What factors induce differences in depopulation and ageing in similar geographical conditions? The case of Slovak former mining cities

Bleha Branislav, Buček Ján
Research background

• focus on 15 former mining cities

• mining tradition – since medieval times - important source for medieval Hungary or Habsburg empire, or for such important mining and merchant families like Fuggers, later industrialization...

• selection - decline in mining occurred during the last decades of the socialist period and later - it could directly influence the demographic developments during the last quarter of a century

• geographical similarity - in mountain, more peripheral, less developed regions – mining was core of their local economy - depend

• two main clusters – coal mining cities (5 cities in two regions) and mining other minerals (two regions)

• size differences – small towns, as well as cities above 40 thousand inhabitants
Cities location with respect to regional disparities and bigger cities/regional centres (2021)
Research questions

• is the decline of mining a "death sentence" for these cities, especially in less developed regions

• is there any kind of response and effort to mitigate such development and is it visible in demographic data?

• can local (and other level policies – central state, regional government, EU) change development trajectories and „defeat“ geography – local activity matters?

• in this „indicative“ presentation – presented are trends, wider context and possible fields of action – responses

• we will analyse „factors“ later on, presented are preliminary comments, we will be progressing in forthcoming months
Factors assumed in the evaluation

- Macro-regional „attractivity“ („poor“ southeast/east vs „rich“ west/northwest)
- Access to main transit routes (motorways, railways)
- Proximity to the bigger urban centres (min. 50 thousand)
- Administrative and special/other functions
- Existence of segregated (mainly Roma) communities in the city or nearby
- Suburbanization (slowly occurring also in these poor regions)
- Decision making – possibilities of governments to stabilize their development
- Other?
  - Timing of mining closure, local finance, planning abilities, human capital
Population size - index of change (1996=100)

Source: SO SR and own calculations
Natural increase (per thousand pop)

Source: SO SR and own calculations
Total fertility rate

Source: SO SR, Branislav Šprocha’s calculations
Net migration (per thousand pop)

Source: SO SR and own calculations
Central state and EU involvement

- no explicit general urban policy, or specific policy addressing specific issues (like urban shrinkage) formulated in Slovakia (very general „Urban Development Policy“ 2019)
- **no specific policy addressing mining regions/cities**, only partial mitigation of phasing out (state aid)
- central state less interested in early stages of transition (liberal, privatization, weaker state)
- **general tools – less efficient** - *Support for the least developed regions* (Act 336/2015 as amended), *Regional Investment Support* (Ministry of Economy) available to business development and support
- individual support for cities with valuable historical heritage – Banská Štiavnica and Kremnica – limited effect
- **the role of EU multiplied within last decade – phasing-out of coal mining** – and its energy role – mines and related power plant closure until 2023 – with better planning a resources availability (primarily region Prievidza, Nováky, Handlová)
Local self-government – possible fields of action

• local self-government can act, they are responsible for various local services, some infrastructure, can be initiative (are quite autonomous)
• „local capacities“ in question - personally weak, underfinanced are especially small local self-governments
• depending on other levels of government initiatives and support schemes, resources

We already identified possible fields of local action with effect on population development:
• support of social housing,
• support of social enterprises/municipal,
• support of families „local family policy“ (facilities e.g. pre-school, financial support),
• local economic development effort – new workplaces/businesses - limited possibilities,
• quality of life – primarily environmental issues,
• improving planning – territorial (Master Plan), strategic planning, community social planning (social assistance system)
Conclusions and preliminary comments

• not easy to change population trends by available approaches and policy framework
• not enough focused support – only within general support schemes addressing less-developed, peripheral regions, with higher unemployment
• depending on importance/scale of particular field of mining (coal/energy more attention?)
• timing of mining closure impact – very limited/selective attention in early stages of transition
• minor role of local self-governments/local community – more powers and resources only after 2000-2005 reforms
• nevertheless chance for own initiative and use of available support increased,
• search for new „local equilibrium“ – population – economy – society - environment
• local activity matters? – can influence population development (numbers, structures)? – seems very limited – more adaptation, mitigation, stabilization - individual differences
Thank you for attention

REALISTIC UTOPIA VEĽKÝ KRTÍŠ (arttalk.cz)
(one showcase of local/external effort)