

**Danka Moravčíková: Vidiecke obce v podmienkach transformácie
(Rural Communes in the Conditions of Transformation)**

Nitra: SPU 2010, 135 p.

The reviewed monograph is an adapted version of the doctoral thesis defended at the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in 2010. The basic information already points out that the work encompasses the field of sociology and ethnology in the wider context of social sciences (it also overlaps politics, history and social anthropology). Although the author is a graduate of Ethnology, her scientific and educational activities at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra has led her to the sociological surroundings and to the research oriented on changes of the Slovak countryside after 1989. The survey was carried out in the localities Mildice and Drobná, which are situated in the Nitra region. It started in 2001 and lasted for five years. This period enabled to evaluate the impacts of the transformation on socio-economic behaviour of individuals and local communities and provided the author with sufficient time to monitor the developmental processes. The author also benefited from her participation in the international survey of rural households carried out in more localities of the Nitra region as well as from the participation in the quantitative research with wider regional scope.

Research questions were set up in a relatively general way. They led to the evaluation of the importance of the strength of community in relation to generally declared political principles and goals of rural development as well as to the effort to understand the reactions of people with different societal positions to the transformation and to the effort to determine how it is reflected in their attitudes, aspirations and interpersonal relations. The author monitored both globalization trends as an opposition to the quality of relations in the local society, and types of households from the point of view of social stratification, which could be considered to be *winners* and *losers* of transformation processes.

As the author presents, her work is not based on the hypothetical-deductive approach. Nevertheless, the hypotheses are introduced and their evaluation is spread out in wider final analyses looking for answers to the above-mentioned questions.

Methodological outcomes were based on works of respected theoreticians of social sciences such as Giddens, Bauman, Bourdieu, Gellner, Geertz, Miller, Machonin, Buchowski and others as well as on works of domestic authors (Sopóci, Falt'an, Gajdoš) and ethnologists Danglová, Falt'anová, Luther. The theoretical framework is based on the terms of glocalization, social change, community, transition and transformation, social system and habitus. The author used the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods within her

own survey. She combined the questionnaire survey and interviews with local representatives with the interviews with selected rural inhabitants who represented a social structure of surveyed communes. These methods were used to get the case studies, which reflected the micro-level of the transformation processes – the individual's point of view on social reality. The acquired knowledge was confronted with the general knowledge of macro-level. The author focused on the structure of households and on characteristics of individual members, their material sphere and economic activities, education, socio-economic positions and job migrations and on the development of financial situation of respondents. She also paid attention to life strategies, relational and neighbourly help and state support, perception of local community, evaluation of living standard and to the opinions on life ups and downs. The work is enriched by personal activities of the author in the surveyed municipalities, which resulted indirectly from her position as a “researcher” and enabled her to observe several aspects of social relations. These activities included the survey on public opinion within the preparation of the programme of economic and social development of the municipality Mildice and the co-organisation of the opening ceremony of the community cultural centre in the municipality Drobany.

The third and fourth chapters represent the core of the monograph, where the author presents her own findings. In order to recognize the current situation, it is necessary to be well-oriented in the history of the surveyed communities, detailed historiography, description of the socio-economic situation as well as in the social and cultural infrastructures and societal life. All above-mentioned issues are described in the third chapter. There is particularly detailed information about the socialist period, when agricultural cooperatives were the main employers in rural communities. However, more than half of inhabitants from both municipalities went to the industrial enterprises located in nearby towns. Another detailed part is dedicated to the post-socialist transformation in both municipalities. It is aimed at the mezzo-level of the socio-economic development based on the study of local annals and interviews with both contemporary and former local representatives and actors. The fourth chapter, “*Transformation through the Optics of Social Actors*”, has completely different character. It introduces the profiles of rural households with different status and brings the interviews with their members. They represent the case studies oriented on life strategies and economic practices of representatives from the lower, middle and upper strata. Author's own interpretations are combined with the answers of respondents. Within the scope of the importance of social networks, the author highlights the family, neighbourhood, level of individualization, relations to local government and state.

In the final chapter, the author summarizes the partial results of individual periods of the survey, formulates the answers on research questions and evaluates hypotheses. One of the quantitative findings of the author is that the socio-demographic and socio-economic differences between the districts were manifested at the level of rural households. It is evident that the work is based on a wider range of quantitative research carried out by the author. However, this research is not discussed in detail in the book. Therefore, the reader could be a little bit lost within this context. The quantitative findings from the pre-research overlap with the qualitative findings from research, which are the subject of the reviewed work. On the one hand, there is a lot of general observations (e.g. rural people with different societal position react on transformation in different way); on the other hand, very interesting conclusions about *winner*s and *loser*s of transformation processes are included (e.g. particularly two-members households of retirees belong to the category of *loser*s and the category of *winner*s is strongly determined not only by having a good socio-economic position but also by appropriate cultural and social capital). The development of social networks between inhabitants arose mainly during the period of industrial urbanization. New social networks from the transformation period bring the strengthening of togetherness and elements of informal solidarity. On the other hand, they also present different barriers and conflicts. In Drobany, the “four legs of the table” are introduced (partnership of local political leaders, local entrepreneurs, local institutions and local citizens). The fact that the phenomenon of continuity with the socialist period still plays an important role almost in all areas of community life is very interesting as well.

The likeable feature of the reviewed work is a synoptic and comprehensible way of formulating solved problems, what is underlined by the fact that it is a qualifying work. Publishing of findings of the doctoral thesis presents the dissemination of new knowledge and gives an added value to the author’s effort. As it has been mentioned in the introduction, the monograph will also serve as a textbook for students studying the subjects related to rural sociology. It represents an example of interdisciplinary approach and overlapping of quantitative and qualitative research methods. In addition, all of us who are interested in contemporary social processes in the Slovak countryside should find interesting parts in this monograph.

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