FROM THE SCIENTIFIC SPHERE

20th Biennial Conference of the European Society for Rural Sociology

European Society for Rural Sociology has arranged 20th Biennial Conference in 18–22 August 2003. The Conference of the European Society for Rural Sociology took place on the North-West coast of Ireland in the city of Sligo – city about 20 000 people, recently identified as one of Ireland's development 'gateways' and most famously associated with the Nobel Prize winning poet W.B. Yeats. The conference topic was **"Work, Leisure and Development in Rural Europe Today"**. The plenary session included ten presentations and presented over two hundred papers in more of twenty working groups.

I would like to inform you briefly about papers presented at the conference and basic topics discussed in working groups and I will focus my information on the researchers and issues related to the CEEC.

Two afternoons were dedicated to presentations on the plenary session. The first "evergreen" topic – **Science and practice in rural development** – included presentations of M. Mormont, K. Bruckmeier, N. Long, R. Almas and J. Portela; the second issue **The enlargement of the EU** was presented from different points of view by the representatives of the EU members and the EU candidate countries representatives: H. Tovey, P. Lowe, M. Shucksmith, J. Reis and I. Kovach. Kovach's presentation reflected transformation in the rural economy and society of the post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe with respect to the EU enlargement. He characterised "new actors" and their role in the new societal situation and stressed the importance of three factors – reforms of administrative structures in the EU, the application of national (rural) development policies and the cultural factor (he reflected the theoretical concept of H. Tovey, Ch. Ray and others).

The conference program had four basic sections focused on the topics concerning ***1. Farming and Food; 2. Heritage, Globalisation, Leisure and Tourism, 3. Environment and Rural Geography and 4. Rural Society, Social Structures and Development***. Each of the four sections was divided into several working groups, differentiated not only by the topics, but also by the numbers of presented paper and participants coming from different countries (Europeans, Americans, Australians, Africans).

First section concerning "food" was differentiated into five working groups. The first working group, **Farm family transitions: Responses to modernity and changing agricultural conditions,** discussed research and theoretical developments in the area of family farm conditions and *A.L. Small*, Canadian doctoral student, presented the paper, which reflected the role of family in agrarian changes in Bulgaria and Southern Russia. Second working group, **Food consumption and farming***,* focused on the process how food habits in the present European societies influence the transformation of agricultural practices and the development of rural areas. Third, the largest working group (17 papers were presented) **The wider impacts of the Organic Movement on rural society** explored the degree to which the Organic Movement has managed to effect changes in the broader structures of rural society. A better understanding of the role and significance of small speciality food producers within the rural economy was the aim of fourth working group **Alternative food networks in rural development**. The last working group of the first section was titled **Labour, skills and training for multidimensional agriculture**. The working group concentrated on papers analysing how the skills, training and labour regulation issues are reflected in agrar export of less developed countries as well as in rural areas. The papers were divided into three levels: farm level (new requirements on knowledge-based strategies of farmers and farmer groups); territorial level (new forms of collective action by farmers and non-farmers challenging rural development advisers) and sectoral level (new negotiations between agricultural producers and official training providers). The third level was represented by the paper "*Innovative Vocational Training for Romanian Rural Inhabitants"* (Ion V. at all).

Second section (including six working groups) ***Heritage, Globalisation, Leisure and Tourism*** was mainly represented by papers related to the CEEC issues. In the first working group, it was **Rural history and rural development in 20th century**, dominated by Hungarian sociologists and historians (M. Štambuk, K. Jávor, J. Molnár, E.P. Mihai, Z. Volgyesi, T. Valuch). They discussed changes in the European rural society in the last century to understand problems of the contemporary rural development. The issues related to the **Cultural representation of European rurality** was discussed in the second working group including different dimensions of the cultural representations of the European rurality within the context of the processes and directions of both rural and societal change in Europe. I.K. Nagy, Hungarian sociologist, presented the paper "*Cultural heritage of the rurality as a part of the rural development in Hungary",* which analysed the renewal of cultural rural traditions in the case of dance houses. Papers presented in third work-

ing group: **Globalisation and counter-globalisation: Social individualisation in rural areas**, convened by K. Gorlach and P.H. Mooney, studied the particular phenomena and processes in various countries with focus on the issues of social individualisation in order to explain the nature of the process of European integration. In the frame of the next working group (**Leisure and heritage in rural areas**), the participants focused on the question how leisure in rural areas will possibly favour environmental and life style preservation and natural and cultural heritage re-valorisation. Hungarian sociologist *B. Csurgo* presented the paper "*Urban pressure and cultural tourism in Hungary: The Valley of Arts case"* focused on the urban dwellers impact on the rural cultural life. The fifth working group (**Rural tourism and rural development**) was concerning tourism in the rural areas, and the papers explored, described and discussed different dimensions of rural tourism within the context of rural development (i.e.: eco-, agro-tourism as new forms of tourism in rural areas; new ideas and practices for and around rural tourism, small-scale vs. mass tourism); theoretical issues which contribute to the sociology of rural tourism; the role of social and cultural and human capital in the development of rural tourism; and development patterns and impacts of developing tourism in rural areas (f.e. integrated vs. sectoral tourism development; individual vs. collective/participatory actions; national, regional and local case studies on rural tourism development including the LEADER and SAPARD programmes experiences).

The Polish and Czech conference participants were represented in the last working group – **Recreating local rural development in the era of globalisation**. W. Idziak presented empirical case studies concerning the alternative (inspirited by the Hobbit story) consume of social space. E. Kučerová, Czech doctoral student – presented an empirical study "*Rural Anticipation of the Welfare State – the Czech Republic in Comparison to the Post-Socialist Europe".*

Four working groups included in the third section addressed the ***Environment and Rural Geography.*** The crucial question the convenor of the first working group, J. Frows, put into the working group name, was: **Environment-induced rural restructuring?** The presupposition of the working group was that the environment is considered as the key concept in the re-definition of farming and its implications for the countryside. Generally, the presented papers related to the environmental regulation process; rural identities and landscape management, ecologising agriculture, rural planning discourses, environmental regulation and new models of rural governance. A wider view on landscape were put into the practice in the working group **Social natures in the European countryside** aimed at exploring how such re-positioning and re-connections are influencing our understanding of the past, contemporary and future nature in the European rural spaces. Nine participants examined how different cultural and community processes impact the understanding of rural nature and most of them presented case studies from Nordic and West European countries. The consumption in agro-food studies was the phenomenon addressed in the working group **Rural areas – new sites of consumption?** A. Pilichowski, Polish sociologist, convened the working group to discussing rural consumption in analysing of rural areas, i.e. rural areas as the means of consumption of the space, landscape, sustainable environment, tourist attractions, safety food and so on in the frame of the recent post-structuralist and post-modern social theories. Consumption was reflected, as the Budapest Declaration has proclaimed, "in the context of new, often urban-based, demands on rural resources and rural space". The last working group of this section, **Geography of work and employment in rural Europe,** brought together geographers and sociologists working on the issues related to work and employment in the rural sphere. The particular aim was to explore critical approaches to the impact of the recent changes in rural Europe in the contexts in which people live and work. Eight papers were presented on different aspects of work and employment at a variety of scales from the household to the international labour market. The working group brought together research from six different European countries (Russia, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Norway and Germany). The working group involved also two papers from Hungarian researchers – J. Timár and E. Fékete, both from Hungarian Academy of Sciences. *J. Timár* discussed the relationships between changing rural household strategies and gender work in the context of regional inequalities in Hungary, attempting to bridge the gap between geographical research, which focuses on the region, and sociological research, which tends to focus on the household. The focus of *É. Fekete's* paper were the attitudes to employment among rural population in a region of high unemployment in Hungary. On empirical level she identification a gap between job creation strategies, which emphasise alternatives to conventional types of employment, and the dominant desire among the rural population for more conventional 'urban' types of employment. The fourth section ***Rural society, social structures and development*** has the highest number of working groups – eight. In the first working group **Demographic change and rural restructuring,** there were presented nine papers, mainly reflecting the general agreement that the links between demographic change and rural restructuring are worth research attention. K. Kovács, from the Centre for Regional Studies in Budapest, presented a joint paper (with B. Koós and M. Váradi) on "*The Interdependence between Social and Demographic Change in the Hungarian Rural Space".* She identified the most important driving forces behind recent social and economic changes in rural areas as being the transition-related factors, such as the uneven pace and consequences of the collapse of the economy and its regeneration, the intervention policies introduced, and the abilities of the post-socialist governments to balance the effects of market forces. The

paper declared empirical results showing that urban middle-class aspirations have resulted in a marked suburbanisation around the larger towns, whilst hopes towards a better livelihood have motivated the urban poor to move to more rural areas. The convenors of the working group **Migration, Labour Relations and Socio-economic Integration in Rural Europe** had ambition to reflect many important topics related to the migration – various aspects of migrant labour and labour relations in rural areas, the implications of migrant employment on the operation of the farm, the "new" division of labour and farm household strategies, the living conditions of migrants and so on. They also wanted to stress migration problems connected with the collapse of regimes: expected massive exodus of large parts of the population, and the inflow from the Third World countries. The working group included only tree papers and co-operated with the participants of 3.3. working group. Third working group, titled **Networks, communities and social identities in rural areas: Moving frontiers?,** focused on the ongoing changes in the structuring of social ties of inhabitants of rural areas. All contributions have stressed the importance of networks in the construction of rural societies. The types of networks (their density, closeness/openness, bonding/bridging properties, etc.) were related to the professional and territorial identities. P. Starosta and O. Stanek, Polish and Czech researchers, based their paper on the common empirical research and their discussion encompassed some theoretical issues connected with the concepts of network and community. They constructed a typology of personal networks in 21 communities selected in Bulgaria, Poland, Russia and Quebec and examined its relevance to the understanding of different levels of territorial identification, social participation and the changing patterns of the social structure of villages. The representative of the Czech Republic, J. Čmejrek, spoke about the political identification in Czech rural areas, which is different from the national (parliamentary) level of political life. He discussed the peculiarity of electoral behaviour of small communities in the Czech Republic.

The gender working group, titled **New realities of gender relations,** comprised 15 papers. The papers were focused on gender as one of the central dimensions of power, taking, however, the into consideration also the intersection with other dimensions (like ethnicity, class and age). The papers mainly reflected gender equality and the choices and future of farming, gender equality versus tradition in rural areas, gender and rural politics, gender conditions of employment in rural areas. *V. Majerová,* Czech sociologists, presented the paper focused on the gender conditions of employment in rural areas. She reported on the different employment opportunities the transition offers to younger and older rural women in the Czech Republic.

Next four working groups were focused on specific topics. The British scholars convened the working group **Social exclusion, housing and homelessness in the European countryside** to discuss housing problems in the European countryside within broader discourses of social exclusion. The broad question of 4.6 working group **Rural NGOs, civic associations and rural civil society** was whether civil society groups are capable of constituting a major social force in rural society. The sociologists from Eastern Europe contributed to the general discussion about perspectives of civil society (*P. Starosta* with the Polish case) and two concrete studies concerning Polish peasants protest against post-communism (*G. Forys*). The influence of civil society in the case of the Czech Republic was discussed by *B. Hašová*. The working group **ICT in rural development – is the Net working?** brought together researchers interested in the sociological and socio-economic implications of the rise of the Information Society for, and within, rural areas. *I. Vrana* from the Czech Republic presented the paper describing the way of successful accomplishing of education (contributed to the easier and more economic way by using ICT) at the Czech University of Agriculture in Prague (CUA). Czech sociologist, economist and researchers in political sciences dominated the last section **Teaching of Social Sciences for Rural Development**. *V. Majerová*, the working group convenor, presented the proposal of international project titled "*Rural Bridge"*, which has brought together rural sociologists of the European as well as overseas countries and is based on the exchange of videos for the purpose of teaching rural sociology. The Czech Ph.D. students (*B. Hašová* and L. *Kocmánková*) presented the paper discussed their experience from teaching rural sociology and *J. Čmejrek*, also from the Czech Republic, contributed to the discussion by his experiences with teaching political sciences.

The last section of the ESRS conference, ***Development Policies,*** was divided into four working groups. The first working group **Evaluation issues: The role of sociologist in the evaluation of rural development and other quality-of-life initiatives** posted the question what should be the role of sociologists in the evaluation of initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life (economic, socio-cultural, health, education, etc.) in the ailing or vulnerable rural areas of Europe? Second working group **Impacts of European integration process on the rural development and agricultural sectors of accession countries** was convened by Hungarian scientists to analyse the European integration with the consequent multiple effects on the rural sector of the CEE countries; and the innovative ideas respecting the EU rhetoric (integrated rural development, local participation, agri-environment, etc). The papers analysed the current and foreseeable effects of the integration process in the agri-food industry, rural development, and institutional system and in the general rural policy arena of CEE countries. In the third working group, **Changing Politics of Food, Agriculture and the Environment,** 13 papers were presented. Two introductory papers reflected the contemporary issues and theoretical approaches to studying the politics and policies of agriculture, food and the environment. The remaining presentations focussed specifically on rich

research material addressing novel and emerging policy agendas, changing policy arenas, decision-making in international systems and the issues of food and rural governance and risk communication. The Czech Republic was represented here by the paper addressing the crucial problems in the implementation process of the SAPARD program and reflected (possible) winners and losers of the implementation process (M. Lošťák, H. Hudečková). The last working group, dominated by the French scientists, **Science, Policy and Practice in Agricultural and Rural Development,** analysed how different types of scientific knowledge have been successively used in the definition and implementation of agricultural and rural development policies, and how this politicised scientific knowledge has been disputed in public arenas together with the consequences of these policies.

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