (Male, university education, 1955, 28/713)

*Did a lot of people from the Hlučín Region die? – Many; in my family alone, my mother's brother and two brothers of my father fell. My father was in Wrocław at the end of the Second World War, and as a prisoner he was lucky that he was not sent to Russia. We had no idea what had happened to him; we thought he was dead. He only returned in 1946. When I had last seen him, I was three years old; when he came back, I was eight.* (Male, university education, 1937, 9/0711)

The war split families again; only women, children, and old men generally remained at home. The oldest respondents remember that a labour force was assigned to each farm to secure food supplies.

*This was during the war. Back then, each family without a father had a maid-servant ... the maid-servant had to take care of us children, work in the field, and so on. They were not from here ... they were Poles.* (Male, apprenticed, 1934, 19/713)

### ***The second flight to the interior – evacuation because of the approaching front line***

Before the end of the Second World War, the front line was approaching the Hlučín Region, and the German authorities thus decided to evacuate the residents. Some members of the first generation remember the evacuation, others learned about it later from their parents or grandparents.

*... controlled evacuation, everybody had to go. Women, children. We went on trucks all the way to a village near Munich; my sister was two months old at that time. The local farmers had to take us in. Of course, they were not happy about it. ... After the war, we went back. Mothers were always telling their children that they had to be quiet. It was unthinkable to talk aloud in German. We arrived in Pilsen; someone said something in German and they immediately said: these are Germans, send them back. No one would believe what those women went through. And then we came here; my grandfather was already waiting for us and asked us: Why have you come back? It is awful here. The Czech people are in charge here.* (Female, secondary education, 1941, 6/0712)

The return home meant a significant risk, which was why many people never went back to the Hlučín region; this caused further family divisions:

*The people fled before the front line because they had been told: You have to leave, it will be terrible here. Therefore, many people went to Germany, while some of them came back later and some of them did not. My grandfather stayed behind; he sent my mother and her brother back to take care of our property in the Hlučín Region. Unfortunately, they returned and found out that the house had gone. It had been bombed, so they had nowhere to live ... They found shelter with their relatives ... But my grandfather never returned from Germany.* (Female, secondary education, 1947, 16/713)

### **1945 – The third shift of the border**

In 1945, after the end of the Second World War, the *state border shifted for the third time*, this time to the north, back to the place where it had been formed in 1920 (see

the picture: border A shifted to the line labelled B). The border exists today as the state border with Poland (see the picture: border C shifted to the line labelled D in 1945). The Hlučín region again became part of Czechoslovakia and today forms the northern border area of the Czech Republic, which was established after the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993.

This border shift is also a significant moment in the communicative memory of the Hlučín region, as its consequences were often tragic. For example, the situation of the war veterans was very complicated because, as Wehrmacht soldiers and citizens of the Reich, they were considered Germans by Czechoslovak authorities. Many of them thus ended up in prison after their return from captivity.

*All those soldiers who had been in the German army and had returned home were locked up in labour camps. Those who were set free were later locked up again and sent to coal shafts or uranium mines ... after they had served at least three or four years in prison. (Male, apprenticed, 1940, 13/0712)*

The people in the Hlučín Region were affected by the principle of the collective guilt of the German nation for having started the Second World War. According to Arburg and Staněk, the category of “unreliable population” was established (Government Regulation No. 4/1945 Coll.). The people were affected by Great Retribution Decree No. 16/1945 Coll., on the punishment of Nazi criminals and their accomplices, Decree No. 17/1945 on the National Court and on the ways to prosecute prominent traitors and collaborators from the Czech ranks, and the so-called Small Decree No. 138/1945 on the punishment for certain offences against the honour of the nation. According to these decrees, the character of the individual offences was not specified, and thus there was fierce retribution; at the same time, the deportations were delayed and relief was granted for economic reasons [Arburg – Staněk 2010].

### ***Deportations in the Hlučín Region***

Nevertheless, the rate of deportations and property confiscation was relatively low in the Hlučín Region. Approximately 4,000 inhabitants were deported (out of the then total number of 47 thousand). If all of the above post-war standards had been applied in the Hlučín Region, virtually the entire population would have had to be deported. However, it was difficult to determine the nationality and citizenship of the residents of the Hlučín Region. The deportation criteria were never objectively established and the issue was called the “Hlučín Region Problem” until the end of the 1950s. The deportations resulted in major disputes and the issue is still alive for members of the oldest generation in the Hlučín Region.

*It was like this: the first ones who had obtained German citizenship had to go as early as the harvest season in 1945. We were never told that we could not be deported, as mixed couples were not allowed to be deported. They told us: Get ready, you will have to go. So we prepared. Our neighbours were also waiting outside; a truck came for us, loaded our things and then a man came and said: You are not coming, go back inside, you are coming in the second transport. So we went back. Then there was the third wave of deportations. I do not know why but nobody came for us. – But your relatives were deported, were they not? – They were; the family of my father’s sister went in the second transport. They went to Bavaria. (Male, elementary education, 1937, 30/713)*

*People walked about with the letter “N” on their backs, marking them as Germans (translator’s note: “N” stands for “Němec”, which means a German in Czech), and waited for deportation ... the so-called People’s Commissars, who organised this, unfortunately included local people. – In the end, the scale of the deportations was not that massive. – It was not, it was only about 2,000 people, but you have to realise that those were people who had nothing to do with anything. My husband always said that they had deported people who had had some property. I remember the family of such a commissar, I knew them well and had been in their house. All the furniture they owned had been taken from the Germans. They walked on three or four layers of plush carpets. Toys, dishes, paintings, everything, but that did not bring happiness to the family. The commissar ended up in jail anyway. Those were the people who fled when Hitler came. And then they returned with the Russians, like great Czechs. (Female, secondary education, 1941, 6/0712)*

*Why were so few people deported? – Who would otherwise have worked in Ostrava? That was the reason. – Do you think so? – I know so! Most of the people were to be deported but Ostrava was experiencing a great development of industry – mines and smelting plants were being opened, everything was destroyed after the war. It was close and the Hlučín Region practically served as the “dormitory” for Ostrava; everyone from here worked in the Vítkovice Mines. (Female, secondary education, 1952, 7/0712)*

The post-war period is a period already remembered by members of the first generation. The following events are thus not only included in the communicative memory of the Hlučín Region inhabitants, but they are also personal memories of people who are still alive today.

After the end of the Second World War, the shifting border settled at the place where it lies today. However, the consequences of the border shifting continued to be manifested in the Hlučín Region.

*My husband’s father stayed in Germany after the war and never returned, and his mother was left alone with the children – my husband and his sister. They lived together with my husband’s grandparents. The grandparents helped the mother to raise the children. It was difficult for them, as their father never came back and they were considered Germans, so they received fewer ration stamps and so on; they actually survived thanks to the grandparents. (Female, secondary education, 1947, 16/713)*

Given that the front line had passed through the Hlučín region, many houses had been destroyed; the post-war restoration of the Hlučín Region began. The people built their houses themselves, and families and neighbours helped each other. The post-war construction of the Hlučín Region affected the lives of members of the first generation, who had to take part in the restoration.

*After the war ... we had nowhere to live, everything was destroyed, so a farmer took us in ... and then we started building a new house. I had already submitted my school applications, but my mother told me: “My girl, you cannot go. You have to go to work; we need to build the house and who is going to help us?” So I completed a typing and shorthand course and went to work in the local factory. My father lost his arm in the war ... and my brother had a lung disease and could not work either, so I had to. “Go to work, my girl, you cannot go to school.” (Female, elementary education, 1939, C/513)*

*In 1948, the Communists seized power in Czechoslovakia, which further worsened the situation in the Hlučín region. It should be emphasised that the events that followed, especially*

*nationalisation and collectivisation, affected not only the people in the Hlučín region but all the citizens of Czechoslovakia. However, the truth is that the stigmatisation, marginalisation, and discrimination by the Czechoslovak authorities launched in 1945 naturally continued after 1948, and that many of the pre-war and post-war grievances felt by the residents of the Hlučín Region were deepened and rooted in their communicative memory.*

*In 1948, after I finished elementary school, I enrolled in a one-year course ... I was very thin, I weighed only 45 kg, I was malnourished, as you can imagine ... I knew nothing but work. Here is my leaving certificate from elementary school. – Straight A's. – With these results, I left school. Then I went to Opava to start the one-year course, where we had Czech teachers. They saw us as Preußens, German children, and did not want to let us continue in our studies. (Male, apprenticed, 1934, 19/713)*

The language issue was a major problem in itself. As has already been mentioned, German was the official language in the Hlučín region until 1920, and people used the Moravian dialect at home. After 1920, Czech became the official language, despite the fact that most adults did not speak it. In 1938, the use of the Czech language was forbidden and German again became the official language. In 1945, after the war, German was forbidden and Czech became the official language. In the course of these events, children were born and were growing up in the Hlučín Region; while their parents learned everything at school in Czech (and could also speak German from before the annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1920), the children learned everything in German at first and after the war had to go to Czech schools. Children who were born after the war were virtually isolated from German, and these people mostly cannot speak German at all.

*My mother was born in 1907 and she went to Czech and Moravian schools ... so she could speak both German and Czech. My brother was born in 1937 and started attending a German school. My brother and I could only speak German. Now imagine that suddenly there were national administrators here and we could speak no language but German. Our mother never took us with her when she went shopping and so on because she was scared ... nobody was allowed to talk aloud in German. In 1948, I had to go to a Czech school. (Male, secondary education, 1942, 23/713)*

*I kept asking my mother, "Why didn't you teach us German?" And she always replied, "It was not that easy after the war ... whenever we wanted to talk to each other in German at home, we had to look outside first to make sure that no one was listening." They were scared because there was the risk of deportation. ... The deportation of the residents of the Hlučín Region was a constant topic. (Male, secondary education, 1947, 32/713)*

Both the authorities and the population of Czechoslovakia considered the Hlučín region people suspicious. This was because of their German associations during the war and because of their contacts with their relatives who were deported after the war and who lived in Germany (even though such contacts were infrequent and were monitored).

Another important circumstance was the fact that the survivors of fallen residents started receiving war pensions from Germany in the 1960s. Therefore, the Hlučín Region was relatively rich, when compared to the rest of the country, which raised suspicion among people outside the region and among the Czechoslovak authorities. The inhabitants of the Hlučín Region were stigmatised, marginalised, and discriminated against, when, for example, they applied for secondary schools and universities, jobs, etc. In addition to the above-mentioned historical circumstances, a negative role was also played by the high

level of religiousness of the people, which has been maintained to this day; according to the census in 2001 (when the answer to the question about religious belief was still compulsory), the percentage of religious people was double (80%) that in the Czech Republic as a whole (40%).

*Well, when we were leaving school and they wrote testimonials for us, they said that our fathers had served in the German army, you know? But what else were our fathers supposed to have done? They would have got shot if they had not enlisted. Nobody joined the army voluntarily.* (Female, secondary education, 1948, 6/0711)

*Do you believe that your daughter was not admitted to secondary school because of religion? – Yes, it was because of religion; we got the application back with a note that she had attended religion classes for xx years. And it was underlined in red.* (Female, elementary education, 1939, C/513)

The 1989 Revolution and the subsequent economic and political transformation of Czechoslovakia brought significant changes to the lives of the inhabitants of the Hlučín Region. In addition to the changes that affected the entire society (democratisation, privatisation, and restitution), there were two facts that played a major role for the population of the Hlučín Region. In 1990, the then Czechoslovak President Václav Havel apologised for the post-war deportation of the Germans. It was a nice gesture of the new regime aimed at all those who saw the deportations as a great injustice. The apology of the Czech Prime Minister Nečas for the wrongs committed after the war, made in the Landtag of Bavaria in 2013, had a similar effect.

Another important factor was the possibility of working in Germany after 1989. This depended on the recognition of the German nationality of the residents of the Hlučín Region by the Administrative Court in Cologne. On the basis of a positive decision, a German passport was issued to the respective applicant, who was then able to apply for a job in Germany as a German citizen. Many people in the Hlučín Region met the conditions for the recognition of German nationality, and many took this opportunity. The main reasons mentioned by the residents were practical and pragmatic reasons, not that they felt themselves to be German. After 1989, with the acquisition of German passports, the people automatically became citizens of the European Union, with the right to work without any administrative delays not only in Germany but also anywhere else in the EU long before the Czech Republic joined the EU and thus the Schengen Area (2004, implemented in 2007).

Organisations that were unacceptable under the Communist regime were established in the new democratic environment of the post-revolutionary Hlučín Region. These included the Silesian German Union, based in Bolatice and founded in 1992, and the Association of Silesia and Germany in Hlučín, founded in 1995. In 2008, a German radio station, Halloradio Hultschin, started broadcasting from Hlučín in German; it was founded as an organisation under the Association of Silesia and Germany in the Hlučín region.

### **The Identity and Community of Hlučín Region Inhabitants**

The specific and complicated historical development of the Hlučín Region, stored in the regional communicative and cultural memory, has a considerable influence on the

formation and consolidation of the regional collective identity. Whereas the ethnic/national<sup>4</sup> identity of the members of the two generations that were monitored is indifferent<sup>5</sup>, the regional identity of Hlučín Region inhabitants is very strong.

*Imagine this: my brother was born as a true-born Czech in 1938. I was born as a true-born German in 1941, and my other brother was born as a true-born Czech again in 1947. So where is any national identity? National identity does not concern us; we have just always wanted to earn a living, have a roof over our heads, raise our children, and secure their future. The only kind of identity which makes any difference to us is regional identity.* (Male, secondary education, 1941, field notes of November 2013)

*... but everyone wants to feel that they belong somewhere, right? And when I was a child ... the identity issue troubled me greatly; I cried and kept asking my dad what we actually were: Czechs, Germans, Poles or what? And he told me not to worry, that we were Moravians. This issue troubled many families ...* (Female, university education, 1941, 8/0711)

Regional identity of the inhabitants is shaped by a strong identification with Hlučín Region and community, stemming from common history of people living in the Hlučín region, stored in their communicative memory. Its other sources are uniform culture and mentality, which result, to a certain extent, from strong social ties in terms of above-standard familial and neighbourly relations [cf. e.g. *Zich 2003; Paasi 2001; Passi 2013; Chromý 2003*]. Regional identity of the inhabitants arises from human coexistence and reflects the degree of common consciousness, a sense of belonging, a certain mutual consensus, and the degree of solidarity. The identity of the Hlučín Region inhabitants is strengthened by the fact that residents have lived in one place for generations and that almost all the people they encounter in everyday life and at festivities are people like them, with similar pasts and habits, lived and perceived belonging to a unique, clearly outlined group (a feeling of belonging together). According to Brubaker and Cooper, the concept of identity is a regional consciousness of a group living in the same territory. Various types of ties (connectedness) exist between the members of the group, e.g. familial, neighbourly, legal or economical, and some common attributes (commonalities) characterizing them can be found [*Brubaker – Cooper 2010*].

The regional identity of Hlučín Region inhabitants is manifested in shared values and behaviour patterns. In relation to the community, the regional consciousness of Hlučín Region inhabitants performs the functions of integration and social control in order to monitor the degree of loyalty of individuals towards the group through widely accepted values and standards.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Many experts on identity point to the fact that there is no clear boundary between the concepts of ethnicity and nation [cf. e.g. *Hirt 2005; Lozoviuk 2005a; Schlee 2006*].

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Lozoviuk sees the residents of the Hlučín Region as a population that spoke Czech dialects but that did not identify with the Czech nation in terms of ethnicity [*Lozoviuk 2005b: 185*]; Pavelčíková believes that the residents of the Hlučín Region remained ethnically neutral for a long time and that they made up for their lack of national consciousness with regional sentiments [*Pavelčíková 1999: 57*]. The situation may be somewhat confusing because the vast majority of the inhabitants state their nationality as Czech in population censuses. However, the results of the qualitative research indicate that this is a mere declaration in many cases, as the people's national identity remains uncertain.

<sup>6</sup> For example, according to Kohn, collective identity is expressed as a sense of belonging between an individual and the relevant group, which is created, maintained, and strengthened by upbringing. An individual who identifies with the group and group thinking is bound to such group thinking by his/her loyalty [*Kohn 2012*].

The identity of the Hlučín Region is manifested in particular in the common sense of uniqueness and exclusivity. One of the aspects of the identity of the region is the way in which the residents view themselves. Members of the first and second generations believe that the spirit of Prussia – the Prussian national disposition manifested in typical characteristics such as diligence, frugality, wisdom, obedience, discipline, and tidiness – still endures in them. Being a native of the Hlučín Region also means praying and going to church, respecting one's parents, providing for one's family, observing law and order, and keeping one's word. When asked to list the typical features of the regional society, both generations mentioned the appreciation of land, the ability to deal with any situation, and the uncommonness of relying on outside help – the people do things themselves, help each other, and do not open their hearts to strangers.

*The inhabitants of the Hlučín Region are known to be very hard-working but also very careful with regard to money. What they earn they invest in their houses.* (Male, university education, 1937, 9/0711)

*What would you say makes you special as a Preußen? – I would say that at least the members of the older generations have always been sociable and hard-working, and respected their parents when they were young ... and mostly there were experts here.* (Male, secondary education, 1943, 9/713)

*In this area, everyone is emotionally tied to their land, house, and family. To everything, basically ...* (Male, secondary education, 1961, 38/713)

The inevitable presupposition of the origin and strengthening of the common regional consciousness is the distinction between “us” and “them”. This typical way of distinguishing the locals from other people has been based on the distinction between Preußens and non-Preußens ever since the annexation of the Hlučín region to Prussia in 1742; the so-called non-Preußens are all people who “live beyond the water”, i.e. beyond the Rivers Opava and Oder, which have defined the borders of the Hlučín Region for centuries. Members of the first and second generations working in Ostrava or Opava often met with open exclusion, stigmatisation, and discrimination from non-Preußens.

*Preußens were not allowed to hold any directorial posts until 1989; the highest achievable level was a master or foreman. Fear also played its part, in addition to the ban itself: what with the constant changes, people did not want to become too involved. Their experience had taught them to be cautious.* (Field notes, visiting contemporaries, April 2014)

*When you hear the term “Preußen” ... – I have experienced a lot with that, I can tell you. It was when I worked in Ostrava-Fifejdy; as soon as they learned that I was a Preußen, there was pandemonium. – Were they not rather making fun of you? – No, they were really mean. Not all of them, but many were: they wanted to hang me on every tree. That was cruel ... Some of them perhaps did not realise what they were saying, but it was cruel.* (Female, elementary education, 1946, 4/1113)

When asked what tied them to the region, the respondents mostly answered that they had their roots, families, and homes there, and that they liked the local community, solidarity, and order.

*If fate had forced me, I might have lived somewhere else because it is not as if I would not have been able to move. On the other hand ... I feel good here and I wish to live here until I die ... I feel that ... whatever the case, a certain order still exists here.* (Male, secondary education, 1947, 32/713)

The ties and links to a particular environment are strengthened by the sense of the intergenerational continuity of life in a particular place. The vast majority of the population of the Hlučín region comprises natives and actually also relatives, as the region is dominated by regional endogamy. As follows from the analysis of the interviews, members of both generations consciously preferred partners from the same municipality or region without having been forced to do so. It seems that local and regional endogamy is also popular because it offers many advantages: the partners are alike (they inhabit the same environment), they do not need to redefine their world or values [cf. e.g. *Berger – Kellner 1993*], and the families of the future partners already know each other. Moreover, the regional endogamy causes reproduction of the whole region as such, or, respectively, an increase in the extent of its institutionalization.

To this day, people are reluctant to leave the region, and if they do leave, they generally come back.

*A lot of guys and families who live here used to work in America. They earned money there and built or reconstructed their houses here. That means they are coming back.* (Male, secondary education, 1947, 32/713)

Hlučínian natives are intimately linked with their region and community. They consider the Hlučín Region as their home. Spatial vicinity, regional social bonds, awareness of common history stored in the communicative memory create a strong sense of belonging to the Hlučín community. The strong regional consciousness of Hlučín Region inhabitants points to the fact that to a certain extent, people are able to resist the modernisation processes of individualisation and social atomisation.

The strong regional consciousness of Hlučín Region inhabitants is expressed in social behaviour, particularly in communal life, such as club activities, participation in cultural and social regional events, etc. On the basis of the analysis of qualitative interviews, we defined the regional public life by various activities, such as social activities, balls, festivities, and other similar events which we consider unifying, since organising or participating in such events indicates the existence of similar or common interests of the members of Hlučínian community, as well as the intensity and degree of interaction within the framework of the region. They are in fact no local activities (within individual municipalities), but activities within the framework of the whole region. Even when it is a local event organized by one municipality, it is very often attended by inhabitants of other municipalities of the region. Undoubtedly, this is due to rich network of social ties, both between the members of the family and friends. As mentioned above one of the peculiarities of the Hlučín Region lies in the fact that the local social ties are largely shaped by blood relationships within the framework of the whole region. This situation is due to the fact that regional endogamy and a sense of belonging prevail in the region.

The regional social ties are manifested also in mutual assistance. People in the Hlučín Region generally help each other a lot; they never pay for such help, but rather “help back”. The practice of “helping back” has its roots in the past, when there were rational reasons for it. Many members of the first generation believe, either on the basis of personal experience or on the basis of experience mediated by family socialisation, that the Hlučín Region was politically and economically marginalised both at the time when it belonged to Germany and at the time when it belonged to Czechoslovakia. Therefore, the local people got used to the fact that they had to rely on themselves. Whether this idea is based on reality or not,

what matters is that this feeling has persisted in the consciousness of the inhabitants of the Hlučín Region and has social implications.

It is also true that the mutual help and participation in regional social and other kinds of events is up to a certain extent a norm. Supposing that regional consciousness is manifested in uniform culture, consisting not only of traditions, but also of shared values and behaviour patterns, then regional consciousness fulfils also the role of social control. Social control was very strong in the Hlučín Region once (as indeed in all rural populations); in intergenerational terms, however, its influence is gradually waning.

The Hlučín Region community was relatively immune to external influences until the early 1990s, which was mainly due to a certain degree of stigmatisation of the population arising from the specific history of the region as described above, and also due to the fact that not many people moved to the region; this might have resulted from the fact that most people migrated from the countryside to cities in the second half of the 20th century. The result was that the citizens of the Hlučín Region managed without outside help and lived secluded lives; even though many of them worked and studied in the neighbouring cities and brought back innovations, the region remained relatively isolated. In contrast to this isolation in relation to the outside world, there was an internal openness and the people used to meet in the streets or sit and chat on benches in front of their houses in the evenings.

*There used to be a bench in front of every house and people used to gather at the benches after work every evening. There were no televisions or any such things, you know. And this lasted until the 1980s ... neighbours were sitting there, others joined them ... many times when I was walking with my husband and children, I said that we would cross the tracks there because all the old women were calling "where were you, where are you going" ... it was very familial, sometimes too much so ... well, our young generation was a bit differen ... (Female, secondary education, 1948, 6/0711)*

Since the 1990s, the development of the local community has seen a change, characterised by openness towards the outside world and a contrasting internal isolation. The benches have gone, most people have cars and no longer walk or use public transport, and they have planted white cedars along their fences. This shift from an internally open to a rather closed community has been caused by the process of social differentiation and individualisation and the increasing degree of completed education, among other things. Better education has resulted in the fact that more and more people work away from their places of residence, which means that most villages are quite deserted during the week and that the inhabitants return from work late in the afternoon and want to have their privacy.

Nevertheless, the community of the Hlučín Region is still alive and real. The people meet at various events, participate in the development of the municipality and the region, help each other, and stick together. Naturally, contemporary communal life is no longer as traditional as the life remembered by contemporaries of the first and partially the second generation. The modernisation processes associated with improving education, especially the growing social differentiation leading to the heterogeneity of the originally homogeneous population, have resulted in an individual way of spending free time. On the other hand, this trend toward social differentiation and individualisation is mitigated by the fact that the primary values of the local population still consist of kinship, a sense of belonging, local and regional endogamy, and a relatively low number of newcomers, who are not

rooted in the region. This results in a widespread strong identification with the region and the Hlučín community.

Max Weber assumed that community may be established and exist in any place where the social actors become involved and thus create a common interest [Weber 1978: 41]. According to Váně, it is common interest that defines the intensity, permanency, and form of a community [Váně 2013]. The people of the Hlučín Region, regardless of their generation, are interested in taking care of their municipality and region, contributing to their development, socialising, and helping each other.

The strong regional identity of inhabitants, largely stemming from the communicative memory of the Hlučín region, forms the basis for a positive climate for communal life, cooperation and readiness to share in the development of the region.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the identified content of the communicative memory of Hlučín Region inhabitants, it can be said that to have lived in the Hlučín Region in the first half of the 20th century meant to be on the run, to have to decide whether to return or not, live in divided families, have a childhood without a father, fear for one's life, and suffer both materially and emotionally. These are the consequences of the world wars, shifting borders, and changing nationality. The shifting border that affected even those generations of the population of the Hlučín Region which did not experience these events is still a living memory in the region. Many of our respondents do remember the period after the Second World War; they remember the fear of deportation, language problems, and bullying at school, and later at work. Bullying and discrimination are remembered by the second generation as well.

The participation of the local men in the war and the fact that they fought in the Wehrmacht and were often killed, maimed, or captured considerably affected the history of the Hlučín Region, even though such things were never mentioned in front of the children before 1989.

*The fear was considerable; the people in the Hlučín region were scared to admit what they were because they were seen as traitors, Hitler's accomplices, and so on. They thus did not tell such things to their children because they were scared ... they themselves were not very proud of having been part of Hitler's army. – But what else could they have done? – Of course, the children were told that their fathers had had no other choice. But the explanations ended there. This topic became taboo. (Male, university education, 1937, 9/0711)*

In many cases, this taboo led to a disruption of the multi-generational family memory. This began to change after 1989, when people were finally free to express their views and political and religious beliefs. In many families in the Hlučín region, the memory was revitalised and, consequently, the hitherto tabooed parts of the communicative memory were again passed on to the younger generations.

Even so, the influence of the historical context on the youngest generations is waning. While the first and second generations consider the historical context to have been an important part of their lives and something which considerably affected not only their communicative memory but also the way they grew up, studied, and sought employment, today's young adults in the Hlučín Region are not really interested in the historical context

any longer. Their way of life has gradually been individualised, which might be due to modernisation offering a wide range of possible ways of living and self-fulfilment [Bauman 1999; Bauman 2000; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Kubátová 2013].

Nevertheless, the influence of the historical context should not be underestimated. Until the early 1990s, one of the major stabilising factors influencing the way of life of the families and the identity and community of the Hlučín region was a common enemy, whether that enemy took the form of the Czechs between the world wars or the Communists. Only the process of democratisation after 1989 brought about a plurality of options and thus a greater potential for change.

One of the consequences of the memories of the tragic events of the first half of the 20th century and the post-war years of Communist oppression is the deeply rooted regional consciousness of Hlučín Region inhabitants and the orientation to the wider family and neighbourly ties. The Hlučín Region has maintained a united wide family, helpful community, and religious faith. The region has been successful in modifying these traditional characteristics so that they can be applied in the highly unstable conditions of modern society. The residents of the region are still able to adapt to changing conditions, which is possibly a result of the complicated history of the shifting border. Over more than two and a half centuries of life in a “buffer” zone, with ever-changing cultural and political influences, borders, regimes, and official languages, generation after generation learned to effectively adapt to change and passed this social skill on to their descendants.

The collective memory of Hlučín Region inhabitants is considered by us one of the most important sources of their regional identity. In our opinion, it is meaningful that our respondents started talking about the history of the Hlučín Region and their regional consciousness and community of the Hlučín Region spontaneously, as it is almost certain that the phenomena that were investigated exist not only in the minds of the researchers but also in the real world of the inhabitants of the Hlučín Region.

The specific identity of the Hlučín region and the strong regional consciousness of its inhabitants affects positively the possibilities of further development of the region. It also forms a migration barrier [Raagmaa 2002], preventing thus depopulation of the region and ensuring the stability of its inhabitants. It also contributes to the formation and development of the region's potential to help itself. As mentioned above, the strong regional consciousness is based on regional social ties (familial, economical, legat, etc.) They are real and potential factors of the development of cooperation between individual and collective actors in the Hlučín Region, and thus the development of the entire region from bottom up.

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## Appendix



Changing annexation of the region to state formations between 1920–1945

Source: The author's sketch

Legend:

- A: The boundaries of the Hlučín region after The Munich Agreement in 1938  
 B: The boundaries of the Hlučín region before The Munich Agreement in 1938  
 C: The boundaries of Poland and Germany before The II. World War  
 D: The boundaries of Poland and Germany after The II. World War