

Authors belong to a group that helped revive sociology of space in Slovakia and they deserve acclaim for institutionalising this scientific discipline in Slovakia. This is why the publication deals with the retrospective evolution of this complex of problems with appropriate professionalism and real knowledge of the connected issues. The presented book constitutes a further stage in answering wider questions regarding regional development in Slovakia, by a team of authors who have been dealing with these issues for a long time and in a systematic way through the optics of sociology of space. The problems concerning regional development continue to be affected by sector approaches – they require a sound concept that would solve not only current problems but also real dispositions, especially from the point of implementation of programme documents of the new period 2007 – 2013. In this respect, the book is an asset as well as an incentive and increases the cognitive conceptual basis of spatial views on socio-economic development of Slovakia. With its theoretical and wide multi-dimensional scope, the book represents an important phase of development of Slovak sociology of space.

The publication is based in studies that have been conducted within the framework of the project *Regional differentiation and regional development in the Slovak republic in the context of integration*, carried out by the Institute for Sociology of Slovak Academy of Sciences during 2003 – 2005; as well as the VEGA grant project *Transformation impacts on developmental disponibilities of the settlements and their communities in Slovakia* and *The town in the context of social and social-spatial transformations of the Slovak society* that were researched at the Institute for Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

The reviewed book consists of four parts that are logically and clearly divided into more detailed subchapters. These relatively independent sections are inter-connected in an appropriate manner, the writing is sound, accomplished and knowledgeable and it is clear that the authors are experts in the given field. The range and width of the book's scope is extensive – this put high demands on the links between its individual parts not only in conceptual-theoretical terms but also at the methodological-empirical level – for instance in the case of classifying and typological analyses, including their application verification.

In the first part, authors deal with the reflection of theoretical and methodological regional issues throughout the evolution of Slovak sociology. They criticise the interruption of the continuity of historical evolution of natural and original regions, as well as state interference in the regions and setting their development dimensions, restrictions imposed on development of local administration, devastation of human potential in small rural settlements associated with marginalisation of some regions etc. They believe that our disintegrated settlement structure lacks a natural integrative socio-cultural fundament that would enable convergence at the micro- and mezo-levels. According to the authors, sociological research should concentrate more on the smallest villages (with up to 500 inhabitants), which have entered a demographic, social and cultural regression and are threatened by extinction. Nevertheless, regional policy planned for the new programme period 2007 – 2013 in fact penalises small rural settlements outside the innovative and cohesive growth poles. Strategy of regional policy as determined in the National Strategic Referential Framework (European Regional Development Fund – RDF – within the Regional Operative Programme) and National Strategic Plan for Rural Development (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development – EAFRD – within Rural Development Programme) focuses on supporting the most important centres (poles) of settlement (so-called innovative and cohesive growth poles) and explicitly defines a territorial concentration of the support. In this sense, it is expected that the growth effect will spread from the well-developed regions (innovative and cohesive growth poles) to less advanced parts of Slovakia (other settlements). However, this strategy may lead to a situation where some time will have passed before regional disparities are balanced – or such equalisation may not take place at all. Rural development beyond innovative and cohesive growth poles, based on EAFRD support, will be negligible in terms of public resources volume. Thus we face the risk that the under-developed remote rural regions will continue to lag behind for years to come, population of these territories will gradually decrease and that will lead to problems in the diffused reproduction of manpower in these areas. The outlined strategy does not take into account the restricted and differentiated capabilities of the rural settlements to develop in an endogenous manner; neither does it respect the fact that significantly under-developed regions and the smallest villages are not capable of such endogenous development without external assistance.

In the second part of the book, authors describe the development of Slovakia during the period of industrial-urban modernisation. They focus on the second half of the last century that has seen spatial and social consequences of the accelerated dynamics of the process of industrialisation and urbanisation. Unrestrained and fast urbanisation had negative consequences in towns as well as the countryside (town ruralisation, drop in rural population, devastation of social and natural environment, stagnation of social and technical innovation in the society and so on). In spite of the proclaimed objective to eliminate the contrasts between towns and countryside, the overall development opportunities and conditions in most rural settlements were insufficient and often liquidating (central system of settlement). Within the historical development context, writers characterise the changes in settlement and residential and spatial differentiation that led to Slovakia turning from an originally rural country to a mixed urban-rural type of society during the last decade of the 20th century. Among the consequences of this industrialisation and urbanisation period are intensive migration of the population (linked particularly to work migration), de-population of rural settlements, loss of residential identity, deterioration of human and social capital of the villages, lack of complexity of conditions and pre-requisites for development, appearance of new imbalances and relations in the development of settlements and similar.

This part of the book is extensively documented by means of development indicators that vividly illustrate the prevailing trends of spatial concentration.

In the third part of the book, authors discuss the socio-spatial development of Slovakia during the transformation period. This section is the longest and in my view, the issues described here are central to the whole publication. During the transformation period, significant disintegrative and integrative processes affect the settlement system and influence the regionalisation of Slovakia. They are characteristic for the transformations and socio-spatial situation in the context of the new local government organisation and at various spatial levels. Authors have identified 8 types of regions according to their socio-spatial disponibilities. They say that the regional differentiation of Slovakia considerably complicates a more balanced regional development and requires the application of effective tools and policies in order to reduce the disparities between regions. Here, authors use their expertise to analyse the changes in urban settlements and especially rural territories, with particular emphasis on problems of small villages.

In the final chapter of the book, authors have attempted to outline the possibilities and pre-requisites for solutions to the regional settlement problems that have been identified in the context of new development trends, including the expected effects on development of regions and settlements. In light of changing opinions on several socio-spatial processes in the post-integration period we see further changes in the theoretical and implementation framework of regional development, as well as their evaluation and solutions. The trends in residential and regional development in the early third millennium will be accompanied by continuing process of globalisation which in turn will lead to territorial convergence. The authors observe an ever increasing tendency of space diversification as a new dominant trend. They suggest that settlement structure in its fundamental attributes will only change very slowly. They envisage a shift in development of settlements that will acquire a new attractiveness, an increase of the suburbanisation effect, lower concentration of population in stagnating industrial agglomerations, the appearance of new forms of settlement and increasing diversity of the latter, and so on.

The reviewed publication with its scope and outlook on approaching regional problems considerably contributes to a wider conceptional and analytical view of regional development in Slovakia, which is currently at the centre of broad discussions among experts and politicians. The authors have succeeded in expertly synthesising a huge volume of scientific and specialised knowledge into an inspiring and interesting publication. In my opinion, the presented book will be sought after not only by state and public administration (or local government) for use in designing necessary policies and measures, but also will be of interest for political parties when drafting appropriate strategies that could bring about positive changes in the areas that have been analysed.

*Regional Development of Slovakia from the Perspective of Spatial Sociology* is a sociologically sound, valuable and inspiring works within this field of sociology and represents an undisputed contribution to the knowledge basis of Slovak sociology of space.

Stanislav Buchta