

ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF FRONTIER DISTRICTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Antonín Vaishar*

POVZETEK

NARODNOSTNI, VERSKI IN SOCIALNI PROBLEMI OBMEJNIH OBMOČIJ NA ČEŠKEM

Obmejna območja na Češkem so v štiridesetih letih tega stoletja izgubila okrog 2.3 milijone nemškega prebivalstva: 2.1 milijon Nemcev se je bilo prisiljeno izseliti se, okrog 200 000 jih je padlo v vojni. Ozemlje so poselili prebivalci iz mnogih območij bivše Čehoslovaške, pa tudi Čehi in Slovaki iz tujine. Vendar izgube avtohtonega prebivalstva številčno nikoli niso uspeli nadomestiti.

V omenjenih območjih se je oblikovalo socialno in ekonomsko izrazito specifično okolje, ki ga označuje demografska nestabilnost. Razmerja zapleta perifernost, ki je bila še posebej izrazita ob "železni zavesi" vzdolž avstrijsko-češke in bavarsko-češke meje. Na prebivalstvena gibanja neugodno vplivajo tudi ekološke razmere (degradirano okolje) v sosednjih obmejnih območjih Šlezije in Saške.

Povojni dogodki vplivajo na razmerja v družbi po 50. letih enako, oziroma celo bolj intenzivno kot poprej. Izražajo se v specifični demografski, etnični, verski in socialni strukturi prebivalstva. V omenjenih območjih se porajajo novi problemi v obdobju sedanjega družbenega prehoda. Stvari se zamotavajo tudi zaradi razpada čehoslovaške države.

Introduction

From 85 districts in the Czech Republic, 34 are localized along German, Austrian, Polish and Slovakian frontiers. This fact affects not only their economy but also the population structure and development. The special social milieu of these districts is a result of the ethnic, religious and social structure of inhabitants and of former as well as present migrations.

Except four new frontier districts in Eastern Moravia, 30 districts lost an important part of their population in the period of 1938–1946. In this period, about 5 million people moved within former Czechoslovakia. It was the biggest mechanical movement of population from the 6th century. An decrease of population of the Czech part of former Czechoslovakia reached 2188 thousand people, – 20.1 % [1].

* Institute of Geonics in Ostrava, Branch Brno, Drobneho 28, 60 200 Brno, Czechia



About 55 000 Czechs and Slovaks and 71 000 Jews were executed, killed in concentration camps or perished in insurrections in Prague and in Slovakia. War casualties of German population within the German army are estimated for 19 000 men (it means 40 % soldiers) [2]. Losses of German civil population are estimated at 25 000 persons, of these about 15 000 at the beginning of May, 1945.

The remainder, it means about 1.8 million people of German origin were transferred from frontier regions after the war. Altogether 18 889 Germans died in connection with the transfer, of these 5596 due to violence (only namely demonstrated cases are taken into account, actual losses may be slightly higher). Only 250 000 Germans, mostly experts, members of mixed matrimonies and antinazis remained. It means that Bohemia and Moravia lost over 2 million people of German nationality. The majority of them had lived in frontier districts.

The frontier districts were repopulated from areas of the whole former Czechoslovakia and also by Czechs and Slovaks repatriated from abroad. Later, larger migrations from abroad were directed to these regions: Greeks, Roma and Sinti Czechs from the Ukrainian territory affected by the Chernobyl event. Similarly as in the case of the transfer of German population also the resettlement was not managed without problems. Specific social milieu arose step by step.

An results of the new political situation in Central Europe was the split of Czechoslovakia. Six districts create a new Czech-Slovakian frontierland. The monetary separation was evoking huge problems. The frontier became a barrier. The market dissapeared. Companies dimensioned for a larger territory have difficulties in selling their products. The traffic on main transport roads decreased sometimes by one third. Also political problems result from the split. Especially people with lower education succumb to nationalistic publicity campaigns.

The new frontier towards Slovakia seems to be not only a political and economical barrier but also a psychological one. People are frustrated by the fact that they are limited in movements on territories where they used to go daily, where they have relatives, friends, partners [3]. In conditions of the former system, they could understand it better. But now the situation is at such variance, with global liberation of life, that the psychological problems are very pronounced. It is a special experience for people from the frontierland.

Present Ethnic and Religious Structure

Let us consider that the Czech, Moravian and Silesian nationalities are autochthonous in the Czech Republic. [see 4]. About 94.9 % of inhabitants of the Czech Republic are Czechs, Moravians or Silesians. The ethnic structure in the Czech Republic is as follows:

Table 1: Ethnic Structure of the Czech Republic

Ethnicity	Members	(in %)	Ethnicity	Members	(in %)
Czech	8 372 648	81.3 %	Silesian	44 025	0.4 %
Moravian	1 356 267	13.2 %	Romanian	33 489	0.3 %
Slovak	308 269	3.0 %	Hungarian	20 143	0.2 %
Polish	58 573	0.6 %	Ukrainian	6 807	0.0 %
German	47 789	0.5 %	other	5 072	10.5 %

Table 2: Ethnic Population Structure in Individual Sectors of Frontiers are as follows:

nationality	F r o n t i e r				
	Bavarian	Saxonian	Polish	Slovak	Austrian
Autochthonous*	94.7 %	88.9 %	91.0 %	97.9 %	96.1 %
Slovak	4.1 %	6.4 %	4.4 %	1.7 %	2.9 %
German	0.5 %	2.3 %	0.7 %	0.0 %	0.2 %
Polish	0.1 %	0.2 %	2.8 %	0.1 %	0.1 %
Roma an Sinti	0.3 %	0.8 %	0.3 %	0.1 %	0.2 %
Hungarian	0.2 %	0.5 %	0.3 %	0.0 %	0.1 %
others	0.1 %	0.9 %	0.5 %	0.2 %	0.4 %

* Czech, Moravian, Silesian nationalities

It shows that only the northern frontier of the Czech Republic – it means the Saxonian and Polish sectors – are ethnically more differentiated than the country in itself. In contrast, Austrian and especially Slovak sectors are ethnically more homogeneous than the Czech average. The ethnic structure is similar in all sectors with the exception of the Polish one, where the Polish nationality is the third most frequent.

Slovak nationality is the second one in all sectors of all the frontiers, similarly as in the whole territory of Czechia. The position of Slovaks in Bohemia and Moravia has been changed. Before 1992, they formed a part of the Czechoslovak ethnic majority with rights to use their language as official one in the whole territory of former Czechoslovakia. Present problems are connected more with citizenship than with ethnicity. Slovaks born in Slovakia to Slovak parents are considered foreigners in the country, where they live for a great part of their lives. It has some consequences, for example they are not allowed to take part in the "Coupon privatization", to serve the military service in the Czech army etc. Many of them have ask for Czech citizenship. There are some preconditions which have to be fulfilled: vacating the Slovak citizenship, creditability, permanent residency on Czech lands, etc.).

German population does not present any ethnic problem in the Czech Republic. The Germans have almost disappeared and are dispersed in the whole borderland. They have hardly any possibility to develop their culture. In contrast to Polish, Hungarian and Ukrainian minorities in former Czechoslovakia, Germans were not allowed to use their language, they had no national schools etc. The process of assimilating of the German population was relatively intensive during the last forty years.

Present German-Czech problems are of political origin. They are connected with requests of the transferred German population living in Germany (or their descendants) to reinstitute of their ownership. There is a paradox that the first impulse to refresh such requests originated in the moral standpoint of president Havel to problems of collective guilt. Nevertheless, the situation evoked certain social disturbances in the frontierland.

The biggest present ethnic, racial and social problem in the Czech Republic is related to Roma and the Sinti population. The number of Gipsies is much higher than observed by the census. It is estimated that in some border districts or towns their share in the population structure exceeds 10%. There is no legal way how to control their migration from Slovakia. The Roma and Sinti are a very problematic social group with a high unemployment rate (very often they are not interested in work). This results into a high crime-rate and into other social problems. Unfortunately, the conduct of life and also their physical features differentiate Gipsies from the rest of the population. Illegal and anti-social behaviour of a significant part of this group evokes racial reactions of a part of the domestic population.

The Poles are the only actual minority in the present Czech Republic. They are concentrated in two frontier districts – Karviná and Frýdek-Místek. The region is similarly as the Saxonian borderland, deeply affected by economic restructuring and is highly polluted. This are not very advantageous preconditions for solutions of contingent ethnic problems.

The numbers of people of Asian origin have increased rapidly after 1989. A greater part of these people are illegally residing in the country. The first of them were Vietnamese, who stayed in the Czech Republic after finishing their employment within former Czech–Vietnamese co-operation.

The next large group of foreign ethnicities is formed by refugees from areas of the former Yugoslavia, countries of SW Asia and other countries being in war or in a bad political and economic situation. Many of them want to move further towards Western Europe.

There are also criminal groups organized on an ethnic base. Chinese, as well as Vietnamese mafias are to be found within the Chinese and Vietnamese community, Russian (formed partly by former soldiers from Afghanistan), Chechen or Yugoslavian crime groupings are in contact with the domestic population. They make a

competition in regard to the domestic crime groups. As a rule, all these ethnic groups of non-European and SE European origin are concentrated in Prague and in some other big towns in the northern and western borderland. Their activities are often oriented to the frontiers making use of economic and legal differences between the Czech Republic and Germany.

Consequences in the Population Structure

Younger age population has specific common characteristics within frontier districts [5]. It is a consequence of former immigration, which evoked younger population base to function similarly even after 45 years. It concerns features following the urbanization processes in the first place. Other relations are observed after 1989 when frontier regions received advantages or disadvantages in regard to the openness of the border and country-type bordering.

The northern frontierland (Saxonian and Silesian) is markedly more urbanized and industrialized than the southern one. From 20 towns with 50–150 thousand inhabitants in the Czech Republic, 11 are localized in the northern frontierland (of these 7 in Saxonian, 4 in Silesian part), 7 in inland, 2 (České Budějovice and Zlín) in southern (Bavarian and Austrian) and eastern (Slovak) frontierland. Migration processes following the solution of ethnic problems after 1945, formed a synergic effect together with migration processes, which were evoked by extensive urbanization.

A significant part of the northern frontier districts is unstable. In this part of the frontierland, the majority of people are immigrants of different time periods: resettlement after the transfer of the German population, extensive urbanization in the period of the so called socialist industrialization, population movement after the revolution in 1989. It means that a greater part of the population has not fully identified themselves with their social milieu. Religious feelings are expressed lowest in the Saxonian frontierland and medium in the Silesian frontierland. Only the districts of Opava and Frýdek-Místek form exceptions. As a rule, the low religiosity indicates lower social control.

Some indicators of social environment are investigated from the end of the 1970's [6]. The northern frontierland is characterized by extremely unfavourable values of such indicators as divorces, suicides, extramarital children (in Czech conditions mostly by other reasons than by alternative common life), whereas the southwestern frontierland by extreme values of requested abortions. Also crime rates reach high values in the northern frontierland. It brings a clear evidence about consequences of social instability of the region.

On the other hand, the rural character of southern and southwestern frontierland counteracts the destabilization. The district of Český Krumlov is the only exception. Former development in the southern frontierland was characterized by weak immi-

gration. Living in one-family housing units stabilized the population in conditions of flat politics in the period of socialism. The above-average religiosity indicates a higher level of social control. Unfortunately, there is no reason for optimism. The above mentioned factors indicate the lower level of economic development, at the same time. The peripheral position along the iron curtain was one of cause of the recent situation.

New frontier districts with Slovakia are high industrialized but they have kept rural character to a certain extent. This fact is indicated for example by the share of population living in villages, by the population living in one-family housing units, by a maximum religiosity and by the rich popular culture, forming special ethno-cultural activity groups.

Regional Differences

New effects in the frontierland have been indicated after 1989 as a consequence of differential advantages in relation to the neighbouring countries. Economic problems function in relation to the specific ethnic population structure; some of them were caused by it. The effects are territorially differentiated.

The Bavarian frontierland acts as a belt of innovations to the certain extent. Co-operation with Bavarian districts and communities and the utilization of cheap Czech labour force by Bavarian entrepreneurs bring new development impulses for the Bohemian frontier districts. Some residents of this region work abroad, many of them illegally. These people bring home foreign currency and stimulate the purchasing potential. This relatively favourable situation does not create conditions for ethnic or religious tensions. The ethnically preconditioned criminality could be the only exception.

On the other hand, the Saxonian frontierland is most problematic. Although Bavaria and Saxony are parts of the same Germany, they are quite different neighbours. The synergic effect of the resettlement in 1945 and the industrialization and extensive urbanisation is intensified by the specific situation in new federal units of Germany. Social problems exist on both sides of the frontier. Under these circumstances the differential advantages are often manifested through criminal features. It is a catalyzer for ethnically preconditioned migrations and consequential problems.

The Austrian frontier does not influence economic, ethnic or religious situation in such a scale. Especially southern Moravia and Lower Austria are rural, economically underdeveloped parts of both countries. Buying foods in Czechia and industrial products in Austria has been lowered in intensity after the first wave. Some southern frontier districts have indicated high numbers of foreign visitors. Mostly Polish visitors make use of the last cheap accommodation and board here before crossing the border.

The Silesian frontier changed from German to an Polish one after 1945. The Polish side has dealing with similar problems, the consequences of the population resettlement. Differential statehood advantages are not so expressive, but it is possible to find some – for example different prices of certain products. “Abortional tourism” as a consequence of the newly introduced abortion prohibition in Poland seems to be a new feature. But the consequences of the structural transformation of the economy and the unfavourable ecological situation in districts with high shares of Poles could be more of a topic in the future.

Economic problems of the new frontier districts were disclosed above. The question is, whether the economic problems could outgrow in ethnic tension. Slovakia is in serious economic problems after the split from Czechoslovakia. The easiest way to explain problems is to blame the Czechs. In my opinion, this could lead to deteriorating relations between both countries. But the ethnic and religious structures in the Moravian-Slovak borderland are stable and local ethnic problems are not expected. On the other hand, living popular culture and ethnographic folklore of the Moravian Slovakia and the Moravian Valacchia support local identities and are a factor of revitalization.

Conclusions

The Czech Republic seems to be a relatively homogeneous country from the ethnic viewpoint. There are hardly any internal reasons for ethnic or religious problems. Population movement in the period of 1938–1946 evoked changes in the population structure and in social conditions. But these problems are not sensed as ethnic ones. They were intensified by the urbanization and industrialization processes of the northern frontierland. On the other hand, the southern frontierland is affected by economic underdevelopment evoked by its peripheral position. The situation of districts along the Bavarian frontier has been improving after 1989.

After the decomposition of the former socialist system, new ethnic and religious movements swept across Europe. The Czech Republic is localized in the main direction of major east-west migration paths. This relates to many problems in spheres of economy, politics, security and international relations. Many of these problems are ethnically modified. Such features as racism, ethnically preconditioned criminality etc. have come into existence. Inadequate reactions of the local authorities are the result. The situation in some towns and in communities of the Saxonian borderland is tensed. Fortunately, this is not a common and permanent feature yet. But let us warn against the possible development.

New problems have arisen after the division of Czechoslovakia into Chechia and Slovakia at the end of 1992. It is necessary to evaluate the split itself as a negative feature from both, a global economical and political viewpoint. Now, the Czech

Republic is ethnically more homogeneous (but economically and politically weaker) than former Czechoslovakia. It presents a possibility to organize it on the civil (not ethnic) principle. Slovakia expects serious problems with its minorities, especially with the Hungarian one. Ethnic discords on the Moravian-Slovak frontier are not expected. But economic ones, indicated for example by the unemployment rate, are very serious.

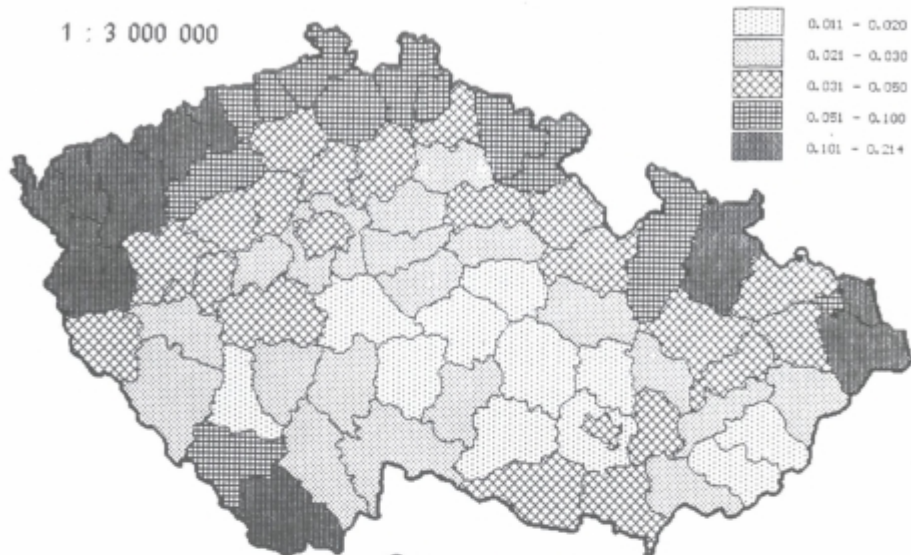
Next ethnic attention has to be paid to the northern frontierland, where ethnic problems are combined with economy, ecology and politics and where the only actual national minority – the Poles reside. On the other hand, Austrian and Slovak borderland asks for economic and social attention.

References:

- [1] Srb, V. 1993: Mnichov a II. světová válka z hlediska demografie; Munich and World War II from the viewpoint of Demography. *Demografie* 35, nr. 1, pgs. 10–13
- [2] Srb, V. 1993: Pohyb obyvatelstva na území Československa 1938–1944; Population Movement on the Czechoslovak Territory 1938 to 1944. *Demografie* 35, nr. 2, pgs. 73–94
- [3] Vaishar, A., Mikulík, O. 1993: Revitalizace venkova v mikroregionu Velké nad Veličkou; Revitalisation of the Countryside in the Microregion of Velká nad Veličkou. REGIOGRAPH Brno. 60 pgs.
- [4] Vaishar, A. 1992: Ethnic Structure of the Czech Republic in the Census of 1991 and its Connections. In: *Social Geography in Theory and Practice*, Geographica Slovenica 23. Inst. of Geography of the University of Ljubljana, pgs. 385–401
- [5] Pokorný, J., Vaishar, A., Kabeláčová, K. 1992: Set of Cartogrammes from the Population Census 1991. REGIOGRAPH Brno, pgs. 43
- [6] Vaishar, A. 1992: Regional Differentiation of Population Destabilization owing to Environment. In: *La geografia medica e gli Ecosistemi*. RUX Editrice Perugia, pgs. 267–272

NATIONAL UNHOMOGENEITY

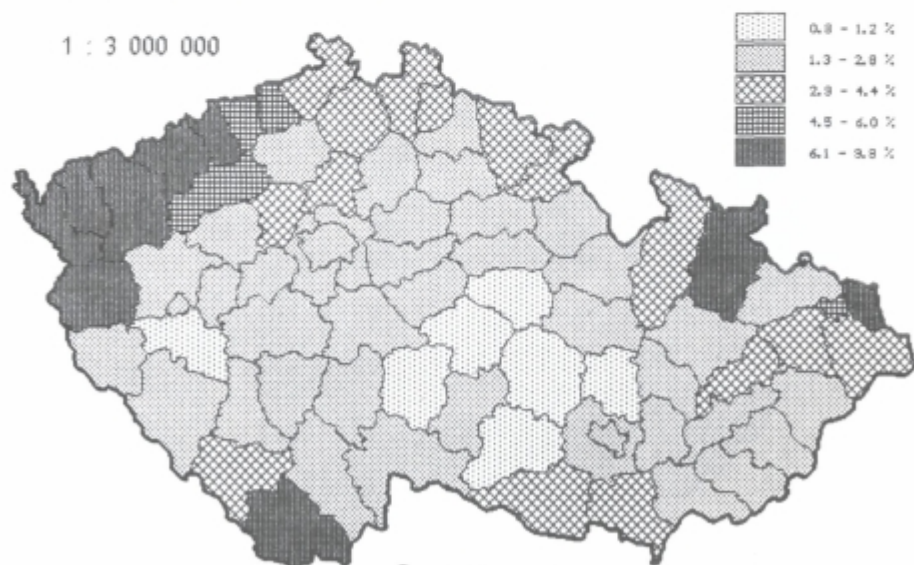
1 : 3 000 000



© REGIOGRAPH 1992

SLOVAK POPULATION

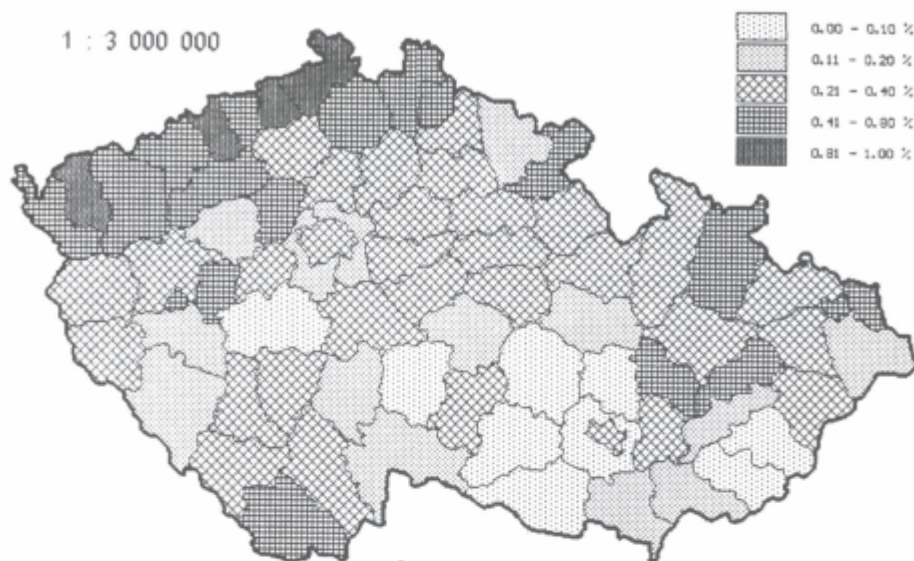
1 : 3 000 000



© REGIOGRAPH 1992

ROMIAN POPULATION

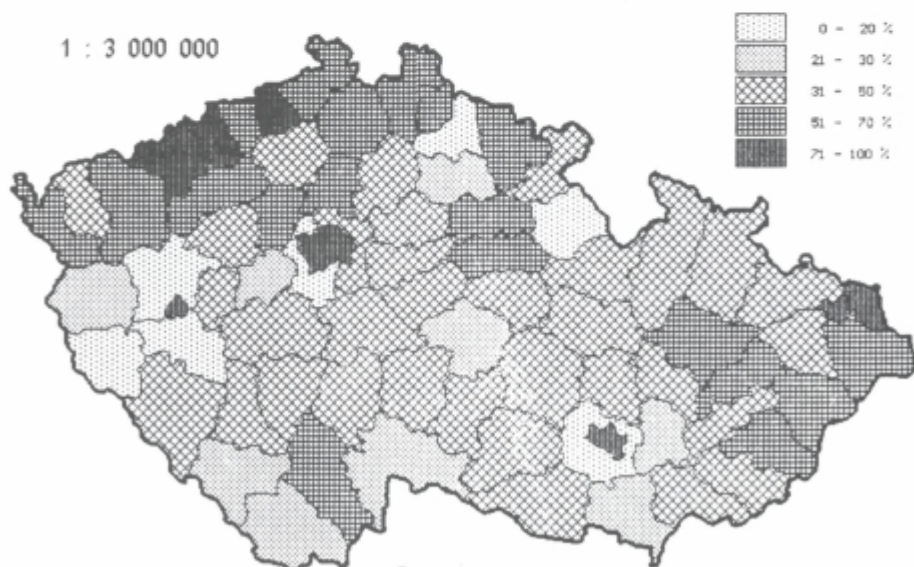
1 : 3 000 000



© REGIOGRAPH 1992

URBAN POPULATION

1 : 3 000 000

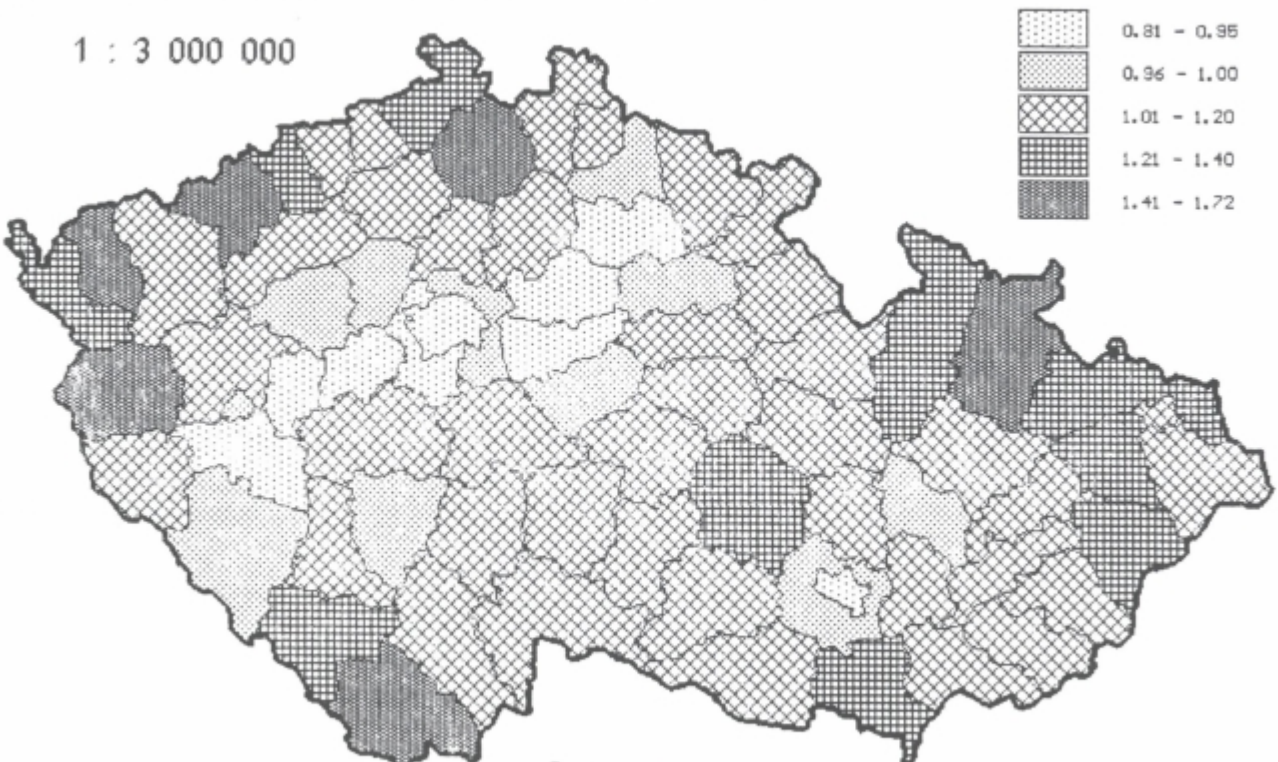


© REGIOGRAPH 1992

AGE STRUCTURE

SHARE OF POPULATION IN PRE-PRODUCTIVE AND POST-PRODUCTIVE AGE

1 : 3 000 000



© REGIOGRAPH 1992