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## **The Bulgarian Village and Globalization Processes**

“The Bulgarian Village and Globalization Processes”, edited by Veska Kozhuharova (Bulgarian Society of Rural Sociology, Sofia 1997) appeared as a result of presentations and discussions at the XVII Congress of the European Society of Rural Sociology. This debate regarding changes in Bulgarian rural areas during recent years concerns various questions which urgently need to be answered not only for the case of Bulgaria but also other Eastern European countries.

The authors of the book focused on certain complex issues like: the question of an open society as a framework for reforms and social change in East European countries, social policy in Bulgaria in the wider European context, the problems of alternative employment in Bulgaria and development of the private sector in this country.

When introducing readers to the book, Kozhuharova refers to the concept of an open society which gives wide and very up-to-date theoretical frames for further analyses. The book is intended to show problems of rural area development in the wide East European context, where states of that region shared the same experience and today have similar types of questions regarding development in rural areas. However, some comparisons have been mentioned to stress the differentiation inside the group of these countries and peculiarities of each of them, Bulgaria in particular. The situation in the region has been analyzed from the perspective of dynamic changes accompanying the long way toward a free market economy. Although, as few of the authors point out, these countries including Bulgaria are torn between their past and the aspirations toward building an open society. The inquiry is to find an answer as to how post-communist countries should be seen in the context of global changes. Kozhuharova's proposal is simple — that both groups (socialist and capitalist societies) should be seen as societies open in a way specific for them to the globalization processes looking for most suitable solutions to the problems of local development in different “non-standard ways”. Moreover, she stresses the importance of dealing with these questions in the context of preparations to join West European structures.

The example of Bulgaria shows some similarities with agriculture in Poland and other post-communist states. However, it also has its strong specific characteristic. Summing up, we can say that Kozhuharova gives a pessimistic view of the changes taking place in that country. The same tone may be observed in articles by other authors speaking about reforms and trends in the Bulgarian village. They clearly spell out the opposite results from the main objectives which closed the state to the open society model. The authors agree with Kozhuharova's pessimistic view of closing the Bulgarian village, shrinking the social environment, apathy and passiveness and seeing these effects as de-modernization and destruction, which is in fact the opposite result to the one which is expected.

The analyses left no doubt about the very difficult situation in the Bulgarian village and its peculiarities faced on its path toward a more democratic state model. All the authors of the book agree that Bulgaria is very far away from completing this difficult task. One of the final conclusions, clearly formulated by Maria Stoyanova among others, is that without a special government policy further progress will not be possible. Otherwise, stagnation or even regress and destruction are the prognosis.

At the same time, planned structural changes and reforms have been taking place. Speaking about reforms, Nikolina Ilijeva shows the return of arable land to the owners as being the most characteristic feature of Bulgarian agricultural reforms. She also speaks about the problems connected with the liquidation of the state farms and consequently the big loss to Bulgarian agriculture. Finally, the position of agriculture has been described by her as the sector not only unable to compete in a foreign market but also unable to feed its local inhabitants. An interesting question: why have the young generation not been interested in starting their own enterprises, why are they not encouraged by the new chance of private ownership? has been left without an answer. However, we learnt further on, that on the one hand, young people are trade-oriented and on the other, they are dealing in large scale farms, which can give hope for modern farming in the future but for the time being this is a small group of farmers. And the chances of promoting that model are very limited.

Other authors also stress a pessimistic prognosis for further developments taking into account negative natural growth, demographic disequilibrium and continuous two-direction migrations. They state that the fall of rural areas has been caused by many factors combined into a strong blockade against development. For certain improvement of the general situation in the village, the authors of the book point out, extended economic and social intervention with the implementation of complex and long perspective program for economic, social and demographic development are necessary.

The new economic and structural situation also brought big changes into relations between the town and the village, which according to Maria

Shismanova plays a special role in the whole picture of changes in the economic sphere of Bulgaria.

Very useful information can be found in the chapter regarding new economic actors, where new patterns of self-employment are shown as a result of economic and structural changes. According to Marianna Draganova, in Bulgaria one can speak about new types of social actors in agriculture based on the new patterns of entrepreneurship (self-employment, leasing or combined). However, these models are still not stable. They are rather "first swallows", as says the author, of the new economic conditions which should be followed and strongly supported. It is worth mentioning here that these new actors are the well known categories in numerous states having long experience of a free market economy and are basic forms of economic functioning and coexistence. Being new in Bulgaria they are still to face agrarian policy as one of the main obstacles in developing entrepreneurship, and as the factor "ruining agricultural production and destroying the private sector in particular". Private businessmen in Bulgaria are in a specific situation since this country has developed rural industry, which could widen the possibilities of alternative enterprises and accommodate various economic patterns. The uncertainty and fear stops people from showing initiative and enterprise, from establishing or extending their own business.

In conditions of an unstable economy, new businessmen are trying to take quick benefit and to explore alternative chances of functioning. Their interest is frequently in the processing of foodstuffs or other services connected with food production and processing. From among other alternative employment forms in the rural areas, it is worth mentioning, says Donka Ivanova, agrotourism and ecological farming.

All the authors agree that the village should be seen as part of society and this is not yet true in practice. In this book a pessimistic (realistic?) picture of the Bulgarian countryside is portrayed with a decreasing income from farming, with decreasing interest in farming on the part of the young generation where even the right to private land does not encourage them to take the risk of starting a new business. Another aspect of the picture presented here are the worsening living conditions. Here, some of the authors stress the lack of a proper policy (lack of medical care in the rural areas, etc.) among other problems while others show an intended resignation from facilities brought by modernization (lesser use of electricity, modern bathrooms etc.), which could be recognized as symptoms of an intended return to natural life in the village. Showing these various points of view toward the life in the Bulgarian village makes the book an interesting case study of Bulgarian rural areas. It gives a picture of difficulties in this country which have to be overcome but also brings proposals and some ideas showing the directions which if followed would have an essential meaning in the process of turning to a market economy, to a democratic constitution and values.