

Bojkovice: Transformation of a peripheral micro-region at the Czech-Slovak border

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Abstract. The paper analyses the problem of a rural region in the peripheral position. Bojkovice micro-region on the Czech (Moravian)-Slovak border has been chosen as a case study. Economic transformation of productive and non-productive branches, demographic development (depopulation and aging) and networking in the area were characterized by using statistical data and field research. Development, understood as improvement in quality of life and not in sense of quantitative growth, is highlighted with regard to the changing perception of the countryside. The question remains: how to use peripherality for prosperity? Peripheral countryside is known as “the right countryside” in comparison to suburbanized and globalized countryside in core regions. Based on the research, production embedded in local sources and traditions, ecological agriculture using the protection of landscape and soft tourism are proposed as solutions. Networking like the association of municipalities, LEADER local action group or White Carpathian Euroregion could be the instruments of micro-regional collaboration. The human and social factors seem to be more important than objective conditions. Long-term population stability is the main advantage. However, a lower level of formal education could be a problem. The character of social capital is considered as a decisive circumstance – whether it is passive social capital resistant to outer innovations or active social capital open for new ideas.

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1. Introduction

Central and East-European (CEE) regions have been currently passing through multifaceted transformations. The change from the centrally planned to market economy has opened the way to other directions of permanent transformations such as: from productive to post-productive and from (inter)national to global transformations. Also the geopolitical situation in central Europe has changed.

It is understandable that experts have paid attention mostly to general problems of this transformation and their manifestations on the national level and in metropolitan areas. However, the question is how the situation looks in the periphery, in particular the periphery which has changed its position from the geopolitical view? The Czech (Moravian)-Slovak borderland represents such a territory. It was a part of the bridge between western and eastern part of former Czechoslovakia and a part of the transitional line from the western border of the socialist part of Europe with its centre in Russia. After 1990, the situation has been reversed. The east-west direction is no longer important but the north-southern connection has gained in importance. The territory of the Moravian-Slovak borderland has become a barrier. The character of this barrier is emphasized by the mountain relief.

What role can such a territory play in the new situation? Is it possible to point out some historical events or to use new possibilities which are created by the development of the service sector and by the opening to the world? What kind of future can be expected? Can some development turn the peripheral position into an advantage?

According to Chromý and Skála (2010), the geographical position of the territory (especially its role in the settlement hierarchy and the West-East gradient) is the key factor for the existence of a periphery. Bojkovice and its surroundings were chosen as an example to illustrate the situation. The research was a part of a larger project directed to landscape ecological situation comparing two regions in the Czech Republic and Romania (Šťastná et al., 2015). This micro-region represents an “*end of the world*” from a certain point of view. It is distanced from regional centres, less accessible due to the dissected relief and situated in the borderland position. Although there are no border controls and almost no language barrier, the mountain represents both physical and also a historical barrier.

There are two main interrelated concepts: borderland and periphery. The number of geographical studies on border regions has increased over the last twenty years. They were triggered by the process of globalization and the European integration process. The following approaches can be identified: flow, cross-border cooperation, and people (van Houtum, 2000). Anderson and O’Dowd (1999) ask such questions as how and to what extent state borders and border regions are being re-made, re-negotiated and managed or mismanaged? Some authors speak about the “borderless world” – at least within the European Union (e.g. Paasi 2009). Great expectations are connected with border regions as territories of cross-border collaboration – especially in the post-communist countries (e.g. Johnson, 2009).

Many authors are focusing on the cross-border collaboration in this part of Europe. They deal with euroregions (Dolzblasz, 2013) and other EU sup-

ports and impacts (e.g. Marot, 2013), with collaboration based on landscape values and protection (Horváth and Csüllögh, 2013) or simply analyse cross-border flows (Bufon, 2013). Euroregions should form the bridge between countries (see Yoder, 2003) – especially before the access of the Eastern European countries in the EU. Some geographers speak about re-territorialization of the borderland (e.g. Popescu, 2008). Turnock (2002) considers euroregions to be a major element of the East-European regional policy.

The situation is not so easy, especially in Europe. Borders have often historically developed on the limits of zones of gravity of national (regional) centres. These limits are frequently formed by natural barriers: mountain ranges or big rivers. Such limits remain barriers also after reduction or disappearance of political limits. Cross-border collaboration across the mountain or a river does not function well. If we see the border as a psychological barrier, sometimes expressed in different language or culture, the problem of the borderland is worth of investigating. Consequently, if the border remains a barrier also within unified Europe, it probably indicates problems of peripherality and marginality.

Jeřábek (2006) classifies the territory under research as a new borderland, impacted with consequences of the Czechoslovak disintegration. However, such a statement is true just partially. The Moravian-Slovak border originated a thousand years ago and was discontinued in the periods 1918-1939 and 1944-1992. Halás (2006) discovered that the section of the Moravian-Slovak borderland under study is characterized with the lowest intensity of cross-border contacts (evidently due to the physical barrier and lack of important centres).

The peripheral micro-regions in the Czech Republic were delimited by Müller and Musil (2008) who introduced a set of 17 socio-economic indicators in combination with population development to delimit the so called inner periphery (although they evaluated the whole territory of the Czech Republic, including the borderland). The distance from regional centres is taken into account as a characteristic, not as an indicator, and the delimitation of regional centres is not discussed. The following indicators play the most important role: employment in agriculture, demographic development, population density, lower education structure, technical

infrastructure of flats and municipalities, share of foreigners, insufficient PC equipments, share of flats in detached houses and unemployment.

Marada et al. (2006) differentiate between economic and social periphery (with a special case of cultural periphery connected with ethnic minorities) and the environmental periphery (which often functions in the opposite way). They also speak about the inner and outer periphery. However, is the Moravian-Slovak borderland an inner or outer periphery? The problem consists in the fact that all other peripheries were impacted with the ethnically based population exchange after WWII whereas the population in the Slovak borderland kept its stability. For almost 50 years of Czechoslovakia the borderland developed as the inner borderland.

2. Post-socialist transformation: the methodological approach

What does the post-socialist transformation mean? According to the almost 25 year long experience, the transformation and its consequences can be seen on several levels. In the economic sense, the transformation means the change from centrally planned to market economy which was followed by extensive ownership changes - privatisation, restitutions, transformation of cooperatives, etc. – unfortunately under relatively non-transparent conditions. As a result, many economic entities in peripheral regions collapsed. On the other hand, a relatively wide network of small enterprises, often individuals or family firms was established.

The transformation in the field of agriculture was discussed by Blacksell (2010) who describes it as a process of changes from the production subsidies to the most broadly conceived sustainable rural strategy. The process has been illustrated by the accession of Central and Eastern European countries into the EU in 2004 and 2007 and the introduction of the rules of the Common Agricultural Policy. The author concludes that agriculture alone is not able to ensure the sustainability of the countryside.

As a consequence, the rural more and more differs from the agricultural. Although some non-agricultural activities combined with a relatively intensive commuting for work from villages to

towns existed before the transformation started, the process has intensified in the last 25 years. In contrast, the supply and frequency of public transport, – especially in peripheral micro-regions, has decreased rapidly. Two branches are considered as possible substitutes for agriculture and forestry in the countryside: tourism and energy production from renewable sources.

In the political sense, also the decision-making process was formally shifted from the centre to individuals, communes, and firms. The socialist system of levelling was changed into the system of purpose-oriented subsidies and grants. Of course, due to the lack of financial resources the new entities were hardly able to compete with the centre and big multinational firms. The LEADER approach was introduced as an instrument of rural development in post-communist countries (Kováč 2000).

Opening to the world was the third important transformation of the post-socialist countries. The processes which were hampered by the iron curtain and central planning burst forth. Globalization brought worldwide consumption habits and opened the space for global competition. However, Woods (2013) highlights the fact that different rural regions differently respond to globalization challenges. Contemporary urbanisation processes like suburbanization started to change residential preferences of people. The second demographic transition entered in full force. All these trends which had impacted the Western Europe for decades began to work at once and in mutual interaction.

The transformation started 25 years ago. It is more than the whole period of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918 – 1938). Is it still possible to talk about transforming countries? Shouldn't we talk about our regions as post-industrial rather than post-socialist? There is no doubt that some remainders of the former way of thinking, habits, relations have survived. Of course, it would be possible to discuss whether these remainders are consequences of the former socialist regime or manifestations of special Slavonic culture. However, it is believed that the Czech society exhibits more features of post-industrial consumer society. The other side of the coin is the termination of the excuses and applications for special attention because of post-socialist problems. We can speak rather about the final stage of the transformation.

How to describe and measure the transformation? In the economic sense, we can observe the fate of the most important firms, development of entrepreneurial activities and the present economic structure in agriculture, industry and services (with special focus on tourism). In the social sense, we can take into account demographic development, (un)employment, and educational structure. In the political sense, it could be for example election results, collaboration between communes and other subjects in the territory, etc.

All these indicators will be discussed from the perspective of peripherality. The transformation to the liberal capitalist society increased the differences not only among people but also among regions. For example, Heller (1998) points to differences in the perception of development between the centre and core regions on the one hand and peripheral rural areas on the other (in the case of Romania).

3. Geographical overview and historical development of the micro-region

The Bojkovice micro-region (Fig. 1) consists of the town, surrounding villages Bzová, Krhov, Přečkovice (which are administrative parts of the town) and self-government municipalities Hostětín, Komňa, Pitín, Rudice, Záhorovice, Žitková.

The micro-region is situated in the Zlínský kraj (region), Uherské Hradiště district (Fig. 2). The small town Bojkovice represents its centre. It is distanced 106 km from Brno, which is the closest big city, 39 km from Zlín, its own regional capital (but 33 km from Trenčín, the closest Slovak regional centre) and 33 km from the district town Uherské Hradiště. There are some other small towns in the vicinity: Slavičín - very similar in character (11 km), Luhačovice - the best known Moravian spa (15 km) and Uherský Brod with a wider range of services (15 km).

However, due to the dissected relief, the time distances are more important: Brno 94 minutes, Zlín 48 minutes, Trenčín 44 minutes, Uherské Hradiště 37 minutes, Uherský Brod 22 minutes, Luhačovice 20 minutes and Slavičín 16 minutes (the time distances were calculated on the basis of *mapy.cz* which is an issue of the *seznam.cz* server).



Fig. 1. The micro-region of Bojkovice. General situation

Source: <http://mapy.cz/> modified by J. Pokorná (2015)



Fig. 2. Geographical position of the micro-region under study

Source: <http://mapy.cz/> modified by J. Pokorná (2015)

It is evident that the time distances are substantially longer in the case of public transport. The existence of railway connection is generally an advantage, but it takes about 50 minutes to reach Uherské Hradiště by public transport, which makes daily commuting hardly possible. Accordingly, it follows that only small towns like Uherský Brod, Bojkovice, Slavičín and Luhačovice can form some job and basic service market for the inhabitants of the Bojkovice micro-region. This territory lacks a more significant centre. These factors are the main reasons of its peripherality.

The micro-region is situated on the foothills of the White Carpathian Mts. The location is reflected in the land use. Forests cover 42% of the land,

whereas agricultural soils 48%. The share of arable land in the total agricultural land is only 43%, whereas the share of grasslands is 53%. It results in a relatively advantageous coefficient of ecological stability, which reaches the value 2.18. The coefficient is calculated as the ratio of ecologically stable land (forests, grasslands, water, etc.) to ecologically less stable land (arable, gardens, orchards, built-up areas, others). The micro-region is situated in the catchment area of the Olšava river. A water reservoir (built in 1966) can be found about 2 km above the city on the Kolelač brook. It serves as a water tank for the water supply system of the Uherský Brod region. Any recreational use of the reservoir is excluded. A big part of

the micro-region is included into the Protected Landscape Area of the White Carpathian Mts., Carpathian meadows being the main protected attractions.

Since the fall of the Great Moravian Empire in the 10th century, the region has been situated on the border between two states: the Lands of the Czech Crown and Hungary. Although both the Czech Re-

public and Hungary were parts of the same empires for a long time (the Holy Empire of Rome, later the Austro-Hungarian Empire), they always had different political, legal, cultural systems. Additionally, the frontier was sometimes a war border. The border was fortified against the enemies (not only Hungarians but also Turks, Tatars, etc.). The worst situation occurred in the 17th century.



Photo 1. Bojkovice: The riverside of Olšava (2014)

Author: A. Vaishar (14 July 2014)

Bojkovice (Photo 1) obtained rights in 1449. As a centre of the Světlov manor, it gathered handicrafts (mostly drapers) and merchants and was a centre of forest production. At the beginning of the 19th century, some small industrial plants were established (iron works, food processing). Animal pruning was a special branch which was realized by the people from the micro-region in a big part of the monarchy and also abroad. Bojkovice had kept the agricultural – handicraft character till 1930s.

In relation to the requirements to defend the Republic against Nazi Germany in 1930, weapon factories were built at the Moravian-Slovak borderland which was less accessible to potential German bombing (it was one of the moments when peripherality played a positive role in development). An ammunition factory was built in Bojkovice and the town (and partly the whole micro-region) changed its character from agricultural to industrial. Bojkovice obtained town rights in 1965.

4. The course of the transformation: empirical findings

4.1. Productive base

Historically, the activities in primary economy were realized mostly by the Světlav (noble family) estate till 1914. For a short/brief time, it was owned by the Land Bank in Prague and was later divided within the land reform. A part of the land became communal forests. At present, the forests of the micro-region are mostly owned by the state enterprise Lesy České republiky, branch Luhačovice. This firm pursues professional activities also for other forest owners. Bojkovice, Pitín and Komňa municipalities also own forests which provide important income for their budgets. The private firm Ilex Bojkovice provides services for forestry.

After the 1st land reform (between the two world wars), individual farms operated in the territory. The collectivization took place in the second half of the 1950s. Agricultural cooperatives originated in individual villages. Later some concentration and linking took place. In the 1990s, the cooperatives were transformed. At the present time, four large agricultural firms exist in the micro-region: Zemědělská společnost Pitín, joint-stock company, Agrofiniš Bojkovice Ltd. and two cooperatives: Bzová-Krhov and Rudice-Přečkovice. They specialize in the cultivation of cereals, oil-seeds and cattle breeding.

Due to the fact that the conditions for intensive agricultural production are not very good, ecological agriculture received a chance (it is another moment when peripherality plays a positive role in rural development). Ecological agriculture is applied by the firm Agrofiniš Ltd. and Zemědělská společnost Pitín. Eight family farms can be found on the list of ecological farmers – mostly in the mountain part of the micro-region. The area of their farms varies between 3 and 18 ha. They grow fruits and vegetables and breed sheep and horses for entertainment. Some of them run agritourism. Alcohol burning (mostly from plums) and production of apple cider are one of the peculiarities of the micro-region.

ZEVETA ammunition factory had been transformed and adapted to the market conditions within the 1st privatization wave. It went bankrupt in 1995. Four new medium scale machinery enterprises have grown on the ruins of ZEVETA step by step.

Together with an engineering co-operative, they offer about 1,000 jobs in this industrial branch. It is only about a half of the original ZEVETA but in comparison with other weapon industries in the Moravian-Slovak borderland the situation is relatively good. Other industrial branches are marginal as some small wood-processing companies.

4.2. Other services and infrastructure

The structure of services reflects the population number and the position of Bojkovice in the settlement structure – that is, some basic urban services and shops in Bojkovice. A church secondary school specializing in social care and a house for seniors with 58 flats is the only specific phenomena in the area.

The villages have only the basic social infrastructure. Three of them have the 1st level of primary school. Other services, such Sportclub Niva in Pitín, can be mentioned. Services of higher level are provided in Uherský Brod town.

Along the Olšava river is the main transport corridor of the area. It is represented by the road of the 2nd order Nr. 495 and the so called Vlára railway originally connecting the regional metropolis Brno with the Váh valley in Slovakia. After the division of Czechoslovakia, the west-east directions lost their importance and most trains end their journeys in the Vlára after passing the borderline. Nevertheless, the rail connection represents an advantage for the micro-region. The traffic on the roads from Bojkovice is not extremely frequent: there are 3,757 vehicles per day on way to Uherský Brod passing, 2,096 vehicles per day to Slavičín and Valašské Klobouky, 1,420 vehicles per day to Luhačovice and 1,641 vehicles per day to Starý Hrozenkov and the Slovak border. The data about the road traffic are taken from the Road traffic census 2010 (Directorate of Roads and Motorways).

Settlements situated on the railway are satisfactorily connected with the closest centres by public transport (14 to 23 connections on working days). Other directions are served by the public bus transport. Only three bus connections per day from Bojkovice to the surrounding villages are insufficient – the direction to Luhačovice with 6 connections is an exception. Such a situation asks for daily use of private cars.

4.3. Tourism development

The micro-region offers different kinds of tourism – firstly focussing on families, students, seniors, secondly on cognitive tourism (mainly natural scientists) and thirdly on tourists preferring undulating relief, e.g. visitors from flat countries like the Netherlands or Denmark.

Nový Světlov chateau additionally provides also services for tourists. It was originally reconstructed as a hotel for tourists of higher income, mainly foreigners. However, due to the distance from the closest airport and absence of first-class services in the micro-region, the hotel went bankrupt. In contrast, Eurocamp Bojkovice, which is visited not only by domestic tourists but also by foreigners, flourishes – evidently due to the characteristic of the micro-region which better reflects the demands of such a type of tourism.

Additionally, let us mention two special examples: the first one is “Ecological village” Hostětín. This destination is visited by ecologists and people interested in the natural environment and an envi-

ronmentally friendly approach. The base of the ecological organization “Veronica” offers premises for workshops and seminars (Photo 2). It is an example of the activity which could be applied in many places and brings benefits from the fact that it was the first one where the idea was realized.

The commune Komňa is the second case. This village is the possible birthplace of Jan Ámos Komenský, the famous teacher, philosopher and writer, the last bishop of the Unity of the Brethren. The legacy of Komenský has been adopted by the Moravian College (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, found 1742) and the Moravian Church (825,000 believers worldwide). The memory of Komenský is utilized only partly and provides higher potential for tourism development.

The insufficient general infrastructure of the micro-region seems to be the problem. That is why tourism development should be directed to the customers who are reconciled with the local level of services and do not expect first-class facilities. These are groups of economical tourists or people who always carry all the necessary equipment with them.



Photo 2. The premises of the ecological NGO Veronica in Hostětín village (2014)

Author: A. Vaishar (14 July 2014)

4.4. Human factor

Long term population development is shown in figure 3. Permanent population had grown till 1960,

and was followed by concentration of inhabitants in the local centre followed. Finally, population decrease both in the town and its rural surroundings has occurred after 1990.

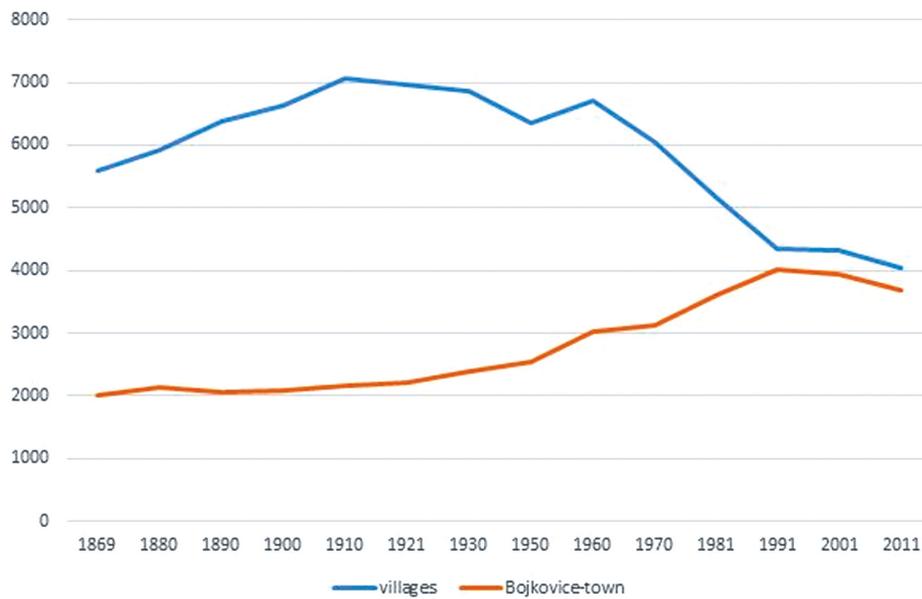


Fig. 3. Population development in the microregion during 1869 – 2011

Source: Historický lexikon obcí ČR. Praha: Czech Statistical Office (for the data 1869 – 2001) and Statistický lexikon obcí ČR. Praha: Czech Statistical Office (for the data 2011)

Analysing the situation in detail, a huge population decrease has been reached in the most peripheral settlements away from main roads (especially Žitková from 939 inhabitants in 1910 to 176 inhabitants in 2011).

Negative population balance (Database of demographic data for municipalities) of 22.9 ‰ in the last 5 years (2009–2013) is shown. The natural decrease is 8.3 ‰, whereas the migration decrease is 11.8 ‰. It is interesting that Bojkovice town shows a big negative migration net (-22.4 ‰) and a smaller negative natural balance (8.0 ‰), whereas rural communes have a relatively big natural population decrease (15.2 ‰), but they gain population by migration (0.2 ‰). It seems that counter-urbanization manifests itself also on the micro-regional level: the town loses population by migration whereas better situated villages gain or stagnate. Only Žitková in the most peripheral mountain position loses population both naturally and by migration (10.8 % in the last 5 years). The settlement is endangered by depopulation which could probably be manifested by a change of permanent houses to second ones. At the same time, natural decrease of rural settlements could indicate aging. In such a case, it is possible to speculate that seniors are among the immigrants to the countryside.

Depopulation is typical for peripheral rural areas in the Czech conditions in general and especially for the Moravian-Slovak borderland. Two factors can play a role: this borderland is the easternmost one in the country and as such / and thus illustrates the general decrease in development and prosperity from the west to the east. The long-term population stability without any new immigration waves in the last dozens of years is the second factor.

However, not only population number but also its structure is important to evaluate the human factor. Altogether 9.2 % of the inhabitants of Bojkovice have reached university education (Population Census 2011). In rural communes this indicator is 7.7 %. Both values are deeply below the national level (12.5 %). Basic and apprenticeship education are typical for the micro-region. This corresponds with productive branches in the local labour market and limits involvements in the post-productive labour division.

49.6 % of population are non-productive in Bojkovice (mostly children and seniors). It is 52.2 % in rural communes. On the other hand, the share of pre-productive and post-productive age in Bojkovice is 0.80, whereas in rural communes it is 0.90. It indicates younger population in the countryside.

Even in Žitková the pre-productive part of population is bigger than the elderly. It may be that in extreme conditions seniors have to move while young mobile people are able to survive there.

It is interesting that unemployment is kept at a relatively acceptable level (Integrated Portal of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic). The unemployment rate in the Bojkovice micro-region was 7.1% in January 2015 (6.4% in the whole Uherské Hradiště district). To compare it with the pre-crisis period, the unemployment rate was 6.7% for the micro-region and 5.2% for the district. It seems that the peripheral micro-region is more resistant to fluctuations on the labour market in this case. The fact that it is embedded in local activities and sources could be the main reason.

However, the social situation is the result of the support by the left-wing parties (Election results). In the last election to the House of Commons (2013), the Social-Democratic party was the winner in the Bojkovice micro-region with 23.3% of votes (the national value was 20.5%). It was followed by the Communist party of Bohemia and Moravia with 19.6% (14.9% on the national level), the Christian-Democratic Union / Czech People party 13.0% (6.8%) – which corresponds with higher religiosity in the micro-region, with the populist Down of Direct Democracy 12.2% (6.9%) and the first right-wing party / populist ANO 2011 with only 10.8% of votes (18.7%).

4.5. Local and global networks

Labrianidis (2006) points out that if a small village or a rural region is going to be revitalized, the construction of local and global networks must also occur. New democratic conditions brought also new impulses to communal life. Shortly after 1990 three villages hived off their centres: Hostětín from Pitín and Záhorovice and Komňa from Bojkovice. This has enabled them to take over the responsibility for the future development of individual villages. On the other hand, small villages have small budgets and also a limited number of people able to work efficiently for the municipality. It is impossible and inefficient to provide all administrative services in such small communes. That is why the system of municipal offices with extended competences has

been created. Such municipal offices ensure administrative services for surrounding communes like registry, building authority and others. This role is played by the municipality of Bojkovice in the area under study. In such a way the villages gained more autonomy in exchange for smaller budget and abandoning of certain functions to the centres. However, the municipality offices of the centres are elected only by the population in the centre. Serviced villages have hardly any possibility to impact the quality of their activities. The result is an unbalanced administrative structure.

Due to the limited financial resources, small municipalities are merged into voluntary associations. This form makes it possible to combine funds for important investments or share of European grants. Bojkovsko, the voluntary association of municipalities, includes all communes in the micro-region and some additional municipalities. Support of job creation and support of tourism are the main goals of the association. The problem could be the fact that a voluntary association depends on voluntary activities and the willingness of the municipalities to finance common projects. The Association is a member of the Local Action Group Bojkovsko (since 2005). The main aims of the LAG are the following: development of agriculture and forestry, environmental protection, tourism development and development of human resources. Together with other Eastern Moravian micro-regions it is a part of the Czech-Slovak Euroregion Bílé/Biele Karpaty. However, the cross-border collaboration does not seem to be crucial because the border is created by the natural barrier (mountain range) and the collaboration “across the mountain” is not traditional. Hypothetically, Zlín and Trenčín regional centres profit from the collaboration more than the villages located directly in the borderland.

Connecting the Bojkovice micro-region with the global network seems to be a problem. Paradoxically, 150 years ago when the men from the area travelled throughout Central Europe as masons and pruners, direct personal connection with the world was apparently more intensive (although there is no statistical evidence available). At the present time, electronic media are mostly preferably used. According to the 2011 population census, 46.6 % of households in Bojkovice are equipped with PC and internet access. Concerning the rural municipalities,

the value is 47.5 %. To compare it with the national average (53.0 %), the equipment of households

with internet in the Bojkovice micro-region is significantly smaller.



Photo 3. The village Komňa (2014)

Author: A. Vaishar (14 July 2014)

The tourist who visits the micro-region presents another way of global networking. This is illustrated by Dutch tourists visiting the Eurocamp. Ecological workshops and seminars in Hostětín could be the next example of joining global networks. Charles, Prince of Wales, who visited Hostětín in 2010 was the most prominent of the visitors. The potential of the Komenský tradition in Komňa (Photo 3) seems have been used only occasionally until this time.

5. Chances and challenges of remote peripheral micro-regions: A discussion

What does micro-regional development in rural periphery mean? It has probably hardly any sense to seek for quantitative development data which could be measured by increase of production, number of inhabitants, benefits from tourism, etc. It is much more useful to focus on the sustainable develop-

ment of an adequate quality of life. It could mean the creation of suitable conditions for local inhabitants (including jobs, services and infrastructure), creative conditions for entrepreneurs (mainly SMEs) and friendly conditions for tourists.

Depopulation represents a vicious circle. Population decrease leads to a diminution of customers for local services. Individual services gradually disappear. It worsens the life conditions of local people and discourages potential settlers, entrepreneurs and tourists. Lack of local financial resources forces local authorities to search for investors from the outside. However, in the case of external investment, the most benefits go away from the area. Public subsidies resent some possibility, but again, more developed areas dispose with more money as people are able to elaborate and enforce the projects. The LEADER initiative presents some opportunity if it is properly used.

The way to break the vicious circle is to turn problems into potentials. From a certain perspective, rurality is the main attraction of the micro-re-

gion. Whereas a part of the countryside in the surroundings of big and medium cities is suburbanized and another part in well-accessible lowlands is globalized, peripheral countryside remains the “right (real) countryside”. This type of countryside could attract amenity migrants and/or tourists. However, Kneafsey (2000) shows how the tourist potentials could be used quite differently depending on the ability of local stakeholders to connect local genius loci with other factors. Similarly, according to Bosworth and Willett (2011), the contribution of amenity migrants (or counter-urbanizers) depends on their attitudes towards the receiving rural community. It means that the process could be complicated.

Nevertheless, the increase of either migrants or tourists should not be too large. Otherwise the territory loses its typical rural character. It means, among others, that the economy of the micro-region must not be based on tourism only. The situation asks for multifunctional development. Multifunctional rural development is often based on multifunctional agriculture (van Huylenbroek, Durand, 2003) or on (agri)tourism (Sznajder et al., 2009).

However, the educational structure of the inhabitants corresponds to the productive branches. A certain proportion of them should be maintained. It concerns both the primary sector and the industries. The tertiary sector should be represented not only by tourism but also by social services (partly reflecting the fact of aging of the local population).

McAreevey (2009) points out that not only the profile of rural areas is changing but also their perception is shifting. The countryside is not anymore considered as an exclusive agricultural territory. On the other hand, some people perceive the countryside as idyllic, not taking into account the problems of rural life. Moreover, inhabitants of cities sometimes confuse the countryside with suburban areas. However, the periphery has its own needs for education, work, health and social care.

The existing rural policies stimulating the entrepreneurship in peripheral rural areas were analysed by, for example North and Smallbone (2006). They call for a more strategic and coordinated approach. It may be a stumbling block. Micro-regional strategies are often elaborated with the vision to support individual investment plans of local stakeholders – not to define realistic strategic interests

of the territory. Moreover, the collaboration is not very popular.

A different view of rural periphery is introduced by Copus (2001) who operates with the concept of aspatial organisation of the territory. He is of the opinion that the development of transport, communication and information technologies gives new opportunities to the periphery which can be connected with the world. He is partly right (comparing to the past) but it seems that face-to-face contacts are not compensated for by electronic ones. Important role is played by the fact that the closest international airport (Brno) is distanced 1:35 hours from Bojkovice and the closest and bigger international airport with more frequent connections to many destinations in Europe and all over the world (Vienna) is more than 2 hours away. Thus, contacts are possible but still less efficient when compared them with core areas.

Nevertheless, Jančák et al. (2010) investigating social capital based on engagement, confidentiality and satisfaction found that the Bojkovice micro-region belongs to the peripheries with the highest quality of social capital. The authors presuppose that the cause lies in the position of Bojkovice in relation to the regional centre. We believe that the continuity of the settlement and its population could play a very important role. Together with Pileček et al. (2013), we see social capital as an instrument for the activation of endogenous development in communities especially in peripheral regions. In contrast to human capital, which is given by qualification of local people, social capital is based on the long-term social stability.

6. Conclusions

Van Berkel and Verburg (2011) analysed four possible functions of Europe’s rural periphery: intensive agriculture, off-farm employment, rural tourism and conservation. They state that high rural tourism potential is usually combined with conservation, whereas potentials for intensive agriculture and off-farm employment is low as a rule – though in Central and Eastern Europe such dependency is not so regular. It could be also the case of Bojkovice, where industry is combined with tourism and conservation.

The article describes the situation of a micro-region which is not only distanced from regional centres and situated on the easternmost corn of the Czech Republic, but which has been also out of the spotlight of researchers. It was selected to show its pros and cons in a relatively complex way and to discuss the potential of such territories. There is no doubt that Bojkovice is a peripheral micro-region far from the regional centres and from the western part of the country, hardly accessible (especially settlements which are not situated in the Olšava valley), limited by the mountain barrier and the state border on the east side, with unfavourable conditions for productive agriculture, with insufficient investments from outside the region, with depopulation and ageing tendencies. The future of the micro-region is theoretically without any hope.

However, is it really the case? At least three examples of how to change the disadvantages into advantages were mentioned above: to use the peripheral position for the defence industry, which is partly kept; to use the inconvenient natural conditions for ecological agriculture and to use the relatively less disturbed nature to develop soft tourism. Of course, the situation is not that easy. In order to be efficient, the advantages need suitable conditions like human and social factor or infrastructure. It is also necessary to find customers to be successful at the market.

The questions remain whether there are creative people in the micro-region who are able to realize some prospective projects? As it was shown, the educational level is relatively low. However, formal education is not the only indicator of the human factor. There were 62% people in the region in 2011 who were born in the municipality where they live (the same indicator in the national average is 49%). It indicates long-term population stability. We can presuppose that most of the natives have a strong regional identity, and a positive relation to the landscape, settlements and local society. It could be a factor motivating for micro-regional development.

The long-term population stability indicates a high level of social capital in its classical sense (trust, social interactions and norms). The question is whether the social capital is suitable to support the local development in the Bojkovice micro-region. More precisely, whether the particular social capital in the micro-region is open to innovations from the outside, which enable the development, or

whether it serves as a means of defence and closes the local communities against outer impulses. Letki and Mierina (2014) highlight the problem of increasing social disparities in post-communist countries which limit the efficiency of using social capital for development. It seems to be crucial for future development.

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