

CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Highlights

- Identification of objective and subjective conditions for development of community education
- Evaluation of the development of the main activities of Rural Community Schools
- Identification of strengths and weaknesses in the development of Rural Community Schools

Abstract

The paper is based on the concepts of the learning society and community-led local development, specifically focused on community education in rural areas of the Czech Republic. The research questions are connected with the identification of objective and subjective conditions for the development of community education and with the development of activities of Rural Community Schools, both from the supply and demand perspectives. The aim is fulfilled through a secondary analysis of Rural Community Schools' websites and mainly through primary research carried out by interviewing techniques with a high level of standardisation, conducted with the main actors (Community Coordinators) of Rural Community Schools. The results of the study show the higher importance of subjective conditions for the successful development of community education in the Czech Republic. The paper also identifies the demand for educational activities provided by Rural Community Schools as a positive factor in their development. On the other hand, weaknesses could mainly be seen in cooperation with local partners. This is also the main possibility or necessity for their successful future development.

Keywords

Community education, learning society, local development, objective conditions, Rural Community School, subjective conditions

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Introduction

The paper is based in general on the concept of the learning society and learning regions which are commonly used as the background for community education (Maskell and Malmberg, 1999; Lam, 2002; Morgan, 2007). These concepts are currently shifted to the higher level of a whole society. Nielsen and Lundvall (2006) use the term "learning economy", which is defined as one in which the ability to attain new competencies is crucial to the performance of individuals, firms, regions and states. Considering local education and especially community education in rural areas, it is also necessary to deal with the concepts emphasising endogenous development and "bottom-up" approaches to rural development (Atterton, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2005; Shucksmith, 2000). These concepts deal with networking and the participation of citizens in local and regional development as crucial factors in the successful implementation of an endogenous approach to rural development (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000). Also regional development theories dealing with the issue of the ability to learn through cooperation (Hudson, 2007; Lundvall and Nielsen, 2007) form the theoretical background for community education.

The third theoretical concept used in the paper is the concept of community education as a modernisation trend in education. The concept of community education has been spreading since the 1960s. This is the reason for its inconsistent conceptualisation and diverse applications in different states. There is a constantly applicable common basis – the involvement of people from outside the school and close links between the school and the local community (Heers *et al.*, 2011). Sanders (2003) stresses various elements of community education, but explicitly emphasises the collaboration of local schools with parents of school children, with local entrepreneurs, with local associations

and also with universities. The main mission of community education is to provide opportunities for lifelong learning and participation in community development to adults, working class people, minority learners, women with young children and also to members of rural communities who are disadvantaged due to the decreased availability of other educational possibilities (Staykova, 2012). The priority objective of rural community education is mainly to develop new skills and communication skills and cooperation with an educational institution within the rural community – e.g. local authorities, local action groups, entire families and various local associations and organisations (Birescu and Babaita, 2014). In general, community education extends classic education, especially from the perspectives of its socialisation function, social aspects, sociopolitical aspects and temporal dimension (Coleman, 1987).

Community education in rural areas of the Czech Republic is realised through Rural Community Schools. In the Czech Republic, this type of organisation is obviously defined as "an educational facility which is located in a municipality of less than 5000 inhabitants, with prescribed legal form (NGOs, municipal contributory organisation, secondary economic activity of the local school), which offers lifelong education to adult residents of the catchment area, and regularly participates in community development activities and community life, managing its own budget and respecting the principles of financial self-sufficiency and sustainability" (Hudeckova and Husak, 2015: 34). Only marginal attention is paid to the research of community education in the Czech Republic, due to the short-term application of this concept (between 5 and 10 years). As stated by Kalenda and Smekalova (2015), the appropriate interpretative framework for community education in the Czech Republic is still absent.

However, research by these authors equates the perception of community education with the consensual concept defined by solidarity and stability.

In this context, the paper strives to deepen the knowledge of community education in the Czech Republic and specifically that of the rural community education which is carried out by Rural Community Schools. This paper, based both on secondary and primary research, deals with the ensuing research questions: Which are the main objective (conditions based on the surroundings of RCSs and specific features of the locality where the RCS is situated) and subjective (conditions based on cooperation and involvement of local people with RCSs) endogenous conditions for development of Rural Community Schools in the Czech Republic? How do Rural Community Schools fulfil their mission in rural areas? Are their activities increasing or decreasing? The principal aim of the paper is to identify the main endogenous conditions for the development of Rural Community Schools (RCSs) in the Czech Republic and to evaluate the development of their various activities including their strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, the Results subsection of the paper is structured in four parts, focused on the evaluation of subjective and objective endogenous conditions for the development of RCSs, supply and demand perspectives of RCS activities, promotion of the activities and networking of RCSs with partners at local and supralocal levels.

Materials and Methods

From the methodological perspectives, the paper is based both on primary and secondary research techniques. A secondary approach is used for the analysis of RCS websites, with special attention paid to educational courses provided and other activities of RCSs. In addition, websites of the National Network of Rural Community Schools (NNRCS) are used for secondary analysis. The data obtained by secondary analysis were used especially for check and update the list of more and less active RCSs and for more detailed analysis of content of supplied courses (it form the basis for ensuing primary research).

Moreover, the paper stems from the long-term focus of the author on the issues of education and especially on community education in rural areas. Firstly, the significance of RCSs was identified by the author in 2010 under the project “Education for rural areas as a part of regional development priorities”, supported by the Internal Grant Agency of the Faculty of Economics and Management of the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague (IGA FEM CULS). Within this project, the main educational activities in rural areas of the Czech Republic were identified. The ensuing research project in 2012, called “Rural community school—institute for education and innovation workshop (case study of rural municipalities in the territory of LAG Pošumaví)” and also supported by IGA FEM CULS, was specifically focused on the research of establishing a network of RCSs on the territory of LAG Pošumaví. The third research project supported by IGA FEM CULS in 2014 – “Appreciation of Natural and Sociocultural Potential of Rural Areas through Activities Contributing to Social Inclusion” – was specifically focused on the selected activities of RCSs and mainly on the socially inclusive activities. The aforementioned experience of the author has also led to the ability to identify subjective and objective conditions for the development of RCSs in the Czech Republic and to evaluate the development of their various activities. The paper presents an extended version of the results published within “Proceedings from the International Conference on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education 2016” (Husak and Hudeckova, 2016). The paper

is extended mainly by the identification of subjective and objective conditions for the development of RCSs in the Czech Republic, the issue of funding of RCSs, attention paid to RCSs within municipal development strategy and the evaluation of the involvement of local teaching staff in community education.

The proposed primary research is based on the above-mentioned experience. From the total number of 37 RCSs in the Czech Republic, 22 RCSs (after the correction in 2015) were identified as active (Husak and Hudeckova, 2015). Sixteen of the active RCSs were selected as an object for the research. Therefore, the primary research consists of 16 interviews (each with a duration of approximately 90 minutes) with a high level of standardisation. The interviews were conducted with the main actors (Community Coordinators) of the chosen RCSs in the Czech Republic. The selection of interviewed RCSs was based on the indicator of high/less activity of RCSs – 8 selected RCSs rank as being very active (more than 8 courses per year) and 8 selected RCSs rank as being less or moderately active (less than 7 courses per year) – according to the criteria specified in detail in the previous research (Husak and Hudeckova, 2015). The interviews consisted mainly of the issues of the evaluation of subjective and objective conditions for the development of RCSs, the development of courses and other activities of RCSs, both from the supply and demand perspectives, promotion of RCSs within the locality and current and possible partnerships within the locality and also outside the locality.

Results

The concept of community education is fairly new (about 90 years). It has been implemented in Central Europe for about 20 years and specifically in the Czech Republic for 10 years with regard to the rural areas. Thirty-seven RCSs exist in the Czech Republic and, according to the valid rules (NNRCS, 2011), they may operate within municipalities of up to 5000 inhabitants (there is one exception – Telč with 6111 inhabitants). The first RCSs were established in 2005 and most of the RCSs were established by 2010. So, the 10 (or minimally 5) years of existence of RCSs are sufficient for the evaluation of the development of RCSs with regard to their activities. There are no dependencies considering the time of the existence of an RCS on the one hand, and an indicator of high/less activity of an RCS on the other hand. Among the very active RCSs are schools established in 2005 and also two RCSs established in 2012. The situation is similar with regard to less or moderately active RCSs. Therefore, the time of existence of the RCSs could not be evaluated as a factor influencing the activity of RCSs.

The first part of the Results section is focused on the identification and evaluation of conditions for the development of RCSs in the Czech Republic. It is useful to start with the funding of RCSs, because financial aspects are (according to Community Coordinators) the most important for the sustainable development of RCSs and community education in general.

Funding Source	Funding of RCSs (% of RCSs)	
	Very active RCSs	Less active RCSs
One-source funding	25.0	50.0
Multi-source funding	75.0	50.0
Specific:*		
Course fees	87.5	87.5
Municipality	50.0	50.0
Projects	25.0	12.5
Others (e.g. primary school, Region NUTS 3)	25.0	25.0

* more possible answers

Table 1: Funding of RCSs, 2015-2016 (source: own research)

Table 1 depicts the main funding sources of RCSs and a comparison of very active and less active RCSs with regard to the usage of various funding sources. Considering the type of funding, one-source funding prevails at less active RCSs and multi-source funding at very active RCSs. If Community Coordinators declare one-source funding, this means mainly course fees and rarely funding from the municipal budget. Course fees are also the most frequent funding sources. This indicates self-sufficiency of RCSs, regardless of their level of activity. However, very active RCSs rather use multi-source funding and course fees are supplemented by projects (funded by EU regional policy) and funding from the municipal budget. This indicates increased fund-raising activities and, on the other hand, also utilisation of social capital during negotiations with local government, which supports RCSs. Considering the development of the type of funding, there is an obvious shift from multi-source funding to one-source funding (mainly course fees) at less active RCSs. Therefore, decreasing activity of RCSs is detectable not only with regard to supplied courses but also with regard to funding activities.

Education/RCSs	Education and RCSs as important part of municipal development strategy (average rate)*	
	Very active RCSs	Less active RCSs
Education in general	2.00	1.29
RCSs	2.50	3.66

* Are education/RCSs considered as an important part of municipal development strategy? (1 = most important, 5 = least important)

Table 2: Education and RCSs as important part of municipal development strategy, 2015-2016 (source: own research)

One of the most important conditions for the development of RCSs is the strategic approach of local government to education and especially to RCSs. Table 2 depicts data on the evaluation of the importance of education and RCSs within strategic municipal documents. The data show that education in general is considered as an important part of municipal development strategies. Surprisingly, greater importance of education is observed within municipalities where less active RCSs are located. Community education (particular RCSs) is considered as a less important part of municipal development strategies. It is the same for both very active and less active RCSs. However, the difference between the importance of education in general and community education is significantly greater with regard to less active RCSs (difference between average rates is 2.37). It is obvious that the importance of education in general within municipal development strategies is less significant for the successful and sustainable development (according to Hudeckova and Husak (2015) it means development which ensures functioning of RCSs regardless of project support or one particular person) of RCSs than the importance of RCSs within municipal development strategies. Community Coordinators of less active RCSs state that municipal development strategies emphasise education as a significant part of rural development, but local government prefers forms of education other than community education and RCSs. Therefore we can conclude that the attitude of local government to community education and RCSs is an important condition for the successful and sustainable development of RCSs (regardless of whether it is always linked to the funding of RCSs).

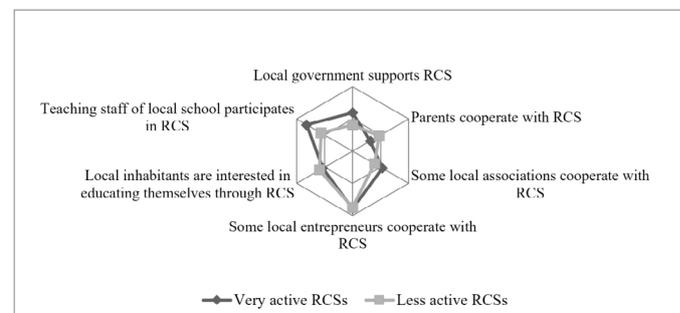
Other important conditions for the development of RCSs are the interest and involvement of local teaching staff within community education. Table 3 depicts data on the evaluation of the participation of local teaching staff in community education. The data show that interest and involvement of the Headmaster

of the local school is generally higher than the rest of the teaching staff. This is especially valid for RCSs which are strongly personally connected to the local primary school. A comparison of very active and less active RCSs is quite surprising. Greater interest and involvement of teaching staff was identified at less active RCSs. However, the variance of answers is significantly lower than when considering the very active RCSs (the answers oscillate between 1 and 3). On the contrary, considering the very active RCSs the answers are usually extreme – the local teaching staff actively cooperates with RCS or ignores the existence of RCS within the municipality. It is obvious that involvement of local teaching staff within community education is not very important with regard to the activity or inactivity of RCSs. On the other hand, involvement of local teaching staff is evaluated as an important fact for the sustainable development of RCSs. This results from interviews with Community Coordinators. They evaluated the participation of local teaching staff in community education as significant for the functioning of RCSs. In particular, they positively evaluate cooperation with the Headmaster of the local primary school. Evaluation of the participation of other teaching staff is quite ambivalent. A small group of participating teaching staff is usually present and the rest of the teaching staff does not want to cooperate with RCSs. They usually do not want to work beyond their official working hours. However sustainability of RCSs is based mainly on extra working hours and the enthusiasm of the local teaching staff.

Type of staff	Interest and involvement of the teaching staff (average rate)*	
	Very active RCSs	Less active RCSs
Headmaster	2.25	1.86
Other teaching staff	2.75	2.13

* Evaluate interest and involvement of the teaching staff of local school to participate in community education. (1 = highest interest, 5 = lowest interest)

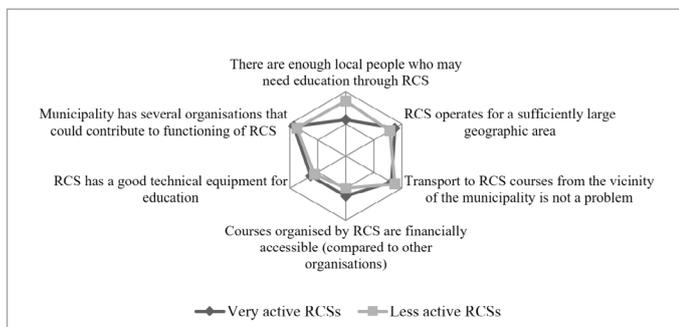
Table 3: Interest and involvement of the teaching staff, 2015-2016 (source: own research)



Note: Evaluate conditions for development of RCS within the municipality. (according to average rate; 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)

Figure 1: Spider Graph - Subjective endogenous conditions for development of RCSs, 2015-2016 (source: own research)

Spider graph (Figure 1) shows the subjective endogenous conditions for the development of RCSs. The data show that cooperation with parents of local pupils and chosen local associations is evaluated as the best. Cooperation with local entrepreneurs, who usually do not cooperate with RCSs in any way, is evaluated as the worst. Subjective endogenous conditions differ only slightly when considering the activity of RCSs. The data show that the most important factor for increasing the activities of RCSs is cooperation with the parents. On the other hand, cooperation with local government and local teaching staff is of less importance.



Note: Evaluate conditions for development of RCS within the municipality. (according to average rate; 1= strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree)

Figure 2: Spider Graph - Objective endogenous conditions for development of RCSs, 2015-2016 (source: own research)

The spider graph (Figure 2) shows the objective endogenous conditions for the development of RCSs. The data show that technical equipment of RCSs, financial accessibility of courses organised by RCSs and sufficient amount of local people who may need education through RCSs are the best evaluated objective endogenous conditions. The evaluation of objective endogenous conditions is very similar considering very active and less active RCSs. There is one exception – the number of local people who may need education through RCSs. This factor is evaluated significantly better at very active RCSs. It is obvious that the demand by local people for education through RCSs is most important for increasing the activities of RCSs. On the other hand, financial accessibility of courses organised by RCSs is of less importance. There is the possibility for improved funding of RCSs and for a decrease of their dependence on the municipal budget.

The above analysed conditions for the development of RCSs are a prerequisite for their successful development. The development of various activities of RCSs in the Czech Republic is evaluated within the following part of the paper.

Table 4 focuses attention on the development of different types of courses (for a detailed distinction of the types of courses, see Husak and Hadkova, 2015) and other realised activities of RCSs – courses to increase opportunities on the labour market (A), courses with the mission of promoting active citizenship and local identity (B) and courses focused on the personal growth of participants (C).

Type of activity	Development of the activities of RCSs (% of RCSs)		
	Increase	Stagnation	Decrease
A	9.1	27.3	63.6
B	13.3	40.0	46.7
C	13.3	66.7	20.0
Others	10.0	70.0	20.0
Overall view	20.0	53.3	26.7

Table 4: Development of the activities of RCSs during their existence, 2015-2016 (source: own research)

The above-mentioned data depicted in Table 4 indicate the development of the supply of courses and other activities for potential participants. The supply of organised courses provided by RCSs shows stagnation or a significant decrease, in consideration of the courses to increase opportunities on the labour market and courses with the mission of promoting active citizenship and local identity. In only about 10 % of RCSs is the supply of courses increasing. There is a rather similar situation with regard to the supply of other activities (e.g. handicraft workshops, farmers’ markets, occasional creative workshops, occasional discussions with local interesting people, trips to surroundings of the municipalities, Children’s Day), which

supply stagnates in 70 % of RCSs. There is no difference (focusing attention on the structure of stagnant and decreasing RCSs) in the development of the supply of courses and other activities of RCSs, in consideration of the indicator of high/less activity. An increase of activities is possible to be observed only at very active RCSs (with one exception). The overall view provided by Community Coordinators of the development of activities of RCSs is also very interesting. The Community Coordinators of 20% of RCSs evaluate the development of activities of their RCSs as increasing, but if they pay attention to particular types of courses, the situation differs. Therefore Community Coordinators seem to be more optimistic in their evaluation of the development of RCSs than what the actual situation is when thinking about it in more depth.

Measure	Development of the demand for courses and other activities of RCSs (% of RCSs)		
	Increase	Stagnation	Decrease
Number of participants in organised courses	26.7	60.0	13.3
Number of participants in other activities	30.8	61.5	7.7
Others (e.g. information requests, queries)	46.7	40.0	13.3

Table 5: Development of the demand for courses and other activities of RCSs, 2015-2016 (source: own research)

Besides the supply side of the development of activities being the subject of the research, the demand side is also the centre of attention. The development of the demand for courses and other activities of RCSs is depicted in Table 5. Considering the development of the demand for organised courses and other activities, the situation of RCSs seems to be more positive than when considering the supply side. About 30% of RCSs indicate an increase in the number of participants, both in organised courses and other activities. 46.7% of RCSs observe an increase in the interest in RCSs shown in other ways. Community Coordinators specifically mention requests for information about RCS, queries about the mission of RCS and also co-partnership requirements for the organisation of local events. There is no difference (focusing attention on the structure of stagnant and increasing RCSs) in the development of the demand for courses and other activities of RCSs, when considering the indicator of high/less activity of RCSs. A decrease in the demand for activities is possible to be observed only at less or moderately active RCSs.

If we compare the supply and demand perspectives of RCS activities, it is possible to evaluate the development of RCSs as positive, due to the predominance of the increasing demand on the one hand and the decreasing supply on the other hand. The demand for the activities of RCSs is a crucial precondition for their future development.

Tools	RCSs using the particular tools (%)	from this (%)	
		Regularly	Occasionally
Web pages	100.0	87.5	12.5
Local newsletters	93.8	73.3	26.7
Leaflets	81.3	38.5	61.5
Others (e.g. Facebook, Primary School pupils, local radio)	37.5	66.7	33.3

Table 6: Promotional tools of RCSs, 2015-2016 (source: own research)

Because the increasing demand for the activities of RCSs is not obvious, it is also necessary to research the promotional tools used by RCSs. The promotional tools used by RCSs are depicted in Table 6 and are sorted in descending order, according to the

percentage of RCSs using the particular tool. All RCSs use web pages to inform the public of their activities; most of them regularly, and 12.5% of RCSs use the web pages of a Primary School within the municipality for occasional information about their activities. The second position, which is also mostly used regularly, is that of local newspapers where RCSs usually have their own section. However, the use of local newspapers is strongly connected with close cooperation with the municipal council (see below). Leaflets are another promotional tool, which is generally used only occasionally for promoting current events organised by RCSs. However, the successful RCSs (very active) commonly use leaflets regularly. Their Community Coordinators state that, due to the social and age structure of the rural population, online communication and promotion are insufficient. Because there is no difference between the utilisation of the other promotional tools, when considering the indicator of the activity of RCSs, it is possible to evaluate the regular use of leaflets distributed to households or through local schools as a significant tool to support the development of RCSs. The other promotional tools are used only by a minority of RCSs and, despite the fact that they are mostly used regularly, there is no difference with regard to the indicator of the activity RCSs.

Local level		Supralocal level	
Partners	Cooperating RCSs (%)	Partners	Cooperating RCSs (%)
Municipal council	75.0	NNRCS	50.0
Local associations (NGOs)	62.5	Other RCSs	18.8
Primary School or Nursery School	18.8	Network of mother centres	12.5
Local action groups	12.5	x	x

Table 7: Main partners of RCSs, 2015-2016 (source: own research)

The promotion of RCS activities, as well as their collaboration with other organisations, both within the locality and outside the locality, are prerequisites for their successful development. Table 7 depicts the most frequent partners for RCSs, both at local and supralocal levels. The significantly most frequent partners at local level are municipal councils and other local associations, such as volunteer firefighters, Sokol association, hunting associations and others which are less frequent. The most important partner for RCSs at supralocal level is NNRCS. Other partners are only marginal, or only a few RCSs collaborate with them. However, not all partnerships may be considered as productive. A significantly higher proportion of successful (very active) RCSs actively cooperate with NNRCS. Therefore, this kind of cooperation may be classified as productive. On the contrary, collaboration with municipal councils provides possibilities for promotion in local newspapers (there is approximately the same proportion of collaborating RCSs as those RCSs who regularly use local newspapers for promotion – see above), but this could be classified as unproductive. This is because a higher proportion of less successful (less or moderately active) RCSs actively collaborate with municipal councils. On the other hand, according to Community Coordinators, for the long-term functioning of RCSs, if not collaboration, at least good relations with municipal councils are necessary. Collaboration with other local associations may be classified as neutral, because there is the same proportion of successful and less successful RCSs collaborating with them.

Discussion

The development of activities of RCSs within the Czech Republic is quite ambivalent. With regard to the researched RCSs, half of them may be classified as successful (very active with increasing or at least stagnant activities) and half of them may be classified as less successful (less or moderately active with decreasing or stagnant activities). Positive success factors (strengths) of the development of RCSs were identified as the increasing demand for courses and other activities of RCSs, regular use of personal and leaflet promotion (besides online promotional tools) and active collaboration with NNRCS. Negative failure factors (weaknesses) of the development of RCSs were identified as the decreasing number of realised courses, online communication as the only tool for promotion of RCS activities and unproductive cooperation with local municipal councils. However, according to Community Coordinators, cooperation with partners at local level is significantly improving. This is very important for future development of RCSs especially in context of significance of collaboration of RCSs with community and other local partners as stated by Oktari *et al.* (2015) in international context. In comparison with the first years after the establishment of RCSs (Hudeckova and Husak, 2015), there are no local partners which could only with difficulty be partners to RCSs. This acknowledges the results provided by Kalenda and Smekalova (2015), who found a relationship between community education and a consensual approach (rather than a conflictual approach). According to Community Coordinators, the development of RCSs in the Czech Republic and their activities are based not only on cooperation with other local partners, but also on the activities of actor groups involved in community education in rural municipalities. This is especially important with regard to small rural municipalities with a higher proportion of personal relationships, not only in the rural areas of the Czech Republic but also abroad, as stated by Laudams (2013).

Endogenous subjective conditions prevail when considering the main conditions which influence the successful development of community education and RCSs in the Czech Republic. These are mainly multi-source funding, incorporation of RCSs and community education into municipal development strategy, and cooperation and involvement of parents in community educational activities. However, Biriescu and Babaita (2014) stated that in Romania are still more important objective conditions like financial aspects of educational courses, educational facilities, transportations problems and lack of modern information networks. Our research shows that situation in the Czech Republic is significantly different and similar to Anglo-Saxons conditions for development of RCSs (Heers *et al.*, 2011). The data show that only one endogenous objective condition is an important factor of RCS activities. This is specifically a sufficient number of people who wish to be educated through RCSs. The results are consistent with the evaluation of RCS activities as stated above and also acknowledged by Laudams (2013) in a broader perspective. The higher importance of subjective conditions for the development of community education is consistent with the studies provided by Lauerman (2010) with regard to the national context, and Heers *et al.* (2014) with regard to the international context. These studies mention in particular social (multiple partnership, social networks and social capital) and sociopolitical (increase of development potential of the whole community) aspects of the development of community education, which also match the subjective conditions.

Conclusion

The paper is focused on the development of community education within rural areas of the Czech Republic. Special attention is paid to the identification of objective and subjective endogenous conditions for the development of RCSs, activities, promotion and current partnerships of RCSs. The issue is topical due to the more than ten years' existence of the oldest RCSs in the Czech Republic and due to the emphasis on institutional and knowledge-based approaches in current rural development theories.

Considering the main results of our research, it is possible to state that subjective conditions prevail above objective conditions with regard to differences in the development of very active and less active RCSs. Convenient endogenous subjective conditions are the most important for the successful development of community education and RCSs in the Czech Republic. Results acknowledge that local networking, partnership and collaboration with the local municipality, parents and other local people are still more important than the technical aspects of RCSs. This is also reflected in the evaluation of the realised educational courses. There are significant differences between the development of the supply and demand sides of RCSs' activities. While the supply of courses and other activities is somewhat decreasing or stagnant, the demand for various activities is rather increasing. This is one of the most important factors influencing the development of RCSs. It also indicates that RCSs have established themselves as significant actors in rural education and rural development. The confidence of local people in RCSs, as illustrated by the increasing interest in their activities, may be evaluated as fulfilling the mission of RCSs for the first decade of their existence. The possibilities for the future development of RCSs are connected mainly with increased collaboration with other active local partners. The research shows that the best way how to support cooperation with local partners is to choose credible Community Coordinator, who has central position within local social network. As is apparent from our research, current partnerships (especially at local level) may be classified as unproductive or neutral – especially considering the less active RCSs. However, for the long-term successful existence of RCSs, cooperation within local networks is necessary.

An investigation into the possibilities for cooperation between RCSs, parents and municipalities within the framework of regional family policy at the municipal level is also the focus of our ensuing research.

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