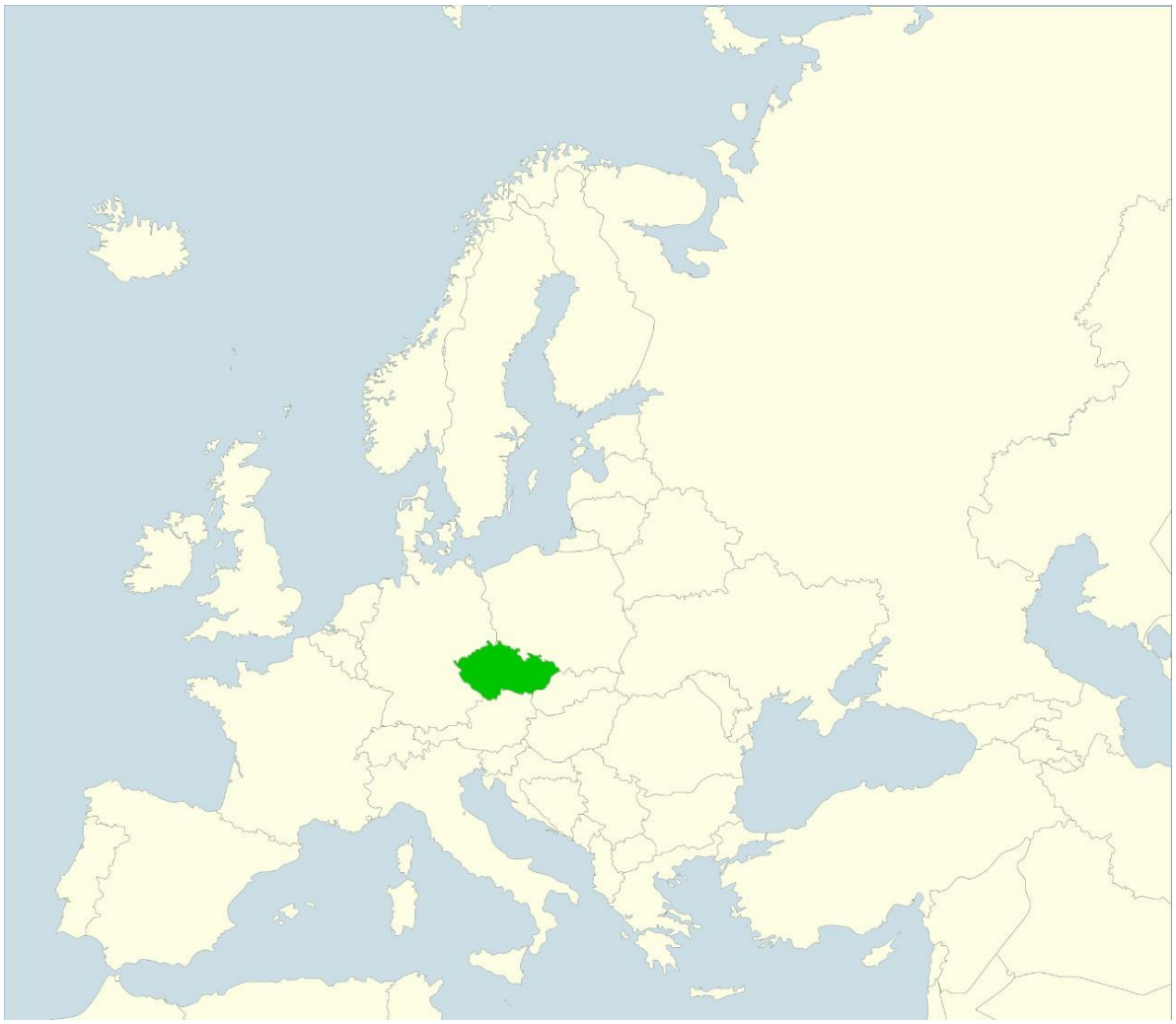
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COMMUNITY FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOLS AND MUNICIPAL SUPPORT OF SCHOOLS ON THE CONTINUUM OF THE RURAL PERIPHERY – TOWN

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Abstract: The article compares the community functions of schools and the support to schools from the municipality representatives and community depending on the location of the school – in peripheral or semi-peripheral rural areas, rural small towns, outer suburbs and also in towns, i.e., at various distances from the town. It is based on controlled interviews with school headmasters and mayors of the respective municipalities and on the collection of information from annual school reports and school inspection reports. A total of 57 schools of two districts in the south-west of Czechia were evaluated. The assumption that complete rural schools in peripheries have the greatest community functions was confirmed; but complete rural schools in semi-peripheries also received similar assessment. However, a fully functioning rural "community school" was not found in the case study area. Schools in towns show weak community functions, because community functions in towns are provided by other institutions and facilities.

Key words: Rural community, rural periphery, rural semi-periphery, rural school, community school, community functions

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Abstrakt: Článek porovnává komunitní funkce škol a podpory školám ze strany představitelů obce a komunity v závislosti na umístění školy – v periferních nebo semi-periferních venkovských oblastech, v malých venkovských městech, v suburbiích a také ve městech, tedy v různých vzdálenostech od města. Je založen na řízených rozhovorech s řediteli škol a starosty příslušných obcí a na sběru informací z výročních zpráv škol a zpráv školní inspekce. Celkem bylo hodnoceno 57 škol dvou okresů jihozápadu Česka. Potvrdil se předpoklad, že největší komunitní funkce mají úplné venkovské školy periferií; ale podobné hodnocení obdržely i úplné venkovské školy semi-periferií. Ve zkoumaném území však nebyla nalezena plně funkční venkovská „komunitní škola“. Školy ve městech vykazují slabé komunitní funkce, protože ve městech zajišťují komunitní funkce jiné instituce a zařízení.

Klíčová slova: Venkovská komunita, venkovská periferie, venkovská semi-periferie, venkovská škola, komunitní škola, komunitní funkce

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Highlights

- Interviews were held with many school headmasters and municipality mayors.
- Rural schools on the periphery and semi-periphery have the greatest community functions.
- Moreover, they are strongly supported by their municipality and community.
- However, no fully functional rural "community school" was found in the study area.
- In towns, community functions are primarily provided by entities other than schools.

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1. Introduction

In addition to the educational function, “elementary” schools providing primary and lower secondary education usually also have various community functions – e.g., cultural, social-advisory, providing their facilities to the public, and others. This is especially true for rural schools (Lyson, 2002; Autti and Hyry-Beihammer, 2014; Lind and Stjernström, 2015, and others). The representatives of rural municipalities are therefore aware of the need to maintain and develop their school and support the school financially and in other ways (Trnková, 2009; Preston and Barnes, 2017; Karlberg-Granlund, 2019). In towns, several institutions and facilities are providing cultural, advisory, sport and other activities for the numerous town populations, so the community functions of schools are not so important here.

A significant part of Europe's rural peripheries has been losing population, including school-aged children, in recent decades. This depopulation threatens the existence of local schools (Autti and Hyry-Beihammer, 2014; Elshof et al., 2015; Slee and Miller, 2015; Kučerová et al. 2020; Lehtonen, 2021). This is also true for the USA (Bard et al., 2006), Canada (Oncescu, 2014), and Australia and New Zealand (Eacott, 2022; Kearns et al., 2009), especially for the ultra-peripheries in these vast countries. After the closure of a school, both the educational and community functions of the school disappear. The remaining school-age children often have a difficult and long commute to a distant central school, which can be considered a manifestation of specific social exclusion affecting children, their parents, and the entire rural community (similarly Aberg-Bengtsson, 2009; Assmo and Wihlborg, 2012). In towns, there are usually enough children of school age. The existence of at least one school is not threatened here.

The paper aims *to identify, evaluate, and compare the community functions of schools and the support of schools by municipality representatives and local communities in areas with different distances from towns, i.e., in areas with different peripherality – in towns, outer suburbs, rural semi-peripheries and rural peripheries.* No such comparative research is known to have been published. The paper covers complete schools (providing primary and lower secondary education) and small incomplete schools (providing only primary education) in two districts in the southwest of Czechia. Community functions of the school and support to the school by representatives of the municipality and the local community tend to be a significant contribution to the preservation, functioning and development of the school and to the development of the municipality and community. Within the aim of the paper, two research questions will be addressed:

(i) How extensive community functions do schools provide to their communities depending on the degree of peripherality and completeness (and size) of the schools?

(ii) How extensive support do municipalities and communities (their representatives) provide to schools depending on the degree of peripherality and completeness (and size) of the schools?

Based on preliminary surveys and literature (Kalaoja and Pietarinen, 2009; Cedering and Wihlborg, 2020, and others), it can be assumed that the greatest community functions of schools and the greatest support for schools from the municipality representatives and the local community will be in rural peripheries, where strong mutual support of the municipality, school, local associations and residents is necessary and where closing a school would bring great problems in the functioning of the community.

2. Community functions of schools and their support by municipalities and communities in literature

In addition to educational functions, *rural schools usually provide important community functions*. Their teachers and pupils perform at cultural events in rural communities, and some of these events are organized by the headmaster and teachers (Sigsworth and Solstad, 2005; Green, 2013; Autti and Hyry-Beihammer, 2014). Teachers and the headmaster, especially if they are local, tend to be organizationally active in the rural community, e.g., in local associations and in the municipal council (Preston et al., 2013). Rural schools usually provide their spaces to local associations and the public (Oncescu, 2014; Tūna, 2014). The literature also talks about lifelong learning of adult community residents in rural schools (Kłoczko-Gajewska, 2020; Supule, 2019) and about leisure activities for pupils and youth organized by some rural schools (Miller, 1995; Knutas, 2017; Trnková, 2009).

Rural schools usually rent cheaply or provide free classrooms, gyms, and sports grounds to local associations and the public, and also offer lunches from the school kitchen for local residents (Hargreaves et al., 2009; Oncescu, 2014; Lind and Stjernström, 2015). In a village, the school is often an important employer – it employs both teachers and non-teaching staff (Barley and Beesley, 2007; Green, 2013; Lind and Stjernström, 2015). The curriculum of rural schools should be somewhat different from the curriculum of urban schools; it should also reflect the nature of employment opportunities, business and life in rural areas (Kannapel and DeYoung, 1999; Dowling, 2009; Harmon and Schafft, 2009; Harris, 2014). Unfortunately, the realization of all the above-mentioned activities and functions of rural schools is not usually reflected in the evaluation of schools by the school administration (Supule, 2019).

The literature mentions community-inactive, -less-active and -active rural schools (Solstad, 1997; Sigsworth and Solstad 2005; Valli et al., 2018) or even rural full-service "community schools" (FSCS). The FSCS in the USA is the centre of education (including lifelong), various partnerships with the school, various services and development programs and projects in the community (Samberg and Sheeran, 2000; Dryfoos and Maguire, 2002; Fereira, 2011; Green, 2013; Arqué et al., 2018). But Bell and Sigsworth (1991) and Arnold (1998) wrote that the proclaimed very strong role of the school in the rural community may be a modern myth. McHenry-Sorber (2014) pointed out that some of the problems in rural schools may stem from local political and other rivalries.

Representatives of rural municipalities and communities usually support their schools in various ways. In many countries, rural municipalities provide and finance the technical operation of the school, school equipment and school building repairs. Fortunately, public school teacher salaries are mostly covered by the state or larger region. Some municipalities provide transport for pupils and housing for teachers (Trnková, 2009; Supule, 2019). Mayors and other representatives of rural municipalities usually perceive the importance of the school in their territory and try to help it in every possible way.

Local associations, parents, and other residents often participate in the repairs and operation of a rural school and, sometimes also teaching pupils, usually free of charge (Hargreaves et al., 2009; Downes and Roberts, 2015; Kłoczko-Gajewska, 2020). Rural parents may be faced with the choice of choosing a local rural school for their children or a large, fully equipped school in a more distant town requiring commuting (Walker and Clark, 2010; Bagley and Hillyard, 2015 and others). The good physical and educational quality of a rural school, its family climate and physical proximity, its community functions, and the positive personal experience of residents with this school, can support the choice of the local rural school (Ross, 2007; Kubeš and Vokrouhlík, 2019).

Many studies describe the *various adverse effects of rural school closure on a local rural community* – Lyson (2002), Bard et al. (2006), Autti and Hyry-Beihamme (2014), and many others. In addition to worsening school accessibility and the loss of the aforementioned community functions, there are other impacts. Pupils commuting to a distant school must be paid for by parents (Gristy, 2019; Lehtonen, 2021). Parents lose control of their school children while commuting to and from school (Coleman, 1997). Families with children often prefer to move to another municipality where there is a school, and families with children who might move to the municipality may change their minds due to the absence of a school (Assmo and Wihlborg, 2012; Sørensen et al., 2021). There will be school job losses (Oncescu, 2014). The departure of an educated headmaster and teachers is a loss to the human and social capital in a local community (Kłoczko-Gajewska, 2020; Sørensen et al., 2021). The municipality must continue to maintain the school building (Kroismayr, 2019), but the municipality can also use it for other activities or sell it. After the closure of a rural school, there is often a decrease in the sense of cohesion of the residents (Kearns et al., 2009; Blauwkamp et al., 2011), as well as their identity with the municipality and community (Lyson, 2002).

Scholars mostly confirm the effect of the depopulation of rural areas on school closures (Kvalsund, 2009; Lehtonen, 2021; Sørensen et al., 2021) and see the closure of the school as an impetus to the closure of other services in the municipality (Autti and Hyry-Beihammer, 2014). Others write that closing a rural school can lead to the gradual "dying" of the local rural community (Egelund and Laustsen, 2006; Lind and Stjernström, 2015). But there are also studies questioning the depopulation after the closure of a rural school (Amcoff, 2012; Barakat, 2015) and pointing out the possible benefits of reducing small rural schools. After the closure of a small rural school, pupils commute to a large and mostly better equipped school with specialized teachers, classrooms, and programs (Alloway and Dallet-Trim, 2009 or Wildy and Clarke, 2012). In a large school, pupils can have more stimuli, opportunities, and a larger group of age-appropriate friends (Surface, 2011).

The lack of pupils, the associated economic inefficiency, and sometimes the poor quality of teaching and educational conditions, are the most frequently cited reasons for the closure of small rural schools (Aberg-Bengtsson, 2009; Oncescu, 2014; Lind and Stjernström, 2015). However, the supposed economic savings from this closure are questioned by some authors (Duncombe and Yinger, 2007) due to the costs and losses resulting from pupil commuting, declines in local business, reductions in local revenue and taxes,

and declines in property values (Kannapel and DeYoung, 1999; Amcoff, 2012; Montgomery, 2021). The improvement in the quality of education in a larger central school (Sell et al., 1997; Brummet, 2014) is sometimes also disputed due to difficult comparisons (Hargreaves et al., 2009; Amcoff, 2012). Closures are mostly decided by distant politicians and officials, often without local consultation and assessment of the impacts on the local community (Kearns et al., 2009; Aberg-Bengtsson, 2009).

Rural residents and pupils have several specifics compared to town ones – people from a rural community know each other well, communicate together, mostly help each other, are cohesive, mostly support the municipality, are connected to the surrounding rural landscape. The villagers' strong social capital is accompanied by their strong local identity (Witten et al., 2007; Go et al., 2013; Kramer, 2019). These specifics are then reflected in education and other activities at rural schools and in the relations between the rural school and the rural municipality and community (Lind and Stjernström, 2015; Kłoczko-Gajewska, 2020 or Mayger and Hochbein, 2021).

The community functions of urban schools and the relationship between urban schools and towns and their residents are understudied in the literature, and this makes it difficult to compare. As mentioned above, there are many institutions in towns providing cultural, entertainment, sport and other leisure needs for a large urban population. In addition, some town schools have an employee with the function of community coordinator. However, this employee is primarily focused on supporting relations between the school and the numerous parents of the school's pupils (FitzGerald and Quiñones, 2018 and others). Urban schools have sufficient potential of pupils and capable teachers to create selective and high-quality school dance, music, singing, theatre and sports ensembles and groups. However, they mainly tour regional and national presentations and competitions (Malini, 2018). Their impact on the entire population of the town is limited. Large urban schools usually have enough financial resources and personnel to ensure the full operation of the school, so they do not need as much help as small rural schools (Kalaoja and Pietarinen, 2009; Kubeš and Vokrouhlík, 2019).

3. Schools in Czechia and in the case study area

In Czechia, compulsory education includes at least one year of pre-primary education in kindergarten, five years of primary education in the first grade of complete school or in incomplete school (for children aged 6–10), and four years of lower secondary education in the second grade of complete school (for children aged 11–14). Incomplete schools almost always have composite classrooms with merged pupil years; these are small schools in terms of the number of pupils. Pupil years cannot be merged in the second grade of complete schools. Large complete schools with a large number of pupils and classrooms are in towns, while smaller complete schools and small incomplete schools are mainly in villages. The paper does not deal with special complete schools for mentally handicapped pupils or with “gymnázia” (similar to British grammar schools) – schools for gifted pupils from the ages of 11, 13 and 15.

The case study area of the paper includes the Prachatice and Český Krumlov districts in the southwest of the South Bohemian region, near the state border of Czechia with Germany (Bavaria) and Austria (Upper Austria) – Fig. 1. It is a mountainous landscape with extensive forests and pastures, and with a scattering of small settlements with variously strong functions in tourism in the belt along the state border, and a hilly landscape with a mosaic of forests, meadows, pastures, fields, and villages in the northeast. The case study area covers 2,990 km^2 with a population of 112,000. Four towns (Vimperk, Prachatice, Český Krumlov, Kaplice) have 7,000–12,000 inhabitants, and they are centres of daily commuting for work and higher services. They are supplemented by eight rural (very) small towns (the names of the towns in Fig. 1). There are a large number of mostly small rural municipalities, they usually consist of several nearby villages. There are 57 schools – 34 complete schools and 23 incomplete schools. They are distributed unevenly in the territory (Fig. 1).

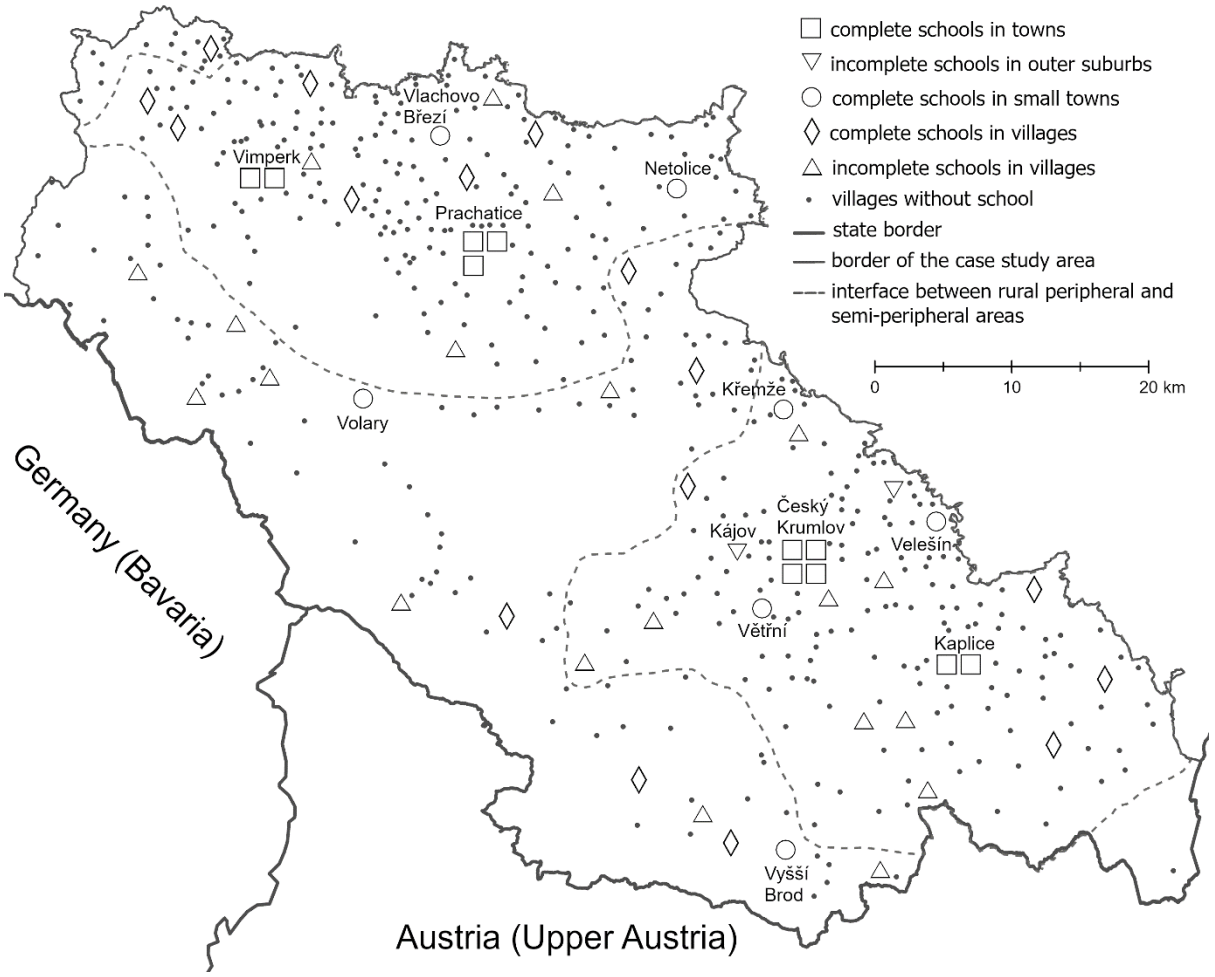


Fig 1. Location and completeness of schools in the case study area (2022). Source: State Register of Schools

4. Methods

In the paper, schools are differentiated according to their completeness – into complete and incomplete schools (see above) and to their distance from the town (according to peripherality) – schools in towns, outer suburbs, semi-peripheral rural small towns, semi-peripheral villages, peripheral rural small towns, and peripheral villages (8 types). Towns are defined as centres of services, jobs, and public transport in their catchment micro-region. Rural small towns are very small towns with 2,000–4,999 inhabitants. The outer suburbs have a predominance of new suburban houses and residents immigrated from the nearby towns (residential suburbanization has been taking place here since approximately 1998). Czech pupils use regular public transport to get to school, this is also used by the majority of people commuting to towns for work. The interface between rural semi-peripheral and peripheral areas is given in the paper by a 30-minute isochron when commuting to the town by public transport (see Kubeš and Chvojková, 2020). This interface is suitable for most of the territory of Bohemia, not so much for Moravia with larger municipalities and more intensive public transport (Vaishar and Šťastná, 2021).

The analysis of the article is based mainly on information from interviews with school headmasters and mayors of relevant municipalities. The numbers of pupils, classrooms and teachers are based on annual school reports and school inspection reports. The scoring condition of the school building and equipment of the school campus was done by the author of the paper. Only information that could be quantified could be included in the indicators in the tables.

Table 1 compares the size characteristics of the types of schools in terms of the number of pupils, teachers, occupied classrooms and the number of pupils per occupied classroom. Parents of pupils from poor backgrounds (see the relevant row of the table) cannot afford to pay for school lunches, after-school clubs, and trips. Pupils with learning difficulties were indicated by educational psychologists. “Gymnázia”

are described above. A qualified teacher must have a university pedagogical master's degree. A teacher's assistant helps pupils with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, or even mild mental disabilities.

Indicators of community functions of schools follow (Table 2). The indicator of cultural events for residents outside the school shows the variety of involvement of pupils and teachers in creating a culture for the local community outside the school campus. These are mainly school performances on church and public holidays, municipality celebrations, for seniors and others. In the next row, school events for residents at the school are evaluated. These are thematic discussions, adult education, creative workshops, school celebrations open to the residents, and others. Use of the school by the local associations and residents follows – use of classrooms, gym, and outdoor playgrounds during non-teaching hours and cooking school lunches for the residents. The connection between kindergarten and school is useful for children, their parents and teachers. The presence of pupils' parents at regular meetings with teachers in school also shows the bond between school and parents. The last row of the table evaluates the frequency (none, occasional, frequent) and variety (in the vicinity of the school, in the surrounding nature, organizing excursions to the local establishments, trips to the immediate surroundings and to greater distance) of outdoor education. This education promotes a relationship with the local environment and landscape.

The support for the school from the municipality representatives and local community is evaluated in Table 3. First, the physical condition of the exterior and interior of the school building was assessed by the author of the paper. It is the result of the municipality's care for the school, as the municipality owns and takes care of it. Also, the facilities of the school campus (school club, kitchen, dining room, gym, outdoor sports field, computer classroom, another specialist classroom, and also interactive whiteboards, computers and data projectors in the classrooms) are largely the result of the efforts of the municipality representatives. The next two rows of the table compare the values of two indicators of financing the school operation by the municipality – assessment by the headmaster and annual school expenses in the municipal budget per pupil. Another table row compares offering municipal flats to teachers. The involvement of local associations (cultural, sport, firefighting, hunting-protective and fishing) in school education also supports the school and school–community relationships.

If the indicators are based on scoring, then they take on 0–10 points. In Table 2, the maximum number of points was awarded to the school that organized 10 and more types of cultural events for residents outside the school and 5 and more inside the school (per year). The same was the case when local associations and the public could use up to 5 types of facilities in the school building and campus and when the school often and variedly used outdoor teaching. Within Table 3, the very good condition of the school building (cladding, roof, windows, inside classrooms and other inner spaces) was awarded 10 points, as well as the complete equipment of the school and campus (equipment see above), and also the involvement of at least 5 of the above-aforementioned associations in school education. The headmasters' statement about satisfaction with the financing of the school by the municipality was also transformed into a scale of 0–10 points. Finally, in the last row of Table 2 and Table 3, the average ranking of individual types of schools in the values of the table's indicators is evaluated. But it is a rather rough calculation.

5. Results

5.1 Size differences between types of schools

In the case study area, there are large and understandable differences in the number of pupils, teachers, and classrooms between complete and incomplete schools and between urban, small-town and rural schools – Table 1. In the case of incomplete schools, pupils, teachers and classrooms decrease with increasing distance from the town. This is similar in complete schools, but the decline is "disturbed" by the schools in rural small towns, which have a larger population base. Long-term depopulation of many rural areas until the end of the 1990s brought reduced numbers of pupils in rural schools and their classrooms. Incomplete schools in villages with composite classrooms have significantly fewer pupils in classrooms compared to complete schools in towns. The state standard for the minimum number of pupils

in a classroom is 10–13 pupils in incomplete schools (according to the number of classrooms). Some of these schools do not meet this. However, the small number of pupils per classroom, teacher and teaching assistant in rural schools is an advantage for education.

The proportion of pupils from a poor background increases towards schools in peripheral rural small towns and peripheral villages, where the socio-economic situation of young families tends to be worse. For these pupils and families, the presence of the school and its support from the municipality representatives are important. The higher proportion of pupils with learning difficulties in schools in villages, especially peripheral ones, is due to the higher representation of slightly mentally handicapped pupils, for whom commuting to special schools in towns is difficult to implement. In smaller rural schools, poor and disabled pupils have the most suitable school environment (similarly Bickel and Howley, 2000; Surface and Theobald, 2014). The differences in the continuation of pupils at "gymnázia" (grammar schools) are large. This is related to the different socio-economic status and professional aspirations of rural, suburban and urban pupils (and their parents) and to the different territorial availability of "gymnázia" for these pupils. The large representation of unqualified teachers in incomplete schools in peripheral villages (more than 30%) is a major problem (similarly Popa and Acedo, 2006; Lind and Stjernström, 2015) that must be solved by the municipality representatives (e.g., by allocating apartments to young qualified teachers), but mainly by the state or region (Fowles et al., 2014; e.g., by increasing salaries for qualified rural teachers). Fortunately, there are enough teaching assistants in rural schools (the last row of the table). They serve numerous slightly mentally and other handicapped pupils there.

Tab 1. Size characteristics of the types of schools (2022). Source: Interviewing school headmasters and municipality mayors, annual school reports, school inspection reports and own survey of schools

Indicator	**Indicator values[1]**								
	Complete schools					Incomplete schools			All schools
	Schools in towns	Schools in semi-peripheral rural small towns	Schools in semi-peripheral villages	Schools in peripheral rural small towns	Schools in peripheral villages	Schools in outer suburbs	Schools in semi-peripheral villages	Schools in peripheral villages	
Number of pupils	447	358	160	322	183	68	29	26	189
Number of teachers[2]	31.8	25.2	13.3	26.5	15.8	5.5	3.2	2.9	14.4
Number of occupied classrooms[3]	20.4	18.8	9.1	15.5	10.3	4.5	2.3	2.1	9.8
Number of pupils per occupied classroom	21.9	19.0	17.6	20.7	17.7	15.0	12.4	12.1	19.3
Pupils from poor background in %	3.6	9.2	9.4	12.5	12.3	3.4	11.3	26.3	11.3
Pupils with learning difficulties in %	9.4	12.3	13.7	11.0	15.8	3.0	15.8	22.1	14.1
Pupils admitted to "gymnázia" in %[4]	26.4	10.7	13.4	9.9	7.9	21.7	4.6	3.9	12.1
Qualified teachers in %[2]	96.1	92.3	88.3	81.5	84.5	100.0	92.4	68.9	88.1
Number of pupils per teaching assistant	78.0	48.3	45.2	50.9	31.2	44.0	21.2	27.5	44.5

Notes: [1]Average indicator values. [2]Including the headmaster. [3]Occupied classrooms do not include occasionally occupied specialized classrooms. [4]The description of Czech "gymnázia" is in the text.

5.2 Community functions of schools

Cultural events for residents outside the school in the form of singing, musical, dancing, theatrical, and other performances by school pupils and teachers for the residents are an important and popular part of community life, especially in rural areas and rural small towns of the case study area – Table 2, see also Trnková (2009). The community function of schools can be significantly supported by school events for the residents inside the school. During the course of the year, however, only a few thematic discussions, creative workshops, and adult education intended for the residents took place in the surveyed schools – Table 2. In this respect, the community function of the examined schools is still weak. However, it should be noted that there are other institutions in towns that provide these activities. The use of school facilities (mainly gyms, outdoor playgrounds and classrooms) by the local associations and residents is higher, especially in complete schools in villages, which tend to be well equipped (similarly Miller, 1995). In addition, almost all schools provide cooking lunches for the residents, especially for seniors. It is especially important for villages where there is usually no service of this type.

Tab 2. Community functions of the types of schools (2022). Source: see Table 1

Indicator	**Indicator values[1]**								
	Complete schools					Incomplete schools			All schools
	Schools in towns	Schools in semi-peripheral rural small towns	Schools in semi-peripheral villages	Schools in peripheral rural small towns	Schools in peripheral villages	Schools in outer suburbs	Schools in semi-peripheral villages	Schools in peripheral villages	
Cultural events for residents outside the school – scoring[2,3]	3.3	6.0	6.2	6.0	6.3	5.0	7.4	7.3	6.0
School events for residents at school – scoring[2]	1.3	2.0	2.2	1.0	2.7	2.0	1.1	1.8	1.7
Use of school campus facilities by residents – scoring[2]	4.5	5.2	5.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	3.7	4.5	4.7
Connection of kinder-garten and school in %[4]	9.1	40.0	84.6	50.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	71.9
The presence of parents of pupils at meetings with teachers in %	61.4	73.0	74.8	62.5	73.3	80.0	85.8	73.8	74.0
Outdoor education of pupils – scoring[2]	4.9	5.6	6.6	6.0	6.3	4.0	6.2	8.0	6.1
Average order[5]	5.9	4.3	3.2	5.0	3.3	5.8	4.4	4.0	-

Notes: [1]Average indicator values. [2]Scoring in the interval 0–10 points, explanation in the Methodology. [3]Off the school campus. [4]Yes = 100%, no = 0%. [5]Average order of indicator values, lower values are more favourable.

In the case of schools in villages, the connection between kindergarten and school is almost one hundred percent – Table 2. Local children can be gradually educated there in a stable, safe, and familiar environment already from three years old (similarly Kannapel and DeYoung, 1999; Autti and Hyry-Beihammer, 2014). The presence of parents of pupils at regular meetings with teachers is also higher at schools in villages than at schools in towns. Moreover, in villages with a small population and area, local teachers and parents also meet on other occasions. Education in nature and the landscape outside

the school brings practical knowledge and experience to pupils; it also contributes to their identification with the locality and improves their health status (Boix-Tomàs et al., 2015; Barthes and Alpe, 2018). Incomplete schools in peripheral villages have the most outdoor education – Table 2. Complete rural schools in the semi-periphery and periphery have the greatest overall community function (last row in Table 2).

Only two incomplete suburban schools were defined in the case study area (Fig. 1). In connection with the arrival of suburbanites with children from towns to the suburbs in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of pupils, teachers and classes in suburban schools (Table 1). So far, their community functions are weak (Table 2) because the respective suburban communities have not yet fully developed. School clubs work well in them, looking after pupils waiting for their parents to return from work in the town (also Dyson, 2008). The so-called "green widows" (unemployed women taking care of children and family in the suburbs) use the premises of the suburban school to meet each other, exchange experiences and exercise.

5.3 Supports of schools by municipalities and communities

All mayors interviewed expressed the desire to keep their school and are trying to support it. This is also the reason that the physical condition of the school buildings is mostly good – Table 3.; only incomplete schools in semi-peripheral villages have mostly old and difficult-to-modernize school buildings (similarly Fereira, 2011). In the case of the "equipment of school campus", we can observe the justifiable different equipment of complete and small incomplete schools and a slight decrease in equipment towards the peripheries. Small incomplete schools that serve only primary education sometimes lack a gym, a quality outdoor sports ground, or a computer classroom. Headmasters mostly positively evaluated the financing of their schools from the municipality budget (see next table row). The exception is schools in not very wealthy rural small towns, where political representation often changes after elections, which affects the cooperation between the headmaster and the newly elected town representatives in school funding. Schools with a large number of pupils can benefit from economies of scale (Bard et al., 2006). This is primarily why there are such large differences in expenditure per school pupil in municipal budget between complete and incomplete schools, as well as between schools in towns and villages (Table 3). Nevertheless, mayors of municipalities with a small number of pupils in the school and classrooms said that they want to keep their schools even at this high price.

The offer of municipality flats to teachers can attract qualified young teachers and their families to the school and municipality (Lowe 2006). The values in Table 3 show a greater supply of municipality flats where it is most needed – in complete schools in peripheral villages with a need for subject-specific teachers. The involvement of local associations and groups (e.g., sports, culture, firefighting, hunting, …) and their members and other residents in school education enriches education and cooperation within the local community (Autti and Bæck, 2021), and it brings economic savings. The lowest is in towns, while the highest is in complete schools in peripheral villages. These are larger villages in which more associations are located. The summary assessment of school supports from municipalities and communities in the last row of the table again highlights complete rural schools in semi-peripheral and peripheral villages.

Tab 3. Supports of schools by municipalities and communities according to types of schools (2022). Source: see Table 1

Indicator	Indicator values[1]								
	Complete schools					Incomplete schools			All schools
	Schools in towns	Schools in semi-peripheral rural small towns	Schools in semi-peripheral villages	Schools in peripheral rural small towns	Schools in peripheral villages	Schools in outer suburbs	Schools in semi-peripheral villages	Schools in peripheral villages	
Condition of the school building – scoring[2,3]	8.3	7.4	8.4	7.0	8.0	7.0	4.7	7.6	7.2
Equipment of school campus – scoring[2,3]	8.0	6.6	6.7	8.0	6.2	4.0	3.8	3.4	5.7
Financing of school by municipality (headmaster's view) – scoring[2]	6.1	4.5	6.3	3.8	5.0	7.5	6.2	6.9	6.0
Expenses for school in municipal budget per pupil in CZK[4]	14,936	16,723	21,914	20,374	18,498	35,029	47,642	45,513	29,182
Offering municipality flats to teachers in %[5,6]	36.4	20.0	40.0	50.0	83.3	0.0	38.4	25.0	38.6
Involvement of local associations in school education – scoring[2]	2.7	4.4	4.8	4.0	5.7	4.0	4.0	3.8	4.1
Average order[7]	4.9	5.5	2.7	4.7	3.7	4.9	4.8	4.8	-

Notes: [1]Average indicator values. [2]Scoring in the interval 0–10 points, explanation in the Methodology. [3]Rated by the author of the paper. [4]For school and kindergarten. [5]"Yes" = 100%, "no" = 0%. [6]Including the school headmasters. [7]Average order of indicator values, lower values are more favourable.

6. Discussion

In the case study area, the long-term depopulation of rural semi-peripheral and also to some extent, peripheral municipalities has stopped in recent years. It was caused by weak counter-urbanization and amenity migration and the development of tourism in mountain municipalities (Furlong, 2006), and also a slight increase in the birth rate – Edelmanová (2019) or Kubeš and Chvojková (2020). Political and economic changes in Czechia after 1989, relatively good functioning of rural municipalities after 2000 and the current stabilization of the rural population supported the development of social capital in rural communities, the care of local rural schools by representatives of municipalities and the development of community functions of these schools in the case study area. However, 23% of the schools in the case study area still do not fully meet the state standards for the minimum number of pupils in classrooms, and teachers' salaries at these schools therefore have to be partially covered by the municipality.

Very important are those rural headmasters and teachers who at the same time work in the management or council of the municipality and participate in the activities of local associations (Preston and Barnes 2017; Kramer, 2019; Kłoczko-Gajewska, 2020). However, some of the headmasters and mayors interviewed complained about “the low activity of some teachers in this work” resulting from certain fatigue, loss of interest in local community events, family responsibilities, or long commutes (often from towns), especially in recent years affected by Covid19 and the economic crisis. Some of the headmasters stated that "the financial evaluation of rural headmasters and teachers should also include their work for the municipality and community” (see also Kannapel and DeYoung, 1999; Wilson, 2009 and Trnková,

2009). The majority of headmasters in the rural peripheries answered that "state and regional programs aimed at better-equipping schools and recruiting and retaining quality teachers should be announced for rural peripheral areas" (similarly Fowles et al., 2014 or Lind and Stjernström, 2015). Respondents and Bard et al. (2006), Corbett and Tinkham (2014) and Lehtonen (2021) were also in favour of expanding the community functions of schools.

In the case study area, complete rural schools in the peripheries and semi-peripheries have the greatest community functions. Significantly fewer people live in rural municipalities and villages than in towns, so the numerous community functions and activities of their schools affect the majority of their residents. Connecting the school with the municipality representatives and the local community is a necessity in rural areas due to limited human, budgetary, and other resources. But, indeed, a fully functional rural community school as defined by Miller (1995), Solstad (1997), or Samberg and Sheeran (2000) was not found in the case study area. Such schools do not yet have the tradition, conditions, and state or regional support there.

All the interviewed mayors wanted the school to remain in the municipality and tried to support it. However, some tension in relations between the mayor and the headmaster was noted in 16% of schools (in 11% of rural schools). These tensions are then negatively reflected in the support of the school by the municipality representatives and in mutual cooperation. But the relevant headmasters said that "these problems may disappear with the arrival of a new mayor". Representatives of local associations, churches, political and informal groups and local entrepreneurs, as well as other educated, experienced, and active people from the local community, are important for supporting a school. The use of this potential within the school is primarily a matter for headmasters.

7. Conclusion

The geographic typology of schools used in the paper helped to explain the differences in community functions of schools and municipality (community) – school relations in the case study area. The differences between the types of schools examined in the number of pupils, teachers, classrooms and the proportion of pupils per classroom are large (Table 1). The low economic efficiency of small rural schools caused by the small number of pupils can be saturated to some extent by the economic and organizational help from the municipality and the community and by the high community activity of these schools.

Complete schools in peripheral and semi-peripheral villages have the greatest community function (Table 2, compared with the input research assumption of the paper). Moreover, they are mostly strongly supported by relevant rural municipality representatives and communities (Table 3). The rural schools in the case study area can mostly be characterized as community-active (see typology in Solstad, 1997). They mainly participate in cultural performances for residents and enable associations and residents of the municipality to use school facilities. A fully functional rural community school, as defined for example by Miller (1995), Solstad (1997) or Samberg and Sheeran (2000), in post-socialist countries, for example, Supule (2019), was not found. Such schools do not yet have the tradition, conditions, and state or regional support in the case study area. In any case, the community functions of rural schools are of considerable importance for the respective rural communities in the case study area, and these schools would have difficulty functioning without the help of the respective rural municipalities. Compared to complete rural schools, small incomplete rural schools are somewhat more active in holding cultural events outside school, and those in the periphery also in outdoor teaching, but due to their smaller equipment, they cannot provide such a diverse use of their facilities for the local public.

Most rural small towns in the case study area experienced a deterioration in their socio-economic characteristics as their small and uncompetitive originally socialist industrial plants mostly disappeared. This deterioration, and the certain political instability of these towns, then enter into the relations between school – municipality representatives – local community. Somewhat larger towns are home to more municipal and private cultural, educational, entertainment, and other institutions and facilities, so the community function of urban schools is not so strong and necessary. Schools in towns are large,

financially well supported, renovated, well equipped and have qualified teachers. Due to the small number of suburban schools in the case study area, the results obtained for them cannot be fully generalized.

Rural depopulation in the case study area has stopped in recent years, especially in rural semi-peripheries. All schools in Czechia gained considerable autonomy in the post-socialist era, but also a lot of work with administration and funding. Teacher salaries in Czechia have been rising in recent years and have begun to depend on the hours taught, rather than on the number of pupils in the classrooms. For rural municipalities, the preservation and development of their schools has become a matter of prestige. These trends are now positively influencing the functioning and filling of rural schools with pupils as well as relations between schools and representatives of the respective municipalities and communities.

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