

Abstract

Within the framework of the research focused on the polarization of space, or peripheral areas of Czechia respectively, approaches of cultural geography have been applied to a significant extent recently. As far as the issue of such areas development is concerned, the importance of the so-called “soft” socio-cultural development factors (including social and human capital) has been accentuated. The way-out is the belief that with the limited development potential of the peripheral (and rural) areas, activity and activism of local communities (quality of social and human capital) as the important internal (endogenous) development factor become more important. Despite the number of attempts, which have been made, we are not able to find exhaustive answers to questions relating to the actual importance of social and human capital (and different forms thereof) in the (socio-economic) development of these areas or the mutual relation (conditionality) thereof. For this reason, problems can be seen both in the area of theory and methodology (conceptualization) and, in particular, in insufficient verification of such theoretical concepts by means of empirical research, be specific in particular at the micro-regional up to local level.

The dissertation therefore focuses on identification and explanation of the importance of the selected socio-cultural factors of regional development (social and human capital) in the development of peripheral (of which particularly rural) areas of Czechia. The aim is to contribute to the discussion, or to extend the existing knowledge of: a) the theoretical and methodological points-of-departure of the research of the polarization of space, or the peripheral areas respectively; b) within the meaning of a shift from the long-term evaluation of the “hard”, easily measurable factors of regional development (geographical and socio-economic ones) towards geographical study of the importance of the so-called “soft” factors (in particular social and human capital), which are moreover more difficult to monitor (measure) territorially; c) the importance of social and human capital in the development of peripheral (and rural) areas.

The thesis is divided into four main parts. While the first part pays attention to the question of the source of theoretical and methodological issues of the research of space polarization, conceptual questions of the problem areas development, the second part covers the conceptualization of social and human capital and the importance thereof for the development of peripheral (and rural) areas. The third part includes the reflection of the research of the polarization of space, or peripheries in Czechia and discussion of the importance of social and human capital for the development of the problem areas (peripheral and rural areas). The fourth part introduces a set of published studies, starting with more generally focused papers dealing in particular with the discussion of the theoretical and methodological points-of-departure and basic terms (clarification of the terminology and key concepts – polarization of space, periphery, social and human capital), through the analysis of epistemology (testing of the possibility to measure and assess the territorial differentiation of social capital at the level of districts of Czechia based on the evaluation of data of a secondary character), up to examples of two empirical studies at lower levels of the Czech regions (selected peripheral areas) utilizing in particular primary data acquired from field survey with a view to assess the importance of social and human capital for the development of these areas.

Key words: social and human capital – polarization of space – peripheral areas (inner and external/borderland) – local development – Czechia