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REGIONAL PROSPERITY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE PROSPECTS OF MARGINAL REGIONS

Regional prosperity is understood as a quality of a certain space. According to Hampl (1996), the prosperity of a region is given by the level of the socio-geographic system, which reflects the external organisation of a society, the organisation of a particular society within a certain environment. It is a complex system, which has a strong internal heterogeneity of a hierarchical type. This hierarchy is, indeed, primarily conditional upon the disproportion in the distribution of natural conditions, but, secondarily, it is strongly augmented by the activity of the society, an activity oriented toward creating more effective complex structures, making use of the advantages of concentration and agglomeration etc. The whole process of the dynamics of the functioning of a society can be schematically described by means of evaluating problems arranged in the following way: processes of creating differences — types of differences created — processes of the (partial) removing of differences.

In terms of creating or, eventually, deepening differences, the significance of two types of processes must be stressed. The first type is linked to the heterogeneity of the external environment of the society, thus to the geographical disproportion in natural conditions. The second type is conditional upon the predominantly cumulative orientation of the development itself. Therefore, it is brought to bear at the level of the differentiation among people. Thus, the co-acting of both types of processes and their synergical effect create great differences among people, social groups or spatial complexes.

In the Czech Republic, the development of the society has gone through three development stages: preindustrial–industrial–post-industrial. The study of spatial units, the evaluation of their development and the setting up of programmes and directions for the further development of regions must be based upon historical aspects which have created a certain quality and specificity of the territory involved. The development in the period between the end of World War Two and the 1990s was completely different from that in the surrounding “Western European” countries. The communist system of building up the society has resulted in great deformations in the socio-economic system.

Almost ten years of developing market economy in post-communist countries is a much more complicated process than originally expected even in less optimistic forecasts. The change in ownership's relations, privatisation, restitution, the establishment of a new political structure, the struggle for economic and political power, the

coping with the past, the overlapping of old and new structures and the negligence of regional policy have created conditions, which are very unfavourable to the development of marginal regions and activities needed to develop small and medium-sized businesses in these areas.

In terms of the developments currently going on in societies with advanced market economies, the primary focus is on shifting the central point (of growth) to the tertiary and, in particular, quaternary sectors. The role of information contacts is becoming more important, with the same being true of the activity of all those playing a role in these developments, the creativity in working processes, etc. In the external structure of the society, a relative reduction in concentration processes, a sharper polarisation of the centres of settlement, a general development of interlinkages within the pattern of settlement and the intensification of the spatial division of activities are taking place.

Maybe, also a transformation of competitive approaches by the society to the landscape is taking place gradually, this transformation leading to a true protection of nature and a true environment management.

Gradually, the quantitative growth is slowing down (growth of the number of population, their concentration, material production inputs etc.), and the importance of qualitative growth is increasing (more frequent contacts between people, the managing role of centres, growth of effectiveness, the exploitation of resources, the improvement of organisational structures etc.). On aggregate, this transformation can be thought of as a transition from the extensive form of development to the intensive form. The intensifying tendencies can be considered to be the core of a broadly understood transformation process that has taken place in modern societies in the past few decades.

In terms of the development of the geographical organisation of the society (in advanced countries), the traditional processes of urbanisation and concentration, the growth of cities and towns etc. are slowly approaching their completion. In regions, the development of these processes is connected with a number of irregularities and conflicting tendencies that bring about different opinions. Gradually, the growth of cities and towns is being replaced by the growth of their impacts on wider systems, and the size hierarchy of nodes is being replaced by the qualitative hierarchy, or by a hierarchy combining both aspects respectively.

How can we address the issues of the prosperity of marginal regions? How to help socially weaker groups of population or declining regions? The industrial and post-industrial developments of the society have shaped the basic functionality of the area concerned. The basic pattern of settlement and the basic linkages have formed, the production activities have found their locations in the individual regions. In terms of the Czech Republic, the process of a "natural European development" of regions has been interrupted by the building up of socialism in the spirit of political economy. In a way, political decisions made it possible for backward regions to qualify for being subsidised by the Government, some areas had a special regime of management, all was average, etc.

At present, the focus should be on replacing the simple policy of subsidies by a policy of incentives making use of more complicated economic and political stimuli to activate the internal potential of areas lagging behind. However, encouraging regions to take advantage of their potential is, under current conditions, a great problem. In solving problems faced by marginal areas, it is necessary to take into account the opposite poles of social justice and economic efficiency. Given the current developments in the society, both of these two aspects are very problematic. An undue egalitarian policy will always lead to supporting the weak rather than the active. In so doing, it may be difficult, in many cases, to distinguish them from the incapable, which gives rise to threats that may result in the "mortification" of the whole system.



Agricultural landscape of the valley of Nyklovický potok brook in the Kunštát region (photo M. Hrádek).

The creation of a hierarchical organisation of the pattern of settlement and the following division of functions as well, the differing attraction of residential locations etc., they all testify to the existence of certain natural laws. To cognise the reality of the social and regional development is very difficult. Similarly, it is also difficult to make full use of the cognition of this reality given the reaction of the vital players themselves. These players, going by their interests, accept or refuse specialised studies, be it deliberately or unintentionally.

The insufficient interconnection between cognition and decision making is a long-term problem. The less we know, the easier we make decisions. From which side must we tackle the problem of analytical science and synthetical policy? Within the decision-making process, there is no solution that would give preferential treatment to everything and everybody!

These notes alone allow to conclude that it is necessary to develop synthetic scientific cognition. The way leading to it, and the way of implementing the whole cognition process in a quality required and in the balance of input information needed are very important. Alone the estimation of the rate of detail needed for the scope of the system requires that experts making up the design team entrusted with this task be very skilled. Similarly, it is very demanding to transform a synthesis of all knowledge into a form usable for the decisionmaking process. Proposals for addressing the reality in several ways, be they ever so good, require, in terms of their implementation, a certain level of quality of the decision-making process. Only if all those interested in these issues have the same level of knowledge, an effective regional policy for the territory of the particular country can be conceived.

The examined marginal regions of Horní Podyjí, White Carpathians and Kunštát are characterised by a good quality of the environment. They are situated outside the impacts of major industrial and urban agglomerations, which represent the major sources of environmental pollution in the Czech Republic. After 1990, the figures for the quality of the environment began to improve. The focus of this contribution is not on seeking for, and commenting on, the causes leading to improving the values showing the quality of soil, water, air, waste, noise and the whole social environment (change of technologies, decline in economic activities etc.). To remove and rectify long-lasting loads in the most affected areas is a process that will take dozens of years and require considerable financial means. Therefore, one of the greatest advantages of the regions examined in our study is a good quality of the environment.

The territory of the regions of Horní Podyjí and White Carpathians can be included into the category of "external" peripheries, the territory of the region of Kunštát can be characterised as an "internal" periphery. The historical developments in the Czech Republic, the establishment of the pattern of settlement, the development stages of the society and the natural conditions played a crucial role in the process of the dynamics of the functioning of the society.

The region of Horní Podyjí was clearly more viable in the past. The establishment of the borderland zone and the erection of the "Iron Curtain" (compulsory transfer of residents from the borderland area and the introduction of a special regime of landscape management) resulted in destroying not only of what man has created there, but, first of all, in bringing natural activities of people to a halt. What was the priority in this area throughout decades? The protection of the border! The removal of barbed wires has not solved the problem of the isolation of this area. This was only the first step. Rectifying ownership rights in this area will be much more complicated. Ownership rights and changes in them give rise to a wide variety of speculations.

Problematic legal norms and “black spots” in them have launched complicated processes whose implications are catastrophic particularly in marginal areas. The closing down of one industrial plant (even if it is a small one) may result in a decay affecting a considerably large area (unemployment etc.). Under communism, the viability of these areas was provided by state-owned farms, state-owned and co-operative companies and Government subsidies. Management of companies that had been privatised benefited a great deal from this privatisation (not all forms and cases of privatisation have been absolutely “clean”).

Over decades, the shaping of human potential has been carried out in the “employee’s spirit”, i.d. the Government provided for people’s employment, housing and recreation. Changes in people’s way of thinking will need several generations to take place. In the “everything-is-allowed-now” period, the chances for decent people, as compared to those for the others, are very small. This can be observed in a wide range of social activities and developments. The curiosity to know what is happening on the other side of the border was a short-term issue. The current period is as yet characterised by making use of economic advantages, primarily by the inhabitants of the borderland zone.

After the division of Czechoslovakia, the area of the White Carpathians became a marginal area. The new border separating Czech and Slovak Republic is an open border as yet. This barrier caused first conflicts as early as it was being set. There were always specific conditions for life in this area, and no extraordinary natural prerequisites for the development of economic activities. Unlike the region of Horní Podyjí, the evolution of the process of the functioning of the society has not been completely altered here. Both of these regions have a protected nature area in their territory. Is it an advantage or a drawback for these areas? On the one hand, it signals a certain attraction of this area from the point of view of landscape, on the other hand it creates aspects limiting human activities. The landscape and the state of the environment of these regions are a good precondition for their functioning. The society must consider what it wants to be preserved for future generations, and what approach it will adopt to preserve natural values of the territory of the Czech Republic. Is it only the form of protected nature areas, national parks, protected locations, museums and open air museums?

More and more money is needed to finance all “remedial” interventions, but not all is solely an economic question. It is also a conceptual question, a question of regional policy, a question of a system approach and a question of knowing what in fact we want and how we want to achieve it. The question of real potentials contained in a certain type of landscape is very sensitive. Not all is a good or bad deal only, even a well-working market economy is not a panacea. It is just market economy that needs a qualified analysis and synthesis of a wide spectrum of knowledge about space and society to work well. To underestimate scientific cognition is a dim-sighted doing by bad politicians whose principal focus is on political power.

“People live everywhere”, they have a different style of life and different opinions

about the implementation of their own ideas. There will always be opposite poles, such as the rich and the poor, the entrepreneurs and the employees, those who are prosperous and those who go bankrupt, the successful and the unsuccessful, the decent and the others. Much is a question of the system of values in a particular period and the structure of society, but mainly a question of good sense. There will always be a discrepancy between personal and social ambitions. Where people do not know what decency is, even the most intricate legal system will not be of any help. Policy brings us (the society) more and more away from the search for more simple forms of addressing issues related to regional problems. In many cases, we know too much, but we do not know what to do with it. Hampl (1996) calls it "placing priority to the into-the-depth researches over the into-the-width researches" in cases necessary to tackle systems that are complex and large in scale.



Olešnice is in undulated landscape of hill territory of Kunštát region lying near 600 m a.s.l. high. Together with Kunštát na Moravě belong to the largest settlements of this region (photo M. Hrádek).

The entire development of the society, the historical forming of the pattern of settlement, the economic activities etc. clearly show that marginal areas will always exist. There will always be individuals or groups of people who will find a sense in living in them. However, this social group must be aware of the fact that their members' standard of living primarily depends on themselves, and that, in turn, the society can support their activity to an extent which would make it possible to

maintain a favourable quality of the environment in these regions. These areas are suitable for small and medium-sized businesses. Today, a number of programmes are available to support them. But, on the other hand, the conditions needed to support serious business have not been very stable so far.

In many cases, attention comparable to that paid to urbanised areas must be also given to marginal areas. However, this should not mean anyway that they would be subject to excessive urbanisation. Neither is such urbanisation desired by people who see or find the sense of their life in residing in these areas. In most cases, these areas are in the centre of interest of regional and supra-regional centres, which, in their way, exploit them (for recreation, water management etc.). Those responsible for these activities should be able to take advantage of these aspects to maintain the qualities necessary for these areas.

Literature

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