## Outmigration intentions of secondary school students from a rural micro-region in the Czech inner periphery: a case study of the Bystřice nad Pernštejnem area in the Vysočina Region

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes push and pull factors of eventual secondary school student's outmigration from the micro-region of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem in the Czech inner periphery in the light of presupposed depopulation trends and manifestations of peripherality and marginality. The outmigration affects primarily the micro-region's centre while small rural settlements as a whole exhibit a population growth. The lack of prestigious and well-paid jobs and limited cultural activities, entertainment, and sports appear to be the main push migration factors. Possible solutions to this situation are limited and should include efforts to strengthen the relationship of the local population to the territory, to maintain the good quality of the environment, and to enhance the feeling of personal safety. It is argued that similar motivations can be expected in the majority of Czech peripheral micro-regions.

### **KEYWORDS**

depopulation; push factors; inner periphery; Bystrice nad Pernštejnem

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The contemporary migration and urban processes in the Czech countryside are far from being of a one-way character. We meet with suburbanization, deurbanization, naturbanization, and in the opposite direction with urbanization, re-urbanization, and gentrification. The processes are often in opposite directions when young and skilled persons leave for towns while seniors move (return) back to rural areas after having ended their economic activities. These migration movements influence both the age and social population structure and the natural change of population. As Štěpánková and Drbohlav (2014) show, preferences of rural residence increase with the age of the people and decrease with the education level.

The countryside is apparently not coherent in terms of migration. In the surroundings of cities and medium-sized towns, one can see suburbanization trends. On the other side, peripheries seem to be threatened by depopulation. Nevertheless, conclusive for migration are also individual characteristics of rural settlements such as their size (population number), which determines the size of the local market and hence equipment with services, natural conditions (including recreation possibilities) or specific characteristics such as sites vacant for building, the responsiveness of local authorities etc.

The micro-region of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem in the district of Žďár nad Sázavou on the borderline of regions Vysočina, South Moravia (Jihomoravský) and Pardubice (Pardubický) is one of the specific rural areas. The area is situated in an inner periphery due to remoteness from regional centres, rugged relief and recently also due to inappropriate administrative arrangement since the area of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem, which always fell into the catchment area of Brno, is now a part of the Vysočina Region, the centre of which can be reached only with difficulties. The weak ties of the Bystřice nad Pernšteinem micro-region with the administrative region were brought to attention by Kraft and Blažek (2012). Hynek et al. (2005) consider this territory alternatively for a part of semi-periphery, which has developed on the original Bohemian-Moravian border and on the borderline of three administrative Regions.

Furthermore, the peripheral location of the studied area is complicated by consequences of the recent past with the mining of uranium for which workers were moving into the micro-region with a totally different psychology from the psychology of the original population. The newly emerging population was a mixture of initial residents with their identity and traditions and the newcomers. However, we can deduce that the migration wave affected primarily the town of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem itself, possibly some other larger villages especially within the space of mines (Vaishar et al. 2002). It is generally presupposed that the rural-to-urban migration is caused by insufficient jobs in the countryside. However, statistical data do not confirm it. The unemployment is in fact usually accompanied with structural problems in the economy, it means with industrial and thus mainly urban regions.

During the decline of mining in the Bystřice micro-region, which is still ongoing, hundreds of workers gradually lose their jobs. A specific issue in the micro-region is among other things that employees of DIAMO Dolní Rožínka (the mining company) used to have above-standard salaries given as a rule not by their high qualifications but rather by hard and dangerous work. Alternative jobs often calling for requalification cannot compensate for the original income of the former miners.

Thus, it happened that the micro-region cumulates drawbacks of the periphery with the problems of the structural reconstruction of its economy. On the other hand, the micro-region of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem can boast about the valuable landscape (with the exception of the space directly impacted by consequences of mining), which has been preserved exactly thanks to its remoteness.

It seems that mainly young and educated people leave the countryside. The question sounds what pull and push factors impact on the outmigration or rural youth. We try to explain the situation on the example of a micro-region which is both distanced from regional centres and affected with structural changes.

This paper aims at establishing residential preferences (interest to outmigrate or to stay) of young inhabitants in the micro-region of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem and discussing possible generalization for other rural micro-regions.

## 2. Migration and peripheral micro-regions

There is a general opinion that peripheral rural micro-regions are threatened by depopulation and aging. The trends are attributed primarily to the lack of available work opportunities in the micro-region, and secondarily to the lack of available cultural and social activities. It seems however that the mentioned outmigration is selective. The peripheral rural area is left mainly by young and educated people who miss skilled jobs as well as social and cultural contacts most (Venhorst et al. 2010). On the other hand, the senior part of the population stays because jobs are no more decisive for them and social activities are seen rather in the maintenance of traditional neighbourly relations. It may even happen that the post-productive population moves (back) into the rural micro-regions for (perhaps only seemingly) the high-quality environment and cheaper and easier living. Seniors are not so much dependent on available jobs and culture but rather on services provided for them including medical, rehabilitation services etc. Depopulation and aging bring undoubtedly consequences for changes in the social environment and life quality (Špačková et al. 2011; Palát 2011).

Thus, one has often to do with counter motivations and trends, which somewhat stabilize the periphery population in terms of its numbers but may worsen its age structure. Immigration from rural areas may be replaced by the negative development of natural movement (e.g. Pinilla et al. 2008). Here, one should consider also the fact that higher age categories are represented mainly by their female component, which may move into the forefront also the gender issue.

Depopulation is sometimes taken for a typical feature of rural areas in many European countries. Karcagi Kováts and Katona Kovács (2012) mention particularly territories of the former GDR (e.g. Beetz et al. 2008), Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, three Baltic countries, northern Sweden and eastern Finland. In Czechia, the issue is more complicated because the rural population has been slowly but steadily growing since the 1991 census both in absolute and relative figures, this growth nevertheless concerning only about two-thirds of rural municipalities. By contrast, some rural settlements on the periphery suffer from depopulation. An interaction occurs of decentralization and centralization migrations, which may seem to be chaotic (Šimon 2011). If human and social capital is decisive for the development of peripheral areas (see Jančák et al. 2000) the migration trends can play an important role in the future.

The issue of peripheral or marginal regions is broadly discussed in the Czech and foreign literature (e.g. Havlíček et al. 2005; Pileček, Jančák 2011). The general consensus about the definition of this term does not exist (Ferrão, Lopes 2004). The logic of these terms implies that the regions in question are "on the edge". The differences follow out from the interpretation of this edge. Some authors incline to perceive the marginality in the literal sense and take peripheral areas as areas geographically remote, more distant and difficult to access. The indicator of peripherality is distance (in kilometers, time, financial expenses) from important centres. Other experts rather tend to a figurative meaning of marginality and consider as peripheral or marginal the regions that are on the outskirts of attention, interest, progress and the like. Indicators of peripherality are for them, for example, a worse educational structure, a higher unemployment in manufacturing industries, lower population density, depopulation trends etc. Yet other authors discern the terms peripherality and marginality and seem to identify peripherality rather with remoteness while marginality is identified rather with backwardness. The situation is even more complicated by the fact that remoteness in space and backwardness often go hand in hand and cannot be simply differentiated. One of the specific terms used in Czech geography is inner periphery (Musil, Müller 2008) in contrast to borderland periphery where the geographical

location is further complicated by consequences of after-war ethnic population exchange.

In our paper, we build on the spatial concept of peripherality as an area on the borderline of spheres of influence of important regional centres in effort to determine the extent to which depopulation trends show in these regions as one of the most palpable manifestation of marginality in the sense of backwardness and/or absence of development impulses.

Recently, an idea emerged in connection with international migration whether the problem of depopulating rural areas could not be resolved by channeling foreign migrants into peripheral micro-regions. It appears however that the foreign migrants head for developing rural regions with prospective tourism while peripheries are not interesting for them (Solana-Solana 2010: Bavona-i-Carasco, Gil-Alonso 2013). Nevertheless, countryside marginalization in the sense of downscaling of intensive agriculture can be perceived positively too as it led to the enhancement of the environment (Pinto Correia, Brenan 2008). In this context manifests the amenity migration, which changes the traditional view of reasons for migration. While jobs generate immigration in the typical concept, in the case of amenity migration, immigrants generate jobs (Golding, Curtis 2013).

Migration is being influenced and by itself influences the process, which is typical in the contemporary European conditions not only for the rural periphery but also for the countryside of developed countries (Fischer 2014). This is why not only the absolute numbers of migrants should be monitored but also the age structure of population developing through the migration. Part of migration to rural areas may be represented by the reverse migration of people (Jauhiainen 2009; Farrell et al. 2012) returning to their home regions from towns or other regions after having ended their economic activity.

Studying migration streams in rural regions we have to take into account subjective residential preferences expressed by inhabitants in the sociological research, and objective decisions given by real possibilities to move and the will to make such a decision (Niedomysl, Amcoff 2010).

## 3. Material and methods

The area of our interest is defined as an administrative district of the municipality with extended powers Bystřice nad Pernštejnem. The territory is situated in the northeast corner of the district Žďár nad Sázavou and at the same time in the north-east corner of Vysočina Region (Fig. 1). As to geomorphology, the micro-region is located in the Svratecká hornatina Hilly Land, which is the most rugged part of the Bohemian-Moravian Upland. The population density is 58 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. Unless otherwise stated, the following figures are taken from the Czech Statistical Office.



**Fig. 1** Geographical position of the Bytřice nad Pernštejnem micro-region. The background of the map expresses the net-migration in the 5-years period of 2012–2016. Source: Czech Statiostical Office Prgue, own elaboration

The micro-region consists of one small town Bystřice nad Pernštejnem and 90 rural settlements concentrated in 39 municipalities. Apart from Bystřice n. P., the residential structure is characterized by the dominance of small and very small villages situated not far from one another. The most frequently occurring settlement type has less than 50 inhabitants (28 cases). The number of villages with 51-100 and 101–200 inhabitants is 22 and 24, respectively, which means that 74 rural settlements (81%) fall into the category of very small villages. The number of small rural settlements (201-500 inhabitants) amounts to 10 and the number of medium-sized villages (501-1000 inhabitants) is only 7. Rural settlements of this size can apparently have only the basic social infrastructure and are usually referred to Bystřice nad Pernštejnem (whose urban core has 7 thousand inhabitants) in meeting their needs. None of the rural settlements of the micro-region reaches a thousand of inhabitants.

The outmigration has been investigated by both quantitative and qualitative methods. The statistical data were used for an analysis of realistic population development in the micro-region. Because of very different characteristics of the central town and surrounded villages, the situation of Bystřice was analysed separately from rural settlements. In order to evaluate the demographic situation, the micro-region has been compared with other (less peripheral) micro-regions of the district Žďár nad Sázavou.

Mostly data from the population balances (Czech Statistical Office Prague) were used. Because one year seems to be too short period for an analysis of rural areas with a small number of inhabitants, the 5-year period 2011–2015 was taken into account.

In order to look for possible causes and consequences of migration following data were used: the demographic, economic, and educational structure of population (both based on the 2011 population census), the unemployment (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic), the transport conditions (in relation to the accessibility of the micro-region).

The motivation has been investigated with application of sociological methods, mainly the questionnaire. Similar approach was used by Thissen et al. (2010) for peripheral areas in Belgium and the Netherlands. In 2016, a questionnaire survey was organized whose respondents were students from the only two secondary schools in Bystřice n. P. – the grammar school, and the higher vocational agricultural school. We chose these respondents because they represent potential outmigrants in terms of their future perspectives and thus this category of respondents most responds to the aim of the paper. The survey was carried out electronically by means of the Czech software survio.cz. This questionnaire form usually does not have a great return but is most acceptable for the given group of young respondents. The target group was addressed more or less totally. It is possible that some pupils from the micro-region study on some special secondary schools in other localities but there can be individuals only.

## 4. Bystřice nad Pernštejnem microregion, migration and related problems

Residential structure consisting of small and very small rural settlements in a peripheral position theoretically suggests a risk of depopulation trends. However, what is the fact? In 2011-2015, the micro-region actually lost 429 residents, i.e. 21.4‰ from its total population of about 20 thousand residents. This depopulation was nearly equally shared by natural and migration population loss. However, we get an interesting view if we separate Bystřice nad Pernštejnem from its rural hinterland. As the only town in the micro-region, Bystrice nad Pernštejnem exhibits significant population loss both natural and via migration. In the studied period, it lost 16 residents based on the balance of natural movement and 306 residents due to migration. The rural hinterland - although exhibiting a natural loss too – shows a very slight population growth due to migration (67 persons). Thus, it appears that while the micro-region's centre is losing inhabitants, its rural hinterland has recently the migration balance equable at least. There are logical differences among individual municipalities, some showing a population growth via migration, other a loss and some have the balance equable. However, the relatively high natural population loss suggests that people of productive age apparently do not move into the micro-region's rural settlements. Thus, we can deduce that the trend is not suburbanization but rather deurbanization or even naturbanization.



Fig. 2 Population increase of individual microregions of the Žďár nad Sázavou district in the period 2011–2015. Source: Czech Statistical Office

As to the town of Bystřice n. P. itself, one can deduce based on analogy with other post-mining regions, that the population loss is contributed not only by the peripheral location but also by the structural problems of economy related to the end of mining. In the studied period, there were 157 new apartments completed in the micro-region, of which 45 in Bystřice nad Pernštejnem and 112 in rural municipalities.

How does the population structure look like? In the micro-region, there are 17.5% of seniors (aged 65 years and older), which copies nearly precisely the national average, and 14.1% of children (up to 15 years). Thus, the ratio of junior/seniors is 0.81, and after detracting the town of Bystřice n. P. it is only 0.78. The value of this indicator for the district of Žďár nad Sázavou amounts to 0.94. This clearly shows that the population of the Bystřice n. P. micro-region is older. However, the fact does not apply for all settlement even here. With the population in the micro-region heading towards senior age, the local policy should be adapted to the fact. It appears that attention should be given not only to the creation of new jobs but also to the assurance of social services, especially those for senior people.

The unemployment rate is often mentioned as a motive for emigration. In June 2017, the indicator reached 5.2% and was actually the highest one among catchment areas of authorized municipal offices in the district of Žďár nad Sázavou. As at the same date, the rate of unemployment in the district amounted to 4.1% while the national average was 4.0%. At that, in Bystrice nad Pernštejnem itself, the rate of unemployment was higher and reached 6.0% (Source of unemployment rates: Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic). This once again points to structural problems and also to the fact that Bystrice n. P. fulfills the role of a centre of work opportunities for its micro-region only to a certain extent, although the highest number of jobs (3055) concentrates exactly in this town. Another centre of work opportunities is the seat of gradually downscaling uranium mines Dolní Rožínka (1087 jobs) and Štěpánov nad Svratkou with ironworks (241 jobs). In small villages of the micro-region, there are however further 1676 occupied jobs (2014). In the micro-region, we can find 3310 entrepreneurs – natural persons of whom 1795 (of them 236 in agriculture) reported some activity in 2015. The 2011 census recorded 376 working old age pensioners.

In 2011, the below-average 46.3% of economically active residents were employed in services. The relatively most significant productive sectors of the economy in the micro-region were industry and construction (45.3% of economically active persons). Markedly increased was also employment in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries (8.3%). In 2011, inhabitants over 15 years of age had basic education including uncompleted school (20.6%), and 40.8% completed an apprenticeship. The shares of inhabitants in these two

education groups is by 10 percentage points higher than the national average, the educational structure being typical of manufacturing regions. On the other hand, only 27.3% of persons completed the secondary school leaving examination, which is by 2.3 percentage points less than the national average. The highest deficit shows the share of persons with the university education (8.2%) as compared with the national average of 12.5%.

The most important transport communication in the micro-region is the 1st class State Road No. 19, which however does not connect the micro-region with any regional centre of importance. Its significance culminated before World War II when it represented a traffic line connecting the west and the east of the country outside the immediate reach of the expected enemy. Its current importance is much lower. The road at the Bystřice nad Pernštejnem is passed by approx. 4700 vehicles per 24 hours (2016 -Headquarters of the roads and highways of the CR). The connection with important centres is provided by 2nd class roads with corresponding directional and height parameters and problematic maintenance in the winter period. A drive to the nearest regional centre of Brno takes 60 minutes and the fact is often considered the main obstacle to the development of the micro-region.

The railway track from Tišnov to Žďár nad Sázavou, which passes through the Bystřice n. P. micro-region, was put into operation in 1905 as a slow-operation regional track. It was rather important in the past, especially in connection with the mining of uranium ores. Today's function of the railway is rather recreational. In 2015, Bystřice nad Pernštejnem joined the Integrated Transport System of the (neighbouring) South-Moravian (Jihomoravský) Region by means of the above-mentioned railway track and one regional bus line, which in fact represents urban public transport in Bystřice nad Pernštejnem. This resolves the connection of the micro-region's centre in terms of frequency and continuity of connections but not in terms of time availability. The Vysočina Region does not have such a system. Regarding the structure of settlements (a large amount of small communities, non-existence of a clearly leading centre), its construction is far from being realistic. A journey by public transport to Brno takes 100-130 minutes.

Another important factor of the situation is the relation between the town of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem as a centre of the micro-region and rural settlements in its hinterland, of which none has even a thousand of residents. Based on the found data, Bystřice nad Pernštejnem does not act as a centre of development but rather as a centre of the recession in its micro-region. The fact can be attributed both to the structural problems of the town, following out from the downscaling of uranium mining, and probably also to general deurbanization trends of today's Czechia.

# 5. Relation of young residents to their native micro-region

As stated above, the micro-region of Bystrice nad Pernštejnem exhibits both the features of remoteness (distance from regional centres, difficult traffic access) as well as the features of backwardness (unfavourable educational structure, predominant share of manufacturing industries in the employment structure, slightly increased rate of unemployment). Nevertheless, one cannot say that the territory as a whole is threatened by depopulation. On the contrary, the balance of migration movements is positive in the rural municipalities of the micro-region as a whole. It should be pointed out however that the statistics of population balances dwell on a so-called permanent residence, which may often differ from the habitual residence. This is why we considered useful to proceed to the qualitative research by using sociological methods.



Fig. 3 Interest of respondents to move to a larger town. Source: own research

Within the questionnaire survey, altogether 92 responses were received. They indicate that about twofifths of students do not wish to emigrate to a city or a medium-sized town while nearly 47% of students have the intention to outmigrate – permanently or temporarily, and the rest of them do not know or do not think about it yet. Thus, the numbers of persons interested to leave and those planning to stay are more or less equable among the more educated young people in the Bystřice nad Pernštejnem micro-region.

In terms of pull factors (Fig. 3), the first position is occupied by expectations of more entertainment, culture, and sports in cities and medium-sized towns. This factor is followed by the expectation of better-paid jobs.

The main push factor ousting young and educated people from the micro-region (Fig. 4) is a lack of good jobs (for 4/5 of respondents). Missing entertainment and cultural events follow a large gap. The third significant reason for emigration is the effort to become independent on the family (too big social control in the milieu of very small rural settlements). In both cases, the respondents were allowed to mention more possibilities.



Fig. 4 Pull factors attracting respondents in cities and medium-sized towns.

Source: own research



Fig. 5 Push factors of migration. Source: own research

## 6. Discussion

Young and educated people in the micro-region of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem apparently have to consider whether to stay or to leave. It seems that many of them would prefer to stay if the native micro-region could provide conditions corresponding to their needs. A certain outmigration rate would definitely still exist because such factors as independence or the attraction of rich cultural and social life in a big town are irreplaceable. This outmigration could be compensated by the return or amenity migration, which could stabilize the population development in the micro-region following the solution of structural problems related to the downscaling of uranium mining.

The authorities in Bystřice nad Pernštejnem intensively attempt to increase the number of jobs especially by means of an industrial zone. A certain problem is however that most of the vacant jobs correspond to the current educational structure of micro-region's population with a relatively high share of persons with only the basic education (20.6%). Preliminary jobs in productive branches are offered. The micro-region still have the predominace of jobs in the productive branches (8.3% employed in the primary and 45.4% of persons employed in the secondary sector). This would not solve the requirements of young and educated people in the micro-region.

Another possibility to increase the number of jobs exists in the rapidly developing sector of tourism for which many attractivity exist in the micro-region (Vaishar et al. 2015). Nevertheless, not even this sector with low wages and the necessity to serve to the customers is too attractive for educated residents. The average salary in accommodation and gastronomy was 17,354 CZK in 2017, which was the lowest amount of all economic branches (the same amount for agriculture was 24,126 CZK and the national average reached 29,050 CZK). A certain possibility, although not too significant quantitatively, would be work from home (teleworking), which would make it possible to combine excellent natural conditions of micro-region with online work for companies residing in large towns, or establishment of such a company. It is however not to be expected that the Bystřice n. P. micro-region will be able to offer a corresponding number of prestigious and well-paid jobs to its young and educated residents in the near future. The share of people with the university education was 8.2% only (2011) which was deeply under the national average. It does not create very favourable conditions for the development of the teleworking.

It should be admitted that the micro-region and the town of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem in particular attempt at creating a range of cultural and sports opportunities for their inhabitants. The town has been for a longer time involved in the annually organized international musical festival Concentus Moraviae, bringing into the region classical music. The town builds sports facilities including a multi-purpose sports hall and a winter stadium. Although these facilities cannot compete with the cultural life in cities and medium-sized towns, they provide relatively good opportunities for cultural activities and enjoyment of the sport.

On the other hand, the appropriate strategy for maintaining the population in the micro-region of Bystřice n. P. consists in strengthening the currently strong point of particularly the rural parts, i.e. the relation of citizens to their place of residence. This can be reinforced by the good condition of the environment (with the exception of areas directly affected by mining) and by "soft" factors like the community life (Arnon, Shamai 2010) or the feel of relatively high personal security in the difficult political situation of these days. An attention should be paid to the development of services for seniors. The micro-region belongs to the rural areas with the highest share of seniors in the age of 65+ which amounts 20.2% (2016).

This to a certain extent also relates to the issue of a possible arrival of new immigrants, especially from Muslim areas. We assume that spontaneous migration flows will not be directed to this mainly rural micro-region as the migrants rather seek urban areas. Nevertheless, the refugees could be artificially settled exactly in these depopulation micro-regions. Although this could increase the population number, it would apparently bring a number of problems in relations and communication as well as worsened feeling of personal security, and the locals might react by increased outmigration.

One should also become used to the fact that people have more domiciles as indicated by nearly 30% of respondents who mentioned their interest to move to a larger town temporarily. Registering inhabitants according to the place of permanent residence, the current statistics do not make it possible for us to reveal these aspects (in spite of the fact that the last census in 2011 introduced the category of habitual residence, a question remains to ask how many persons indicated the fact by the truth). A possibility to live in the peripheral countryside in a certain season of the year and in a big town in another season may become an attractive alternative to the living style of certain population groups.

## 7. Conclusion

The paper analyzes the current situation of the micro-region Bystřice nad Pernštejnem from the perspective of depopulation trends as the case study. Residential preferences of young and educated people (potential emigrants) were identified. The intention to outmigrate was confirmed only partially. Decisive factors are as expected the amount and structure of job opportunities and possibilities for an enjoyment of culture and sports.

Conclusions of our study are as follows: Even the relatively remote and underdeveloped micro-region of the Czech Republic exhibits counter-urbanization trends that mean demographic growth of the countryside as a whole (with some exceptions of course) and weakening of the demographic role of towns. Local and regional roots of residents and their relationship to the area are relatively strong; nevertheless, they have to fight with the lack of suitable jobs, insufficient offer of cultural and social activities and enjoyment of sports.

It will be interesting to follow the further development of the situation namely with respect to general demographic changes, continuing the transition to the post-industrial (consumer) society, solution of problems with the downscaling of mining, international migration, technological changes (e.g. online work development) etc.

The validity of our findings for other Czech rural micro-regions is worth discussing. It is more and more clear that the Czech rural area does not contain only one countryside. Peri-urban and well accessible rural micro-regions in lowlands can have different characteristics of the migration development. On the other side, the interest of young educated generation in rich cultural life, prestigious and well-paid jobs seem to be general. Peripheral, hardly accessible micro-regions are usually not able to offer these advantages.

It is possible to presuppose that the findings from the Bystřice nad Pernštejnerm micro-region can be applied also for other peripheral micro-regions in Czechia (with certain precaution). However, it could be another task for next research.

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