Human resources and their regional dimension in the National Strategy of Sustainable Development for the Slovak Republic

Introduction

Preparation of the National Strategy of Sustainable Development for the Slovak Republic (hereafter NSSD SR) adopted by the Government of the Slovak Republic in 2001 is oriented to search for possibilities to harmonizing the economic and social development with sustainable status of environment at all decision-making levels as applied at the national, regional, and local levels. Activity connected with NSSD SR is concentrated into 6 thematic work groups: global aspects of SD, natural resources, human resources, cultural-historical resources, economic aspects of SD, and institutional aspects of SD. These interconnected working groups which intensively collaborated on agreed solutions, were supposed to cover the complexity of the submitted material. It is presumed that the approved document should influence behaviour of investors who will be compelled to adapt their plans to requirements of protection and creation of the environment in the broadest sense of the word. This paper, character of which is informative above all, focuses on one of the themes, that of human resources with the specific aim to present its regional dimension.

Selected aims of NSSD SR in working group Human resources

The main aim of strategy in the area of human resources which is considered the most important component because of its decisive impact on other aspects of SD, is an educated and healthy population and sustainable life quality. The generally formulated main aim is expressed in more details by several partial and very heterogeneous aims with one common trait - respect for general conception of sustainable development. The partial aims which a priori included the regional dimension are:

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to improve the indicators of physical and mental health of population, to reduce mortality of infants and new-borns and to increase life expectancy, to maintain favourable demographic reproduction,

- to eliminate the growth of the social gap between rich and poor components of society, to reduce regional differences in economic performance of the individual spatial units,

- to take into account particular conditions of economically underdeveloped regions (individual approach) in the process of demarginalization,

- to stop the decaying trend in towns and rural settlements and to support (improve) inhabitability of the local environment,

- to create functional and complementary relationships between the towns and their rural hinterland,

- slowing down of urbanization processes (quantitatively) should be used for improvement of qualitative development of urban settlements,

- to eliminate social-pathological phenomena above all in urban environment,

- to create enough sustainable jobs,

- to regulate mobility of population by spatial dispersion and branch diversification of jobs and more efficient organization of public administration.

It is obvious that such formulation of partial aims has influenced the structure of analytical part of the issue of sustainable development of human resources.

Human resources in NSTUR SR - partial analyses and regional dimension of obtained results

Spatial differentiation of population distribution

Analysis of spatial differentiation of population distribution and its dynamic changes in relation to sustainable development of society (prepared by P. Podolák and V. Ina) represents one of the main parts of the issue of human resources. Regional analyses which are expressed either by the differences between the individual districts of Slovakia or differences between the towns and rural communities, view the population from different aspects. Regional differences in natural, mechanical or overall movement of population, age, ethnic, educational and religious population structures, as well as their health condition and mean life expectancy of population are studied.

Natality and natural increase rates are characterized by distinct polarization between the northern and (partly) eastern parts of the state, which represent the resource areas, and the depopulation regions in the south of Slovakia. The scheme of spatial differentiation practically does not change for several decades now. The differences between the rural and urban settlements are more distinct. The overall decrease of natality and natural increase rates which characterize both towns and rural communities is more pronounced in rural area, especially the smallest communities.
The mechanical, inner movement of population of the 1990s is characterized by striking decrease of migration flows heading to towns which caused slowing down of urbanization. Causes are: freezing of mass construction of flats in almost all urban immigration centres of Slovakia, relative "exhaustion" of demographic resources in immediate hinterland of some towns, decrease of available jobs in towns.

The distinct reduction of migration movement between districts typical for the 1990s influences regional differentiation of overall population increase in the individual districts of Slovakia. Overall increase of population is decisively formed by natural increase. This is the reason why districts with the highest rates of average annual population increases are concentrated in the most dynamic areas of Slovakia (from the population dynamics point of view) in the north or east of the country (Námestovo, Kežmarok). The highest decrease of population in the course of the 1990s was recorded in 8 depopulation district where it was also influenced by the negative migration balance (Nové Zámky, Krupina, Zlaté Moravce, Myjava, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Turčianske Teplice, Medzilaborce, and Sobrance).

Age structure is the most important demographic characteristics as it influences the level of natural population reproduction of communities and regions. Age index is considered the synthesizing characteristics of age structure which expresses the relationship of pre-productive groups to post-productive population component. In the southern and part of western districts of Slovakia type of population with prevailing number of post-productive groups (age index rates from 70% to 120%) prevails. Districts of northern Slovakia and northern part of eastern Slovakia are characterized by higher number of pre-productive population group.

Apart from the Slovak majority, Slovakia is also inhabited by ethnic minorities. Most of Hungarian, Ruthenian and Ukrainian minorities are concentrated in peripheral regions of the southern and northeastern Slovakia where the economic and social problems (unemployment, poverty, lack of investments) are more pronounced. Population of the Czech, Moravian, and Silesian nationalities which represent the 3rd largest minority in Slovakia is in difference from other minorities dispersed all over the territory. Analysis did not prove any direct implications between ethnic appurtenance and socio-economic problems. The Roma minority, concentrated in the eastern part of Slovakia, above all in Spiš's districts (Spišská Nová Ves, Kežmarok, Celnica, and Levoča), is the only exception.

Regional differences in mean life expectancy values between the individual districts are considerable. In case of men (Slovak average in 1998 was 68.6 years at birth) the difference between the districts with the highest (Bratislava, Trencín, Prešov) and the lowest life expectancy at birth (Trebišov) is more than six years and in case of women (Slovak average in 1998 was 76.7 years at birth) it is more than 5 years. From the point of view of area of the state the quoted values can be considered the sign of exceptionally high spatial disparity. In general, the northern half of Slovakia is characterized by strikingly higher values than its southern part.
The continuous decrease of the share of the smallest communities (up to 2000 inhabitants) and the increasing share of population living in towns with more than 20 000 inhabitants in the total number of population of Slovakia provokes the interest in assessment of an optimum sustainable settlement structure. NSSD declares the need of dispersion of population into all size groups of settlements and the need of its more regular distribution. Concentration of population into large settlements which used to bring economic effect in form of agglomeration savings is not the condition of development of society any more. Seen from the sustainable point of view it even hinders it. Exaggerated concentrations of population and economic activities into the limited space (above all in selected settlements in the Inner Carpathian basins) in Slovakia is manifested by unsustainable loading of natural landscapes and considerable deterioration of their environment. The ambition of NSSD is to solve these problems but above all prevent them by balanced socio-economic development of regions, by support to regional diversity and strengthening of regional identity, and by support to development and investments into the rural area.

Spatial differentiation of socio-pathological phenomena

Slovakia’s society and life quality of its individuals is threatened by different socio-pathological phenomena, monitoring of which with emphasis on regional disparities is one of the prerequisites necessary for preparation of strategic decisions for their solution. Out of many socio-pathological phenomena, NSSD pays special attention to unemployment (studied by V. Székely) and poverty (elaborated by A. Michálek) mostly caused by loss of job.

Unemployment in Slovakia is statistically recorded since 1990. The decisive indicator for its characteristics is the unemployment rate. Already the first different research results showed a close relationship between the increase of unemployment rate and increase of differences between the regions. The most striking differences manifested from the very beginning of statistical records of regional unemployment between Bratislava and its later established urban districts and the districts consisting of rural and urban communities. Theoretically presumed regional contrast manifests in long term between central (Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Košice) and peripheral regions situated next to the state frontiers in the south, north and east of Slovakia. The existing regional contrast is explainable as the effect of relative geographical position of the individual districts with regards to the existence and gravitational attractiveness of centres of economic growth. However, the regionalists find that the most notable difference in unemployment levels which exists between the western and eastern part of Slovakia is caused by the effect of several factors of spatial and not spatial nature: relative geographical position, educational and ethnic structure of regional population, branch, size, and organizational structure of regional economy, level of regional entrepreneurial activity, and level of technical infrastructure.
Unemployment enormously influences occurrence of material poverty declared by NSSD as socio-economic phenomenon depending on definition and measuring. Based on study of three indirect indicators of poverty (unemployment, social dependency - percentage of social beneficiaries out of total population, and mean wages), modern poverty regions were defined for NSSD SR. Unfavourable rates of two characteristics used for identification of risk areas occurred in 16 districts. Increased unemployment and social dependency rates were found in the districts of Rimavská Sobota, Rožňava, Spišská Nová Ves, and Trebišov. Inhabitants of districts of Krupina, Revúca, Veľký Krňa, Bardejov, Kežmarok, Levoča, Sabinov, Snina, Svidník, Vranov, Stropkov, and Poltáre are afflicted by increased social dependency and critical rates of mean wages. Alarming situation was found in three newly established districts of eastern Slovakia: Medzilaborce, Sobrance, and Gelnica, which reached critical rates of the three observed characteristics and the majority of inhabitants were in material poverty. The results show that inhabitants of rural settlements and peripheral regions are especially affected by poverty. However, results of inquiry into public opinion which prove that the individually perceived poverty causes more serious problems to inhabitants of towns and central regions, are interesting.

**Spatial differentiation of Human Development Index**

Comprehensive characterizations of life quality and development of population is unusually complicated and almost always questionable. Human Development Index is considered one of integrated (aggregated) socio-economic indicators of sustainable development. In Slovakia alternative synthesized indicator of human development consisting of partial indicators of three basic components: long and healthy life, education, access to means necessary for appropriate living standard, was used in the NSSD SR analysis of regional disparities in human development. (L. Vagač ed. 1999). Comparison of the individual administrative regions (Fig.1) was based on the sum of point evaluation of the reached ranking of the individual indicators.

The region of Bratislava, with about 11.5% of inhabitants of Slovakia living in its territory was characterized (according the used methodics) as the most developed region with good conditions for long and healthy life, with developed network of school and educational facilities and strong economic potential which increases the living standard high above the averages of the Slovak Republic. Developed regions include those of Trimava and Trenčín with 21.5% of total population of Slovakia.
The region of Trenčín, in contrast to that of Tmava, which is characterized as the region with average conditions for long and healthy life, fairly good access to educational capacities, and with developed conditions for reaching an adequate living standard, is that with good conditions for living a long and healthy life, with average conditions for education and with developed living standard.

As much as 67% of inhabitants of Slovakia live in five regions attributed the status of "less developed region". From the point of view of human development they can be characterized as follows:

Region of Žilina - region with good conditions for living a long and healthy life, with good access to educational capacities, but with the lower living standard induced by lower economic power.

Region of Košice - the region with less adequate conditions for long and healthy life, average conditions for education and with developed economic potential which is predominantly concentrated in the centre of region.

Region of Žilina - the region with less adequate conditions for long and healthy life, good conditions for education, average living standard measured by selected economic indicators.

Region of Banská Bystrica - the region with good conditions for long and healthy life, average conditions for education, and below average economic strength and purchase power of population.

Region of Prešov - the region with very good conditions for long and healthy life, low educational potential and the lowest economic performance and purchase power of population, (L. Vagač, ed. 1999).

Based on the results of calculation of the synthesized indicator of human development and typological classification of administrative regions of Slovakia, it is
possible to say that Bratislava and its hinterland occupy an exceptional position in regional structure of Slovakia. Higher life quality is above all conditioned by the economic potential of this region. On the other side, the region of Bratislava also shows high rates of negative aspects of human development, such as criminality or air pollution, caused by very high concentration of human activities in this region. Favourable conditions for long and health life can be found in the region of Prešov but the life standard measured by economic indicators is the lowest in Slovakia. Results have also shown that the higher rate of environmental pollution does not correlate with the lower values of mean life expectancy. It means that environmental quality is one of the many statistically not very significant factors affecting mean life expectancy.

Conclusion

It is an undeniable fact that the "philosophy" of sustainable development is the matter of man, human society. Its implementation into practical life requires change of attitudes to all components of nature and society. It requires gradual inner transformation of man exploiter to man preferring rational administration of his environment in harmonious co-existence with members of his community. NSSD with its analyses reflects the need of such transformation. Processing of the issue of human resources has showed that the regional dimensions should or even must be taken into account. Presented results point to exceptionally differentiated regional structure of Slovakia and the ensuing need of an individual approach to implementation of principles of sustainable development into the individual regions and localities. Success of implementation will be influenced by quality of cognition, which represents a challenge not only for environmentalists but also for all representatives of regional science.

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