

THE ROLE OF HUMAN CAPITAL OF REPRESENTATIVES OF MUNICIPAL SELF-GOVERNMENT BODIES IN DEVELOPMENT OF BORDERLAND PERIPHERIES IN CZECHIA: THE CASE OF VOLARSKO

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ABSTRACT

The article seeks to evaluate the development potential of the borderland peripheral territory of Volarsko on the basis of an analysis of selected characteristics concerning the level and quality of human capital possessed by representatives of municipal self-government bodies, and to identify the central development problems of this territory. Empirical field research (directed/semi-structured interviews with the mayors and written survey focusing on municipal council members) was conducted in the model territory, directed at three thematic sections: "personal" characteristics of respondents; evaluation of work and mutual cooperation of respondents; identification of central development problems. In terms of the selected characteristics of human capital, the model territory exhibits relatively positive values (level of education attained; length of time in office; for mayors, the manner in which they fulfil their duties and their willingness to candidate in the upcoming communal elections). The same applies to the evaluation of the work and mutual cooperation of representatives of municipal self-government bodies (activity level, nature of professional and inter-personal relationships). In terms of the subjective opinions of the mayors and council members concerning central development problems, a high degree of compliance was shown to exist among their answers. Both "groups" identify a lack of financial resources for pursuing the priorities of the municipal authority and the general lack of jobs as the two most serious problems in the model territory.

Key words: human capital, development problems, representatives of municipal self-government bodies, periphery, Volarsko

1. Introduction

In recent years, research on peripheral areas has become a frequent topic of Czech geographical research, although there were some older works (e.g. Musil 1988). This is partly due to the fact that it was from the beginning of the 1990s that basic natural processes (hierarchization, concentration, suburbanisation, etc.), which manifest themselves in the differentiation of space, started to change dramatically. The principally political (transition from a totalitarian to a democratic political system), economic and societal changes (generally transition from centrally planned to market-oriented economy), subsequent to 1989, have significantly impacted the nature and orientation of differentiation processes (increased selectivity and greater dynamics – for more, see Hampl 2005). An increase in regional differences occurred (growing polarity between core and peripheral areas) and, subsequently, social problems with a regional character emerged "particularly in old industrial and in certain rural peripheral areas" (Hampl 2001: 28).

Regarding the development of research on peripheral areas, according to Chromý and Skála (2010), attention has focused on: (i) discussing theoretical-methodological points of departure for studying the polarisation of space (Havlíček, Chromý 2001; Havlíček et al. 2005; Pileček, Jančák 2011); (ii) issues of evaluating the polarisation of space or rather delimiting peripheral areas at

various scale levels and studies of the attributes of such areas (Marada 2001; Musil, Müller 2008; Pileček 2005); (iii) efforts to discover and explain factors behind uneven development and systematic evaluations "of processes of change and their mutual and frequently even contradictory manifestations, a discussion of the conditionality of the emergence of centres and peripheries, evaluations of development, mechanisms behind the driving forces and the dynamic of socio-spatial change as well as the impact of 'external' and 'internal' conditions of differentiation" (Chromý, Skála 2010: 224) – Havlíček et al. (2008); Jančák et al. (2008).

In light of the above-indicated stages of development concerning research of peripheral areas within Czechia, this paper focuses on the last of the issues described. Not only in connection with the development of peripheral areas, but also in general studies concerning regional development, the increasing influence of non-economic factors (human and social capital, institutions) on economic growth has been mentioned with increasing frequency in recent years (Belgeusdijk, van Schaik 2005; Blažek, Hampl 2009; Hadjimichalis 2006). The quality of human capital is seen as an instrument in the activation of the endogenous development potential of regional/local communities (Hampl 2003). Within the context of research on peripheral areas then the quality (level) of human capital is perceived as a significant factor in determining the process of the polarisation of space or the

very existence of peripheral areas (Jančák et al. 2008). The significance of the actions of local/micro-regional stakeholders and communities, which can “compensate” for the limited development potential of an area, is emphasised first and foremost (Hampl, Dostál, Drbohlav 2007). Some authors (e.g. Leimgruber 2001) go as far as to attribute key significance to human decisions based on subjective interests and values in the development of peripheries. Similar points of departure are emphasised within the so-called European neo-regionalism, which places emphasis on the activation of the internal potential of regions; the mobilisation of stakeholders from public, private and non-profit sectors; support for raising the quality and level of human and social capital; support for civic initiatives and the role of “soft” factors, such as civic association, regional identity, culture (e.g. Chromý, Janů 2003; Stachová 2008).

Studies focused on development of borderland regions are also very similar to issues regarding the development of peripheral areas. Some authors consider borderland regions to be peripheries “*par excellence*” (Wastl-Walter, Váradi, Veider 2003), due to their geographical situation – so-called geometric periphery (e.g. Pileček, Jančák 2011). The peripherality of a borderland regions depends on the permeability of the border (Leimgruber 2004) and the nature of border effects (e.g. Dokoupil 2000). Hampl (2000) emphasizes that the difficulties of borderlands arise primarily out of: (i) border effects (“between whom does the border exist?”) and peripheral situation (“the region is peripheral in comparison to what?”); (ii) the vulnerability of borderland regions to site and “local” factors (the necessity to distinguish between spatial and socioeconomic periphery); (iii) scale level differentiation/hierarchization of regions along with their situational relationships.

Similarly to Chromý and Skála (2010), this article aims to utilise selected results from empirical field research carried out in a specific model territory (Volarsko) to illustrate the application of general approaches to examine a specific peripheral borderland territory. Specifically, this article evaluates the potential of local development within this territory on the basis of an analysis of selected characteristics concerning the level and quality of human capital of representatives of municipal self-government bodies, and seeks to verify Jančák’s thesis (2001) on the impact of human factors in the development of peripheral areas, or rather, the presence of key people, who are willing and able to participate in or even initiate development. Another objective is the identification of central problems concerning the development of the model territory in question.

The article is structured as follows. The subsequent section presents the concept of human capital. This is followed by a methods section, wherein the preparation and implementation of empirical field research in the model territory of Volarsko is described in detail. The next section presents a brief characterization of the model

territory. Research findings, detailing the “personal” and political characteristics of representatives of municipal self-government bodies, evaluating their work and mutual cooperation and identifying central development problems are presented in the fifth section. Further, associations of municipalities are discussed as another source for the activation of endogenous development potential of the model territory. The concluding remarks then, in a discussible way, summarize the most significant findings of the article.

2. The concept of human capital

The concept of human capital was developed during the 1960s when some authors (e.g. Becker 1962; Schultz 1961) started to explore the implications of human capital investments for economic growth (Becker 1992). It arose out of the assumption that “individuals decide on their education, training, medical care, and other additions to knowledge and health by weighing the benefits and costs” (Becker 1992: 43). Nowadays, human capital is most often defined as the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that enable the establishment of personal, social and economical prosperity (OECD 2001; Schuller 2001). In recent years, the concept has been extended to include such elements as motivation, moral values as well as interpersonal attitudes and abilities (Côté 2001). Additional elements of human capital could include experience, flexibility, the ability to take action (Jančák, Pileček 2009) and the ability to flexibly react to changes and to adopt innovations (Maskell, Malmberg 1999). According to Zich (2006), within the component of experience, human capital also includes the way a person acts and the ability to establish and utilise contacts (predicting and evaluating situations, judging one’s own possibilities, establishing contacts, the “art” of asking questions, utilising information for one’s own benefit, etc.). The formation of human capital results primarily in connection with the development of the territorial division of labour (Hampl 2003). Human capital is an attribute of individuals, embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual (Coleman 1988). According to Kučerová (2011) individuals obtain a portion of these skills and knowledge through the system of institutions authorized and accredited to provide educational services. Consequently, acquired skills and knowledge can help individuals to obtain corresponding social positions and additional capital (economic and political).

Although studying the role of human capital in the public sector has not received much attention, the level and quality of human capital among the representatives of self-government bodies can play a considerable role in local development. Carmeli (2004), for example, discovered that, in Israel, local government authorities

possessing strategic human capital (a highly educated workforce with organization-specific competencies and experience) achieve better financial performance.

In Czechia, during the post-totalitarian period, the position of municipal self-government bodies in local development has been determined by general conditions of local self-government operations, the progress and consequences of social and economic transformation and the degree of democratisation in local self-government (Buček 2002). The level and quality of human capital (e.g. the educational level) in municipal councils appears grown during this period, feeding hopes for improved local governance (Illner, Hanšpach 1994). However, Illner (2001) points out that, in terms of possible elements of human capital, good morale, good knowledge of local problems and people's ability to solve conflicts represent more important qualities for local councillors than higher education and good speaking abilities.

3. Methodology

The focus of particular empirical field research was directed at representatives of municipal self-government bodies, specifically on mayors and municipal council members within the selected peripheral borderland territory of Volarsko (the reasons behind the selection of the model territory are based primarily on the results of earlier research – see Pileček (2005, 2006), in which it became evident that the Volarsko region ranks among the most peripheral areas of all evaluated territorial units – Prachatice District and Prachatice Municipality with Extended Jurisdiction – MEJ). The representatives of municipal self-government bodies are perceived as representing the human capital of the public sector. They represent one source of endogenous development potential (an accumulation of internal conditions and sources that stimulate local development). Through their acquired education, experience, abilities, behaviour and motivation, these actors can very significantly impact and shape regional development at the local level.

Research was conducted in the form of combination of directed and semi-structured interviews with the mayors of seven municipalities (Křišťanov, Lenora, Nová Pec, Stožec, Volary, Zbytiny and Želnavá), which allowed not only to obtain answers to the questions prepared in advance, but there was also possibility to find out related contextual information, as well as a written survey focusing on municipal council members (58 altogether). Both forms of research were implemented during April 2006. In terms of content, inspiration for the research content was taken from related studies, which partially focus on issues surrounding evaluation of the significance of human capital (Illner 1996, 2001; Perlín 2000) and on local development (Bičík, Perlín, Šefrna 2001; Jeřábek,

Dokoupil, Havlíček 2004). The outline for the directed/semi-structured interviews included 28 questions, which were arranged into three thematic sections: a) “personal” characteristics of the mayor; b) evaluation of a mayor's work; c) local municipal development.

Construction of the questionnaire for municipal council members was based on the outline of the directed/semi-structured interviews. The basic idea was to include identical (i.e. council members would answer the very same question as mayors) or similar (i.e. council members would answer about themselves and about the mayor, while the mayor would evaluate himself/herself and the municipal council as a collective group) questions aimed at ascertaining council members' opinion on the “same things”, with the added perspective of potential confrontations between their opinions and those of the mayors. Considering Illner's (1996) work this is something of an analogy of “subjective representability”, which “expresses the degree, to which the attitudes and opinions of a municipal council on issues significant for development of the municipality are in line with the attitudes and opinions of voters” (Illner 1996: 347). The questionnaire included 11 questions, which were conceived in similar thematic sections as the outline for the directed/semi-structured interviews (see above).

Together with accompanying letters, questionnaires were distributed directly to the permanent residences of the various municipal council members using addresses obtained from the municipal office. Only in isolated cases (Zbytiny) did the mayor offer to help by distributing the questionnaire at the next meeting of the municipal council. The rate of return for questionnaires from municipalities within the model territory is shown in table 1. From a total of 58 council members, 40 of them (68.97%) correctly filled in and returned the questionnaire. The number of members in a municipality's council is set forth in Act No. 128/2000 Coll., the Municipality Act (general proceedings).

Tab. 1 Rate of return of questionnaires from municipalities within the model territory Volarsko

Municipality	Number of municipal council members (excluding the mayor)	Returned questionnaires	
		number	%
Křišťanov	4	2	50.00
Lenora	14	11	78.57
Nová Pec	7	3	42.86
Stožec	7	5	71.43
Volary	14	8	57.11
Zbytiny	8	7	87.50
Želnavá	4	4	100.00
Volarsko	58	40	68.97

Source: own survey (April 2006).

4. Brief characterization of the model territory of Volarsko

The model territory of Volarsko is located in the southern reaches of the Prachatice MEJ along the border with Germany and, to a lesser degree, the Austrian border. It borders the Český Krumlov and Vimperk MEJs (see Fig. 1). In terms of the approaches, by which periphery can be defined (see Pileček, Jančák 2011), the area is representative, not only of external (geometric) periphery (Hampl 2000), but also of economic (Marada 2001) and, to a lesser extent, even cultural (lack of cultural roots among local population, low quality of social capital – Jančák et al. 2010) periphery. Perlín, Kučerová,

Kučera (2010) call this area “recreationally problematic countryside” with unfavourable developing potential in the area of human resources, economic productivity and social cohesion.

Common denominators of all municipalities in the model territory include their historical development (post-World War II expulsion of Germans and subsequent partial resettlement), which had in principle influence not only on quantitative as well as the qualitative “state” of the territory (Chromý, Jančák 2005), and relatively strong pressures focused on the conservation of nature (Šumava National Park is located along the border with Germany and Austria to the southeast and the Šumava Protected Landscape Area, another



Fig. 1 Model territory of Volarsko

protected zone, further extends this large area of natural value). Volarsko is predominantly agricultural in nature with a large portion of forest lands. On one hand, the south and southwest portions of the region have great development potential thanks to excellent potential for tourism, which has yet to be completely supplemented with corresponding infrastructure (Bartoš, Kušová, Těšitel 1998). On the other hand, the Boletice Military Training Area represents a barrier to the development of the municipalities in its neighbourhood (Seidl, Chromý, Habartová 2010).

unemployment data, residents of the municipalities within the model territory do not encounter significant problems finding work in the labour market. Over the last four years, the unemployment rate in Volarsko has fluctuated under the nationwide average. In addition to commuting to other regional centres (Prachatic, Vimperk) that offer a number of job opportunities, economically active residents finding work in neighbouring Bavaria (so-called pendulum workers – e.g. Jeřábek 1998) could also play a considerable role in employment. Agriculture, forestry and tourism, which

Tab. 2 Selected characteristics of the model territory Volarsko

Municipality	General indicators			Human capital indicators			
	Area (km ²)	Population (2009)	Population density (people/km ²)	Index of population change 1991–2009 (1991 = 100.0)	Portion of population older than 15 with a university education (2001) (%)	Index of economic burden (2009) (%)	Unemployment rate (August – average for 2006–2010) (%)
Křišťanov	17.9	109	6.1	70.8	1.7	58.5	6.2
Lenora	17.8	775	43.5	90.0	3.1	40.4	5.5
Nová Pec	66.4	546	8.2	85.3	2.8	40.4	5.3
Stožec	104.8	208	2.0	123.8	7.9	43.8	3.9
Volary	107.6	4,015	37.3	102.5	3.9	37.8	6.1
Zbytiny	39.0	320	8.2	100.6	2.0	36.8	3.7
Želnavá	10.3	141	13.6	92.8	3.7	26.5	6.7
Volarsko	363.9	6,114	16.8	98.5	3.7	38.4	5.8
Czechia	78,864	10,491,492	133.0	101.8	8.9	41.7	7.3

Note: Index of economic burden = number of children (0–14 years old) plus number of elderly people (65+) divided by the number of individuals in the productive years (15–64).

Source: Czech Statistical Office; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Table 2 provides an overview of several general indicators and indicators that can characterize human capital (Blažek, Macešková, Csank 2006), or the quality of the local environment for the development of human capital (Jančák et al. 2008).

In terms of population, the largest municipality is Volary (4015 inhabitants), which forms a natural centre for the model territory. Over the long-term, changes in population tend to be negative. Considering the individual municipalities, Křišťanov has fared the worst. In contrast, the municipality to increase most in population, during the observed time period, was Stožec. This municipality also exhibited the highest level of education in 2001, a level approaching Czechia's overall average. The age structure, as expressed through the index of economic burden, varies greatly (Křišťanov vs. Želnavá). Finally and surprisingly, according to

are subject to marked seasonal fluctuations, supply an indispensable portion of local employment opportunities (Pileček 2006).

5. Research findings

5.1 “Personal” characteristics of representatives of municipal self-government bodies

The level of education completed is one of the most significant characteristics within the context of human capital. Regarding mayors, we can assume that with an increasing level of qualifications, we will also find increasing capacity to successfully direct a municipality. Within the model territory, the mayors of Křišťanov, Lenora, Zbytiny and Želnavá had a secondary school education,

while the mayors of Nová Pec, Stožec and Volary had a university education.

The number of terms of election in which they had served as mayor was another monitored characteristic. Generally we can say that with the length of time serving as mayor one's experience with directing the affairs of the municipality clearly increases. A serving mayor is better acquainted with the mechanisms by which state and local government operate; he/she personally knows a number of other government workers and additional representatives as well as legislation, procedures, etc. (Perlín 2000). It can be affirmed that, within the model territory, mayors were relatively "experienced". Three of them were already serving their third term of office and the mayor of Želnavá was actually serving his fourth term in office. In this sense, the mayors of Volary (first term in office) and Nová Pec, who became mayor almost one year before the empirical field research was conducted, could be designated "newbies".

The next question focused on the manner in which the mayors fulfilled their duties. "Concerning the duties of a mayor in a rural municipality, it is important to consider how much time he/she has to carry out the mayoral duties he/she is entrusted with" (Perlín 2000: 137). In terms of the manner in which a mayor, who is "released", meaning that he/she is not employed in any other profession, carries out his/her duties, he/she has "time" to focus entirely on management of the municipality, issues concerning its development, relations with various partners, with state administration, etc. In contrast, an "unreleased" mayor does not have as much time available and, as a result, he/she carries out mayoral duties in his/her spare time, after completing the duties of his/her primary employment. A third possibility is that the mayor carries out his/her duties as a pensioner. In light of his/her advanced age, such a mayor could be less able or less willing to discover and thoroughly comprehend new realities, significant for the development of the municipality. Within the model territory, mayors of the two municipalities with the smallest populations serve as "unreleased" mayors (Křišťanov and Želnavá), the mayors of Lenora and Nová Pec were pensioners and the remaining municipalities (Stožec, Volary, Zbytín) had "released" mayors.

Finally, but no less importantly, mayors commented on their intentions concerning candidacy in the upcoming communal elections (2006). The notions of various mayors, concerning their continuance in their work, proved to be rather different within the model territory. Three mayors (from Nová Pec, Volary and Zbytín) were completely convinced that they wished to continue in their work (of course, under the assumption that they were selected through the communal elections). The mayor of Želnavá viewed the possibility of continuing to work as mayor in the future positively, using the words: "If they come and request that I run for office..." The mayors of Křišťanov and Stožec were leaning towards not

continuing as mayors. Likely due to his advanced age, the mayor of Lenora also expressed a preference to not continue as mayor.

Regarding council members, their educational structure is shown on Fig. 2. The largest group (37%) had successfully completed full secondary education as their highest educational level and one quarter of the council members had a university education. These findings can be evaluated relatively positively, even though the category of university educated only included council members from the largest municipalities (Lenora and Volary). The same as with mayors, a larger number of terms of office served translates to the greater experience of a given council member. The largest percentage of council members (57%) were new to their positions (serving in the first term of office), 15% of the council members were serving their second term and the smallest portion, 13% of the council members, were serving their third term of office. Those serving more than four terms of office (15% of those surveyed) can be considered the most experienced council members. The results acquired can falsely lead to a not overly positive evaluation. However, the specific activities of the council members in question and their active approach (see below) is much more important.

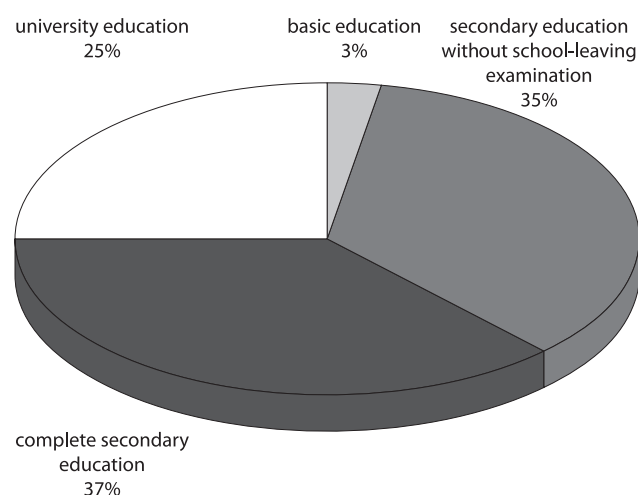


Fig. 2 Educational structure of council members.
Source: own survey

5.2 Evaluation of work and mutual cooperation of the representatives of municipal self-government bodies

The next thematic section utilised questions that are very subjective in nature. The introductory question ("Do you consider yourself to be an active ('good') mayor?") was intended to evaluate, in the eyes of the various mayors, the degree of their activities. The question was, therefore, conceived as "self-evaluating". Posing this question arose out of a conviction that, particularly in

small peripheral municipalities, the activity level of the mayor (his/her personal passion for the job) plays an important role in local development. Various personal traits, such as leadership talent – strategic (the ability to make decisions about what to focus on in local development), interpretative, combinative, absorptive and excitement capability (for more, see Sotarauta 2005), political talent – the ability to negotiate, to argue convincingly, the “quality” of moral values – honesty, integrity, incorruptibility, etc. can significantly influence the successfulness or rather the activity level of a local politician (Illner 2001). One can infer from the answers of the mayors that they were reluctant to evaluate themselves. They most frequently selected the category “I don’t know, I can’t judge the situation”. According to thoughts expressed by the majority, it is not fitting for them to evaluate their own work and their personality themselves, but that someone else should evaluate (e.g. the citizens of their municipality). Nonetheless, there were “exceptions”. The mayors of Lenora, Stožec and Volary consider themselves to be “relatively active”.

Council members were also asked to respond to a similar question (see Fig. 3). In accordance with a pertinent act, a council member is entitled to submit proposals for discussion to the municipal council, or to committees; to make inquiries, comments and suggestions for the municipal board and to its individual members; etc. Such attributes are, assuming a council member utilises them, a real indicator of his/her activity. The results obtained are very positive. Nonetheless, the truthfulness of some answers can be disputed, in light of a certain element of “self-praise”, which could have, in the author’s opinion, entered into the answers.

The purpose of the next question was to evaluate the activities of the municipal council. The rationale for asking this question arises out of the opinion that in certain rural peripheral municipalities with a small

number of inhabitants, there are only a few residents, who are willing and able to devote time and energy to working in the council. As table 3 demonstrates, the various mayors did not evaluate “their” council members very positively. The average grade of 3 showed up most frequently as the highest score. We can infer expectations for improved work among members of the various councils that could, in a certain sense, encourage the development of the municipalities in question. The answers provided by council members to evaluate the work of mayors provide an interesting comparison (table 3). Such work could include public representation of a given municipality, concerning for its development, etc. The resultant evaluations are quite varied. According to the council members, the mayor of Stožec (average grade 1.40) and the mayors of Zbytiny and Želnavá (average grades of 1.71 and 1.75, respectively) exhibit the most activity. On the other hand, the mayor of Nová Pec emerged from the evaluation with the worst average grade (3.67). Council members in Křišťanov and Lenora evaluated the work of their mayors with an average grade (3.00).

Tab. 3 Assessment of the work of mayors and council members

<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Evaluation of council members by the mayor</i>	<i>Evaluation of the mayor by council members (average grade)</i>
Křišťanov	4.00	3.00
Lenora	3.00	3.00
Nová Pec	3.50	3.67
Stožec	4.00	1.40
Volary	3.00	2.38
Zbytiny	3.00	1.71
Želnavá	3.00	1.75

Note: Evaluation was made by using 1 for the best grade and 5 for the worst grade.

Source: own survey.

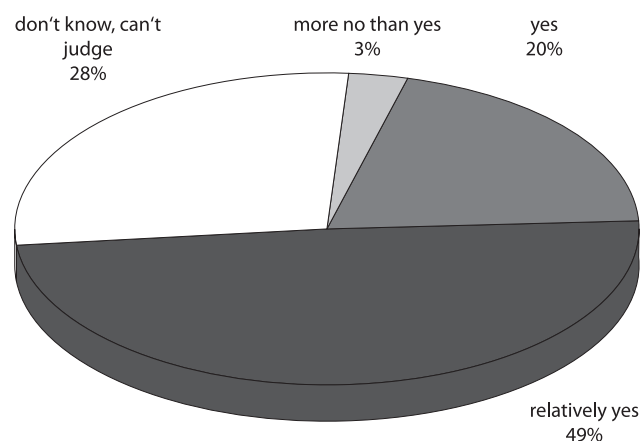


Fig. 3 Evaluation of the activity level of council members

Note 1: Wording of the question – “Do you consider yourself an active (‘good’) council member (do you present proposals for discussion to the municipal council, do you make questions, comments, suggestions, etc.)?”. Note 2: None of the respondents selected the “no” response. Source: own survey.

The final question in this section focused on evaluating the professional and inter-personal relations between mayors and council members. In small municipalities, it is often possible to find a certain insurmountable aversion among municipal representatives, which can negatively impact the work of the council and, consequently, the development of the municipality. The results show, however, that such tendencies did not express themselves in the model territory. All mayors deemed their professional and inter-personal relationships with council members to be relatively positive or positive. Among the council members, nearly 75% of respondents rated professional and inter-personal relationships with their mayor as relatively positive or positive. Altogether only 13% of the

responses described negative relations (i.e. “relatively negative” or “negative”).

It is possible to assume that the explanation of relatively positive results in this thematic section obtained by the evaluation of work and mutual cooperation of the representatives of municipal self-government bodies could be based on their “personal” characteristics (e.g. the higher number of election terms of mayors, the more positive nature of professional and inter-personal relationship of mayors with council members; the lower number of election terms of mayors, the worse evaluation of mayors by council members – probably the case of Nová Pec; the manner in which the mayors fulfil their duties can also influence the evaluation of mayors by council members – “unreleased” mayors and mayors who are pensioners are evaluated worse by council members than “released” mayors). Additionally, political engagement of the representatives of municipal self-government bodies could also help in better understanding of the research findings. Usually, the more negative nature of professional and inter-personal relationships of mayors with council members, the higher number of members of political parties among these representatives, especially in the larger municipalities of the model territory. However, all these assumptions should be verified by additional research.

5.3 Identification of central development problems from the perspective of representatives of municipal self-government bodies

For the purposes of this article, a question identifying the central development problems facing municipalities in the model territory was selected from the final thematic section of the field research. Respondents assessed a total of 18 “problems” that their municipality could be subject to. Table 4 depicts the most significant of these. Five of the seven mayors perceived a lack of financial resources to pursue the priorities of the municipal authority (average grade 1.43) as one of the greatest problems. A second, most serious problem was the general lack of jobs (average grade 1.57). Somewhat related to that, the unemployment rate (1.86) also ranked high on the list. Other significant problems included issues concerning the encroachment of Šumava National Park and Protected Landscape Area into the territory of certain municipalities (1.57), which results in a number of restrictions, limiting, in particular, entrepreneurial activities, which in turn negatively impacts a municipality’s tax income. In this way, the national park presents something of a barrier, working against the potential development of the territory (Chromý, Jančák, Winklerová 2003). In this regard, we could point to the relatively laconic words of Volary’s mayor (“what the management of Šumava National Park will allow”) speaking a potentially supported type of business within this municipality.

Tab. 4 Central development problems

<i>According to mayors' opinions (average grade)</i>	<i>According to council members' opinions (average grade)</i>
1. lack of financial resources to pursue the priorities of the municipal authority (1.43)	1. lack of jobs (1.75)
2. lack of jobs (1.57)	2. lack of financial resources to pursue the priorities of the municipal authority (1.90)
2. problems, arising due to the presence of Šumava NP and PLA within the municipality (1.57)	3. condition of local roads (including beyond the built-up area) (2.08)
4. housing (lack of available dwellings, sites for new construction) (1.86)	4. the dissolution or transformation of an agricultural enterprise or another enterprise in the municipality (2.18)
4. unemployment (1.86)	5. unemployment (2.23)
6. condition of local roads (including beyond the built-up area) (2.14)	6. lack of leisure facilities (culture, sport) (2.60)
6. the dissolution or transformation of an agricultural enterprise or another enterprise in the municipality (2.14)	7. problems, arising due to the presence of Šumava NP and PLA within the municipality (2.65)
8. depopulation (2.29)	8. housing (lack of available dwellings, sites for new construction) (2.70)
9. lack of civic amenities (2.57)	9. public transport, transport accessibility (low frequency of connections, high financial requirements of carrier) (2.83)
10. lack of leisure facilities (culture, sport) (2.86)	10. sewerage (old sewerage system, missing sewerage clarification plant) (2.85)

Note: Evaluation was made by using 1 grade for the greatest problem and 5 grade for the smallest problem.

Source: own survey.

In contrast with the answers of the mayors, council members’ answers exhibited less extreme values. This is most likely due to the much larger size of the respondent group. Nonetheless, the central problems that were identified by council members proved to be quite similar to the mayors’ perceptions. According to 58% of the council members, one of the greatest problems was the general lack of jobs (average grade 1.75). A lack of financial resources to pursue the priorities of the municipal authority (1.90) was another of the greatest problems. The condition of local roadways (2.10) was perceived to be a rather serious problem. An interesting result can be seen in connection with the presence of Šumava National Park and Protected Landscape Area within the territory of a given municipality. Council members’ opinions (average grade 2.65) are substantially different than the opinions of the mayors interviewed (average grade 1.57). It is

possible to assume that this could be caused by the fact that it is primarily the mayors, who participate in all types of negotiations concerning the future of the national park. In this way, the mayors could be expected to be much more informed concerning this issue and, consequently, to express stronger opinions about its significance.

6. Associations of municipalities as another source for the activation of endogenous development potential of the model territory Volarsko

Associations of municipalities represent yet another source for the activation of endogenous development potential, which is closely related to the concept of human capital. This resource (instrument) represents an institutional level of the regional organisation of society, as outlined by Hampl (2003). This, along with the communal level, reflects the “social quality of a region”, i.e. the quality of social and, in particular, human capital (Pileček 2010). Pursuant to a pertinent act, municipalities have the right to be members of an association for the purpose of the protection and pursuit of their mutual interests. Perlín (2000) claims that associations of municipalities are usually formed as a means of pooling financial resources for the construction and operation of technical infrastructure, to improve passenger mass transport or to facilitate the coordination of municipalities as destinations for tourism. Kukorelli Szörényiné (2005) has studied the role of micro-regional cooperation. With the example of Hungary, she distinguishes between three distinct and, over time, more intensive phases (types) of micro-regional cooperation. Initially, most regions see the emergence of the “classical” common presentation of a micro-region (common lobbying), followed by the submission of project proposals for support from the European Union’s structural funds. During the next phase, cooperation leads to activities in the realm of territorial planning.

The implementation of similar activities can be found within the model territory. With the exception of Křišťanov, all of the municipalities are members of one or two voluntary associations of municipalities (Mikro-region Horní Vltava-Boubínsko and Svazek lipenských obcí). Respondents’ answers indicated that the most significant cooperation of municipalities, in terms of its extent, is carried out within Mikroregion Horní Vltava-Boubínsko, which has grown, over time, to include several areas: cooperation in significant investment activities – e.g. a request for financial support from Community Initiative Programme INTERREG IIIA; the establishment of a local action group for Community Initiative Programme LEADER; infrastructure improvements; seeking solutions to the lack of employment opportunities; coordination of general territorial plans; alignment of interests and activities of local self-government bodies and common efforts to impact the implementation of state administration – e.g. a common procedure against the

Administration of the Šumava National Park and Protected Landscape Area in connection with zoning changes; promotion of the micro-region; the creation of conditions for the development of hiking – e.g. uniform hiking signs.

7. Concluding remarks

The article primarily seeks to contribute to discussion concerning the local development potential of a particular type of peripheral areas in Czechia (external/borderland peripheries). The question of the development of Czechia’s peripheral areas has been discussed many times in the past (e.g. Jančák 2001; Kostić 2004; Vaishar 1999). From the perspective of human capital, however, the topic is rarely discussed, even at a European scale (Labrianidis 2006). Nevertheless, the quality of human capital is a significant factor in determining the process of the polarisation of space (Havlíček 2009). This and other “soft” factors, which are primarily socio-cultural in nature are seen as potential instruments in activating the endogenous development potential of regional/local communities (Hampl 2003). These factors gain in importance under the conditions of limited development potential in peripheral regions (Hampl, Dostál, Drbohlav 2007). Their impact is, however, very selective and their role should not be overestimated (Belgeusdijk, van Schaik 2005; Hadjimichalis 2006). Regional and local development can be influenced by other, more stable characteristics (e.g. population and geographical position – Perlín, Kučerová, Kučera 2010).

In accordance with the aim of this paper, the first two thematic sections focused on an analysis of the “personal” characteristics of representatives of municipal self-government bodies or rather on an evaluation of their work and mutual cooperation. In terms of the selected characteristics of human capital, the model territory exhibited relatively positive values (level of education attained; length of time in office; for mayors, the manner in which they fulfil their duties and their willingness to candidate in the upcoming communal elections) and relatively high degree of cohesion (whether among the various municipalities or between the mayors of specific municipalities and the council members of the same municipalities). In terms of the evaluation of the work and mutual cooperation of representatives of municipal self-government bodies, the model territory again showed relatively positive values (activity level, nature of professional and interpersonal relationships), but with relatively lower degree of cohesion (particularly in the case of evaluating the work of a mayor or of council members – see table 3). Results attained seem to be relatively positive within the first two thematic sections, nevertheless, two arising questions matter. On the one hand, there is a problem with the representativeness of results because of small sample of respondents, on the other hand the second problem rests upon the imbalance of the sample of respondents (answers from two largest municipalities in the model

territory accounted for 47.5% of all returned questionnaires). Therefore, it is necessary to “keep in mind” these problems, perceive the results “sensitively” and, at the same time, rather critically.

If we were to return to Jančák's (2001) thesis, as mentioned in the introduction, the findings of the empirical field research clearly demonstrate that the mayors rank among key personalities within the model territory. Nonetheless, additional, related studies among other stakeholders from entrepreneurial and non-profit sectors could result in the actual verification of this thesis. Vajdová (2008), for example, has confirmed that the representatives of public sector are clearly the engine of local development of Association of Municipalities Orlicko located in eastern part of Bohemia. The nature of local development of municipalities and the degree of their peripherality partially depends on the individual character traits, abilities, experience or selected strategies for taking action of mayors of the model territory of Volarsko. In this sense, we can positively assess the work of mayors in Stožec, Volary and Zbytín, who were shown to carry out their mayoral duties at a “maximum” level (i.e. all their time – this is related to the type of mayoral office (“released vs. unreleased”), great enthusiasm for work, interest in and efforts expended to resolve problems). In contrast, the work of mayors in Křišťanov, Lenora, Nová Pec and Želnavá can be assessed only less favourably. In the case of the two smallest municipalities (Křišťanov and Želnavá), this is due in part to the type of mayoral office, but also, for example, by an expressed desire or efforts taken by the mayors to amalgamate theirs with other municipalities. The negative assessment of Lenora's mayor arises in part from the presumptuous conviction that his relatively advanced age in combination with a certain distaste on his part for fulfilling his mayoral duties could, in a sense, slow the development of the municipality. The mayor of Nová Pec was faced with a difficult starting position, as he was already the fourth mayor to serve during one term of election.

Further, the article partly seeks to contribute to discussion concerning the drafting of regional development policies in Czechia's problematic regions. In terms of the subjective opinions of the mayors and council members concerning central development problems of the model territory, a high degree of compliance was shown to exist among their answers. Both “groups” identified a lack of financial resources for pursuing the priorities of the municipal authority and the general lack of jobs as the two most serious problems. Similar to Chromý and Skála (2010), who analyze selected cultural-geographical aspects of development in a similar territory, it became clear that the model territory exhibits, from a subjective perspective, the attributes of an economic periphery, while in fact actual objective data (e.g. trends concerning the unemployment rate) can be rather assessed positively (see table 2). In addition, the mayors recognised a serious problem in the presence of Šumava National Park and Protected Landscape Area on the territory of their municipalities. This can be

understood as a conflict between the significance of nature and landscape conservation efforts on the one hand and the functional (commercial) utilisation of landscape as a potential form of territorial development on the other. The mayors also saw the lack of available dwellings and sites for new construction as a significant problem. In contrast, the council members rated the condition of local roadways (including those beyond the built-up area) and the dissolution or transformation of an agricultural enterprise or another enterprise within the municipality as very serious problems. Generally, however, it can be affirmed that the high degree of compliance among answers is a very positive result. The representatives of municipal self-government bodies, independent of each other, confirmed the existence of a certain degree of common “thinking” concerning the model territory as a whole, which could definitely be a contributing factor in its future development. However, it would be very helpful to know the views of residents and other stakeholders (e.g. representatives of entrepreneurial and non-profit sector, representatives of Šumava National Park and Protected Landscape Area).

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RÉSUMÉ

Role lidského kapitálu představitelů obecních samospráv v rozvoji příhraničních periferií Česka: příklad Volarska

Příspěvek si klád za cíl zhodnotit potenciál lokálního rozvoje periferního příhraničního modelového území Volarska

na základě analýzy vybraných charakteristik úrovně a kvality lidského kapitálu představitelů obecních samospráv a také identifikovat hlavní problémy rozvoje tohoto modelového území. První dva tematické okruhy byly zaměřeny na analýzu „personální“ vybavenosti představitelů obecních samospráv, resp. hodnocení jejich práce a vzájemné spolupráce. Ukázalo se, že z pohledu vybraných charakteristik lidského kapitálu vykazovalo modelové území jako celek spíše pozitivní hodnoty (úroveň dosaženého vzdělání, doba výkonu funkce, v případě starostů způsob výkonu funkce a ochota kandidovat v následujících komunálních volbách) a nižší „míru diferenciací“ (jednak mezi jednotlivými obcemi, jednak mezi starosty konkrétních obcí a zastupiteli těchto obcí). Z hlediska hodnocení práce a spolupráce představitelů obecních samospráv vykazovalo modelové území jako celek rovněž spíše pozitivní hodnoty (míra aktivity, charakter pracovních a mezilidských vztahů), avšak vyšší „míru diferenciací“ (zejména v případě posuzování práce starosty a zastupitelů). Z provedeného terénního empirického šetření jednoznačně vyplývá, že starostové patří mezi klíčové osobnosti modelového území. Na jejich individuálních vlastnostech, schopnostech, zkušenostech, či zvolených strategiích chování částečně závisí charakter lokálního rozvoje obcí a míra jejich perifernosti. V tomto smyslu lze pozitivně hodnotit práci starostů Stožce, Volar a Zbytin, u kterých se ukázalo, že své funkci věnují „maximum“ (tzn. veškerý čas – souvisí se způsobem výkonu funkce, velké zaujetí pro práci, zájem a úsilí řešit problémy). Naopak negativně lze hodnotit práci starostů Křišťanova, Lenory, Nové Pece a Želnavy. V otázce subjektivních názorů starostů a zastupitelů na hlavní rozvojové problémy došlo k velké míře shody jejich odpovědí. Obě „skupiny“ identifikovaly nedostatek finančních prostředků na prosazení priorit obecního úřadu a nedostatek pracovních příležitostí jako dva nejzávažnější problémy modelového území. Ve shodě s Chromým a Skálou (2010), kteří analyzovali vybrané kulturněgeografické aspekty rozvoje v typově shodném území, se ukázalo, že modelové území vykazuje, ze subjektivního pohledu, atributy ekonomické periferie, i když aktuální, objektivní, čísla např. o vývoji míry nezaměstnanosti lze hodnotit spíše kladně. Starostové obcí dále velmi silně vnímali opodstatněný problém v podobě zasahování hranic Národního parku či Chráněné krajinné oblasti Šumava na území obce. V tomto směru lze hovořit o konfliktu mezi významem ochrany přírody a krajiny na jedné straně a funkčním (komerčním) využitím krajiny jako potenciálu možného rozvoje území na straně druhé. Starostové dále viděli velký problém v nedostatku volných bytů a parcel pro novou výstavbu. Naopak zastupitelé zařadili mezi nejzávažnější problémy stav místních komunikací (i mimo zastavěné území) a rozpad či transformaci zemědělského podniku či jiného podniku v obci. Celkově lze však konstatovat, že poměrně velká míra shody odpovědí je velkým pozitivem. Představitelé obecních samospráv, nezávisle na sobě, potvrdili existenci jakéhosi společného „smýšlení“ o modelovém území jako celku, což by mohlo být pro jeho rozvoj do budoucna rozhodně přínosem.

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