

The co-operation of rural municipalities – chance or condition of achievement

Spolupráce venkovských obcí – možnost nebo podmínka úspěchu

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Abstract: Czech settlement structure as well as the structure of public administration on municipal level is extremely disintegrated. Besides a great number of very small villages – small settlement units – there exists a big share of very small municipalities with self-government. Those municipalities can and often do cooperate in voluntary associations, which can transfer some of their competencies by a specific municipal treaty. This paper is focused on the discussion of possibilities and limits of cooperation among rural municipalities. Different forms of existing collaboration are discussed and possibilities of new forms of municipal collaboration are drafted, including the possible presumed and real dangers of such collaboration.

Key words: public administration, self-government, rural development, cooperation of municipalities, development strategies

Abstrakt: Česká sídelní struktura a stejně tak i struktura veřejné správy na municipální úrovni je extrémně rozdrobená. Kromě velkého počtu malých sídel – místních částí existuje také velký podíl velmi malých obcí se samostatnou působností veřejné správy. Tyto obce mohou a také velmi často spolupracují ve dobrovolných svazcích obcí, na které také mohou formou smlouvy přenést některé své kompetence. Příspěvek je zaměřen na diskuzi možností a limitů spolupráce venkovských obcí. V textu jsou analyzovány jednotlivé formy dosavadní spolupráce a naznačeny i možnosti dalších dosud nerealizovaných forem obecní spolupráce včetně jednotlivých domnělých i skutečných hrozeb této spolupráce.

Klíčová slova: veřejná správa, samospráva, rozvoj venkova, spolupráce obcí, strategie rozvoje

Czech settlement structure is extremely disintegrated. The causes of this very high disintegration of settlement structure consist in the historical formation of the structure of towns and rural municipalities and they are conditioned above all by physical-geographical aspects, by the quality of agricultural land and by other external factors. The traditionally very disintegrated settlement structure was taken over also by the historical organization of public administration formed in the territory of Czech lands since the second half of the 19th century. In spite of various development difficulties, this disintegrated network of municipalities has survived up to present days. In reaction to the administratively performed and ruthless integration of municipalities going on from the 1960s to the 1980s, individual rural communities proceeded immediately after loosening of the restrictive conditions to a spontaneous disintegration

of municipalities. In the period between June 1990 and March 1991, more than 1 800 municipalities were re-established and during two following years, the number of municipalities in the Czech Republic grew from 4 000 at the end of the totalitarian period to 6 250. The structure of municipalities in Czechia is extremely asymmetrical. There are 551 (8.8%) municipalities with less than 100 inhabitants and in total 1 655 (26.4%) municipalities with less than 200 inhabitants. More than 60% of all municipalities have less than 500 inhabitants and nearly 80% of all municipalities less than 1 000 inhabitants.

Rural municipalities, including the smallest ones, are further divided into detached settlement units which have a very low number of inhabitants, often less than 20 permanent residents, and where a great part of houses serve only for recreation and are thus not permanently used. Small rural municipalities are

Supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic (Grant No. MSM 0021620831).

nevertheless obliged to ensure public administration also in these small settlements, at least to a certain degree which is reduced on public illumination and transport services (with subsidies of regional government).

In these micromunicipalities, it is often very difficult to ensure staff to perform, even in the minimal extent, public administration and formal procedures required by the Municipality Act are in these settlement units often violated. Act N°128/2000 on municipalities stipulates the same conditions for self-government exercising for all municipalities. It means that Brno and other large cities have the same self government competences as municipalities with less than 100 inhabitants.

AIM AND METHODS

The aim of this paper is to analyse the existing forms of collaboration and to show limitations and barriers of collaboration of rural municipalities. The paper is based on the long-term monitoring of strategic documents of rural development and on interviews with mayors of rural municipalities associated in the Association for Village Renewal and in the Union of Towns and Municipalities.

Especially after the change of social conditions and reestablishment of local self-government, various working places started to study the organization of public administration and conditions for good self-government. This interest is evident also on international level and the transformation of public administration is for instance studied also by the International Geographical Union within its specialized Geography and Public Administration Commission. The Masaryk Czech Sociological Society deals within its section Sociology of Rural Areas with public administration issues and with the organization of public administration. In the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic, the importance of public administration was studied by Vajdová (2005) and Illner (1997). The significance of public administration manifested also by an extreme increase of university working places dealing with public administration issues.

Discussions on the size of municipalities and on the possibilities of their collaboration have been carried on both in professional circles and by the representatives of executive power. Among foreign authors, the issues of public administration changes in Central Europe are studied in a long-term perspective by Bennett (1994, 1997), who observes changes in the organization of public administration and

differentiates three basic types of organization of public administration. The joint model of organization is defined as the combination of a locally elected body and of a strong central supervision over the decision-making of this body. According to Bennett, this model is characteristic especially for the French system of public administration organization. Then he characterizes the British dual (separated) model of public administration organization and the divided system of public administration organization which is a combination of the separated and the joint model. According to Bennett, this system is used in Scandinavian countries.

The issues of theoretical delimitation of rural municipalities and of the definition of the extent or characteristics of rural areas and rural landscape were dealt with by Perlín (2003a) and Maříková (2005). Both of them notice the ambiguous delimitation of rural areas as observed entity. Maříková looks for different criteria to delimit rural areas, as historical development or economic, social quantitative and public characters of rural areas, and based on mostly Czech literature she seeks to implement individual criteria.

One of the first complex views on the organization of public administration was further brought by Barlow et al. (1994) in their paper "Territory, Society and Administration. The Czech Republic and the Industrial Region of Liberec". Their volume of contributions offers a complex view on issues of the newly forming public administration in Czechia.

Haml and Müller (1998) analyse the Czech settlement system and discuss the size of municipalities. They compare the population size of municipalities in the Czech Republic with the size of municipalities measured by the number of job opportunities and the index of complex functional size and solve also regional differences in size structure of municipalities. In the part dedicated to public administration structure and possibilities of amalgamation, they draw attention to economic and organization rationality of public administration exercising, as economies of scale and qualification for exercising administration. As a proof of the instability of public administration, they indicate frequent organisation of elections in exceptional terms after dismemberment of the duly elected municipal councils. They stress, in accordance with Blažek (1994), the polarity of property of municipalities formed by incomes of the municipal budget. This problem was nevertheless solved by the later reform of budget tax determination, which fixed tax incomes of municipal budgets on the basis of solidarity approach in dependence on size categories of municipalities.

Based on a high size variability of municipalities, the authors conclude that it is useful to separate the multilevel model of communal administration and to build a two-level model of local administration organization.

Monitoring of the forms and types of integration of municipalities is carried on by Labounková (2005) from the Institute for Spatial Development in Brno (ÚUR), who, based on the repeated evaluations of number, goals and forms of collaboration of rural municipalities documents a significant increase of this form of collaboration. Labounková does not deal with the legal background of the possible collaboration nor evaluates the efficiency of individual associations or linkages of municipalities, but she examines above all the development of this form of cooperation and evaluates development documents of individual microregions, and that on the basis of inquiries through regional authorities. She convincingly documents in her studies an increase of collaboration between municipalities in the period 2000–2004. As alarming can be considered her statement that 70% of development documents are elaborated only to obtain subsidies. This result proves the purpose origin of development strategies as well as of microregions.

Problems of development of small rural municipalities are also dealt with by two studies by the Terplan and the University of Mining Engineering “Significance of Small Municipalities” elaborated to order of the Union of Towns and Municipalities which should help the Union to understand the development issues of small municipalities. In the Terplan Study, the authors stress mainly the exercise of self-government activities and of political power. They indicate that representatives in municipalities of less than 2000 inhabitants are responsible of the complex territorial development, including territorial planning competences (Terplan 2000). According to the same paper, municipalities have a historical and relatively solid position within political, economic, social and cultural life. Their part in environmental issues is increasing. They are considered as vectors of cultural heritage. The authors stress municipalities and not abstract communities which maintain historical, cultural and social riches of nations and states. It seems nevertheless that a stress put upon municipalities as public administration units maintaining above all cultural and social heritage is overestimated in this study. Development of a local community is possible also without an active part of the mayor and of other representatives; on the contrary, in many cases it is evident (Majerová 2005) that local communities are active even without a significant leading part of self-government representatives.

Study of the University of Mining Engineering “Role and Position of Small Municipalities” (2000) is more focused on the possibilities of formal and informal cooperation of municipalities and on administrative and economic instruments enabling better cooperation of individual municipalities. The authors propose above all legislative modifications which would lead to an easier exercising of public administration in small municipalities and to an easier formal cooperation on the level of larger territorial units. Very ambitious is their proposed measure consisting in the progressive elimination of groups of municipalities with less than 3 or 5 thousand inhabitants, i.e. to reach municipal councils of at least 15 members (Úloha a postavení ... 2000). According to the representatives of small municipalities as well as those of the Union of Towns and Municipalities, this proposal is quite unacceptable and would lead to an unprecedented integration process, much more intensive than at the time of central system (1970–1990).

In response to a very deep disintegration of municipalities and practical problems in exercising self-government, the Ministry of Interior proposed a new form of cooperation between municipalities. Based on long-term negotiations of a working group and on studies of many documents, an act was drafted in 2005 to enable a higher form of cooperation of rural municipalities. It supposed to develop the cooperation of rural municipalities on the basis of existing microregional cooperation into a two-level model of self-government, where municipalities – according to a legislative norms members of a linkage would delegate a part of their self-government competences to linkage/association bodies, in which all municipalities would be duly represented. Besides formal structures and building of individual bodies of the association, the proposal deals also with financing of this linkage. It parts from the experience of the French model of public administration organization which resembles by its structure of municipalities the conditions in Czechia. After a period of voluntary but little effective linkages of municipalities, new institutions were formed in France at the end of 20th century – associations of municipalities exercising some of the up-to-then communal competencies on the regional level.

The Union of Towns and Municipalities, as well as the Association for Village Renewal required that the draft act ensures also an increase of financial means for activities of newly drafted associations without resources of budget assignation of taxes delimited for participating municipalities. As this proposal could not be granted, both associations refused the draft act.

Concrete results of collaboration of municipalities are up to now little conclusive. If we do not include into results the elaboration of the complex development programme/development strategy, we must state that results of cooperation of municipalities are up to now relatively modest.

TYOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The collaboration of municipalities can be evaluated according to the really realized cooperation projects which can contribute to the development of municipalities and of the whole region. The individual projects can be both of investment character – common investments into some project of the municipality, or they can have the character of “soft” projects aimed at backing of common activities, on strengthening regional identity or on possibilities of leisure activities. It is possible either to monitor projects proposed in the individual strategic documents of microregions or to monitor the really realized projects in the individual municipalities and to evaluate their contribution for the microregional development. The evaluation of proposed or realized projects is however difficult because of theoretical classification of individual projects.

The first problem is to identify real microregional projects which can contribute to the development of the whole territory. In individual linkages of municipalities, it is difficult to identify common projects contributing to the development of the whole micro-region territory. The majority of strategic documents, if they ever propose a concrete solution, are focused on the projects of municipalities and not on those of the whole microregion. It is thus politically but also formally difficult to find and to support projects relevant for the whole region. Political support to these projects is low, because the representatives of municipalities do not understand reasons for common investments to build or reconstruct for instance an industrial area in the largest municipality/town of the region and thus to ensure a higher employment in the region and to limit emigration from the region. Formal reasons limiting common investments lay above all in accounting limitations enabling to invest from public budgets only into municipality-owned propriety.

It is also possible to differentiate the individual proposed or realized projects according to their significance for the development of the territory. Some types of activities are based on the necessity (or presumed necessity) to complete technical infrastructure networks or to maintain public areas. These types of projects respond to the still existing consequences

of low investments and unsatisfactorily maintenance of rural public areas before 1990. Representatives of municipalities are convinced that they have to complete or to build individual technical infrastructure networks and thus ensure the development of their municipality. But elimination of old loads does not ensure development of the municipality. Another type of projects from the viewpoint of capacity development are those strengthening innovative intentions, creating new jobs, ensuring more visitors coming to the region or creating demand for activities in the region.

The individual prepared or really realized projects of individual municipalities can be divided into four basic types:

1. Municipality projects to eliminate old loads
2. Municipality development projects
3. Projects of the whole region to eliminate old loads
4. Regional development projects

Their division according to their presumed frequency is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Typology of the development projects of micro-regions

Projects	Development capacity	
	elimination of old loads	development
Local	XXXX (1)	XX (2)
Regional	X (3)	0 (4)

Key: XXX probability of occurrence of such projects (XXX = very high, XX = probable, X = rare, 0 = not existing)

From the viewpoint of attractiveness, individual activities can be classified in the following way:

- 1 not enabling active using and being in place
- 2 enabling active using in place, enabling active using by inhabitants
- 3 not enabling active using, enabling interconnection, communication
- 4 enabling active using for local inhabitants and for visitors

When using the classification of projects from the viewpoint of capacity development and from that of territorial orientation on really realized projects of municipalities in the years 1998–2003, we can evaluate the legitimacy of the presumed using of the frequency of projects.

The analysis is based on a realized detailed sociological research into municipalities done in 2003 in

Table 2. Really invested activities in the years 1998–2003 in 1 135 municipalities of Czechia

	First action		Second action		Third action		Fourth action		Total	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
Number of actions	838	100.0	522	100.0	308	100.0	174	100.0	1 842	100.0
Out of them of type 1	674	80.4	364	69.7	194	63.0	107	61.5	1339	72.7
Out of them of type 2	150	18.1	148	28.4	113	36.7	65	37.4	477	25.9
Out of them of type 3	8	1.0	8	1.5	0	0.0	1	0.6	18	1.0
Out of them of type 4	4	0.5	2	0.4	1	0.3	1	0.6	8	0.4

Source: Inquiry in 1 135 municipalities of the Czech Republic, the Sociological Laboratory of the Czech University of Agriculture, own calculations, types of projects, see text

2000 selected rural municipalities (1 135 municipalities really responded). The inquiry was prepared by the Sociological Laboratory of the Czech University of Agriculture. Municipalities were selected in a way to represent, both territorially and by their size, the size structure of municipalities in the Czech Republic. Collection of data was done in cooperation with STEM agency which also prepared individual data for processing of results.

The results are based on the responses of mayors of the individual municipalities and the methods of their processing do not allow to differentiate whether they are statements concerning only a part of the municipality or its whole administrative district. As we use only the evaluation of individual actions related always to a concrete place, this problem is not essential.

The classification of individual activities was done in conformity with the above classification according to capacity development and to territorial impact of the realized activity.

The evaluation is based on a set of responses of mayors of 1 135 rural municipalities to the following question: "State the investment actions (in a sum of more than CZK 500 000) since 1998 and their amount". The mayors had the possibility to indicate up to four individual actions.

Only rural municipalities with less than 2000 inhabitants were included into this evaluation and their selection was done in a way to correspond to both size structure of municipalities and to the territorial distribution of individual municipalities in Czechia.

The classification of individual investment actions according to their types (see Table 2):

Type 1 technical and transport infrastructure, public illumination, municipal councils, public areas, maintenance of water streams and areas, cemeteries

Type 2 flats, schools, play and sport grounds, social activities; homes with community care service, civic community centres

Type 3 cycling paths, ways

Type 4 information centres, activities for visitors, tourist activities

This evaluation does not take into account differences between the terms investment, reconstruction, building, etc. In the set of all statements are given also other sporadic types of projects which were, according to their prevailing characteristics, classified into individual categories.

In the whole set of municipal activities, there was no project leading directly to an increase of local or regional employment, business support or development of business environment in the municipality.

The reasons for absence of really development activities of municipalities lie in both above discussed factors. On the one hand, it is much easier and at the same time more visible and by the public more requested to complete the individual networks of technical infrastructure in the municipality and then to reconstruct local communications. Because of lacking financial means for integrated projects of

Table 3. Number of municipalities having invested in the years 1998–2003

Without investments	297	26.2
One investment	315	27.8
Two investments	215	18.9
Three investments	135	11.9
Four investments	173	15.2
Total	1 135	100.0

Source: Inquiry carried out in 1 135 municipalities of the Czech Republic, the Sociological Laboratory of the Czech University of Agriculture, own calculations

building all networks at the same time, building of individual networks goes on one after another when financial means are disposable and thus local communications are repeatedly dug up.

In addition, mayors are little interested to back common projects of several municipalities and to ensure an effective development investment for the whole microregion.

When studying the number of individual investments according to municipalities, it is possible to conclude that more than 25% of municipalities did not invest at all during the monitored period, but 15% of municipalities financed four and more investments.

COOPERATION OF MUNICIPALITIES

Very small municipalities can cooperate to ensure certain activities. Since the reintroduction of self-government, the possibilities of cooperation are regulated by the Municipality Act and especially since 1998 municipalities have been making a very intensive use of this possibility and cooperating in different purpose associations of municipalities. There are two forms of this cooperation. A great majority of municipalities cooperate within a linkage of municipalities (public corporation), some municipalities further cooperate in purpose associations of physical and legal persons and municipalities. The purpose of cooperation in association is to ensure one function or activity in the territory. An example is for instance an association of municipalities for providing public transports, in which also regional transport providers participate (besides municipalities).

As it follows from the register of municipalities kept by the Institute for Spatial Planning in Brno, individual linkages are very different as to the size of the administered territory, number of participating municipalities or delimited territory. The formal aim of the majority of linkages is to "ensure complex development" of the territory. Municipalities often participate in two or more linkages. In some regions (Rakovník district), there exists a two level structure of municipalities, where individual rural municipalities are on the one hand members of a "small" microregion formed by about ten municipalities, and on the other hand individual municipalities and their linkages are members of a "big" Rakovník microregion, where presidents of small microregions are represented in the council of the big microregion.

The willingness of rural municipalities to cooperate is strong. Equally strong is also the desire of municipalities to safeguard the existing extend of communal

self-government and not to allow amalgamation of municipalities or any delegation of some self-government competencies to other bodies. This apparent paradox can be explained by the historical roots of forced and ruthless integration of municipalities in the 1970s and 1980s and by the then existing way of financing of municipalities. The municipalities which at that time lost their formal independence immediately lost any investments. The centrally controlled model of public administration investments ensured only a minimal volume of investments for rural municipalities and these investments were in addition granted within the central system only for selected central municipalities. Other settlements were not developed at all. Another reason of refusal of integration by municipalities and their representatives is the constantly stressed willingness and need of self-government of the municipalities to ensure their own development. Especially in the period after 1990, municipalities were considered in Czechia as basic units of communal democracy and self-government of municipalities was considered to be the basic stone of the new democratic system irrespective of the quality of the exercise of public administration. Unfortunately the experience of the often experimental management of municipalities, of their extreme indebtedness and of their insolvency towards creditors lead the Ministry of Finance to the delimitation of the heavily indebted municipalities by the index of debt service. If this index is higher than 30% of all tax and non-tax incomes of the municipality, then these individual municipalities have only a limited access to other subsidy programmes or titles.

On the one hand, there exists a generally perceived problem of disintegration of municipalities, low quality of exercise of public administration, the problem of ineffective or even ill management of public means and the problem of low quality of exercise of public administration, and on the other hand there exist a strong will to safeguard independence of municipalities and a strong feeling of pride on the own self-government.

As it follows from the repeated research into public administration realized by the Sociological Laboratory FEM CUA in 2003, only 41 of the 1 135 requested mayors of rural municipalities admitted that their municipalities were discussing a possible integration with another municipality. Only 17 mayors admitted that they would be ready to accept another municipality wishing to integrate with their municipality. A surprisingly higher number of positive answers was obtained to the question if citizens would agree with integration with another municipality. In total 217 mayors gave a positive answer, which represents

19.1% of all monitored municipalities. The difference between discussing integration and a theoretical possibility of integration with another municipality can be explained mainly by the difference between a really articulated intention and a confusedly expressed willingness without knowing concrete details.

The same results were obtained also when studying the conditions of intermunicipal cooperation in the Rakovník region (2005), when it clearly followed from directed interviews with representatives of microregions and individual municipalities that in spite of a very intensive cooperation within the microregion, none of the 40 questioned mayors of rural municipalities intended at that time or in future to integrate with neighbouring municipalities. The same results were obtained also in previous research in the Kolín and Kutná Hora regions (2001), where none of the 25 questioned mayors was in favour of integration with another municipality. On the contrary, concerning less concrete questions on cooperation of municipalities, all questioned mayors (in the Rakovník and Kolín region) appreciated the cooperation of more municipalities without being able to clearly specify the extent and form of such cooperation. Affirmations of the mayors are mostly general and identifying cooperation goals in complex development, cooperation in building infrastructure or the most frequently cooperation in building tourist infrastructure and especially in building cycling paths in the region. A specific type of statements of the monitored set of mayors is represented by answers identifying as the main objective of cooperation obtaining subsidies from the European funds. Similar results were obtained also by Labounková (2005).

Municipalities can further cooperate also through the contractual delegation of a part of their competencies to other units. The form of cooperation is regulated by the Municipal Act and up to now it can be realized only between a municipality with extended competences and a municipality. Municipalities can, by a special agreement, delegate a part of their competence to a municipality with extended competence. This form of cooperation is thus realized without the existing microregional association and does not allow a deeper cooperation within the rural association of municipalities. Municipalities profit of this possibility mostly to deal with petty offences and less frequently in relation to the work of local police.

The performed detailed analysis of forms of cooperation of rural mayors in the Rakovník District (2005) focused on microregional linkages clearly identified possibilities and problems of cooperation as follows:

- Microregional cooperation of municipal linkages (10–15 members) is little effective.
- Linkages are not professionally staffed and their activities depend on the leading personality of the linkage, mostly the mayors of the largest of initiating municipality.
- The mayor of the leading municipality is satisfied with the form of cooperation.
- Other mayors of member municipalities evaluate it in a contradictory way (it is advantageous only for the leading municipality).
- The objective of the linkage is to obtain subsidies for own municipalities and not for the microregional cooperation or microregional projects.
- Methodological or organizational support from regional authorities or institutions is lacking.
- Municipalities appreciate activities of all-district linkage of municipalities, in which the majority of municipalities participate.
- Municipalities weigh up the effectiveness of paid member contributions for the linkage (CZK 30 per inhabitant a year)
- In general, microregions have elaborated strategic documents, but they do not use them in their activities. Mayors mostly ignore the fixed priorities of the strategic document.
- Municipalities only rarely cooperate through intermediary of public agreements.

The monitored example of microregional cooperation in the Rakovník region clearly showed the problem of the development of rural municipalities consisting in abolition of regional offices. Municipalities now evidently lack organizational and methodical assistance formerly provided to them by the professionally well-trained staff of district offices and they have many difficulties with ensuring their activities. They see the main problem above all in the non-existing training and the transfer of information. Municipalities have to ensure the exercise of highly demanding public administration, they must organize professional training for their staff which is demanding both financially and organizationally. Especially training of staff in special professional competencies is very difficult for municipalities. This role is played by the newly constituted municipality linkage of the Rakovník region with all-district competencies which has already the professional staff and partly serves as a consultative and methodological centre for microregions and municipalities. Municipalities appreciate mainly the individual training cycles for their staff and information on the individual subsidy titles or possibilities how to obtain financial means for investment in the municipality.

Although the all-district linkage has elaborated a very detailed development strategy identifying more than 50 projects of development of the region, municipalities, microregions and representatives of the district linkage are still not able and willing to promote realization of at least some proposed strategy projects and focus their activities rather on operative assistance and management of the linkage's activities. Long-term perspectives or programme of actions are lacking and only on a targeted question the representatives of the Rakovník region linkage admitted as an objective to build an all-district network of cycling paths. This is evidently a very frequent but a quite insufficient impulsion for the further development of rural municipalities.

A similar research on the situation in the district Plzeň-sever done in 2004 makes it clear that in this regions linkages of municipalities exist only formally and do not perform any common activities and even in some part of the territory such linkages are formally constituted but practically do not exist. Municipalities are oriented, similarly as in other regions, only at ensuring the operative management and are not able to formulate any development visions or long-term goals. The situation is the same as in the neighbouring Rakovník region, where linkages are existing from the organizational viewpoint, but similarly as in the Plzeň sever region, they do not realize any common development projects.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The possibilities to develop cooperation of rural municipalities are thus determined by a whole series of external and internal factors.

External factors include above all small population size of the municipalities and a very small volume of means that municipalities can use for their own development.

Internal factors of cooperation development include above all a surprisingly low quality of public administration exercising, ill knowledge of legal environment and impossibility to participate in larger development programmes. Rural municipalities are constantly focused mainly on elimination of deficits in their equipment and direct their limited investment means to completion of technical infrastructure networks and repairs and reconstruction of local communications. Their preparedness to participate in common projects for several municipalities is very still low. Social activities of municipalities linkages are mostly on a low level, the support for favourable business climate in municipalities or in their linkages

is limited both by legislative conditions and by limited organization capacities to back active businessmen in the region.

State bodies are aware of the existing difficulties in formation of self-government bodies and of a difficult exercise of all competencies of municipalities. But the up-to-now used instruments, mostly of restrictive character, do not lead to an increased cooperation of municipalities. Above all the extremely asymmetrical model of financing of the smallest municipalities, where the used coefficient for the smallest municipalities of less than 100 inhabitants practically reduces their income in comparison with the period before the public finances reform, did not lead to disappearing of the smallest municipalities.

Individually or in linkages, municipalities compete for the same and limited volume of means for development (the Programme of Village Renewal, regional subsidy titles, etc.).

It is evident that for further development of public administration and consequently also for development of rural areas, several principal conditions must be fulfilled, as for instance:

- Methodical and organizational support for the activities of linkages of municipalities and for individual rural municipalities
- Support for drafting common development projects
- Focusing of development projects on key matters only – concentration of means on a limited number of projects
- Concentration of means on the development of microregional centres as opposed to the existing practice to distribute investments proportionally in the whole region.

It appears that state restrictive instruments including the draft act on linkages of municipalities (Nová forma meziobecné spolupráce 2005) do not lead to a strengthening of cooperation but rather to a growing opposition to these limiting proposals of the state. If the society has to be interested to support a closer cooperation of municipalities, it would be necessary to create above all the motivation and initiation instruments leading to a voluntary and long-term cooperation of municipalities and to progressively consolidate this cooperation in several formalized structures.

The possibilities of further development of rural regions in Czechia exist in two key areas. Above all, the basic functions of municipalities must be granted and technical infrastructure in larger municipalities must be completed. This key tasks must be granted by the state which must offer to municipalities the

professional assistance under the form of purpose delimited means. This kind of activities is thus primarily aimed at ensuring operation activities of individual rural municipalities.

The second key area is the support to development projects of municipalities. It is evident that very small Czech municipalities have only limited capacities and means to ensure a long-term programme-oriented development. In spite of the elaborated strategic documents or development programmes, individual activities are more or less accidental depending of available subsidies and information. It is thus evident that especially in streaming development programmes, municipalities have to cooperate (and not to compete) and it would thus be useful to provide more effective instruments to support this cooperation. It would be useful to proceed here, according to the conclusions by Hampl and Müller (1998), to a two-level organization of communal self-government and to formal delimitation of microregional linkages of municipalities. Municipalities should thus have the right to delegate some of their competences to these linkages, especially those that they are not able to ensure by their own forces and at the same time they should have right to control the exercise of individual activities through the elected bodies of the linkage.

The proposal of the new system of public administration should be thus oriented at formation of two-level self-government in which would, on the one hand, exist common municipalities with mainly operational competences and the second level of self-government should be formed by larger microregional linkages of municipalities which would exercise mainly competences bound with the development of the concerned territory. This second level of self-government should be effectively controlled by the individual participating municipalities.

The process of formation of the two-level model of public administration organization is very complicated from the legal point of view as it means an intervention into many acts and regulations. Before drafting such act, it would be thus necessary to proceed to a whole series of partial steps leading to its easier adoption by representatives of communal self-government. It would be necessary to reconsider the existing exercise of public administration and its high administrative requirements, often an excessive duty to record and keep evidence of the individual activities. At the same time, it is necessary to increase the supervision over self-government exercising and to methodologically lead municipalities to legally indisputable methods of decision-making and to punish those municipalities which are not able to

implement the clearly established procedures of adoption of the individual decisions and the exercise of public administration. A step to enlargement of the existing and non-effective way of cooperation of self-governing municipalities could be an enlarged public agreement enabling to delegate competences not only to municipalities with enlarged competences but also to other municipalities, for instance within one linkage.

Because of the former central system, the two-level model of communal self-government is not easy to be realized in the Czech Republic, because the representatives of municipalities, although they are not able to ensure the development by their own forces, refuse to formalize the existing voluntary linkages of municipalities to the detriment of powers of municipalities.

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Arrived on 26th April 2006

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