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ON NON-AGRICULTURAL AND NON-TOURISM-RELATED ECONOMIC INDUSTRIES IN RURAL AREAS: REPORT ON RESEARCH PROJECT FINANCED BY THE INTERNATIONAL VISEGRAD FUND

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For centuries, agriculture was the dominant source of employment in rural areas, and the driving force behind rural economies. It had a pervasive influence on the organization of rural society and culture, to the extent that references to rural development were traditionally taken to mean measures by which agricultural production could be increased. After World War II, one of the main policy goals of nation states was to provide food security, which called for the maximization of agricultural production. However, the rapid technological modernization of farms, their specialization, and the concentration of agricultural production all also reduced demand for labour in rural areas. Over time,

these circumstances have left it ever-more important that employment-oriented measures and policies for rural areas be pursued. Yet, in our view, these tend to be absent from the planning-related, political and even academic discourse concerning rural development, not only in the Visegrad countries. Instead, existing rural development policies very often still focus on agriculture, notwithstanding its steadily declining importance to rural areas, in terms of both employment and the income of rural inhabitants. It is true to say that tourism is very often presented alongside agriculture, as the 'salvation' for rural areas in the policies designed thereof, though in truth the economic contribution

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here is found to be limited spatially to just a few areas in which a very attractive environment and/or very strong regional marketing have made intensive commoditization possible.

In reaction to the above considerations, a Project called "Non-agricultural and non-tourism-related economic industries in rural peripheries of the Visegrad countries", as funded by the International Visegrad Fund (Project No. 21410332), has been carried out over the last year by four institutions from the Visegrad Countries working together. The four Project partners in fact constitute:

- in the Czech Republic: the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem – Faculty of Science (Department of Geography) and Faculty of Social and Economic Studies;
- in Hungary: the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – Research Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences;
- in Slovakia: the Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice – Department of Geography;
- in Poland: the Polish Academy of Sciences – Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization.

The partners have joined together to conduct research focusing on rural economies, rural and regional policies and entrepreneurship in their respective countries. The Project has had as its three goals: mapping of the non-agricultural and non-tourism-related enterprises present in peripheral rural areas of the selected region; examination of the opinions of entrepreneurs where the running of a business in a peripheral rural area is concerned; and research on the attitudes towards entrepreneurship manifested by representatives of peripheral rural municipalities.

The wider aim of the Project has in turn been to support a view of rural economies other than that focused mainly on agriculture. Emphasis is therefore to be placed on the fact that the economic importance of non-agricultural economic activities (e.g. those in manufacturing or services) in rural areas is much greater than that of agricultural activities as such. Therefore, when rural

economic growth is spoken about, a shifting of attention towards these non-agricultural economic activities, rather than agriculture *per se* as has been usual in recent decades, is something the authors advocate with conviction. However, in the light of this potential shift, research into the 'other' economic activities is very much needed, as is support for these within the framework of rural development instruments. To summarize, the results from the Project referred to above should help with some necessary erosion of the idea that rural economies equate to agriculture, which has proved so very prevalent on a daily basis in the relevant political and even academic discourse.

In the course of the realization of the Project (June 2014 – July 2015) the events held were:

- the workshop initiating the research studies (Budapest, September 2014),
- the Concluding Conference (held in the Czech Republic in July 2015, Fig. 1) on "Post-agricultural rural economies and rural development policies", at which 15 papers were presented,
- the special thematic session on "New economic spaces in rural areas", run at the 2015 EUGEO Congress at which 10 papers were presented.

The most measurable effect of the Project is a collection of eight articles presented in the 39th volume of *Studia Obszarów Wiejskich* (Rural Studies) published under the common title: "Post-agricultural rural space of the Visegrad countries: economies, entrepreneurship and policies". The review of the content of these published papers will serve simultaneously as a best presentation of the results obtained as the Project was being implemented.

In the article by V. Hruška, T. Siviček and K. Czapiewski, the rationale for the Project being run is demonstrated in the context of changing rural space and stagnating rural economic research. The changing roles of the different economic sectors in rural is presented in more detail on the basis of literature analysis. In turn, in the article by L. Novotný,



Figure 1. Participants of the Conference convened in the Czech Republic to sum up the Project (Ore mountains – Krušné hory, July 2015)

T. Hruška, T. Egedy and M. Mazur, a conceptualization of what it means to be 'rural' is discussed, and there are seen to be many approaches to the process of defining 'rural'. Different approaches are seen to be suitable for different situations or research purposes. Therefore descriptive definitions of what is 'rural' are introduced and implemented as these are exemplified by the Visegrad countries, given that quantitative approaches are needed in the case of large-scale research. The definition of 'rural' as a locality proves very useful in making us aware of the barriers to, and opportunities for, doing business in rural areas. Post-modern approaches have in turn introduced a definition of 'rural' as a social construct, which proves very important in explaining the economic revival of rural areas related to the process of counterurbanization, and a resulting influx of qualified people. From this point of view, the 'rural idyll' as one of the dominating discourses of what is 'rural' is serving as one of the drivers behind this spatial process. The article by L. Novotný, M. Mazur and T. Egedy thus provides a theoretical discussion focusing on the term 'periphery'. Various approaches to the definition of this term are introduced, with these found to derive from different attitudes to, and perceptions of, what is called 'the periphery' or 'peripheral'. Finally, a delimitation of peripheries

in the Visegrad countries is presented on the basis of statistical criteria relating to distances from the closest city.

Those seeking to refer to rural economies in the Visegrad countries require general information about the economic climate there, and this is offered in the article by D. Cerić, which is based on the 2013 results of the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor*, the world's largest study of entrepreneurship. This article investigates entrepreneurial attitudes and perceptions, as well the entrepreneurial aspirations and activities of nascent, early-stage and new businesses in Visegrad countries. In turn, in the article by V. Hruška and K. Czapiewski, examples of both Western developed and Visegrad countries' changes of rural economies and current situations are analysed. A minimal contribution of agriculture in the developed countries is stressed, with rural employment in both manufacturing and services growing. This article also looks for reasons for such economic restructuring, and for the expansion of business activities into rural areas. Finally, prospects for rural entrepreneurship in the era of the knowledge-based society and the development of ICT are re-evaluated.

The aforementioned article provides the necessary background for a further one by Z. Kovács, S. Csachová, M. Ferenc, V. Hruška and M. Konopski. This discusses the rele-

vance of rural/regional development policies for present rural or peripheral areas of the Visegrad countries. Growing regional disparities as a result of post-communist economic restructuring and the EU have been key drivers underpinning the establishment of regional development policies from the mid-1990s onwards. The EU, or more precisely its Common Agriculture Policy, has also influenced rural development policies significantly, with the measures relating to rural economies tending to remain very strongly focused on agriculture or tourism.

However, in the last article by T. Egedy, D. Cerić, M. Konopski, S.R. Kučerová, M. Kulla, J. Nestorová-Dická and R. Svobodová it is shown that enterprises operating in peripheral rural areas of the Visegrad countries are not confined to the agricultural and tourist sectors. Nevertheless, as was indicated in the paragraph above, enterprises beyond the last two sectors are neglected by rural development policies, despite their substantial contribution to local economies and employment. Nine enterprises, with quite different histories, and operating in different economic branches, are presented in this article. Some of these are successors of enterprises founded in the communist era, while others are businesses newly established in the conditions of the free-market economy. A Hungarian social enterprise and a Polish

social cooperative also demonstrate new trends as regards job creation in peripheral rural areas, and are presented in this article.

Moreover, the above-mentioned volume, based on the knowledge and experience of all the co-authors from the Visegrad countries, should – in its last article by V. Hruška, K. Czapiewski and Z. Kovács – provide the reader with a set of planning tools by which entrepreneurship and economic growth in rural areas can be promoted. To make these recommendations still-more accessible to rural representatives from the Visegrad countries, these measures are presented in the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak languages, as well as in English.

It is hoped that the Project described here will combine with results from other Projects to encourage policymakers, students, scholars and the general public into some change of thinking about rural areas and their economic development. Hopefully, it will also facilitate the introduction of more-efficient, job-generating rural policies which will not be relying solely on agriculture or tourism.

Editors' note:

Unless otherwise stated, the sources of tables and figures are the authors', on the basis of their own research.

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