

# Agricultural research: traditions and innovations in sociological monographic study of countryside

## *Zemědělský výzkum: tradice a inovace v sociologickém monografickém studiu venkova*

H. HUDEČKOVÁ

*Czech University of Agriculture, Prague, Czech Republic*

**Abstract:** This paper deals with the classic and contemporary sociological research of countryside in the Czech Republic, carried out with a monographic procedure. It mentions basic social factors and theoretical and methodological assumptions of the monographic study of the Czech and Moravian countryside until the 30's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It briefly introduces one of the classical studies Dolní Roveň. Then comes a part that provides information on post-war monographic research. Last part of the paper aims at present sociological study of countryside using the monographic procedure. It characterizes its new approach, different from the classic studies due to accepting interpretativistic paradigm and regarding empirical methods. This last chapter is based on empirical experience of the author of this paper.

**Key words:** sociological methodology, monographic procedure, rural sociology

**Abstrakt:** Příspěvek je věnován klasickému a soudobému sociologickému výzkumu venkova v České republice, prováděnému monografickou procedurou. Uvádí základní společenské vlivy a teoreticko-metodologická východiska monografického studia českého a moravského venkova do 30. let 20. století a stručně seznamuje s vybraným příkladem, klasickou studií Dolní Roveň. Poté informuje o poválečném sociologickém monografickém studiu venkovských obcí. Poslední část příspěvku je zaměřena k soudobému sociologickému studiu venkova monografickou procedurou. Charakterizuje jeho nový přístup, odlišný od klasických studií přijetím interpretativistického paradigmatu a jemu odpovídající empirické metody. Tato poslední část je opřena o empirickou zkušenost autorky příspěvku.

**Klíčová slova:** sociologická metodologie, monografická procedura sociologie venkova

## INTRODUCTION

Monographic study of rural localities has represented one of the most distinct aims of empirical rural sociology since its origins in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Second reason, why this paper focuses on this subject, is the fact that it can be taken as an example, on which one can well depict the development of the Czech rural sociology. It was developing against a background of the Czech sociology in general.

## SOCIAL INFLUENCES AND THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF MONOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE CZECH AND MORAVIAN COUNTRYSIDE

Considering the space as a criterion, one can distinguish three levels (the broadest and the narrowest) of social contexts, which have influenced sociological monographic studies of countryside in our countries.

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<sup>1</sup> The Chicago school is not important only for sociology. In older expert literature it is often named as the school of social ecology, because its main aim was studying relations between spatial form and social organization of human communities. Due to this, "city" or "village" regularly became their study objects. Authors J. Klofáč, V. Tlustý cite (In: *Současná empirická sociologie 1959*: 85): "... besides the empirical studies on city, it was countryside, characterized with relative simplicity and a small scale..." The Chicago school became famous in history of sociology for its "pictures of life" (event. groups of individuals). Some authors see this approach as a base for future development in qualitative

The broadest context is the founding of rural sociology in the USA at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. This event is linked with two important acts. One of them is the use of the term “Rural Sociology” by Professor C.R. Henderson in his lectures at the Chicago University (1894).<sup>1</sup> The second act was the constituting of the “Commission for Country Life” (1908) and its research on social conditions of rural life in the USA. Due to the institutional support the rural sociology, that was very empirically laden, spread at American universities. At the same time, there was elaborated a methodological orientation of the so-called community studies.<sup>2</sup> Main contribution for it came from studies of rural agricultural communities of the authors, such as W. H. Wilson, C. J. Galpin,<sup>3</sup> K. L. Butterfield and others.

The basic, general question of the rural sociology – “what is the nature of rural social life” the American rural sociology originally answered in a significantly practicistic and pragmatic style. There (in the specific American environment) was an effort to transfer the outcomes to practice within their settlement policy. At this point, there were colliding problems of at least two kinds: social-cultural (because it included communities with a not-long history of their existence) and social-economic (because the communities directly headed a rapidly progressing urbanization and industrialization of the North-American continent). One can learn in their works that the transformation of outcomes to practice was rather problematic.

At the end of the 20's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were published fundamental works generalizing large amount of the gained facts, which also included methodological principles. What is considered to be the most important work of the rural sociology is the “Principles of Rural – Urban Sociology” (P.A. Sorokin, C.C. Zimmerman 1929), however, it is needed to note that already before that N.L. Sims had published his

“Elements of Rural Sociology” (1928) and P.L. Vogt's had published “Introduction to Rural Sociology” in 1914. The most important work for the Czech rural sociology is likely the first title and also the Gillet's “Rural Sociology” (J.M. Gillette 1928) that has been translated to Czech language. The mentioned influence of the American colleagues on the Czech authors was striking, especially with regards to sociological empirical method. The subject of study – Czech and Moravian countryside was considered to be very different from “social reality, which induce their (American colleagues' – note of the author) findings” (Galla 1939: 401). What is typical of the American empiricism and what is compiled in the named work of P.A. Sorokin and C.C. Zimmerman, divides two Czech schools in the field of rural sociology (as we will later see). We can briefly say, that it is about a presence of evaluative approaches that are stepping in and coming out of empirical study of rural social human life. American rural sociology empirics of the 20's and 30's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century refuse to admit them, because they are speculative, unscientific and non-objective. Nonetheless, this rugged empirism (i.e. empiricism) was also refused by some important sociologists belonging to the Chicago school (such as F. Znaniecki and W.I. Thomas, who contributed to the rural sociology with their work “The Polish Peasant in Europe and America”). The Czech rural sociology (especially the monographic study of rural settlements in Europe) was inspired during its development with works of the Polish, French and Romanian origins.<sup>4</sup> We can also state that the social reality of the Czech countryside in the 30's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century differed in economic, politic and social-cultural way from the Romanian (a lot), the Polish (less) and the French countryside (probably the least). However, the method of study of rural communities elaborated by the Bucharest school is the main source of inspiration

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methodology in sociology. One of the typical studies of this nature is the five-volume “The Polish Peasant in Europe and America” by W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki (1918–1920). In to order to disclose dramatic perception of change and adaptation on the change among immigrants from Polish rural areas, they used biographic method. Main materials were represented with written autobiographies of one person and 754 letters that were written by those immigrants (farmers, workers and navies) for their families in Poland.

<sup>2</sup> For more see Vajdová Z.: Situační zpráva o komunitních studiích. *Sociologický časopis*, 1992, roč. XXVIII (4): 493–507.

<sup>3</sup> Czech authors could have been inspired with the study (due to its accessibility) of C. J. Galpina “The Social Anatomy of an Agricultural Community” from 1914.

<sup>4</sup> It was mainly the Bucharest schools, called the monographic school and founded by D. Gusti, that strongly influenced Czech rural sociology, respectively its authors of the school in Brno. Contrary to the American empiricism, this intellectual orientation stemmed from German sociology, philosophy and psychology. Gusti developed the so-called operational model of monographic research of social reality for the purposes of synthesis of social sciences. This model, applicable to various social formations, enabled to disclose the system of a given formation in mutual relations that included their hierarchization (Velký sociologický slovník, 1996: 1135). Before Gusti, there was a significant German sociologists L. von Wiese, a formalist, who reflected a need to come over speculative approach typical of Europeans and tended in his work “Das Dorf als Soziales Gebilde” (1928) to use of empirical methods for the study of countryside.

that overcomes (in its times – the 30's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) some disadvantages of the empiricist-analyzing American approach that lacks unifying point of view. This helps reaching a synthesizing perspective and amply analyzed structural elements of the observed social formation.

The narrowest and also the most imminent context, which the Czech rural sociology responded on, including empiric-oriented monographic studies on rural localities, is the development of the Czech general sociology. In the Czech context, rural sociology has got a great advantage over other sectional sociologies, which is a solid institutional basis that had been given by the Czechoslovak Academy of Agricultural Sciences in 1924. Its chair members included influential Czech agrarian politicians and the most founded rural sociologist of those times, respectively experts in the border disciplines between sociology, economics, philosophy and history. This explains establishing of Ústřední komise pro sociologii venkova (Central Commission for Rural Sociology) and other institutes, whose mission was to elaborate on this discipline either within the frame of the Czechoslovak Academy of Agricultural Sciences, or in a close cooperation with it.

We are going to focus more on the second point of the suggested dimension, on the theoretical assumptions that inspired the Czech sociology, including the sectional rural sociology. As we will later see, the Czech sociology of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is represented by two competing schools<sup>5</sup> – the Prague and the Brno school. Both of them are engaged in the study of rural communities, i.e. the community studies. The both draw on the Durkheim's heritage for sociology as a science about social facts, and work it out in structural-functionalistic way, which enriches classical positivism with psychologistic aspects (either of the Weber's or the social-interactionists' style). This basic approach crystallizes in the Masaryk's realism. It means that the Czech sociologists let themselves to inspire from objectivist paradigm, deductive method and that they accent confirmation of pre-prepared hypotheses by treating social phenomena as social facts.

The Prague sociological school embodies a more obvious inclination to neo-positivism, especially due

to the aspect that is shared with the American empiricism – refusing evaluative approach and stressing strictly exact approach. Considering the research of countryside, an important person is Z. Ullrich<sup>6</sup> with his study that was published only in German language “Soziologische Studien zur Verstädterung der Prager Umgebung” (1938). Object of the study is the surrounding of Prague (not a typical countryside, but a mixed “rurban” space) and the subject is its progress towards urbanization. Ullrich suggests using the so-called “componentary method”. This method, in the Pareto's sense, shall overcome actual limits of empirical treating of the complex (compounded and correlated on a multivariate basis) social phenomena in the way, that their analysis will follow the necessary synthesizing phase. Later on other scientists (Klofáč, Tlustý 1959) pointed out that if there is missing a certain philosophical view (which cannot be of empirical nature), it is not possible to organize particular components of a given (every complicated) social phenomenon to such a structure, which distinguishes “substantialities”, or at least illuminate a chain of events among structural elements, and so aims at the essence of phenomenon. It goes without saying that this strict objectivistic approach, which combines during its empirical study several techniques (document study, survey, the so-called personal references), brought in a lot of valuable factual materials.

The Brno school was founded by I.A. Bláha and developed by at least two, but rather three generations of his students (let's name at least two of them, who are important for the rural sociology – T. Čep and M. Hájek). This resulted in specific differences from the strict objectivism of the Prague sociological school. I. A. Bláha advocated structuralism, however, he was also attracted with the so-called Thomas' theorem. That represents interactionistic and interpretativistic approaches, and hence means a deviation from objectivism. The meanings of social situation are not given in advance, actors create them, situations are therefore relative and only understandable on condition of the so-called reciprocity of perspectives (Velký sociologický slovník 1996: 171). It implies that social reality expressed in social phenomena is

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<sup>5</sup> The word “competing” does not mean in this case an absolute irreconcilability and strong counteractions. However certain clues – such as the parallel existence of two sociological journals, Sociální problémy (Social Problems) of the Prague school and Sociologická revue (Sociological revue) of the Brno school and other indices, let us use this term. The both school clearly defined their boundaries for others.

<sup>6</sup> His student H. Janišová wrote about him: “...he expected from all of his working colleagues objective approach. The fieldwork was considered to be a base of all. Considering this he differed from his predecessors and times, when a sociologists had taken after philosophers of history. He recommended founding the scientific method on observation and description of social phenomenon, on its explanation and evidence. He preferred the so-called statistical procedure and put stress on the survey technique...” (Janišová 1998: 16).

an intersection of the objective givenness (structural perspective) and of subjective interpretations (interpretative, humanistic perspective). I. A. Bláha within this approach sees society as a “peculiar over-subjective and intersubjective reality, as a system of systems” (Sedlák 1994: 93). In accord with this perspective, which settles two different paradigm in sociology – objectivistic and interpretativistic, he involves his special method of social introspection in the methods of studying social phenomena as social facts (according to E. Durkheim).

Comparison of the Prague and Brno sociological school leads to one more aspect that is usually mentioned. The strict objectivism that tends to exact description of elements of the structure of social reality, makes the Prague school’s authors to accent social static, while the Brno school’s authors, who engage more psychological and ethic elements to the their studies, exert social-dynamic approach.

Within the introduced context, the Czech authors were carrying out their monographic studies in times before the WWII. They always raised questions, what is the impact of urbanization on rural communities; how do they appear in economic and social life of people; it is a development that has its pro in the progress, but can it be eventually followed by some threats? The last question, respectively the part mentioning the potential urbanization’s negatives for social identity and community subculture, was not raised in the studies nor explicitly answered. It showed up from time to time within the reflections about future.

The most famous studies were realized in the late 30’s – Hájek’s *Neslovice*, Bláha’s *Velká na Moravě*, *Severomoravské pohraničí*, *Vsacko*, *Moravské Kopanice*, Galla’s *Dolní Roveň* and *Sány*.

## DOLNÍ ROVEŇ (1939)

The monographic study of this village, which had 1081 inhabitants (in 1930), was published under the title “Sociological picture of a Czech village”. Even today it is still accessible to a common reader. What made it more famous was its aim that had included scientific, but also popularization goal. The study was published by the *Spolek péče o blaho venkova* and was strongly supported by governmental groups and scientific institutions.

The author of the study K. Galla was a student of B. Foustka, who was a direct successor of T.G. Masaryk at the Charles University. Therefore, he belonged to the Prague sociological school. The research in

Dolní Roveň was carried out simultaneously with the research of urbanization processes in Prague’s surroundings, which was being done by a group of researchers from the Prague sociological school (led by J. Král and the above mentioned Z. Ullrich). The Galla’s work is closer to the Brno school – the author, at the end of the work in *General remarks* of a methodological nature, refers to Bláha’s delineation of the research in *Velká Morava* published in *Sociological revue*.<sup>7</sup> Besides that, it is known that close to K. Galla was also the Slovak sociographic school represented by A. Štefánek.

The study is divided into 4 basic sections – place, inhabitants, cultural and public-education issues, general social conditions. The author, in accord with the Bláha’s notion, claims that the work delineates between two axes – geographic (village) and demographic (inhabitants), and exercises sociological view on social structures of inhabitants (including the phenomenon of peasantry) and also on institutionalization of social life in the village. He deals not only with static, but also “kinetic” point of view. Culture life in a narrow sense, from an ethnographic point of view, stayed out of their perspective due to insufficient experience of the research team.

The fieldwork was started in 1931 and among the following long 5 years there were being collected data, using a combination of technique of document study, observation, questionnaires of quantitative and qualitative type. The attached methodological remarks are dedicated to the everlasting problem of data confirmation and control, which were done by triangulation of the respondents and triangulation of the techniques. A methodological note was also dedicated to the question of possible generalization of the research results on the type-village level. K. Galla states that typologization, respectively categorization of villages, which would empower researches to apply results of the monographic study to a certain type of community according to “similarities of social conditions and circumstances” conveying with “natural conditions and formation of all significant social elements” and simultaneously with “allocation on intersection of the same social areas, with regards to external influences”, has not been done yet (Galla 1939: 404).

This kind of typology has not been done until now and most likely will never be. Respectively, if there is and will be done any typology, it does not and will not probably include the typology with the higher-mentioned sociological perspective, but rather a narrowly set perspective of geographic and demographic nature,

<sup>7</sup> Bláha I.A.: Sociologický výzkum Velké. Sociologická revue, III. r., 1932: 92–99 (in Galla 1939: 401).

for which it would be easier to find measurable and quantifiable indicators. Since it is very hard to find valid indicators for social and cultural aspects from the monographic-study point of view.

### THE POSTWAR SOCIOLOGICAL MONOGRAPHIC STUDY OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS (50's–80's)

In the postwar era, the works that could be considered as a base of monographic studies of Czech and Moravian settlement were complicated by social changes in the 50's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many villages were affected by migration waves of either war or collectivization events. "Social conditions and circumstances" (if we stick to the Galla's vocabulary) are influenced with such factor in two-generation, but rather three-generation interval, if we think about "social conditions and circumstances in the sense of stabilized social structure of inhabitants and of formed institutionalization of social life in the village" (we are again using the Galla's vocabulary).

The sociological monographic studies of this nature went on until the 60's (for instance F. Lom, J. Honcová), albeit they were mainly focused on the progress of collectivization (Honcová, Němcová 1999). They slowly adapted such basic focus, which could be labelled as "from rural community to agricultural (large-scale) business - the center of rural life".<sup>8</sup> A retrospective view allows one to suggest that the urbanization and collectivization processes often appeared simultaneously. If we focus on the question and want to deal with it that was raised above – what is the impact of urbanization (and since the 50's also the impact of collectivization) on social life of rural communities, with a reference to the analysis presented in the author's

habilitation thesis<sup>9</sup>, we can shortly sum up. Czech village was turning, under the influence of modernization process, from a relatively peculiar (with regards to production and consumption of material and non-material products) and homogenous "microcosmos" within a relatively heterogenous national society into heterogenous "microcosmos" within homogenizing "macrocosmos" of national society. The base of rural culture that was eroded due to the collectivization facilitated a quicker penetration of modernization tendencies in sense of the globalization tendencies. Homogenization of rural community into national society (and global society) progressed more, when the collectivization with its ideology "off-individualization" oppressed regionalization activities, which spring from the local identity and at the same time strengthen the identity. While heterogeneous "microcosmos" of rural community was exposed to a supply of pleasing elements of urban culture – consumerism, free time and leisure (Hudečková 2001: 55-59).

### CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL MONOGRAPHIC STUDY OF RURAL SETTLEMENT (SINCE THE 90's)<sup>10</sup>

The aim of this paper's section is not a minute description of monographic studies of rural settlements that were done by us in the 90's, or a review of contemporary studies of this type done by other authors. The goal is to illuminate some facts to readers (who do not necessary have to be sociologists). Especially the assumptions, which led us to decision about using the monographic procedure for studying social change in Central and Eastern Europe in application to rural areas. Besides that, there will be stated basic questions that emerged during the research. There

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<sup>8</sup> In the beginning of the 70's the author of this paper started her career in the section of sociological research of that time in the VÚEZVž (Research Institute of the Economics of Agriculture and Nutrition) in Prague. She had known K. Galla from her previous study at the Faculty of Social of Sciences of the Charles University. On occasion of working seminar aimed at rural sociology she had also got to know M. Hájek. However classical sociological monographic studies of rural communities were not carried out any more. This procedure was used only by ethnographs. Rural sociologists became more interested in issue of institutionalization large-scale agriculture in relation with changes in lifestyles of rural inhabitants. Many large researches, carried out during the 70's, focused on this topic. In the 80's appeared the issue of the so-called social planning in agricultural organizations.

<sup>9</sup> Hudečková H.: *Makrosvět a mikrosvět zemědělství v sociální změně 90. let*. Praha, 2001. Habilitation thesis, CUA Prague.

<sup>10</sup> This section of the paper mainly focuses on research experience of the author, who together with her colleagues took part (during the years 1990–1999) in researches aimed at transformation of countryside and agriculture in the post-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Objects of those empirical studies became (gradually or at one time) 15 rural communities that differed in their sizes (from 156 to 3 936 inhabitants in 1991), geographic, demographic, economic and social characteristics. The internal publication of authors H. Hudečkové a M. Lošťáka *Chodov: monografická studie české vesnice* (Praha, VŠZ 1993) is an example of the work (see below).

will also be showed a comparison of to what extent we continue the tradition of the Czech pre-war monographic studies of rural settlements (because they represent classic works) and in what sense we step this tradition over.

### **(a) Choosing the monographic study**

It was not only the tradition given from the Chicago school to European sociologists by the monographic study of rural communities, which led us to the decision about using the monographic procedure for studying social change in Czech and Moravian countryside. The choice was made mainly due to methodological reasoning, which tackles the procedure itself, and also by the subject and the object of the intended sociological research.

It has been briefly stated that the focus was on a social change. Our point of view did not include only capturing the change in its “macro-dimension”, how it had been deemed, prepared and controlled by the decisive sphere. As sociologists, we were more interested in its impacts and in particular responses to it in social actions of rural-actors (special attention was paid to agriculture). The basic social formation, in which the actors perceive themselves, live through, interpret and reconstitute institutionalizing social moves (coming towards them from “macroworld”), is a rural community – their “microworld”. That is why the rural community was chosen as a basic object of our study. “Macroworld” intersects with its “microworld” there.<sup>11</sup>

When we focused on constituting and reconstituting social changes (prepared and controlled by “macro-world”) in “microworlds” of rural community life, it meant discovering new relations, without following the concepts anchored in theories. Eventually, to realize analogies (as thought inspiration) with other different time and spatial progresses of similar social changes, i.e. the basic transitions between institutional order in modern society that reach all macro and micro-levels of given societies.

The conclusion of the two above-mentioned paragraphs implies that we aimed at a few objects and within them, we studied very a comprehensive and

deep-focused subject. In those cases, the monographic procedure is the best applicable. In order to gain as valid data (corresponding with reality) as possible, we used the so-called triangulation of data collection techniques (observation, questionnaires and document study in their basic varieties for qualitative approach, and also special techniques of biographies collection and life-trajectories study) and triangulation of researches, who were constantly confronting their interpretation of the collected data. If it had been legitimate and possible from the methodological point of view (for selected partial phenomena of the studied social reality), there would have been also used techniques typical of quantitative research (analysis of statistical and official documents, surveys).<sup>12</sup>

### **(b) Basic questions**

The basic sociological question, which is applied to countryside in contemporary society in general, was adjusted for the Czech Republic – does the liberalization proclaimed in politics and supported in economy bring chance to renaissance of countryside? We know that answering such a question requires a long-term work not only of sociologists, but also historians, economists, political scientists, urbanists, ethnologists, ecologists and eventually other experts focused on issues involving rural areas.

We set a more modest objective for the empirical study using the monographic procedure – to point out difficulties of politic and economic context of the social change that takes place in the Czech rural areas, with a special attention paid to the process of privatization and restructuring of agriculture. As one of the difficulties, there appeared the imbalance between the institutionally-set parameters of privatization and restructuring agriculture and generally proclaimed strive for the so-called “rural renaissance”, as it is asserted in the Western Europe. It means rediscovering countryside as a social space, place for living that performs social and ecologic functions with the equal importance as the economic functions have (just like it is nowadays included in the global aim of the National development plan and as it is valid for agriculture – sustainable development based on competitiveness).

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<sup>11</sup> Current ruralists, who are concerned about redefinition of rural space exposed to process of modernization and globalization, insist on that the affiliation to small communities remains to be one of the basic characteristics of the rural space.

<sup>12</sup> In 1997, after the research that had been carried out in 14 villages using this research procedure, we got together with researchers from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University (J. Kabele, J. Kandert, D. Ryšavý) and formed a team that used for its research the method of heuristic investigation for empirical study of the processes of rebirth in one microregion in Southern Moravia, which included a little town and nearby villages (see below).

Three sub-questions formed the main starting points of our empirical study:

- What kind of tendencies in the development of agriculture does support the climate (constituted on level of politics and economy) in the Czech Republic? And how do the inhabitants of rural areas respond to it?
- What problems do emerge in the field of social relations in agriculture, with regard to the privatization of agricultural property and restructuring business forms, and how do the rural inhabitants deal with them?
- Do we look more back in history, rather than think about future, or not take time in mind when we think about scenarios of social change in the Czech agriculture, and how is this scenario (with regard to tradition and innovation) remade by those who are influenced with this change?

The raised questions indicate (i) a need to respect historical approach; (ii) to concentrate on analysis of the current social situation and position of agriculture in it (broad social context); (iii) to add to this picture of “macro-situation” outcomes of own study of cases of the progressing social change in rural areas. Based on the confrontation, one can deduce ideas about the above-mentioned difficulties.<sup>13</sup>

### (c) Phases of the study

Chodov became the first of the villages that we were regularly attending between the years 1990–1992 to “do research” and later on as well, but irregularly. The village was firstly studied on the basis of archive and statistical documents. Then we started with observation in field, survey and local documents study. There were several surveys carried out, either standardized ones (one survey focused on agricultural inhabitants, another on all households in Chodov, and both focused on the conditions and quality of life in the village), or non-standardized research actions (we carried out 23 comprehensive interviews with the contemporaries and the so-called key persons, other interviews were

realized occasionally and were not planned in advance). They always focused on the development and state of the local life (including its economic, political and citizens, social and cultural aspects). This large research was realized according to the prepared project, there was always used several research instruments and the project was being added and adjusted during the research. We applied the same method in other 13 villages. The last object (1997–1999) researched using the monographic procedure was larger – Southern Moravian town and its surrounding, the subject of study was as well more theoretically conceptualized – processes of rebirth.<sup>14</sup> In this research that was done in cooperation with a research team from the Charles University Faculty of Social Sciences, we managed to use the gained experience and aimed at special areas of development and changes of the local “agricultural life”

Originally we had been inspired from the previous sociological monographic studies of rural settlements and their basic schemes remained in our internal publication *Chodov* (1993)<sup>15</sup>. In contrary to classical studies, we paid more attention to social changes (i.e. social dynamics), which have significantly shaped the rural life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That is why the study outline is divided in four eras of the community’s life – the era before collectivization (since the 20s until 1949), collectivization (1950–1959), the post-collectivization era (1960–1989) and the present era (since 1990).

The study of the other 13 villages was laden with experience gained from our own fieldwork. The research project was constantly confronted with them, but at the same time, we were in particular interested about the possibility of mutual comparison of the researched objects. This one and another work (1992–1999) did not result in single monographic publications, albeit the authors published a number of articles in scientific journals (*Zemědělská ekonomika*, *Sociologický časopis*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, *Eastern European Countryside*, *Journal of Rural Cooperation*), in which they had drawn on this research.

By now, we can conclude that we have advanced from an obvious inspiration from tradition and gain-

<sup>13</sup> For more see Hudečková H.: Privatizace v zemědělství a obnova venkova. *Sociologický časopis*, 1995, XXXI (4): 449–462. In this paper answers on the raised questions are based on monographic procedure of 7 communities.

<sup>14</sup> For more see Informatoria of the department of sociology of Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Filipov I (1998) a Filipov II (1999) and the author’s habilitation thesis *Makrosvět a mikrosvět zemědělství v sociální změně 90. let* (2001).

<sup>15</sup> Larger regional area, smaller frame of district and a specific village form a geographic axis of the study, which intersects with demographic axis on the district level. Demographic characteristics on the level of village are taken from statistical sources, but the structure of the Chodov households was also a subject of the survey. Sociological point of view observes three points – institutionalization of community life (in the three areas that have been stated), social networks facilitating everyday life (neighborly, kinship), selected opinions, attitudes and values of the inhabitants of Chodov.

ing our own experience to such aim of monographic study of rural settlements that would reflect not only the development of sociology in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also social facts that we studied.

#### d) New approach at the monographic study

Innovations that we have implemented into the sociological monographic study of countryside stem from the theoretical approach, which does not correspond with the Durkheim's tradition advocated by the Prague as well as the Brno sociological school. I am going to mention those innovations only briefly, despite the fact they would deserve larger attention, so let me refer you to the literature stated in the footnote number 14. Our approach corresponds with the social-constructivism point of view and reflects the interpretative paradigm. In the case of the study of the social changes occurring in a rural area and agriculture, it means that the "macro world" is not given a preferable position in a sense of influential factor. The "macroworld" and "microworld" (local individuals) appear as two sides of a constantly running interaction and communication, and form the given change based on their interpretations. What attracts the main attention is not than an entire social structure (that is independent on individual actors, according to Durkheim), but single actors (different social formation) on all level of the studied social reality. Their link is social interaction within equal transaction of its content. From this point of view, social action does not mean meeting the expected actions in social roles (based on social positions within hierarchical social structure) that are driven by rational thinking about goals and the best instruments for their achievement – this is the approach of roles theory that is based on the Weber's rational actions. Our approach is close to phenomenological sociology and assumes the so-called disposition philosophy of actions – an actor acts according to his/her common sense, driven by by interest "to play just this game and no other one", and therefore he/she plays the game with internal interest, without (consciously) setting own goals. However, the actor internally follows the goals, because "he/she cannot play differently". Actors' games meet and collide and find its intersection in intersubjectivity. Not in objectivity that is of an external nature and at the same time controls everyone.

If we accept this theoretical assumption, from the methodological point of view it means that even educated and experienced researcher is not looking for the objective (one) truth, but seeks to understand many unique truths, which occur in social reality and together creates a mosaic of "shared truth" about the reality. A researcher then has to look at various participants, social formations, including important persons. At this sense, we follow the Chicago school tradition and its pictures of life and biographic method.<sup>16</sup>

J. Kabele calls this rather qualitative approach an intervention heuristic investigation.<sup>17</sup> It is based on methodological individualism (the world is not happening, but is being made by actors) and admits interventionism (i.e. he believes that a researching sociologist can not stay aside when looks for significant social facts, therefore his/her presence and reflection of the researched events influences those events). However, he also states that a sociologist has to be driven by the great and pure effort to use expert experience for the best possible understanding and encompassing social events, which are crucial for a look at their merit. One can then say that sociologists adds an expert logic to the world lived by laymen. This method proves the criticism of objectivism, respectively refers to the so-called objectivistic illusion. In those times, when there had been carried out the classic sociological monographic studies of rural localities, no one would probably risk to claim such an approach in public.

#### CONCLUSION

The common inclination to interpretativist point of view and conveying methodological approach (as well as interest in the the issue of process of rebirth in a locality) brought together a cooperating team for the research of a Southern Moravian town. The team included two researches from the Czech university of Agriculture (the author of this paper and her colleague M. Lošťák) and researches from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Charles University J. Kabele, J. Kandert, D. Ryšavý). The author of this paper has fructified a part of the outcomes in her habilitation thesis.<sup>18</sup> A short introduction into the empirical part of the thesis can be illustrated by a piece of monographic study of this micro region, which is affected by development and actual process of rebirth of local "agricultural world".

<sup>16</sup> In this case, we used the study of life trajectories in accord with P. Bourdieu, who only draws on the biographic method and constructs life trajectories that are based on the biographies (Hudečková 2001).

<sup>17</sup> For more see Kabele J.: *Filipov II*, 1999: 113–136.

<sup>18</sup> There was published a book in 2004, which covers the entire research that had been done.



The empirical part of the thesis begins with a chapter about changing Czech countryside under the processes of urbanization and collectivization (the aim is to involve changes of “macro world”). The opening section is dedicated to historical heritage of Czech countryside. This is followed with a reflection about convergence and divergence of the urbanization and collectivization process, in order to analyze those elements of farmers’ lives that had changed due to the intervention of the processes. Other sections show pros and cons of the decollectivization process, the peripetia of agrarian policy, classification of changes of business forms of farming, birth of new agricultural actors and their strategies. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to agriculture and its role in frame of the so-called rural renaissance.

Second chapter of the empirical part is named Local changes of farming in the Filipov region, with a subtitle Local micro world in a scenario of macro world. It is based on a brief characterization of the locality. Attention is paid to agriculture, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the land reform, changes in the structure of farms after the reform, the era of the WWII, early post-war era of collectivization, collectivization, the period of concentration and decollectivization (always with regard to institutional changes and narrativization).

The last chapter of the empirical part is named Decollectivization and family tradition in farming, subtitled Intersection of local and individual micro world in a scenario of the macro world. It includes widening methodological remarks on the study of life trajectories (in relation with the method of intervention heuristic investigation), then there is presented a scene (“Agriculture made and experienced anew”) and casting of basic actors. Three selected (studied) actors are characterized with their choices, bets in games for agriculture anew, types of their changes, risks and profits. The chapter ends with an evaluation of these actors as scenarists and dramaturgists of their lives.

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### Contact address:

Doc. Mgr. Helena Hudečková, CSc., Česká zemědělská univerzita v Praze, Kamýcká 129,  
165 21 Praha 6-Suchbát, Česká republika  
tel.: +420 224 382 310, e-mail: kucerova@pef.czu.cz

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