The theoretical outline of methodological procedure of selection of assisted regions

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Introduction

Regional policy has been used and still is in a form of specific regional assistance devised to palliate the consequences of economic behaviour of entrepreneurial subjects that led to the origin of spatial disparities impossible to cope with by the proper regions. Assistance of the state, state interventionism was necessary. Regional policy found application above all in the solution of regional problems connected with high unemployment rate.

A comprehensive view on regional differences

Even a superficial analysis of the majority of important, spatially differentiated macro-economic criteria shows that the transition to market economy brought to Slovakia a deepening of the existing regional differences as inherited from the former period of centrally planned economy. It was not anything unexpected. For instance, the economist Komínková recognizes: "spatially irregular development – formation of "rich" and "poor" (eventually stronger or weaker in performance) regions is a natural attribute of functioning of market economy" (KOMÍNKOVÁ, Z. 1992).

Regional differences manifested themselves, according to the statistical results, most transparently in regional labour markets. It was so because not all regions were equally successful in adapting themselves to the new economic conditions. In the economy of Slovakia appeared a new, though known, phenomenon – unemployment. Rate of unemployment is in Western Europe one of the decisive criteria of socio-economic level of a region (BALÁZ, P. 1995) and it participates by a decisive share in classification of the territorial units among the assisted regions. Origin of unemployment in Slovakia is linked with a denuded primary and secondary insolvency of the state enterprises that along with the loss of markets led to the reduction of production and consequently to the lower demand for employees. The simplest way to the solution of the originated problems was releasing of a part of employees who form a group of unemployed since 1990.

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Even in spite of the fact that the rate of unemployment is ascribed a decisive significance, while delimiting assisted regions, it is in no case a complex criterion and its stating value is considerably limited. A comprehensive view is necessary above all while characterizing and evaluating the socio-economic level of the region, providing more space and importance to the criteria of geographic, economic, social, cultural and political nature. For objective interpretation of chosen criteria it is adequate to reduce the pressure of power and political ambitions of the one who presents the project.

In Slovakia there exist several problem regions that seek inclusion among assisted regions, for instance underdeveloped regions with under-average values of important macro-economic criteria – among them prevailing peripheral, boundary areas (districts of southern Slovakia), depressed regions with obsolete industrial structure and suffering the negative impact of restructuring processes, especially on regional labour market (for instance districts of Galanta, Spiská Nová Ves). Central support to all problem regions is not possible and that is why the recognition of the status of assisted region at the mezzo level is so interesting. Support lies in differentiated provision of limited direct (financial) and more extensive indirect (tools of fiscal policy) privileges granted by government for the chosen regions.

Questions related with delimitation of assisted regions

Question of assessing the socio-economic level of spatial units is undoubtedly an interesting scientific problem with potential practical impact on delimitation of the assisted regions. Several key questions appear in the foreground that are relevant from the viewpoint of final choice of assisted regions. In the first place there is a question: What should be characterized to express the regional differentiation that would help to determine objectively the territorial units requiring special attention of the central administration? At the second place is the following question: What criteria should be used for the expression of regional differentiation so that their statement value from the viewpoint of the region's characteristics should be as substantial as possible? Then follow the questions: What number of criteria should be selected, with what weight, what is their optimum value, in what way should be the multi-criterial evaluation of regions expressed and how to include the subjective evaluation by the "most important persons," etc. The mere formulation of the questions prove an extraordinarily complicated methodological approach to the final choice of the assisted regions.

In order to reduce lobbying together with subjective attitudes of the governmental representatives and those of political parties during the preferential deciding process on particular assisted regions, methods are searched that objectively determine either the territorial units in most critical state or the ones where the probability of return of the input investments is the highest, based in values of chosen criteria. This is an important novelty in the approach to the process of delimitation of assisted regions. The above-mentioned implies that there is not a hundred percent presumption for the differentiated governmental regional assistance that the Government of the Slovak Republic will grant the greatest attention to the region with the highest rate of unemployment (at the present moment the district of Rimavská Sobota).

An outline of methodological procedure of hypothetic selection of assisted regions based in assessment of socio-economic level of regions

Method of expert interviews – selection of experts

As there is not a consensus in a opinion over the problem of assessment of socio-economic level of the regions even in the scientific community, it is desirable to form a team of experts and to submit them to qualified standard interviews. Expert interviews are a common methodological tool of analysis of elements and processes subject of different opinion (NIJKAMP, P. and VAN DELFT, A. 1977; VOOGD, H. 1983; RÍHA, J. 1987). In Slovakia was used this method by LEHOTSKY, M., OT'AHEL', J., IRA, V. 1989 in their paper about the evaluation of motorway impact on the landscape. The purpose of expert interviews is reduction of subjective factors influencing the evaluation of single regions of Slovakia and exclusion of authoritative opinion of individual experts.

An important part of expert interviews is ensuring the considerable heterogeneity of experts. That is why the team of selected experts should reflect a wide spectre of competent persons of various fields of social life, professionally bound to the area of regional development and regional policy (scientists – geographers, economists, sociologists., employees of the Centre of Strategic Studies of the SR, employees of the Ministry of Work, Social Matters and Family of the SR, Ministry of Economy Of the SR, Ministry of Environment of the SR and Ministry of Finances of the SR., workers of district administrations – departments of regional development).

Standard interview

Each expert should be introduced to the problem in a common session. In order to achieve univocal comprehensibility of the questions, the "philosophy" and aims of the research should be made clear. Standard interview should consist of closed and open questions that enable the experts to specify their opinion. Its contents will include all problem questions, like for instance, choice of relevant criteria along with determination of the order of importance. The questions will be put in a way that facilitates and evokes spontaneous (exclusively on basis of perception of the followed problem) reactions and responses (by means of a scale of possible answers). Experts must be convinced that they are not being examined. Obtained information will be coded and computerized.

Structure of standard interview

Let us depart of a hypothetic example. The task of the experts is to render general characteristics of single regions of Slovakia with the aim to disclose the groups of problem regions with some potential for revival of economic life. It means that the aim of the research will not be the choice of regions with least favourable values of chosen criteria, but rather a region that is on the basis of chosen criterion in the group of problem regions and simultaneously also has the best prerequisites for economic revival. The introductory questions will be submitted to this intention:

Which districts of Slovakia are, after your opinion among the problem regions while having available a certain potential for the revival of the economic life?

Open question requires a spontaneous answer. The experts may be also given the final number of chosen regions (for instance, ten). The purpose of the question is to find out which problem regions with available potential from the point of view of revival of economy are fixed as such in the minds of the experts. The question is rather demanding for them, because they must relate the negative situation of the regions to the positive prerequisites. Extensive heterogeneity of answers is expected that will confirm the justification of the use of expert interview method.

The second question will be the same with the difference that the experts will be presented cards with the names of regions of Slovakia that are expected to be included among assisted regions. It means that we exclude in advance the most developed regions of Slovakia (districts: Bratislava City, Kosice City). We shall ask the experts to order the single regions according to the degree of economic recession, eventually according to socioeconomic backwardness and with the best prerequisites of economic revival. Even though the possibility of choice of regions will be substantially reduced, the request of assessment of the order of regions according to the given criteria will again ensure considerable heterogeneity of the answers. Comparison of obtained responses will show justification of widening of the group of applicants for classification among the assisted regions.

Following questions, eventually tasks, will be oriented to the choice of relevant criteria of socio-economic level of the regions. Experts will be given an open task they are expected to answer spontaneously:

Evaluation of the level of socio-economic development of any territorial unit is based on various criteria. Quote at least 5 criteria that according to you best characterize the level of socio-economic level of the districts of Slovakia.

As the pilot study among voluntary experts showed, it is necessary to emphasize the difference between the criterion and potential. Supposed occurrence of various criteria is suitable to align into thematic groups (for instance criteria concerning (un)employment, criteria of number and quality of population, criteria of furnishing by technical infrastructure, etc. Individual thematic groups will be submitted to further research by selection of limited number of criteria that best characterize the given thematic groups (again according to the opinion of experts who choose from the final amount of criteria – evoked answer to closed question).

The previous task will be modified. Experts will be presented the cards with criteria used for assessment of socio-economic level of the region (for instance, rate of unemployment, mean monthly wages, rate of entrepreneurial activity, share of foreign capital, educational structure of the population, relative geographical position, etc.) We shall ask them to form 3 groups of the criteria. Task for the experts:

Include the criteria that are according to you the decisive ones (their number is limited only by the total number of cards) into the first group. The criteria that are according to you merely "supplementing", and do not supply important information to the characteristics of socio-economic situation of the district, should be aligned into the second group. Order the criteria that are according to you negligible from the viewpoint of evaluation of the level of socio-conomic situation of the district into the third group. (Note: The 2nd and 3rd groups can be also empty, without criteria).

The aim of the task is to identify the decisive criteria (criteria with the largest number of ordering into the first group according to the opinion of the chosen group of

experts) that will be in the following part of the research submitted to more detailed analysis and used in overall characteristics of socio-economic level of the regions. The supplementing and negligible criteria will not be further dealt with.

The next task is aimed at the assessment of the weight of the single criteria. In this step we shall ask the experts to order the criteria of the first group (the decisive ones) according to importance. The criterion that is from the viewpoint of statement value on the level of the socio-economic level of the region the most important one will be at the first place. The last place will be occupied by the criterion that out of the decisive criteria possesses the least statement value.

While evaluating we shall consider only the first ten decisive criteria in the order of each expert. Each criterion that appears at the first place will be aligned the value of 10 points, the second will have the value of 9, etc. The criterion ordered in the 10th place will obtain 1 point. The remaining decisive criteria occupying the 11th and higher positions will be automatically given the value of 0 points. Sum of n-point alignments will be divided by the n-number of experts and thus the single importance weights of the decisive (according to experts) criteria will be attained.

$$V_1 = \frac{\sum\limits_{i=1}^{n} a_1}{n} \ ,$$

where: V_1 = weight of the first criterion, a_i = whole number value of $< 10 >$ aligned to criterion a $(a = 1)$ by i-expert, n = number of experts.

Extraordinarily important point of research is assessment of optimum (and simultaneously also eventual normative) value of single criteria from the point of view of stopping the economic recession and eventual subsequent economic revival. For the chosen decisive criteria we shall determine in the scale the possible alternative critical values that the criterion reaches in the framework of Slovakia. The task of the experts is to chose certain value of the observed criterion that seems to him as an optimum one from the viewpoint of the followed aim. As optimum value while evaluating the single criteria, a value that was most preferred by the experts will be determined.

Calculation of synthetic criterion of socio-economic level of the regions from the point of view of their classification among assisted regions

Methodological principle of evaluation of socio-economic level of the regions and prerequisites of economic revival of single regions of Slovakia will be the comparative method. The basis (standard) for comparison will be in most criteria their all-Slovakian mean values or (in extra cases) preferred optimum value of single criteria expressed by expert evaluation. For the expression of the extent of regional deviation of the observed criterion from the normative, all-Slovakian mean values and of the subjective optimum value a 5 degree scale will be used (expressions of experts from previous task will be used as auxiliary criterion for the assessment of scale degrees). Value 5 will be corresponded by the best prerequisites of economic revival, value 3 will be a mean one and value 1 will be

corresponded by the worst prerequisites for economic revival. Single scaled values of criteria for every individual region will be weighed (multiplied) by the weight of importance attributed to by the group of experts. Resulting synthetic criterion of socio-economic level of the regions from the viewpoint of the classification among assisted regions will be obtained as a sum of multiplications of scaled criterion by the importance weight.

$$X_r = \sum S_{ir} \cdot V_i$$

where: X_r = synthetic criterion of socio-economic level of r-th region, S_{ir} = scaled i-th criterion in the r-th region, V_i = general weight of the i-th criterion for all region.

Region with the highest value of synthetic criterion represents a unit with best prerequisites for economic revival. According to the opinion of experts it should be classified with preference among the assisted regions. Regions with the lowest value represent the unit with worst prerequisites for economic revival and should also be classified among the assisted regions.

Conclusion

Presented methodological procedure is an attempt to objectivize the classfication of regions among assisted regions. It is a proposal without pretensions to be final, it rather tries to provoke further discussion.

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A TÁMOGATÁSRA SZORULÓ TERÜLETEK KIVÁLASZTÁSÁNAK ELMÉLETI-MÓDSZERTANI KÉRDÉSEI

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Összefoglaló

Az egyes területi egységek társadalmi-gazdasági fejlettségének felmérése érdekes kérdés, amely gyakorlati vonatkozásai elvezethetnek a támogatásra szoruló régiók lehatárolásához.

Szlovákiában számos probléma létezik, amelyek a régiókat arra késztetik, hogy a támogatást élvezők közé kerüljenek (fontos makrogazdasági mutatók szempontjából hátrányos helyzetű térségek, elavult iparszerkezetű, a gazdasági szerkezetváltás negatív hatásaitól szenvedő területek, stb.). Az összes problémákkal küszködő térség központi forrásokból történő támogatására nincs lehetőség; a támogatásra szoruló középszintű területi egységek elhatárolására ezért van szükség.

Mivelhogy a régiók társadalmi-gazdasági fejlettsége megítélésének kérdésében még a tudományos körök álláspontja is megoszlik, kívánatos volna egy szakértői csoport létrehozása, és véleményük egységes kérdőívekkel történő lekérdezése. Az ilyen, szakértők körében végzendő közvéleménykutatás célja az értékelés során felmerülő szubjektív tényezők kiszűrése és annak megakadályozása lenne, hogy egyes, nagy tekintéllyel rendelkező szakemberek véleménye túlzott mértékben érvényesülhessen.

A régiók társadalmi-gazdasági fejlettségi szintje értékelésének módszertani elve és az egyes szlovákiai régiók gazdasági megújhodása feltételeinek megléte lenne az összehasonlító módszer alapja. A támogatásra szoruló régiók közötti osztályozás alapját, a fontosság szerinti súlyokkal felszorzott mutatókkal kifejezett sorrendiséget a régió társadalmi-gazdasági szintjét reprezentáló szintetikus mutató fejezi ki. A legmagasabb értékű szintetikus mutatójú régió rendelkezik a legnagyobb esélyekkel a gazdasági felzárkózásra. A szakértők szerint az ilyen régió(k) a támogatások odaítélésekor előnyben részesítendő(k).

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