



The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rirr20>

Sustainability and the development trends of rural retail business in the Czech Republic

Tomáš Sadílek, Hana Kunešová & Petr Cimler

To cite this article: Tomáš Sadílek, Hana Kunešová & Petr Cimler (2023) Sustainability and the development trends of rural retail business in the Czech Republic, The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research, 33:4, 396-414, DOI: [10.1080/09593969.2023.2235100](https://doi.org/10.1080/09593969.2023.2235100)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593969.2023.2235100>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 17 Jul 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 78



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Sustainability and the development trends of rural retail business in the Czech Republic

Tomáš Sadílek , Hana Kunešová  and Petr Cimler

Department of Marketing, Trade and Services, University of West Bohemia, Plzeň, Czechia

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to identify the factors that influence the sustainability of rural grocery stores and to assess the effects of the ongoing consolidation and spatial concentration in rural grocery stores on the accessibility of rural grocery stores in the Czech Republic. In this paper, we start by presenting the continued decline of retail grocery stores in rural areas of the Czech Republic. The decline is seen to be especially severe in villages with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. By examining official statistics from the Czech Republic and research papers from selected European countries, we see how the rural retail sector is monitored. We demonstrate the very good accessibility of grocery stores for residents of the entire Czech Republic, including residents of small villages. Differences in the external and internal environment of rural grocery stores were identified. Consequently, we also present the preliminary findings of in-depth interviews with rural grocery storekeepers in Southwestern Bohemia. The article ends with a summary of the current situation in rural retail. In policy terms, the research shows that more work needs to be done to identify, quantify, and then promote the advantages of rural retail. External factors influencing rural retail business are the high level of competition, grant programs for rural grocery stores, the relatively short distances consumers have to travel by car or public transportation to modern retail facilities with a wider assortment, better prices, and more attractive shopping space in modern retail facilities. Internal factors that negatively affect a rural retail business are staff with inadequate qualifications and an approach that is not focused on the consumer and his needs, and opening hours and a product range that does not reflect consumer requirements. The contribution of this paper is focused on the sustainability of entrepreneurialism in rural retail.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 July 2022
Accepted 5 July 2023

KEYWORDS

Czech Republic; retail; rural retail; grocery stores; sustainability

Introduction

Since the start of the 1990s, the retail sector in the Czech Republic has undergone fundamental changes in ownership forms, the creation of new business entities and the arrival of foreign investors were accompanied by enormous growth in sales areas, the modernisation of the retail network and the introduction of

CONTACT Tomáš Sadílek  sadilekt@kmo.zcu.cz

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

modern technologies. However, the expansion of retail chains and their activities was accompanied by the disappearance of inefficient stores in small villages. In the 1990s, commercial companies began to close their stores in small rural villages, and this process also affected the traditional stores of the consumer cooperative (Jednota) (Szczyrba, Fiedor, and Kunc 2013). According to the results of research by the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Bernard et al. 2020), the number of small villages with grocery stores underwent significant development from the mid-1990s, which manifested itself in a decline in grocery stores in villages of up to 800 inhabitants, whereby the biggest decline affected the smallest villages, with less than 200 inhabitants. While in 1994 80% of villages with less than 200 inhabitants had a grocery store, by 2019 it was only around 30%. Almost all villages with 200 to 400 inhabitants had a grocery store, in 2019 this was only approximately 70%. The fastest decline in the share of villages with a grocery store took place in the second half of the 1990s, whereby in the case of the smallest villages, this share fell by 16% in five years. From 1999 to 2009, the decline continued by a further 24%. In the last decade (2010–2020), the decline slowed significantly and in the case of villages with more than 400 inhabitants, it even practically stopped.

Reducing the number of grocery stores in small villages has been a frequently discussed issue in the Czech Republic in recent years. The government of the Czech Republic (2017) in its policy report entitled Rural Service Support states that stores in small villages in the Czech Republic do not just supply everyday consumer goods; they also affect the quality of life in the municipality and fulfil an important social function because they serve as an important communication point, similar to the local pub.

To meet the changing environment in rural retail, research is needed on the current situation in the Czech Republic. A limited number of studies show the entrepreneurial conditions for rural retailers (the main possibilities and obstacles, the critical factors for maintaining a rural retail business), as well as consumer perceptions and attitudes towards rural retail. In this paper, the authors investigate what tools can support the sustainability of rural retail (by supporting programs selected by national or local governments) and its efficiency (by offering additional services). The authors would like to prove that the situation in the Czech Republic is not as serious as the mass media shows, and there exist actions that may be approved in rural retail and can react to the current situation.

Given the gap in the literature on rural retail in the Czech Republic, this article attempts to (1) identify factors influencing the sustainability of rural grocery stores and (2) assess the effects of ongoing consolidation and spatial concentration in rural grocery stores and (3) on the accessibility of rural grocery stores in the Czech Republic.

The rest of the study is structured into the following chapters: Literature Review, Materials and methods, Results and Conclusions. The contribution of this paper is focused on the sustainability of entrepreneurialism in rural Czech retail and makes recommendations for other European countries. The study takes a new perspective on the theory of rural retail business in Central Europe and identifies the most significant external and internal factors that influence them.

Literature review

Juergens (2020) defines a 'village grocery store' as a retail format in rural areas that should safeguard local food supplies but is fighting for survival after years of intense commercial pressure arising from the competition with chains of discounters and supermarkets. This definition describes the situation in which rural grocery stores are located in the Czech Republic and other European countries. Findlay and Sparks (2008) state that new retail locations and formats and changing consumer capabilities and behaviours have encouraged 'out shopping' from rural to urban areas. Rural areas have been suffering from a decline in the provision of services, including retailing. The research by Twardzik and Heffner (2019) confirms the hypothesis that the modern retail chain eliminates the activities of traditional forms of retail trade in small towns and rural areas in Poland. The number of stores is regularly decreasing in Poland; this mainly concerns small-scale, small-scale grocery stores (25% over the last five years). According to Juergens (2020), the number of food retail companies has declined by about 75% in 50 years (1966–2013) in Germany. Neumeier and Kokorsch (2021) say that the number of grocery stores has been in a continuous decline in Germany since 1990, particularly in rural areas.

The same process has also been going on in the Czech Republic since the 1990s. At the same time, the question arises whether to strive to maintain grocery stores in small rural villages in a situation where the consumer has access to modern retail formats that offer them a much wider assortment and more favourable prices than stores in small communities. Many authors have dealt with the same question. Peiffer-Smadja and Torre (2018) conclude that small retail units are essential for suburban and rural villages because of their attractiveness and quality of life. The research by Schiffling, Karamperidis, and Nelson (2015) found that small stores are vital for communities, particularly for elderly residents. Their close connection with the community enables store owners to respond flexibly to demand, but elevated transport costs and the lack of economies of scale lead to high prices. The conclusion of the survey by Baron et al. (2001) confirms that retail grocery stores in rural villages are central to social and community activities.

According to Coca-Stefaniak et al. (2005), many voices point out that, for deprived communities, a small grocery store can be a vital resource. Gieling, Haartsen, and Vermeij (2019) conclude that in rural areas in the Netherlands, both near and away from cities, supermarkets and cafés can well be important for the social attachment of residents. They found a small but significant positive relationship between supermarkets and cafes and the social place attachment of rural residents. According to Gieling, Haartsen, and Vermeij (2019), the accessibility of a village supermarket can still be considered an important venue in the lives of less mobile, older and disabled residents. These groups of residents often prefer to do their grocery shopping during the day, which can often lead to spontaneous meetings with fellow residents. The importance of local rural grocery stores for retired consumers and particularly old consumers (75 plus) supports Juergens' research (Juergens 2020), which says that the effects of ageing in place and the growth of single-person households are increasing the importance of discussions about local shopping facilities in rural areas, not only in Germany. Christiaanse and Haartsen (2017) state that from a policy perspective, it is worth considering the accessibility of facilities in rural areas for the elderly and less mobile residents, even in a country with a high density of retail services as the Netherlands.

According to research by Gieling, Haartsen, and Vermeij (2019), the accessibility of a village store also affects the social place attachment of residents with a short period of residency. Village stores and also cafés can play an important role in the integration of socially oriented newcomers into existing rural communities. In contrast to common expectations, community centres, primary schools and sports facilities were not shown to improve the attachment to social places. Research by Scarpello et al. (2009) confirmed that village grocery stores were seen as important for community identity ('rural idyll'), as well as for providing access to food and services.

However, the community significantly affects the functioning of the village grocery store. Village stores are privately owned facilities and only remain available if economically viable. According to Paddison and Calderwood (2007), the survival of the village grocery store is, in some cases, dependent on the community becoming directly involved in its functioning. The interest and participation of the community can be instrumental in the development and mechanism for the differentiation and adaptation of rural grocery stores. According to Gieling, Haartsen, and Vermeij (2019), high levels of social place attachment can cause village stores to stay in business. According to Rybaczevska and Sparks (2020), to make village grocery stores function on the market, customers must be convinced to shop there. Their attitude could be more positive if they get easy access to trustworthy information on the stores' involvement in the local community. Research by Landry, Arnold, and Stark (2005) concludes that the more the retailer is seen as being a part of the community, the more lenient the consumer is in calculating the utilitarian value of the products offered by the retailer, and the more likely they are to allow for situations involving higher prices and interaction costs with the retailer. According to Coca-Stefaniak et al. (2005), small independent retailers play an important role in the resident community by providing an economic 'glue' for residents. Small grocery stores can also be a seedbed for entrepreneurs due to low entry barriers and the prevalence of self-employment in this sector. Rybaczevska and Sparks (2020) investigate the social function of rural grocery stores, except for the economic function. Village locally-owned stores can be the only store available in the area, enabling (emergency) supply, they foster a sense of community and security, reducing isolation, and supporting the independence of residents, this is significant mostly for the less-mobile or immobile consumers.

When assessing the importance of the store for a small municipality, the perspective of employment is also important; both direct, in connection with the store, and indirect, where small stores in rural villages sell food from the given region and local agricultural products. Christiaanse and Haartsen (2017) say that in different contexts, village stores may have a mix of functional, social, economic, symbolic or emotional meanings for residents. In rural villages, grocery stores are likely to be part of a shared identity; there may be a prevailing belief among village residents that a village should have a grocery store. This is the symbolic meaning of the village store. Residents of the village may also have a personal attachment to the grocery store, which indicates the emotional function of the store.

The importance of grocery stores in small villages and their communities is the reason for finding suitable solutions to keep stores in small villages, even if their operation is at the limit of viability.

Twenty years ago, Byrom, Medway, and Warnaby (2001) already identified strategies that stores in small villages can use, for example, symbol group membership, mobile

stores, and expanding rural retail operations through e-Commerce and by marketing products that draw heavily on the specifics of the locality. According to Schiffing, Karamperidis, and Nelson (2015), rural grocery stores remain competitive by offering additional services to the community, for example, they frequently incorporate the post office. According to Juergens (2020), rural grocery stores can live thanks to personalised communication through email newsletters, subscription systems, and doorstep delivery services. A basic range of food is not sufficient for rural grocery stores to survive in competition with discounters and supermarkets. Rural grocery stores must therefore occupy distinctive niches in terms of product range, quality standards, designations of origin, and services. Rural grocery stores can also gain a competitive advantage through the personal touch of the retailer and staff. Kollárová and Ungerová (2019) recommend that rural grocery stores also engage in purchasing alliances, cooperate with local suppliers, engage in short courteous conversations with customers, and offer additional services such as parking places, payment by card, and others.

Coca-Stefaniak et al. (2005) suggest that research on how to strengthen rural grocery stores' sustainability may usefully begin to develop a more Eurocentric approach ensuring that the EU-wide small store sector learns from transnational experiences.

Rural grocery stores and local governments, when implementing activities to increase the efficiency and sustainability of stores in small villages, can be inspired by measures that have been proven in selected regions of the European Union. It currently represents a platform for the exchange of positive experiences on how to increase the efficiency and sustainability of village grocery stores. The Rural Retail Save program (abbreviated SARURE), was implemented from June 2018 to November 2022. SARURE was an inter-regional cooperation project tasked with improving policies aimed at boosting SME competitiveness. The project partners were from Spain, Germany, Greece, Finland, Poland, Sweden, and Ireland. The SARURE partnership intended to build on the models essayed during the past decade, but also on the possibilities that are opening for retail SMEs today (SARURE 2021b). For stores in small villages in the Czech Republic and public administration, examples of good practices from rural villages in Sweden, Finland, and Spain can be beneficial (SARURE 2021a). In Söderhamn (Sweden), for example, rural stores can receive financial aid for the delivery of food to households, enabling them to expand their consumer base. The grant is provided by the municipality and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, where 50 % is paid by every participant (SARURE 2021a). The business owner receives 20 Euros per household a week for the home delivery service. In the locality of Aragon (Spain), consumers can receive a subsidy for purchases at the local store (SARURE 2021a). This initiative works through a website where consumers choose a local business and then buy a voucher with a 20% discount. Bonuses are aimed at anyone who wants to support local trade and professional services, and this also means a small amount of financial aid to maintain their purchasing power.

The public administration in Finland, Sweden, and Spain financially supports the multiservice concept. The main objective is to improve rural retail activity with complementary services: a store with basic consumer goods, home delivery, coffee and restaurant as a meeting place, Internet (WiFi), a library, a post office, and others. The diversity of income grows, and consumers become more tied to the store. Stores can be appointed Service Points (e.g. in Swedish villages). They receive recompense for performing several services on behalf of the municipality. These services are agreed upon with the

municipality. The stores function as a hub for the local community and receive an amount that depends on the number of services provided.

Small stores also work together to participate in e-commerce. Small stores in Aragon (Spain) began to group into an e-commerce platform in which every store has its own space, but they share services such as training, updating of new technologies, and promotion. The e-Commerce platform has the support of the Government of Aragon, through current calls for public aid (SARURE 2021a).

Given the literature review, we formulate the following three research questions.

RQ 1: What is the current situation with the accessibility of grocery stores for residents of rural villages in the Czech Republic?

RQ 2: What are the external and internal factors that influence the sustainability of rural grocery stores?

RQ 3: What recommendations may improve the sustainability of grocery stores in rural villages of the Czech Republic?

Accessibility of grocery stores in the Czech Republic

The structure of the Czech retail market and its influence on the accessibility of grocery shopping

The retail network in the Czech Republic, which largely satisfies consumers when shopping for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), is currently comprised primarily of stores operated by multinational retail chains, which began to appear on the Czech market in the 1990s and thereby contributed to the relatively rapid rise in the standard of the Czech consumer's shopping conditions to the normal Western European level.

In the Czech Republic in 2022, there are 1,600 hypermarkets, supermarkets, and discount stores that represent international retail chains (GfK Czech/Consumer Panels and Services 2021). Traditional retail is represented by thousands of small retail stores that operate particularly in rural areas. A dominant shopping place for almost 50% of Czech consumers was gradually gained by hypermarkets (Globus, Tesco, Ahold, Kaufland). The other biggest groups are discount stores (Lidl, Penny) and supermarkets (Ahold, Billa, Coop) that are located in all Czech cities with 5,000 or more inhabitants (GfK 2021).

Retail catchment

The Czech Republic's equipment with modern large-format formats of multinational chains focused primarily on FMCG is at a high level, and thus creates very favourable purchasing conditions for customers, even for customers in rural areas. Not only due to the small average distance of settlements but also due to the network of roads and good transportation systems. The number of modern formats and their relatively uniform distribution throughout the Czech Republic (an area of 78,865 km²) ensures their above-

standard retail catchment. According to Cimler (2012), the proximity coefficient is a measure of what retail catchment is covered by a store from a specific retail chain (hypermarkets, supermarkets, discount stores) per selected region. Cimler (2012) applied the proximity coefficient for the evaluation of the local distribution of retail catchment in the Czech Republic. The calculation is based on a square (Formula 1) or a circle (Formula 2).

$$r = \frac{\sqrt{\text{average area}}}{2} \quad (1)$$

$$r = \frac{\sqrt{\text{average area}}}{\pi} \quad (2)$$

If we choose the proximity coefficient to express catchment, then the Czech consumer (including consumers from rural villages) has one of the three modern formats available within approximately 3.5 km, whereby they have a hypermarket within approximately 8 km, a supermarket within 6 km and a discount store within approximately 5 km. Of course, there are territorial differences and disadvantaged areas; nevertheless, the hypermarket, for example, often belongs among the most popular with rural consumers from the smallest villages, located within a 20-minute drive of a hypermarket on the outskirts of a bigger city. Highway network, according to GfK (2021), even in 2011 almost 90% of Czech consumers were within 20 minute drive of a hypermarket. Given the increase in the number of hypermarkets, especially Kaufland (approximately one-third since 2011), a rise in this share of Czech consumers can also be expected.

The average road network catchment of large-format FMCG-oriented formats operated by multinational chains in the Czech Republic is approximately 3.5–4 km. For discount stores (Lidl, Penny Market, and Norma), it is about 5 to 6 km, for supermarkets (Ahold, Tesco, Billa), it is 6 to 7 km, for hypermarkets (Kaufland, Ahold, Tesco, Globus), it is about 8 to 9 km. The detailed information is presented in Table 1. The calculation was performed experimentally according to two formulas differing in construction (derivation) of the scope of the store and, respectively (action radius), stores from the area of the territory belonging to the store.

Table 1. Presence of multinational retail chains formats in the Czech Republic.

	Area per store in km ²	Average availability ($r = \frac{\sqrt{\text{average area}}}{2}$)	Average availability ($r = \frac{\sqrt{\text{average area}}}{\pi}$)
Lidl	300	8.7	9.8
Penny Market	202	7	8
Norma	1753	21	23.6
<i>All food discounts</i>	113	5	6
Ahold Supermarket	331	9	10
Tesco Supermarket	1384	18.5	21
Billa	331	9	10
<i>All supermarkets</i>	148	6	7
Kaufland	589	12	13.7
Ahold Hypermarket	886	15	17
Tesco Hypermarket	886	15	17
Globus	5258	36	41
<i>All hypermarkets</i>	241	8	9
All formats in total	5.65	3.5	4

Source: own elaboration.

The results correspond to the nature of the settlement, for example, from 1 km to the supermarket in Prague to about 10 km in the southern Bohemian region with predominant rural development and several important settlement centres serving rural areas in their hinterland. Due to the extent to which the shopping area of interest exceeds the administrative boundaries of the district for all the formats mentioned, the average accessibility for individual regions of the Czech Republic (NUTS 3 level) was determined, with a worse catchment (above average values). However, in the near foothills, within acceptable reachability for the inhabitants of mountain areas, there are multinational chains with a sufficient number and capacity of stores. The results of the calculations of the proximity coefficient by region are presented in Table 2.

The density of settlement units (cities) district (with a population of 5,000 to tens or hundreds of thousands of inhabitants) or their even distribution varies on the territory of the state. This creates economic preconditions for the effective operation of large formats in these localities (sufficient demand concentration) and preconditions for convenient/acceptable catchment (road network catchment) in the territory. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the mobile or motorized customer in the Czech Republic has many hypermarkets and supermarkets within acceptable reach in most locations. A significant number of other smaller stores – grocery stores, smaller supermarkets and mixed stores with self-service and counter sales thicken the retail network to such an extent that only a negligible number of locations in the Czech Republic is not immediately served by a store with a reasonable supply of basic goods.

Table 2. Presence of multinational retail chains formats in the Czech Republic.

Region (NUTS 3)	Average availability by Formula 1				Average availability by Formula 2			
	Hyper-markets	Super-markets	Discount stores	Average availability (km)	Hyper-markets	Super-markets	Discount stores	Average availability (km)
Prague	2.1	1.0	1.1	0.7	2.4	1.1	1.2	0.8
South Bohemian region	11.5	9.6	7.0	2.8	13.0	1.9	7.8	5.7
South Moravian region	7.6	4.1	3.8	3.1	8.6	5.8	6.3	3.8
Karlovy Vary region	7.4	4.2	3.2	2.8	8.4	9.0	6.0	4.3
Vysočina region	1.0	3.8	3.0	2.7	11.3	9.7	8.4	5.5
Hradec Králové region	7.9	3.4	3.1	2.5	8.9	1.1	5.7	4.4
Liberec region	8.5	3.6	3.6	2.8	9.6	8.2	5.2	4.0
Moravia-Silesian region	5.7	3.8	3.2	2.8	6.4	6.7	5.4	3.5
Olomouc region	7.6	4.2	3.6	3.1	8.5	7.1	7.1	4.3
Pardubice region	8.2	3.6	3.2	2.7	9.2	8.3	5.9	4.3
Plzeň region	12.1	3.4	3.0	2.5	13.6	1.0	7.3	5.4
Central Bohemian region	8.7	3.3	3.4	2.6	9.9	7.1	5.8	4.1
Ústí nad Labem region	6.5	3.5	3.2	2.7	7.3	6.7	5.0	3.5
Zlín region	7.4	5.4	5.7	3.5	8.4	6.1	6.5	3.9
Total	7.8	6.0	5.2	3.5	8.8	6.8	5.8	4.0

Source: own elaboration.

According to the results of the research by Bernard et al. (2020), the distance from a grocery store for the inhabitants of small villages in the Czech Republic is currently not long. The vast majority of the population of the Czech Republic lives within 2 km of the nearest grocery store (95% within 2.3 km). Less than 0.5% of the population lives more than 5 km away, and only a few settlements and several hundred persons are more than 10 km away (Bernard et al. 2020). However, at the same time, the data show that part of the population does not have a grocery store within walking distance and is dependent on private or public transport when shopping for groceries. This fact is a problem, particularly for the older and immobile inhabitants of small villages, for whom the option of simple grocery shopping near their homes is key.

Czech rural retail and its support

Operation of rural grocery stores

The main reason for maintaining grocery stores in small villages in the Czech Republic is not the poor accessibility of rural grocery stores, but the fact that the existence of stores in small villages in the Czech Republic is considered an important factor that affects the quality of life in the countryside. In the Rural Development Concept for the period 2021–2027, the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic (2019, p. 52) refers to the disappearance of the retail store in the smallest villages as a factor that reduces the quality of life of its inhabitants. The problem is the low profitability, or even loss, of operating a store in a small village with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. The situation is most critical in small villages with less than 500 inhabitants (Government of the Czech Republic 2017). In 2017, the Czech Republic's government approved the document 'Support for Rural Services' (Government of the Czech Republic 2017), which presented possible forms of support for stores in small villages. Direct aid to small villages through financial public aid was presented as a systemic and universal solution. In this context, the document pointed out that, as per Article 107 paragraph 1 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, aid provided in any form by the state or from state funds, which disrupts or could disrupt economic competition, is incompatible with the EU single market if it affects trade between the EU Member States. The provision of public aid is possible only if there is a legal title (exception) for its legal provision. Such exceptions may include, for example, the provision of aid in the form of aid de minimis (i.e. small-scale aid), regional aid, or compensation for public service following the relevant rules. The question discussed is the extent to which the operation of the only grocery store in a municipality satisfies the characteristics of a public service for whose functioning public administration should bear responsibility. In 2017, the Czech Traditional Trade Association and town and municipal representatives prepared a draft of the principles of a subsidy title to ensure the operation of grocery stores in small villages as a public service. Assuming that the operator of a store in a small municipality offers this service under appropriate operating conditions and to a respectable extent, fulfils their tax obligations and pays social and health insurance, it is not possible, apart from some exceptions, to

ensure a profit. In these cases, the provision of grocery services in villages with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants can be described as a public service that would be entitled to public aid. Since 2018, some regions of the Czech Republic (for example, the Plzeň and Karlovy Vary regions) have been announcing annual subsidy programs to support stores in small villages. The subsidy programs in various regions contain different conditions for obtaining the subsidy and stipulate various maximum financial aid amounts.

Support programmes for rural grocery stores

In June 2021, the Czech Republic Government announced an aid program for small rural stores for the period 2021–2025, Obchůdek 2021 + (Small Store 2021+, supported by the Ministry of Industry and Trade CZ 2021). This programme takes the form of a framework programme, which will function on the principle of invitations for regions, and will be financed from the state budget. The first invitation was announced by the Ministry of Industry and Trade CZ (2021), and the last invitation will be announced in 2025.

The Small Store 2021 + program aims to provide subsidies to regions to pay financial support, which the region will provide to a selected retail store. It is about maintaining the operation of a retail store in a municipality of up to 1,000 inhabitants, or in a municipality of up to 3,000 inhabitants whose local districts have less than 1,000 inhabitants. The programme focuses on subsidy aid for store operating costs. The maximum subsidy for a region is 2022 4,000,000 CZK per year (approximately 164,600 €). One store can receive a maximum of 130,000 CZK (approx. 5,300 €) in 2022.

A region that wants to receive a subsidy from the Small Store 2021 + program must announce a program to support the operation of rural stores, which will follow the objectives of the Small Store 2021+ programme and the invitation for the same. An applicant for financial support from the regional programme can be a business entity or municipality operating a retail store that deals primarily in foodstuffs, beverages, and tobacco products in non-specialized stores (as per CZ-NACE 47.11). The store must be open at least 5 days a week, all year, and must at least sell groceries. At the time of approval of the application, there must be no more than one store that falls under CZ-NACE 47.11 in one municipality or a district thereof. The aid that the region provides must be following the applicable public aid. In the first year of existence of the Small Store 2021 + program, more than 400 stores received a subsidy, the total amount of the subsidy provided was 1.16 million € (Ministry of Industry and Trade CZ 2022).

Financial subsidies from the above program can help cover part of the operating costs of some rural grocery stores, but will not increase their efficiency. Therefore, other ways must also be used to increase the efficiency of stores in small villages.

Activities in regions of the European Union that are involved in the aforementioned SARURE program can currently be an inspiration for stores in small villages in the Czech Republic. Similar activities, as reported by some regions included in the SARURE program, are being carried out in small villages in the Czech Republic. For example, in addition to buying goods for everyday use, the inhabitants of small villages can also use other selected services in local COOP stores: the Cashback service, electronic ordering of goods with collection in-store or a dispensing box,

Table 3. Sample structure.

Village	Name	Business type	Region	Inhabitants	Other competitors in the village	Interview length (minutes)
Krajníčko	Václav	Entrepreneur	Strakonice	100	No	25
Kváskovice	Jan	Entrepreneur	Strakonice	100	No	35
Bílsko	Jiří	Entrepreneur	Strakonice	200	Yes	40
Lažišťe	Petr	Entrepreneur	Prachatice	300	No	26
Bavorov – shop	Jaroslava	Entrepreneur	Strakonice	1000	Yes	33
Bavorov – CS	Pavčina	Consumer society	Strakonice	1000	Yes	65

Source: own elaboration.

postal services, and others. However, the range of complementary services in stores in small villages in the Czech Republic is smaller than in rural regions participating in the SARURE program. Online groceries deliveries are available, particularly in metropolitan areas. Online retailers just extend their services offered in the biggest cities of the Czech Republic to their suburbs. Many villages are located out of these suburbs, and no online retailer supplies their deliveries of fresh foodstuffs; therefore, there exists a space for the initiative of local grocery stores.

Materials and methods

To fulfil the objective of this article to identify the factors that influence the current situation and the sustainability of rural grocery stores, we applied semi-structured in-depth semi-structured interviews with six entrepreneurs in rural retail in the Strakonice region (Southwestern Bohemia). This research was deliberately designed to allow participants to reflect on their current situation and formulate the external and internal factors that influence their business. These interviews were carried out during the first half of 2021 in the following five villages (Bavorov, Bílsko, Krajníčko, Kváskovice, Lažišťe). The willingness and interest of the interviewees to participate in this participative research process were crucial to arranging the interview setting, where reflection, rather than mere information, was the explicit goal.

The data collection technique used semi-structured one-to-one interviews in an open-ended format. Beginning with general questions about the situation in their retail store business, the respondents were then confronted with more specific questions about their attitudes toward the external and internal factors that influence their business. All interviews were conducted in a personal way (face to face) and a pleasant and quiet environment was provided to create a relaxed environment that would facilitate the achievement of the participants' opinions about the subject. This also helped to keep the emotions of the respondents in check during the interview. The sample structure is presented in Table 3.

With the permission of the participants, audio recordings of all interviews were obtained, each interview lasting approximately between a half-hour and a full hour. The point of data saturation depended on the gathered information and was reached at a stage when no new insights were gained with further interviews (Willig 2001). The data, containing categories, concepts of different mindsets and similarities, were then transcribed verbatim for

subsequent in-depth analysis. Respondents were selected based on several criteria. The interviews were conducted according to a prepared procedure. To test the reliability of the answers, questions on every topic were posed several times, but always at a different time and using different words. The objective was to answer the questions posed above. Therefore, the interviews examined the motivation to launch and sustain the rural retail business.

Results

This section presents the answers to the following questions that were posed to the respondents. Questions related to why respondents decided to begin operating the store, if the reasons for establishing and operating the store are still applicable, what respondents enjoy the most about running a rural retail business, and what benefits they see. On the contrary, the other questions focused on what bothered the respondents the most, when they last have to resolve problems related to operating the store, and how they managed the crisis caused by Covid-19.

Why did you decide to start operating the store?

The motivation of self-employed people to establish a business is often entrepreneurial freedom and previous experience in the field, or it involves a long-term business operated within a family. This was confirmed in the villages of Krajnko, Bavorov, and Lait). In the villages, it shows that small stores have been a tradition and that the inhabitants have gotten used to them and still want them. In Blsko, the store had previously been operated by private entrepreneurs for a long time. However, due to low profitability, private entrepreneurs stopped this activity. Therefore, the Blsko council decided to survey legitimate voters. Answers were obtained from approximately 85% of the respondents, that is, around 120 responses, whereby 100 of the respondents requested that the store remains in the municipality.

Are the reasons for establishing and operating the store still applicable?

Most operators agree that if they lost their trade, they would not return to this type of business. From their perspective, the current conditions are not favourable. The operators unanimously state that the biggest problem is the need to always be present in the store, without the possibility of a replacement or going on leave. Employing more people is not desirable because under normal circumstances (before Covid-19), the store did not generate sufficient profit. In 2018, the store in Blsko was reopened under the management of the municipality. Therefore, we can state that the reasons for its operation are still applicable.

What do you like the most about running a rural retail business? (What benefits do you see?)

In most cases, the opportunity to work where you live is perceived as a benefit. Operators often live directly in the given municipality and, in some cases, in the

same building that the store is operated in. In the villages of Krajnko and Kváskovice, where a restaurant is operated together with the store, the store is used as a suitable source of food for the restaurant. Furthermore, operators often mention the possibility of social contact with residents as a very favourable benefit. Consumers often use shopping as an opportunity to socialize with assistants in the store, so that they can confide in them about their daily problems. For example, in the case of the store in Bavorov, the operator praises social interaction so much that, despite unfavourable business conditions, she has decided to continue operating the store, mainly because of personal relationships with consumers. The operator of the store in Lait expressed similar thoughts. In the case of stores staffed by employees of advanced age or in poor health, these assistants also perceive the opportunity to exercise regularly and maintain an active regimen as a benefit.

In the case of the consumer cooperative in Bavorov, there are completely different conditions, primarily in terms of financial, personnel, and system security. The consumer cooperative has already introduced registration software in its stores. Every grocery store has such a system, which enables it to easily monitor sales, stock, and the number of visitors, while also drawing attention to loss-making goods. First, it was necessary to train the store assistants, but now both staff and management praise this system. One of the most fundamental factors is the quality of the staff. Personnel changes often led to significantly better economic results for individual stores. The friendly and willing staff, which can work well with goods and consumers, was much more efficient in terms of sales. Here, too, the shop assistants perceive working where they live as a benefit. The opening hours have also been changed to better suit the needs and capabilities of the sales staff. Reconstruction of the premises is also proving to be a profitable investment. The more spacious and better illuminated and painted stores recorded better results after reconstruction.

What bothers you the most?

Operators perceive the inability to close the store as the biggest problem. As most of them do not have a replacement who would operate the store in their absence, any illness, accident, or leave is a fundamental problem. The worries of self-employed people, when they close the store, are related not only to lower sales but also to the possible long-term decline in the number of consumers.

Within the consumer cooperative, poor-quality staff is perceived as a problem. For example, some store assistants refuse to stock specific goods in the store, claiming that the given goods would not sell. The shop assistants probably adopted this habit at a time when fines were imposed for goods that were not sold and had to be discarded. Therefore, the store assistants had to be much more careful when handling goods. After a change of staff, the disputed goods are sold in the store without any problems. There are also cases where some perishable items in the store are not adequately stored, leading to consumers' reluctance to buy the given goods. During the current health situation, some stores had to close for a long period due to the illness of all staff.

Table 4. Summary of the main results.

Positive factors	Critical problems
Local products	Unskillfull staff
Convenient space	Staff sickness
Consumer relations	Limited opening hours
Village support	Limited assortment
Wholesale cooperation	
Suitable location	

Source: own elaboration.

When did you last have to resolve problems related to running the store?

Most operators state that no significant unpleasant events related to store operations occurred during recent years. In Kváskovice, the store was flooded due to adverse weather during roof reconstruction. However, everything dried out in the end. This year, the Lait store operator of the store in Lažiště did not have time to apply for the regional subsidies, which often cover a significant part of the investment in the development of the store. Even this case does not involve fundamental interference in the operation of the store. However, the Bavorov store found itself in an unpleasant situation due to the health condition of the assistant, where for a long time it was difficult to operate the store properly. The Bavorov store, which is operated by the consumer cooperative, had significant problems at a time when the loss-making stores were not supported by the villages.

How did you manage the crisis caused by Covid-19?

The Kváskovice storeKváskovice is closed due to the situation caused by Covid-19. Other stores recorded a significant increase in sales and consumers in March 2020. This even led to an excessive workload for the staff and the need for a greater replenishment of stock. At present, the operation has stabilised almost to the original level, before 2020. Higher sales are still being recorded in the municipality of Lažiště, and it is expected that after the end of the situation, sales will fall again. The consumer cooperative in Bavorov remained open even during the COVID-19 pandemic and recorded a significant increase in sales. Over the last year, consumers have started to visit smaller establishments more frequently. This has improved awareness of local stores, and consumers buy there more even when they don't have to.

Table 4 concludes the working models identified from the interviews and the main critical problems mentioned by the interviewees. A further evaluation described three business models that could also be typical for other rural retail locations. The first one is a small store together with a pub (this is typical for Krajníčko and Kváskovice), the second one is wholesale cooperation (Lažiště, Bílsko and Bavorov), and the third one is a consumer society utilizing cooperation with the particular village.

Discussion

The situation with the accessibility of grocery stores for residents of rural communities in the Czech Republic is not as complicated as in countries with a lower density of population and higher remoteness or travel times (e.g. Scandinavian countries). Mobile or motorized customers (including customers from rural villages) in the Czech Republic have many hypermarkets and supermarkets within acceptable reach in most locations. According to the satisfaction survey among Czech consumers in 1,083 cities and villages. In 2022 (Ježek et al. 2020), more than 69% of consumers living in cities and villages with fewer than 3,000 are satisfied with the accessibility of everyday purchased products; however, 44% of consumers from villages with fewer than 200 inhabitants are satisfied with the accessibility of everyday purchased products. The remainder of the Discussion section is structured into the external and internal factors that influence rural retail stores and their operations.

External factors

The more serious issue is internal peripheries within the Czech Republic that are far from the big cities, and there is a low density of population and therefore a low demand and purchasing power. The network of a large number of modern stores, with accessibility that enables convenient shopping, represents significant competition for rural grocery stores. This effect is amplified by the significant motorisation of the Czech consumer, and the tendency towards shopping in bulk. Therefore, the distribution of Czech rural retail is influenced by the level of competition and the relatively short distances consumers must travel by car or public transportation to modern retail facilities with a wider assortment, better pricing, and more attractive shopping space in modern retail facilities. Activities to maintain grocery stores in small rural villages in the Czech Republic are therefore not caused by the poor accessibility of stores for the residents of rural villages but are mainly caused by other reasons.

The situation of grocery stores in small rural villages was investigated in a selected locality in southwestern Bohemia. The results are presented in this paper. Based on the interviews conducted, it was determined that the external factors that positively influence the interest of consumers in shopping in rural retail stores are the financial support of the municipality in form (discounted rent in municipal buildings) or non-financial (support in communicating the offer by municipal radio), the partnership with a wholesaler which will ensure more advantageous prices for food and non-food goods and participation in loyalty programmes. Among other external factors that positively influence business in a rural retail store, it is also certainly possible to include the request for a refund of selected costs from subsidy programs offered by the regional authority or the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

Internal factors

The main internal factors include a suitable location in the natural centre of the municipality, with the option of parking. A connection with other services, such as the operation of a restaurant and the sale of refreshments, will allow fixed costs, particularly rent, wages, and energy, to be offset by revenue from multiple business activities. Other internal

factors were formulated as the accessibility of local products from local farmers and food producers, pleasant premises with a positive shopping atmosphere, and a focus on relationships with consumers, which in practice means stocking products that consumers demand, and adaptation of opening hours to consumers' needs.

We also think of the internal factors in a different light. An issue such as the inability of rural grocery store owners to take time off because of a lack of available personnel has previously been confirmed. However, it is often seen as purely an economic resource issue where low turnover means that it is not efficient to hire more staff. But thinking about this in social terms answers the question of what should we pay to ensure that we can allow the shopkeeper a life outside of the grocery store whilst also keeping the store open regularly. A solution is offered in the form of price increases in rural stores, but this is associated with the threat of an outflow of customers to retail chains that can afford lower prices and discount events. An alternative to higher prices is to provide stores with subsidies from public budgets to cover part of the operating costs. In the Czech Republic, the Small Store 2021 + subsidy program was introduced for this purpose in (Skála 2021).

However, the benefit of support from this subsidy program is debatable. Aid in a maximum amount of 1,300,000 CZK per store (or approximately 5,334 € per store) will probably only help reduce the store's losses rather than ensure its profitability. In the current situation, where the unsettling state of public finances in the Czech Republic continues, a significant increase in subsidies for rural grocery stores is unlikely. The last possibility is to increase the efficiency of internal business operations by operating complementary services, such as home delivery, customer boxes by delivery companies, coffee shops, pubs and restaurants as meeting places, Internet (WiFi), libraries, post office, and others.

Conclusion

The article aimed to identify the factors that influence the sustainability of rural grocery stores and assess the effects of the ongoing consolidation and spatial concentration in rural grocery stores on the accessibility of rural grocery stores in the Czech Republic.

We demonstrate the very good accessibility of grocery stores for residents of the entire Czech Republic, including residents of small villages. Mobile or motorized customers in the Czech Republic have many hypermarkets, supermarkets, and other smaller stores within acceptable reach in most locations. However, at the same time, the data shows that part of the population does not have a grocery store within walking distance and is dependent on private or public transport when shopping for groceries. This fact is a problem, particularly for immobile inhabitants of small villages. Thus, the main reason for maintaining grocery stores in small villages in the Czech Republic is not the poor accessibility of grocery stores, but the fact that the existence of stores in small villages in the Czech Republic is an important factor that affects the quality of life in the countryside. The problem is the low profitability, or even loss, of operating a store in a small village with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. However, the importance of grocery stores in small villages and their communities is the reason for finding suitable solutions to keep stores in small villages, even if their operation is at the limit of viability. From 2021, the CZ Ministry of Industry and Trade is implementing a direct financial public support program for small

village stores as a universal and systemic solution. However, in policy terms, the research shows that more work needs to be done to identify, quantify, and then promote the advantages of rural retail.

Based on our research, internal factors play a more important role for rural grocery stores than external factors established in the business environment. Internal factors that negatively affect a rural retail business are, on the one hand, staff with inadequate qualifications and an approach that is not focused on the consumer and their needs, opening hours and a product range that does not reflect the needs of consumers. From a short-term perspective, sick staff can also be considered a negative factor and in small stores, a replacement is not possible and, therefore, the store has to be closed, which means major complications in economic and logistical terms. On the other hand, employment of local employees even for part-time jobs increases the positive external factors produced by rural retail stores because it retains labour in the rural space. The case of this activity is for COOP grocery stores. The main limitation of the research is that the data were obtained only from a geographically restricted area of southwestern Bohemia, and it would be interesting to explore this issue in an international comparison, for example, with Slovakia, Hungary, or Germany, where the situation can be quite similar. Other differences are also possible when comparing southwestern Bohemia with other countries, either with a similar population density as Austria or with a lower population density such as Norway or Sweden, where rural retail sustainability is also an important topic.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the Západočeská Univerzita v Plzni [SGS-2021-032 “Sustainability of Retail in Czech].

Notes on contributors

Tomáš Sadílek, PhD, works at the Department of Marketing, Trade and Services, Faculty of Economics, University of West Bohemia, Czechia. He teaches and make a research in the field of retail marketing, food quality labels and consumer behaviour

Hana Kunešová, PhD, works at the Department of Marketing, Trade and Services, Faculty of Economics, University of West Bohemia, Czechia. She teaches and make a research in the field of retailing (including e-commerce) and international trade operations

Petr Cimler, works at the Department of Marketing, Trade and Services, Faculty of Economics, University of West Bohemia, Czechia. He teaches and make a research in the field of retail management, distribution and logistics.

ORCID

Tomáš Sadílek  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9358-5797>

Hana Kunešová  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1242-3911>

References

- Baron, S., K. Harris, D. Leaver, and B. M. Oldfield. 2001. "Beyond Convenience: The Future for Independent Food and Grocery Retailers in the UK." *The International Review of Retail, Distribution & Consumer Research* 11 (4): 395–414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593960126381>.
- Bernard, J., A. Decker, J. Kyselovič, M. Šimon, M. Joukl, P. Tličimuková, and L. Vítková. 2020. *Občanská vybavenost v malých obcích: Aktuální vybavenost službami a infrastrukturami, její vývoj a prostorová dostupnost služeb*. Sociologický ústav AV ČR a Univerzita Hradec Králové. Accessed October 5, 2021: <https://www.soc.cas.cz/publikace/obcanska-vybavenost-v-malych-obcich>.
- Byrom, J., D. Medway, and G. Warnaby. 2001. *Strategic Alternatives for Small Retail Businesses in Rural Areas: Evidence from the Southern Western Isles of Scotland*. Manchester Metropolitan University Business School Working Paper Series. October 5, 2021. https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/1633/1/byrom%20wp01_05.pdf.
- Christiaanse, S., and T. Haartsen. 2017. "The Influence of Symbolic and Emotional Meanings of Rural Facilities on Reactions to Closure: The Case of the Village Supermarket." *Journal of Rural Studies* 54 (August 2017): 326–336. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.07.005>.
- Cimler, P. 2012. *Profil des Tschechischen Handels und Kunden*. Chemnitz: GUC - Verlag des Gesellschaft für Unternehmensrechnung und Controlling m.b.H.
- Coca-Stefaniak, A., A. G. Hallsworth, C. Parker, S. Bainbridge, and R. Yuste. 2005. "Decline in the British Small Shop Independent Retail Sector: Exploring European Parallels." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 12 (5): 357–371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2004.11.007>.
- Findlay, A., and L. Sparks. 2008. "Weaving New Retail and Consumer Landscapes in the Scottish Borders." *Journal of Rural Studies* 24 (1): 86–97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2007.05.007>.
- GfK Czech/Consumer Panels and Services. 2021. *#shopper GfK*. Prague: GfK Czech.
- Gieling, J., T. Haartsen, and L. Vermeij. 2019. "Village Facilities and Social Place Attachment in the Rural Netherlands." *Rural Sociology* 84 (1): 66–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12213>.
- Government of the Czech Republic. 2017. *Rural Service Support*. Accessed October 3, 2021: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&drct=jandq=andesrc=sandsource=webandcd=andved=2ahUKEwi7vc2g4rvyAhXuhf0HHaXxCUQQFnoECA0QAQandurl=https%3A%2F%2Fipodpora.odbory.info%2Fsource%2Fdocs%2Fwysiwyg_uploads%2F4d52603261b1f599%2Fuploads%2Fipodpora_obslnosti_venkova.docx&usq=AOvVaw09BWhSz9pUkQTsV2KtLda4.
- Ježek, J. 2020. *Adaptační strategie rozvoje venkova. Příklady dobré praxe*. Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita.
- Juergens, U. 2020. "Food Retail in the Rural Periphery Using the Example of Germany: Identifying Success Factors." In *Emotional, Sensory, and Social Dimensions of Consumer Buying Behavior*, 270–298. IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-2220-2.ch012>.
- Kollárová, D., and M. Ungerová. 2019. "Independent Retail Trade as Public Service?" *Marketing Identity*, no. (1): 118–127. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=870884>.
- Landry, T. D., T. J. Arnold, and J. B. Stark. 2005. "Retailer Community Embeddedness and Consumer Patronage." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 12 (1): 65–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2004.03.001>.
- Ministry of Industry and Trade CZ. 2021. *Program podpory malých prodejen na venkově: OBCHŮDEK 2021+*. Podpora provozního financování. Accessed October 3, 2021: <https://www.mpo.cz/assets/cz/podnikani/vnitri-obchod/program-obchudek-2021/2021/8/Program-Obchudek-2021.docx>.
- Ministry of Industry and Trade CZ. 2022. *Obchůdek 2021+*. Vyhlášení. Accessed November 25, 2022: <https://www.obchudek2021plus.cz/novinky/vyhlasi/>.
- Ministry of Regional Development CZ. 2019. *Koncepce rozvoje venkova na období 2021-2027*. Accessed October 3, 2021: <https://www.mmr.cz/cs/ministerstvo/regionalni-rozvoj/regionalni-politika/koncepce-a-strategie/koncepce-rozvoje-venkova>.

- Neumeier, S., and M. Kokorsch. 2021. "Supermarket and Discounter Accessibility in Rural Germany—Identifying Food Deserts Using a GIS Accessibility Model." *Journal of Rural Studies* 86 (2021): 247–261. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.06.013>.
- Paddison, A., and E. Calderwood. 2007. "Rural Retailing: A Sector in Decline?" *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* 35 (2): 136–155. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09590550710728093>.
- Peiffer-Smadja, C., and A. Torre. 2018. "Retail Decentralization and Land Use Regulation Policies in Suburban and Rural Communities: The Case of the Ile-de-France Region." *Habitat International* 72 (February 2018): 27–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2017.02.003>.
- Rybaczewska, M., and L. Sparks. 2020. "Locally-Owned Convenience Stores and the Local Economy." *Journal of Retailing & Consumer Services* 52 (2020): 101939. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101939>.
- SARURE. 2021a. *Good Practices Handbook*. SARURE Interreg Europe. Accessed October 5, 2021: https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/tx_tevprojects/library/file_1623261108.pdf.
- SARURE. 2021b. *Save Rural Retail*. SARURE Interreg Europe. Accessed October 5, 2021: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/sarure/>.
- Scarpello, T., F. Poland, N. Lambert, and T. Wakeman. 2009. "A Qualitative Study of the Food-Related Experiences of Rural Village Shop Customers." *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* 22 (2): 108–115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-277X.2008.00940.x>.
- Schiffing, S., S. Karamperidis, and J. D. Nelson. 2015. "Local Shops Vs. Online Retailers: Competition or Synergy?" *Scottish Geographical Journal* 131 (3–4): 220–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702541.2014.978805>.
- Skála, Z. 2021. *Trendy obchodu 2021+ . Řetězce, kategorie a nakupující v datech*. Prague: Skála a Šulc s. r.o.
- Szczyrba, Z., D. Fiedor, and J. Kunc. 2013. "Služby ve venkovských regionech Česka – kvantitativní hodnocení změn v uplynulém transformačním období". *Sborník příspěvků XVI mezinárodní kolokvium o regionálních vědách Valtice 19–21 6 2013*: <https://doi.org/10.5817/CZ.MUNI.P210-6257-2013-26>. Accessed October 5, 2021 https://www.econ.muni.cz/do/econ/soubory/katedry/kres/4884317/41725568/27_2013.pdf.
- Twardzik, M., and K. Heffner. 2019. "Small Towns and Rural Areas – as a Prospective Place of Modern Retail Trade Formats in Poland." *European Countryside* 11 (1): 74–84. <https://doi.org/10.2478/euco-2019-0005>.
- Willig, C. 2001. Interpretive phenomenology, in: *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method*, 50–69. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education.