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## Factors Affecting Development of Rural Areas in the Czech Republic: A Literature Review

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### Abstract

Rural development is a frequently discussed topic but there is no consensus how to measure it. There are number of various criteria, such as economic, social, cultural or environmental which can be used to assess rural development. Therefore the main question addressed in this paper is to find out what factors and indicators are suitable for scrutinizing the development of rural areas in condition of the Czech Republic. In order to identify them, the articles focused on Czech rural regions were analysed. Based on the comprehensive analysis of the selected Czech studies, 14 most frequently used indicators were identified.

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*Keywords:* rural areas; rural development; regional development; factors of rural development; indicators of rural development

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### 1. Introduction

The aim of the paper is to analyse articles focused on Czech rural regions and to identify factors and indicators which are used to examine the development of the Czech Republic.

There are number of economic, social, cultural or environmental factors and indicators that can be used to assess rural development. Based on this, it is difficult to choose suitable of them describing development of rural areas. Although phenomena of rural development is discussed by many authors, authorities and institutions for decades, there is no consensus how to measure rural development. This phenomena is also often misinterpreted and

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misunderstood. Especially in media is (rural) development frequently considered as positive development of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita or regional GDP per capita. However, this approach is not correct mainly because it is a very narrow conception for measurement of regional development. Regional GDP, primarily focused on economic development, says nothing about living standards of population or social, cultural and environmental development of the region. Based on the fact, measurement of development using GDP per capita has been criticized by researchers in last decades (e.g. Mankiw, 2000; Michalek & Zarnekow, 2011). It is obvious that knowledge, how to objectively measure rural development is a main goal of many subjects.

Current state of research in term of the Czech Republic is still insufficient and findings about this issue have two main deficits. Firstly, there is unclear which factors and indicators should be used for the measuring of Czech rural development and secondly, what level of region (e.g. county – NUTS 3 or Local Administrative Unit – LAU 2) is appropriate for rural development assessing. The aim of this paper is to eliminate these deficits and find answers to these questions.

## 2. Literature Review

Even though, rural development is one of the main goals of the EU development policy, still there does not exist unified approach how to define and measure it. Firstly, there exist many similar terms associated with the development as rural, regional, remote, local, peripheral etc. which make definition difficult. Secondly, there are also many differences among EU countries in economic, social, cultural and environmental factors, causing there is no consensus how to define rural areas and at what level – local (usually municipalities) or regional. Thirdly, there is also no consensus, which of mentioned factors are suitable for characterizing the rural development (Clark et al., 1997) and whether to use weights to distinguish importance of factors.

Chromý et al. (2011) identified two approaches to define rural area: broader and narrow. In broader approach, every not urban area is considered as rural. These rural areas also differ in socioeconomic, sociocultural or institutional environment. On the other hand, in the narrow approach, rural area can be defined as area with low population density and predominant primary sector (Jančák, 2003 and Blažek, 2004 In Chromý et al., 2011).

For example, based on methodology of German Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, Spellerberg et al. (2007) consider as rural all districts with population density lower than 140 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> where at least 40% of population live in small communities. Other approach to define rural areas is used in England. As rural areas are considered all areas which do not belongs to the settlements with more than 10,000 resident population (Bibby, 2013). The classification then assigns rural areas to six categories based on their different types. Although this English approach may seem complicated, in our opinion it reflects the current situation. It seems that the existence of many types of rural areas is the main reason why there is still no consensus in the definition.

Although, there exist many definitions of rural areas, the most commonly used definition is definition of the European Commission (abbreviated to EC), based on Eurostat and the OECD. This regional approach defines rural areas based on 1 km<sup>2</sup> grid cells where predominantly rural regions are areas with share of population living in rural grid cells is 50% and more. These areas have to also fulfil two conditions: maximum population density threshold of 300 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and maximum population of 5,000 inhabitants in contiguous cells below the density threshold (Eurostat, 2015).

Although, the definition of EC is broadly used for its possibility of international region comparison, in specific terms of the Czech Republic (large number of municipalities in regions) should be adjusted (Matoušková, 2011). Institutions and researchers usually use combinations of previous approaches. For example Czech Statistical Bureau definition of rural areas is based on the definition of EC and OECD. Definitions of Czech researchers (e.g. Binek et al., 2007; Pospěch et al., 2009) are usually based at the municipal level (LAU 2) as municipalities up to 2,000 (Bernard, 2011; Hrabánková & Trnková, 1996) or 3,000 inhabitants (Perlín et al., 2010). Often with population density threshold of 100/150 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> which is based on the previous Eurostat/OECD approach (Eurostat, 2015). But for example Perlín et al. (2010) states that the threshold of 100 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> is not suitable for specific terms of the Czech Republic (its use will cause reduce in diversification of region types) and should not be included in rural areas definition. It must be stressed that authors often use municipalities with threshold of 3,000 inhabitants because of availability of statistical data and the fact that this threshold is by Czech law a condition where the municipality can become a city (Zákon o obcích č. 128/2000 Sb.).

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