

Strategic planning of the Czech rural space: the analysis of its failure, improving its image on the example of the Moravskoslezský Region

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Abstract

Since 1989 the differentiation of the Czech rural space has been growing rapidly. Together with the accession to the European Union and adoption the programming approach to the regional development, the importance of the strategic rural planning has increased. In the Czech Republic, the strategic rural planning has been used on many spatial levels, however, its quality is still unsatisfactory. The paper aims to analyse the causes of this failure on the example of the Moravskoslezský Region and suggests new steps which are necessary to be done in order to make the strategic planning more helpful in the restructuring of rural areas and to improve its image. It is necessary to change the conceptualisation of the rural space in the planning discourse and consider further re-scaling of planning powers. The attention should be paid also to the governance concept in the strategic rural planning, the participation and mutual collaboration of rural development actors in the Czech Republic is still poorly developed.

Strategic rural planning, Czech Republic, rural space, Moravskoslezský Region, image, governance

Zusammenfassung

Strategische Planung des tschechischen ländlichen Raumes: Analyse ihrer Fehlentwicklung und Verbesserung ihres Images am Beispiel des Moravskoslezský Kreises

Seit 1989 entwickelte sich die Differenzierung des tschechischen ländlichen Raumes sehr schnell, was mit einer zunehmenden Bedeutung der ländlichen Planung verbunden ist. In Tschechien wird die strategische Planung auf vielen verschiedenen Ebenen umgesetzt. Jedoch ist die Qualität noch nicht zufrieden stellend. Das Ziel des Artikels ist es, das Versagen der ländlichen Planung am Beispiel des Moravskoslezský Kreises zu analysieren sowie einen Vorschlag für mögliche Maßnahmen zu machen, damit die Planung bei der sozio-ökonomischen Umstrukturierung des ländlichen Raums effektiver und ihr Image besser wird. Es ist notwendig, den ländlichen Raum im Planungsdiskurs wieder und richtig zu konzeptualisieren. Genauso muss das weitere Re-scaling von Planungskompetenzen in Betracht gezogen werden. Abschließend richtet der Artikel die Aufmerksamkeit auf das Konzept Governance. Hiermit wird die Notwendigkeit einer starken Partizipation der Akteure der ländlichen Entwicklung dargestellt, die in Tschechien nur in schwachem Maße an den Prozess der strategischen Planung angebunden ist.

Strategische Planung, Tschechische Republik, ländlicher Raum, der Moravskoslezský Kreis, Image, Governance

Introduction

The fall of the socialist regime in the Czech Republic (CR) in 1989 conditioned crucial social, economic and even environmental changes in the rural space of the CR. In connection with the democratization of the regime, the process of liberalization of economic and social lives, restoration of municipalities' self-government, the differentiation of the rural space has been growing rapidly (PERLÍN 1998). Such a situation asked for pol-

icies that would help decrease the undesirable differences in the social and economic indicators. However, the basement for a real regional policy wasn't set until 1998. At this time the Ministry for Local Development was established and later the Principles of the Regional Policy of the Czech Republic were accepted by the Government in terms of preparing for the EU accession. With the development of regional policy, also strategic planning appeared as a part of spatial planning.

MAIER (2010, p. 109) defines spatial planning as "all institutionalized activities which aim to coordinate, regulate and stimulate spatial ordering and land development on the local, regional and higher level including supra-national level (the EU)". Thus, spatial planning involves activities linked to the regulation of the 'hard space' as well as regional development and regional policy which stimulate economic, social and environmental processes with indirect and un-

equal impacts on 'soft space'. Just for the coordination of the unequal development of regions the strategic planning is used. Then, strategic plans are outcomes of the discussion on priorities of the regional policies and development on a specific planning level. Simultaneously, they are also programmes of intended activities which would lead to the sustainable development of regions especially due to the activation of local human and non-human sources.

Herein, we have to stress one speciality of spatial planning in the CR – the domi-

nance of urban planning at the expense of strategic planning. Whereas in western countries of the EU urban and strategic planning make a complementary complex of spatial planning together, in the CR these types of planning are separate with neglecting the role of strategic planning in regional development (BINEK and GALVASOVÁ 2008; MAIER 2010).

This fact could reason poor quality and especially weak implementation of rural strategic plans in the CR as recognized by many authors (e.g. Bičík et al. 2001; Bičík and PERLÍN 2006; PERLÍN 2006;

Novák 2010). The paper aims to analyse the causes of this failure, whether they are on the side of public or private actors. It evaluates the quality of the system of strategic rural planning in the CR. It engages all three levels in the CR – national, regional and microregional. In order to limit the large number of examined strategic plans on the microregional level, in the section Rural space in the planning and political discourses the author focuses on the strategic plans of such spatial units in the Moravskoslezský (Moravian-Silesian) Region (Fig. 1). The purpose of this analysis

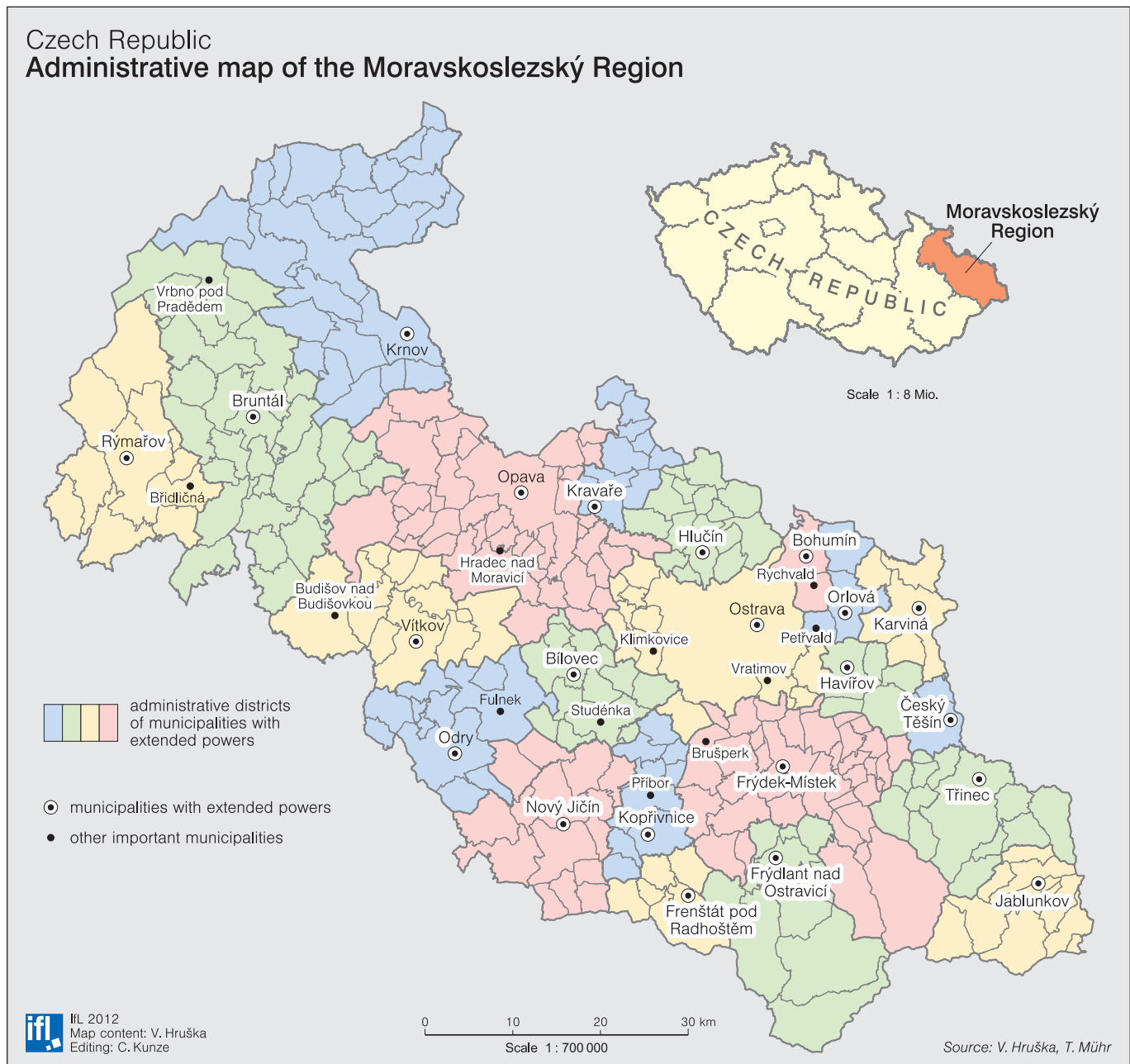


Fig. 1: Administrative map of the Moravskoslezský Region

is to demonstrate the general trend of strategic planning in the CR.

The first mention about the strategic planning in the Czech legislation appeared already in 1990 in Municipality Act which qualifies the councils for approving the municipality development programme. Regional strategic planning arose in the legislation ten years later, but contrary to the urban planning, there is no specific act concerning the strategic planning. The strategic documents are only partially mentioned in Regional Development Act passed by the Parliament in 2000 (No. 248/2000 – has established Regional Development Programmes on the regional level) and in Government resolution No. 682/2000 – Regional Development Strategy of the CR, (BINEK and GALVASOVÁ 2008), the rural development strategies are not mentioned in the Czech legislation at all.

The national Countryside Revitalization Programme played a major role in the development of the strategic planning in the rural space. In 1997, a measurement focusing just on the elaborating strategic plans of rural microregions was incorporated in this programme. The first strategic documents could be characterised by poor quality and by searching the correct method. The method for constructing the rural strategic plans was influenced by the strategic plans of Czech cities which were developed first (BIČÍK and PERLÍN 2006). In order to improve the quality of these documents, a project of Ministry of Agriculture called “The Development of the Kocába basin” (BIČÍK et al. 2001) was elaborated by the Research Institute for Land Protection at Charles University in Prague. This project aimed to draft particular methodological instructions for constructing strategic plans of rural microregions. Afterwards, many similar handbooks followed – e.g. LABOUNKOVÁ et al. 2009, PERLÍN and BIČÍK 2006.

As such, strategic planning has become a part of the spatial planning in the CR and its character has been significantly derived from European spatial planning whose fundamentals were set in

1999 in the European Spatial Development Perspective. The term spatial planning has different meanings in the context of various national states (DÜHR et al. 2010); therefore it is necessary to specify the meaning of this term in the Czech context.

MAIER (2010, p. 109) defines spatial planning as: “all institutionalized activities which aim to coordinate, regulate and stimulate spatial ordering and land development on the local, regional and higher level including supra-national level (the EU)”. Thus, spatial planning involves activities linked to the regulation of the “hard space” as well as regional development and regional policy which stimulate economic, social and environmental processes with indirect and unequal impacts on “soft space”. Just for the coordination of the unequal development of regions the strategic planning is used. Then, strategic plans are outcomes of the discussion on priorities of the regional policies and development on a specific planning level and simultaneously also programmes of intended activities which would lead to the sustainable development of regions.

On this place we have to stress one speciality of spatial planning in the CR – the dominance of the urban planning at the expense of strategic planning. Whereas in western countries of the EU urban and strategic planning create together a complementary complex of spatial planning, in the CR these types of planning are separate with neglecting the role of strategic planning in regional development (BINEK and GALVASOVÁ 2008).

In the paper the author doesn't struggle so much with the imperfections which stem from the structure of the strategic plans, which have already been quite intensively discussed in the Czech geographical literature (e.g. BIČÍK et al. 2001; BLAŽEK and VOZÁB 2004; BIČÍK and PERLÍN 2006; PERLÍN 2006; SMEJKAL 2008; NOVÁK 2010). The purpose of this paper is rather to look just a bit further and deeper, in order to answer the question how the bad image of the strategic planning in the CR has been constructed. In

conclusion the author considers measures which are necessary to adopt in order to improve the image of the strategic rural planning in the CR.

Strategic planning of rural space – theoretical-conceptual basis

The central role of the state in the regulation of society and economy after 1989 became unsustainable and also the regional planning of settlements and settlement system appeared as ineffective. Despite the national level is still the dominant force in shaping the rural space, its position has been undermined both from above (increasing integration into European or even global structures) and from bottom due to the desired decentralization of powers from national level (the re-establishment of self-governance of municipalities in 1990 and later of regions in 2000) which leads to the growth of activity of local players involved in the rural development due to their linkages in various social, political and economic networks (MURDOCH et al. 2003). Democratization and the re-scaling of power have ensured the fundament for rural spatial planning as a process which can be moulded by various actors who share plurality of representations of the rural.

Integration of the CR into the EU and more generally to the global economy have conditioned growing mobility of people, goods and information, so the territoriality of the state or lower administrative units is getting more and more disrupted. Therefore, in the European planning discourse the call for a new conceptualization of space has emerged in order to leave the perception of European space as set of territories with strict boundaries (e.g. DÜHR et al. 2010; FALUDI 2010 and TEWDWR-JONES et al. 2010).

This call is up to date when we concern the perception of rural space which is still influenced by the urban-rural dichotomy (EUROPEAN SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE 1999). Such conception of space can not accept the counterurbanization trend, growing interests of city-inhabitants for tourism and recreation in rural space etc. Moreover, with regard to

the definition of rural as a social construction (e.g. HALFACREE 1993) it is necessary to be aware of rural space delimited not only in the “hard space” but also in “soft space” as well. In rural localities there are many ruralities created by different motivations and perceptions of rural people. One of the most important representations shaping rural space is so-called rural idyll which tends to idealize the rural as “a place of peace, tranquillity and simple virtue, contrasted with the bustle and brashness of the city” (WOODS 2010, p. 21). Idyllic perception stands behind the development of recreation function of the rural and therefore it is used as one of the development tools of spatial planning of the rural. The construction of specific identities or images of rural areas has therefore a key role in the strategic planning of rural areas. Yet, in this point of view, we can not neglect the urban and regional planning because the physical space with present components perceived as rural is still crucial. That’s why we have to ask for a holistic spatial planning and agree with COUNSELL and VIGAR (2010, quoted in FALUDI 2010, p. 177) who contend: “The ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ spaces of governance are mutually constitutive ... The aim is not to replace ‘hard’ institutional spaces ..., rather to create complementary and potentially competing opportunities for developing activities to focus around, whether at some kind of ‘sub’ regional or ‘sub’ local government scale.”

Growing competencies of regions and limited central interventions in neo-liberal economic systems have conditioned the neo-regionalism view in regional policy when unique characteristics of regions are emphasised in their contest for economic fortune. Developed civic society and knowledge how to commodify local sources are becoming the main competitive advantage of regions. Commodification of the rural cultural heritage is supported also in the frame of the new rural development paradigm described in the OECD document *The New Rural Paradigm* (2006) which set a new framework for spatial planning of rural areas

with the accent on endogenous development. But as RAY (2006, quoted in WOODS 2011) suggests, such concept of development should be more correctly called neo-endogenous, because in this point of view the linkages out beyond the localities are particularly important in such way of development.

European spatial planning gradually penetrates the planning systems of the new member countries of the EU. In such milieu new planning cultures arise as hybrids of spatial planning cultures of Western countries with local planning structures. How far the ideas from the European spatial planning penetrate through the new member countries is dependent on the capability of local planners and institutions to learn and to be innovative (ZANON 2010).

Institutional background of strategic rural planning in the CR

The issue of rural development in the CR is divided mostly in three ministries – the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry for Regional Development, and the Ministry of the Environment (but naturally, agendas of further ministries struggle explicitly or implicitly with the topic of rural development). This is the reason why there is no consistent and integrated rural development policy in the CR. Czech rural policy is rather ad hoc – a system which would integrate various social, economic and environmental topics in

one coherent framework is missing. The Ministry of Agriculture is mainly the ministry for agriculture and food industry, water resources, forestry, hunting and fishery. The issue of the rural development has become a part of its agenda not until the Czech accession in the EU and adoption the Common Agriculture Policy. The policy of rural and agricultural development is implemented by the network of regional agencies which are rather financial-distributive and regulative authorities than real development-supporting agencies (e.g. agriculture agencies on the district level, regional veterinary agencies, The State Agricultural Intervention Fund administrating the Rural Development Programme and distributing the subsidies from the EAGF, EAFRD and EFF on the regional level).

The definition of rural space for the purposes of article is derived from the definition of rural in the strategic documents (Tab. 1). Concerning the National Strategic Plan of Rural Development, the municipalities with less than 2,000 are identified as rural. In the Actualization of the concept of agricultural and rural development in the Moravskoslezský Region (2005) the limiting population size is 4,000 (because of the high population number of municipalities perceived as rural in the Moravskoslezský Region). Rural microregions are delimited according to the definition of area of Local action groups – the maximal population density

The Czech rural strategic documents

Level	Rural planning documents
Czech Republic	National Strategic Plan of Rural Development (Rural Development Programme)
Region (“kraj”, NUTS III)	strategic plan (concept) of rural development
Microregion	
Association of municipalities	strategic plan of association of municipalities
Local Action Group	strategic plan of Local Action Group
Administrative area of Municipalities with Extended Powers	Planning Analytic Materials
Municipality (NUTS V)	programme of village revitalization (linked to the Countryside Revitalization Programme)
	own plans not linked to the Countryside Revitalization Programme

Source: V. Hruška

Tab. 1: The Czech rural strategic documents

is 150 inhabitants per 1 km² and simultaneously without a city with population larger than 25,000. Czech Government, regions and municipalities can, as self-governance units, create and implement their own development policy. Moreover, strategic plans are used on the microregional level as well.

Strategic rural planning on the national level

The strategic rural planning on the whole is in the competence of the Ministry of Agriculture due to the strategic document the National Strategic Plan of Rural Development of the Czech Republic 2007-2013 (further the National Strategy). The National Strategy is derived from the main priorities of the rural development of the EU and from the Strategic Plan of Economic Growth of the CR. The goals of the National Strategy are executed through the Rural Development Programme of the Czech Republic 2007-2013 (RDP) which is the implementation document of the EAFRD in the CR.

Formulations of the National Strategy and RDP were quite intensively discussed in 2005 by various actors of rural development – there were regular meetings where participators (i.e. Association for Countryside Renewal, Association of Farmers of the CR, representatives of agricultural chambers, various non-profit organisations, mayors of rural municipalities and representatives of local action groups) expressed their attitudes to the future form of the RDP (PAPEŽ 2005).

Nevertheless, despite this discussion, many recommendations were neglected (for example the proposed financial allocation for the RDP axes was not respected) and the National strategy and the RDP have to be considered as BLÁŽEK and VOZÁB (2004, p. 5) contend, as “sets of technical rules intended to administer spending from the state [European] budget. Therefore, it is difficult to call them programming documents”. The contents of the National strategy and RDP are fastened in the EU discourse of the rural and their priorities are derived

from the Council Regulation No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Therefore there is a need for a real integrated strategy of rural policy which would become the leading document of rural development in the CR.

Strategic rural planning on the regional level (in the Moravskoslezský Region)

The CR is divided into 14 NUTS III self-governing regions (one of them is the Capital City Prague and two regions have also parameters of NUTS II regions) which have a wide array of tools by which they can increase the capability of rural areas in absorbing the development impulses (regional programmes of rural renewal and other financial schemes, education policy etc.). For formulating development policies they use various strategic plans. The structure of strategic documents in the interregional comparison is very diverse. The basic strategic documents are usually long-term strategic plans which are specified in short-term development programmes of the region. Some of the regions have both types of documents (6 regions), some only one of them (7 regions) (HÁJEK et al. 2010). More specialized development concepts are related to these documents – the concept of rural development is one of them. Only 4 regions have elaborated such concept – Moravskoslezský, Olomoucký, Ústecký and Zlínský Region. If a region doesn't possess the concept of rural development, the issue is usually incorporated explicitly or implicitly in the strategic plan or programme of the region, however in a limited scope.

Concerning the concept of rural development in the Moravskoslezský Region – the Actualization of the concept of agricultural and rural development in the Moravskoslezský Region (2005) has arisen as a reaction on growing consciousness of the rural and agricultural development problem in conditions of the integration of the CR into the EU. The process of strategic planning accompany-

ing the creation of the strategic document could be, however, characterised by poor integration of various actors of rural and agricultural development. Wide array of national and regional strategic documents, sectoral policies, European regulations concerning regional development were reflected in elaborating such document whereas the local public, private and non-governmental actors were neglected. The coordinating committee for the conception included only representatives of the elaborating company and regional officials.

The low number of regions which possess the concepts of the rural development is astonishing when we consider the fact they financially facilitate the rural development through their own rural development programmes. For example, nearly 1.5 mil. EUR was invested in 78 projects focused both on the reconstruction of physical infrastructure and cultural events in the Moravskoslezský Region in 2010 within the scope of the regional Programme for Rural Renewal and Development. However, because the Moravskoslezský Region has no rural development policy (the Actualization of the concept of agricultural and rural development in the Moravskoslezský Region due to its quality can not be regarded as a platform for it) the financial sources from the Programme for Rural Renewal and Development are geographically distributed into the rural areas only according the population size of municipalities – it means according no sophisticated conception.

Strategic rural planning on the microregional level

On the microregional level in the CR, we can distinguish three types of microregions consisting of municipalities for which the strategic plans are elaborated. Firstly, associations of municipalities arise for the purpose of collective projects and because of supposed better availability of funding from the EU (or from the national or regional grants). Increasing the chance of receiving the subsidy is usually one of the main reasons of

elaborating the strategic documents. Unfortunately, this is mostly the only purpose of these strategic plans – the strategies are not implemented as a whole, but rather according to accessibility of grants (PERLÍN 2006). Another problem is that the public discussion and meetings which has become a usual part of the strategic planning in the CR are usually formal events with the low participation of public (BINEK and GALVASOVÁ 2008).

Secondly, strategic plan is the fundamental document for local action groups established in the fourth priority of the Rural Development Programme LEADER. This type of strategic plans arises in the mutual cooperation of various rural development actors from the public, private and non-governmental sector. This document is a necessary requirement for the work of the local action groups.

Thirdly, on this place also the Analysis of Sustainable Development of the Area (ASDA) should be mentioned in spite of their use for regional planning. Since 2007, new legislation (Act No. 183/2006 Coll.) on territorial planning and the building code (Building Act) has been adopted which has delegated so-called municipalities with extended competency (MEC – totally 204 in the CR, 22 in the Moravskoslezský Region) and regions to provide so-called Planning Analytic Materials as a new tool for regional planning. Areas of MEC are not self-government units, they were established in order to optimise the state administrative and in this frame MEC ensure the Planning Analytic Materials for their area as well. The delimitation of the areas of MEC, as HAMPL (2005) contends, mostly responds (when we compare other spatial units in the CR) to functional regions defined according to work-and-service-commuting patterns (exception is a few areas of MEC delimited in the hinterlands of large cities). Planning Analytic Materials include i.a. the ASDA whose aim is to unfold various social, economic and environmental problems which are to be solved through the regional planning.

The advantage of the ASDA regarding strategic planning is that it is not exclu-

sively focused on the rural space but it struggles with the whole integrity of urban-rural relationships. Another advantage is that the Committee of Municipalities for Sustainable Development whose members are representatives of the municipalities could be established in the area of the MEC. This body can discuss and comment the elaborating of the ASDA and, more broadly, whole Planning Analytic Materials. However, the Committees of Municipalities for Sustainable Development are established only rarely, in 2010, when the first volume of the ASDA was actualised, no Committee was established in 22 MEC of the Moravskoslezský Region. Moreover, according to the Building Act only the representatives of municipalities can intervene to the creation of MEC, other actors of rural or regional development are excluded. Regional development can not be reached by planning “hard space”, “soft space” must be organised as well. Therefore the character of ASDA is very close to the holistic spatial planning which integrates organisation of the physical spatial structure as well as stimulation of social and economic development.

Strategic rural planning on the municipality level

The lowest level, where the development plans are elaborated, is the municipality level. The municipalities have their countryside revitalization programmes, but their character doesn't respond to the strategic plans. With regard to a small area of municipality, programmes of this kind are rather lists of possible development projects (PERLÍN 2006) and therefore it is not dealt with these documents further in the text.

Re-scaling process among the administrative levels

The division of competencies among above mentioned planning levels in the CR is highly unequal or rather chaotic. In spite of the re-scaling processes after the political change in 1989, there are still substantial inadequacies concerning the division of competencies among the spatial planning levels. MARSDEN (1998,

p. 109) argues that we should perceive rural localities as “... ensembles of local and non-local connections, of combinations of local actions and actions ‘at a distance’, situated in regional and different institutional contexts. In this sense, different rural spaces have different combinations of networks to which are they connected”. Both internal and external processes of rural (un)development must be regulated, however especially higher-scale processes are neglected in the Czech strategic planning. They must be also regulated, but the local or microregional level has not sufficient tools to do it. Here it is crucial to coordinate the distribution of competencies for regulation of processes of various scales in the strategic planning. According to the subsidiarity principle, each level should concentrate only on those processes for which management it has suitable tools, it should not deal with problems which it can't influence because of a big vertical or horizontal distance from the level (place) where the problem is located.

Nevertheless, in the case of National strategy it doesn't work so – the national strategy struggles entirely with problems of local character – it focuses on modernization of agricultural or forestry enterprises, on land adjustments or on the development of civic amenity. There is no mention about the problematic setting of agricultural subsidies which decreases the competitiveness of the Czech farms; about the present setting of budgetary assignment of tax revenue (small municipalities receive proportionally much less finances from the state budget than cities larger than 100,000 inhabitants) or about the high rate of bureaucracy which persecutes Czech farmers and municipality representatives. These particular problems are almost incapable of solution from the local level; therefore they must be solved on the higher level. Briefly, national and regional authorities can not only order, what should be done on the local level, but they must also care about their own problems, which must be transformed in order to bring the rural areas on development trajectory.

Similarly, we can't neglect local or microregional level in strategic planning. On the contrary, the differentiated character of rural space asks for further re-scaling of rural planning in order to reveal the main processes shaping the Czech rural localities and not neglecting the significant variations among them. On the microregional level in the CR, there are three kinds of strategic plans, but they are used only for the local purposes – by the representatives of the microregions or municipalities. Therefore, the communication bridge between local, microregional level and regional level is missing and the officials of the corresponding region don't know what the real needs of local people are. In this point of view, not only the division of power among the planning levels is important, but also the mutual communication among representatives of these levels is crucial, in order to transfer the needs of the lower level to upper level or vice-versa.

Rural space in the planning and political discourses

As mentioned in the introduction, many Czech scholars are not persuaded of the quality of the Czech strategic rural planning and its implementation. Author thinks problems are both in the process of strategic planning in the CR on each administrative level and in the very outputs of such processes – strategic plans of rural development. Similarly BLAŽEK and VOZÁB (2004) in the context of national and regional strategic planning documents share this feeling and speak even about “over-programming” in the CR. They call attention to their implementation (BLAŽEK and VOZÁB 2004, p. 5): “In addition, the implementation of these numerous documents is slow or – more often – these documents are not implemented in practice at all. Therefore, there is even a real danger of discrediting the whole concept of programming and even the very method of strategic planning as well.” Thus, let's have a look at the problems of the strategic rural planning in the CR.

One of the basic problems of strategic planning is unsuitable conceptualization of space. The cause is located probably in the “harmony” of political discourse, discourse made by the workers in Czech private consulting agencies which are mostly the builders of strategic plans (PERLÍN 2006) and lastly discourse of local representatives. Space is constructed as a box where various objects are located in the planning and political discourses. Then, rurality of such areas is defined according to the functional concepts of rurality characterised by CLOKE (2006) by the dominance of extensive land-use (agriculture and forestry); as a set of small seats (considered to be rural by most of its residents) dependent on the landscape in the surrounding; and which produces a way of life characterized by a cohesive identity and behavioural qualities.

In order to demonstrate such construction of space, the strategic documents of rural development on the national, regional (the Actualization of the concept of agricultural and rural development in the Moravskoslezský Region) and microregional level (both strategic plans of 8 local action groups and 21 strategies of association of municipalities in the Moravskoslezský Region) were analysed. The ASDA were not examined because of their use for regional planning (in this paper they are mentioned because of their would-be importance in the strategic rural planning in the future). As a framework for the analysis of these strategic documents the approach of WEBER (2009) was used who reveals 5 myths connected with the conceptualization of rural space in the Austrian planning.

Rural as opposed to urban

Firstly, as rural is defined all the area that is located behind the city-borders – in geographical terminology – the rural is defined in agreement with the concept of rural-urban dichotomy. Thus the strict separation from a city is taken for granted (MARINI and MOONEY 2006). Such a static conceptualization of the rural space is not acceptable in conditions when processes penetrating rural space don't re-

spect an imaginative boundary between rural and urban areas. For the needs of the spatial planning it is useful to perceive space rather as “a network of flows and as functional linkages between the different parts of the territory” (DÜHR et al. 2010, p. 58).

For example, the Strategic Development Plan of the Microregion Osoblaha 2010-2020 (2010) totally ignores linkages between the periphery rural microregion of Osoblaha and the commuting centre Krnov or the nearest city Glubczyce on the Polish side of the border. In the draft of possible development projects there is no project based on the cooperation with these cities. Even a restoration of former cross-border roads (before quite often alluded by local representatives) is neglected in this plan.

The approaching to the rural space from the political economy point of view would be more fruitful (GILG 1998). A concept of rural space derived from this approach supposes that the rural is no more an autonomic entity. It agrees that much of that what happens in the rural space is caused by the processes proceeding outside the rural space (CLOKE 2006). Thus, if we research these processes separately in cities and in rural areas, we are in danger that we will not understand their principles. Therefore the development measurements in the strategic rural documents must cross the border between the rural and urban areas by means of mutual cooperation. Even small cities have a big importance for the maintenance of particular living conditions in rural areas (VAISHAR et al. 2002). Problems of rural residents are localised in cities (jobs, consumption of rural products etc.), whereas problems of city inhabitants can have a rural character (rural areas as a place for recreation, living etc.). Therefore the development policy must be a policy of all inhabitants of a state/region, not only of rural dwellers (BELL 2007). Thus, the strategic rural planning is in this sense very close to the regional planning.

The static perception of rural areas or microregions evokes another problem –

such approach prevents rural areas from higher integration into the adjacent (not only urban) areas. This point seems to be problematic because of the demand for growing integration of the EU and cross-border cooperation. Although one of the aims of the strategic plans of Local Action Group Development of the Microregion of Krnov and Local Action Group of the Microregion of Opava (both are located on the Polish border) is increasing the tourism in rural municipalities, in the strategic plans there are no measurements focused on attracting the Polish tourists to the areas of local action groups.

Rural as homogeneous

Secondly, another myth is a homogeneous rural space. WEBER (2009) argues that particular rural areas could be identified as areas with different concentration of functions that have arose after the retreat of agriculture as a main economic sector of rural economy. Similarly MARS DEN (1998) contends that we must avoid the strictly defined rural space because we must be aware of differentiated rural spaces that are placed in various combinations of local, regional, national, European and global networks and regulation dynamics.

The officials of the Moravskoslezský Region partially admit this fact. In the Actualization of the concept of agricultural and rural development in the Moravskoslezský Region (2005) the differentiation of rural space is mentioned, but is not further researched or even implemented in various regional development tools. This concept is exactly that kind of document, where the differentiated character of rural localities should be stressed and which should be used as a framework for redistributing public sources for rural development. Instead, the key geographical indicator for directing sources from the regional financial scheme the Programme for Rural Renewal and Development is, as mentioned above, population size of rural municipalities which is the only one of factors determining the differentiation of rural space. Therefore the financial

sources from the Programme are distributed throughout the rural space of the Moravskoslezský Region without any conception.

Rural as structurally weak

The third myth – association of the rural as a structurally weak in the planning discourse is closely connected to the previous one. BELL (2007) argues that in the perception of the rural as opposed to the urban, the rural is perceived as weak and vulnerable, as a subject that needs a politics of defence. Simultaneously, due to its weakness the rural is dependent on a city and on external resources. Therefore in the strategic rural plans we can see more projects based on external sources (not only financial) than the ones focusing on the activation of local sources (PERLÍN 2006) which are perceived as more efficient in delivering rural development (The New Rural Paradigm 2006). This fact then formulates the present strategic plans as tools for reaching the subsidies from without (PERLÍN 2006). Yet, strategic plans of local action groups in the Moravskoslezský Region are exceptions in this point of view. They stress more endogenous and innovative approaches to rural development. However, this fact is probably the result of normative principles of such strategies which have been set by state officials administrating the RDP (eventually LEADER).

The ability to use the local sources varies in rural areas. Some areas have significant problems concerning their social and economic structures, on the other hand some rural areas are very well integrated in the knowledge economy of the largest cities and their population is growing. Just the peripheral areas need, besides the activating of local sources, special support. However, as already said, the rural development policy of the Moravskoslezský Region doesn't reflect this problem and distributes the subsidies from the Programme for Rural Renewal and Development only according to the population size without distinguishing the different socio-economic level of rural municipalities. Similarly,

also the national RDP acknowledges the differentiated rural space, but measurements suggested in the programme enable equal distribution of financial sources into Czech rural areas. If we prefer solidarity to meritocracy in the basic discussion about the distribution of public sources, we must ask a question: why there is no platform that would distinguish the rural municipalities according their socio-economic level? This platform would help us target the subsidies to the rural areas where they are really needed.

The EU has no typology of such kind as well, but, on the other hand, the EU possesses such typology for agriculture (the delimitation of Less Favourable Areas). Why is it so? The answer bears upon the fourth myth (WEBER 2009) – the rural is equal to agricultural.

Rural as agricultural

The rural development policy of the EU is controlled by this myth. Truly, the agriculture dominates in the land-use in the rural areas, but its shares on the whole employment in the CR (employment in agriculture in 2000 was 151,000 people – 2.9 per cent of workforce (VĚŽNÍK 2002) or on the GDP (2.6 per cent of GDP is made by agriculture, forestry and fishery (CZECH STATISTICAL OFFICE 2009) are negligible. Despite of this, its symbolic meaning still persists as evident in the Common Agriculture Policy of the EU that creates the image of the EU rural development policy. GRAY (2000, quoted in Woods 2009) says that due to this Policy the perception of the rural is still linked with agriculture which creates the encompassing concept defining the nature of the present European rural space. Although there were some attempts aiming to weakening or even deconstructing this image (e.g. The Cork Declaration), the agricultural aspect of the rural development is still persistent.

As already stated, the rural development policy in the CR is mostly in the competency of the Ministry of Agriculture. Despite this fact, the re-orientation from the agriculturally-led development policies to policies of rural development

which would focus on other than agricultural actors has not been finished until now (BINEK et al. 2009). We can observe it on the example of the RDP in the CR. The Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in Article 17 sets the minimal financial shares from the EAFRD for axis 1 and 3 (both 10 per cent). From this regulation the financial allocation for each country of the EU is derived. In the RDP of the CR for axis 1 Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry 22 per cent of EAFRD sources is allocated, whereas for the axis III Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity only 17 per cent. 55 per cent of EAFRD funds are allocated in the agriculture-tuned axis II Improving the environment and the countryside by supporting land management.

In the CR, the perception of rural as agricultural is more obvious rather on higher planning scales (national, regional). Actualization of the concept of agricultural and rural development in the Moravskoslezský Region (2005) can serve as an example. The agricultural parts are much more detailed than the similar sections concerning rural development in this document and the number of pages of the agricultural part exceeds the part of rural development more than three times. This is inadequate when we consider which competencies the Moravskoslezský Region has in regulation of agriculture in comparison to rural development. The agricultural policy in the CR is formed like in other countries of the EU by the Common Agricultural Policy and by various national agencies. Contrary, the Moravskoslezský Region has a wide array of tools by which it can increase the capability of rural areas in absorbing the development impulses (the Programme for Rural Renewal and Development or other financial schemes, education policy etc.).

In strategic plans of microregions non-agricultural approach to rural development dominates probably because of the domination of the representatives of ru-

ral municipalities in the process of strategic planning.

Idyllic rural

Lastly, idyllic perception of the rural space is linked to the notion of the rural as nature-close space where cohesive and warm-hearted community of people lives. In such imagination of the rural there is no space for other aspects of social life – rural deprivation, alcoholism, ethnic problems or high rates of unemployment.

The Microregion of Osoblaha located in the Moravskoslezský Region in the lowland on the Polish border was quite intensively affected by the socialist agriculture modernization in the form of land consolidation, construction of large-scale agricultural objects etc. In spite of this fact, the Strategic Development Plan of the Microregion of Osoblaha 2010-2020 (2010, p. 6) observes that concerning tourism, there is “a potential in almost virgin nature”. Moreover, there is an excluded Roma ethnic minority in the Microregion of Osoblaha, however in the Plan there is no notion about this problem.

The supposed importance of tourism and recreation for the economic restructuring of Czech rural areas is also derived from the idyllic perception of rural space. The RDP contends: “The main opportunity for development of Czech rural areas is first of all the use of the potential of rich cultural traditions and non-production functions of agriculture for the development of the sustainable forms of tourism” (2006, p. 35). As PERLÍN (1998) mentions, in 1990s, agrotourism was perceived by many authors as a specific form of consumption of rural space which would enable the revitalization of rural space. However later it was clear that agrotourism and rural tourism will still remain only one of many economic activities which can facilitate rural development. Concerning the cultural traditions of Czech rural areas, it is debatable to speak about rich cultural traditions particularly in the context of borderland rural areas which were settled almost totally by Germans until the World War II. After the transition, new traditions which

would have been attractive for tourism appeared only rarely and the old ones are being only slowly or not at all renewed.

The development actors' engagement to the process of strategic rural planning

The missing transparent national rural development policy and rural development plan which would be a product of nation-wide discussion within the whole spectrum of development actors is a consequence of another problem of the strategic rural planning in the CR – insufficient engagement of rural actors into decision making processes. According to PAINTER (2009, p. 313) “‘good governance’ involves transparency and accountability in public administration, the efficient use of public resources, participation in decision-making and respect for the rule of law”.

The steady weakening of the national level in the structuring of rural life will probably continue in the future. This gives these actors a unique possibility for carrying their points in the rural space as we can see for example on the case of growing popularity and importance of the EU initiative LEADER (GOODWIN 1998). Good governance is exactly the missing point in the Czech strategic rural planning. There are three reasons of weak engagement in the strategic rural planning on each level. The intransparency and let's say closeness of the procedure of strategic planning can be the first one. Further, the passivity of these actors is the second reason and finally their small power in the decision making by the strategic planning is the third one. In the CR, the first reason is not so serious, the public discussion and meetings has become a usual part of the strategic planning, but problem is that the public presentations of strategic plans in the CR are usually formal events with the low participation of public (BINEK and GALVASOVÁ 2008) whose opinions are seldom respected.

Concerning the small power of rural citizens and institutions, the discussion about the RDP could serve as a good ex-

ample. The most important organization protecting the interests of the rural municipalities – the Association for Countryside Renewal in the cooperation with the government hasn't made their rural development claims public insofar. The most serious claims are (published in the Association's appeal to the chairmen of the main political parties in the bulletin of the Association *Zpravodaj venkova* in July 2010): the present act concerning budgetary assignment of tax revenue, the excessive bureaucracy, missing definition of the "rural" in the legislation and claim on establishing of the Ministry of Countryside. These problems of rural municipalities have been known for a long time, but despite that, the Association was not able to carry these proposals and make them public in any form of a really *national* rural development plan.

Therefore on the national level the space for a discussion about the following National strategy should be opened and primarily – it *must be used* by all actors of the rural development. This will guarantee that not only the problems of the European character, but also problems of national character will be incorporated. If the requirements of these actors are not included in the National strategy, this document can not be the national strategic plan of rural development and should get only a corresponding place in the Czech strategic planning – thus as an implementation plan of the EAFRD in the CR. In this case the rural actors must struggle for elaborating of real national strategy of rural development because problems of the Czech rural space are problems of local representatives, inhabitants of the rural and local entrepreneurs rather than of the European officials and politicians.

Image of the Czech strategic planning

The strategic plans of local action groups are generally the best in comparison to other strategic plans on regional and microregional level. In the Moravskoslezský Region seven of them were elaborated in the cooperation of local actors and exter-

nal experts. The criteria in which they succeed are problem-oriented analysis, proposal of development measurements focused on the problems identified in the analysis, draft of concrete projects and they have financial and implementation plans. Concerning the approaches to rural development, they are endogenous and most innovative (plans introduce e.g. branding of agricultural products which has never appeared in the strategic plans before). The causes of such success, as mentioned above, could be found in the normative principles for elaborating such document. Thus, their setting seems to be an important fact for the construction of good strategic plans in the CR. However the conceptualization of space still appears problematic particularly because of its static perception.

The strategic documents on the regional and microregional level (of association of municipalities) are mostly elaborated externally by various consulting companies. On the regional level all four conceptions of rural development were elaborated by such companies, on the lower level in the Moravskoslezský Region, more than half of the strategic plans of associations of municipalities were elaborated by consulting companies. Nevertheless, there are many insufficiencies in the regional conceptions of rural development and strategic plans of the association of municipalities when examining them according to the criteria mentioned at the beginning of this section. The analyses are usually overdimensioned and identification of problems is missing. The extensive Actualization of the concept of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Moravskoslezský Region (2005) could serve as a good example. The objectives and measurements are set too generally with only a small respect to the researched area, they are rather derived from the superior strategic plans. The formulation of concrete development projects is missing or it is vaguely stated (Strategic plan of the Microregion of Jablunkov is an exception in this point of view). Many of the strategic plans are enclosed in the functional ap-

proach to the space accompanied by five myths according to WEBER (2009).

Regarding the regional concept of rural development, in spite of the deficiencies concerning its would-be implementation, a question arises – why was such a strategic document approved and accepted by the representatives of the Moravskoslezský Region? Why the deficiencies were not revealed and removed? The answer lies in the passivity of the rural actors of the public and non-public sector in the process of elaborating a strategic plan. This is caused by the conviction that the strategic plans are not so important when we aim to coordinate the development of a particular rural area. SMEJKAL (2008) evaluates regional development programmes in all Czech regions and he finds that even officials responsible for implementation of these documents have not a clear and definite opinion about the helpfulness of these documents.

We must ask a question – why do the public authorities purchase these strategic documents, if they don't use them? BIČÍK and PERLÍN (2006, p. 23) point at the superstition which circulates among the representatives of associations of municipalities: "association of municipalities – microregion which has no strategic plan, is as though it didn't exist or it had no possibility to ask for the finances from the Structural Funds". Prague geographers continue that this superstition is fuelled by consulting agencies in order to increase their profits. Similarly also the image of strategic planning is constructed – the plans are perceived as a tool for reaching financial sources from without and not as a condition for activation of local sources and development which supposes also incorporating and interlinking various rural development actors (PERLÍN 2006). The representatives elaborate strategic documents not because they want to, but because they must (as they think). They live, negotiate, administer in environment which is full to overflowing of strategic documents (BIČÍK and PERLÍN 2006) and it is unacceptable not to have own strategic plan. Vague and generally set goals and indicators of progress

decrease the possibility of evaluating the activity of representatives (BLAŽEK and VOZÁB 2004). Thus they get a very comfortable tool through which they can proof a particular level of development activity, however the tool is really not-committal and they can use it, only when they want to.

Strategic rural planning in the Czech Republic – where does it head?

In the last decade, when the strategic planning has been used in the CR for the regulating the rural development, it has lost its potential in the thinking of its users. Associations of municipalities use strategic plans as a tool for reaching finances from the EU-funds. Similarly, although there is the National strategy, it also serves as a tool for distribution of financial sources from the Rural Development Programme, whereas other problems of national character are neglected. The failure is multifaceted – partly of the public representatives who approved them and who set the limits for their acceptance. Also some consulting companies which elaborated the plans play their role in this failure. Problem lies in the insufficient qualification of their employees. Although some strategic plans were elaborated by renowned professionals, they couldn't manage to meet the demand for strategic plans (in 2006 there were more than 500 associations of municipalities and most of them have their strategic plans (PERLÍN 2006). Lastly, the participation of the rural development actors on the discussion about the character of strategic plans was very weak. The question arises – how to change the negative image of the strategic rural planning and persuade the actors of rural development to use the strategic plans as a tool for activation of local sources and social capital?

Firstly, the strategic plans have to be elaborated only by qualified professionals who will make problem-focused analyses of researched areas based on the integrated approaches (Novák 2010). Only on such basement good strategic plans

could be produced which avoid perception of the rural space accompanied by five myths according to WEBER (2009) and other insufficiencies.

Secondly, the increasingly differentiated character of the Czech rural space forces us to the further re-scaling of planning activities to the lower level. The microregional level in the form of nodal regions seems to be the most favourable level because it covers the most intensive processes which form the mutual interdependence between the urban and the rural. The delimitation of areas of MEC corresponds with the regions of this kind. The planning functions of these spatial units established in the ASDA could become a suitable tool for coordinating the development in the form of regional strategic planning. Now, the ASDA is used for regional planning but some problems in these documents are evidently answerable only by the spatial planning. After a proper restructuring of the content, replacing the vertical analytical approaches by horizontal ones and equalization hard and soft projects this document could become a new platform for the rural (regional) strategic planning. Unfortunately, the last round of actualisations of the Planning Analytic Materials in 2010 indicated an opposite trend – the Ministry for Regional Development of the CR stressed in the methodology of elaborating the ASDA problems responding to the physical planning.

Thirdly, in the constructing new image of the strategic rural planning we must be aware of adding another strategic document and broadening the bureaucratic machinery of the already “over-programmed” (BLAŽEK and VOZÁB 2004) system of the strategic planning. This question is hot because strategic plans of association of municipalities and of the local action groups are already being used on this level. Therefore it is probably better not to force the local players to accept another form of strategic planning (the ASDA for example) and let them change the dented reputation of the Czech strategic planning from the bottom. As PERLÍN and BIČÍK (2006, p. 12) argue – “We con-

sider the strategic document as a political manifest, which has especially political aspect. This manifest expresses a will of the city, regional or microregional representatives to regulate the development according a stated schedule along with use of own or external resources.” From this point of view the strategic planning of the local action groups, which works very well in the CR and is even getting more popular, seems as a good tool for reconstructing the image of strategic planning as a activation tool for promoting endogenous development.

Fourthly, enabling and supporting the transparent process of strategic planning seems to be the most important tool in improving the quality of it. The activity of rural representatives should be perceived on the national and regional level as helpful and not destructive. Similarly, the voice should be given to the local. That's why the ASDA (after proper reconfiguration) could serve as a platform, as a communication bridge between rural municipalities and regions. It could serve the regions which, so far, have failed in formulating the different rural policies and coordinating the rural development in spite of having this possibility due to the Countryside Revitalization Programme. Conceptions of the rural development on the regional level seem to be necessity and the ASDA could serve as a referential framework for differentiated rural policies. Afterwards, the regions in cooperation with the State Agricultural Intervention Fund (structured on the regional level) could create a strong alliance for promoting rural development policy.

Fifthly and most importantly, the thinking of people incorporated to the strategic rural planning must change. The process of strategic planning is strongly influenced by the legacy both of socialistic period and later by the strong neo-liberal phase after the Velvet Revolution. In the socialistic period urban and regional planning was very narrowly delimited as an activity devoted to the planning of the construction development of settlements without no respect to different economic,

social and environmental milieus – therefore longer tradition of strategic planning is missing. After 1989 the word “planning” had a bad connotation connected with the ineffective central planning. Consequently it was no wonder that in the neo-liberal condition the idea of planning was left on the regional level so the power of market could have free space. This is one of the reasons, why the position and implementation of strategic planning is so weak in the CR and in this point of view absolutely different when compared it to the strategic planning in the Western countries of the EU (MAIER 2010).

Last year The National Conference Countryside 2010 was organised by the Ministry of Agriculture in the cooperation with the Nation-wide Network for Countryside and other rural and agricultural organisations. The problems partly outlined in this paper were discussed by representatives of all important players in the Czech rural arena. They spoke not only about the promotion of urban-rural partnership, the governance principle in the rural development and about the differentiated countryside. The increasing importance of the local action groups in promoting the rural development was discussed too and the participants asked for a bigger independence in developing the rural microregions. Hopefully these requirements will not be forgotten and will appear in the Czech rural development discourse.

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