Introduction

When in 2000 we started teaching a course ‘Geography of Canada’ at our geography study program at the Institute of Geography, Masaryk University in Brno, we were very surprised by exceptional students’ interest in it. Unflagging interest still continues and Canada is generally viewed as a very friendly country in spite of the geographical distance between Canada and the Czechlands. Outstanding natural beauties of physical Canadian landscapes, especially natural and provincial parks are very highly evaluated by the Czech youth. Also Canadian society, its multiculturality and the role of Canada in keeping the peace in the world’s unrest epicentres, ice-hockey and a maple leaf as a symbol of nature-culture relations show the seeds of mutual consonance between both countries. Not only nature, culture, society, but also economy is very important in international relations and Canadian economy in fierce competition does not favour the Czech one provoking it to be more developed. This is a serious problem of the Czech society underestimating the difference between social cooperation and economic competition.

Geography is a very old branch of science/humanity since Herodot, who was not only father of history, but also geography. Traditional view of geography consisting in locating rivers, towns, mountains, agricultural production, transport, etc. leads to encyclopaedic inventory of single countries and regions. However, geography is not so simple, its humanistic and behavioural branches concern the perception and imagination of natural and human spaces. Oblique questions: what and where is it? are only initial in contemporary geography and we go on – why is it there? How has it happened? And especially: is it a challenge, an issue for my behaviour? What can/may/must/mustn’t… I do with it? How do you perceive and imagine various locations?

So we asked our course students to answer questions: how do you perceive and imagine Canada? What is Canada in your mind? Students of geography were very keen on perception of Canada and interviewed their schoolmates – biologists, mathematicians,
historians and also common people to find out how they perceive Canada. We used the technique of mental maps for finding it.

What are the mental maps?

From the geographical point of view (Geography for Life: National Geography Standards 1994, p.64-66.) any person has in mind:

- information about people, places, and environments
- organization of this information in the appropriate spatial context
- very effective way of doing this is a mental map - an individual’s internalized representation of human space on the Earth

Mental maps generally:

- represent what the person knows about the locations and the characteristics of places at a variety of scales (local to global)
- are a mixture of both objective knowledge and subjective perceptions
- these maps in the mind provide students with essential means of making sense of the world, and of storing and recalling information about the shapes and patterns of the physical and human features of Earth; learning how to create and use mental maps, therefore, is a fundamental part of the process of becoming geographically informed
- contain objective and precise knowledge about the location of geographic features such as continents, countries, cities, mountain ranges, and oceans
- contain also more subjective and less precise information, such as impressions of places, rough estimates of relative size, shape, and location
- include certain connections between places, as well as priorities that reflect the mapmaker’s own predilections
- are used in some form by all people through their lives
- enable people to know what routes to take when travelling
- comprehend what others say or write about various places, and develop an understanding of the world
- represent ever changing summaries of spatial knowledge
- serve as indicators of how well people know the spatial characteristics of places are developed and refined both through personal experience, learning from teachers and the media
accumulate multiple layers of useful information, refine completeness and accuracy so that they reflect a growing understanding of a changing world

reflect people’s skill in observing and thinking about the world in spatial terms

accumulate, structure, process, store and offer for use what we read, hear, observe, and think about the world

connect our perceived or imagined spatial fragments – places and events in the world into meaningful spatial contexts

D. Lowenthal (1961, p.248) claims that separate personal worlds of experience, learning, and imagination necessarily underlie any universe of discourse. The whole structure of the shared picture of the world is relevant to the life of every participant; and anyone who adheres to a consensus must personally have acquired some of the constituent elements. Everyday perception (J.Gibson, in D.Lowenthal, 1961, p.250) tends to be selective, creative, fleeting, inexact, generalized, and stereotyped. Perception itself is never one layer process: sensing, thinking, feeling, and believing are simultaneous, interdependent processes. The most direct and simple experience of the world is a composite of perception, memory, logic, and faith. Any perception is influenced by language and it means that it is not pure; always with some apperception, situated. …. Lynch characterizes structural images of the environment as positional, disjointed, flexible, and rigid, depending on whether people orient themselves principally by distant landmarks, by memories of details in the landscape, by crossings, street turns, or directions, or by maps.

The differences between mental map and imaginative geography was discussed by E.Said (1978) emphasizing that imaginative geographies are never the product of purely cognitive operations, but are animated by fantasy and the play of desire, power, positionality, figurative value, dramatizing the distance and difference, performativity.

A sensitivity towards the significance of place and space, landscape and nature in the constitution and conduct of life on earth is defined by D.Gregory (in Johnston R.J., Gregory D., Pratt G., Watts M., eds., 2000: p.298-301).

Mental maps, as D.Ley (2000, p. 498-499) summarizes, are one of the principal concepts of behavioural geography, referring to the psychological representation of places as revealed by simple paper and pencil tests. Among the pioneers who paved the way are:

K.Lynch (1960) : images of the downtown districts by their residents
✓ R. Downs a D. Stea (1973): orientation and way-finding behaviour, cognitive mapping, image
✓ D. Ley (1974): the meaning of space, evaluation of space
✓ Yi-Fu Tuan (1975): images and mental maps,
✓ R. Kitchin (1994): environmental psychology
✓ R. Golledge and R. Stimson (1997): spatial cognition and schemata, action and activity space, awareness space

Mental maps are both spatially and temporally organized, based on both own firsthand personal and mediated experience. In the case of Canada the Czech experience is predominantly a mediated one.

How is Canada perceived/imagined by the Czech university students?

Mental maps technique was used in our course Geography of Canada in the last five years and includes a sample of 100 mental maps. And prevailing images?

✓ country of many contrasts
✓ country of extremes and the sky’s the limit
✓ big country, spacious, fewer people
✓ the second largest country in the world
✓ harsh conditions
✓ free and pleasant country
✓ maple leaf’s country
✓ ‘OH CANADA’
✓ ice hockey
✓ Great Canadian lakes
✓ Toronto, Ottawa, Québec, Calgary, Vancouver, Montréal, Sudbury
✓ The Rocky Mts.
✓ First People
✓ Eskymos – more frequently than Inuits
✓ Bilinguality
✓ Immigration, Czech immigrants – Josef Skvorecky, Otta Jelinek
Advanced Canadian economy
Plentiful natural resources
Less frequently:
  - Canadian whisky
  - Legal marihuana
  - Dogsledge
  - Corn growing
  - Canadian jokes
  - Royal Canadian Mounted Police
  - Transcanadian railways
  - Low density of population
  - Canadian coins
  - Famous persons as J.Chrétien, Allanis Morisette, D.Bailey…

What was drawn with colour pencils?

Landforms:
- the Rocky Mts., Cordillera, the Coast Mts., Great Plains, Canadian/Laurentian shield, Arctic lowlands, Hudson Bay, Labrador Peninsula, Baffin Island, St.Elias Mts. with Mt.Logan (rarely with the correct height, occasionally Mt.McKinley is mentioned to be Canadian), the North has a logo: ‘ice, cold, snow and frost’, the islands of Victoria, Banks, Ellesmere, Alert are mentioned. The Appalachian Mts. are missing…

Waters
- Great Canadian Lakes (Superior, Huron, Erie, Ontario) and Great Bear L., Great Slave L., L. Athabasca, Reindeer L., L.Winnipeg, much less L. of the Woods, Garry L., Baker L., only exceptionally L. Dubawnt
- rivers – Mackenzie, Yukon, St. Lawrence drawn almost in all maps, majority drew Fraser, Nelson, Columbia, and Churchill and minority - Peace, Saskatchewan, Severn, Moose, somebody remembered NAWAPA ( North America Water and Power Alliance)
- Hudson Bay, Bay of Fundy with the highest tide in the world, Gulf of St. Lawrence, sometimes Ungava Bay, James Bay, and few Davis Strait mistaken for Baffin Bay
- hydro power plants and marsh land in Labrador
- three oceans and their fish stock – salmon, cod

Minerals
✓ vast amount of minerals is always mentioned but not always located
✓ oil and gas, iron, uranium, zinc, nickel, copper, gold, and silver ores, even asbestos
✓ Alberta, gold rush in Yukon, Labrador, Sudbury and surrounding ‘ moonscape’
✓ hard to come at mining and transport

Climate
✓ mainly arctic and subarctic emphasizing cold winters, frost and snow, even confused subarctic and boreal
✓ mild climate almost not noticed
✓ ocean currents - Labrador and Gulf only in 10% mental maps, however fishing in the sea is not omitted

Vegetation
✓ boreal forests with Douglas fir in Cordillera
✓ temperate forests with maple – image of syrup and brown sugar
✓ forests are considered as one the symbols of Canada
✓ forestry is perceived as controversial, environmentally harmful

Fauna
✓ sea animals – seal, walrus, not whales
✓ ice bear, grizzly, arctic fox, caribou, moose, wapiti
✓ penguins [!] are also sketched at the coast of the Arctic ocean
✓ not omitted buffalo though now only in reserves
✓ one student recalled flies and gnats at Hudson Bay

Physical landscapes
✓ national parks, especially Banff, then Jasper, Buffalo
✓ mountain scenery – first of all the Rocky Mts.
✓ Great Canadian Lakes
✓ highly valued Canadian sense for environmental protection

Settlement
✓ cities are correctly positioned, some students label Canadian cities as one of the symbols of Canada
✓ each map includes:
  o Vancouver - port and a window to Asia, multicultural
  o Toronto – the biggest Canadian city with banks and CN Tower
  o The capital – Ottawa
  o Montréal and the city of Québec
Calgary – unforgettable Winter Olympic Games in 1988

- 40% maps – Edmonton (oil, gas, sport), Winnipeg (Ukrainian minority)
- 20% maps – Yellowknife, Dawson (gold rush), Victoria, Thunder Bay, Regina, Whitehorse, Saskatoon, Halifax
- 10% maps – Iqualuit (Frobisher Bay) - the capital of Nunavut, Hamilton (steelworks), St. John’s
- fewer maps – Windsor, London, Medicine Hat, Uranium City, Detroit [sic!]

Administrative division

- They correctly listed 10 provinces and 3 territories though they muddled provinces in Atlantic Canada, especially New Brunswick and Prince Edward I.
- Ontario is named as ‘heartland’ in the north and ‘hinterland’ in the south
- Québec is characterized as bilingual province with tendencies to be independent
- the land between Windsor and Québec, called in mental maps ‘business and money’ and environmentally polluted is perceived as the core of Canada (better said with M. Yeates - the main street)

History

- The First People in Canada crossing Beringia (probably not true)
- Vikings in Canada - Newfoundland/Vinland
- John Cabot, Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain
- Hudson’s Bay Company
- loyalists
- Kanata and European exploration including Arctic Canada (the North-West passage)
- immigrants from France, Britain, the US, etc.
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police as Canadian phenomenon
- national flag with maple leaf
- P. Trudeau, J. Chrétien

Agriculture

- wheat belt
- potatoes from Prince Edward I
- vineyards, vegetables, orchards
- farming – livestock, dairying, pigs, cattle, poultry
- fishery and over fishing
Infrastructure

✓ transportation
  ❖ Air Canada
  ❖ Trans-Canada Highway, Alaska Hwy.
  ❖ shipping
  ❖ The St. Lawrence Seaway

✓ Energy
  ❖ Hydro-Québec
  ❖ nuclear power plants (reactors CANDU)

Population

✓ only two respondents knew the size of Canadian population
✓ low population density, dispersal population distribution
✓ high standard of living
✓ labour force mainly in services
✓ Canadian multiculturalism
✓ liberal federal immigrant policy and Czech Roma emigrants in Canada, entry visa
✓ Czech emigrant Tomas Bata
✓ aboriginal peoples, Métis

Sport:

✓ especially ice hockey
  o NHL, W. Gretzky, E. Lindros
  o measuring ice hockey sticks
  o cradle of ice hockey, country of ice hockey
  o emblems of ice hockey teams
    ▪ Calgary Flames
    ▪ Vancouver Canucks
    ▪ Edmonton Oilers
    ▪ Ottawa Senators
    ▪ Toronto Maple Leafs
    ▪ Montréal Canadians
    ▪ Bankrupt Winnipeg team…

✓ Edmonton – also the city of World cups – cross country run, triathlon, swimming, cycling
✓ Toronto – baseball club with the emblem of a blue jay
Donovan Bailey, Bruni Surin, infamous Ben Johnson, even Edi Podivinsky, formerly Slovak
country of winter sports
one girl-student mentioned the city of St. Catherines, Ontario, known for rowing races

Culture:
Canadian films and TV – serials for children, X-Files, StarGate, The Last Mohican
one student remembers EXPO’86 in Vancouver
Anne Herbert: The First Garden
Leonard Cohen
Czech adventurer in Canada – Leos Simanek and his books
Philippe-Aubert de Gaspé and his family saga of the first Canadian colonists
Nova Scotia – Highland Games
one student remembers Canadian amusement park Canada’s Wonderland
Where would you like to live?

- 59% Don't Know
- 29% Vancouver
- 4% Toronto
- 4% in Canada
- 3% Montréal
- 1% Québec
- 1% Calgary
- 1% Edmonton
- 1% in Japan

Knowledge of Canadian Products

- 43% Maple syrup
- 13% Ice-hockey, hockey sticks
- 7% Whisky
- 7% Other
- 6% Wood
- 5% Fodder
- 6% Healthy Food
- 7% Building material
- 7% Aircraft
- 6% Natural resources
- 4% Fish products
- 4% Knives, cartridges
- 2% Film production
- 1% OSKAR (Mobile phone provider)
Conclusion

The majority of respondents could not imagine the Canadian and the Czech mutual benefit. However significant number judges it as potential cooperation in:

- trade: lumber processing, machinery, food processing industry
- exchanges of experts and students
- language training
- science and education.
- respondents evaluate drafting in ice hockey – players, coaches and their schooling in Toronto
- to accept Canadian experience in environmental policy, ecological management, environmental protection and nuclear energy
- changing Czech approaches to ethnic minorities inspired by the Canadian concept of a multicultural society
- folk culture exchanges
- a joint fight against the international terrorism

Respecting Canadian advanced economy some respondents emphasize rather one-sided Canadian support of the Czech land in:

- financing non-profit organization (NGOs)
There is growing support for the Czech request for lifting a visa requirement to Canada which would oil the wheels of tourism and emigration. Canada is considered a qualitatively better administrated country with developed public administration, functional juridical system. That is also a reason for upgrading diplomatic relations. For the great distance and variety of both countries some respondents claim that there is no possibility for common cooperation and benefit…

Works Cited:


Kitchin R., 1994: *Cognitive maps: what are they and why study them?* Journal of Environmental Psychology 13, 183-86


