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Instruments for the Development of Rural  
Municipalities

Summary

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Gradual change in the functional utilisation of rural space is characteristic of the second half of the twentieth century. The original agrarian function of rural areas is losing its significance and rural areas and municipalities, along with their residents, are subsequently seeking new roles within society's division of functions. Following increases in rural population during the second half of the nineteenth century, caused by the demographic revolution, a portion of the economically active residents of rural areas emigrated over the next several decades, contributing to the rapid population growth of cities. Decreases in family size represent a consequence of the departure of a portion of rural inhabitants. Korčák studied the initial phases of these processes back in 1929.

After World War II and in connection with the necessity to ensure food security and sufficient volume of agricultural production, the Common Agricultural Policy was formulated within the emerging European community as one of the first joint policies. It focuses primarily on ensuring sufficient income for agricultural workers, in the midst of pressure to increase the quality and food security of their production. The first objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy are set forth in the founding documents of the European Community – in the Treaties of Rome. At the end of the 1950s, agricultural workers were considered characteristic representatives of rural society and the development of rural areas was, therefore, achieved by supporting agricultural production. The primary forms of support for the agrarian sector in the EU have been, with numerous alterations, retained to the present time.

With the declining share of the primary sector both in terms of employment as well as overall economic productivity, it is becoming increasingly clear that it will be necessary to find new forms and new instruments for supporting agricultural production and the development of rural areas. Consequently, after 1990, the topic of rural development, as a stand-alone research topic, has become a very frequent theme for research conducted in Europe. This emphasis on resolving problems concerning the development of rural areas is connected, on the one hand, with the conclusion of a wave of depopulation and, on the other hand, with changes in the functional utilisation of rural space and the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society.

The submitted dissertation could be considered an attempt to expand the, as of yet, not entirely all-encompassing spectrum of contributions to our understanding of rural geography in Czechia.

Rural geography can be perceived as a field that explores the spatial aspects of human activities in rural areas. Rural geography is, therefore, classified as a penetrative field, which studies the penetrations of various geographical disciplines into rural space (Hurbánek 2004). Some problems concerning the development of rural areas, particularly those related with the observation of various stakeholders in rural development, are studied by a relatively strong group of sociologists, while geographers, primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries, utilise certain procedures and instruments taken from sociology. This dichotomy of perception concerning the instruments of rural geography is also evident in the differing focus of research activities employed by the various, individual authors. For instance, a very strong school of rural geography/rural sociology explores the position of people in rural areas: opportunities for communication, cooperation or employment. Woods (2005) defines rural geography as the study of rural economy and rural societies. "Rural geography study rural economies and rural societies, processes of rural restructuring, globalization, agricultural and economic change, social and population recomposition and environmental changes." (Woods, 2005).

In connection with the transformation of rural society and the search for new functional uses for rural space, theoretical paradigms are also changing. Initial approaches to the study of rural development issues find their theoretical base in core-periphery theories (Blažek, Uhlíř 2002). This group of theories views rural areas, primarily, as peripheral areas. Certain instruments of developmental support for rural/peripheral areas arose out of the theoretical points-of-departure of various core-periphery theories (Hirschman, 1958, Perroux, 1950). The objective was to ensure balance between developed (urbanized) and peripheral (rural) areas and economic instruments and to support development in rural/peripheral areas. This meant that the benefactors of support were primarily firms, in this case the majority were agricultural enterprises, which represented the dominant companies, both in terms of their share in local employment as well as their role in the formation of the landscape. To this day, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, which places great emphasis on support for the agrarian sector, in particular, and the instruments of which focus on increasing the income level of individual agricultural workers, is implemented in the spirit of these theoretical approaches.

However, one typical characteristic of modern rural areas in developed countries has been an ongoing decrease in the significance of agricultural production as a primary source of employment opportunities. Its current share is 2.3% of the gross value added in the countries of the EU 27. In the same way, in 2006, the employment level in the primary sector fell to

6.8% of all economically active individuals in EU countries (Rural Development in the EU, 2006). While the primary sector's share in the gross value added of various countries is not significantly unstable and varies from 0.9% (Great Britain) to 4.6% (Lithuania). Only Bulgaria and Romania, where the share of the primary sector in the gross value added reaches values over 10%, present more significant outliers. The level of employment in the primary sector ranges from 1.6% of all economically active inhabitants in Great Britain to 17.9% in Poland. Bulgaria and Romania exhibit extreme values with employment in the primary sector accounting for more than 30% of economically active inhabitants.

A more modern approach to the development of rural areas can be found in the theoretical points-of-departure arising out of institutional approaches to regional development, in particular based on the theory of learning regions (Lundvall, 1992). The development of rural areas is based on support for adaptable systems with the intention of utilising closer and more firmly established social network connections in rural areas and thereby shaping the development potential of entire areas. The focus of the entire pillar II of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and, in particular, the EU Leader programme exemplify developmental goals conceived in this manner (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008).

Since the beginning of the new millennium, it is clear that changes are occurring in the functional utilisation of rural areas and that a reformulation of instruments for rural development must, therefore, be implemented. Bryden (2000) demonstrates the general shift that is occurring in the functional utilisation of rural areas as a whole, in rural municipalities along with a new role for rural residents. He also emphasises the strengthening of rural – not merely agrarian – economies with an emphasis on bottom-up approaches and improvements in transport and telecommunications infrastructures as an instrument in overcoming site and situational barriers to development.

New functional uses of rural space are very difficult to define. Rural areas have always been connected primarily with agricultural production and agricultural workers have likewise always been perceived as representative of rural areas. In light of the decreasing relative significance of agricultural production, both in terms of employment levels as well as its portion in the creation of gross value added, it appears that, as of yet, neither decision making bodies, which monitor rural development, nor society as a whole, has come to terms with these new functional uses of rural areas. Public self-government bodies in rural municipalities are considered to be one of the key stakeholders in development (Blažek, Hampl, 2009). Bennet (1997 and 1998) analyzed the significance and the manner of organisation of public

administration, including rural areas in post-socialist countries. He points out differing scale levels in monitoring municipalities and the differing role of municipalities in various types of public administration organisational schemes in directing local and regional development.

A total of four selected articles have been presented in this dissertation. They represent the author's view on the typology of rural areas and on three primary instruments for the development of rural municipalities or rural space. The following articles have been included in the dissertation:

PERLÍN, R. (2006): Mikroregionální strategie jako nástroj rozvoje venkova v Česku (Microregional strategies as an instrument of rural development in Czechia), in *Acta Facultatis Rerum Naturalium Universitatis Comenianae Geographica*, Supplementum No. 3 Bratislava, str. 445-455,

PERLÍN, R. (2006): The Co-Operation Of Rural Municipalities - Chance Or Condition Of Achievement (Spolupráce venkovských obcí - možnost nebo podmínka úspěchu), *Agricultural Economic (Zemědělská ekonomika)* 6/2006, Prague, pp 263 – 272,

SPILKOVÁ, J., PERLÍN R. (2010): Czech Spatial planning at the crossroads: Towards the regulation of the large-scale retail development?, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, volume 28, pages 290 - 303

PERLÍN, R., KUČEROVÁ, S., KUČERA, Z. (2010): Typologie venkovského prostoru Česka. *Geografie*, 115, č. 2, s. 161–187.

Certain opportunities and problems related to the application of land-use plans, strategic plans, opportunities for the development of municipalities, based on mutual cooperation and, last but not least, an overall typology of rural municipalities in Czechia is proposed.

A land-use plan is a traditional instrument that is widely used to direct the spatial development of a municipality, for defining various developmental zones and for defining rules – regulations for the development of such zones in existence since the 1920s. After 1990, general perceptions of spatial planning and possibilities for its utilisation changed in connection with changing socio-economic conditions. Due to the fact that, after 1990, no new legal document addressing spatial planning was introduced and the original and much-amended and altered Act No. 50/1976 Coll. on Spatial Planning and Building Regulations (the Building Code) remained in force until 2006, a number of small-scale amendments to the act were approved. In addition to content and procedural changes regarding the preparation and approval process, these also addressed municipalities' authority to approve a land-use plan. The authority to approve a land-use plan was transferred to municipalities through a provision in Section 26 (2). In the same manner the new Act No. 183/2006 Coll. on Spatial

Planning and Building Regulations, explicitly states that a “municipality shall independently issue its own land-use plan” (Section 6(5)(c) of the act). The preparation and approval process for a land-use plan is very strictly set forth in Czech legislation and presents municipalities with a relatively high degree of authority in deciding on the future utilisation of their own territory.

Municipalities use a municipal land-use plan, which is approved by the municipal council, as a key instrument in their own development. Through it a municipality sets forth binding regulations regarding the spatial and functional utilisation of its territory. At present, this document has been approved or is being prepared for more than 90% of Czechia’s municipalities (the database of the Institute for Territorial Development). Additional instruments, which municipalities can utilise to direct territorial development, include the regulation plan and a document that was not added into legislation until 2006 a delimitation of the built-up area of a municipality. Whereas the land-use plan is a standard document for the majority of municipalities, regulation plans are only used sporadically and delimitations of built-up area present a document that can be used in municipalities which do not have a land-use plan in force. To this point, the use of this final type of document has not been monitored.

The land-use plan is a document approved by the municipal council and as such it can be considered a political document of a given municipality. Representatives can significantly influence its content – the delimitation of built-up and developable areas within the municipality and building regulations – and, by approving a land-use plan, can effectively impact the future development of the territory. Problems surrounding the application of land-use plans as well as the low level of functionality observed among territorial regulations in the case of the development of large-scale shopping centres in the hinterland of large cities form the focus of the article Spilková, Perlín 2010.

Like the land-use plan, the strategic plan is also a political document of a municipality and the authority to approve this document lies exclusively within the competencies of the municipal council. Due to the fact that the strategic plan, in contrast to a land-use plan, is not regulatory in nature but simply outlines initiatives; the procedures for the processing, negotiating and ultimate approval are not determined by any detailed legislative regulations and this process is, therefore, relatively unfettered for municipalities as well as for additional subjects. A whole series of methodological approaches, which differ from one another in emphasising various components of the planning process and in assessing the meaning of strategic

planning, address the significance of such planning for municipalities (Berman et al., Rektořík, Šelešovský, Perlín).

The strategic plan is focused on identifying development potential and eliminating barriers or problems within the territory in question. By setting objectives for future layouts and identifying the opportunities provided by such layouts, including the integration of various stakeholders, the strategic plan is focused more into the future; while, at the same time, it arises out of needs for the effective mutual coordination and cooperation of stakeholders in local or regional development from commercial, non-profit and public administration sectors. To successfully fulfil at least some of the objectives of a strategic plan; sufficient human capacity and knowledge must be tapped into in the territory in question, mutual will to work together must exist among all stakeholders and sufficient economic resources, which will be utilised to resolve the defined problems or which shall stimulate development in the desired directions, must be available.

Among rural municipalities and their associated groups, in particular, it is very difficult to find both sufficient human capital potential and sufficient resources to complete even some of the strategic objectives. The Perlín (2006) article focuses on problems and risks associated with the possibilities of utilising a strategic plan as an instrument in the development of rural areas.

Cooperation among municipalities is another potential instrument for ensuring development objectives, especially in rural space. In the Czech settlement system and in its highly fragmented structure of public administration (Hampl, Miller, 1998), cooperation among municipalities has been anchored in the Act on municipalities since the renewal of local self-government. In contrast, however, experience with the administratively implemented integration of municipalities into nodal groups of municipalities (Blažek B. 2004) can be cause for any type of closer connections among various municipalities to be perceived very negatively by the representatives of municipalities or of associations of municipalities (the Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic), as an attempt to limit the acquired self-government capacities of municipalities. Since the renewal of municipal self-government, municipalities can cooperate through voluntary associations of municipalities. Since 1998, Czech legislation has distinguished two types of cooperation. Cooperation merely among municipalities as bodies of public administration has been, since this time, termed voluntary associations of municipalities (VAM) while cooperation between municipalities and additional legal entities or non-profit organisations is referred to simply as associations of

municipalities. The legislative differences between these two types of cooperation focus primarily on the fact that voluntary associations of municipalities act as additional units of public administration and any decision making, documentation, public monitoring or public participation in decision-making processes is carried out as in municipalities. Associations among municipalities and additional legal entities act as private-legal institutions and the publishing of documents as well as any public participation or public monitoring is ensured only to the limits set forth by the Civil Code.

The degree of formal cooperation among rural municipalities in Czechia is very high (Labounková, 2005); however, the effectiveness of this cooperation as measured for instance by the number of joint development projects is relatively low (Perlín, 2006).

One included article (Perlín 2006) explores possibilities and completed projects within a select group of voluntary associations of municipalities and emphasises the significant formal barriers and informal problems surrounding effective cooperation and the relatively small array, in terms of their focus, of actually completed projects. Some voluntary associations of municipalities joined to create a partnership as a Leader Local Action Group and their original strategic VAM documents became a foundation in preparing a Leader strategic plan.

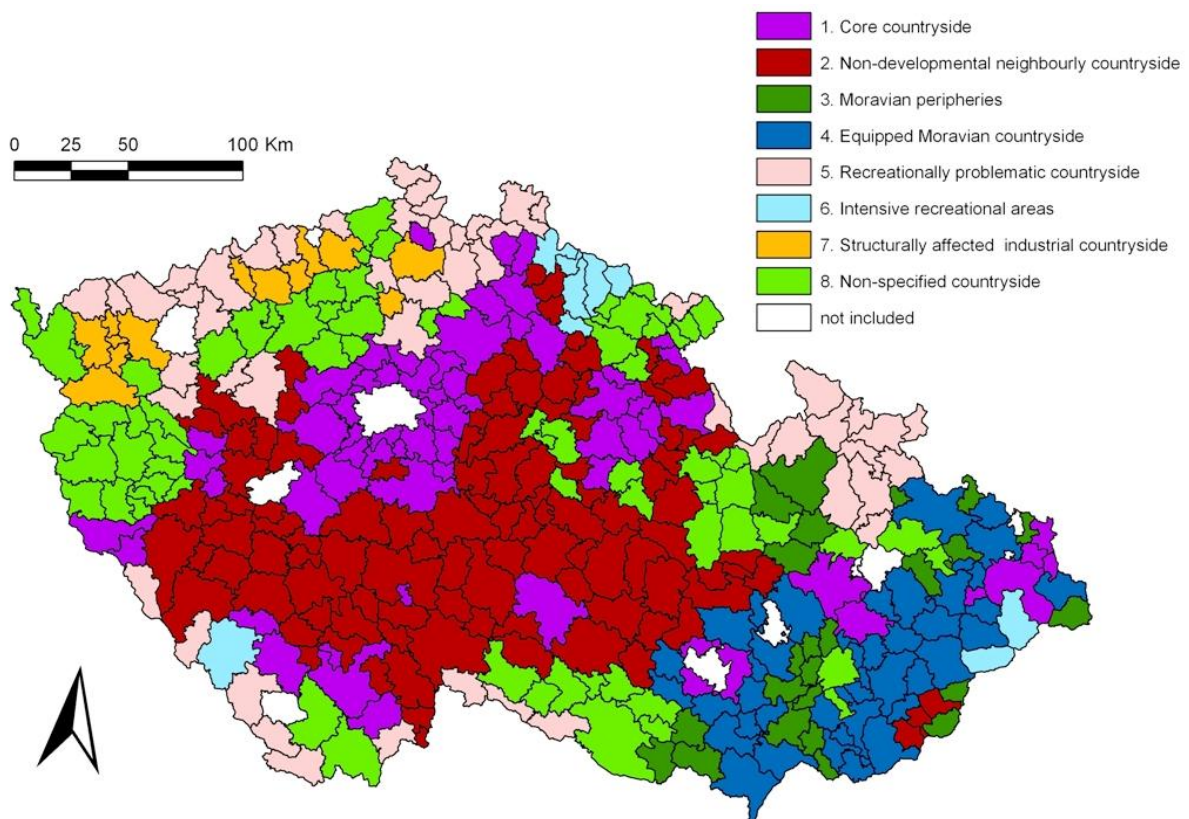
Rural space in Czechia is highly differentiated. Musil and Müller (2008) and Marada (2001) have written on the delimitation of peripheral areas in Czechia as one type of rural territory. Analysis of rural space in terms of its development potential is the central topic of the article Perlín, Kučerová, Kučera (2010). The differentiation of rural space on the basis of divergent assumptions concerning rural development is significant in terms of the application of various instruments of local and regional development. Programmes that have a nationwide impact and which do not have specific sub-programmes outlined for various types of rural areas are, in terms of successfulness in rural space, more difficult to apply and less effective. Municipalities in these various types of rural space are faced with different conditions for development, have different objectives and should have the opportunity to utilise different instruments for ensuring their unique development objectives.

On the basis of an assessment of statistical data, relating to rural municipalities, the authors outlined four primary factors of development potential, including municipality size, growth, human capital and stability. The identified primary factors exhibit very different distributions in Czech rural space, in terms of the intensity of the phenomena, making it possible to distinguish basic types of rural space in accordance with combinations of these factors.

The following types of rural space were delimited in the article:

- Developing countryside
- Non-developing, neighbourly countryside
- Moravian peripheries
- Equipped Moravian countryside
- Recreationally problematic countryside
- Intensive recreational areas
- Structurally affected industrial countryside
- Non-specified countryside

Fig. 1: Typology of Czechia's rural space



Source: Perlín, Kučerová, Kučera (2010)

The submitted dissertation reviews three primary instruments of local development that can be applied in Czechia's rural space and emphasises the divergent development conditions of various types of rural areas. While rural areas classified as Developing Countryside are extremely burdened with new investments in construction and the necessity of applying and thoroughly utilising the instruments discussed is very urgent; in regions classified for instance as Non-Developing, Neighbourly Countryside, the appropriateness of applying certain instruments can be debated. In particular, pressure from state government institutions to prepare a land-use plan or the excessively high frequency of preparing various types of

strategic plans often leads to the very ineffective use of municipal resources. Municipalities use their limited financial resources to prepare highly formalized documents, even when actual investment activities in such rural municipalities