REGIONAL DIFFERENTIATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND ITS CHOSEN SOCIAL REFLECTIONS

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Abstract

Although it is seldom stated, activities of the population can be comprehended as one of major sources and embodiments of regional differentiation. This paper deals with chosen social characteristics of the Czech population from spatial standpoint.

Keywords: regional differences, population, social characteristics

1 INTRODUCTION

It is not necessary to underline that human beings create inner basis of all relevant happenings. From this perspective, society, economy, culture and other spheres of life should be perceived as certain outer manifestations and structures of inner characteristics of human beings. Activities of the population can be comprehended also as one of major embodiments of regional differentiation. Human activities shape spatial processes and phenomena substantially and therefore, essential demographic and social characteristics are of great relevance in all countries.

The amount of inhabitants living in the given territory can perceived as an approximate indicator of the volume of activities in the analyzed territory. That is why basic demographic and social analysis provides us with useful information about the formation of spatial structures in general. The main aim of this article is to show the chosen social reflections as well as sources of territorial differentiation in the Czech Republic.

2 CZECH POPULATION FROM DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Average annual increase per 1000 inhabitants represents an indicator, which provides us with aggregate information about spatial differentiation in the growth or decrease of the population. This indicator consists of two basic components:

- A natural increase, which is a population increase due to more births and less mortality. Obviously, there could be also negative natural increase, which is caused by less births and bigger mortality.

- Migration increase or decrease of the population, which is based upon the difference between emigration and immigration related to the given territory.
As it is visible in figure 1, total average annual increase per 1000 inhabitants in Czech regions is not so differentiated; however, average annual increase in Central Bohemia between 2001-2005 deserves an attention. As it will be seen later, this phenomenon can be accounted for by migration behaviour of the population. Relatively unfavourable position of Prague is caused by negative natural annual increase of the population on the one hand and by suburbanisation processes in Prague’s surroundings on the other hand.
As for natural average annual increase per 1000 inhabitants, in the first analysed period, there existed increases in 8 regions; nonetheless, between 1996-2000 and 2001-2005, all regions witnessed the decrease of this indicator. At the same time, there exists certain convergence\(^1\) in behavioural patterns of all regions in terms of average natural increase or more precisely average natural decrease.

\(^1\) It has to be mentioned that there is the natural dissimilarity between Prague and other regions, since the capital city is only one region, which is exclusively of urban character. Subsequently, the city of Prague offers relatively more opportunities in terms of both work and leisure.
These trends are usually explained by the whole set of interconnected factors ranging from demographic and social composition of the population to the general socioeconomic transformations after 1989. In any case, from 1994 on, the total number of inhabitants of the Czech Republic was decreasing since the number of deaths exceeded the number of live-born and the immigration from abroad did not compensate for the above mentioned decrease of the population.

Migration of the population constitutes one of the most important regional processes and belongs to the mechanisms that co-create spatial organisation of the society. It can be comprehended as a relatively aggregate indicator expressing spatial differences of demographical, social, economic or ecological character. At the same time, migration is process influencing socio-occupational, age as well as settlement structure. Impacts of migration on the labour markets or social stability are observable at local, regional as well as national levels. In contrast to the natural reproduction of the population, migration patterns are regionally more differentiated. However, general tendencies are only hardly catchable mainly for the sake of imperfect records about both domestic and international migration.

The most important feature of migration in the Czech Republic is the attractiveness of Central Bohemia. Such attractiveness is related to the superiority of Prague as well as its metropolitan area. Central Bohemia lures not only well-situated inhabitants of Prague, which is in compliance with
suburbanistic trends, but also affluent population from the remaining parts of the country and partly from abroad.

There is rather peculiar situation in Prague itself as some of its inhabitants move to the city vicinity but at the same time the city attracts many people from other Czech regions as well as from abroad. Moreover, many people working in Prague have only temporary stay in the city and are not included in the statistics. At the same time, the amount of people commuting to the city due to their jobs is steadily increasing and if we take into account also the ‘compulsory’ travels from the rest of the country and flourishing tourism, the number of people present in the capital city exceeds its permanent population considerably.

And the last important comment on country’s demographic issues: total average annual increase of the population differs more on the lower territorial levels, i.e. districts. Not surprisingly, the biggest values of the total average annual increase per 1000 inhabitants in the period 2001-2005 have been reached in Prague-West district (30.8) and Prague-East district (22.8) that surround the capital city. No one district in the remaining parts of the country exceeded the value 10.

3 POPULATION FROM SOCIAL STANDPOINT

Social characteristics are basically inseparable from demographic ones and draw more precise picture of the population. Spatial differentiation in average amounts of state support discloses to certain extent ‘inverse’ perspective to the spatial differentiation in average incomes.

As it can be seen, inhabitants of Prague need on average approximately only 60% of monthly amounts of state social support common in other regions. This fact only confirms unique socioeconomic position of Prague within the country.
Generally, there are distinct tendencies towards the rise of average social support. They can be contemplated primarily in socially complex and at the same time sensitive regions of Moravia-Silesia and Ústí. Both of them are typical representatives of traditional industrial territories. On the contrary, the decrease in the amounts of state social support in Plzeň and South Moravian regions can be ascribed to the influx of new investments into these territories.
Differentiation of the population according to the education, which also substantially delimitates developmental possibilities and limitations in particular regions, shows an exclusive position of Prague again. It is worth to notice that in Prague, full 26.2% of university-educated in the Czech Republic lives. Moreover, this polarisation is further fortified by massive brain drain from the majority of other regions either to Prague or abroad.

4 CONCLUSION

Activities of the population constitute certain reflection and at the same time also the cause of spatial socioeconomic developments. While natural average annual increase has quite similar pattern in all regions, migration average annual increase is already more differentiated. Central Bohemia as a region, which surrounds Prague attracts the population from both capital city as well as the rest of the country and witnesses by far the biggest total average annual increase of inhabitants. This can be attributed to the complex attractiveness of Prague metropolitan area. It is not surprising that these migration processes are often connected with brain drain that befalls territories outside the capital city.

Prague also enjoys the most favourable social characteristics of the population and comprises over one quarter of all university-educated in the country. Due to the biggest incomes in the capital city, social support is less needed there in comparison with the average of the country.
REFERENCES


