

The role of soft factors in the development of the inner periphery of the Eastern Bohemia

Abstract

In recent years, research on conditionality process of space polarization and regional development puts emphasis on understanding importance of endogenous and “soft” factors. General theories of regional development (formed mainly on the basis of evaluating “hard” data) are verified by frequent case studies because of their limited explanatory power. In these case studies, especially qualitative approaches of evaluation are applied. Influence and validity of “soft” factors significantly increases with decreasing hierarchical level, so it is desirable to conduct empirical research at the municipal level.

Diploma thesis aims to analyze “soft” factors of regional development and understand the nature of differences in socio-economic development at the municipal level in the inner periphery of Bohemia. The concept of the institutional thickness has become the theoretical basis. This concept has logical overlap to the concept of the social capital. The objects of research are the spatial co-operation of actors of regional development (mayors), their reciprocal trust and engagement in local activities. Thesis aims to identify and to explain the nature of relations, direction of interactions and impact of political orientation of actors on their position in a local community.

The initial part presents general contribution to the issue of research. Then goals, research questions, methods and some information about data collection follow. The empirical outcomes are based on analysis of 38 semi-structured interviews with mayors from five administrative districts of municipality with an authorized municipal office (Jičín, Kopidlno, Nový Bydžov, Hořice, Městec Králové). The interviews took place from November 2016 to January 2017. Sample of interviews is representative of the spatial distribution, population size and age of respondents based on statistical inference.

Research confirmed the key role of the municipal authority in the local interactions. Municipal authorities (at the local level usually represented only by a mayor) take very heterogeneous positions towards local activities. There is an immense difference between groups of mayors in participation in the local networks.

Thesis confirms findings of previous research on space polarization, especially researches of the inner peripheries. This research confirmed the importance of administrative boundaries and especially regional boundaries. These boundaries limited creation of formal and informal relations between actors of territorial development. The research provides evidence of still existing links between municipalities formed during the period of the communist regime and also the evidence of the importance of the political orientation of local development actors.

Keywords: municipal authority, institutional thickness, inner periphery, local development, Czechia