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MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Danka et al.: Vidiek a mládež v sociálnovedných reflexiách (Rural areas and Youth Reflected in the Social Science)

Nitra: Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, 2012, 134 p. ISBN 978-80-552-0928-9

The scientific monograph *Rural Areas and Youth Reflected in the Social Science (Vidiek a mládež v sociálno-vedných reflexiách)* is a free continuation of the work published in 2010 *Rural Communities in the Conditions of Transformation (Vidiecke obce v podmienkach transformácie)*, and it is aimed at the issues of rural areas, rural communities, addressed by the professionals and specialists dealing with young adults. Last but not least, it is focused on the students of the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra. The book is placed in the reading list the students are expected to read as part of their course in the Sociology of rural areas and agriculture, or “Rural Sociology”. The main author is D. Moravčíková, who has devoted her activities to the matters of rural areas, as a teacher and researcher at the Slovak University of Agriculture. Her field of interest has been mainly the research of specific groups in the rural areas and the specific matters dealing with the life in the rural environment (ecological behavior, adaptation processes, transformation).

The monograph is divided into two topical parts creating two main chapters, with the main theme of the first one – the countryside, the rural area, and the second one is aimed at young people living in the rural areas. The chapters are based on two connected research projects running at the Department of social science at the Faculty of Economics and Management at SUA in Nitra, promoted by the Slovak Youth Institute Iuventa, the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport.

The main subject of the monograph is the rural area, so in the preface to the book the author presents her approaches towards the definitions given by various authors and by the social scientific literature. At the same time she characterizes the theoretical approaches towards understanding the differences between towns and rural areas which prevailed in certain historical periods. She also outlines the fact that from the ethnological point of view and also from the point of view of other social sciences, rural areas can be seen as the dwelling community, a local community or a specific type of a community which is defined by a specific quality of human relations, and which is mainly presented as the opposite of the urban community. In the next part of the chapter the author's attention is paid to the relations between municipalities, towns and rural areas, where in the chronological order certain concepts are presented. The author also discusses the inner change that rural communities have gone through while being attacked by the process of urbanization developing into globalization.

According to a specification of the village and rural areas within the sociological interpretation by A. Štefánek, as well as the actual situation, The monograph offers justification for the need to distinguish between the terms – a *village* and a *rural area*. The terms *rurality* and *rural process* are explained due to the fact how the rural area unfairly deals with the economic, social, technical and cultural innovations.

The author focuses on the terms *rural* and *countryside*, which are mostly related to a certain type and way of placing the population within an area, as well to the approaches to the definitions of the rural areas. The rural area is seen as a part of the social whole, concrete society and determines the functions of the rural area. Taking into consideration the fact that until the recent times, the rural area has been seen, from the point of view of functions, as a seat of the agricultural and forest production, or the place where rural people lived, etc., the monograph outlines the functions, which are not profitable only for the rural population, but also for the whole society (productive, living, relaxation, social and cultural).

The monograph focuses on rural areas, rural population as interesting objects for social and scientific research referring to the fact that in the transformation period, the living conditions of the people have changed

substantially. At the same time the author offers results gained in the research that has been carried out lately in the field of rural areas and defines the areas that umbrella the research carried out in the rural sociology. Referring to this topic, she also discusses the methodology of the research with the quantitative characteristics of the population where she points out the fact that the procedure of the combination of the quantitative and qualitative research should flow from the concretely defined objectives of the certain research projects as well as from the intentions in the practical application of findings and results.

The second sub-chapter of the monograph firstly covers the historical moments and milestones changing the conditions of the living in the rural areas and significantly influencing the rural population, however, the attention is paid to certain rural institutions administering and managing everyday life and day-to-day events in rural municipalities. Through them, the social changes in rural areas are presented during the period between and after the wars, in the socialistic and post-socialistic period. The author focuses on the issue of the rural family (its traditional and present rural family) and rural household, as well as the economic, political, education, cultural, social and religious institutions. Some of the changes and functions of the above mentioned institutions are described. In the final part of this subchapter, the author is describing the present situation in the Slovak rural areas that play a role in the European context. Based on the theory by L. Falf'an, the author outlines the three diverse tendencies in the development within three regional types. At the same time she assesses the contemporary revitalization trends in the rural areas, while asking the question: "What are the priorities and main areas of the further development of the rural areas, or where shall we find and see some opportunities for the development in the rural area?" Then she is answering the question by herself and at the same time, she is defining the key priorities for the Slovak rural areas that are based on the real challenge titled "*Initiative for the development of the Slovak rural areas for the next Slovak government*". Although the initiative is not guaranteed to be accepted and fulfilled, not even in the case if the initiative is legally promoted, the author sees it positively as it reflects the actual needs of the present Slovak rural areas.

Other research activities carried out in the rural areas and their population may reveal some changes that are necessarily to be made in rural areas. As the author herself states the rural areas with their population do not represent quite "attractive" subject of research projects, as they evoke certain worries in some of the researchers. Referring to this fact, the active part is taken by the Department of Social studies, Faculty of Economics and Management, the Slovak University of Agriculture. Within the programs "*Support and research development of the young population*" (2008 – 2010) and the "*Support and*

research development within the field of the youth policy” (2011 – 2013) under the umbrella of the Slovak Institute of the Youth, the department carries out the research: “Social and moral aspects of economic and civic life of the rural young people” the authors of which are the teachers from the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra.

As the term *youth, young population* itself has not been expressly defined so far, the beginning of the second part of the monograph is devoted to this term where the main author focuses her attention on also some documents about young adults, initiatives or strategies (The World Youth Report, White Paper on Youth, EU strategies for the youth, Youth on the move, Europe 2020). The monograph offers also an overview of creating the national policy managing the work with the youth in the Slovak Republic. It characterizes the difficult process of the competence division of the state administration/ central government in the field of the work with young adults, as well as the process of searching for the relation between the government and the civic society. Despite of the statement that the youth has become a part of the political programs and also of some national and international research projects, the readers can agree with the author, that only a few research European and Slovak projects are aimed at specific problems of the rural youth. The given statement is also a sort of an impulse to develop the research activities in this field. The author confirms that it is inevitable to analyze the rural dimension in the youth politics on one hand, as well as the youth dimension in the rural development, on the other hand, and the monograph is one of the attempts to support it.

The second chapter of the monograph also includes: *Methodological aspects of the rural youth research*, which relates to the both already mentioned research projects, carried out at the Department of Social Studies FEM SUA in Nitra. The target group is defined in the chapter, offering reasons for the research instruments selection as well as the explanation why the second project deals with the qualitative research. The author discusses the objective and subjective knowledge gained in this field, the theoretical concepts and information gained from the secondary resources. The terms and categories are explained in a systematic way, the current situation in rural areas is described. Although young adults represent “a hope” for the businesses development, they are on moves, they move to other places to find a job and thus create a situation of a poor demographic structure. Such a situation is properly linked to the modernization tendencies in the society and with such tendencies also some functions of the rural area are connected (recreational, ecological), which come forward, as well as the trends (i.e. living in villages in a convenient distances from the towns). The author of this chapter briefly comments on the value preferences of the current rural youth, towards the possibilities offered by the

rural areas and some suggestions to foster the situation are given. Closer attention shall be focused on the civic life and political participation of the young people in the rural area, however, the author pays her attention to a general explanation of the terms such as participation, civic participation, social participation, political participation, direct and indirect participation, etc. It probably comes out from the fact that the clear understanding of these terms and explanations of certain forms of participations enable the correct interpretation of the knowledge and reached results via research. Considering these terms as the ones linked to the rural areas shall be more appropriate. The research carried out in this field is expected to bring new findings.

The second part of the monograph includes the chapter *Methodology of the quantitative research on the rural youth* defining the methods and techniques employed in the research project *Social and civic participation of the rural youth in the Nitra region*. Due to the fact that the project is based on the quantitative research, one of the members of the team, M. Hanová working for the Department of Statistics and operational research explains the methods and techniques of the social and scientific research used in the collection of the empirical data as well as when they were processed.

The final chapter included in the second part of the monograph develops that what has already been more at the theoretical level and via the help of the secondary resources presented by the main author. It focuses on the spheres, fields and forms of participation of the rural youth and it relies on the results mainly on the results of the completed research project: *Social and moral aspects of economic and civic life of the rural youth*, the chapter deals with only some of the achieved information and their analyses which will be gradually completed. The research team of the ongoing research in this phase has just started to analyze achieved and processed material and interpret it based on the stated objectives. We also expect that readers and scientific public will get to know other findings in a new monograph.

Based on the fact that the second part of the published monograph addresses the rural youth, the part *Key reference of the rural youth research* forms the final part of the work. The main author explains them by means of generalizing the achieved findings, through professional literature, and thanks to the results gained in the on-going research the author has been involved in. The given reference as well as the whole monograph fulfills the strict criteria of scientific also scientific and popular monograph. The monograph *Rural Areas and Youth Reflected in the Social Science* is thus a valuable contribution aimed at the professional public, for SUA students in Nitra as well as for other readers who are interested in the issue of present rural areas. As the book deals with the situation that is marginal for the general sociology, it partially fills in the empty place in the Slovak sociology. We hope that mainly the professional public will

be motivated to perceive the modern rural areas as an “attractive” area and more attention is paid to rural youth playing the key role in the local communities and in a great extent it predetermines the future of the rural areas.

(Proof reading by M. Igazová, FSV UCM in Trnava)

Eva Svitáčová
Department of Social Sciences
Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra