

## **Peter Gajdoš – Ján Pašiak: Social Resources of Local and Regional Development**

Institute for Sociology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava 2008, 217 pages.

Divided into seven logically structured chapters, this book discusses societal capital, not only in a wider theoretical and methodological frame but also empirically (as a presentation of pilot social study results in the model region of Gemer-Malohont and Novohrad). The results of this sociological research were supplemented by data from a secondary analysis of the authors' previous research and with other research activities that were carried out in these regions. The layout of this work is designed in such a way as to present the problem of societal capital not only as a result of sociological research (the pilot study) but also in wider theoretical and methodological frame that reflects the development of this issue in the social sciences. The authors focused on defining societal capital in a narrower sense as an aggregate of the inner social resources of the local and regional development of, in this case, predominantly villages and rural areas. The chapters evidence a profound scientific approach and elaborate knowledge of the topic. A solid intersection and combination of the theoretical and empirical reflects the authors' scientific experience. The authors refer to a category of "societal capital" that is composed of human, social and cultural capital. The term societal has been used in "Brno-school" sociology and it can also be found in concepts close to evolutionism and neo-evolutionism. These three kinds of capital interfere with, enhance and determine each other and thus create "societal capital" that has a new, aggregate quality.

This sociological research was carried out on a sample of 495 respondents, selected from residents of villages located in the model region, proportionally covering five micro-regions and the town of Tisovec. The questions in the semi-structured interview concerned respondents' households. The authors did not intend to generalise the results gathered from this sample for the whole of Slovakia.

Speaking of the theoretical background in human, social and cultural capital research, the authors point out that the topic of the societal capital has not been fully explored empirically in Slovakia yet. Definitions of human capital usually emphasize experience, skills, creative abilities, work experience, and initiative. Within empirical research of spatial sociology, the human capital of residencies is considered to be an initial condition for understanding all social processes and phenomena in the region. Human capital in rural villages has been facing many problems during the era of urbanisation in the 1970s and 1980s.

The authors characterise societal capital as the sum of social relations and their networks which constitute everyday social life and the social organisation of regional and municipal communities. According to the authors, the "socialness" of the capital means that it infiltrates itself in all human relationships and has a character of social association or collectivity. It does not belong to an individual, but individuals are the basis of social associations, and social relationships are roots of social capital. Social capital can also be misused for activities that harm the community or social group (e.g. nepotism or positive discrimination).

In defining cultural capital, the authors drew on P. Bourdieu's concept characterized by these elements:

- values and norms of an individual and family, community participation (such as membership in unions or participation in civic associations or leisure groups)
- ownership of cultural and civilisational goods and properties, total cultural and civilisational level of an individual, family and household
- symbols of education level achieved etc.

The cultural form of capital is still underestimated in Slovakia. But the sociological context of this issue has a long tradition in the history of sociological research. And, according to authors, the cultural dimension is one of the most complicated issues in the transformation of a society. One of the symptoms of this process is that the cultural capital of village residencies has been weakened through the immigration of the cultural elite to bigger towns.

Research results show that the present Slovak countryside is no longer characterised by what were once its dominant features, such as agrarianism, rusticality, and peasant or rural character. Opinions about work and its place in the rural life have changed. Empirical analysis shows that such phenomena as neighbour relationships, togetherness, hospitality, traditional activities or the maintenance of traditions are diminishing. Disruption of social relationships and communal life stems predominantly from an unfavourable economical situation, with the typical marks of poverty that the majority of

village residents have to face. The quality of social relationships in village residencies is connected with unemployment and poverty. Philanthropic behaviour that was once typical for wealthy farmers and the middle class is now obviously diminishing. This philanthropic behaviour used to be a part of social status as a traditional norm. In difficult historic periods, like the economic crisis in the first half of the 20th century or during the Slovak National Uprising, philanthropy represented the usual form of behaviour towards fellow citizens as well as towards foreign refugees. Philanthropy came to full expression in a form of reciprocity after World War II when the economy had to be restored and new housing had to be built. Philanthropy was not “popular” during the years of socialism since it was in opposition to the socialist idea of social equality and homogeneity in a socialist society. The notion of philanthropy occurred less and less in rural regions after 1990.

The results of the pilot study show that social relationships are disappearing in village communities, social webs are breaking apart, and indifference towards public issues of the community results in social isolation. Social trust, personal and property security, social assurances, reciprocal help or belief in improvement in the near future have weakened. The typical association that one has of rural life with hard work and portraying work as a central necessary activity of village people is also no longer as strong as it used to be. This situation has a negative influence on civic participation aimed at solving community problems and the formation of civic society in general. According to the authors, a certain dehumanisation of this social environment has occurred, and there is a lower level of social capital, which is also rapidly growing old. Nevertheless, the results of the pilot study have no representative character and the research was carried out in economically underdeveloped regions with high unemployment. These findings should be empirically verified in a representative study that would include all regions of Slovakia.

Transferring social capital to public matters is quite difficult in such circumstances, but not impossible. Mayors of villages prove this, as they have great social capital in their hands and they can use it effectively for the prosperity of their community as well as for their own good. The solution for this difficult situation lies, according to the authors, in the mobilisation of communities’ inner resources and in the inevitable creation and implementation of specific, regionally oriented policies.

This study’s social contribution is to broaden our knowledge of the decision-making sphere that is responsible for creating and implementing regional policies and the policies of rural development, predominantly through a long-term examination of socio-economic changes and a mapping of countryside residencies and micro-regions. This book shows the authors’ thorough approach towards these issues and their research is an undeniable contribution to the analytical apparatus of spatial sociology in Slovakia. The results help to identify significant supporting arguments for the creation of rural development policies and they should be helpful for a better articulation of strategic goals and for finding the most effective tools for an implementation of these policies.

*Social resources of local and regional development* is another excellent work in spatial sociology. It is a significant contribution to the analysis of regional development and problematic areas of the Slovak countryside.

Stanislav Buchta