TOWARDS THE FRAMING OF THE *'REGION'* FROM CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Neringa Liubinienė

ABSTRACT

The glance at the classical anthropological perspectives implies that the concept of 'region' was often tied to the environment and used mainly as a comparison unit and there were fewer intentions to try to discover the internal aspects of a 'region'. The ideas of the contemporary scholars give a new room for the discussions about the connections between different territories, regions, concepts of local/global, homogeneity/heterogeneity, place, space/time etc. Generally, the article strives to prefigure possible 'framework' for the concept of 'region' and main elements as well as problems of its definition, and its application possibilities in the anthropological studies. The term 'region' is often occurring both in everyday and academic languages. But the question is, if it is possible to describe what kind of content is framed within the word 'region', because it does not have its own exact definition. Still it is usual to relate the term 'region' with geographical terms of various kinds of territories, for example, area, place, site, city etc. The scholarly discussions about globalization, its elements and processes influence perceptions of different territorial units and start questioning their stability and fixity.

KEY WORDS: anthropology, social sciences, definition of region, geographical territories, cultural borderlines.

ANOTACIJA

Socialiniuose moksluose regionas bendru sutarimu lyg ir neturi konkretaus apibrėžimo, tačiau labai dažnai jis visų pirma yra siejamas su geografine vieta. Remiantis klasikinių ir šiuolaikinių antropologų bei sociologų darbais šiuo straipsniu yra siekiama apžvelgti problematiškas regiono sąvokos puses ir paanalizuoti dėl to kylančius iššūkius regiono kaip tam tikros geografinės teritorijos apibrėžimui. Šiuolaikiniuose socialiniuose moksluose, ypač antropologijoje, galima išskirti bent keletą problematiškų aspektų, susijusių su regiono samprata. Kultūrinės ribos, sienos ir pan. labai priklauso nuo tyrėjo požiūrio ir tyrimo metodologijos, tačiau antropologijai daug svarbiau yra atskleisti, kaip šios „iš viršaus" nuleistos konstrukcijos yra patiriamos kasdieniame gyvenime. Tai yra aktualu bandant apibrėžti regiono sąvoką; kadangi svarbu atskleisti, kiek regionas yra tiesiog socialinė, kultūrinė ar politinė konstrukcija ir kiek regionas yra jaučiamas bei patiriamas kasdieniame gyvenime.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: antropologija, socialiniai mokslai, regiono samprata, geografinė vieta, kultūrinės ribos.

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The glance at the classical anthropological perspectives implies that the concept of 'region' was often tied to the environment and used mainly as a comparison unit and there were fewer intentions to try to discover the internal aspects of a 'region'. The ideas of the contemporary scholars give a new room for the discussions about the connections between different territories, regions, concepts of local/global, homogeneity/heterogeneity, place, space/time etc. Generally, the article strives to prefigure possible 'framework' for the concept of 'region' and main elements as well as problems of its definition, and its application possibilities in the anthropological studies.

The term 'region' is often occurring both in everyday and academic languages. But the question is, if it is possible to describe what kind of content is framed within the word 'region', because it does not have its own exact definition. Still it is usual to relate the term 'region' with geographical terms of various kinds of territories, for example, area, place, site, city etc. The scholarly discus-

sions about globalization, its elements and processes influence perceptions of different territorial units and start questioning their stability and fixity.

Therefore, this article aims to scan through the problematic aspects of the term 'region' and challenges its understanding only as a territorial unit while referring to the ideas of classical, modern, post-modern anthropologists and sociologists, such as Edvard Burnett Tylor; Friedrich Ratzel, Leo Frobenius, Fritz Greabner; Wilhelm Schmidt, Franz Boas; Jonathan Friedman, Máiréad Nic Craith, June Nash, Simon Harrison, Maja Povrzanović Frykman; Arjun Appadurai, Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, Marc Augé; Roland Robertson, Nederveen J. Pieterse, John Tomlinson. Such interdisciplinary approach gives an opportunity to distinguish several important aspects, why the term 'region' becomes a problematic concept in the contemporary social sciences, and especially, in the discipline of anthropology, where 'region' is problematized as the main organizational principle; to discuss the shift from trait to process geographies, region as a main representation of local or global, regional identity, situation in contemporary anthropology, political construction of region.

Territory as the main organizational principle

In social sciences geographical terms like area, region etc. are very often used as organisational elements for classification of people and cultures. For example, for classical tradition of anthropology it is implicit to map the world as a series of discrete, territorialized cultures, and to see and understand "culture" as a natural property of spatially localized people (Gupta & Ferguson 1997a: 5).

And indeed, the ideas of evolutionistic, diffusionistic branches in anthropology support the above-mentioned statement very clearly. Tylor says that to the comparison of cultures it is very important the distribution of ethnographic objects or things in different geographic territories, that is, their spread from one region to another: "the geographical distribution of these things, and their transmission from region to region have to be studied as the naturalist studies the geography of his botanical and zoological species" (Tylor 1988: 68). He also thinks that "as the catalogue of all species of plants and animals of a district represents its Flora and Fauna, so the list of all the items of the general life of a people represents that whole which we call its culture" (Tylor 1988: 68). And even the later trends of anthropology, like cultural historical trend (for example, Boas[1]) also used the ideas of cultural territories and agreed that geographical environmental factors are instrumental together with others in explaining cultural development.

By this we come back again to Gupta and Ferguson remark that the world was represented as a collection of "counties", as on most world maps, that is, this world was composed of inherently fragmented space (or it could be used the word 'territory'), divided by different colours into diverse national societies, each "rooted" in its proper place (Gupta & Ferguson 1997b: 34). So, according to Gupta and Ferguson (ibid.), space (or territory) itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization is inscribed; and in this way space functions as a central organizing principle in the social sphere at the same time that it disappears from analytical sphere.

But nowadays such ideas about boundedness of culture to territories are very much challenged by new, often named as post-modern, ideas. As the example it can be seen the statement of Gupta

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[1] Boas (Boas 1988: 90) thought, that development of every culture could be explained using three perspectives: environmental geographical conditions, psychological factors, and historical connections.

and Ferguson: "cultures are no longer (were they ever?) fixed in place" (Gupta & Ferguson 1997a: 4). The reflections and research of scientists about contemporary sociocultural life, its transformations and the influence of globalization to it (for example, a lot of attention to different aspects of globalization is appointed by Friedman[2], Appadurai[3], Pieterse[4] and others) also question the perception and importance of 'territory' as a geographical unit.

When cultural difference becomes deterritorialized and it is no longer possible for anthropologists to assume the existence of bounded cultures and societies, it seems to be increasingly important to understand the ways that those whom we study employ representations of boundedness in ethnic, cultural boundaries or in some other kind of boundaries and of what sharpness, to look for the ways that questions of identity and cultural difference are territorialized in new ways (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997a; Harrison, 1999; Tomlinson, 2002; Robertson, 1995).

Coming back to the 'region' concept and its coherence with territory it becomes evident that in nowadays society and scientific projects we can and even must already start questioning the relation of 'region' to culture, people and territory.

Change from traits geographies to process geographies

According to Appadurai, the traditional thinking about territories referred to the conceptions of geographical, civilizational, cultural coherence, that in turn referred to certain list of values, languages, material practices, ecological adaptations, marriage patterns, etc. (Appadurai 2002: 275). And such a conception reflects the tendency to handle these areas as relatively immobile aggregates of traits, that have more or less durable historical boundaries and some kind of a unity composed of more or less enduring properties. So even though, as Nic Craith writes, cultures are usually perceived as rooted in a particular territory, we already find that new elements of globalization (such as fragmentation, hybridization, homogenization) start challenging the relations between territory and culture (Nic Craith 2004: 286).

Also Nic Craith states that in increasingly globalized world concepts of space rather than place have come to influence the process of cultural transmission. International cultures have become deterritorialized and are no longer associated with specific localities. Local cultures that were traditionally rooted in particular places, now have the potential to travel (Nic Craith 2004: 279). So these so to call deterritorizational processes coming together with globalization weaken the relations of culture to territory. And according to Tomlinson (2002) this decrement of boundedness is felt by individuals not like some kind of cultural loss or estrangement but more as complex and ambiguous fusion of a various things: familiar and strange, new opportunities and dangers, opening of new worlds and invasion to individual intimate worlds, etc. The results of such experiences are understood not like striking overturns or deviations from the present life, but more as life styles, which in turn are absorbed by routine condition.

Appadurai, considering globalization and culture - territory connections sees a shift from 'trait' geographies to 'process' geographies (Appadurai 2002: 275). He feels a need for the studies based

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[2]   Friedman (Friedman 1996: 200-203) sees globalization as some kind of a subset of global systemic processes.
[3]   Appadurai (Appadurai 2002: 274) sees globalization as a symbol of contemporary world, which is a world of flows and of objects in motion.
[4]   Pieterse (Pieterse 1995: 45-49) understands globalization in the terms of hybridization processes, that are plural and a multidimensional.

on process geographies, that see significant areas of human organization as precipitates of various kinds of action, interaction, motion – trade, travel, pilgrimage, warfare, colonization, exile, etc., because a living culture is constantly re-worked, re-negotiated and re-defined. And Nic Craith agrees with Appadurai offering to perceive culture as an evolving thing, that is, to see culture as a process, instead of a stable, "rooted" unit (Nic Craith 2004: 280).

Now we come again to the question about the definition of 'region'. If we take a classical stance saying that region must be seen and used as a rational concept, which can be classified or used as a type for comparison, so such an approach uncovers region as a stable concept, build of certain traits, and there is a great possibility to define it in physical way, that is, geographicaly/territorialy. But if we see 'region' as imagined, that is, based on some kind of imagination and images, so we get a completely post-modern and unstable, fluid concept of 'region', which is difficult to use like an analytical tool for comparison.

Region as representation of local or global

In addition, it is very common in anthropology to understand 'local' as the original, the centered, the natural, the authentic, and as opposed to 'global', that is, seen as new, external, artificially imposed, and inauthentic. Gupta and Ferguson notice, that anthropologists have long studied spatial units larger than the "local" and there is a tradition to emphasize interrelations and linkages between local settings and larger regional or global structures and processes. Very often anthropological approaches in the relation between "the local" and something that lies beyond it (regional, national, international, global) have taken the local as given, without asking how perceptions of locality and community are discursively and historically constructed (Gupta & Ferguson 1997a: 6).

Taking into account all that was already mentioned in this article a new question comes, if 'region' is a representation of locality or of globality. Looking at the traditional anthropological perspectives (evolutionism, diffusionism, cultural historical trend), mentioned earlier, we find 'region' being the representation of locality[5].

Looking at the contemporary – modern and post-modern – approaches it is quite difficult to define 'region' as a homologous, unambiguous representation of local or global. For example, Robertson (1995) uses the term glocalization to describe the globalization as a some kind of blend of global and local And this concept, as it is seen by Robertson (1995), is very useful in the analysis of 'global-local' problematic, because very often the globalizing trends are regarded as in tension with 'local' assertions of identity and culture, but instead of seeing globalization as some kind of compression of the world that involves the creation and the incorporation of locality. And local processes while being one of the aspects of globalization at the same time shape the compression of the world as a whole. So 'global' is not counterposed to the local, but the local is essentially included within the global. In this respect globalization defined in its most general sense as the compression of the world as a whole, involves the linking of localities. And local can be seen as micro manifestations of the global.

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[5]   For example, let us look at diffusionists: their perspective was concerned with distributions of human sociocultural ideas and forms in specific territories; they had an idea that cultural traits are spread geographically and if some cultures are similar, that means, they have the same origin. According to these ideas this trend developed several concepts that were strongly connected with territories: culture circle, culture area, culture origin.

Like Robertson, but maybe not so sharply, Friedman, Nic Craith and others complement the idea about ongoing articulation of global and local. For example, Nic Craith says, that globalization is ultimately a process of tension between the global and the local; and globalization may not necessarily act as a force of homogeneity, but instead the process will serve as an agent of cultural fragmentation, enrichment and diversity (Nic Craith 2004: 295-297).

Friedman thinks, that the prerequisite for a strong globalization is the homogenization of local contexts, so that subjects in different positions in the system have a disposition to attribute the same meaning to the same globalized objects, images, representations, etc. (Friedman 1996: 204, 236). Weak globalization entails that the local assimilates the global into its own realm of practiced meaning. Also he states (ibid.) that integration into a sector of the global system has usually implied displacement, the disarticulation of local structures and increased levels of conflicts. But such processes are temporal and soon new stabilities are established: as local – regional systems collapse, disorder increases, to be followed by a phase of reintegration into the larger system as a subunit in a global hierarchy. Disorder at the global level transforms conditions of existence throughout the system. But global disorder may mean some other kind of order: national, ethnic, religious etc.

So according to the above-mentioned contemporary ideas about interrelations of global and local, maybe 'region' could be also defined as having both traits – those of locality and globality. 'Region' can become a representation of local world or worlds in relation with larger global structures and at the same time or in the specific situation it can represent globality in relation with smaller units (localities). Such perception of 'region', compared to the classical one saying that 'region' represents locality (and at the same it works as a stable concept), turns 'region' into more fluid and shadowy concept. However, a lot of space remains for discussions about what factors can turn region into one or another representation and under what conditions it could happen (for example, if it happens only under circumstances of globalization, or…).

Identity and region

Nash (2001) notices, that identification with locality becomes increasingly important with globalization; so it is important to pay attention to relations and relationship between man and culture, man and place etc. So another quite problematic aspect of 'region' definition is connected to the relation of identity and region: is it more important to do research on 'region' as a container of various traits or on the identity of people who identify with this region, if they identify themselves with 'region' at all.

There is a question, if it is possible to identify yourself with region in the same way as, for example, with a city. According to Augé, the city is a world first of all because it is a symbolized place - space with orientation points, monuments, evocative power, all that is shared by those who declare they are of that city (Augé 1999: 111). In sum, the city has a history and a personality: a certain number of individuals recognize themselves in it, and this collective identification, which can push some to affirm that the inhabitants of a particular city share certain psychological traits, is hardly irrelevant to the singular relations that each person establishes with the city. It is multiple; it has a unique existence in the imagination and memory of each of its inhabitants or regular visitors.

So it is very important to think if 'region' can be understood as a symbolic place. Moreover, it is evident, that identity is always reactive. Then, who or what occupies the role of 'Other' while de-

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fining the regional identity? In the case of 'region' the 'Other' can become anybody, while being geographically far or near:

> Today the planet has shrunk; information and images circulate readily, and because of this the others' mythic dimension is fading. The "others" are in fact not so very different, or rather, their otherness remains, but the prestige of their erstwhile exoticism is gone. The other stripped of the prestige of his exoticism – of a belief in exoticism – is simply a foreigner, often feared more for his proximity than his difference" (Augé 1999: 14).

It is very important to ask, if people experience 'this' or 'that' region and how they live it out, because the voices of these people are so important in anthropology. Everybody knows the definition of anthropology as of a science that holistically explores similarities and differences of human lifestyle, behaviour and mindset using ethnographic fieldwork. So maybe it is inaccurate for anthropologist to pay so much of attention to the 'region' concept in terms of territoriality, while it is more important to analyze it in emic perspective (for example, in terms of identity).

And it is important to take into account the fact that people cannot experience 'region' as we expect and it is only we, the researchers, who imagine it, as being very important while it is just an illusion? In this instance 'region' turns into the product of different fields of interests and it exists as some kind of theoretical-analytical construction, for example, as a construction of our academic interests.

Possible approach: region as a political construct

Appadurai (2002) offers the notion, that large regions that dominate our current maps for area studies are not permanent geographical facts – they are problematic heuristic devices for the study of global geographic and cultural processes. And regions are best viewed as initial contexts for themes that generate variable geographies, rather than as fixed geographies marked by pre-given themes. These themes are results of our interests and not their causes. Also Appadurai thinks, that all areas conceive and produce their own areas, so it is important to understand not only the apparatus through which areal worlds are globally produced, but also the fact that areas are artifacts of our interests and our fantasies as well as of our needs to know, to remember, to forget (Appadurai 2002: 276).

In regard to all that was already mentioned in this article I would advocate the definition of 'region' in the following manner: 'region' is a product of various interest groups, that is, of different strategies and practices used with particular aims under particular circumstances. It is evident that such an approach to 'region' seems to present its construction in the political terms, framing it within the triangle of prestige, power and resources. And such a strictly political definition of 'region' in this case would be too simplistic and single-sided.

Together with actors (people, institutions, groups) involved in the making of definitions some 'region' and frameworks (various contexts) within which these definitions take place, the aspects of materialization of such constructions in the everyday life (how they are expressed, manipulated, perceived by individuals) and of relations of particular 'region' with other 'regions' (for example, is it a mediator of some sociocultural flows? or their producer? or their receiver?) are of none the less importance and must not be overlooked.

I will illustrate my last statement by finding the definitions of Baltic Region in different contexts. For this short research I have used a popular internet search program "Google" to find out the

different constructions of the word 'Baltic' and its usage strategies. And the findings could be brought under two main groups – geography and culture – that are at the same time different but still interelated.

Geography. The largest part of the phrases with the word 'Baltic' refers to the Baltic as a geographical region. Still the phrases does not offer the clear answer what geographical area exactly the 'Baltic Region' covers: in some cases it refers only to three Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), in the others – to the all territory around the Baltic Sea or the Baltic Sea itself. For example, it is said, that "Baltic times" cover news from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, "Baltic Institute of Folklore" is founded by three Baltic States, "Baltic university program" is coordinated by Uppsala University in Sweden and it works as a network of universities in the Baltic Sea region, that there exists "Baltic diving centre" etc.

It follows that perceiving the Baltic Region as a geographical territory or place, the most important element in defining this region becomes 'territory', especially taking into consideration such examples as "Union of the Baltic cities web service" – it covers 70 cities around or near the Baltic sea, "Baltic Roads" – road maps of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, "Baltic Block" – a block about Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania etc.

Culture. But the other group of phrases refers not so much to the territory, but more to people – who share some characteristical cultural traits, for example, they have particular historical-cultural heritage, or have something culturaly very original or typical ("Baltic cook book" – compilation of recipes of traditional food from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia; "The Baltic Romuva" – the Old Baltic Faith Community in Lithuania, "Baltic music", "Baltic arts"). Suchlike phrases imply not the territory itself, but history, culture and heritage.

And if to look under the surface of the above examples and the others, which contain reference to 'Baltic region' it is easy to discover that in its construction the territorial element is easily manipulated by some groups seeking their aims, mostly economical and political. For example, the use of the word "Baltic" in the name of internet service and soft producing company "Baltic solutions" implies that it is a big company covering a large area, but this company operates only in Lithuania; the same happens with "Baltic Travel Centre", "Baltic Models" etc.

But, for example, taking the company in the United Kingdom that offers "Baltic Holliday" in Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn, or to the Football club "Baltic United" in London, or the "Baltic School of English", or the "Baltic cup" (in sports), or "Hotel Baltic" in Denmark, or "Baltic Brides" – Latvian women for dating etc., all these names produce the word 'Baltic' not so much as a particular territory, but more as something exotic, unfamiliar, strange etc., that is, as something culturally different. Yet in the most cases it is clear that cultural element maintains strong connections with geographical: the former implies the latter.

By summing up it is enough to say that different actors (politicians, academics, entrepreneurs and others) clearly manipulate the term "Baltic" to create a particular image (for example, putting in name of company a smell of 'international', 'large', 'exotic', 'historical') in order to present some political or/and economical strength and power. Examples presented above imply that the physical/geographical element (territory) dominates the definition of the Baltic Region, but it is not the only one employed – it competes with the cultural element (history, heritage) as well. However this competition is not equal, because cultural element still maintains a deep relation with 'territory' while refering to the Baltic Region, and that implies the existence of some "rooted" culture out there.

The situation of contemporary anthropology

For a traditional anthropologist to study a culture, which he/she understands as "rooted" in concrete territory and having some specific traits, the only possibility to do that is to go "there" - among the users of that culture in a concrete geographical place, that is, to do a single-sited ethnography. Malinowski (1922), the representative of Functional anthropological school, nicely stated this while seeing anthropological ethnography as a long-term process during which an anthropologist has to learn a language of studied society and to go there to do a fieldwork: to participate in 'native' life, observe it and register it in 'natives' own words; and in such a way to perceive the world as it is for 'natives'.

And today, as it is remarked by Augé, all the relevance and difficulty of anthropology has to do with the coexistence of the single entity implied by the word "contemporaneous" and the multiplicity of worlds it qualifies. "Multiple worlds" has multiple meanings: nations constitute worlds in relation to other nations; alliances or confederations of nations seek to constitute worlds in the same political sense of the term. Disconnected from its political and geographical definition, however, the notion of worlds becomes problematic. That the contemporary world is unified and yet still multiple that the worlds that constitute it are heterogeneous yet linked – this is what we must accept and assert if we want to try to understand our present world (Augé 1999: 89-90).

Contemporary anthropologists more and more look at their own societies and less search for single-sited 'authentic', 'isolated' cultures and societies. The most popular become the ideas about multi-sited ethnographies and about 'anthropology at home'. It is difficult to say what kind of strategy could be best for anthropological regional studies. Perhaps anthropological research instead of regions should "follow" the *people* (migrants/exiles), *thing* (commodities, gifts, money, works of art, and intellectual property), *metaphor* (signs, symbols and images), *plot*, *story* or *allegory* (narratives of everyday experience or memory), *life* or *biography* (of exemplary individuals), or *conflict* (issues contested in public space), that is to do a multi-sited ethnography, as it was proposed by George Marcus (cited from Frykman, 2001[6]).

Concluding I would like to use the words said by French anthropologist Thomas Schippers[7] that cultural borders, boundaries etc. can appear and disappear in connection with researchers' stance and used toolkits, but the main thing is to find out how the borders imposed from above are experienced in daily lives of the people. The same words are also eligible for the problematic concept of 'region', which was discussed herein.

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[6] The original paper by Marcus on multi-sited ethnography is published in Annual Review of Anthropology (1995, Vol. 24): "Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography".

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REGIONO SĄVOKOS APIBRĖŽIMAS ŽVELGIANT IŠ ŠIUOLAIKINĖS ANTROPOLOGINĖS PERSPEKTYVOS

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S a n t r a u k a

Socialiniuose moksluose regionas bendru sutarimu lyg ir neturi konkretaus apibrėžimo, tačiau labai dažnai jis visų pirma yra siejamas su geografine vieta. Remiantis klasikinių ir šiuolaikinių antropologų bei sociologų darbais šiuo straipsniu yra siekiama apžvelgti problemiškas regiono są-vokos puses ir paanalizuoti dėl to kylančius iššūkius regiono, kaip tam tikros geografinės teritori-jos, apibrėžimui.

Šiuolaikiniuose socialiniuose moksluose, ypač antropologijos, galima išskirti bent keletą pro-blemiškų aspektų, susijusių su regiono samprata:

- Teritorija kaip pagrindinis organizacijos principas.
- Perėjimas nuo geografijos, kaip tam tikro bruožų komplekso, prie geografijos, kaip tam tik-ro proceso suvokimo.
- Regionas kaip lokalumo ir/ar globalumo reprezentacija.
- Regiono ir identiteto ryšys.
- Regionas kaip politinė konstrukcija.
- Šiuolaikinės antropologijos situacija.

Apibendrinant verta pažymėti, remiantis T. Schippers mintimis, kad kultūrinės ribos, sienos ir pan. labai priklauso nuo tyrėjo požiūrio ir tyrimo metodologijos, tačiau antropologijai daug svar-biau yra atskleisti, kaip šios „iš viršaus“ nuleistos konstrukcijos yra patiriamos kasdieniame gyve-nime. Tai yra aktualu bandant apibrėžti regiono sąvoką; kadangi yra svarbu atskleisti, kiek regionas yra tiesiog socialinė, kultūrinė ar politinė konstrukcija ir kiek regionas yra jaučiamas bei patiriamas kasdieniame gyvenime.