SIZE AND POSITION MATTERS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON POLARIZATION BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN MAJOR URBAN AREAS AND PERIPHERAL REGIONS IN CZECHIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses insights from a survey of Czech towns and municipalities commissioned by the Union of Czech Municipalities and Ministry for Regional Development as an input to Strategy of Regional Development 2020+. The survey uniquely used open questions favoring self-identification of issues by municipal representatives. The key areas of inquiry included achievements in municipal development, problems and limits faced by local governments, detection of strengths and development potentials, possibilities to overcome limits and activate potentials, identification of factors of future development and practices in inter-municipal co-operation. The analysis of responses from 732 towns and municipalities revealed striking differences between large cities and small municipalities and between urban and suburban local governments in metropolitan and large urban areas and municipal governments in peripheral rural areas. The major challenge is increasing polarity of the labor market between cities and towns, which face lack of labor force with needed qualification and skills, on the one hand side, and small
Peripheral local governments that face lack of job opportunities. While it is acknowledged that this polarity results from uneven territorial impact of the involvement of employers in global production networks (GPN), the process of job loss is not adequately addressed by national policies. The spatial effects of labor market polarization result in increasing population development cleavage between peripheral local governments of small municipalities, which face ageing and depopulation and, hence, lack of demand leading to the non-use and closure of local services. On the other hand, suburban municipalities in major urban agglomerations deal with unprecedented dynamics of population growth which leads to need for development land and provision of sufficient capacity of services. While the national and EU regional policy recognize these territorial cleavages, the tools intended to foster territorial cooperation, such as ITI Integrated Territorial Investments or ITDP Integrated Territorial Development Plans, face mistrust of small municipal governments towards cities and do not address the issues of increasing core-periphery polarization.