

Perception of Pandemic in Rural Hungary

Problems and Solutions in minor Settlements of Sellye district

In Western societies, rural exodus and functional transformation of rural areas are the outcomes of a longer, organic process. In Eastern states, the population in villages was less mobile due to the socialist shortage-economy. There was a high demand for food and other agricultural products produced by rural post peasants. Rural poverty appears as a general problem in post-socialist countries (Kovách 2012, Tagai et al. 2018). In the past decade, rural regions may have reacted to challenges of contradictory processes. Migration trends are heterogeneous; unemployment, underemployment and lack of labour power are existing problems at the same time, in the same locality. In addition, the nature of poverty has changed recently (Ragadics 2020).

In Hungary, rural pauperization is one of the most serious problems aggravated by Roma segregation, child poverty, vulnerability and various forms of deprivation. Segregation is strongly connected to the country's marginalized regions with small villages characterised by unemployment, lack of appropriate services, negative processes of migration and an increasing rate of Roma population (Váradi and Virág 2014).

Traditional forms of pauperization are combined with helplessness and inability for future planning and saving up. At the personal level, marginalization is connected to undereducation and a disadvantageous status at the labour market due to ethnical and gender differences (Thickmayer 2006). Adult members of families living in the culture of poverty are not able to deliver over children the patterns and motivation for social and economic advancement, not either the values or norms for the conventional organizing everyday life. Illogical consumer habits ("Carpe diem" mentality, commercial credit, purchasing status symbols etc.) are deepening the social gap and segregation and confining the accidental chances for self-care. Complex supporting system is necessary with the elements of labour market incentives, consulting, mentoring and development of competencies.

Several trap situations appear in marginalized Hungarian countryside for individuals and families living in poverty. Dealing with problems are blocked by the low level of labour market competencies and proper skills for self-care. Values and norms acquired by family socialization (e.g. attitudes against education system, early motherhood) often restrict the chances for social integration and a successful entrance into the labour market. In addition, the strong effects of consumer society are acting against rational planning of household budget and occupation. Credit and mortgage is a heavy burden for several families.

Research

The period of the first three waves of Covid19 epidemic had a strong impact on local societies of disadvantaged regions, too. Unemployment deepened and the role of public work has been more significant. The importance of charity organizations increased. However, some of the rural social integration projects stopped or were reduced by social workers complying with the governmental regulations of social distancing.

Concentration of social problems and family attitudes is examined in an underdeveloped, depressive rural area of the South Transdanubia in Hungary. In Sellye district we chose three minor settlements,

which are typical of this region with regard to the population and economic indices. The main criterion for selecting villages was the high proportion of families receiving regular child care benefit. This social subsidy consists of monetary support and free dining for children at schools and kindergartens. In connection to the higher number of children, these villages belong to the group of settlements with younger age-structure. In the background of the higher number of children and youth, we can find the dominant presence of Roma population characterised by higher fertility and stronger mortality of undereducated rural inhabitants.

This presentation aims to introduce the outcomes of a survey implemented in three minor settlements of Sellye district in 2021. Subjects of the research were families living in disadvantageous status. Our questions focused on their main problems and experiments during the pandemic. We were primarily interested in the changes of living conditions, family relations and labour status in connection with the transformed frames of everyday life. This presentation offers an overview of the following questions and topics: Which are the major problems in the life of families? How can people solve these problems? Which are the supporting factors in the life of inhabitants? What were the most pressing problems of families in everyday life, work and social connections in the pandemic period? In what sense has life changed in families during the pandemic?

The findings of our research project can contribute to a more effective and complex social care in rural Hungary.

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