

# Operational zones, countryside, network society

## *Operační zóny, venkov, síťová společnost*

S. HUBÍK

*Mendel University of Agriculture and Forestry, Brno, Czech Republic*

**Abstract:** An important issue in the theory of social constructivism is the issue of spatial arrangement. Space is grasped as the primary/secondary zone of operation. The secondary zone of operation is determined by the use of technical means. Technically conditioned social networks currently give a new dimension to both zones. From this point of view, the new solutions for the network/agglomeration economies arise: networks may substitute for agglomerations.

**Key words:** zone of operation, network society, countryside, agglomeration, Granovetter M., Schutz A.

**Abstrakt:** Důležitým problémem teorie sociálního konstruktivismu je problém prostorového uspořádání. Prostor je zde pojat jako primární operační zóna a sekundární operační zóna. Sekundární operační zóna je podmíněna technickými prostředky. Technicky podmíněné sociální sítě dnes dávají oběma operačním zónám nový rozměr. Z tohoto hlediska se nabízejí nová řešení ekonomik aglomerací/sítí: sítě mohou nahradit aglomerace.

**Klíčová slova:** operační zóna, síťová společnost, venkov, aglomerace, Granovetter M., Schutz A.

As M. Granovetter showed in the concept of *social embeddedness* (Granovetter 1985), theories concerning the behaviour of people in actual situations are in most cases “under-socialized” (there are no people in them) or “over-socialized” (there are no objectively acting determinants). Or, as the contemporary representatives of regional science and new economic geography show, the models functioning until recently are changing as a result of the start of new technical networks. For instance, the dichotomy model of regional analyses “core – periphery”, which is plentifully applied to rural regional issues, loses its heuristic function (Johansson, Quigley 2004).

The transition of highly developed societies from the organizational phase to the network phase leads to a search for those new theoretical and methodological combinations, which would present an appropriate image of what is called the “rural region”. However, this does not require accepting and strengthening the given dichotomies, but overcoming them.

The groundwork for the following comments is the basic ideas of the theory of social constructivism on the

origin and method of the spatial organization framed by Schutz and Granovetter’s theories distinguishing between *strong social ties* and *weak social ties in the social networks*. The basic term which connects both theories is *distance*: both in the sense of physical distance and social distance. The spatial organization, which is a starting point of every regionalization and therefore also of the regionalization differentiating between the countryside and city, countryside and agglomeration, or core and periphery, becomes the identification, description and classification of distances in both logical and empirical ways.

*The aim* of the work is to show the heuristic possibilities of the research of rural areas arising from the connection of the network theory with the theory of operational zones.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Schutz’s theory of social behaviour corresponds with the concept of social networks as well as the

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concept of social embeddedness. The starting point for this statement is Schutz's concept of the *world within reach* (*erreichbar*) (Schutz 1962).

*The world within reach* is understood as the space of everyday social behaviour, which is accessible to the actor either in a prospect *without time* or in a prospect *with time* of the past or future. Schutz supports his theory by the concept of the *manipulation zone* of G.H. Mead, who considered the manipulation zone the "the kernel of the reality". This core of reality plays a double role: (a) it is the *groundwork for the construction* of other zones of reality and (b) it is a source of various spatial *measures* still relevant to the actor of the social behaviour (Schutz, Luckmann 1973).

Schutz differentiates *the world within reach* in its *real reach* and *possible reach*. The world within real reach is identical to the space of the present without time, whereas the world within possible reach is a space of the past or the future.

The space created by everyday social behaviour can be further divided into "the *primary zone of operation* (the province of nonmediated action, and correspondingly the primary world within reach) and the *secondary zone of operation* (and the corresponding secondary reach), which is built upon the primary zone and which finds its limits in the prevailing technological conditions of a society" (Schutz, Luckmann 1973: 44).

This theory establishes the possibilities of micro-analyses of the spatial behaviour of people. It is a very effective cognitive instrument of everyday actions, but it does not allow the identification and description of what determines and exceeds the actions as well as what could be identified as the subject of a macro-analysis. If we use the aforementioned Granovetter terminology, Schutz's concept is suitable as a starting point; however, it will soon prove to be "over-socialized".

The interest in the countryside and the issue of rural regions is regulated nowadays especially by the question of its further development. Economic problems necessarily play an important role. If we study the contemporary or recent professional works focused on the development of the countryside, we will soon find that the problem of *growth* often covers the problem of *development*, economic questions cover social questions or vice versa. Simply said, the aforementioned subjectivities win out.

Granovetter came out strongly with the requirement to accept a new view of the economic and social behaviour of people:

This requirement contributed to discussions which followed in the theories of the *new institutional eco-*

*nomy*. To connect the social and economic behaviour by one heuristically effective concept presumed ascertaining the intersection point of these two types of behaviour. To better place this matter in historical and theoretical contexts, Granovetter introduced the terms of "over-socialized" and "under-socialized" theories of individual social behaviour. In his opinion, the classical and neoclassical economic theories operate with atomized, i.e. *under-socialized* conception of human behaviour, which generally follows the British tradition of utilitarianism. However, if the contemporary economic or sociological theory wants to overcome the subjectivities of the *under-socialized* social behaviour concept, it is in most cases oriented towards the opposite extremity: the *under-socialized* concept. The reason is obvious: even in this case, the starting point is an atomized individual and the subsequent effort to "place" him or her into social ties leads to the over-socialized concept. The way to a more realistic theory must be different: "A fruitful analysis of human action requires us to avoid of atomization implicit in the theoretical extremes of under- and oversocialized conceptions. Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside the social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them ... Their attempts at purposive action instead embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations" (Granovetter 1985: 487). Behaviour is in most cases based in a *network of interpersonal ties*: if we accept this thesis, we will avoid the two extremities of under-socialized and over-socialized human behaviour concept.

Interpersonal networks function as a bridge between the issue elaborated at the level of micro-analysis and the issue detected at the level of macro-analysis. We can recognize interpersonal ties which are strong as well as weak. To understand the term *social tie*, we have to explain what a *weak social tie* is, as any social relationship has to be at least weak (in order to exist). Granovetter explains the term of weak social tie in a similar manner as the socio-metric theory by the term of social distance. He defines the social distance between two individuals in the social network as the "number of lines in the shortest path from one to another" (Granovetter 1973: 1366, note 10), while not all individuals are connected directly or by strong social ties. This implies that the "shortest line" from individual *A* to individual *B* can lead "through" several other individuals with whom *A* does not have a strong tie or does not even have a tie at all and their relationship is mediated by other individuals. This alphabet of the sociometric theory and later beginnings of the social network theory, verified by empirical research, also gives weak social ties a meaning: "... this means that

whatever is to be diffused can reach a larger number of people, and traverse greater social distance (...), when passed through weak ties rather than strong” (Granovetter 1973: 1366).

The division of social ties into *strong* and *weak* is enabled by a criterion which is identical to four properties of *strong* social tie and allows the following definition: the strength of the tie is a combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity, mutual trust and reciprocal services. This definition of a strong social tie includes two terms directing the researches to psychology and social psychology (*emotional intensity* and *mutual trust*) as well as two terms pointing to sociology and economy (*time* and *reciprocal services*). These two term pairs are the main reason which leads us to make a connection between the *theories of social embeddedness* and *theories of social constructivism*.

Social embeddedness in networks formed by weak and strong ties is an empirical concretization of Schutz’s operational zones. The space determined by the primary and secondary operational zone can be described by the construction of the actors of social behaviour, as Schutz demanded. However, it can be also described and measured by the weak and strong ties of Granovetter’s theory. Moreover, the theory of strong and weak ties allows us to answer the question of how and where the examined space expands and which parts of the social tie network are carriers of this spatial organization. The question of development is always connected with the question of bearers and carriers of development and Granovetter’s theory combined with the theses about operational zones answers this question: weak ties are the carriers of innovations. However, there are other possibilities as well.

## RESULTS

The theory of social embeddedness allows working theoretically as well as empirically with the categories *central* and *marginal* (centre and periphery) in the social space in an effective manner. The concept of weak social ties reads the structure of weak ties as a “bridge” to marginal social processes (in comparison with general expectations) (Granovetter 1973): they are marginal because the *strong* social ties are the social source of the formation of a *centre*, whereas the *weak* social ties create the remaining social space and are the only channel of information transmission in this remaining social space.

B. Johansson and J.M. Quigley, in spite of being the representatives of the regional science or

system composed discipline, show what happens when we attach a network dimension to the centre-periphery or agglomeration-countryside model. First, they repeat the basic thesis of the theory of agglomeration and networks: “... agglomeration economies and network economies are two different, complementary ways of solving problems of market exchange. There is a clear relationship between the alternates, and diversity plays a key role. There is, however, another relationship between agglomeration and networks, focusing on the role of spillovers or communication externalities. Again, there are two basic approaches to these externalities, the pure market agglomeration and the pure network solution” (Johansson, Quigley 2004: 173). However, they add a significant conclusion about the possibility of *replacing the agglomeration by networks* to this alphabet. Such a substitution can take place provided that it is impossible to reach the spatial closeness of various subjects necessary for the formation and development of agglomeration (centre) due to economic, political or technical reasons. Networks can easily reach this spatial closeness as they can shorten the distances between the nodes and reduce the transactional or transport costs: “networks may substitute for agglomeration. This possibility of substitution means that small regions can survive and prosper – to the extent that networks can substitute for geographically proximate linkages, for local diversity in production and consumption, and for the spillouts of knowledge in dense regions.” (Johansson, Quigley 2004: 175). This applies to the countryside in the full extent.

The theoretical conclusion defined from the positions of regional science then assigns the functions of agglomeration to social networks if one condition is met: elimination of distances. Overcoming spatial distances especially allows technical development, firstly the development of information and communication networks. M. Fujita and P. Krugman (2004) have a similar opinion when analyzing the influence of centrifugal and centripetal forces in the centre-periphery model: the network dimension of a region changes this model in a similar way as the Johansson and Quigley state.

And again, the concretization of these (and other) networks by the theory of weak and strong ties (Granovetter) and theory of operational zones (Schutz) comes forward. It is also about which parts of the existing networks in the region represent strong ties demonstrating the functions of agglomerations and which represent weak ties functioning as channels for transmitting innovations and therefore the functions of agglomerations.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The combination of different theoretical and methodological approaches often leading to eclecticism is necessary for the research of the countryside matter. In spite of the fact that it is possible to describe and analyse the countryside in pairing categories which settled in the organizational phase of the modern society development, this will not bring much that is new in the network phase of modern society development. The following formulation by which the supporters of regional science foretell the future also implicitly mentions the need for new approaches: "The emergence of agglomerative economies and the spread of these external economies by networks is the hallmark of regional development in the twenty-first century" (Johansson, Quigley 2004: 175).

The rural space described by the social network theory in operational zones appears different from the rural space depicted by different categories. It appears to be a space which can quickly escape the reach of thinking and investigation which delimits it by properties opposite to those of a town, city and agglomeration thanks to social and technological networks.

The aforementioned combination of theories and methodologies, where we appealed to their initiators (Schutz, Granovetter) for better orientation, shows a certain level of eclecticism which is, however, to-

lerable. This level is similar to that included in the aforementioned prognosis where terms of former parallel theories – *agglomeration* and *network* – co-exist organically side by side.

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### Contact address:

Stanislav Hubík, Mendel University of Agriculture and Forestry Brno, Zemědělská 1, 613 00 Brno, Czech Republic  
e-mail: hubik@mendelu.cz

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