

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WORKING POPULATION MENTALITY AS FORMATIVE ELEMENTS OF REGIONAL IDENTITY – SAMPLE MEĐIMURJE IN CROATIA

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The paper analyzes problems of identity in terms of economic development and working population mentality of the Croatian traditional region of Međimurje whose territory coincides with the northernmost Croatian county. Međimurje is a border region that has been separated from the main nation and state in parts of its history as well as exposed to the process of Hungarization. This separation did not bring a change in the ethnic structure but to the contrary preserved the ethnicity of the population while strengthening the sense of regional belonging.

Focusing on themselves in terms of separation from the main nation, the influence of Protestantism during the reign of Zrinski and hard life in a predominantly rural area, as well as economic migrations in the 19th and 20th centuries, the region created a working mentality of the population that locals perceive as the most distinctive element of identity in relation to neighboring regions, but also as an incentive for future economic development.

Economic development, restructuring tendencies of the inherited economic structure, increasingly active role of the local government in planning for economic development and spatial planning indicate Međimurje as a region of distinct orientation towards decentralization of economy and introduction of innovative economic programs. The very economic peculiarities of Međimurje are becoming the obvious formative elements of regional identity and are making Međimurje a recognizable Croatian traditional and economic region.

Key words: *Međimurje, regional identity, economic development*