

SMALL TOWNS – ENGINES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTH-MORAVIAN REGION (CZECHIA): AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

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Small towns as a specific sector of the settlement system are observed from the demographical viewpoint on the territory of the South-Moravian Region (Czechia). Altogether 23 towns with 4,000 to 12,000 inhabitants were analysed. A long-term analysis (1869–2011; population censuses) as well as the last development (2008–2012; population balances) are taken into account. A relatively stable role of small towns in the regional settlement system throughout the period when population censuses has taken place and population increases in the contemporary period were stated. The first statement can be related to the rural character of the region where small towns play irreplaceable role. The last development shows that the population increase is directly proportional to the distance from the regional metropolis and inverse to the size of small towns. This corresponds to the concept centre – periphery and to current counter-urbanization trends. Recent demographic development supports the role of small towns in local and micro-regional identity and landscape memory in the era of globalization. Small towns seem to be attractive residential place – although not innovators but residences of many creative people.

Keywords: small towns, demographic development, South Moravian Region

INTRODUCTION

Small towns are rarely investigated by urban geographers because they are no bearers of innovations. They usually have limited number of jobs and services comparing to big cities, their environmental problems seem to be negligible and their population does not form any important entity (Bell and Jaune, 2009). However, the situation turns substantially, watching it from the rural viewpoint. Small towns represent important centres assuring the countryside as jobs, services, social contacts but also (micro)regional identity.

As Taormina Declaration (2009) states, “*Europe’s historic small towns and villages should be considered as gems of European cultural heritage. Each small town or village bears witness to its own unique development and history, through the evidence of its architectonical and urban built heritage, and that of the material and created landscape*

in which it is set. As such, historic small towns and villages constitute an important repository of European memory, and thus of the foundation of many European citizens’ and communities’ sense of identity”.

The small town research is in progress at the Brno branch of the Institute of Geonics, Czech Academy of Sciences and of the Department of Applied and Landscape Ecology at Mendel University in Brno since the turn of the millennium. The investigation started from the simple evidence of individual small towns, collection of data and case studies and has been enlarged to more general conclusions like the evaluation and typology. This approach found its full sense in connection with the countryside research during the last period.

Empirical studies have been done preliminary in Moravia and later in South-Moravia which can be considered as more or less rural region (except

Brno, the regional centre). Especially in such conditions the role of small towns as centres for their rural hinterland excels. The problems were investigated in the frame of different projects and diploma theses. The collected material enables to generalize the situation of small towns at least on the territory of the region. Thus we believe that provided conclusions are relevant also on national and European scale.

The paper starts from the theoretical embedding of the position of the small town sector within the national settlement system. The approach is focused on small towns as centres of rural development, e.g. it highlights small towns as a rural feature. The methodology is based on the analysis of the demographic development which forms a synthesis of its kind combining results of economic, social and environmental factors. To enable a comparison, South-Moravian small towns are divided according to their size, position regarding to the regional centre and the function. The results are discussed from the viewpoint of their future as rural centres.

THEORY

Small towns form a specific phenomenon of the settlement system. They are no miniatures of larger cities. They offer an alternative of a life style for certain part of population. The difference could be expressed for example by a simple fact that citizens do not need a car to move within their small towns. A person walking or moving by bike perceives the settlement, its atmosphere and other people in a different way than an inhabitant of a city moving by car or by public transport. The people can feel more secure in small towns than in anonymous big cities. On the other side small towns vary from rural settlements with existence of a basic level of urban functions, including services.

Small towns create the lowest level of centres within the Friedmann's concept of core – periphery. In other words, they manifest the highest level of the countryside and, at the same time, the lowest level of the urban system. Just this attribute is the reason of increasing attention paid to small towns in geography during the last period.

At the present time, geographers perceive the necessity to rethink the Christaller's theory of central places as a consequence of the development of individual transport and increasing motility of people. Therefore rural inhabitants can satisfy their demands for jobs and services in more distanced but better equipped medium-size and big cities or in hypermarkets and industrial zones by motorway crossroads. It is visible especially in well accessible towns in lowlands or in peri-urban zones. Peripheral small towns in badly accessible micro-regions keep their role longer.

In the central European conditions, small towns play a specific role in peripheral regions. That is why the small towns sector is investigated, especially

on the mountain territory of the Alps but similarly also in southern half of France and in inland Spain. Courtney and Errington (2003) paid their attention to small towns as a general issue. Big changes in small towns are connected also with the process of industrialization and later with the post-industrial development. Such changes were explained by Halonen *et al.* (2015) on the example of the Finnish town of Lieksa and in the post-Soviet context also by Printsman (2010) on the example of the Estonian town of Kohtla-Järve. The position of small towns within the countryside is explained by Noronha Vaz *et al.*, 2013): *Rural areas are seen as places that contain important functions such as (agricultural) production, biodiversity, regulation, storage and networks, towns as places with a concentration of facilities and institutions. By such a way, it is easy to understand that they complement each other.* Recently, small towns were a subject of the study by Kwiatek-Soltys *et al.* (2014). They point out the focus on the quality of life, among others.

Small towns are studied also on the European level. Within the ESPON programme, the SMESTO project (The role of small and medium-sized towns) took place during the period of 2005–2006. There was also success with the TOWN project (Small and Medium-Sized Towns) since 2012. Both projects combine small towns with medium-sized ones which seem to be not the best idea because of the different character of both categories.

The transformation of small towns from centrally planned to market conditions is usually the main topic of the small town research in post-communist countries. German researchers (Niedermayer, 2000; Hannemann, 2002; Steinführer and Kabisch, 2004; Cudny, 2012) dealt additionally with the situation of east-German small towns after the German reunion which is characterised by de-industrialization, population decrease, de-urbanization and infrastructural shrinkage. Polish geography pays its attention to small towns as centres of the rural hinterland (Sokolowski, 1999; Heffner and Marszał, 2005; Rydz, 2006). Zuzańska-Żysko (2004) studies small towns in Silesia, whereas Kwiatek-Soltys (2004) in Lesser Poland. A systematic research is provided also in the Institute of Regional Geography in Leipzig (Borsig *et al.*, 2010; Burdack and Kriszan, 2013). Monographs or papers appear as well in other post-communist countries (Slavík, 2002; Rebernik, 2005; Cigale *et al.*, 2006; Spasić and Petrić, 2006; Lampič and Špes, 2007; Kusiš and Abele, 2008; Zamfir *et al.*, 2009; Belova, 2011; including Vaishar and Greer-Wooten, 2006; or Vaishar *et al.*, 2012).

Demographic development is one of the indicators within the analysis of the small town sector. Pirisi and Trócsányi (2007) analysed recent population development in Hungarian small towns (defined as towns under 30,000 inhabitants). The authors stated positive but different development of individual small towns. Camară (2011) analysed the demographic development in north-east Romania. He found differences among small towns of different types. However, the general

situation was evaluated in a relatively optimistic way although this underdeveloped part of the country serves as a reservoir of people for big cities. Population development in small town of the whole Czechia was analysed by Zemanová (2012). She elaborated census data from 1869–2001. Her conclusions are pessimistic, but the de-urbanization processes in Czechia were significant only after 2000. Similarly, Repaská (2011) analysed demographical development of small towns in Nitra Region (Slovakia). She also stated population decrease – although two small towns recorded a positive migratory balance. How the situation in southern Moravia looks like?

Due to the fact that small towns are considered as a part of the countryside in our study, they vary in different parts or the World according to the natural and historical conditions for development of agriculture and other productive and non-productive branches. They differ by the population number, character of housing, central functions etc. We avoid the analysis of small towns sector in the U.S.A., Africa, China, India, Australia, Russia and other parts of the Earth. Hinderink and Titus (2002) made a comparative research of small towns in different regions of the World stating that a generalization of small town role in this scale is extremely difficult. That is why we focused on European, more precisely central European small towns. Historical territory of Moravia as a part of Czechia is the case study area.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The question of small town evaluation is crucial. Demographical dynamics seems to be important but – in a long term experience – it reflects only one aspect of the problem – the attractiveness of the respective town for dwelling. Due to increasing mobility the people can satisfy their demands in different places – not exclusively in the municipality where they live. In our opinion, a successful small town has to provide a suitable residential milieu for its inhabitants, attractive milieu for its visitors, and beneficial milieu for businesses. Besides it has to offer personality development.

Definition of a small town is a basic problem at the beginning of the research. Regarding the case study area, the upper limit is clear. South-Moravian urban system consists of the city of Brno (regional metropolis with ca. 400,000 inhabitants), five district towns with population of 20 to 35,000 and small towns – the largest one is having about 11,000 inhabitants. It means that there is a “natural” gap between middle size and small towns in the region. The lower limit is a problem. There are 23 towns between 4 and 12,000 inhabitants having no doubt about their urban nature. However, another 20 municipalities have a legal status of town – the smallest of them having only 1,100 inhabitants (whereas the largest village in the region crosses 4,000 people). The reason of their status comes

from a historical tradition but their urban functions are not always developed. Some of them have central functions regarding to hinterland, some of them not. We suggest considering such “towns” as an intermediate form and do not include them into the statistical analysis. Consequently, there are 23 small towns in the region according to the mentioned criteria.

The aim of the paper consists of the verification of following hypotheses:

- The population development of South-Moravian towns is inverse to their distance from Brno.
- The population development of South-Moravian small towns is inverse to their size.

The empiric investigation is based on the quantitative and qualitative methods. Hard statistical data were used to evaluate the whole set of South-Moravian small towns. At the moment, a selection of definitive data from the 2011 population census is at disposal as well as data from previous censuses since 1869. Recent population development was investigated by means of population balances during last 5 years (2008–2012). Population development was compared with different typologies of South-Moravian small towns.

The typology consisted of the size of small towns, their geographical position and other aspects based on the data; using other hard data like statistics of unemployment, data from the register of business entities, data from the road traffic census, time tables of the Integrated Transport System of the South-Moravian Region, data from the communal statistics and others.

South-Moravian Small Towns in a Statistical Synthesis

Small towns selected for the statistical analysis can be identified in the Fig. 1. They are situated on the whole territory of the region, especially in its eastern part and a sparse representation in the West. At the same time, the south-western part of the region reports the highest unemployment rate in the region and the highest share of depopulation of villages as well. Is it a coincidence only?

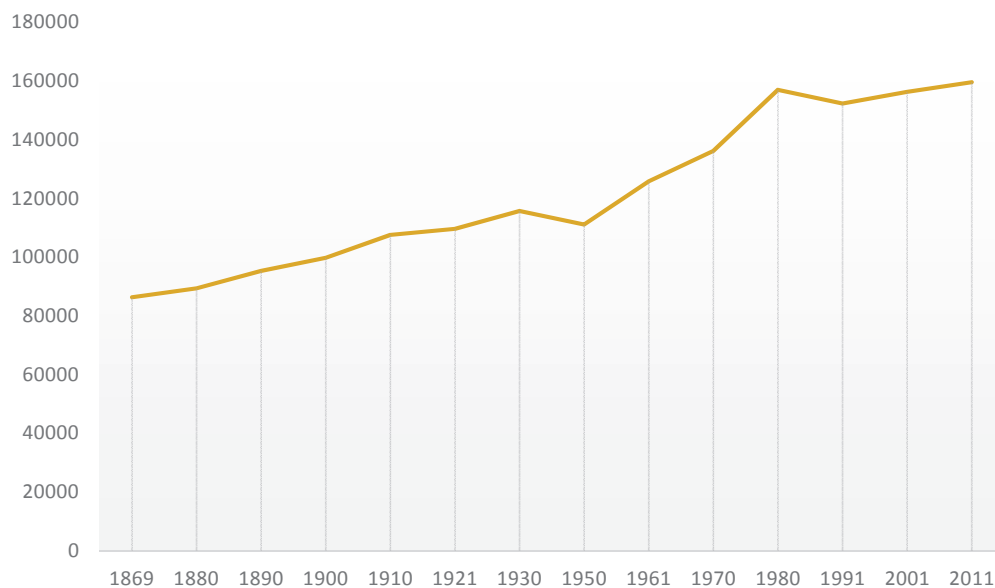
Population Development 1869–2011

Firstly, a population development in South-Moravian small towns was calculated. Fig. 2 shows relatively even population increase which was interrupted only in 1940s by events related to the WWII and also in 1980s when small towns started to lose their dynamics. The increase accelerated during the time of so called “socialist industrialization” and planned economy. Slow growth has been restored within 20 years in connection to counter-urbanization trends, including suburbanization.

Regarding the population development in the South-Moravian Region, the third highest inequality (in fact the level of concentration) after Prague with Central-Bohemian Region and



1: Small towns under study in the South-Moravian region. Drawn by J. Pokorná



2: Population development of South-Moravian small towns (4,000–12,000) inhabitants during the period of 1869–2011. The situation was re-calculated according to the present administrative stay.

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Moravian-Silesian region can be stated. In the same time, the Region entered the concentration process later than urbanized regions in Central, North-Western Bohemia and Northern Moravia (Hámpel and Müller, 2010). In general, the population development in small towns more or less copies the development in the South Moravian region.

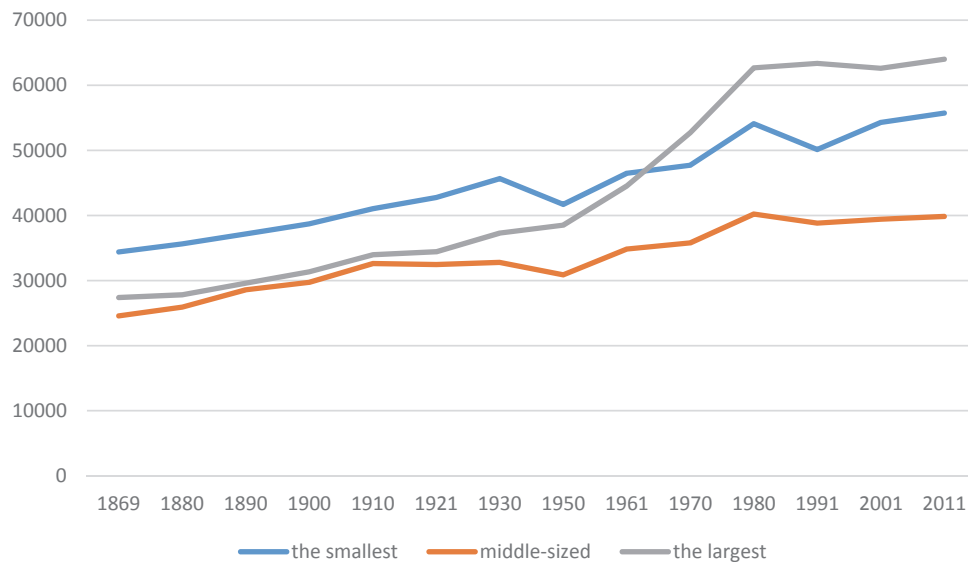
The development of the share of population in individual settlement segment could be of an interest. Tab. I shows that small towns have been

more important part of the South-Moravian settlement system in comparison to medium-scale towns. At the beginning of the investigation period villages concentrated almost 2/3 of population. Typical urbanization followed by concentration of people in big and medium towns can be observed till 1991. During the last 20 years, an opposite trend is visible: the share of population in rural settlements and small towns slowly increases. As regard to small towns, their position in the settlement system

I: *Shares of population living in individual settlement segments in the South-Moravian Region in the period of 1869–2011 [%]*

	1869	1880	1890	1900	1910	1921	1930	1950	1961	1970	1980	1991	2001	2011
Brno	15.71	16.47	18.57	20.79	23.15	24.48	27.16	30.59	30.52	31.74	32.53	33.94	33.15	33.25
Medium towns	6.47	7.13	7.54	7.82	8.14	8.08	8.33	7.99	8.52	9.31	10.70	11.72	11.71	10.82
Small towns	12.92	12.26	12.14	11.74	11.49	11.30	11.07	11.36	11.84	12.56	13.75	13.31	13.78	13.72
Villages	64.90	64.14	61.75	59.65	57.22	56.14	53.44	50.06	49.12	46.39	43.02	41.03	41.36	42.21

Source: Historický přehled obcí ČR. Data for 2011: Population census 2011. Czech Statistical Office Praha



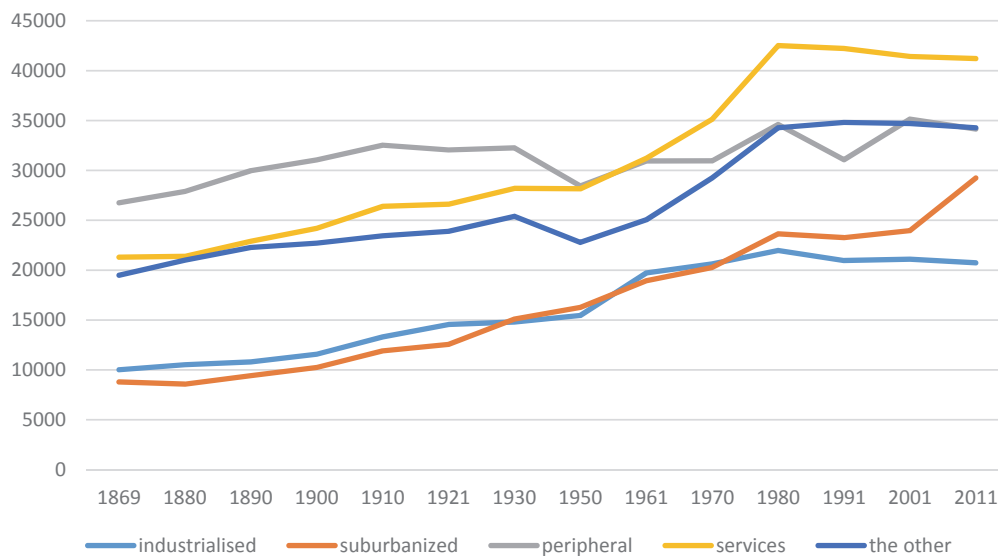
3: *Population development 1869–2011 in small towns according to individual size categories*
Data source: Czech Statistical Office Praha

of the region is relatively stable (unlike all other categories). The share of population living in this settlement segment varies between 11 and 14%, while the difference between the years 1869 and 2011 is 0.8 of the percentage point only.

One can argue that 13.72% is not much. Such a division is caused by two factors. Firstly, Brno is too large city for Southern Moravia because it is not only the regional metropolis. Its zone of influence extends the majority of the Moravian territory with some overlaps to Eastern Bohemia. Secondly, South-Moravia is a rural region with typical large rural settlements. That is why both extreme categories reach higher shares of population in comparison to a majority of other Czech regions. However, just the stable position of small towns among other settlements kept through all the historical development: (feudalism, capitalism, socialism and capitalism again, urbanisation, industrialization, sub-urbanization, central-planned and market-oriented economy) implies the importance of small towns. Is it a random or does it have some logical cause?

Of course, South-Moravian small towns do not form any homogeneous group. They differ by their size, historical development, geographical position, functions etc. In following analysis, we looked for more detailed relations between the population development and types of small towns.

Fig. 3 shows the population development according to individual size categories. The smallest towns have 4,000–5,999 inhabitants in 2011 (11 towns), the medium-size ones 6,000–7,999 (6 towns) and the largest over 8,000 inhabitants (6 towns as well). The population number has increased in the last 140 years in all three cases, but with the different speed during the different periods. Due to the formation of the majority of towns from more or less similar population base (approx. 2,000–5,000 inhabitants), the simple number of the smallest towns reflects their dominance at the beginning of the study period. The smallest towns kept their position till the World War II (WWII). As a consequence of the war and the post-war ethnically based population exchange, population numbers in the smallest and medium-sized small towns decreased whereas the larger ones joined the path of rapid (industrial) development. They surpassed the smallest towns in 1970 and continued a rapid growth till 1991. This growth was followed by stagnation. The development in the smallest and medium-sized towns was relatively similar till 1991. Later on the smallest towns have grown due to suburbanization whereas the middle-sized have stagnated. During the last period (2001–2011), especially the smallest towns have grown followed by the largest ones. It seems that the recent development is in a favour for the



4: Population development 1869–2011 in small towns according to selected categories
Data source: Czech Statistical Office Praha

smallest towns which could be considered as a part of the countryside.

Following division of small towns was applied to run the analysis. First of all, suburbanized small towns (in the vicinity of Brno) and peripheral ones (both examples – in the borderland and in the inner periphery) were selected. Although the process of suburbanization started in the surroundings of Brno only in 2000s, the vicinity of the big city manifested itself also in the past by commuting to work, by supplies of products to the market in Brno and better availability of urban achievements within the diffusion of innovation process. The reminder of small towns was divided according to their functions (Fig. 4): (late) industrialized, towns of services and the other towns (with mixed functions).

The suburbanized small towns recorded relative stagnation at the end of the 19th century (as it could be expected). The vicinity of a big town probably hampered their development that time. During the first 80 years of the 20th century, the suburbanized small towns grew relatively equally. They were not impacted by the post-war population exchange. This period was substituted by stagnation at the end of the last century, which was replaced by a rapid growth during the last decennium.

On the contrary, the peripheral small towns started with the highest population number at the beginning of the period under study. Their growth has stopped by the WWI. Moreover, the WWII brought the biggest population decrease of the peripheral small towns among all the categories. During the last 60 years, the development of the peripheral small towns is irregular. Last years are characterised by slight decrease.

Functional division is another possibility how to classify small towns. Everitt and Gill (1993)

suggested a typology for Canadian small towns which we simplified (due to the different situation of the territory under study and a limited number of cases). All South-Moravian small towns were industrial during the period of both capitalist and socialist industrialization. The term “industrial” means late industrialized small towns by heavy industry in our set of towns. They are characterized by a growth – especially at the beginning of the socialist period and by the stagnation or even decrease during the last 30 years. It is necessary to mention that the decrease has started already in 1980s and it is not a result of a change from central-planned to market economy.

The towns of service represent the strongest group. It is interesting that the period of their extreme growth has been recorded between the censuses 1950 and 1980. The service sector (or its combination with industry) was probably the leader of the development already that time. Under the Czech conditions it was supported by so called system of central places which ordered to locate services for the countryside just in small towns. The stagnation or even decrease of this category is interesting. It could be caused both by urban character of such small towns (they were out of suburban migration flows) and overcoming the micro-regionalization (with increasing population mobility, the people started to be more able to satisfy their demands for services in bigger and more distanced centres). The other small towns follow the category of towns of services.

Population Development 2008–2012 in Detail

This step of the research comes out from data of population balances which are at the disposal since 1970. However, in order to record the last development, the indicators were calculated for

II: Recent population development in the small south Moravian towns 2008–2012

Size	Natural movement		Migrations		Balance [%]		
	Born	Died	Immigrants	Emigrants	Natural	Migratory	Total
Small	2,592	2,322	6,641	6,004	5.4	12.7	18.1
Medium	2,157	1,882	4,459	4,396	6.8	1.6	8.4
Large	3,428	3,078	7,189	7,183	5.5	0.1	5.6
Industrial	1,143	1,031	2,404	2,284	5.3	5.7	11.0
Suburban	1,768	1,177	5,713	4,611	21.4	39.8	61.2
Peripheral	2,025	2,025	3,470	3,978	0.0	-12.1	-12.1
Services	2,146	2,122	4,537	4,360	0.6	4.3	4.9
Other	1,443	1,197	3,86	2,990	8.9	3.5	12.4

Data source: Demographic development in communes. Czech Statistical Office Praha

the period 2008–2012 and related to the average population number.

8,525 children were born during the study period within the whole set of small towns in the South-Moravian Region. In the same period, 7,552 people died which represent a natural increase on the level of 6.1%. Concerning migrations, 19,210 citizens moved in and 18,223 people moved out. It represents mechanical population increase of 6.2%. It means that not only South-Moravian small towns have increased during the last period but also natural increase stays the same.

It is extremely interesting that the development of individual small towns has been quite different. Of 23 small towns, 14 increased whereas 9 decreased. It is evident that the biggest increase was noticed in the suburbanized small towns (Modřice 107.6%). The biggest decrease was naturally in peripheral (Kyjov -36.0%) and post-industrial (Adamov -30.4%) small towns. There are towns with natural increase but migratory decrease (6 cases), natural decrease but migratory increase (3 cases). Other towns have both, natural and migratory increase (9 towns) or both natural and migratory decrease (5 towns). Despite of the mentioned facts, total situation is balanced and prospective.

Using the same small towns division, we can state that the size of small towns plays its role, especially in the case of the migratory movement (Tab. II). Whereas relative natural population increase is

nearly the same for all size categories (between 5.4 and 6.8%), the small towns are evidently the target of migratory movements whereas in case of the largest small towns, the numbers of in and out migrants are almost the same. It also means that the larger of small towns keep their population numbers due to the natural increase only.

Taking into account the second set of groups, it is possible to state that only peripheral small towns recorded the population decrease during the period of 2008–2012 (-12.4%). No group of small towns have had any natural population decrease; the peripheral small towns recorded the same number of births and deaths. All other towns recorded natural increase of inhabitants. Suburbanized small towns form a special category with the biggest natural as well as migratory population increase which manifests total population increase in the amount of more than 6%. On the other side, towns of services have grown slowest (4.9%). It is probably caused by the fact that towns of services belong to the largest small towns.

To conclude the analysis, it is possible to state that the small towns in the South-Moravian Region have enlarged during the last period. According to this criterion, two main aspects play the most important role: the size and the distance from the regional metropolis. It shows that the smaller towns have enlarged faster and more distanced ones have enlarged slowly or even have lost the population.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is more or less clear that small towns differ by their size. Larger small towns have more urban functions and milieu whereas smaller ones are closer to rural way of life and have limited urban functions. Within general trends of counter-urbanization the smaller towns have similar population development like villages whereas the larger ones develop their population similarly as the cities. The first hypothesis was positively verified.

Additionally, the growth itself is no more considered to be an indicator of the progress. As Capel (2009) writes: *“Nowadays it is certainly true that, in some cases, the lesser that growth is, the better; and in every situation, the most balanced it is, the better. Today, small cities may have significant advantages over large ones: they can be innovative, hold education centres, enjoy access to knowledge and culture, and be well communicated with areas of dynamic economic development. And besides all of this, they can be very agreeable places to live in.”* Similarly (Jakoš, 1993) highlights that population decrease in Slovenian small towns does not necessarily mean the stagnation but a development in a new direction. It seems that the South-Moravian small towns as the whole are very well balanced.

Following the balance of small towns in the South-Moravian Region, we can say that the specific settlement structure of the South Moravian Region supports such a development. One big city and rural hinterland might offer relatively stable small towns sector. These small towns play their role as centres of rural micro-regions (see Vaishar, Zapletalová, 2009).

The distance from the metropolis might be the other factor of the difference. Let us concentrate to the typology of small towns according to their geographical position and situation within the national settlement system. We can earmark three basic types of small towns under such a criterion:

- Small towns in the suburbanized zone (of the city of Brno).
- Well accessible small towns of (South-Moravian) lowlands.
- Peripheral small towns in the borderland and in inner periphery.

The results show that the suburban small towns have the best demographic development in terms of population increase whereas the peripheral ones are the only marking a demographic decrease. It means that also the second hypothesis was verified. Similarly, Fuguit, Brown and Beale (1989) mention the growth of metropolitan small towns and the decline of non-metropolitan small towns in the USA in the period of 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Suburbanized small towns draw from the vicinity of the big city. The whole employment market, all the services and social contacts within the big city are available for small town citizens in the hinterland. There are usually young and educated people participating in the suburbanization process. The medium age is represented less, an educational structure of suburbanized small towns is usually higher and the unemployment rate lower than the values of the same indicators in the city. The central function of the suburbanized small towns is overlapped by the gravitation of the big city as a rule. Nevertheless, suburbanized small towns are important elements of the suburbanized zone. They lighten big cities and provide basic urban activities to their inhabitants and to inhabitants of their rural surroundings, so these people do not depend on the big city so much. On the other side, suburbanized small towns are threatened by the danger of the identity loss. Their identity dissolves in the identity of the big city. Even local entrepreneurs advertise their product not on behalf of the small town but on behalf of its bigger neighbour. Suburbanized small towns defend themselves by attempting to support the identity through a realistic or fictional historical tradition, introducing of "popular" traditions etc. The question is whether it could balance the economic power of big cities (see also Vaishar and Zapletalová, 2007).

Small towns in South-Moravian lowlands are well accessible. Favourable natural and geographical conditions have formed a relatively dense network of small towns and large villages with similar level of urban infrastructure. Thus, these small towns (with exception of the largest ones) have hardly any hinterland because they adjoin similar settlements. There is no reason to commute among such kind of settlements. Due to the good accessibility, their inhabitants look for jobs, services and contacts in more distanced but better equipped larger towns. It occurs as a feature which could be named overcoming of micro-regionality. On the other side, as far as medium-size and big cities are well accessible from the lowlands, also the small towns in the lowlands are well accessible from bigger towns and cities. It enables some specialization of small towns in lowlands. Earlier, such a specialization consisted rather in industries. At the present time, also other activities should be taken into account, e.g. (secondary) education, social services, spa and wellness or tourism. It means functions which ask for basic urban activities on one side but also for a small-town milieu on the other one.

Peripheral small towns manifest the most interesting group. They are distanced from the regional centres, badly accessible – especially in the winter season, surrounded by poor villages. Peripheral small towns lack investments; they are economically poor, having the education structure responding to productive branches. Natural potentials including local raw materials play an important role too. Bürk (2013) argues that peripheral small towns are fighting with some stigmatization process as an effect of socio-spatial peripheralization which leads to their decline. Such small towns loose residents, infrastructures, political influence. Nevertheless, their surrounding consists generally of small and very small villages (often with less than 200 or even less than 100 inhabitants). Such villages have only a very limited infrastructure. Their population depends on peripheral small towns because larger and richer towns are badly accessible. It means that the central role of peripheral small towns is unquestionable. Moreover, these small towns without any competition in their vicinity are often bearer of the micro-regional identity. They are indispensable for keeping rural micro-regions. Thus, the watchword in the title of this paper applies to the peripheral small towns at first.

Post-industrial (it means towns which lost a larger industrial employer) and post-mining small towns create a special sub-group. These towns lost their basic function. They are fighting with structural problems and looking for new sense of their existence. The solution is seen in an orientation according to affiliation to one of the mentioned three main types.

It seems that small towns are attractive residential units combining advantages of urban and rural way of life. They will fulfil this mission differently. A presence of the creative class (Florida, 2005)

could be the main dividing factor. It could be measured by an education of population or presence of institutions demanding on qualified jobs (schools, hospitals). However, the creativity is not only the matter of formal education but also talent, motivation, preference and similar factors, which will play their role. Waitt and Gibson (2006) remind that big cities are the bearers of creativity but creative workers often decide to live in small towns.

The role of small towns in the period of globalisation through their identity could be important (Knox and Mayer, 2009). Small towns, concentrated to their traditional environment, products and their social capital could keep their identity face to face the general globalisation process. In this sense, small towns – to the contrast of the big and medium ones – are parts of the rural landscape. Also for the inhabitants of the hinterland, small towns represent a part of their landscape memory and cultural heritage. Sometimes, this heritage can be turned to the tourism development (Bruzzone, 2009). So called nostalgia tourism could be a branch of future in the developed countries (Dann and Theobald, 1995). Paradoxically, whereas local residents try to create a new identity as a rule, tourists and former inhabitants stress the future identity. This process has a special importance in the post-socialist countries (Light, 2000) where tourists are interested in the communist past whereas local people try to overcome it.

Contemporary migration flows from some African and Asian countries and from Balkans are directed mostly to western European countries and within Czechia to big cities. However the numbers of migrants are extremely high and it is not possible to exclude that also the demography of Moravian small towns could be impacted. The question of foreign immigrants was analysed by Nadler (2012) on the example of the Saxony town of Zittau.

There is no special support for the small town development in the Czech Republic. However, the small towns are partly able to receive financial sources through the support of local rural players e.g. within Local Action Groups of the LEADER programme. This possibility currently binds small towns rather with the countryside than with the urban world.

The paper explains the role of small towns within the countryside and reflects some myths about their development. The team of authors is the only one which deals with small towns as a special segment of the settlement system in the Czech conditions. By such a way the results can develop the theory preliminary of Polish and German authors where the small town investigation is frequent.

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