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DEMOGRAPHIC VITALITY AND HUMAN RESOURCES AS IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR RURAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: The heterogeneity and huge regional diversity as key determinant of Slovenian rural areas have not been considered enough in the case of regional development directing. Extensive and multilane questionnaire of case study areas (the survey included 10 selected problem areas) pointed out the most evident development problems and future development opportunities. The latest ought to be respected with the planning and guidance of endogenous regional development. The demographic potential as the basis condition for "realistic planning" is upgraded with the de facto household vitality (i.e. demographic vitality), which enables the most reliable demographic structure review. Various forms of demographic vitality significantly determine the approaches and measures for regional development stimulation. The mentioned are successful only with the simultaneous identification of endogenous resources, stimulation of social capital and human resources as key factors of endogenous development as a whole.

Key words: rural areas, rural development, human resources, demographic vitality, Slovenia.

Садражај: Регионални диспаратет као кључна детерминанта сеоских области у Словенији није довољно истраживан у смислу регионалног развоја. Упитник истраживаних области (истраживање је обављено у 10 проблематичних области) је указао на проблеме који се тичу могућности развоја сеоских области. Демографски потенцијал као основни услов за тзв. "реално планирање" побољшан је са виталношћу домаћинства, чиме се омогућава поуздана анализа демографске структуре. Различите форме виталности домаћинства значајно одређују приступ и мере симулација регионалног развоја. Напред неведено могло би довести до успеха само са симултаном идентификацијом људских ресурса као кључног фактора развоја у целини.

Кључне речи: сеоске области, сеоски развој, људски ресурси, демографска виталност, Словенија.

Introduction

Despite the fact, that 500.000 Slovenian inhabitants (i.e. 25 % of total population) live in seven bigger Slovenian urban centres with more than 20.000 inhabitants, the rural areas still form a picture of more than 90 % of the whole Slovenian territory offering the residence to almost 50 % of total population.

Unequally developed Slovenian rural areas are one of the key problems and challenges for Slovenian spatial and regional policies. As rural areas, often peripheral,

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economically underdeveloped and structurally weak, are problematic from the developmental point of view and permanently depend on state support, it is necessary to re-think about their development concept. From smaller units perspective (for example local communities, municipalities or regions) the concept of endogenous regional development is the most sensible and grounded as it uses the existing potentials and activates population.

Huge regional disparities are evident when one is comparing development characteristics in different Slovenian landscape units. The real regional disparities do not originate only from various statistic data analysis, indicators and statistic methods; but are a result of synergetic (i. e. *de facto*) action of numerous factors. Specific regional and local problems step out as they can not be identified on the national and sometimes even on the regional level (for example on the existing statistical units level).

By re-direction towards endogenous regional development we come across to an important obstacle as the direct (and immediate) economic effects of endogenous regional development are evaluated by theoretics as modest whilst the rural areas economy is exposed to strong external influences. Far too often is the success of development process evaluated on the basis of clear and measurable final results. The main effects of endogenous regional development are on the long-term, the most viable are to be found on the socio-cultural field (the interest of people for local problems is increasing, as also the regional identity and social network), which could influence positively also on economic development (motivated actors would stay in rural areas and get engaged with local problems). Endogenous regional development represents the possibility for rural areas as it encourages the development process, which takes into account its own dynamic and is also very adaptable and above all long-term orientated.

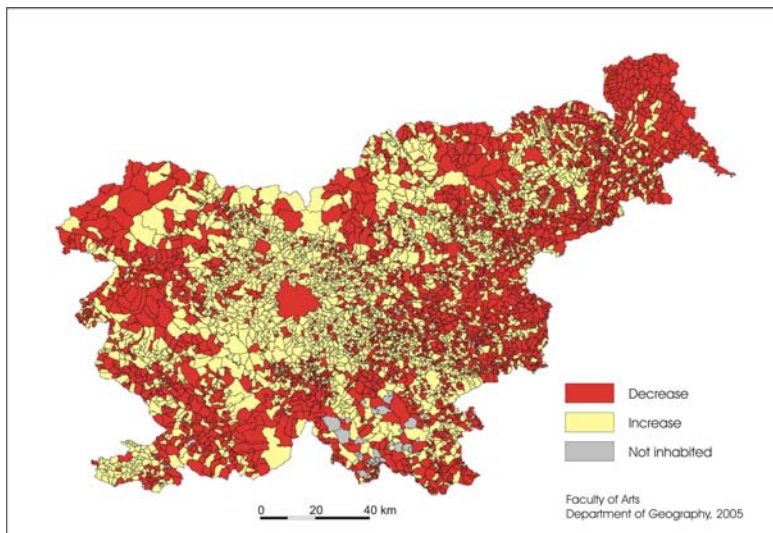


Fig. 1: Demographic dynamics of Slovenian settlements (1991-2002).

Source: SURS, Census 1991, 2002

Tab.1 indicates the intensive population increase in the last decade (1991-2002) mostly on suburban areas and typically rural areas (32.3 % of population). Population decrease is significant in towns and depopulation areas (structurally weak areas). Till 1991 the towns intensively attracted in-migration; according to the latest data the process is going into opposite direction. Urban areas occupy only 2 % of the whole Slovenian territory, but have immense influence on the suburban hinterland. The areas of population out-migration could be characterised as “problematic” Slovenian rural areas as they are relevant to 42 % of Slovenian territory: in 1991 only 14.9 % of Slovenian population lived there, till 2002 this

share had been fallen to 14.2 % and – regarding the other demographic indicators and actual processes - will continue in the future.

Tab. 1: Settlements with the population increase or decrease in 1991-2002 period.

Source: SURS; Census 1991, 2002, Klemenčič et al. 2005.

Area Type	Area (%)	Number of inhabitants in 2002 (%)	Number of settlements with population increase	Share of settlements with population increase (%)	Number of settlements with population decrease	Share of settlements with population decrease (%)	Total number of settlements
Urban areas	1.8	42.8	20	34.5	38	65.5	58
Suburban areas	5.7	10.7	313	70.0	134	30.0	447
Typically rural areas	50.5	32.3	1825	59.2	1258	40.8	3083
Mountainous areas	19.2	5.9	318	58.9	222	41.1	540
Hilly areas	13.9	8.4	578	67.4	280	32.6	858
Flat land rural areas	17.4	18	929	55.1	756	44.9	1685
Areas of out-migration	42	14.2	859	36.7	1481	63.3	2340
Areas of intensive out-migration	19.2	5.2	267	27.7	698	72.3	965
Areas of moderate out-migration	11.9	4.7	348	43.9	445	56.1	793
Areas of potential out-migration	10.9	4.2	244	41.9	338	58.1	582
Total	100	100	3018	50.9	2910	49.1	5928

Methodology

By analyzing the key development problems and rural areas perspectives we started from two basic data sources: the official statistic data (Statistic Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food etc.) and the data, collected on the field. The latest enable the critical data overview of various official data bases, but also the supplement and especially their suitable interpretation. The statistical data itself do not enable the recognition of actual trends and processes in the landscape, nor do they point out the development potential and demographic vitality of settlements or households. With different field work methods (especially with record of population regarding different settlements, questioning, guided interviews at municipalities and mapping) we identified local and regional problems, trends, sources and potentials at the lowest spatial unit – household.

On the basis of selected criteria (demographically endangered areas, border regions, areas exposed to natural hazards, infrastructure equipment, economically weak areas etc.) we had chosen 10 case study areas (Fig. 2). We wanted to enhance different landscape units of Slovenian rural areas (Sub-Pannonian, Sub-Mediterranean, Alpine, Pre-Alpine, and Dinaric-Carst Slovenia), areas with different demographic characteristics, the special emphasis was put on border areas (with Croatia, i. e. Loški potok, Haloze, Bela krajina, Posotelje) and less-favourable areas for agriculture.

We have deliberately excluded the rural areas in the vicinity of bigger towns (so called suburbanised rural areas), as here many demographic and economic trends are completely different: the areas show demographic growth (in-migration of urban population;

Tab. 1), which in (majority) is not traditionally connected to land/space, the typically rural characteristics of landscape are being lost.

The extensive field work was undertaken on 10 problem case study areas (Goričko, Murska ravan, Haloze, Posotelje, Bela krajina, Suha krajina, Loški potok, Zgornje Posočje, Goriška brda, Zgornja Savinjska dolina). The central part of survey was focused on the analysis of actual demographic »picture« of chosen settlements and areas/regions, which is a good foundation for their demographic vitality definition. In total, 73 settlements were considered in the survey of all case study areas with 4500 inhabitants (1333 households).

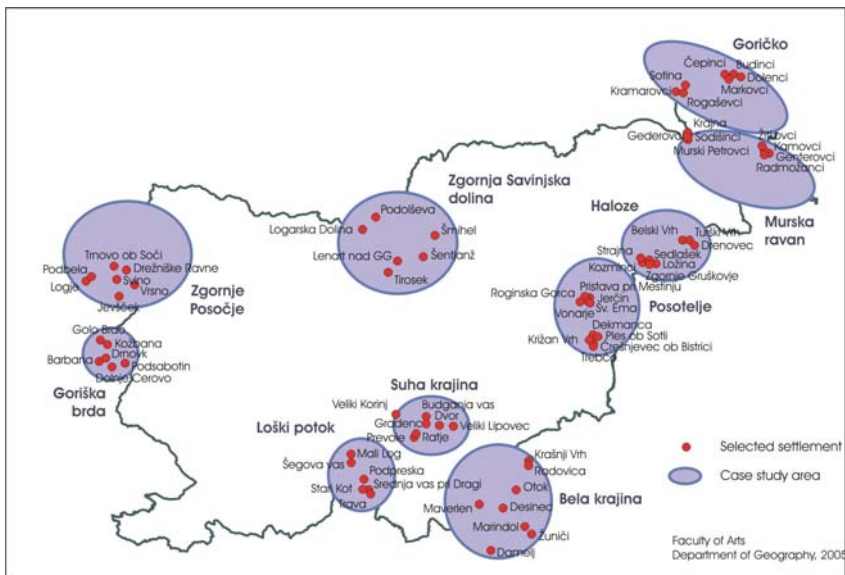


Fig. 2: Selected problem areas in Slovenia

In survey the case study areas were included respecting the following criteria:

1. structurally weak areas,
2. demographically weak areas, settlements with negative demographic growth,
3. settlements with population stagnation of positive demographic trends,
4. the size of settlements (regarding the number of inhabitants): systematically we did not include bigger settlements and municipality centres.

As for the chosen field work method and regarding the wish that we capture (for the demographic vitality purpose) a share of population as big as possible, we focused on the settlements with less than 500 inhabitants. Regarding the number and size structure of Slovenian settlements – with totally almost 6000 settlements, as many as 4700 (nearly 80 %) have less than 250 inhabitants, 600 settlements have even less than 20 inhabitants – the described procedure is reasonable and appropriate (SURSA, 2002).

The collected results were analysed using the method of age-generation household structure (recording the household members), which has already been adopted and proved as a suitable for evaluation of actual and potential development possibilities for small (smaller) areas. Apart from classic demographic analysis, generating from accessible statistic data from population censuses, the mentioned method is based on field work data collection – which is considered time consuming and expensive, but brings the real problem picture and describes the problems. With the additional questionnaire of development problems and

opportunities (nearly 1000 questionnaires) we wanted to found out the key development and environmental problems as well as development potentials and possibilities. Besides we had also guided interviews with the heads of municipalities.

Discussion

Demographic Vitality as Development Potential

The demographic characteristics are of the major importance when we are discussing the regional development of Slovenian rural areas. That was the reason, why we focused on demographic vitality. The functional typology by age groups on the household level as basic economic and functional unit is essential for the prognosis and guidance of future development of individual areas. It has come out, that just and only statistical analysis of demographic data do not enable in-depth analysis and future demographic processes forecasts (herewith also suitable measures). But, if we combine the mentioned analysis with the demographic vitality, than the result is regarded as »closer to real situation«. The key development actor is not an individual, but the household. Vital household units represent a potential in economic sense, they are also important holders of residential function, they maintain the settlement pattern and the landscape as well. The actual demographic vitality of a household in one settlement (and selected settlements of the region) points out to the vitality pattern of the broader region. On the basis of vitality potential we can define suitable measures, which should lead towards desired changes in the sense of sustainable regional development.

The survey showed that we should not be omitted to only the narrow aspect of demographic vitality, which is founded on merely the household age structure (so called reproductive potential). For the development of individual problem areas the demographic-development vitality it is of great importance: it includes appropriate socio-economic factors (age, education of household members etc.). At the starting point, we have to bear in mind, the unfavourable demographic tendencies and conditions in Slovenia: for the last decade we are facing with the negative natural increase. The ageing index is 96.3 – very close to 100, the point at which the share of elderly people equals the share of the young ones. Favourable demographic structure is evident only in in-migration areas (suburban areas), which results in unfavourable and vulnerable out-migration areas (see Tab. 1).

From the developmental point of view, the households were categorised into one of the following seven types. On this basis it is possible to establish actually and potentially appropriate households for development projects set-up. Age-generation household typology depends on the survey aim. In our case, we wanted to expose their potentially development orientation. The mentioned seven categories are as follows:

- 1 – all household members over 70 years old (aged household),
- 2 – all household members over 50 years old (older household),
- 3 – all household members over 35 years old (older parents, children over 35, singles over 35 - potentially vital households),
- 4 – parents, singles or children between 25 and 35 years (potentially vital households),
- 5 – three-generation households - children under 25 years,
- 6 – two-generation households - children under 25 years ,
- 7 – young households – all members under 35 years.

Observing the mentioned household types, one could easily point out those which are potentially capable to be included into development programmes. The first household type is evaluated as physically not active. In the second household type, the household members maintain the economic activity, but are not (exceptions to the rules evident) suitable for entrepreneurship. Very similar is the case of type 3, where the households have to take care

of “unmarried children, sick and handicapped people”. Type 4 is (as has the full working power of household members) potentially interesting as the actor of changes. The type 5 has lost its former importance, but still remains very appropriate for (potentially) family enterprises. Unfortunately is in many cases demographically impoverished. The type 6 seems the most suitable for new activities development. The households are more future oriented (also because of children) and therefore more open to contemporary approaches in the economy. Young families as the last household type are very welcomed in every milieu, but are very sensible and fragile to social environment (school system, health services, development opportunities) and can out-migrate in the case of unfavourable circumstances.

In case study areas every tenth household is declared as aged (2/3 of them with only one household member). This represents heavy social burden for each society, and especially for rural milieu. Older households perform 1/6 of all households – they mostly consist of retired people. As much as one third of households are single member households. We consider the both mentioned types as economically non-functional (this share puts the development planners into very difficult position).

Households with elderly middle generation represents (altogether with the young households) – by the figures - the weakest group (8 %). By the rule, these are two- or three-household members, 20 % with only one member. The described structure points out their weak demographic vitality. Middle aged households (11 %) have on average more households members. Three-generation households represent approx. 20 % of all and are (besides the middle-aged and young households) the strongest by number. Two thirds of them have 5 or 6 members. This group is also demographical impoverished, as 15 % of households have only 3 or 4 members. Evidently we have to deal with the households in very unfavourable social and economic situation. On the other side, there are 20 % of households with 7 to 10 members, representing the used-to-be predominating household type.

Households with middle and young generation are formally the most appropriate ones for the development planning. They are the strongest household type (25 % of all). 55 % of them are single-member, 20 % have more members. We have to consider this group by planning and undertaking the development plans. Besides the parents, also the children can be included into development circle (i. e. via different educational programmes). Young households are – unfortunately – almost exceptional phenomenon – with only 5 % share of total households. We need to have special approaches for them as they represent one of very rare possibilities for maintaining at least a part of nowadays settlement in rural areas development empowering.

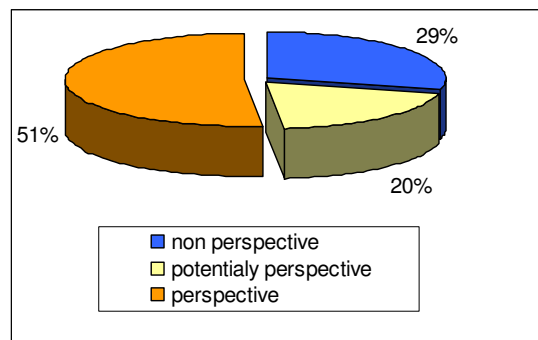


Fig. 3: Demographic vitality in Slovenia.

Source: Field work, Department of Geography, 2004-2005

Regarding transparency, it is reasonable to make some generalization: we therefore define perspective/vital households (type 5, 6, 7), conditionally perspective/vital households (type 3 and 4) and non-perspective/non-vital households (type 1 and 2). Here are field work results: Haloze have a large share of aged and older households (40 %). The demographic poverty is shown also by the relatively small number of household members. Zgornja Savinjska dolina steps out: almost 2/3 of two- and three- generations households and 20 % aged and older households gives the area very advantageous development possibilities. This fact is also underlined by an above average household members in both demographically most fruitable household types.

Problems and opportunities from local population perspective

In the second part of our survey, we focused on the development level of social capital, seen through the local population attitude towards development problems and abilities to evaluate the development potentials. The level of demographic vitality significantly influences on the peoples ability to identify key development problems, and the potential development opportunities on local level even more. At the same time, the population of different vitality types has very various needs, therefore they also see the key problems and development potentials from very different perspectives. In remote, very weak – from vitality point of view- settlements (the majority of population consists of aged people) the remoteness to service centres is seen as a problem, as also the missing shop (due to elderly people immobility), basic health care and help to elderly people. Remote areas with demographically more vital population (where middle and young households prevail), the lack of working places, infrastructure, children care is evident, sociability and cultural performances are needed.

Therefore, we have undertaken a huge questionnaire, which consisted of two parts: we were interested in key development problems (seen through local population eyes as crucial restrictive development factor), and also the population ideas and visions (Where do they see the opportunity for themselves and broader area development?).

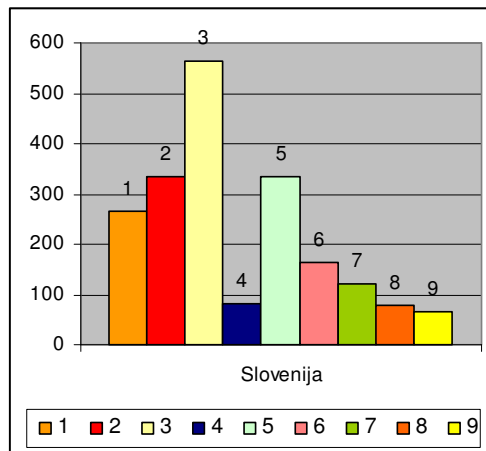


Fig. 4: Major development problems in Slovenian case study areas.
Source: Field work, Department of Geography, 2005-2005.

Remarks: 1 - out-migration, 2 - ageing, 3 - lack of working places, 4 - unfavourable educational structure, 5 - distance to the centres, 6 - insufficient infrastructure, 7 - unfavourable natural conditions, 8 - border area, 9 - other.

We designed relatively extensive list of possible answers: from key demographic (out-migration, ageing), socio-economic (lack of working places, unfavourable educational structure), infrastructure (distance to service centres, insufficient basic infrastructure), spatial (unfavourable physical conditions) and other problems (border regions, etc.). These closed type questionnaires allowed the interviewed people to choose up to three answers, therefore the number of recorded answers is higher than the number of interviewed

As the most important development problem in eight of ten case study areas was the lack of working places (64 % of interviewed people). Problems, associated with the ageing and distance to the service centres represent 17 % of all responses; 13 % answers had to do with the out-migration; insufficient basic infrastructure only 8 %. Only in Bela krajina (the questionnaire was undertaken before the bigger dismisses from employment at the end of 2005) and Zgornja Savinjska dolina other developmental problems came into first place: Bela krajina declared the ageing, whereas Zgornja Savinjska dolina distance to central places. The problem of border areas received 8 % on Slovenian level, but it became more important on regional level (when observing the case study areas in the vicinity of Slovenian-Croatian border).

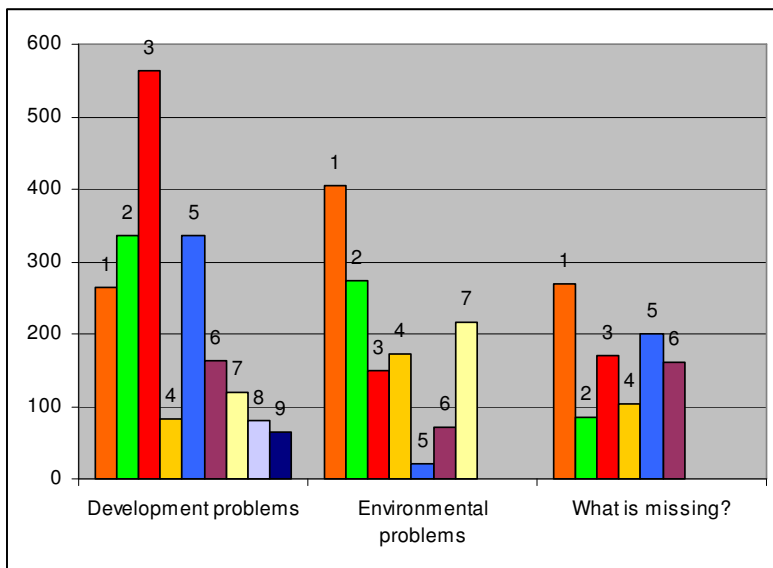


Fig. 5: Slovenian rural areas and their regional development problems.
Source: Field work, Department of Geography, 2004-2005

Remarks:

Development problems: 1 - out-migration, 2 - ageing, 3 - lack of working places, 4 - unfavourable educational structure, 5 - distance to the centres, 6 - insufficient infrastructure, 7 - unfavourable natural conditions, 8 - border area, 9 - other.

Environmental problems: 1 - unregulated sewage system, 2 - drinking water problems, 3 - unregulated dunghill, 4 - illegal dumping ground, 5 - unplanned construction, 6 - other, 7 - no problems of this kind.

What is missing? 1 - nothing, 2- regulated infrastructure, 3 - shop, 4 - health centre, elderly people supply system, 5 - socialising, performances, 6 - other.

Basic statements regarding to the development problems.

- The lack of working places is for the majority of interviewed seen as a key development problem.
- The combination of out-migration, ageing and lack of working places is the most expressive in Goričko, Haloze, Posotelje, Bela krajina (i. e. especially on border areas with Croatia).
- People defined hard conditions for agriculture as problem (Goričko).
- People did not define poor educational structure as a problem.
- Observing the environmental problems, the most important is the unregulated sewage system and drinking water supply (Murska ravan, Haloze, Posotelje, partly Bela krajina, Goričko and Suha krajina).

What are development opportunities for rural areas? 7 different answers were given and also the eighth option, that there is no development opportunities: 13 % of interviewed have decided for this option – this answer is very important as it shows non-engagement of local population as also the state of despair or handicapped people of peripheral rural areas. The majority of answers decided for tourism on farm, tourism development and new agricultural practices development as the most important development opportunity. Traditional economic branches, such as agriculture (as primary activity of rural areas) or manufacturing (although very important after the WW2), have had lost their significance. But we have to think about important regional differences, which are not seen if we aggregate data on the national level.

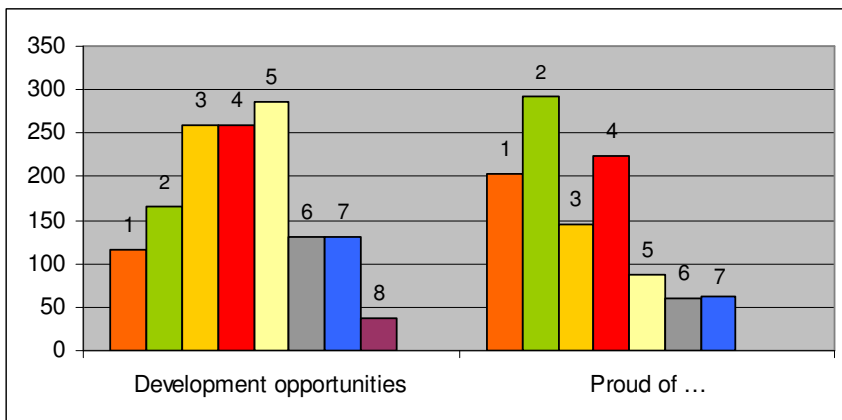


Fig. 9: Development opportunities of case study areas in Slovenia.

Source: Field work, Department of Geography, 2004-2005.

Remarks:

Development opportunities: 1- no opportunities, 2 - agriculture development, 3 - new agriculture practices, 4 - tourism development, 5 - tourism on farm development, 6 - supplementary activities on farm, 7 - entrepreneurship development, 8 - other.

Proud of: 1 - nothing, 2 - nature, silence, well-kept settlement, 3 - cultural heritage, church, school, etc., 4 -population social network, mutual help, performances, 5 - tourist amenities, tavern, 6 - other.

In four case study areas (Haloze, Posotelje, Suha krajina, Bela krajina) the interviewed people declared tourism on farm as the best development opportunity – this shows still persisting strong peoples attachment to land (agriculture), but »in new shoes«. Agriculture is seen only in Murska ravan as the development perspective – together with

very low level of people own initiative and statement, that there are no development opportunities in this area.

In Suha krajina and Loški potok relatively a lot of people saw the opportunity in entrepreneurship development and also in development of small enterprises (in agriculture, wood-processing industry). No real development opportunities are a fact for the majority of population of Murska raven, Haloze and Bela krajina – indicating the passiveness, but also very severe economic and social problems as well.

Numerous answers are connected with the actual circumstances in agriculture (new forms of cultivation, subsidies for organic farming etc.), tourism development and actual tourist project (landscape park Goričko), combination of tourism and supplementary activities on farms. The level of initiative of local population is very important especially for the future development of Slovenian rural areas: regarding the Leader principles, where the initiatives ought to come from the bottom. This concept will be very demanding for nowadays Slovenian rural areas circumstances; the question arises, whether –respecting the actual structure – is really feasible?

We have focused also on the importance and existence of regional identity with the question: What are people proud of in their local/regional environment? Open questionnaire lead a way to different answers: surprisingly, 23 % of interviewed did not see anything to be proud of, the majority is proud of natural environment (33 %) and the social network and harmony in the settlement.

Conclusions

Respecting the regional disparities of Slovenian rural areas, we should have the re-orientation towards different approaches in regional development strategies. By sure, the endogenous regional development is not present enough. The latest is activating local population and sustainable use of regional potentials. We should focus on activation of local population and extension of regional sources base, which should be in the initial phase, identified.

The important part of development effect is depended on human potential. We state that the past measures did not consider the population potential enough. The solid population structure is not seen just from statistical data on number and age structure; the essential is the functional typology respecting the age groups on the household level as basic economic and functional unit. Perspective household units are important part of residential function, they maintain the cultural landscape and settlement pattern, are economic lever.

With the extensive field work and with the method of households vitality we were discovering the importance of demographic potential. For the future development the key groups are so called perspective households with middle generation and young households – the group which should be the leader of the developmental plans in the future.

The engagement and local population participation (together with the local actors) is the second most important factor of successful development planning. The wishes and population visions, as also the awareness of present insufficiencies and main development problems are prerequisite for successful development policies. The field work findings point out to the danger on this field: the lack of interest for development problems amongst local population, not willing to participate in development programmes (negative experiences, mistrust). There is a correlation with the identification of regional development sources: all varieties of natural and cultural heritage, different forms of environmental sources etc. The local population itself is not capable to evaluate its own capital nor is capable to self-dependence activation of numerous regional sources, which are very often to be developed by the help from »top-down« approach and suitable networking (on the market under recognizable trade mark etc.).

Slovenian rural areas is captured in the rails of yesterday, very insecure and fast-changing in the present and has big aspirations for the future. For their realisation of key importance is to be the clear definition and adjustment of priorities and suitable specific measures of regional development, agriculture development and rural areas development, which should be complementary and not exclude themselves as it used to be the past practice.

The present rural areas are structurally and functionally very heterogeneous. Despite the agrarian population, there are retired people, active non-agrarian population, »classic secondary home owners« - now decided to replace the temporary residence in rural milieu in permanent; the natives that came back or come quite often, young families appreciate the cheaper way of life, contact to nature and suitable social environment. Each group has its own interests, therefore the contemporary rural areas have grown from former village communities into the areas of conflict of interests. This is not only evident to suburban areas, but also in the peripheral rural areas. The actual heterogeneity of social groups is making the typology of any kind even more difficult.

The field work survey results have shown demographic, but also very urgent and severe social issues. Weak demographic structure is in many cases connected to huge passivity, incapability and unwillingness to participate in long-term changes. This issue is of great importance as in year 2007 we start with the implementation of the new programme period in rural areas development, which will be founded on Leader initiative principles.

The weakness of rural areas, their demographic, economic and social exhaustion, is a integral problem, which could not be repaired by individual sector measures – the cross-sectorial approach to rural areas development will be crucial.

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БАРБАРА ЛАМПИЧ
ИРМА ПОТОЧНИК СЛАВИЧ

Резиме

ДЕМОГРАФСКА ВИТАЛНОСТ И ЉУДСКИ РЕСУРСИ КАО ЗНАЧАЈАН ФАКТОР РАЗВОЈА
СЕОСКИХ ОБЛАСТИ

Поштујући регионалне диспаритете Словеначких сеоских области, требало би да се оријентишемо према различитим приступима стратегијама регионалног развоја. Сасвим сигурно је да унутрашњи регионални развој није довољно заступљен. Последње у вези са тим, односило се на активирање локалног становништва као и одрживог развоја регионалних потенцијала. Требало би да се фокусирамо на активирање локалног становништва неразвијених региона, што би у првој фази било потребно идентификовати.

Слабости руралних области, њиховог демографског, економског и друштвеног развоја, су основни проблем коме би требало приступити из различитих сектора.