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# Urban-rural relations as a source of transfer of knowledge: some examples from rural surrounding of Bratislava

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**Abstract:** *In-migration is generally accepted as a decisive factor of rural social and economic development and potential rural regeneration. Intellectual quality and practical experiences of new arrivals with their theoretical and practical knowledge, and also with their network of interpersonal contacts, influence (or have the potential to influence) the social and economic development trajectories in positive or negative sense. It was supposed and now is observed the diffusion of innovation (mainly in behaviour) is very dynamic. New forms of neo-liberal behaviour of new inhabitants of rural areas are in the distinct contradiction with rural traditional life and contribute not only to the important, but ambivalently perceived structural changes, but also to the conflicts with locally born population. The aim of the paper is contribute to the discussion about developmental potentials of rural areas in the surrounding of Bratislava under positive and negative impact of in-migrants and their knowledge transfer into rural environment. We use the results of newspaper monitoring about “two tier” rural society, together with overview of relevant published studies in geography, economy, and sociology, and additional face-to face interviews with rural inhabitants.*

**Keywords:** *suburbanization, urban-rural relations, transfer of knowledge, “two tier” rural society, rural surrounding of Bratislava, Slovakia*

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Coexistence of the rural and urban areas is the characteristic feature of any functional region. Towns and countryside are interconnected via different links and form a kind functional organism where each of them, the city and the country, play their specific, mostly complementary roles. A town normally offers more options of work, education, and culture and country with its plant and animal production saturates the needs of urban population. Expansion of towns is practically unimaginable without the population influx from the rural area and the development of rural tourism is not possible without urban visitors. Town with the concentration of educated people often produces new ideas and knowledge that spread to the rural area. The reciprocal process is when the town exploits the knowledge and creativity capital of rural population. The town and the countryside are two sides of the same coin (region), whose full understanding lies not in their isolated research but on account of their functional interdependence and applying a holistic approach. Towns and their surrounding rural areas are (or could be) complementary spaces, which, through cooperation and exchange of knowledge, are able to create added value and new quality for both.

During the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century the movement from rural areas to the towns was typical feature of spatial organization of (not only) Slovak society. Concentration of economic activities and huge building of real estates in the towns represented visual manifestations of industrialization and urbanization processes in Slovakia. Selected in-migration young people with their knowledge, habits, attitudes and behaviour influenced the form, image and life of the towns. From the beginning of this century we can observe (but only in individual cases) the opposite spatial movement – urban population emigrates from towns to rural environment. The process of suburbanization is important mainly in the surroundings of the biggest towns (Bratislava, Košice, ...). The reasons are very heterogonous: from retirement migration to the places of birth, through commercial relocation of entrepreneurial activities and residential relocation of their actors to more advantageous rural places, to preferences of young families to live in healthier (and cheaper) rural environment. Number of rural population in the hinterlands of the biggest towns is increasing by not-autonomous inhabitants with different hierarchy of values, style of life, knowledge, and interests.

In-migration is generally accepted as a decisive factor of rural social and economic development and potential rural regeneration. Intellectual quality and practical experiences of newcomers with their theoretical and practical knowledge, and also with their network of interpersonal contacts, influence (or have the potential to influence) the social and economic development trajectories in positive or negative sense. As supposed and now observed, the diffusion of innovation (mainly in behaviour) is very dynamic. New forms of neo-liberal behaviour of new inhabitants of rural areas are in the distinct contradiction with the rural traditional life and contribute not only to the important, but ambivalently perceived structural changes, but also to the conflicts with locally born population.

The aim of the paper is to contribute to the discussion about the developmental potentials of rural areas in the hinterlands of big towns under positive and negative impact of in-migrants and their knowledge transfer into the rural environment. Results of newspaper monitoring about the “two tier” rural society, together with an overview of relevant studies in geography, economy, and sociology, and additional face-to face interviews with rural inhabitants are used.

## Urban sprawl and suburbanization

Suburbanization and urban sprawl are closely connected processes and terms. There are several definitions of these terms but their common characteristics is linked to space – both processes take place along the boundary between the town and its hinterland, in what is also referred to as the urban-rural fringe. Suburbanization is the process connected with intraregional migration of the urban population to rural hinterland and leads to its physical and social transformation (Sýkora, 2003). Intraregional migration is the process when redistribution of population takes place in a relatively small space of a functional region strictly delimited by relationship between places of permanent living, and places of working (journey to work).

Anthony's definition of sprawl (2004) was inspired by an earlier Downs' (1999) study where the author presented a comprehensive idea of sprawl described by the following characteristics: *1. unlimited outward extension of development, 2. low-density commercial and residential settlement, 3. leap frog development, 4. fragmentation of powers over land use among many localities, 5. dominance of transportation by private automotive, 6. lack of centralized planning and control, 7. widespread strip commercial development, 8. great fiscal disparities among localities, 9. segregation of types of land use in different zones and 10. reliance on the trickle down or filtering process to provide housing to low-income households* (Anthony, 2004).

The two processes are not spontaneous; they depend on existence of certain conditions, an aiding environment, which are helping to their development. According to the European Environment Agency (2006) drivers of urban sprawl are:

- Macro-economic factors (economic growth, globalisation, European integration)
- Micro-economic factors (rising living standards, price of land, availability of cheap agricultural land, competition between municipalities)
- Demographic factors (population growth, increase in household formation)
- Housing preferences (more space per person, housing preferences)
- Inner city problems (poor air quality, noise, small apartments, unsafe environments, social problems, lack of green open space, poor quality of schools)

- Transportation (private car ownership, availability of roads, low cost of fuel, poor public transport)
- Regulatory frameworks (weak land use planning, poor enforcement of existing plans, lack of horizontal and vertical coordination and collaboration).

Each of the quoted factors has its own specific, difficult to measure significance. However, in assessing their impact is essential that individual factors do not operate in isolation and only has partial power. Synergy between them significantly enhances their overall effect, which influences the spatial changes and new relations between the towns and their rural hinterlands.

### **Suburbanization in Slovak context – critical evaluation**

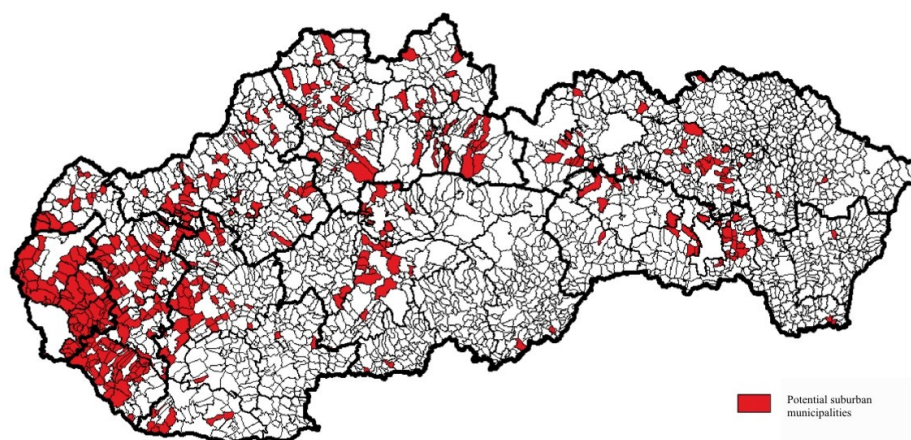
Reduced home construction in big cities, increasing prices of real estates in cities, price comparability of single-family houses in rural areas and dwellings in residential buildings in the cities, but partially also the longer term economic growth which manifested itself not only in the 47.8% increase of net monthly income per person in a non-specified household in the 2004-2011 period (Statistical Office of the SR) but also strong social polarization, provoked an increased interest in living in individual family houses and/or moving to the rural environment. Developers immediately responded to the demand for living in the countryside by construction of single-family houses in order to satisfy not only the interested clients from the close lying cities, but also the numerous interregional immigrants and commuters attracted by the situation on the labour market in the most important centres of the economic growth.

The ongoing dynamic processes of population deconcentration and residential and/or commercial suburbanization, which evidently changed the face of the city and its rural hinterland in Slovakia, triggered an enormous interest in research into spatial aspects of this very specific phenomenon. Geographical research aimed predominately at the spatial mobility, a change in land use, and spatial differentiation of dwellings construction was carried out mainly at university centres in Bratislava, Košice, Prešov, and Nitra. Leading persons of Slovak human and regional geography (influenced by numerous incentives of the Czech geographical school - e.g. Sýkora, 2003; Ouředníček, 2007) determined the direction of research, theoretical and methodological approaches to such research and led their students preparing the diploma and dissertation theses to a detailed study of the situation in hinterland of big Slovak cities (e.g. Bezák, 2000; Dická, 2006; Matlovič and Sedláková, 2007; Zubriczký 2010; Slavík et al., 2011; Šveda 2011, 2012; Repaská 2012). In spite of an important progress achieved in identification, mapping, comprehension and explanation of the phenomenon of suburbanization and its consequences for spatial organization of society and behaviour of individual population groups, the research vision of Sýkora (2003) still remains an attractive challenge for further research. Sýkora believes that priorities of suburbanization research could include: 1. research of such suburban localities, which have been dra-

matically transformed by suburbanization with a specific attention given to the co-existence of locals and newcomers and transformation of local communities., 2. investigation of suburbanization and its consequences for the changes of socio-spatial structure of the metropolitan territory – with a special accent on increasing differentiation of individual parts of the region., 3. investigation of suburbanization effects on way of life and changes of social relationships in the society-wide level (Sýkora, 2003).

Suburb is an ambivalently perceived space in society. On the one side, there is an idea of secluded medium and higher social classes whose houses in suburbs represent different options of access to sources in a modern society. Ownership of a single-family house became the token of independence, preferred life style and prestige. On the other side, a suburb in an economically advanced world is perceived as an agreeable space, which attracts several generations of people with the enrooted idea of a calm and safe place with good neighbours and prerequisites of an orderly family life (Galčanová, 2012).

Spatial sociologists, Gajdoš and Moravanská (2010), compiled a map of 451 potentially suburban municipalities in Slovakia (figure 1). Criteria linked with absolute and relative values of the mechanical population change (proportion of immigrants in the overall municipality's population, migration balance) and home construction (proportion of new dwellings in overall number of dwellings in a municipality, number of new dwellings) were used for their identification for the reference period of 2003-2008. Authors report that the advanced research in potentially suburban municipalities spatially concentrated in the south-western part of Slovakia next to the administrative border of the capital Bratislava confirmed existence of suburbanization process.



**Figure 1. Location of potential rural suburban municipalities (Gajdoš and Moravanská, 2010)**

Source: [http://www.sociologia.sav.sk/cms/uploaded/1242\\_attach\\_suburbanizacia.pdf](http://www.sociologia.sav.sk/cms/uploaded/1242_attach_suburbanizacia.pdf)



Extensive sociological research carried out via electronically mailed questionnaires to representatives of rural self-administrations (rural municipalities) brought some interesting information: 1. Social environment of municipalities in hinterland of cities changes with arrival of new inhabitants. It is first of all young families, which move to municipalities in hinterland of cities. They are characterized by higher education, higher social status and higher income than those of the original inhabitants in these rural municipalities., 2. Newcomers bring a different life style and customs that can mean either a conflict or an impulse for municipality development., 3. Newcomers are either relatively positively or relatively neutrally met (evaluated) by the local self-administration., 4. Co-existence of the natives and newcomers is generally good, friendly and conflictless., 5. The municipality rejuvenates, age and education population structure improves. Final conclusion of the research, although general and biased, due to the very specific group of responders – employees of 158 municipal offices – is that “*suburbanization in Slovakia strengthens the human, social, economic and cultural capital of rural municipalities*” (Gajdoš and Moravanská, 2010).

Human geographer Podolák (2010), who interprets suburbanization as a very complex and by other factors determined process with its positive and negative sides, made an attempt to assess suburbanization and its manifestations in Slovakia. It is symptomatic that in his synthesised assessment Podolák found imbalance between the positives and the negatives. He included “only” improvement of the dwelling pool quality and fulfilled desire of thousands of inhabitants to possess an individual dwelling among positives. He also perceives suburbanization as a “rather uncontrolled process” quoting the following negatives:

- Abrupt increase of road traffic –suburbanites commute and travel to the city by private cars in pursuit of work, education, services, and culture. The fact that public transport cannot efficiently operate in poorly populated areas complicates the situation;
- Social segregation –first of all people with higher social status move to the suburban localities; social isolation of newcomers is deepened by their almost exclusive use of a car for any movement and if the new dwelling is spatially separated, there is a minimal contact with the natives;
- Depression of city centres – in some cases city centres progressively lose their population (they are empty in night hours), old residential and commercial buildings dilapidate, investors are less interested in exploitation of old industrial zones;
- Commercial constructions (hypermarkets, fast food shops, petrol stations, multicinemas) concentrate into strips along motor ways and roads, therefore they are only accessible by private cars; poor architectural quality of new buildings represents negative example of the dilemma between potential and real exploitation of the cultural landscape for living environment;
- Dramatic changes in land use – area of plots suitable for agriculture, forestry or recreation uses is reduced and the change is irreversible (Podolák, 2010).

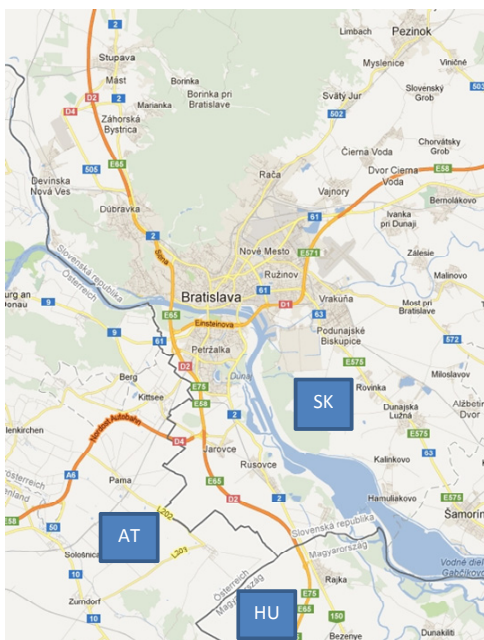
Urbanist Hrdina (2010) also assessed suburbanization in negative terms because the process in the 1990-2010 Slovakia did not represent (according to him) a “*consciously organized development*”. Hrdina criticizes lack of jobs in rural municipalities, which is both the cause and consequence of regular commuting to cities. Commuting overloads the road traffic. The existing transport infrastructure is not able to face and solve the problem of redistribution and mobility of population (favourite the use of private cars), which is the logical consequence of the limited offer of public transports. Improvement of transport systems though, runs into the barriers like shortage of finances and other accumulated problems that are given priority by self-administrations. This situation slows down building of transport infrastructure and deepens the existing problems (Hrdina, 2010). The subject of the Hrdina’s critical assessment is mainly Bratislava and its suburbanised rural hinterland.

### Delimitation of the concerned territory

Geographical position of Bratislava, capital of the Slovak Republic, is fairly specific. Political, economic, cultural and educational centre of Slovakia with population of more than 411 thousand (in 2011) is situated on contact of three states: the Slovak Republic, Hungary and Austria (figure 2). The only Hungarian village that borders on Bratislava is Rajka with 2,550 inhabitants (2011). Territories of two Austrian towns: Hainburg am der Donau (5,935 inhabitants) and Marchegg (2,947 inhabitants) and those of six villages: Deutsch Jahrndorf (608 inhabitants), Pama (1,090 inhabitants), Kitsee (2,310 inhabitants), Berg (724 inhabitants), Wolfsthal (870 inhabitants) and Engelhartstetten (1,890 inhabitants) are Austrian administrative neighbours of Bratislava.

In the Slovak territory, Bratislava shares common administrative borders with two towns: Stupava (9,345 inhabitants) and Svätý Jur (5,229 inhabitants), and 8 rural municipalities (Hamuliakovo, Kalinkovo, Dunajská Lužná, Rovinka, Most pri Bratislave, Ivanka pri Dunaji, Borinka, and Marianka). As the residential suburbanization processes are most intensive in the village of Chorvátsky Grob, situated only about 500 m away from the administrative border of the capital, this dramatically transformed “village” (with status of rural municipality up to now) was also included into the study area. The development of population in rural settlements in Slovakia situated in immediate hinterland of Bratislava is obvious from figure 3, showing the dramatic increase of population in recent years particularly in Chorvátsky Grob, Rovinka and Dunajská Lužná. Population number in all of them, with the exception of Borinka, exceeded 1,000. Scope of suburbanization processes in individual rural municipalities expressed by the changed population number is determined first of all by the type of construction – dramatic population increase is observed in rural municipalities where the construction of complex residential areas by developers takes place while the individual, private construction of houses is limited.





**Figure 2. Bratislava (SK) and its (rural) surrounding – object of the study**

Source: [www.maps.google.sk](http://www.maps.google.sk)

The public transport of Bratislava responded to the changed population distribution between city and suburbanized rural municipalities with aim to improve the transport accessibility by expanding its transport lines to Hungarian Rajka, Austrian Heinburg, and to Chorvátsky Grob in 2010, and prolonged selected connections linking Bratislava with Záhorská Bystrica (outskirts of Bratislava) to neighbouring Marianka in 2012. Specificity and exclusivity of these individual connections, which exceed the administrative space of the capital, is expressed in the financial evaluation. Connections linking Bratislava with foreign countries are charged € 1.50; Bratislava's charter travelcards (owned by about 120 thousand people and used by about 58% passengers) are not valid and a special single time-limited ticket (15 and 60 minutes priced € 0.70 and € 0.90 respectively) must be purchased for the connections to Marianka, the same as for the connections between the fringe part of Bratislava (Vajnory) and the neighbouring village Chorvátsky Grob).

### **Comparison of the development of Bratislava and the surrounding rural municipalities – population deconcentration (?)**

Official results of censuses were always considered the basic data about population numbers in Slovakia. Pursuant these censuses held regularly every 10 years, in 1970 Bratislava's permanently resident population amounted to al-

most 306 thousand (table 1). Due to integration of seven surrounding villages into the administrative territory of the city of Bratislava in 1972, after the 1980 Census of population, houses and flats the population number increased to more than 380 thousand; that is by almost 25 %. The trend of a continuous increase also existed in the following decade and at the time of the following Census in 1991, the population of Bratislava amounted to more than 442 thousand. Signals of slow depopulation of the capital (?) were also recognizable in the results of the 2001 Census, when Bratislava’s population experienced a decrease for the first time. However, this decrease was not only the result of demographic processes. An important share in overall decrease of population is ascribed to the reluctance of people residing in the city in leased houses and flats to acquire the status of permanent residents. At time of the 2011 Census when the population number decreased to around 412 thousand, doubts whether the data were correct were also accompanied by rather considerable unwillingness of people to participate in the Census procedure what, as some experts assert, might have affected the final data. Nevertheless, in spite of it, the increase of population number in the neighbouring rural municipalities is a reality, which insinuates not only deconcentration of population but also sub-urbanization, out-migration of Bratislava’s inhabitants into adjacent, hence accessible, rural municipalities. The phenomenon is also spurred by shortage of flats and consequently their extreme prices in the territory of the capital.

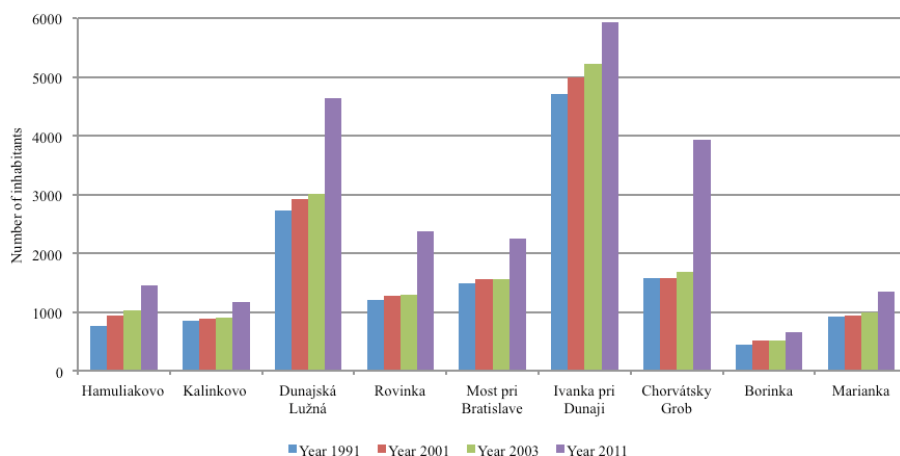
**Table 1. Development of Bratislava’s population number**

Year	1970	1980	1991	2001	2011
Number of inhabitants	305 932	380 259	442 197	428 672 (?)	411 228 (???)

Source: Štatistický úrad SR (Statistical Office of the SR)

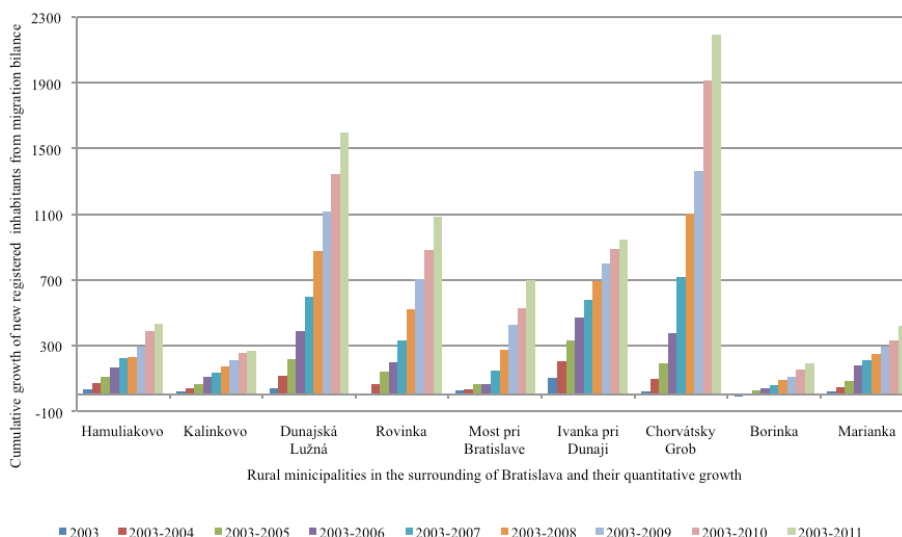
Rural municipalities, just like all spatial units, grow due to combination of natural and migration gains. While the natural gain (which is the difference between the number of births and number of deaths) indicates the appropriate age structure of population, migration gain (the difference between the number of in-migrants and out-migrants) gives evidence of territory’s attractiveness, capacity to attract new inhabitants due to its inherent offer and living conditions.

Figure 4 represents the time-differentiated official population gain in rural municipalities in the immediate hinterland of Bratislava exclusively due to migration balance of population. Unfortunately, the numbers do not always correspond to reality because newcomers allow themselves time to get familiarized with the new place of living before registering the permanent residence. Another and much graver is the problem of recent in-migrants’ unwillingness to register their permanent residence in the rural municipality. The reasons are pragmatic: a flat or company’s seat in Bratislava, cost of the re-registration or access to medical care at more accessible place of work. Benevolent approach to application of legislation and existing legal rules is a widespread phenomenon observed and described by almost all authors involved with suburbanization processes in Slovakia (e.g. Slavík et al., 2011; Šveda, 2012).



**Figure 3. Total population changes in rural municipalities (in Slovakia) closest to Bratislava**

Source: Štatistický úrad SR (Statistical Office of the SR)

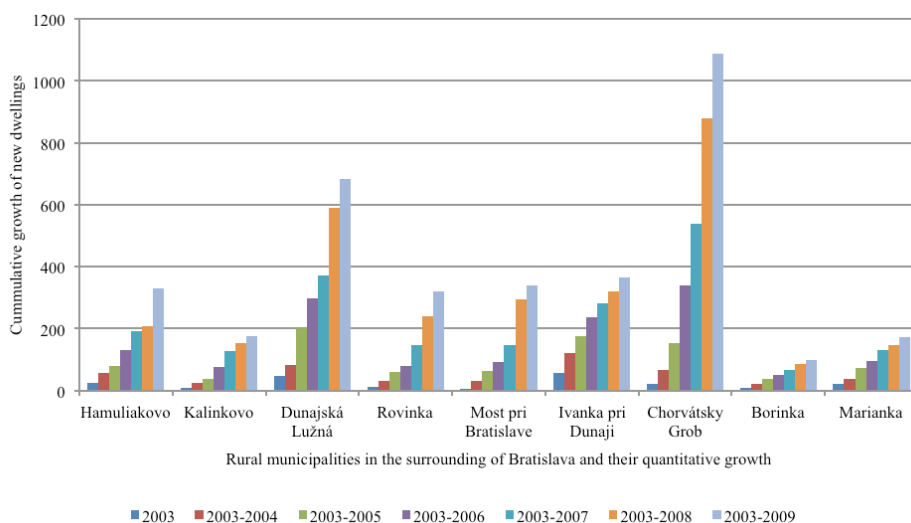


**Figure 4. Rural development (newly registered inhabitants) in the surroundings of Bratislava in 2003-2011**

Source: Štatistický úrad SR (Statistical Office of the SR)

Failure to register the permanent residence (or opposite process - mass registering in special time of municipal elections, speculative registration of alien persons in order to support a specific candidate resulted into invalid elections) directly affects not only the results of analysis and description of observed spatial changes but also the options of development for the concerned rural municipalities. Rural municipalities

are allotted funds (in dependency from population number, as well as other geographically differentiated criteria) from so-called “shared taxes - *podielové dane*” (a quota of income tax of natural persons) which greatly contribute (about 33%) to the sum of the overall municipal income and to the financial possibilities of the rational management of individual municipalities. Supposing that a rural self-government receives € 200-250 per a permanently resident inhabitant, it is no surprise that mayors of rural municipalities try to motivate the residing and unregistered inhabitants to register their permanent residence in the rural municipality. Ways of motivation vary: from positive persuasion to the restricted access to rural municipal benefits. A typical example is the access to local schools and preschool facilities limited to the permanent residents. Rather than a punishment for the indifferent attitude to financial participation in the administration of a rural suburban municipality, such measures represent a tool of selection, use of which is forced by the unregulated chaotic territorial development of municipalities (under the pressure of developers) and the limited school and preschool capacities (as a consequence of this “development”).



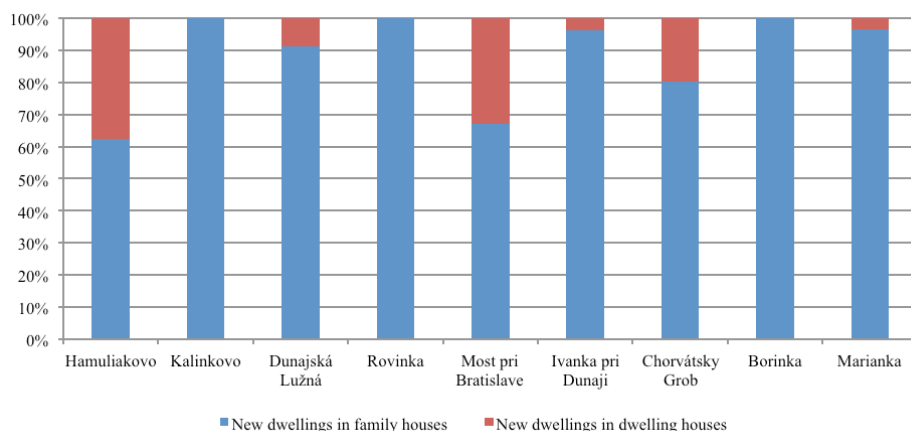
**Figure 5. Rural development (new dwellings) in the surroundings of Bratislava in 2003-2009**

Source: Štatistický úrad SR (Statistical Office of the SR)

Number of (finished) dwellings is an appropriate indicator, which shows the dynamic construction development in rural settlements in the immediate hinterland of Bratislava. As figure 5 demonstrates, the continuous increasing number of new dwellings in all rural municipalities is quite evident in the 2003-2009 period. The greatest gain was observed in Chorvátsky Grob, where the 7-year intensive constructions brought 1,000 new flats and it is in

a sharp contrast with less than 500 flats, which existed here in time of the 2001 Census. More than a 220% increase is the top national one; it made Chorvátsky Grob a rural municipality with the most dynamic dwelling construction in Slovakia (the impact will be evaluated lower). For comparison, the contrast between the old and new constructions in Dunajská Lužná, a rural municipality with the second top increase in number of dwellings in 2003-2009 and bigger than Chorvátsky Grob, is not so sharp; it had 856 dwellings in 2001 and the increase by 683 dwellings (almost 80%) is not so extreme.

The majority of newly constructed dwellings in the immediate hinterland of Bratislava are single-family houses (figure 6), while in some municipalities other type of dwellings (in dwelling houses) not built. Demand of single-family houses, price of which was sometimes lower than that of a smaller flat in a block of flats in Bratislava, was extraordinary. But it was not only connected with the romantic idea of life in healthy and pure countryside air and the decision to build a one's own house. The decisive criterion was the price of the estate that was based not only on the attractiveness of landscape in the concerned locality but also on transport accessibility, connection to motor way and time necessary for commuting – work, study, leisure activities (Šveda, 2011). Information about the dynamics of spatially differentiated prices of plots established by developers in response to the changed situation in the supply and demand sphere became accessible to public at large and in combination with massive advertising campaigns influenced the final decisions of in-migrants.



**Figure 6. Structure of new dwellings in the rural surroundings of Bratislava in 2003-2009**

Source: Štatistický úrad SR (Statistical Office of the SR)

The present transfer of inhabitants of the big cities to their immediate hinterlands, which form a common functional region, is quite different from the one that preceded the 1989 political and economic transition. Falťan (2010) pointed to the fact that while constructions in ru-

ral areas in the past was carried out pursuant the decision of a person interested in living in rural environment and often in the role of an active constructor, now the interested person is in the position of a client who evaluates the alternative localities and then purchases the goods (a plot, house, flat) prepared by the developers. Aggressive invasion into the territory is *“the result of “an external pressure and inputs”, and rural municipality is compelled to accept and potentially solve various discrepancies of own development”* (Falt'an, 2010). According to opinion of locals, aggressive invasion of developers, as an unwanted phenomenon, disturbs the targeted development policy of rural municipalities and provokes a number of socio-pathological and spatial problems.

### **Chorvátsky Grob – rural municipality with a record increase of newly built houses, population (and problems)**

Chaotic, unplanned suburbanization processes, often missing conceptions, in rural hinterland of Bratislava cannot be perceived in an isolated manner. Home construction in the territory of a rural municipality also afflicts the neighbouring urban territories, which become transitory for the commuters to the city centre. The missing additional new transport infrastructure and the old infrastructure, which is not prepared for the enormous increase of traffic, triggered complaints and civil protests of population from peripheral urban parts directly negatively affected by the new spatial organization of population and its activities.

Mayor of Vajnory, urban part of Bratislava, pointed to absolute ignorance of the comprehensive territorial development of the neighbouring Chorvátsky Grob and environs in 2010 when the territorial plan of the village, particularly its part Čierna Voda, was opened to further development activities which planned to increase the number of the “rural” population by 45 thousand. The current unusual expansion of single-family house compounds (and also multi-storeyed blocks) in the most dynamically developing rural settlement in Slovakia is accompanied by a huge number of problems. Some years ago local residents protested and tried to convince the former self-government authorities about irrationality of such concentration of population in an already problematic territory. They were against construction of a big housing estate (which is a typical form of housing in cities and Bratislava in particular) in their village. The aim of protests was conserving and preserving the already very questionable rural character of the village.

Perhaps the the most sensitively is perceived the situation on the existing transport infrastructure and transport options from Čierna Voda to Bratislava. As the mayor of Vajnory asserts, 22 thousand cars daily pass through this marginal part of Bratislava and approval of another extensive construction may lead to a permanent jam of Vajnory. This is the reason



why the mayor requests the change of the territorial plan, which counts with a population of 60 thousand in “rural” Chorvátsky Grob in about 20 years. Such population number in rural municipality sharply contrasts with that of the surrounding towns, which is several fold lower. Mayor of Vajnory initiated negotiations with the mayor of Chorvátsky Grob over the proposal for approval of constructions of rural and not urban nature followed by a cut of the planned population number to a maximum of 20 thousand. Support from the side of current self-government of Chorvátsky Grob is enormous. However, it is very difficult to imagine a rural municipality with population amounting to 20 thousand in Slovakia (the character of the present biggest rural municipality in Slovakia, the former part of urban municipality, is distinctly urban - multi-storeyed blocks of flats - and its population is below 10 thousand). It seems that the representatives of self-government rather attempt to solve the situation, which is product of wrong decisions adopted in the past in favour of developers and their commercial activities. Solution in case of Chorvátsky Grob and its part Čierna Voda is connected with financial participation of developers in building technical infrastructure and amenities in situ.

Administrator of the Region of Bratislava, Pavol Frešo critically assessed the general regional situation and described the situation of Vajnory as “*very, very bad*” in 2010. His commentary will perhaps contribute to a more rational and better timed preparation of a comprehensive territorial development plan for the suburban rural municipalities. Pursuing Administrator’s words who wishes actively negotiate with mayors and developers it is not possible to approve such an extensive construction of residential complexes without previous construction of transport (and other) infrastructure. Obviously though, solution to conflicts will require lengthy and complicated negotiations among representatives of regional and local self-governments, as well as the investors in the position of developers.

The phenomenon of overloaded traffic is the result of inconsistent development of the rural municipality Chorvátsky Grob and its part Čierna Voda by developers as exclusively residential area lacking adequate amenities and transport infrastructure with the tacit consent of the local authorities. The village struggles with the increasing population number, as the necessary school or preschool capacities, shops and health care centres, etc. are still missing. It is necessary to commute in pursue of almost everything. Quality of life of locals decreases. Confrontation between the reality and the declared idyllic living in an own house in the country is disappointing.

Indicator of plot prices, which differentiates hinterlands of big cities and appeals especially to the less solvent clients in their process of spatial decision, is applied in estimation of attractiveness of localities. Price of building plots is dynamic; it responds to new facts that determine it both in negative or positive sense. If place attractiveness increases due to former rational decisions, the price of the area plot increases too. In contrary, if due to wrong decision

the positive image of quality place of living vanishes, the price of plots drops. This precisely is the case typical for Chorvátsky Grob, a rural municipality sometimes referred to as “a good example of a wrong approach to rural municipality’s development”.



**Picture 1. Chorvátsky Grob – old, traditional part of the rural municipality, 2012 (photo: V. Székely)**



**Picture 2. Chorvátsky Grob – Čierna Voda – new, suburban part of the rural municipality, 2012 (photo: V. Székely)**

Administration of the municipality, product of the 2010 municipal elections, actively provides information about municipality’s life. Content-rich municipality website (with information for municipality inhabitants, entrepreneurs, and visitors) offers also video clips appearing the mayor Miroslav Marynčák, licensed expert in architecture and urbanism, who explains not only the present extremely complicated situation of Chorvátsky Grob caused by previous

decisions of developers and representatives of local self-government but, also presents potential solutions to the problem.

The complimentary municipal bimonthly “Chorvatan” informs by contributions of mayor about themes subject to debates and approval by the municipal deputies and responds to questions of citizens. The content of the journal suggests that there are problems between the old part of Chorvátsky Grob and the new part of Čierna Voda, which are perceived by locals as two independent, isolated and competing spatial units (picture 1, 2). Miroslav Marynčák, the mayor, said in 2012 after the municipal self-government (municipal council) failed to approve the 2013 municipal budget: *“Situation of the municipality is critical. Regretfully, the opinion of what are the gravest problems of this village and what is to be done of the old and new part of the village ever more differs.”* (Matula, 2012). The conflict arose of an argument whether to fund construction of a new school at Čierna Voda (concentration of schoolchildren) or reconstruction of the school in the old part of Chorvátsky Grob. It is not the only source of arguments, confrontations or negotiations between the stakeholders of the municipality. The symptomatic thing is that majority of them moved in from the city. It was the city that formed their education and was the source of their expert and managing knowledge and skills. Life in urban community helped them establish and develop a network of intensively used social and/or business contacts for promoting of their interests in rural environment.

One of the causes of the existing situation in social life and social relationships in the rural municipality is that the people pass the majority of time in urban environment. Limited work opportunities and limited shopping and leisure time options prohibitively increase commuting. The need of flexible movement makes people depend on cars. Use of cars and absence of newcomers in the village reduce the possibilities of sharing company with others, of building social links and social cohesion (engagement in public affairs) in the place of permanent residence. On the other side, thanks to the modern ICTs, the limited number of people in a limited space does not define social links anymore. A trend of comparatively extensive even dominant existence of relationships independent on space prevails among - regardless of their educational level - young people. The existing social links can acquire nature of weaker (more superficial?) ties among a greater number of conventionally and unconventionally communicating persons that declare independence on spatial distance. If the community of municipality inhabitants is considered a local spatially determined solidarity network, its relative weakening can be hypothetically presumed in the sense of the ongoing developments - immigration of prevalingly young people (Galčanová, 2012) - with the corresponding consequences in terms of interest in communal affairs and active participation in solution of problems. In this way, the broad-defined non-endogeneous human potential of newcomers from urban environment may be wasted in terms of the communal development with the negative consequences for the management of communal affairs and the vision of rural sustainable development.

## Cross-border suburbanization – example of the Hungarian rural municipality Rajka

Rajka is a peripheral rural municipality situated on the border between Slovakia and Hungary, which lost on an average more than 50 inhabitants a year in the first decade of the 21st century due to internal out-migration (Központi Statistikai Hivatal, <http://www.ksh.hu>). People moved to places more attractive for permanent residence (for instance to the neighbouring town Mosonmagyaróvár). The increasing interest in purchase of Rajka's real estates by Bratislavians most probably also contributed to out-migration of the natives of Rajka. Excentric peripheral position of the village and the resulting advantageous prices compared with those on the real estate market in Bratislava were the reasons why there is a great conformity between supply and demand. Both, the purchasers and sellers are satisfied with their decisions. Friendly prices of houses and their accessibility on the market motivated first Bratislavians to purchase and reconstruct old houses. Only later Rajka becomes a place of developer projects and construction of residential complexes (picture 3).



**Picture 3. Hungarian Rajka with Slovak (automobiles and) immigrants, 2012 (photo: V. Székely)**

Regarding the preferred living in Rajka (population of 2,550 in 2011), “the reverse side of cheap plots” is ever more often mentioned. The reverse side more or less disturbs the influx of new immigrants from Slovakia. It has several facets the most serious seems to be the feeling of general threat and problematic perceiving of general safety. Relationships between Hungary and the Slovak Republic are not ideal and provocations (mentioned in media) on both sides of the frontier are comparatively frequent (not only nationalist extremists, but also significant political representatives). Example from October 2012: part of Hungarian inhabitants of Rajka protested against the unfortunate and controversial billboard slogan of the real estate agency PASS Reality promoting

dwelling in Rajka. It referred to Rajka as the “6th district of Bratislava” (the administrative territory of Bratislava is divided into 5 districts). Reactions to the campaign varied from the innocent albeit unconsidered publicity stragem, which totally ignored the present international relationships of the two countries, as well as empathy with the Hungarian population, to the protesters’ insinuations about changed state frontiers and occupation of the Hungarian territory by annexing Rajka to Bratislava.

A publicity slogan and advertising campaign, witty and innocent for some can be provocative or misleading for others. Part of debaters condemns the creators of publicity campaign from Slovakia for irresponsibility and point to other theoretically possible variants of Hungarian advertisement agency, as “*Komárno as the second district of Komárom, Štrúrovo as suburb of Esztergom, or Slovenské Nové Mesto as the north-eastern quarter of Sátoraljaujhely*”. Similar “creative” promotion of Slovak places as parts of Hungarian towns would most probably also provoke protests of Slovaks.

Commentaries like: “*The EU also offers me the option to pursue work, better living conditions and cheaper house- and this is in Rajka - so I go there live ... no matter whether I am Hungarian, Slovak or Romany*” point to the new political situation and utilitarian preference in the process of spatial choice behaviour of an economically thinking person. Social and cultural dimension of at least a partial breach of human relationships and their significance for a life quality of a human reduced exclusively to a consumer is suppressed in such attitudes. Simultaneously it is obvious that the decision to assume permanent living in the territory of other country can also evoke an idea of hazard. The opinion that “*Our people (citizens of the Slovak Republic) move here only because of lower prices of plots and dwelling. Any rationally thinking person must also expect some problems. The fact that we are an EU member state does not mean that we are safe, although we should be. The idea of the European cohesion and solidarity sometimes fails due to primitivism of individuals and groups*”, is quite frequent and it expresses a self-contained and prudent estimate of Rajka as a place of permanent residence for foreigners (at this moment Rajka is “exclusively” attractive as place of living only for Slovaks). On the other side, stereotypic perception of Hungary, which according to some discussants is “*an economically and politically unstable country which went bankrupt, experienced extremely high inflation and poverty*” also evokes a number of (un)founded questions regarding rationality of such locational choice especially in comparison with Austria, image of which, as a place of permanent residence, is far more positive in the eyes of most Slovaks citizens.

On the other side, research accomplished (Ira et al, 2011; Hardy, 2012) suggests that the people living in Rajka maintain standard neighbour relationships free from mutual animosities. It may be caused by the newcomers’ way of life, who are more active in the Slovak territory and they only come to Rajka to spend the night. Communication with locals is hindered by the language barrier and lack of time, causes why not only deeper mutual enrichment and



engagement in solution of local issues but also any aspiration to participate in or even take over control in the communal sphere are out of question. All in all, life in Rajka is a conflictless co-existence of two ethnicities that instead of living together live side by side.

## Conclusion

Spatial changes observed in the immediate rural hinterland of Bratislava are not exceptional in the European context. Numerous studies point to the suburbanising processes ongoing practically in every European country. However, national differences may appear in the level of rational management of urban-rural space and in contribution of new in-migrants with significant human and social capital (with acquired knowledge and experience in urban environment) to sustainable development of rural municipalities. The surviving model of a monofunctional residential suburb connected with the dominant commuting to work, school and services from rural environment to urban areas creates numerous pressures on the rational functioning of the affected areas and is negatively perceived by both experts and laymen. The outlasting absence of comprehensive development of suburban rural municipalities most often presented as the consequence of wrong approaches in the past and the present lack of funds represents an important threat for their sustainable development. Elimination of such threat requires diffusion of recent knowledge and innovative approaches to accumulated problems. It also requires educated and engaged creative people capable of modifying their living space. But research revealed that spatial distribution of such people is extremely irregular and that creativity is not something that can be simply imported into the rural space.

The deepening social segregation, product of not only differences in income between the newcomers and old embedded rural inhabitants, but also of social changes and inadequate stress on individualism, seems to be another serious problem of suburbanised rural areas. Parallel and mutually isolated co-existence of two population groups (“two tier” rural society) does not help mobilization of local resources and development of social capital and in this way the benefits of sharing the company and learning of newcomers and natives in common activities or possible unconventional innovative solutions (Bock, 2012) run into a significant barrier.

Rural space becomes in certain sense an object of consumption, a commodity and a “battlefield” of different interest groups. The rivalling parties apply special convincing techniques in an effort to win over the adversary and to apply their development strategy. An important role in conservation and strengthening of sustainable development, which exploits also the endogenous potential, is that of the selection and moral qualities of the representatives of local or regional executives and their capacities of comprehensive and independent assessment of intentions of domestic and foreign investors. Examples of Bratislava’s rural hinterland proved that in some cases the developmental tra-



jectory of rural municipalities has been distinctly stigmatised by invasion of an uncontrolled and unregulated “intruder” whose irreversible activities may (also negatively) affect functioning of the urban-rural space and life quality of its population.

## Acknowledgement

*This article was prepared as part of the Project No. 2/0086/12 „Endogenous potential and exogenous factors of local and regional development in Slovakia“, funded by the Slovak VEGA Grant Agency. The author thanks to the Slovak VEGA Grant Agency for its financial support.*

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