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Rural Sociology in the Czech Republic after 1989

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Abstract: Rural sociology came through different development etaps in the CR, during which it was alternately abolished and again gained in importance. During the so-called First Republic (between WW1 and WW2), attention was paid namely to the monographic research of Czech and Slovak villages. After WW2, rural sociology remained silent for a period of time. It started developing again only at the beginning of the 60s, when it was aimed at the large-scale socialist agriculture development. After the Soviet occupation in 1968, rural sociology was suppressed again; it survived, in a reduced form, only in research. After 1989, rural sociology has been revived again, both in research and in teaching. Since mid90s, a systematic empirical research of Czech countryside is done. Czech sociologists are again included into the international co-operation and rural sociology becomes an important discipline in revival and development of rural areas.

Key words: Czech countryside – teaching of rural sociology – empirical sociological research

Origin of rural sociology

The origin of rural sociology is in time situated to the verge between 19. and 20. century, and according to space, to the United States of America. However, it had soon found interest in the Czech countries, and also followers in the most outstanding sociologists of the period¹². According to them, Czech rural

¹² I. A. Bláha wrote in his preface to Gillette's Rural Sociology: "The discipline has found its first keepers on the American soil.... On the ethnic, social, economic, cultural side, there is the permanent searching, permanent endeavour for order-making, amalgamation, putting together in the unifying organisational forms.... There of the often at the local practical needs oriented as a characteristic feature of American universities. Also, the scientific study of American countryside –

areas called for none the less attention, since it had been undergoing similarly important changes connected to the forming of the economic, social and political situation in the newly originated Czechoslovak republic. Namely, the procedure and consequences of the 1919 land reform opened a number of social problems, for which rural sociology should have found the appropriate solutions.

For studying of the rural phenomena and processes, the following methods were recommended in the USA: historical method (searching countryside in connection with its historical development), so-called social survey method (collecting statistical, historical, psychological, sociological, philosophical and other knowledge on a certain village or town –at present, we would rather call it the monographic method) and so-called project method, which regarded isolating and following of one element (probably a fore-step of experiment). Rural problems were understood very widely and sociologists tried to cover the whole multi-dimensional reality of the economic and social life.

Origin of Czechoslovak rural and agricultural sociology

Czechoslovak rural sociology was rather more modest in its goals. However, the roots it issued from were rich. If we muse over the origin of the “rural and agricultural sociology“ in Czech countries, we regard as the “pre-sociology period“ the time when the questions regarding rural life and labour, asked later on by sociology, were the matter of thinking of certain writers, politicians and philosophers. Rural memoir literature³, which the historian Josef Pekař evaluates as the proof of the awaking national self-realisation of peasant population⁴, emerged already at the end of the 18. and beginning of the 19. century.

Numerous outstanding writers of the period supply a plastic picture of Czech countryside.⁵

However, more important was the contribution of some economists and politicians, which were theoretically interested in the agrarian problems study from the viewpoint of their disciplines but expressed their ideas also regarding social questions. Their thoughts influenced directly the emerging Czechoslovak rural and agricultural sociology in the 20s of the 20. century. Karel Galla thinks that G. A.

and americal “rural sociology“ pays attention above all to American countryside – was enticed by the practical needs and necessities of American situation.“ (Gillette, J. M.: Sociologie venkova. Nákladem Ústředního svazu agrárních akademiků, Prague 1928, p.7)

³ Pekař, Josef: Postavy a problémy českých dějin (Personalities and problems of Czech History). Vyšehrad, Prague 1990, pp. 265 - 300 and 308 - 316

⁴ For example the admirable “Paměti Františka Jana Vaváka, souseda a rychtáře milčického (Memoirs of František Jan vavák, the neighbor and mayor of Milčice)“ from the period 1770 - 1816 and the “Paměti sedláka Josefa Dlaska (Mamoirs of the peasant Josef Dlask)“ (1800 - 1853)

⁵ For example Božena Němcová, Karolina Světlá, Tereza Nováková, A. Jirásek, Josef Holeček, J. Š. Baar or the Mrštík brothers and others

Lindner a T. G. Masaryk had started the first expressively sociological period at our country.⁶

The character of Czech sociology started forming approximately since the 80s of the 19. century up to the WWI. In this period, T. G. Masaryk (1850 - 1937) contributed considerably to its forming. The endeavours for catching up with the world and inclusion into the European and world context were strengthening then. These aspirations were shared also by the Masaryk's concept of positivism in the form of critical realism. At the same time, Masaryk's sociological endeavours points from learning about the reality to the uplifting of the cultural, moral and political level of the nation. The whole extensive work of Masaryk bears the marks of ethic approach and the endeavour to implement it in the social life. However, before the origin of the Czechoslovak Republic the institutional base of sociology was very modest.

After the origin of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1919 it started to develop quickly. Departments of sociology were founded at all three universities – in Prague, in Brno and in Bratislava – and soon it was also opened as a scientific branch at the University of Agriculture in Brno. In Brno, sociology developed in its own direction, namely under the influence of Inocenc Arnošt Bláha (1879 - 1960), who created a new tradition of Czechoslovak sociology known under the name *Brno school of sociology*. Bláha also has merits regarding the development of empirical sociology.

Slovak sociology developed at the university in Bratislava in close connection to both the Prague and Brno sociological school. Among the most outstanding sociologists of the time then belonged namely Anton Štefánek (1877 - 1964). The aim of his main work "Základy sociografie Slovenska (Basics of the Sociography of Slovakia) "was to map and describe Slovak society and thus contribute to its national self-realisation. It set then also goals of the educational and national revival character.

The growth of empirical sociology in the 20s and 30s included into its researches very often rural communities as the object of their interest. Monographies of villages Beliny to the classical part of Czech sociological methodology (Galla's Sáňy and Dolní Roveň or Bláha's research of Velká upon Velička and other). The consequences of land reform, social problems of rural population, social policy, agricultural production rationalisation, indebteding of farms, migration from rural areas and other questions belonged to the social dialogue of the time.

J. Tauber notes, that up to the 20s, agrarian-political works (scientific as well as publicist) clarified, but often also confused the situation in rural areas and in agriculture. This depended of their scientific level, information level, sometimes perhaps also on their purposefulness. Up to the 20s, there prevailed publicist works. The margin was instituted by founding of the Czechoslovak Academy of Agriculture (CAA, on December 28, 1924). The goal of this

⁶ Galla, Karel: Vývojové tendence české sociologie (Development tendencies of Czech sociology). In: O koncepci dějin československé sociologie. Collected Works of the symposium, Brno, June 19. - 20., 1967, Socialistická akademie Brno, 1968, p. 22

institution was to bring out scientific analyse not only of the production side of agriculture, but also the social one (economic, political, social and cultural).⁷ President of the Academy became Dr. Milan Hodža, an influential agrarian ideologist and politician, who initiated sociologists to get him data to support his political ideas.⁸ Secretary General of the Academy became Dr. Edvard Reich, who oscillated between economics and sociology and wrote a series of works, which can be labelled as sociological. He became the first docent (associated professor) at the university of agriculture in Brno, where also was founded the first department of rural sociology. Reich established in the CAA first session for sociology and history of village and a small sociological workplace.⁹

The 20s and 30s were the period of great cultural and scientific development in the Czechoslovak society, that reflected also in the development of rural and agricultural sociology. Namely, there emerged many new monographic studies of villages, but also other studies oriented at the social problems of rural areas and agriculture. Important for the development of Czechoslovak sociology is its entering the European structures. It is included into European scientific institutions it is influenced by them and brings impulses, for the mutual co-operation.

The interrupted development of rural and agricultural sociology.

The development of rural sociology after the WW2 was not straightforward and was leading to isolation. In the 50s, sociology as well as other science were regarded as undesirable and did not develop. Its renewal started not sooner than in the first half of the 60s.¹⁰ The renewed teaching of sociology went from the basic topics of general sociology (social structures, social changes, social organisations etc.) to the more complex views at the development of agriculture and countryside.¹¹ Important topics were the changes of social structures in the collectivised enterprises and the ways of functioning and management of the large-scale agricultural enterprises.¹² Only in the first half

⁷ Tauber, J. a kol.: *Sociologie zemědělství a venkova I.* (Sociology of agriculture and rural areas I.) Institut pro vzdělávání pracovníků v zemědělství a výživě, Prague 1968, p. 59

⁸ Hodža, M.: *Agrární demokracie v myšlenkových prouděch současné doby* (Agrarian democracy in the thinking flows of the present time), Prague 1930

⁹ Tauber, J.: *Vznik sociologie venkova a zemědělství* (The origin of rural and agricultural sociology). In: *O koncepci dějin československé sociologie. Sborník materiálů ze symposia*, Brno 19. - 20. června 1967, Socialistická akademie Brno, 1968, p. 257

¹⁰ Tauber, J.: *Vznik sociologie venkova a zemědělství* (The origin of rural and agricultural sociology). In: *O koncepci dějin československé sociologie. Sborník materiálů ze symposia*, Brno 19. - 20. června 1967, Socialistická akademie, Brno, 1968

¹¹ Detailed information on the empirical researches results can be found in the individual issues of the journal *Sociologie venkova a zemědělství*.

¹² Tauber, J. a kol.: *Sociologie zemědělství a venkova I., II.* (Sociology of agriculture and rural areas I, II.). Institut pro vzdělávání pracovníků v zemědělství a výživě, Praha 1968. Křenek, F.: *Sociologie zemědělského podniku* (Sociology of agricultural enterprise), Institut pro vzdělávání pracovníků v zemědělství a výživě, Praha, 1969. Lom, F.: *Vědeckotechnická revoluce v zemědělství* (Scientific and technological revolution in agriculture). In: *Historie a sociologie zemědělství. I. díl*, Socialistická akademie, Prague 1969. Tauber, J.: *Specifické důsledky vědeckotechnické revoluce v zemědělství a její společenské důsledky* (Specific impacts of the scientific and technological revolution in agriculture and its social impacts). In: *Historie a sociologie zemědělství. I. díl*, Socialistická akademie, Prague 1969. Václavů A.: *O některých tendencích*

of the 60s become rural and agricultural sociology to be rather recovered from the previous dampening.

In 1965, the Institute of Rural Sociology and History of Agriculture was established at the Research Institute of Agricultural Economics in Prague. The institute was led by the director Prof. Jan Tauber and became a unifying and co-ordinating workplace for the scientific branch of sociology and history of rural areas and agriculture, which elaborated scientific studies also for the agrarian policy purposes. At the same year, there was started publishing of the first independent journal aimed at these problems – the “*Sborník pro sociologii a historii zemědělství* (Collected Works on Sociology and History of Agriculture “). It represented for the next almost thirty years the only specialised periodical bringing information on the economic and social problems of rural areas. In the autumn of 1992, the journal was stopped for financial reasons and the problematics of sociology is tackled in two monothematic issues per year in the journal *Agricultural Economics*.

In 1965, there were also started continual lectures in the field of the sociology of agriculture and rural areas at the University of agriculture in Prague and in Brno, where later on we also established “Institutes of Rural Sociology“ by the departments of scientific communism (in Prague) and of Marxism (in Brno). Since 1966, rural sociology was lectured also at the University of Agriculture in Nitra (Slovakia).

Jan Tauber became the first full professor of rural sociology and in 1967 the head of the “department of sociology and history of agriculture and rural areas“ at the Faculty of Economics and management (FEM) of the University of Agriculture in Prague. First textbooks on the rural and agricultural sociology were Publisher at the UA in Prague in 1965 and in Brno in 1966. As the head of the Institute of Rural Sociology and History of Agriculture at the Research Institute of Agricultural Economics (RIAE), the re was appointed Doc. Hanuš Schimmerling.¹³

However, this positive development did not last for long. After the Soviet occupation in 1968 and the following “normalisation“ of the political and public life, a radical and long-term dampening of the social discussion started again. Sociology was put (not for the first time in its development) into the role of an undesirable opponent of the Communist Party and government decisions. Research of the real state of the society and public opinions was not regarded as useful for anything. Therefore, sociological workplaces at the UA in Prague and in Brno were abolished, the same as the Institute of Rural Sociology and History of Agriculture by the RIAE in Prague, of which only one small department of the RIAE remained. It was still oriented at the rural and agricultural sociology, however, its activities were strictly set by the economic concepts of the institute. With the further wave of emigrants, tens of thousands qualified specialists as well as hopeful young scientists were leaving Czechoslovakia. All abroad scientific

vývoje zemědělství. Historie a sociologie zemědělství, I.díl (On some tendencies of the development of agriculture, Volume I.), Socialistická akademie, Prague 1969.

¹³ Tauber, J.: Vznik sociologie venkova a zemědělství (The origin of rural and agricultural sociology). In: O koncepci dějin československé sociologie. Sborník materiálů ze symposia, Brno 19. - 20. června 1967, Socialistická akademie Brno, 1968, str. 258 - 260

contacts were broken, no scientific discussion led on for a long period of time; methodology stagnated on the level of the 60s.¹⁴

Sociology of rural areas and agriculture after 1989.

A change occurred only after 1989, when rural and agricultural sociology emerged again as a study program at the Czech University of Agriculture (CUA) in Prague and was also extended in Brno, where it has survived, even if in a somewhat reduced form, in the frame of other departments.

After 1989, Czechoslovakia renewed again its membership in the international organisations as the European Society for Rural Sociology, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) and other (Majerová, 1997). The twenty-years-long gap was being filled in again gradually.

In the frame of the newly established Department of Humanities of the University of Agriculture (later Czech University of Agriculture) in Prague, obligatory teaching of sociology of rural areas and agriculture was renewed. The course was included as obligatory into the study program Economics and Management for the 3rd year. The majority of students had no previous secondary school education in the fields of sociology, therefore it was necessary to include, at the beginning of the course, the basics of general sociology and sociological methods and techniques. In the applied rural sociology part, there were in the first etap searched the relationships to the development prior to 1968, common topics and useful issues. In the following years, the topic of rural and agricultural sociology was extended, specified and adapted to the changing reality of rural areas and agriculture.

In the first years of the renewed teaching (at the beginning of the 90s), the aim of the course was to continue in the traditions of Czechoslovak rural sociology and to underline its applied character. It supplied to the students knowledge on social relationships in rural areas and in agriculture both in the Czech Republic and in the wider European and world context. During seminars, students were acquainted with the literature regarding the individual topics and the prepared essays were discussed. Individual methods and techniques of data collecting and their processing for the aims of the present state of rural areas and agriculture description were exercised. The recommended literature included Czech as well as foreign works, namely those of German rural sociology accessible at the time.

Already in the mid-90s, the content of the course changed partially. There was still taught the general sociology and the methods and techniques of sociological research. The part of the course regarding development of Czech agriculture and rural areas was precised and supplemented, but the stress is put on the structural changes of agricultural enterprises emerging in connection of the processes of restitution, privatisation and transformation of agriculture. The seminars were gradually conceived as independent topical blocks – the role of sociology in the society, key problems of the present society and their reflection

¹⁴ Majerová, V.: *Sociologie venkova a zemědělství (Rural and agricultural sociology)*. Textbook of the FEM CUA, Prague 1998.

in the thinking of people, introduction to the sociological research methodology, practicing individual methodological approaches and individual methods and techniques, processing and interpretation of sociological research, examples of researches, analysis of the social situation, analysis of the contemporary tendencies of rural communities development, construction of the agrarian policy issues.

The end of the 90s meant a more stressed division of the rural sociology teaching into three topical blocks of *general sociology* (including methods and techniques of sociological research) *applied sociology of rural areas and agriculture* and *incorporation of rural and agricultural sociology into the European context*. The methodological block was extended by the knowledge of the quantitative approach in sociological research. Both theoretical and practical knowledge is oriented in such a way that students could utilise it also in other courses (for socio-economic analysis of an enterprise or an area, for marketing research, for the use of personalistics etc.). The acquired knowledge can help students to find job in rural areas not only in agricultural enterprises, but also in public administration, services, local institutions as well as in own business. This course is followed, in the case of a deeper interest of students, other optional sociological courses (main flows in the contemporary sociology, civil society, social policy, equal opportunities for men and women).

Seminars are oriented at topical complexes like private farms, social inequality in the society, problems of ethnics and minorities, social consequences of market economy, changes of local structures, the position of the Eastern and central European countries in the context of common European policy.

At the verge of the 20. and 21. century, the orientation of rural and agricultural sociology was oriented at the EU accession and its preparation. The introductory blocks of general sociology, sociological methods and techniques and the development of Czech rural areas and agriculture stayed, but there were added the actual topics regarding the historical and cultural heritage of the village and the topics oriented at the European and world rural areas (Majerova, 1999). The extensive problematics of the development of Czech, European and world rural areas brings about other specialised courses. For the use of the practice, namely of the regional schools of the rural development managers, there is prepared the course "Social development of regions", which is oriented at the socio-demographic problematics in the Czech Republic with regard to the town and rural inhabitancy. The core of the course is oriented at the questions of employment/unemployment of Czech population including social impacts of unemployment. Attention is paid also to the selected social groups and their position in the society from the social and economic usefulness viewpoint.

The course "Rural Manpower Development" (RMD) was prepared in co-operation with the Institute of Tropical and Subtropical agriculture of the CUA. It issues from the existing knowledge on the social structure development in the changing conditions of the post-transformation period in rural areas. It is aimed at both Czech and foreign students who will work on the managerial positions on different level (national, regional, local) and will meet with the problems of population employment. The course includes the methodological approaches to

problem identification and analysis, solution, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the results.

From the concise survey of the changes in teaching rural sociology, it is obvious that the development of the discipline is not straightforward. The content of the course is supplemented and changed (Majerova, 2000). The rate of the topics regarding rural sociology and the sociology of agriculture is fluctuating as well as the share of the topics regarding European and world agriculture and rural areas. The actual questions are solved at seminars, into the topics of lectures they are incorporated gradually and subsequently.

Sociological research of rural areas and agriculture.

An important part of teaching is its relation to the systematically provided empirical research of rural areas and agriculture. The period immediately after 1989 was characterised by a chaotic approach to the sociological research of rural areas and agriculture. The hitherto existing systems of research financing were abolished; new ones were not yet implemented. On the other hand, there have opened the possibilities unknown before 1989, for example public grant competitions home and abroad, the possibility to acquire personal and group grants, co-operation in the international research teams, study stays at the European and overseas universities and other.

The result of the situation was atomisation and a non-systematic approach to getting the first data resources. There were acquired grant supports from the RSS (Research Support Scheme) and the Open Society. First researches were aimed above all at the solution of unemployment in rural areas, at the revival of private farming and at mapping of the transformation changes. In 1997, the eight-years financial support from the Ministry of education, Youth and Sports was acquired. From the financial means of this support, the research workplace "Sociological Laboratory" was established at the Faculty of Economics and Management of the CUA in Prague. Since 1997, a systematic sociological research of rural areas and agriculture is provided and the editorial series *Czech Countryside* was founded.

In the long-term research plan, the following topics were included: basic data on rural areas, rural institutions, enterprises and enterprising in rural areas, Czech rural areas before the EU accession, life strategies of young people and seniors in rural areas. Besides these key topics, also partial tasks were solved in the national and international co-operation. For the further 5-year period (from 2004 to 2008), there was acquired grant support of the Ministry of labour and Social Affairs, so that the systematic research will continue. Empirical researches represent a well utilisable database also for other Czech ministries and their results are utilised in decision-making processes.

The present orientation and tasks of rural sociology.

Teaching of rural sociology has become an important part of the study programs of the FEM CUA in Prague and the base of the accredited PhD. Study program „Regional and Social Development“. Several courses of sociology are also prepared in English version. Every year, lectures on rural sociology are included in the program of the summer School for American students Tradition

has become the Autumn School of Rural sociology organised in co-operation of the universities in Helsinki, Lodz, Krakow, Prague and Budapest.

Empirical research of Czech rural areas continues by the comparative research of two Czech regions – the South Bohemia and North Bohemia. Simultaneously, the national research “Czech rural areas after the EU accession” is prepared, which will analyse the areas of the rural population economic and social life, which were reflected as problematic in the research “Czech Rural areas before the EU accession”.

International co-operation continues through the grant support from the EU 6th FP. In co-operation with 12 European universities, the project “Cognitive Approach to Rural Sustainable Development” is being solved. It issues from the thesis that among the most important factors of the rural society development, there belongs social capital, without which the development of rural areas cannot be imagined. Differences of the European regions, as well as the regions inside the individual countries, can be very important, but they cannot be solved by the social exclusion, i.e. by excluding of certain social groups from the economic and public life, even if their inclusion is sometimes a very difficult and a long-term task (Majerova, 2001).

Rural sociology – in its pedagogic as well as research form – has then got again into the role of the important scientific discipline, which influences the present reality of Czech rural areas to a considerable extent.

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RURALNA SOCIOLOGIJA U REPUBLICI ČEŠKOJ POSLE 1989. GODINE

- originalni naučni rad -

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Rezime

Ruralna sociologija u Republici Češkoj prolazila je kroz različite razvojne etape u toku kojih je naizmenično bila uništavana i ponovo zadobijala na važnosti. Naime, za vreme takozvane Prve republike (između prvog i drugog svetskog rata) pažnja je bila usmerena na monografsko istraživanje čeških i slovačkih sela. Posle drugog svetskog rata ruralna sociologija "ostala je u tišini" za izvesno vreme. Ona je, međutim, ponovo pokrenuta u razvoju početkom šezdesetih godina kada je bila usmerena na opsežno proporcioniranje socijalističkog razvoja poljoprivrede. Posle sovjetske intervencije 1968. godine ruralna sociologija bila je ponovo potisnuta; ona je opstala, u redukovanom obliku, samo u istraživanju. Posle 1989. godine, ruralna sociologija ponovo je obnovljena i u istraživačkom radu i u studijama. Od sredine devedesetih godina pristupa se sistemsko empirijskom istraživanju čeških seoskih predela. Češki sociolozi ponovo su uključeni u međunarodnu saradnju i ruralna sociologija postaje važna disciplina u oživljavanju i razvoju ruralnih područja.