

# DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL REGIONS – ON EXAMPLE OF HROTOVICKO MICROREGION

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## ANNOTATION

Development of rural regions is actual topic in the long term period, which is caused mainly by their extension within the Czech Republic (80 %). Research project of Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic QH 82249 “SYNERGY in accession to rural areas development” also deals with aspects of rural regions development. The main goal of this project is achieving of synergic action by application of chosen procedures and tools to support higher quality of life in rural areas, development of possibilities of entrepreneurship in agrarian sector and elimination of negative impacts of business on countryside. One of the first activities was realisation of questionnaire survey in the Hrotovicko microregion where activities of involved people and tools of regional development were checked.

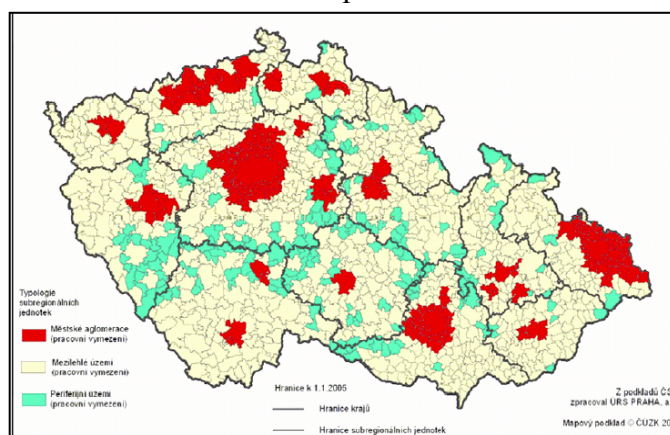
## KEY WORDS

Rural region, Rural Development Programme, Actor of development, Hrotovicko microregion

## INTRODUCTION

Many Czech and foreign authors and institutions are engaged in problems of rural areas and in their delimitation, no matter if from theoretical-research or practical causes (e.g. delimitation of rural areas for needs of public administration and local government for aiming of development programmes). Views on rural areas delimitation differ, with regard on different perception of rural areas in various countries or regions. To difficulties by rural areas delimitation contributes also overlapping of conception of “rural” region (space, area) with conceptions as “peripheral” (marginal, border) or “agrarian” region.

Fig. 1. Typology of rural areas in the Czech Republic



Source: *Rural Development Programme, 2007*

Rural areas are generally qualified as free un-built countryside and rural settlement which is possible to allocate as complex of rural seats, agricultural and water areas, forests, local routes and other areas in this space. Rural areas are usually characteristic by lower density of population, smaller municipalities, higher unemployment but higher employment in agriculture (forestry, fishing), co-existence of local inhabitants with nature and countryside, specific architectonic style and character of house-building, certain way of life which often

differs from urban. However, some of these typical signs of rural areas could be markedly suppressed nowadays. Rural seats themselves can be of different character as well. Hamlets, small colonies and also quite large villages, which sometimes have more inhabitants than small towns, could be found. Special cases are municipalities in hinterland of bigger towns which have (thanks to suburbanisation) many signs typical mainly to urban areas. Since typical characteristics of rural and urban areas are often not fulfilled, explicit delimitation of rural and urban seats is very problematic (translated from Rozvoj venkova v kraji Vysočina, 2008: 7).

## **AIM AND METODOLOGY**

In principle, it is possible to express that there is not single definition of rural area; there is also not only one rural area but several rural areas which are characteristic by various elements. However, definition of rural areas is not the aim of this article. The main contribution should be in setting of participants and tools of rural areas development and checking of their competences in model region. Theoretical part of the article is entering part of project "Synergy"; materials for case study were obtained on base of questionnaire survey with sixteen mayors of municipalities in Hrotovicko microregion.

Actuality of problems of rural areas development confirms also number of publications and scientific articles, such as Hrabánková et. col (1994) who was one of the first of Czech authors engaged in regional policy in agriculture and rural regions, Perlín (1998) worked up one of the typologies of Czech rural areas, Slepíčka (2006) or Binek et. col. (2007) gave attention to possibilities of use and revitalisation of rural areas; from foreign authors deal with agriculture e.g. Spišiak (2002), Ilbery (1998) or Woods (2005).

## **RESULTS**

### **Actors of Development**

It is not easy to appoint all participants of rural development. However, it is possible to divide them into three basic hierarchical levels – national, regional and local/municipal. Rural areas development on national level is by jurisdiction not entrusted to any resort, it is disintegrated mainly between Ministry of Agriculture<sup>1</sup> and Ministry for Regional Development<sup>2</sup>, influence have also Ministry of Environment and other ministries; special position has Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs that controls European Social Fund. On regional level decide about rural areas development mainly sections of regional development or section of agriculture (it depends on organisation structure of each regional office); problems of rural areas development are often equated to development of agriculture. On local level could be

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Agriculture is a central authority of state administration for agriculture excepting preservation of agricultural land fund, for water management excepting preservation of natural water accumulation, preservation of water sources and preservation of water quality, and for food industry. It is also a central state authority administrating forests, hunting and gamekeeping and fisheries outside territory of national parks. More detailed delimitation of agency is set in Act No. 252/1997, about agriculture. This act entrust activities in area "settings of conditions for running Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development Policy of the EU" to resort of agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> The Ministry for Regional Development was established on November 1st, 1996 by the Law No. 272/1996. This Law specified the scope of powers of the Ministry as the central body of the State Administration of the Czech Republic in following areas: regional policy, housing policy, development of housing resources, leasing of residential and non-residential facilities, zoning, building regulations, investment policies and tourism. The Ministry for Regional Development also provides information and methodology for counties, cities and municipalities and their associations and supervises the activities associated with the process of integrating regions into European regional structures.

considered as main participant of development mayors of municipalities (see later) but various social groups which live in rural areas as well (denizens, newly moved in people, cottagers, holidaymakers, farmers etc. – see Slepíčka, 2006).

For economical point of view, participants of development could be dividend into public, private and non-profit sphere. According to Galvasová et. col (2007) could be other division based on relation of participant to solved problem or prepared project to:

- Shareholders – subjects who are deeply engaged into process of preparing or solving (e.g. cooperating municipalities and entrepreneurs).
- Stakeholders – subjects influenced by certain activity (e.g. inhabitants and their unions, visitors etc.).
- Placeholders – in spatial principle, subjects in whose interest areas is activity realised (e.g. Regional authority, Protected landscape area administration, ministry).

Split of subjects into mentioned groups is not absolute; it depends on topic or situation. There can be also diffusion of these positions. Types and positions of participants relates with possibilities of support of regional development. Form this view could be divided following basic types of support:

- Direct support – direct support through participant's sources – human, financial, material sources.
- Role of coordinator – active access to coordination of specific participants' activities.
- Initiatory role – stimulation of activities of specific participants including support.

### **Instruments of Rural Development**

Development of rural areas in the Czech Republic is laid in strategic document “National Strategic Rural Development Plan of the Czech Republic for the period 2007–2013” and is realised by programme document “Rural Development Programme for the period 2007–2013”. However, nor this Programme clearly defines rural areas.

Rural development policy on European level for period 2007–2013 defines four main axes, whereas rural development is concerned mainly in third and fourth axis:

- I. Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector
- II. Improving the environment and the countryside through land management
- III. Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity (values for rural areas)
- IV. LEADER

The third axis helps to develop local infrastructure and human sources in rural areas with the main goal to improve conditions to economic growth and set up of new working places in all branches and for diversification of economical activities. Finances set to diversification of rural economy and quality of life in rural areas should contribute to main priority which is to set up new working opportunities. Measures available in axis 3 should be used mainly for support of capacities building, gaining of skills and organisation of local development strategies, also for maintaining of rural fineness for next generations. By supporting professional preparation, knowledge and entrepreneurship is necessary to be aware of special needs of women and young people.

Method LEADER brings into rural development possibilities of innovation leading through local based approach from down to up (local action group, LAG). Financial support set for

LEADER should support to priorities of axes 1 and 2 and mainly 3 but also could be important for priority “improvement of operating and releasing of endogenous potential for rural development.”

Except from support from Rural Development Programme, it is possible to use finances from seven Regional operational programmes (ROP) or eight thematic operational programmes (OP). Global aim of operational programmes is acceleration of development and reduction of disparities among regions in the Czech Republic. Specific goals of ROP concern priorities of smaller town and rural areas, e.g. support of local products, raising of value of natural heritage, tourism and attractiveness of territory, support of small-scale farming, protection of landscape etc. On regional level should be rural development defined in Regional programme of development, on local level in local strategies of development.

### **Case Study – Hrotovicko microregion**

Hrotovicko microregion consists of sixteen municipalities which are located on north-east side of the Třebíč district. Total 7 119 inhabitants lived on this territory on January 1, 2007.

Management of municipalities in the microregion is very limited – there are only building and agricultural committees, committees for public affairs, culture, youths, sport and school are missing, which is closely connected with limited comprehension of development. Only solving of problems with technical infrastructure (“hard projects”) is considered as development. Mayor of municipality has very important position – he/she suggests topic of projects at the most cases, he also prepares projects and cares about their realisation.

A great deal of municipalities of the microregion haven’t applied for any project, more used are grants of Vysocina region. Five municipalities applied for support from any dotation programme which was interesting and financially available even though it has not corresponded with priorities of the municipality. It means that strategy of municipality development is development tool but it is usually adjusted according to recent needs.

In the most cases municipalities cooperate with unions as an important endogenous activity which empowers local rurality. However, usually only sport and cultural actions are held. Municipalities also often cooperate on organisation base with local entrepreneurs (help with improvement of municipalities’ appearance – mainly farmers). External firms ensure pick-up of garbage, commerce, transport, green maintaining, applying for grants, social services.

Municipalities are members of available optional unions which are located in the region. The main contributions of membership in the union could be: better change to obtain any subsidy, important aspect is also exchange of experience, better access and transfer of information for municipality and its inhabitants, building-up of tracks for bikes, support of innovation (broadband internet), possibilities of marketing, propagation of microregion as an unit etc. Nevertheless, there is still one question – whether the membership in unions is active or if it is only formal.

### **CONCLUSION**

Possibilities of rural development are limited by many factors, from real dispositions of people, territory to administrative barriers. Unclear delimitation of rural areas and indefinite settings of competences of rural development participants will not contribute to rural development. Limited management of municipalities could be considered as a next barrier;

better integrated are municipalities with full time mayor who has rich experience and wide social network.

Mainly investments into infrastructure are considered as development, whereas, according to mayors, human relations in municipalities became markedly worse. In principle, local community degrades from the inside, which means deformation or even liquidation of local communities and their transformation and approach to urban settings.

As it was already noted above, financial budget of municipalities in microregion enable only formal survivance of local administration. It is necessary to obtain subsidies for any projects, even for those which could be hardly defined as development ones. Endowment policy is highly un-transparent and disintegrated. This process has to be formalised, it has to be transparent and project has to be well understandable for more effective administration (translated from Holeček et col., 2008).

Cooperation of local subjects and also among regional subjects is in recent time mainly formal and it is not really active. Cooperation of municipalities and synergy of participant of and effective use of tools of development are not be only possibilities but necessary condition of successful development.

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