Abstract: The role of universities in regional development has changed over the last two decades. Current discussion in literature confronts universities with challenges related to an emergence of a third role, that should universities perform in regional innovation systems. It concerns regionally–oriented activities, through which universities are becoming the leaders of regional economic and social development. This concept is applied to a comparative case study of two different Czech regions, South Bohemia Region and Moravian – Silesian Region. The objective is to verify, if different regional circumstances leads to a different form and intensity of networking between academic and private sector, or whether the main factor influencing the role of the two Czech universities is a specific national context.

Key words: universities, partnership with private sector, regional innovation systems, third role