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DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREA IN SLOVAKIA (Applied to the Microregion Podhorie)

Introduction

The development of Slovak rural area within the last 40 years was considerably influenced by strong deformations, which accompanied the process of urbanization and industrialization in Slovakia. The process of urbanization was gradually reduced to the process of concentration and centralization connected with creation of settlements and with one-sided preferring quantitative growth to quality of residential and social conditions and environment. The deterioration of residential conditions led up to migration of rural residents to cities and towns. The consequences of this policy are as following:

- destruction of demographical and social basis of rural settlements;
- depletion of human potential quality and decrease in utilization of housing stock;
- loss of natural social and demographical basis for work in agriculture and other branches in the settlement and its surroundings;
- decrease in using the land in estate area;
- loss of economical functions of the settlement;
- comedown of the housing stock;
- damage of social conditions and environment of the settlement.

The situation in the rural area was negatively impaired also by deformations in understanding the agriculture, which was presented as a kind of industry, insufficiently respecting biological basis of agriculture and its unique importance in care of land and in forming a social potential of the area.

Rural settlements, their potentials and areas have an irreplaceable role in the development of Slovakia (they represent 95 per cent of all settlements). There live 42 per cent of population in rural regions, 45 per cent in transitional ones and 13 per cent in urban regions. In spite of the high share of rural population, the population density in the rural regions comes to 87 inhabitants/km², while in the transitional regions it is 105 and in the urban regions 1022. In comparison to Austria, Slovakia is less urbanized, with higher population density.

In the paper we will concern with a general geographical characterization of rural area in Slovakia, applying to microregion of Podhorie (a valley of upper flow of the river Bebrava) with outlining its revitalization, renewal.

Development of rural area in Slovakia after 1950

Considerable changes of rural area in Slovakia came after 1950, mainly because of collectivisation of agriculture and industrialization of some agriculture territories. The first factor caused gradual liquidation of small and medium peasant farmers, who had formed the basis of agriculture in rural area and had a relationship to non-agricultural activities. The second factor caused that the newly industrialized territories needed the manpower surplus from rural areas. That is the reason of emigration from rural areas. For example, in 1950 there lived 63.7 per cent of Slovak population in rural settlements. No region of Slovakia had less than 50 per cent of rural population at that time. Main concentrations of rural population were in eastern Slovakia, in Orava (northern Slovakia), South-Slovak Hollow (middle south of Slovakia) and in Žitný ostrov Island (southern part of western Slovakia). The main rural population wane was observed in areas around big industrial plant and large cities and towns, but gradually also in more distant regions, mostly sub-mountainous and mountainous areas.

At the beginning of 1960s 61.2 per cent of population lived in rural settlements, at the beginning of 1970s it was 57 per cent and in 1980s 49 per cent. The lowest share of rural population was observed at the beginning of 1990s, when only 42 per cent and in some regions only one third of population lived in rural areas — mainly the regions of Kysuce (north of Slovakia), regions of Horehonie, Turiec, the Zvolen Hollow (in central Slovakia). The lowest decline of rural population within the last 40 years was observed in regions with good transport position of rural settlements to large cities — region of Košice (eastern Slovakia — metallurgical plant), region of Poprad (northern Slovakia — rising of important engineering and chemical plants). After 1991 the first escalating of rural population share appeared. One cannot find any regional relationship, we suppose the influence of decreasing of occupations in transforming industrial cities and the lack of flats in towns and cities.

The rural regions with a peripheral position to poles of development showed a tendency of comedown after 1991, emigration of young generation to cities because of work and services not only out of region but also out of the republic. This decline concerns mainly mountainous regions in central Slovakia. Some of these regions were important cultural and economic territories in the history of Slovakia. The dominant economic activities there were mountainous agriculture (cattle-breeding), forestry, handicrafts. In case of selfregulating, a damage of natural, social and ecological balance could appear. This is the reason why a renewal of original functions of rural area begins to be realized in some of those regions. The renewal is supported from two sources, firstly by the government, secondly by different voluntary organizations. A big emphasis is placed on the inner sources of inhabitants, their readiness to cooperate and participate in the development. As an example of regions with the symptoms of decline and renewal efforts based on internal and external impulses we give the microregion Podhorie.

The revitalization of the microregion Podhorie

The microregion Podhorie is situated in the Strážovské vrchy Mountains, in basin of upper flow of the river Bebrava (Fig. 1). Administratively, it belongs to a new created region (district) of Bánovce nad Bebravou, being a part of Trenčín county. The



Fig. 1

territory of the microregion is formed by 8 rural settlements: Čierna Lehota, Šípkov, Trebichava, Slatina nad Bebravou, Slatinka nad Bebravou, Krásna Ves, Timorádza and Podlužany. The microregion's population growth has been remarkable: from 4900 in 1910 to 3100 in 1994 (Fig. 2). The highest decrease of population was obser-

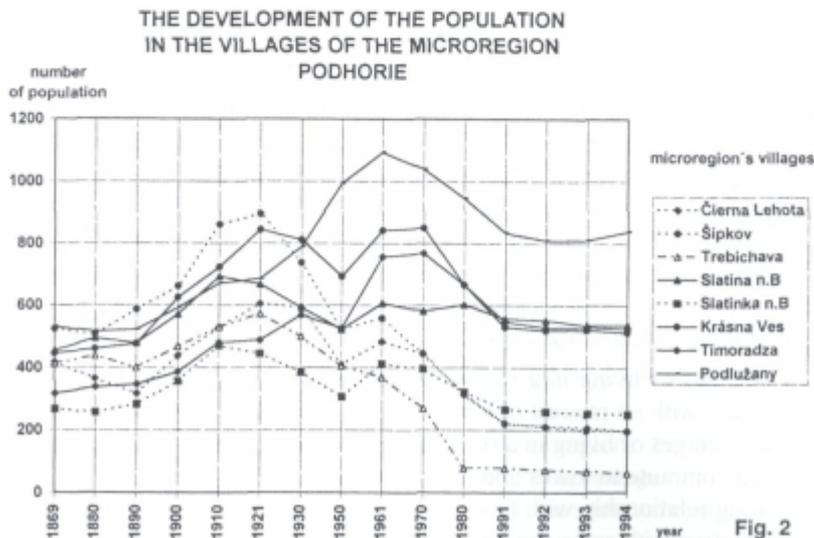
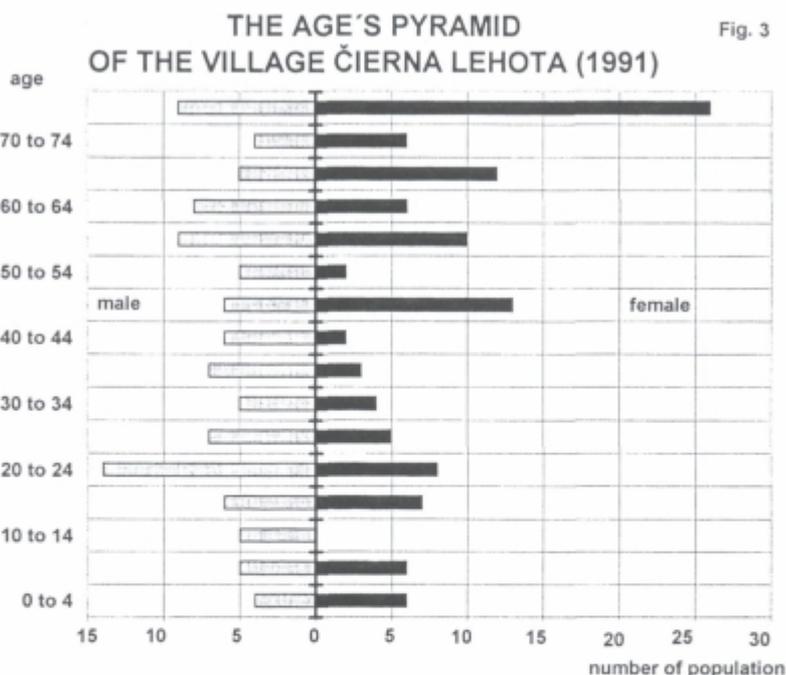


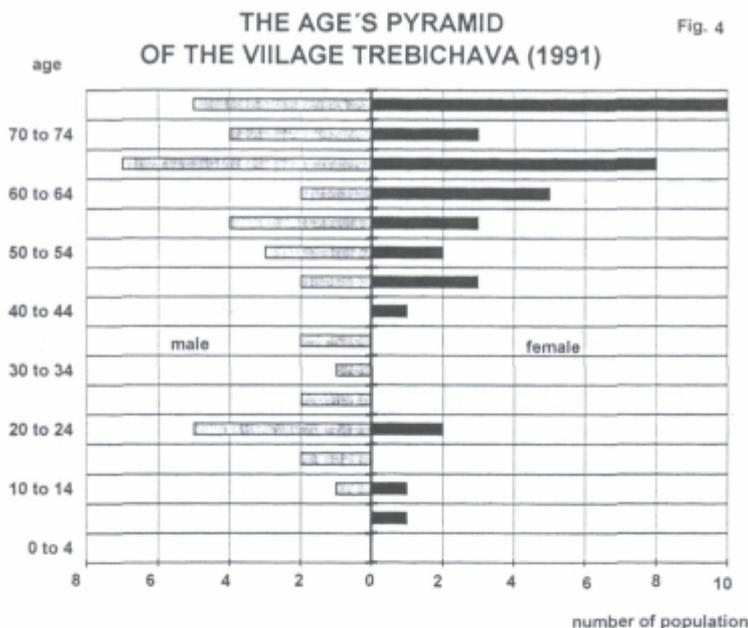
Fig. 2

ved in the most remote settlements: Čierna Lehota (from 530 to 197, Fig. 3) and Trebichava (from 530 to 63, Fig. 4). At the present time, the microregion has an adverse population age structure, with 30 per cent of post-productive population (Trebichava 60 per cent). This is the main reason of the microregion's decline.



The process focused on stopping the decline and developing the region had to be common for all the settlements. The 8 mentioned settlements have founded the Public Association concentrating finances and applied for governmental and other supports. Firstly, it was necessary to mobilize the inner inhabitants' potential, find internal sources, being the most important factors keeping the area's development up. In 1996, a sociogeographical research took place in the microregion, offering the main potentials of microregion's orientation. On this basis, several priorities (static or dynamic) of the microregion were given:

- advantages of living in a rural settlement with a silent, calm and clean environment, with no interest of living in town (the district, regional centre);
- disadvantages of living in a rural settlement — a lack of work occupations and a high commute to towns and cities;
- a strong relationship with family and family house;
- satisfaction with some services (groceries, chemist's, post-office);



- dissatisfaction with the majority of services, mainly for older population (pharmacy, old people house, a canteen for old people, a grief hall);
- social conditions are suitable only in own settlement;
- a strong interest in activities in own settlement;
- a need of occupations in traditional (handicrafts, agriculture, forestry — for older part of population) but also new branches (agrotourism, business enterprising — for young people);
- not very active but almost troublefree youth.

On basis of the mentioned priorities the Public Association of the microregion started to realize some of the projects having a relatively strong support by the local inhabitants.

Conclusion

The renewal (revitalization) of rural area in Slovakia has got different forms but each region or microregion should come out from its own local potential, use the properties that make the region stronger than the other regions. For all rural regions of Slovakia is common that their main comparative advantages are the activities focused on the active co-operation with surroundings, on a mutual exchange of experiences and on creating a common global network.

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