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## **The Bulgarian Countryside in the Process of Transition**

Embarking on the subject of the 18<sup>th</sup> ESRS Congress 'How to be Rural in Late Modernity — Process, Project and Discourse,' which took place at the University of Lund, Sweden from 24 to 28 August 1999, the Bulgarian Society for Rural Sociology organized a national conference (June 1999). Selected papers presented at the conference were published in a book.\* There the authors discuss the challenges facing rural Bulgaria at the turn of the century.

V. Kozhucharova defined late modernity as a time when modernity has already exhausted its potential. This however, does not make modernity equivalent to demodernization and destruction of modernity. Instead it signifies a new kind of global development. 'This implies a search for new forms of *harmonizing* highly modern technologies with the ecological culture and ecological technologies of traditional societies, by means of which natural resources and specific local cultural models will be preserved' (p. 6). The proper nature of late modernity imposed a certain model of development for all Central and Eastern European countries in transition, including Bulgaria, but it was balanced by the historical and geopolitical specificity of each country.

Late modernity related to the Bulgarian village is considered in the papers in three main aspects: (a) restructuring of the agricultural sector; (b) human capital in the countryside; (c) different aspects of late modernity within the Bulgarian village. This fact predetermines the division of the papers published into three basic groups.

*The first group's papers* analyse the transformation of the agricultural sector to a market system, in particular the land reform and restructuring of the rural economy in Bulgaria. M. Stoianova connected the subject matter

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\* *The Bulgarian Village and Late Modernity*, ed. by V. Kozhucharova, Bulgarian Society for Rural Sociology and Institute of Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria Rusticana, ALJA-PRESS, Sofia 1999, 179 p.

of the Bulgarian village in the conditions of late modernity with the problems of liquidation of the organizational structures in agriculture taking place in the 1990s, as well as its reflections and socio-economic consequences in static and dynamic aspect. She tries to find answers to the following questions: What exactly was the liquidation of the organizational structures in agriculture? Why and for whom was it necessary? Which were those organizational structures? Who did the liquidation? How was the legislative basis of liquidation used? What are the social and economic consequences of the liquidation? What are the perspectives? As a result of the analysis she insists on the indispensable need of public intervention, subsidizing, and regulation of the development of the foodstuff sector in the country. It could motivate the economically active population to going back to the village. Finally the author asked the question 'Can liquidation in agriculture be accepted as an element for the change of the Bulgarian village in conditions of late modernity?' She has two answers: yes, because there was a change in agricultural structures — restitution, privatization, which means transformation of public into more productive private property; and no, because the change in Bulgaria was destructive and brought a downfall — availability of uncultivated land, losing markets, and losing the possibility of making use of experience and professional skills, etc.

Under conditions of modernization villages are seeking ways of surviving and even enhancing their potential. G. Koleva focuses on rural business defined as forms of private productive and commercial activities localized in villages. In other words, she pays attention to the private business which has accompanied the changes in Bulgarian society in general, and is a specific response to the problems of the village. She also tries to answer the question of job opportunities for non-agrarian activities in modern villages. For this purpose a survey 'The New Social Stratification in the Bulgarian Village' was carried out in 1996. In respect to opportunities and actual activity in the non-agrarian sphere it reveals the following situation. In about one-third of the villages there is some opportunity for work in an industrial enterprise (workshops, branches); in 28% of the villages there are openings in forestry, of course mostly in mountain villages; in 10% of the villages there are job opportunities in tourism (mostly in villages with natural springs, in mountain and waterside villages); for a small proportion of the villages (4%) there are other opportunities: construction stone-cutting, dairying. Villages with no possibility of a non-agrarian livelihood (40% of all villages) are typically small, four-fifths of them having no more than 500 inhabitants, and their population is in the third age. Analysing the research findings the author proves how stimulating rural business could be a beneficial state strategy.

M. Keliyan makes some parallels between present Bulgarian and Japanese rurality. Her paper is entitled *Modernization of Agriculture and Rural*

*Communities in Bulgaria and Japan.* It presents the Bulgarian and Japanese village and farming in the context of their historical development. In particular it characterizes the specific features of the types of farming, work values and morality of rural communities in the light of the changes after World War II. It is stressed that the post-war agrarian reform destroyed feudal relationships in Japan and turned Japanese peasants into landowners. At the same time, socialist transformation in Bulgaria did away with private ownership and deprived Bulgarian peasants of their status of independent farmers.

The model of modernization of the rural areas and agriculture chosen in Japan in the wake of World War II and in Bulgaria after the collapse of communism was oriented towards petty farms and co-operatives. However, the trends and priorities of the agricultural policy whereby the projected goals are implemented differ. The Japanese state tries to balance between the economic demands of international institutions, national interests and the traditional values of Japanese peasants. State priorities include investment in agriculture, oriented towards credits for buying modern and costly equipment, providing high technological back-up by agricultural co-operatives, and easy financing and marketing. There are programmes for encouraging the development of rural communities and their infrastructure, as well as providing possibilities for diverse forms of employment besides farming.

Transformation in Bulgarian agriculture is implemented through an essentially different agricultural policy. The author argues that agriculture is not subsidized by the state, and agricultural policy is not a result of an integral strategy. The successful transformation of agriculture demands a unified national strategy and policy proving legislative and institutional mechanisms of supporting the sector, stimulation and protection of production. The modernization of agriculture and rural areas is unthinkable without stabilizing the farmers' strata, parallel to stimulating the development of the new middle strata in the villages.

*The second group papers* focused their attention on human capital in the rural areas as a factor of late modernity. Three authors (A. Atanassov, S. Todorova and Z. Toneva) have reported findings from a research project '1999 International Year of Old People — Social Survey of Population of 60 and More Years of Age in Bulgaria' working out in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme. Here the problems of late modernity are related to the intergenerational and interpersonal relations of elderly rural people. The data show that a real problem exists in the intergenerational dialogue and a delineated tendency for loss of social knowledge and skill. Nearly two thirds of the persons interviewed in the village think that they are not in a position to pass their experience on to the young generation. The basic reason for this is the deformed demographic situation in

the villages where the inhabitants are mainly old people and representatives of the young generation are very limited in number, with a significant difference in the educational level of both generations. Another reason is, however, that during the years of transformation of society the most radical, hardest and longest was precisely the transition in the village, which was accompanied by many wrong decisions. The state actually abdicated from its obligations both with regard to the village as a territorial community and with regard to agriculture as a specific and extremely important branch of the national economy. This undoubtedly influenced attitudes towards social dialogue and continuity. Losses from such a social position, will unfortunately accompany not only the present generation because the transfer of social experience from the older generation, burdened with wrong decisions in the past, but given a new meaning from the distance of time, would be of use to the young generation.

Current changes in Bulgarian rural areas have affected and are still affecting the future development of the social structure in villages, separate groups and strata, in particular the intelligentsia. In B. Georgieva's paper two basic problems are raised: firstly, location of the intelligentsia within the social stratification in the context of crisis and social differentiation and in relation to changing social dynamics, and secondly, determination of the basic characteristics and feature of the rural intelligentsia, the determining factors of its features, and the reflection of these factors in the mind and behaviour of the intelligentsia, the formation of new structure-forming qualities adequate to late modernity.

Two authors (G. Geshev and N. Ilieva) analyze the influence of the capital (Sofia) on the demographic processes in the villages situated in its proximity. The object of their study is the influence of Sofia on the changes. It has been underlined that this is an indirect influence, which cannot be exactly measured. On the basis of studies of the statistical data from two subsequent censuses in 1985 and 1992 as well as the current statistics some conclusions are drawn, namely: during the process of urbanization the capital has attracted first of all the younger people from the villages which have permanently migrated to the city; Sofia had one of the highest growth-rates during the 50s and 60s compared to the old European capitals. This growth-rate gradually decreased during the following decades and in the 90s it did not differ from other capitals, especially after the display of the demographic stagnation and of the negative rate of natural increase of population in the country since 1990.

S. Dobрева describes an empirical study on the inequalities between the rural households in Bulgaria. Major groups of factors shaping the social differences between rural households are outlined, namely the economic and legal situation in the country, the demographic and regional characteristics of the Bulgarian village, the human resources of rural households. On

the basis of several classification criteria and using empirical data a stratification typology of the rural households has been made. The following main types of households have been established: successful households, stabilized households, subsisting households and highly impoverished households. The first group is the smallest: it constitutes only 6% of the total number of the studied households. It could be said that the successful households have an explicitly pragmatic behaviour, involving ambitions and plans for the future, they are oriented to developing and expanding their efforts, activities and prosperity, which is in many cases achieved at the expense of great personal (family) strain and hard work. The second group, so-called stabilized households account about 26% of the households under review. The characteristics of this type are closer to those of 'successful' households rather than the trait of the other groups. The 'subsisting' households, i.e. the third type are those with unsatisfactory economic status. This means they have inadequate income to secure a normal existence and an up-to-date living standard. They constitute a prevailing share (proportion) of rural households — 47%. Usually these households pursue strategies of passive accommodation to the new economic realities (enjoying 'pot luck') — by extremely limiting their consumption and partly seeking ways of providing some kind of self-sufficiency through consumption of own farm production. About 21% of the households under review belong to the fourth group, i.e. facing impoverishment. It is difficult to look for any economic strategy or perspective in the households of this group. It could be affirmed that their efforts are aimed at merely scratching a living.

*The papers in the third group* concern different aspects of life of the Bulgarian village in the context of late modernity: strategy of the ecological education in secondary schools (D. Dachev and S. Dimitrova); the village embarking on the computer world (N. Mateev); religiosity: new dimensions of tradition (M. Serafimova); the village in late modernity: a vanishing or changing social structure (T. Rakadjiska); the family social policy in Bulgarian villages today (M. Fileva and R. Bakardjieva); the role of the small family business in the development of the motivation of Bulgarians to live and work in mountainous and semi-mountainous regions (N. Malamova); values and ethnic differentiation in Bulgarian villages (T. Nedelcheva), etc. An interesting approach to studying the two cultural patterns in Bulgaria — urban and rural in the context of late modernity has been used by V. Klinchanski. Actually he considered the cultural pattern in which the individual is brought up and which imprints his/her further development.