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## Limits of the applicability of the social structural model in Czech rural areas

R. Kopřiva

Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic

### Abstract

This article focuses on the voting behaviour of citizens in rural areas of the Czech Republic. Within the theoretical embodiment of the relationships between the individual in a social structure and voting behaviour, a so-called social-structural model for voting behaviour is often mentioned. However, when explaining the behaviour of the voting behaviour of citizens living under the conditions of the Czech Republic the applicability of this model is of course disputable. Due to the predominant inconsistencies of the social status of citizens of rural areas, it is not at all possible to determine the hypothesis of the applicability of a social-structural model of voting behaviour for citizens living in the conditions of the Czech rural countryside. The aim of this article is, through a case study of Zatec region, to prove the predominant (in)consistency of the social status of the given population.

### Key words

Social structural model, voting behaviour, class identification, rural areas, social status, status (in)consistencies, left-wing right-wing continuum.

### Anotace

Článek se zabývá oblastí volebního chování obyvatel venkovského prostoru ČR. V rámci teoretického zakotvení vztahu mezi postavením jedince v sociální struktuře a volebním chováním je často zmiňován tzv. sociálně-strukturální model volebního chování. Uplatnitelnost tohoto modelu je ovšem při vysvětlení volebního chování obyvatel v podmínkách České republiky sporná. Při převládající inkonsistenci sociálního statusu obyvatel venkovských oblastí nelze hypotézu o aplikovatelnosti sociálně-strukturálního modelu volebního chování v podmínkách českého venkova vůbec stanovit. Cílem článku je prostřednictvím případové studie žatecké oblasti prokázat převládající (in)konzistenci sociálního statusu dané populace.

### Klíčová slova

Sociálně strukturální model, volební chování, třídní identifikace, venkov, sociální status, statusová (in)konsistence, kontinuum levice-pravice.

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### Abbreviations

ČSSD = Czech Social Democratic Party, KDU-ČSL = Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party, KSČM = Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, ODS = Civic Democratic Party, SPOZ = Party of Civic Rights – Zemanovci, SUV = Sovereignty, SZ = The Green Party, VV = Public Affairs

## **Introduction and aids**

The specific interests of the value-based positions of residents of rural areas and the differences of society in rural areas compared to society in cities are the main subjects of interest of the sociology of rural areas. In relation to this, the contemporaneousness of the sociology rural areas asks how interests in rural areas are formed, and what determining factors are behind the differences in rural and urban areas. The research is, for example, focused on the results of integration and independence of the small municipalities in the context of citizen participation in public life or the local identity (e.g. [13]), marginalized groups of citizens in rural areas e.g. in relation to unemployment and social-economic effects (e.g. [4]), etc.

The existence of differing interests and value attitudes of citizens of rural areas was repeatedly proven not only throughout the world, but also in the Czech environment. Compared to those in cities, the residents of rural areas differ from the view of demographic and social structure. Radim Perlín characterizes rural areas from a number of viewpoints. From the social viewpoint, he perceives rural areas as spaces with close social contacts, the existence of long-time informal social control and participation [23]. Citizens of rural areas are defined by a lower level of education which, among other things, demonstrates a more-limited cultural progress when compared to cities. Lower level of education is tied to the limited possibilities to assert oneself on the job market, a lower level of material security, etc. From the view of Czech social class structure, a lower level of education plays a significant role. Eric Wright, author of one of the most significant works on social structure, considers education to be the decisive determinant in class identification [30]. It arises from this that the portion of the population in rural areas represented in lower social classes is greater than in cities. The differing characteristics create from rural areas a specific status space [23].

Diverse interests also form the diverse nature of rural areas. The ability of their articulation, assertion and political representation also understandably garners the interest of sociologists. Rural areas are viewed as original areas with their own determinants (in the Czech environment, e.g.

[5]). The investigation into the voting behaviour of the residents of rural areas closely ties into the dilemma of the representation of their interests. Voting behaviour is one of the main themes of political science. This is also an area that in countries with long-time democratic traditions can be considered as sufficiently investigated. A number of works have also arisen with regard to the theme of value attitudes and factors that are the basis for the decisions of voters in the Czech political environment. Even though the research into voting behaviour is limited by the relatively low time span during which free elections have been organized, the applicability of some explanatory theoretical concepts was proven in the Czech Republic, and some general conclusions have been implied. The investigation into voting behaviour was primarily focused on the entire population of Czech voters in elections into the nation representative bodies, e.g. European parliament. The conclusions of these works prove the relationship between the social class structure and voting behaviour (e.g. [22] or [17]), the existence of long-term affective relationships between voters and the political parties they traditionally prefer (e.g. [28] or [18]). The influence of the voting system on voting behaviour (e.g. [17]) or the influence of voting participation on acquiring votes for political parties was also analysed [17]. In the case of municipal elections, mainly the size of the municipality is the monitored variable from the view of voting behaviour. Diverse voting behaviour of citizens of small municipalities with significant support of independent candidates was repeatedly proven to be different from citizens of large cities (for the largest cities in the Czech Republic) who fundamentally do not differ in their voting decision-making during elections into national parliament [6]. Regional differences in voting behaviour were also investigated. These are mainly the works of voting geographers, who proved the existence of regional voting heterogeneity in the Czech Republic. The results of these works proved that relevant political parties enjoy various levels of political support from the view of regional support (e.g. [24]). From the view of investigating the voting behaviour of the residents of rural areas, these works are significant mainly from the view that they provide elementary data material on the basis of which partial conclusions can be made on the differences in the voting behaviour of citizens in purely rural areas and urban regions. It can also be

stated that scientific works oriented this way are practically the only ones that deal with the question of voting behaviour in rural areas in the Czech Republic.

It is evident from the aforementioned investigations that the projection of value positions, or social compositional characteristic of citizens of rural areas in voting behaviour differ in the context of an entire region. A number of questions arise in relation to this, and answers for them will continue to be sought-out in the future. One of these questions is the relationship between social structure and voting behaviour. With regard to the prospects of research into the voting behaviour of citizens of rural areas, the fundamental information regards whether a given class polarization of citizens resides in the background of voting results, or if political conflict is based more on status that is reflected in the form of diverse interests. The picture of the influence of social structure on voting behaviour can be drawn on the basis of investigating the voting behaviour of social classes. This may subsequently lead to the argument whether someone's vote is a consequence of the social structural composition of the population, or the articulation of joint political interests. We can, however, not ignore the premise that the voting choices of the populations of rural areas directly relate to other factors that have not yet been considered.

The development of interest in social conduct influenced by value attitudes began in the second half of the 20th century. This period also brought increased interest in voting behaviour. However, the majority of works oriented this way arise from the much older works of H. Tingsten, which were publicized under the title of *Political Behaviour: Studies in Election Statistics* [26]. In this relation, a common (but not the only) approach became the search for the relationship between the nature of social structure and voting behaviour (e.g. [2], and currently e.g. [8], [27] 2010 or [3]).

Social structure influences, and also has historically influenced the forming of political ideologies such as the group of theoretical concepts, value attitudes or ideas. These are then the basis for the functioning of political parties. When party systems formed in democratic countries during the course of the 20th century, decisive significance belonged to

the ideologies of liberalism, conservatism and socialism, which contributed to establishing liberal, conservative and social-democratic, or communist parties in the party systems. The social structural model explains voting behaviour on the basis of relationships between membership in a social class and election support of a political party that is a representative of the value attitudes of a respective social class. In this relation, a hypothesis is set that the lower social classes (e.g. the workforce) usually identify with left-wing political parties (social-democratic or communist). Adversely, those of middle and upper social classes tend to vote right-wing (conservative or liberal-conservative) [17].

The existence of this relationship was proven among others by the research of British voters from 1964 to 1987 [11]. The variable that differentiated social groups was (among others) the employment of respondents. People doing manual labour (labourers) tended to prefer left-wing values. People not doing manual labour whose jobs are of a routine nature tend to be inclined toward values that represent political entities in the centre of the political continuum. People who have professional jobs identify with right-wing parties, and those who are self-employed are even more inclined toward right-wing values. Other variables that are often taken into consideration when differentiating social groups are education and religion (e.g. [11] or [10]). The age and gender of voters are also decisive factors [10].

Value attitudes and their roles in voting decision-making and the relation between the standing of an individual in a social structure and voting behaviour was also researched in the Czech environment. The works of Petr Matějů and Klára Vlachová are most certainly worth mentioning with regard to this. They are occupied with the social structure in the Czech Republic, its development and variables in the 1990's, and value attitudes that are formed on the basis of belonging to a social group [22].

Their work showed that during the course of the period from the beginning of the 1990's to 1996, when elections took place to the Chamber of Deputies, voting behaviour was stabilized, and voting became more of a custom than always a newly considered decision. The feeling of identity with a socioeconomic group also demonstrably played its role here. At the beginning of the 1990's,

the differences in the likeliness of election support of left-wing parties between members of individual social classes<sup>1</sup> were statistically insignificant. However, during the election in 1996, voting from the view of the main social groups was already significantly different [22].

In the investigation of voting behaviour, the social structural model had its firm place mainly in the period up to the 1970's and 1980's. The situation changed with the growth of regional differences in voting behaviour [16]. The decrease in the significance of the model is also put into relation with unnatural voting behaviour in the context of presumed class interests of voters [1]. These were often explained in accordance with the Michigan school through the effect of so-called party identification [7]. Currently, unnatural voting behaviour is also interpreted as a consequence of the transformation of cultural interests [1]. The greatest influence on the transformation of voting behaviour of social groups is the swing of a part of the middle class to the support of left-wing parties. These are mainly state employees that are directly interested in higher state redistribution and the significance of the state in social regulation [15].

The investigation into the relationship between the positions of voters in social structure and voting behaviour has a purpose only when society is truly fragmented into internally-homogeneous groups, and voters are able to give preference to political entities that are suitable representatives of their group interests.

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*1 The concept of the "social class" is used by Řeháková and Matějů for differentiating the four main social economically active groups of the population. This is a group of professionals with university education and other non-manual workers, the independent (small business owners and businessmen), and tradesmen. The analysis also included a category for pensioners. The other economically non-active were excluded from the analysis. Other variables that entered into the analysis of the relationship between position in a social structure and voting behaviour were gender, age groups and region [29].*

Society is characterized by a structured imbalance of its fractional parts – the so-called social classes. The concept of the social class is usually understood as a relatively homogeneous socioeconomic group with consistent socially-significant attributes that differentiate it from the other social layers. This is also a group of persons interconnected through a feeling of solidarity that forms a strong internal relationship between individual members. Social sciences characterize the nature of social structure of society on the basis of different criteria. The most frequent of these are the shares in the consumption of articles, which are rare in society (e.g. profession, belongings), and a share of power or form of lifestyle relating to economic security [25]. The standing of the individual in class structure relates to his social status. This social status is often understood as a group of rights and obligations that relate to the role that a person had in society. In theory, attributed and acquired social status usually tends to be divided. Attributed status is given from birth and is independent of will. As a rule, it is very difficult to change it. This status includes things such as position of power, family wealth, as well as age, nationality or gender. Achieved status then relates to the individuality of a person. Education, employment, etc. are often taken into consideration for this status.

The utilization of the social structural model of voting behaviour can only be considered under the conditions of Czech rural areas when its population is socially structured with solid internal ties within social groups. There is no question about the existence of social class structure in rural areas in the Czech environment. We are, however, still faced with the question of whether individual social classes are internally homogenous, or in other words, if the prevailing part of the population has a consistent social status in its individual dimensions.

For contemporaneous sociology, it is typical that it approaches social status as a multidimensional characteristic. This means that individual parts of statuses that form the collective social status of the individual are independently studied. The main problem is that the existence consistency or inconsistency of social status is investigated in relation to this. If the individual parts of a status are in a close mutual relationship, then these are known as consistent social status. In this case, the

individual is a member of more social groups in which he has a similar social status. The opposite is true for an inconsistent social status. This means that the position of a person in various social groups embodies various levels. In other words, this means that a person embodies various levels of social status in its partial sections [9]. When investigating the applicability of the social structural model for explaining voting behaviour, it is necessary to take into consideration that in this case, the prevailing status consistency is an explicit presumption. As described above, the social structural model presumes the relationship between social structure and voting behaviour. If an inconsistent social status prevails for the majority of members of a researched population, this theoretical concept cannot be applied at all. A prevailing inconsistent social status in society disables the operational relationship between social structure and voting in that it does not allow for the classification of independent, internally homogenous social classes.

### **Materials and methods**

For the needs of this article, social structure will present a stable system of mutual social relationships as a whole, social groups and individuals in such a way that social structure is understood by, for example Machonin [20] in its fundamental conception. Social groups within the monitored population will be identified on the basis of demographic and economic criteria (education, income, employment). Additional criteria will then be the joint knowledge of belonging to a social group. For such determined social groups, we will use the “social class” concept that routinely uses the theory of social stratification. The theoretical difficulties that relate to this concept will not be further taken into consideration. The monitored population will be the residents of rural areas. This will be determined as a social group on the basis of economic, demographic and geographic criteria.

Rural areas in the Czech Republic have been specified in a number of theoretical works (e.g. [29] 2009 or [21]). Radim Perlín defines rural areas as continually-defined spaces. He thus understands them as areas that show similar characteristics. From a social standpoint, these are areas with a lower intensity of social economic contacts, a lower density of relationships between individual entities, and also with the existence of long-term, informal social controls and participation. From an economic viewpoint, these are areas where the significant

activity is agriculture and the main type of production is food, and where a significant part of economically active persons goes out to seek employment. Along with this, rural areas can be defined through population density, or the number of people related to an area unit. Within the EU, rural areas are usually defined through population density to 100 residents per 1 km<sup>2</sup> [23]. On the basis of the Strategy of Regional Development for the Czech Republic for the period of 2007-2013, rural areas are tied to poor education and age structure.

The citizens of the Žatec region are the subject of the investigation that complies with the mentioned characteristics of rural areas. For the needs of this article, the concept of the “Žatec region” means the region and municipalities of the county of the city of Žatec, which is authorized to perform the transferred competency granted to the municipality with extended competency. The Žatec region displays a number of rural area attributes from the view of cultural, social and business relations of the population, a large portion of agricultural land, the distinct agricultural nature of the region, but also from the view of the permanent stagnation of the development of incomes and employment behind the Czech Republic average. The definition of the Žatec region as a rural area is also supported by its population density and a deficit in the area of the migration of young and professionally-qualified, etc. (specifically [14]).

This data was acquired through standardized discussions with voters during the election into the Chamber of Deputies in 2006 and 2010 in the city of Žatec and the other five municipalities in this area. During the election into the Chamber of Deputies in 2006, data was collected through an exit-poll<sup>2</sup>. In 2010, the data was acquired through discussions with voters during the first ten days

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*2A discussion is held with the voter as soon as they leave the voting room. A two-step, random selection was decided on. During the first step, a random selection of ten voting precincts was used. In the second step, every third voter leaving the voting room was addressed.*

after the election<sup>1</sup>. The scope of the selected group is in both 2006 and 2010 N=400 of completed discussions.

The aim of the work is to describe through the Žatec-region case study the predominant status (in)consistency of the citizens of this region, and thereby contribute to the discussion on the possible applicability of the social-structural model of voting behaviour under the conditions of rural regions in the Czech Republic. The intensity of the relationship between social structure and voting behaviour can be measured only under the premise that society is distinguished by a prevailing consistency of social status. In practice, this means that the majority of members of the population have a similar social status in the various social groups in which individuals participate. The prevailing (in)consistency will be analysed through the relationship between the basic socioeconomic characteristics (education, income, employment and subjective status). The utilized analytical method will be an analysis of dependence.

## **Results and discussion**

On the basis of the research performed to this point, it has been shown that in social, economic and politically stable societies exists a close mutual relationship between individual parts of statuses. A consistent status applies to the majority of members of these societies. However, in societies that undergo transformation processes with significant (positive or negative) social consequences, this fact may not apply. In relation to this, a problem arises in the possibility to utilize the social structural model to explain the voting behaviour of citizens in the Žatec region. As previously mentioned, this is a region with number of negative social

consequences that are due to the political-economic transformation that mainly occurred in the 1990's. The basis for the analysis of the relationship between social class identification and voting behaviour is the analysis of the (in)consistency of socioeconomic status.

The difficulty of the operationalization of the concepts of status consistencies and inconsistencies is the determining of individual variable socioeconomic statuses. The aforementioned work of authors Matějů and Vlachova, which is probably the most comprehensive in the Czech environment, considers the problem of social imbalance as a variable of voting behaviour, and uses the criteria of education, employment and income for measuring status consistency [22]. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, education is considered to be the decisive indicator of social class. Employment positions and income amounts are determined by this variable to a significant level. It is possible to determine a simple presumption that a higher education allows for the acquisition of better employment with a higher wage. Matějů and Vlachová include another variable called subjective social status. This variable is measured through the declared standing of the individual in social structure. The subjective evaluation of actual standing is an important indicator, as well as factor of (in)consistency. As demonstrated in the past, (e.g. [19]), erroneous evaluation is a consequence of status inconsistency. However, the opposite may also be true. If, for example, an individual with an objectively-high status in the dimension of education (e.g. university educated person) evaluates their social standing on a low level, then this individual is willing to accept employment that as a rule is performed by people with a lower education level. In such a case, the person is often also willing to accept a lower wage.

The status (in)consistency of voters in the Žatec region was evaluated on the basis of four variables (education, employment, income and subjective status). It was not possible to include all of the respondents in the analysis. Along with the questioned individuals who did not answer some of the questions relating to the variables of social status, these are also the economically inactive, i.e. the unemployed, pensioners, students and trainees. Achieved education was evaluated according to the commonly-used six-point classification (e.g. [22]).

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*<sup>1</sup>Voters were selected thorough a two-step selection process. In the first step, the number of discussions with respondents from the municipalities of Žatec (360), Libořice (10) and Měcholupy (30) were determined. In the second step, every third citizen was addressed in areas of high frequency of movement of citizens. Discussions were not completed with the citizens of municipalities who are not a part of the Žatec region and respondents who did not vote.*

	Distribution of education (in %)		Distribution of incomes (in %)		Distribution of jobs (in %)			
	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010		
Basic + no further education	6,42	9,86	Up to 10 thousand CZK	10,57	14,08	Labourer	42,64	26,76
Apprenticeship without leaving examination	30,19	28,87	10,001-15 thousand CZK	24,91	21,48	Independent	17,74	32,39
Apprenticeship with leaving examination	14,34	12,32	15,001-20 thousand CZK	20,75	21,13	Routine non-manual	24,91	17,96
High school with leaving examination	36,6	30,99	20,001-25 thousand CZK	24,15	21,83	Professional	8,3	13,03
College, unfinished university	2,64	5,63	25,001-30 thousand CZK	13,58	11,97	Other	6,41	9,86
University	9,81	12,32	over 30 thousand CZK	6,04	9,51			
Total	100	100	Total	100	100	Total	100	100
N	265	284	N	265	284	N	265	284

Source: Examination of elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 2006 and 2010 in the Žatec region

Table 1. Distribution of education and incomes (column percentage)

The six-point classification was also selected in cases where income was measured. Individual categories were construed while taking into consideration the amount of the average gross monthly income in the Czech Republic and in Ústí nad Labem region<sup>4</sup>. The shown employment was classified through the international index of social-economic status of authors Ganzeboom, De Graaf and Treiman<sup>5</sup>. The advantage of the ISEI is the large number of employment categories<sup>6</sup>. Respondents were further divided

according to employment using a five-point classification. Table 1 shows the distribution of education, incomes and employment between respondents of the investigation.

The methodology of Matějů and Vlachová [22] was used to measure subjective positions in social structure. Respondents declared their positions on a ten-point scale<sup>7</sup>. The highest number (10) represents the highest social position and the lowest (1) shows the lowest social position. The average value of subjective social status on the basis of the 2006 examination was 4.58, and it reached an average value of 4.56 in 2010. Table 2 shows the average

<sup>4</sup> The average gross monthly income was 20,158 CZK in 2006, and in the first quarter of 2010, it was 22,748 CZK.

<sup>5</sup> The values of the social-economic status of jobs were derived by the iterative method of optimal scaling on the basis of international research of job prestige. It is an index of the social-economic positions of individuals who work in the respective job. For individual jobs, the values of the index move in the range from 10 (assistant cook) to 90 (judge).

<sup>6</sup> Classification of jobs is based on the ISCO method which registers 217 categories.

<sup>7</sup> The task given to the respondent is: "There are groups in our society which are assigned high social positions and, on the contrary, groups with low social positions. If you think of yourself, where would you place yourself in comparison with other people in his country on the following scale whose highest number (10) represents the highest social position and the lowest (1) then represents the lowest social position?"



	Average rate according to education		Average rate according to income		Average rate according to job			
	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010		
Basic + no further education	2,53	2,39	Up to 10 thousand CZK	2,89	2,65	Labourer	3,69	3,21
Apprenticeship without leaving examination	3,09	2,94	10,001-15 thousand CZK	3,21	3,21	Independent	4,6	4,92
Apprenticeship with leaving examination	3,89	3,83	15,001-20 thousand CZK	4,07	4,43	Routine non-manual	5,55	5,45
High school with leaving examination	5,31	5,43	20,001-25 thousand CZK	5,33	5,48	Professional	6,81	5,97
College, unfinished university	6,86	6,69	25,001-30 thousand CZK	6,58	5,84	Other	3,88	3,57
University	8,23	7,69	over 30 thousand CZK	8	6,93			

Source: Exit-poll examination of the 2006 and 2010 elections to the Chamber of Deputies

Table 2: Average values of subjective status according to education, income and job.

	2006				2010			
	Education	Job	Income	Subjective status	Education	Job	Income	Subjective status
Education	1				1			
Job	0,56	1			0,55	1		
Income	0,8	0,4	1		0,7	0,4	1	
Subjective status	0,83	0,5	0,74	1	0,84	0,46	0,66	1

Source: Examination of elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 2006 and 2010 in the Žatec region

Table 3: Correlation matrices.

values of subjective status according to education and income categories.

When we use regressive analysis, it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that a linear relationship exists between individual selected variables, both in 2006, and in 2010. Thanks to this fact, it is possible to use the Pearson's' correlation coefficient to measure mutual dependence. Table 3 shows correlation matrices.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the current research done in the Czech Republic, it is demonstrated that the position of an individual in the social structure has been playing one of the important roles in the voting

behaviour of the electorate since the election to the Chamber of Deputies in 1996. The research focused on the possibility to apply this sociological concept from the viewpoint of the relationship between class identification and voting behaviour in the Žatec region, which, for many reasons, can be considered a rural area of the Czech Republic.

From the viewpoint of research prospects, the deliberations on the relationship of class identification and voting behaviour meet partial problem from which then methodological problems arise. The social structural determination of the voting decision-making is measurable only under the assumption of the prevailing consistency of the

social status in society, not only from the viewpoint of its individual objective dimensions but also from the viewpoint of subjective perception of the social status. In societies that have undergone fundamental economic, political and other changes in the past with negative social consequences, it is possible to expect a loosened social stratification with a prevailing inconsistency of the social status. Similar problems are also characteristic for the Žatec region. In this relation, the research had to deal with the question whether the Žatec region has already been established from a social viewpoint, with a crystallized consistency of the social status. The research of the (in)consistency of social status was resolved from the methodological standpoint by the dependence analysis which demonstrated a close relationship between individual social-economic variables of the status (education, job, income) and, at the same time, between the objectively measured social status and its subjective perception by the respondents.

The finding on the crystallized social structure warrants the determining of partial hypotheses on the diverse voting behaviour of citizens of individual social-economic groups under the conditions of the Žatec region. From this view, social structure, as a factor of voting behaviour, can be considered mainly in its objective form. The position of the individual in a social structure thus influences the nature of voting behaviour. It is possible to assume that the voting decision-making of the residents of Žatec is not at variance with the classic thesis of voting behaviour. This means that the citizens of a social-economic group who are situated on the lower levels of the social structure are more inclined toward left wing political values and they vote for left wing political parties. Adversely, the political orientation of members of

higher social classes tends to have more of a right wing nature. This of course is also demonstrated in the support of the right wing political parties. This is, however, only a hypothesis which is necessary to empirically verify. Understandably, the results of this study cannot be used generalize the rural areas of the Czech Republic, but they can serve as one of the indicia when investigating the voting behaviour of the citizens of rural areas. The voting behaviour of the residents of rural areas is not a consistently explored field in the Czech environment. The interest of sociologists mainly focuses on the entire political space without the internal electorate or geographical fragmentation. Therefore, from the viewpoint of the voting behaviour of residents, a number of often quite elementary questions remain unanswered. The most basic question is whether it is possible to seek in the Czech environment any important differences in election results if we compare the urban and rural areas. Based on several voting-geographical studies so far published in the Czech environment, differences really can be identified. However, their background is unclear. Are they a consequence of different value attitudes? If so, are the value attitudes of rural population essentially influenced by a different form of the social structure? In the social structure context, a question emerges whether, in accordance with the deliberations on rural areas as an independent social space, it is possible to take the rural population as an internally homogenous political group (i.e. a group of specific status)? If so, can this group relevantly represent its own political interests? These and other questions show the depth of the problem of voting behaviour of the residents of rural areas. It is absolutely necessary to answer them to understand the rural areas as a socially-specific space of the Czech Republic.

*Corresponding author:*

*Ing. Radek Kopriva, Ph.D*

*Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Department of Humanities*

*Kamýcká 129, Prague – Suchbátka, Czech Republic*

*e-mail: kopriva@pef.czu.cz*

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