

## PREFACE

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Rural space is one of the biggest problem areas in transformation countries. Already in the Communist era, it was a zone burdened with socio-economic problems, low quality of life and unfavourable economic and demographic development. After the political turn in 1989/90 and during transformation, the situation has almost everywhere become even more critical, except for rural areas with intensive tourism, areas located along development axes between larger urban centres and along borders towards countries in a more prosperous economic situation. Villages suffer from depopulation, lose their potential for regeneration and innovation. Cultivations are abandoned, and fertile lands turn into fallow or are getting covered by secondary vegetation. Very frequently, also cultural assets like traditional farmsteads and places of worship fall into decay.

Scientists – and not the least geographers – are increasingly getting aware of this problem and have started not only documenting and describing it, but also hinting at possible solutions. Moreover, individuals from the place, but with some external experience and support as well as associations and agencies with the aim of promoting marginalised areas try to activate the remaining endogenous potentials – partly with considerable success. Eventually, they could serve as models, their procedures being transferred to other parts of the wider region.

It seemed therefore worthwhile to devote the meeting of the German Geographical Society's Working Group on Central Europe that was held in conjunction with the German Congress of Geography in Berlin, September 30, 2015, to the topic "New developments in the rural space of Central and Southeast Europe." It saw thirteen paper presentations from eight countries. A selection of seven papers has been included into these proceedings.

The first chapter by Emilija MANIĆ, Svetlana POPOVIĆ and Žaklina STOJANOVIĆ (Belgrade [Beograd]) presents the characteristics and problems of rural space of an entire country by the example of Serbia. It shows a situation typical for post-Communist

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Central and South-East Europe, although agriculture in former Yugoslavia had in contrast to all other former Communist countries except Poland been collectivised only to a minor extent. However, a strict limitation of private agricultural holdings by law contributed to preserving a traditional, small-scale agricultural structure that has major difficulties to adapt to market requirements today.

Aleksandar LUKIĆ and Petra RADELJAK KAUFMANN (Zagreb) then describe the conceptual framework for an interdisciplinary scenario-based study of rural space in Croatia – another successor country of Yugoslavia characterised by small-scale subsistence farming as well as by significant rural depopulation especially in the Dinaric mountain range as well as in the coastal belt. The article is supplemented by a comprehensive bibliography of international literature on rural space.

Johannes HUEMER and Vera KAPELLER (Vienna [Wien]) analyse new settlement and housing developments in the Austrian-Slovakian border region. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, also the Austrian part of this region has been included into suburbanisation processes around Bratislava, Slovakia's booming capital. What strikes most and is subject to a critical reflection as regards rural development is the phenomenon that new activities affect rather village fringes and substantially enlarge settlement areas, while traditional village cores – very frequently valuable built cultural heritage – are abandoned.

Marcin WÓJCIK (Łódź) highlights the Polish initiative “Network of the Most Interesting Villages”, which aims at raising awareness of the assets and problems of rural space, hinting at the cultural heritage still present there and activating endogenous potentials. He addresses the problems connected with establishing such a network, shows the uneven spatial distribution of participants and ranks categories of assets and shortcomings of the villages selected.

Paulina TOBIASZ-LIS (Łódź) investigates into the image rural dwellers have of their own village by asking them to draw freehand sketches and present photographic essays. These reveal not only the perceived character of the village, but also the current view at the ‘rural’ and at ‘rurality’ and suggest modes of improvement and planning. The examples of two Polish villages are embedded into an extensive theoretical framework and a methodological discussion.

Karolina DMOCHOWSKA-DUDEK (Łódź) and Maria BEDNAREK-SZCZEPAŃSKA (Warsaw [Warszawa]) highlight the “Not In My Back Yard” (NIMBY) syndrome by the example of rural areas in Poland. They try to answer the questions, which categories of features arouse the strongest objections, where the highest concentrations in spatial terms occur, how this phenomenon relates to legal and administrative conditions and what it means in social terms.

Kinga Xénia HAVADI NAGY, Oana-Ramona ILOVAN (Cluj-Napoca) as well as Doris DAMYANOVIC, Florian REINWALD and Mandy MĂRGINEAN (Vienna) plead for participatory rural development in the sense of involving inhabitants and local actors and activating in this way local social capital. The article highlights on the Romanian

side the example of a traditional Transylvanian Saxon village, where an energetic lady succeeds in managing the predominantly Roma population with preserving the built cultural heritage and conducting a soft tourism. From the Austrian side, by the example of a village in the Federal State of Burgenland, the principles and problems of the Austrian way of village renewal are demonstrated.

The seven chapters of this volume provide thus a concise introduction into relevant characteristics, problems as well as possible problem solutions of/for rural areas in transformation countries of Central and South-East Europe. The editor feels very obliged to all the authors for their excellent cooperation as well as to Florian PARTL, who skilfully elaborated the layout.

