

CZECH RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES FOR HUMAN RESOURCES AFTER 2004: A STORY OF MUDDLED DEFINITIONS PREVENTING STRATEGIC VISIONS?¹

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Abstract: *This article aims to contribute to the empirical understanding of Czech rural development strategies by means of a critical analysis of the initial definition and formulation, the subsequent policy measures, and the final geographical application of the Czech government's strategic documents and policies. It takes as a case study policies of human resources development in rural areas that were co-financed by EU economic and social cohesion schemes for 2004–2006. The analysis finds significant deficiencies and inconsistencies in all three stages, indicating a low degree of goal-orientedness, adequacy, and effectiveness of this seemingly well-structured scheme.*

Keywords: *rural development, human resources, strategic documents, policy formulation, policy implementation*

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Introduction

The impact of post-1989 structural changes in the Czech Republic on the population differed according to citizens' social status, educational level, age group, and economic activity. Spatial development was similarly affected unevenly (Illner, Andrlé 1994). Policy responses to such uneven development evolved and changed over time depending on political representation, macro-economic situation, and external interventions, such as the fulfilment of EU accession requirements and support from EU economic and social cohesion policy schemes. Some of the policy measures were general (e.g. employment policy); some targeted specific economic segments, social groups, or territories. This article studies the policy measures which aimed to influence rural development, and more specifically, human resources capacities, structure, and characteristics in rural areas. Rural areas were objectively disadvantaged not only in the starting point of transformation. Their infrastructure was underdeveloped, land estate property went through vast restitutions, their economic backbones—agriculture and manufacturing—went through deep restructuring and privatisation (Majerová ed. 2003, Maurel, Lacquement 2007). The article analyses the policies and measures concerning human resources development in rural areas in the Czech government's strategic documents between 2004 and 2006. Applied rural development measures can be generally divided into two subgroups based on the logic of their implementation: a “counter logic” and a “project logic”. The former includes measures which are implemented in the entire national territory and for which an applicant may be eligible by fulfilling a few simple criteria. This logic allows distributing subsidies with little selectivity for applicants. The latter concerns measures based on the elaboration of projects by applicants—often local actors—who compete with each other to obtain subsidies. The focus of this study will be oriented on the policies and measures implemented according to the “project logic”. 2004–2006 was the first programming period in which the Czech Republic participated in the EU policy as full member. Strategic documents and policy priorities were reconsidered and newly formulated for that purpose. Therefore, this is an opportunity to check how the priorities for human resource development in rural areas were formulated, which “project logic” policy measures were implemented, and how they targeted the territory and sector of concern in the wake of EU accession.

The article is structured as follows. First, main actors in rural areas development policies will be identified and the policy programmes in which rural development is an issue will be overviewed. Then, the notion of “rural” in strategic documents will be examined as a precondition of concrete policy measure

formulation and evaluation. Third, I will examine what is perceived as a threat to human resources development in rural areas and whether these perceptions are based on real evidence. Then I will search for concrete policy measures which might represent adequate responses to the policy concerns outlined in the strategic documents and if there are some which are designated for local projects in rural areas. Finally, I will examine whether these locally targeted measures are really targeted to and located in rural areas or if the beneficiaries are rather situated in non-rural areas.

1. Policies for human resources development in rural areas in the Czech Republic

Public rural development policies have a long tradition in the Czech Republic, mainly through the Rural Renewal Programme, which has operated since 1991. This was followed by the pre-accession SAPARD programme (2000–2004), the Operational Programme Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture and the Joint Regional Operational Programme (2004–2006) and, currently, the Rural Development Programme and Regional Operational Programmes of NUTS 2 regions (2007–2013). These programmes targeted rural human resources development at different stages and in different relations. The oldest of them, the Rural Renewal Programme, applied the “project logic” and was divided into grant schemes in which municipalities competed for financial support for their projects. None of these schemes was directly aimed at human resources development. Instead, the reconstruction and maintenance of infrastructure, amenities and cultural heritage was their main focus. Therefore, any impact of this policy tool on human resources development was indirect. The importance of the programme was in the fact that it gave rural actors as well as the programme provider (Ministry for Regional Development) experience with a bottom-up approach and that it delegated initiative to local municipal actors, after long years of centralised decision making and power concentration. The emphasis given to the rural character of eligible municipalities was also important. It was the only programme oriented directly on rural development in the 1990s. And yet, this policy was not incorporated in any broader developmental vision for rural areas; indeed, such a vision was inexistent. Generally speaking, binding and targeted strategic documents continued to be the weak points of Czech developmental policy (Blažek, Vozáb 2006, Blažek 2006, Sirovátka, Rákoczyová 2009).

The situation changed under the pressure of EU programming schemes. As a precondition for participation in EU economic and social cohesion policy,

the Czech Republic was required to implement national development strategies and articulate concrete policy programmes based on them. Thus, a rural development policy was formulated and incorporated within those strategic documents. The National Development Plan for the shortened programming period 2004–2006 represented the country’s principal strategic policy document. It encompassed all areas of national development and resulted in the formulation of Operational Programmes (OP). Different ministries were appointed as regulatory authorities for different OPs. Human resources development in rural areas and the entire rural development agenda were, rather unfortunately, divided between OP Rural Development and Multi-Functional Agriculture and the Joint Regional Operational Programme. As stated explicitly in the National Development Plan: „the main emphases of the OP Rural Development and Multi-Functional Agriculture are on investments in agriculture, including increased support to young farmers, and on the processing of agricultural products.” This programme was administered by the Ministry of Agriculture and paid very little attention to the non-agricultural challenges of rural areas. A pilot version of LEADER (acronym for *Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l’Economie Rurale*) was the only measure that focused rather directly on human resources development. While two decades old in the EU15, this constituted a new approach to community governance and rural development in the Czech Republic. LEADER was “implanted” from outside into the rural and agricultural OP and it appeared inconsistent with the other, rather agro-environmentally oriented measures. The fact that the final responsibility for the programme’s formulation and implementation is under the Ministry of Agriculture may be problematic for a broader representation of the rural development strategy. So far, it has had a relatively narrow view and has been mainly interested in farming issues (Maurel 2008). Beside the EU-co-financed LEADER programme, a similar programme, LEADER CR, was operated as a national programme by the Ministry of Agriculture. The initial impulse for it was to strengthen the absorption capacity of Axe IV (LEADER+) of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) during the 2007–2013 programming period.

Rural development in terms of measures under the Joint Regional Operational Programme (JROP) was not defined as such but was very often latently present in regional and local support measures. Measures focusing on human resources development existed under this programme (measures 3.1 and 3.2) and municipalities and local actors from rural areas were eligible for these as well as non-rural programmes in their respective regions.

Programme formulation, evaluation, promotion, and redistribution of competencies during preparation for full participation in EU economic and

social cohesion policies was in many respects a new experience for the actors involved. Programme preparation and implementation faced several serious problems. First among them was the lack of experience with preparation of such programmes and implementation of the subsidiarity and partnership principles. Second was the scope and targeting of developmental strategies and the role of public administration bodies. Third was the interconnection between the new strategies and programmes and existing national programmes. The respective ministries responsible for the preparation of operational programmes were responsible for coping with these problems. Programme preparation was done in different stages and with different stakeholders involved. Apart from public servants, representatives of NGOs, local authorities, field experts, business associations, and labour unions took part in different stages of programme preparation. Despite some minor achievements in programme formulation or definition of eligible beneficiaries, these stakeholders admitted that their voice did not have any large impact on the general concepts of the Strategies under discussion². They criticized inflexible communication with certain ministries and a tendency of government institutions to concentrate as much executive power as possible (Kostelecký et al. 2005). The resulting strategies and programmes were formulated very generally, seemingly aiming to encompass all possible territorial or sectoral fields in order to be eligible for support. This is connected with the roles national and regional bodies play in the development process. In general, these bodies understand their role as facilitating the development activities of other agents, rather than being development actors themselves. Therefore, the ministries with their agencies and the regional authorities mostly act as administrators of programme resources, giving applicants a high degree of freedom in terms of their objectives and projects (Blažek, Vozáb 2006, p. 240). The interconnection and coherence of the new strategies and programmes with existing ones is weak. Some of the programmes are duplicated for national purposes, on one hand, and for EU economic and social cohesion policy, on the other hand. This problem also affects rural development. Each NUTS 3 region has its own Strategy of Regional Development and, at the same time, a Joint Regional Operational Programme. Moreover, issues of rural development are dealt with in various sectoral policies. This overview demonstrates muddled conceptions of rurality and rural policy, which lead to an unsystematic and incomplete treatment of rural development.

2 These conclusions result from interviews with regional stakeholders and NGOs representatives in 2005 and apply to the actors who participated in preparing the Joint Regional Operational Programme and Regional Development Strategy.

There are four different concepts of rural development (Berriet-Sollic, M. et al., 2001):

- An agriculture-centred concept whereby agriculture is considered as the central activity of rural areas. This is the prevailing approach to rural development represented by the policy of the Ministry of Agriculture and, more specifically, OP Rural Development and Multi-functional Agriculture.
- A regional concept whereby rural areas are not seen as facing specific issues. Development is considered on a regional scale and takes into account the relations between cities and surrounding countryside. The Joint Regional Operation Programme measures seem to draw from this approach.
- An integrated concept whereby rural areas face specific issues, but agriculture does not have a predominant role in those areas. This concept of rural development may include a territorial approach of rural policy implementation, but this is not necessary. The LEADER programme seems to be the closest to that concept.
- An environmental concept whereby rural areas are seen as a living environment.

Policies based on the integrated concept of rural development are essential for successful human resources development in rural areas. In this context, the following target and research question can be formulated: Is the implementation of measures related to human resources development in Czech rural areas based on a “project logic”, and does it address the need for an integrated concept of rural development?

2. What does “rural” mean in the strategic documents?

A precise definition of rural areas and rural population is clearly a precondition for any further policy action as well as policy definition, targeting, and evaluation. Nevertheless, such a definition is conspicuously absent from both the National development plan of the Czech Republic (NDP) and the Horizontal rural development plan for 2004–2006 (HRDP). These avoid any clear definition of “rural” and instead refer to existing or “commonly used” definitions. Both the HRDP and the NDP mention the definition of “rural” according to EU methodology, based on the OECD definition³. As mentioned in the HRDP (p. 21),

3 The OECD defines “rural” in two hierarchical levels of territorial units: local and regional. At the local community level (NUTS 5), it identifies rural areas as communities with a population density below 100 inhabitants per square kilometre. At the regional level (mainly NUTS 3), it distinguishes larger functional or administrative units by their degree of rurality depending on what share of the region’s population lives in rural communities. To facilitate analysis, regions then

“all higher units of the country’s territorial administration at the NUTS 3 (as well as NUTS 2) level save Prague and the Moravskoslezský region (Ostravsko) fell under the definition of a significantly rural region according to the EU methodology, encompassing 92.3% of the country’s territory. The communities in thus defined rural areas accounted for 95.2% of all communities and 76.1% of the CR population.” This definition might be useful for maximizing the number of territorial units and population eligible for funding. But neither a precise monitoring of the localisation of projects nor an analysis of territorial differences and policy targeting is possible with such general definition. Second, the definition mentioned in the strategic documents considers as rural all municipalities with less than 2000 inhabitants. This “traditional” definition neglects the existence of suburban fringes whose dynamics and economic and social structure is incomparable with more remote localities. Therefore, this definition is not satisfactory for the purposes of rural policy implementation. Throughout the entire text of the document, it is unclear which object “rural” represents.

The lack of definition is not solved in the recent strategic documents either. The Rural development programme of the Czech Republic for 2007–13 (RDP) mentions that “rural areas in the Czech Republic are to be distinguished as suburban, intermediate, and remote ones.” But in the very next phrase, it adds that “at present, an unambiguously adopted definition of the above types does not exist” (RDP, p. 17).⁴

To conclude, I could not find a definition of rural for policy purposes in the strategic developmental documents of the Czech Republic dealing with rural development. Such a serious deficiency might be based on prioritizing the openness of the programme of rural development to as many actors and as much territory as possible. The documents do not specify whether measures adopted should be “counter logic” or “project logic” oriented. General or rather inexistent definition of the term “rural” suggests that the intention was to leave the field open to all types of measures, thus favouring the “counter logic”. With such a blurred definition of rural areas or rural population, it is hard to proceed in the outlined analysis. To overcome this problem, I propose an al-

are grouped into three types: (i) predominantly rural regions with over 50% of population living in rural communities; (ii) significantly rural regions with 15 to 50% of population living in rural communities; (iii) predominantly urban regions with less than 15% of population living in rural communities.

4 Somehow emblematic might be that the 300-page text of the RDP is only published in Czech on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture. In English, only 40 pages are available in the National Strategic Rural Development Plan 2007–2013, where the OECD definition is finally quoted (p. 13).

ternative definition of urban, suburban and rural areas—a *commuting based definition*.

2.1. A commuting based definition of the urban-rural gradient

A vast and sophisticated literature has indicated that defining what is rural is neither an easy conceptual task nor does it lead to univocal one-size-fits-all results, as such a definition may be asked to serve a number of divergent policy purposes, research aims, or spatial scales (Halfacree 1993, Falk, Pinhey 1978, Blanc 1997). This remains subject of lively debates among social scientists, geographers, policy makers, and policy evaluators alike (Halfacree et al. 2002, Bengs, Schmidt-Thomé 2005). My proposed definition in this article attempts to make a reasonable choice in filling the void within Czech policy documents. It is inspired by a definition used in France for statistical and policy purposes (Schmitt 1998, Cavaillés, Schmitt 2002). My definition is far from being based rigidly on either the number of inhabitants or population density within municipalities, and rather centres around the intensity of commuting to urban centres. This approach fits quite well to the study of human resources development in different spatial classes because it takes into the account the economic interconnection with urban centres. I distinguish between four major spatial types:⁵

Urban centres are towns and agglomerations which offer more than 5,000 employment opportunities.

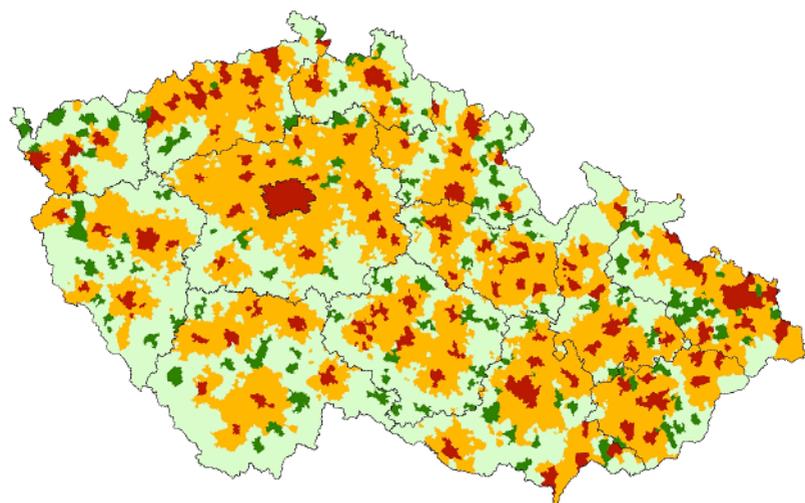
Suburban areas consist of municipalities in which at least 33.3 % of employed residents work in one or more urban centres.

Rural centres are towns and agglomerations which offer between 2,000 and 5,000 employment opportunities and are not in suburban areas of urban centres.

Rural areas are municipalities which do not fall under any of the previous categories. Hence, “rural” is defined as that which is neither urban nor under urban influence (suburban).

5 For more details about the commuting approach see Vobecká (2009).

Figure 1—Czech Republic according to the commuting approach definition



Legend: □ NUTS 3 borderlines, ■ Urban centres, ■ Suburban areas, ■ Rural centres, ■ Rural areas
Source: Author.

3. What is perceived as problematic in the human resources development in rural areas?

Despite the lack of rural population definition, threats to the future development of human resources in rural areas are defined in strategic documents. Relatively high attention is given to that topic both in the HRDP and the NDP. Population ageing, unfavourable age structure and low fertility levels, flight of the young, educated inhabitants and competent entrepreneurs, and low potential of economic diversification are seen as the main threats. Existing disparities between life conditions of urban and rural areas are characterised as a weak point of national development in a SWOT analysis (NDP 2002–2006, p. 108). These problems are interpreted primarily as *structural problems* resulting from the post-communist transformation with its comparatively higher negative impact on rural areas.

Table 1—Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the Czech Republic's population by spatial categories

Spatial categories	Population change 2001/1991 in %	Population change 2007/2001 in %	Young-old ratio 2001	Higher education 2001	Economically active working in:	Unemployment rate 2001
Urban centres	-2.2	-0.5	111	45.0	Agriculture, forestry, fishing (per 100 econ. active) in 2001	9.4
Suburban areas	2.5	6.8	120	29.3	Business and services (per 100 econ. active) in 2001	8.9
Rural centres	-0.4	-0.2	139	34.8		9.5
Rural areas	-0.3	1.1	121	26.1		9.5
Czech Republic	-0.7	1.5	117	37.7		9.3

Source: Czech statistical office, Population census 2001, 1991, author's calculations.

There certainly are some rural municipalities with unfavourable age structure or unemployment rate, but this situation cannot be generalised to all rural areas. As Table 1 shows, rural areas in general are suffering neither from a high unemployment rate, nor a specifically unfavourable age structure, in comparison with other spatial categories. This goes contrary to the description of problematic characteristics of rural areas given in the strategic documents. The potential problem of rural areas lies in low qualification and therefore low flexibility of rural inhabitants on the labour market. Along with a more pronounced role of stagnating and slowly developing economic sectors, this increases the likelihood of stagnation or decline of localities and their human resources. This is true not only for rural areas but also for suburban areas. Furthermore, the level of education is lacking behind and the proportion of agriculture workers shows how important agriculture is for land use and as employer in suburban areas. For suburban and rural areas, as non-urban categories, it should be distinguished between those with closer connection to urban centres and those more remote. But from the point of view of human resources development, both should be considered as priority areas for policy intervention.

4. Which policy measures are intended for human resources development in rural areas?

The policy measures which can influence rural human resources development are cross-sectional as diverse policy measures can have some indirect impact on that field. Human resources development in rural areas may be influenced by policy measures with a more general impact such as school system reform, infrastructure investment, and employment policy. Nevertheless, their impact is geographically dispersed and can be rarely influenced or initiated locally. In this study, I will focus on two “project logic” measures which were supposed to be implemented in individual localities. Those measures were intended to build capacities for human resources development specifically at the local level by local subjects. Financing was allocated to recipients through grant competition.

The first sub-measure analysed is *2.1.4, Rural Development (LEADER+)*, of the Operational programme (OP) Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture. The second is *3.1, Infrastructure for human resources development in regions*, of the Joint Regional Operational Programme. Both programmes were applied within the Objective 1, “Development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind” of the EU social and economic co-

hesion policy funding for which the projects from the entire Czech Republic except Prague were eligible. These two sub-measures represent a small part of projects realized under Objective 1. This is because they are intended for individual local actors (or Local Action Groups in the case of Leader+) and for rather small local projects, following the “project logic”. Interestingly, when searching among projects within the Objective 1, it was very difficult to find measures that fit the requirement of being local and focused on human resources in rural areas. While projects under OP Human resources Development were not territorially focused and rather followed the “counter logic” type of measures, most projects under OP Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture were not oriented on human resources development. The programme with the highest allocations, OP Industry and Enterprise, was focused on business conduct in general (i.e., not only in rural areas) and was fairly demanding as to the economic health of applicants in requiring top quality and profitable projects. This is why strategically significant branches and projects of large viable companies were predominantly supported from it⁶. To conclude, although the development of human resources in rural areas is cited between the high priorities in Czech developmental strategic documents, this does not result in the conceptions of “project oriented” measures targeted directly to rural areas. The only exception is sub-measure *2.1.4, Rural Development (LEADER+)*, of the Operational programme (OP) Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture.

5. Local projects for which beneficiaries?

The two measures I chose, *2.1.4 Rural Development (LEADER+)* and *3.1 Infrastructure for Human Resource Development in Regions*, were the closest to fulfil the condition of “project oriented” measures realized in rural areas by local actors. I will study here whether their projects were carried out in rural municipalities or whether they were carried out in other localities. Provided that neither strategic documents nor concrete measures set out a clear definition of eligibility, urban municipalities and actors might have taken over and benefited from these unclearly focused programmes. This study will verify if the programmes which intended to be “project oriented” in rural areas or regions were tangibly implemented in such localities.

6 Quoted from *Czech Republic: Rural Development*. New York: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development. <http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natinfo/countr/czech/ruralDevelopment.pdf>.

Table 2—Measure 3.1, Infrastructure for Human Resource Development in Regions, of the JROP 2004–2006, number of analysed projects, average total budget, and EU contribution by spatial categories

Spatial categories	Number of projects	Average EU contribution per project (in thousands of Euros)	Average total budget per project (in thousands of Euros)	Average proportion of EU funding
Urban centres	45	411.4	617.9	66.6
Suburban areas	17	316.7	427.0	74.2
Rural centres	14	393.1	605.0	65.0
Rural	16	338.0	449.7	75.2
Total	92	378.3	551.4	68.6

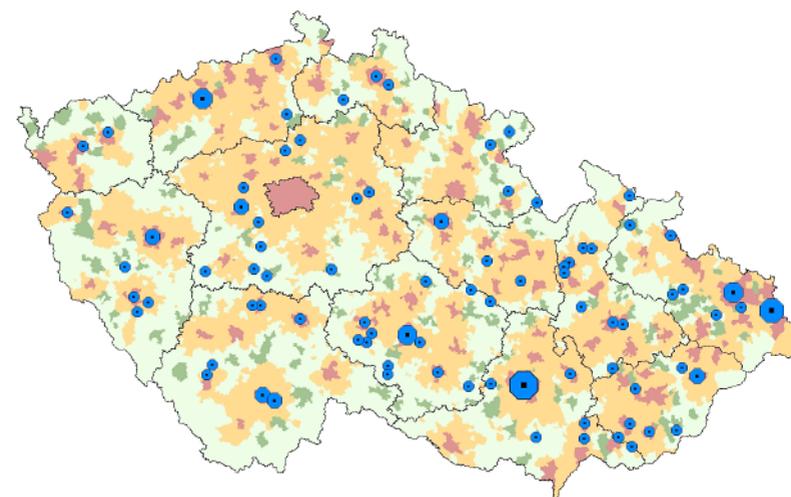
Source: Ministry of Regional Development, author's calculations.
Exchange rate of 29 September 2008: 1 EUR = 24.6 CZK.

I worked with a list of funding recipients for each of the two measures. I identified the localisation of final beneficiaries of supported projects by their places of implementation. Finally, for each individual project I identified whether it was localised in a rural, suburban, or urban municipality, according to the above-described commuting definition (see section 2.1). The results were different for each of the two programmes.

Measure 3.1, *Infrastructure for Human Resources Development in Regions*: the Joint Regional Operational Programme supported projects from the fields of active employment policy, social integration, and lifelong education. Although this measure was not designed solely for rural areas, it was included in the present analysis since it exhibited the second best fit to the requirements for the projects I was looking for. The fact that the measure was not oriented exclusively to rural areas is just another example of the lack of rurally oriented programmes concerning human resources development. The regionally oriented programme can serve as an example of how successful rural actors can be with their projects in competition with non-rural actors. We can also interpret this measure through the lens of the regional concept of rural development, whereby rural areas are not considered as facing specific problems and emphasis is placed on relations between towns and their surrounding countryside. Measure 3.1 was administered directly by the Ministry of Regional Development in the form of individual projects. Final recipients applied directly to the Ministry and constituted at the same time final benefici-

aries. Therefore, the measure followed the “project logic” of support. NGOs, municipalities, unions of municipalities, regions (NUTS III), municipal contributory organizations and state contributory organizations could apply as recipients.

Figure 2—Localisation and number of projects under Measure 3.1, Infrastructure for Human Resource Development in Regions, within urban, suburban, and rural localities



Spatial Classification:
□ NUTS 3 borderlines, ■ Urban centres, ■ Suburban areas, ■ Rural centres, ■ Rural areas
Number of Projects:
● 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5
Source: Author.

Within Measure 3.1, 45 million Euros were allocated from EU funds, or 10% from the total amount for Joint Regional Operational Programme 2004–2006⁷. Support was given to 170 projects in all regions of the Czech Republic, except Prague⁸. For the purposes of my analysis, I have chosen exclusively the projects where the final recipients were municipalities, unions of municipalities, con-

7 Data source: <<http://www.strukturalni-fondy.cz/srop>>.

8 The list of supported projects is available on the website of the Ministry of Regional Development: <http://mssfwww.mmr.cz/WebMSSF_Povs/publicPages/FullFilter.aspx?mode=2>, version of 16 July 2007.

tributory organisations or NGOs. From among final recipients, I excluded regions (self-governing bodies on the NUTS III level) and schools; the former because the localisation of their projects at the municipal level was impossible and the latter because they were mostly represented by secondary schools, mostly situated in major towns rather than rural areas. After that correction, 92 projects were analysed (Table 2).

As it turns out, only 16 projects were localised in rural areas. A great majority of the projects were localised in urban centres (45) and the rest were localised in suburban areas (17 projects) and in rural centres (14). Not only the number of projects but also the average sums allocated to projects differed between spatial categories. Larger projects were supported in urban areas (average amount per project was 618,000 €) and smaller projects in rural areas (450,000 €). Moreover, the proportion of EU funding participation differed: it accounted for three-quarters of total budgets in rural and suburban areas, compared to two-thirds in urban areas.

In other words, the analysis of Measure 3.1, which was supposedly primarily oriented to human resources development in regions, clearly demonstrates that a majority of projects was realized in urban areas. This could be explained by the non-specific spatial orientation of the measure. The projects were chosen on the ministerial level and the overall priority may have been given to larger projects with larger expected impact on potential users, also given the fact that services were predominantly localised in urban centres, providing for the non-resident population as well. Another possible explanation is that actors from urban areas applied in larger numbers or were more experienced in writing project proposals, thereby becoming more competitive in the selection process. The small proportion of projects realized in rural areas indicates a significant degree of counter-productiveness vis-à-vis the goals of the measure. Such outcome not responds to the necessity of human resources development in rural areas articulated in the strategic documents and is rather coherent with the regional concept of development.

The second measure analysed in this paper is Sub-measure 2.1.4, *Rural Development (LEADER+)*. This is a Community initiative designed to help rural actors assess the long-term potential of their territories. The programme supports bottom-up initiatives by local actors (municipalities, farmers, NGOs, businesses), providing local action groups (LAGs) with the possibility to formulate a developmental strategy for the territory and to finance projects fulfilling the aim of the strategy. It is generally acknowledged, even though not always true or demonstrated, that the LEADER approach also enhances organisational capacities of local communities, which can be considered part of

human resources. From this point of view, development of human resources can be considered as a by-product of the LEADER, rather than a first priority goal.

In the 2004–2006 planning period in the Czech Republic, LEADER+ had the character of a pilot program, being new in the Czech context.⁹ Only 10 pilot LAGs were supported within the LEADER+. Individual projects fulfilling the priorities of local action strategies were financed. The amount of support per individual beneficiary in the investment projects was limited to € 20,000. The relatively small maximum amount reflected the expected small-scale, local character of investments. Projects by local actors operating in the territory of the respective LAG such as individuals, municipalities, entrepreneurs, NGO's, or farmers, could be supported.

Within the ten local pilot action groups, 224 projects were supported¹⁰, of which 208 were localised at the municipal level.¹¹

Table 3—Sub-measure 2.1.4, Rural Development (LEADER+), localisation of projects within investment phase (b), average total budget per project realized

Spatial categories	Number of projects	Average total budget per project (in Euros)
Urban centres	9	9,709
Suburban areas	110	22,861
Rural centres	25	12,174
Rural	64	18,581
Total	208	19,690

Source: SZIF (State Agricultural Intervention Fund), author's calculations.

Exchange rate of 29 September 2008: 1 EUR = 24.6 CZK.

A total number of 224 projects were realized in investment phase (b). Municipal localisation was impossible for 16 of them.

9 In the new EU programming period 2007–2013, the programme continues as an Axis 4 of European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

10 In the investment category (b), "Implementation of local development integration strategies", of Sub-measure 2.1.4, Rural Development (LEADER+).

11 The list of supported projects is available on the website of the State Agricultural Intervention Fund <<http://www.szif.cz/irj/portal/anonymous/op-02-21-214>>.

Figure 3—Localisation of projects under Sub-measure 2.1.4, Rural Development (LEADER+), phase (b), within urban, suburban and rural localities

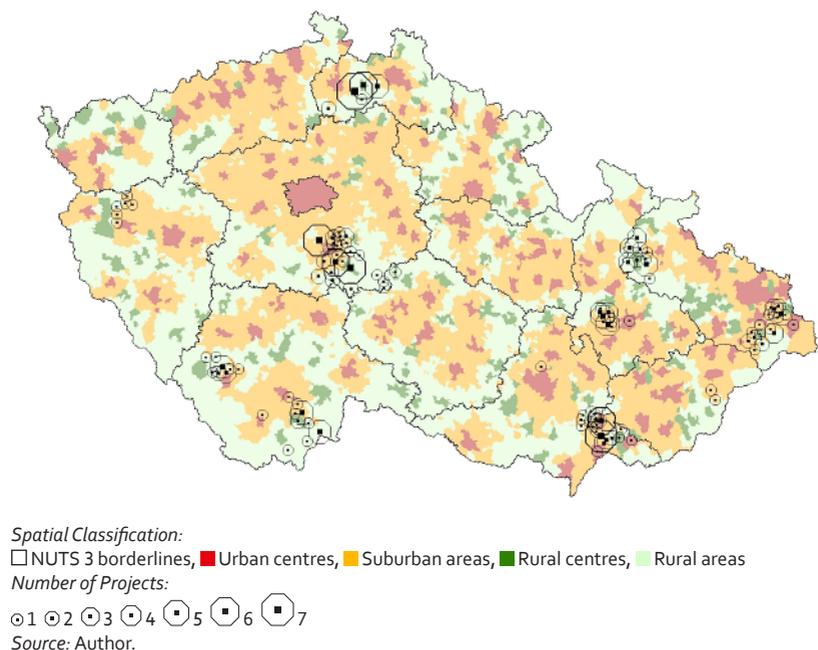


Figure 3 shows clusters of projects implemented according to the locations of LAGs, which is why they are distributed unevenly on the national territory. The localisation of projects was quite favourable to rural areas: 64 out of 209 projects under review were realized in rural areas. Most projects were realized in suburban areas (110 projects). The average total project budget was less than € 20,000 due to the general conditions for support, and only in some cases the total budget exceeded this sum due to co-financing. The average total budget differed according to spatial types and was higher in rural areas than in urban ones. However, the within-group standard deviation is high, and therefore, the between-group differences are not significant.

In spite of time and territory restrictions for the realization of projects within Sub-measure 2.1.4, Rural Development (LEADER+), the program had the capacity to realize projects in rural areas. Analysis also revealed that the local redistribution of smaller grants was more favourable for smaller rural actors. This was probably the best scheme of resource distribution for locally targeted small revitalisation projects. The limits imposed on the size of municipalities

of actors eligible were a good tool to increase the chances of financing projects of smaller municipalities and smaller actors. This seems to be the best solution given the nonexistent definition of rural areas.

6. Conclusions

In line with other empirical studies of cohesion and regional and rural policy in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Bachtler et al. 2000, Halfacree et al. 2002), this article has aimed to contribute to the empirical understanding of rural development strategies. Taking human resources development in rural areas as co-financed by EU economic and social cohesion schemes for 2004–2006 as a case study, it has critically analysed the initial formulation, subsequent policy measures, and final geographical application of the Czech government's strategic documents. The analysis found deficiencies and inconsistencies in all of the three stages, indicating a low degree of goal-orientedness, adequacy, and effectiveness of this seemingly well-structured scheme. Strategic documents explicitly dealing with rural development (namely the National Development Plan and the Horizontal Rural Development Plan) lacked precise definitions of rurality in terms of both space and population, and therefore, their conceptualisation of rurality was deficient. This was further reflected and extended in the unclear and general definition of threats and in the formulation of developmental priorities. As their concept of rural development oscillated between the agriculture-centred concept, the regional concept, and the integrated concept, only fragmented policy measures of rural development could be adopted. As a result, the strategic programming documents did not embody, and hence could not implement, a strategic vision of development. Instead, they mainly re-presented a description of the status quo.

The main policy concerns of human resources development in rural areas that were articulated in these documents touched upon unfavourable demographic structure, low educational level, and low flexibility of labour force, as well as flight of young, educated inhabitants. By proposing an alternative definition of rural suburban and urban areas, the commuting approach, I have shown that some of these concerns, e.g., those regarding an unfavourable demographic structure, are not based on tangible evidence. The vast attention devoted to rural development concerns in strategic documents did not find adequate response in policies. "Project oriented" measures were rare. Only measures taking rural areas policies as a specific issue, without primary stress on agriculture, according to the integrated concept rural development, could be considered as relevant responses to the declared policy concerns: Sub-meas-

ure 2.1.4, Rural Development (LEADER+), of OP Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture. Measure 3.1, Infrastructure for Human Resource Development in Regions, of the JROP was studied as an example of the regionally targeted concept, by observing how strongly rural actors were represented along with other regional actors. LEADER+ represented a new bottom-up form of local development and was just a pilot programme. Hence its scope and financial support were limited. Out of all supported projects whose final beneficiaries could be localised at the municipal level, less than *one-third* of LEADER+ projects were localised in rural areas and more than a half in suburban areas. The localisation of Measure 3.1 in rural areas was rather unsystematic. Only *one-sixth* of projects under this measure were actually implemented in rural areas and the same proportion in suburban areas. From the number of measures, number of realized projects within these measures in rural areas, and total amount of money invested there, one can conclude that the primary policy concerns about human resources development in rural areas could not be sufficiently accomplished. Nevertheless, project-oriented measures within an integrated concept of rural development, represented here by LEADER+, clearly had a higher capacity of being realized in rural areas.

In sum, as in other regions that have benefited from EU Social and Economic Cohesion funding, a critical analysis of the actual implementation of these programmes on the ground has, in some respects, become an exercise in ‘the anatomy of failure’ (Economou 1997). Turning towards the EU’s current programming period, 2007–2013, the question thus arises whether there are signs of improvement in the Czech government’s rural development policies. Some of the crucial problems persist. At first sight, strategic documents still operate with the term “rural” without clear definition and their developmental visions are indefinite. Nevertheless, more generous financial resources are flowing to cohesion policy and to rural development specifically. There are more projects with higher financial support. Programmes now limit eligibility to municipalities of less than 5000, or 2000, or at times even 500 inhabitants, depending on the measure, but without any specifications, rationales, or formulas for these alternating size restrictions. It is thus far from clear whether this is part of a new emerging vision or just a shooting into darkness. And here we come back to the tale of muddled definitions preventing strategic visions. Alternatively, instead of conclusion, one might end by suggesting that the Czech rural development policies after 2004 rather told an inverted tale, one of a strategic vision to “let as many actors as possible eat from the EU’s fleshpots”, thus rather deliberately *creating* muddled definitions.

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