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GLOBALISATION: REGIONAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN EASTERN EUROPE

Abstract: It is now generally recognised that despite the reality of a global world, local variations persist. Indeed, individual communities appear to respond to the inevitability of a global competition by highlighting their distinct social-cultural and economic characteristics and by safeguarding traditional political behaviour and «ways of getting things done». This approach is adopted to interpret the East European transition which exhibits a general tendency towards pluralism, privatisation, foreign investment and EU membership; while retaining many distinctive local characteristics with the «Balkan Problem» as perhaps the clearest example. The paper examines the trends in East European politics over the past decade before dealing with progress in regional and rural development. This is seen as a crucial facet of the transition, given the inevitability of larger and more highly mechanised farms and reduced labour demands. Yet while regional and rural planning is clearly essential – and is now part of the discourse which candidate countries must pursue in their dealings with Bruxelles – there are no model solutions. The paper offers a number of perspectives and approaches which will have to be evaluated at the grass-roots by each civil society as part of the ongoing dialogue between the global and the local.

Key words: regional development, rural areas, East European politics.

1. Introduction

Ten years on from the chain of revolutions that broke out across Eastern Europe in 1989, it is clear that the Gorbachev factor was crucial as a precondition for the open dissent and political mobilization evident in the late 1980s. The rules of the game were altered (Dawisha 1990) by the dismantling the Brezhnev Doctrine in 1985, giving the green light (probably late in 1988) for the Polish government's accommodation with Solidarity hammered out in 1989 and finally in refusing support a crack-down in East Germany shortly before the Berlin Wall collapsed. But this must be placed in the context of economic pressures through Western loans and

social pressures through the Helsinki Accords. Also, there must be reference to social change through the creation of a more urban, more educated and more «aware» population. Social divisions were much reduced in comparison with the nineteenth century but when communism appeared to lose its legitimacy there were idealists who were thinking of better ways of building socialism as a range of economic, cultural and environmental issues came to the fore (Blackburn 1991). It was a bitter blow for some ideologists, such as those in East Germany who wanted to improve the socialist experiment in the context of an ecological-pacifist utopia, to find that majority wanted to enjoy the benefits of Western Europe's welfare capitalism.

Since 1989 civil society has been evolving (Gellner 1994) and struggling with the dilemmas of decommunisation (Rosenberg 1995). When the transition began it seemed that Eastern Europe would quickly reintegrate with the western world because the political imperative for self-sufficiency within the Comecon system was set aside. A somewhat triumphalist note was sounded by Fukuyama (1992), arguing that the end point of ideological evolution had been reached through the universalisation of Western liberal democracy. This is a dubious proposition because even if Western liberal democracy can assimilate the various aspects of East European politics: any monist system will become unstable if it closes off the possibility of improvement. But severe difficulties associated with a radical reorientation of trade were underpinned by the arguments of theoreticians denying any valid stereotypes for a communist or a capitalist system and insisting that specific pathways rooted in the networks and values of the past would indelibly shape the new order arising in different parts of the region (Stark 1995). System substitution in post-socialist Eastern Europe has unleashed a complex range of adjustments at local regional and national levels: all in various ways embedded in past experiences, as demonstrated by the different approaches to privatisation, restitution and restructuring (Stark 1992). The radical change model sees socialism as collapsing „*as though all the blood disappeared from the veins of the old body*”; any legacies „*are entirely negative since anything inherited from a system totally opposed to capitalism must be contradictory to a shift towards capitalism*” (Andrusz et al. 1996). However the moderate change model emphasises reform under some communist regimes which, while not necessarily generating revolution, are relatively compatible with it. The structures of capitalist and democratic societies were to an extent anticipated because «coping mechanisms» developed to overcome the rigidities of central planning were not far removed from entrepreneurship.

There may be no precise modernising goal that would merit unqualified support for the notion of transition (Burawoy 1992), for neither communism nor capitalism have agreed objectives that can be defined with any precision in operational terms. But there is little doubt that Eastern Europe is moving towards a set of norms embraced by the European Union and few political parties (Dostal 1997) advocate policies that are fundamentally irreconcilable with close association. So while it is inappropriate to explain events in terms of «idealised generalisations» (Smith, Swain 1997 p.32), there is a key objective – EU membership – which is driving much of Eastern Europe's policy making. And so while there may well have been an element

of uncertainty in the early transition years, pointing to continuity rather than revolution, it may now be an exaggeration to insist on regarding change as an incoherent bunch of transformations – the «unbridled localism» of Kasimis, Papadopoulos (1999) – each with its roots extending deep into the communist period. And while there must still be causal explanations for observed events which will draw on past experiences these may not lie exclusively or even substantially in the communist period (Isaac 1996).

Two examples may illustrate the point. Restitution in Hungarian agriculture after 1989 severely weakened the cooperatives inherited from the socialist period: indeed the reforms were described as «smashing» («szetveres») because of their destructive impact on the inherited system (Agocs, Agocs 1994). Agricultural production disintegrated, leaving Berend (1996) to reflect on a transition causing more destruction to Hungarian agriculture than the forced collectivisation of the Stalin period. Yet, while restitution created uncertainty, there was a „*legacy of a hidden agricultural crisis in the 1980s*” with high production costs and high subsidies which could not be sustained (Berend 1996, p. 343). Much of the depression arose through the sharp reduction in direct subsidies to producers (from US\$2.6bln in 1987 to 265mln in 1992); and to consumers from (1.4bln to 200mln). At the same time, the communist legacy is arguably no more than a conventional historical antecedent which is not endowed with overriding logic and durability because of a functional association with Marxist ideology. Creed (1995) refers to the continuity of subtle ideas and routine behaviours on a Bulgarian cooperative farm (Zamfirovo). Yet although habits may not be easily discarded, people appreciate the reality of decollectivisation under an elected government and procedural hangovers from the socialist past have no explicit ideological content.

Globalisation, a concept rooted in Wallerstein’s epic of 1979 and subsequently refined by other works in social science (Taylor 1992), may well help to promote Alfred Hettner’s elusive ideal of comparative regional geography (Turnock 1998). It is arguably a useful way of looking at change in Eastern Europe because it emphasises the transformed external dimension that is now at the centre of the political life and also highlights the EU as the principal agency, along with such global institutions as the IMF and World Bank (Dent 1997, Edwards 1997). The notion of transformation can then be assimilated not merely as a reminder of the influence of structures surviving from the past but as an underpinning for the pervasiveness of «localisation»: the filters which determine how global processes will be assimilated. „*Globalisation invades local contexts of action but does not destroy them: on the contrary, new forms of local cultural identity and self-expression are causally bound up with globalising processes*” (Giddens 1996). Local cultural and political activity is to an extent transformed and its distinctiveness reinforced through the need to come to terms with global processes (Amin, Thrift 1995). As was almost certainly the case under communism (although outdated notions of Stalinist uniformity conspired with a hankering after deterministic models of socialist geographies tended to cloud the issue in Western Europe), national, regional and local communities insist on «doing their own thing» and decisions that may well be inevitable will nevertheless be moderated and interpreted in the light

of local sensibilities. Hence the interaction of the global and the local may provide a more flexible way of balancing order and chaos in the continuing East European transition. Pathways will continue to be projected through from communism and even earlier ideological eras (Rugg 1985) but contemporary events will be grounded increasingly in the post-socialist order and the «incremental reconfiguration» of the inherited structures (Smith, Swain 1997 p.35) so as to reconcile them with a global economy and neoliberal tendencies.

2. Politics and the Balkan phenomenon

The new democracies have to deliver economic growth (following the severe slump which marked the start of the transition). And at the same time they must bolster democratic freedoms and citizenship rights for substantial sections of the population who constitute a partially-excluded underclass for cultural, ethnic or economic reasons. In order to survive in Eastern Europe after central planning, communities have to reach outwards to find new markets where their goods can be sold, although for many people – mainly in the countryside – coping strategies include a temporarily retreat to a relatively simple self-sufficient existence (Smith 1997). In this process they may well meet capitalists from abroad coming towards them with «foreign direct investment» (FDI) proposals. But interaction does not happen smoothly for there is uncertainty and imperfect knowledge on both sides. Some communities have remained on the defensive; firmly embedded in systems inherited from the past (Grabher 1994; Grabher, Stark 1997): they are apprehensive that global forces inherent in FDI will transform them into satellites divorced from their familiar surroundings and powerless to regulate the creations of transnational capital («cathedrals in the desert») (Smith 1995). Meanwhile Eastern Europe is becoming more accessible and few areas remain firmly embedded in archaic structures. Yet it is clear that links with global business do not spell an end to local identity: there is a balance between regional coherence and external association - between embeddedness and disembeddedness. Meanwhile, firms are wary of considering countries subjectively regarded as less stable, although neglect of the Balkans through political uncertainty as well as lower spending power may create self-fulfilling prophecies.

Appropriate skills may well be required from the NGOs and from officials in local and national government to identify and harness FDI forces in a highly competitive situation within Eastern Europe and the wider world. However a decade on from the revolutions of 1989 it is clear that information is much more widely available. Potential investors can more objectively consider the region as a whole while the privatisation process and other fundamental elements in a reform package are overcoming most idealistic assertions that there may be «another way» through gradualism (Ekiert 1998) which former governments in Romania (Shen 1997) and Slovakia (Duleba 1997) initially set out to discover. Eastern Europe wants to be on the escalator to prosperity and since the passport is EU membership there is pressure to conform to global norms communicated through the EU transmission belt, as

Klemencic (1996) has noted for Croatia. The EU «Copenhagen Criteria» of 1993 state unambiguously that full membership is conditional on a functioning market economy able to cope with competitive pressures and market forces, as well as democratic institutions and a capacity to cope with the obligations of membership in terms of political, economic and monetary union. All the candidate countries are now working to meet these criteria and Kukliński (1996) therefore stresses that research should focus on adaptation to EU and the holistic nature of transformation. Progress is being made and even where it is most difficult, for example in Romania (Phinnemore 1997), tensions between ethnic groups are being overcome with the signing of a treaty providing for autonomy and the involvement of the main Hungarian political party in the present governing coalition. Deficiencies in the infrastructure are also inspiring imaginative solutions (Celac 1998). And there is also belated progress with privatisation, despite continued government intervention, as in Slovakia, to assist enterprises directed by political allies like VSZ Kosice (Kasala 1997). But none of this will prevent the region retaining its independent cultural identity, combining the civilisations of east and west (Rey 1996).

After it seemed that political life might polarise on Latin American lines with economic policy veering to interventionism of the kind familiar in Asian «tiger» economies, a broadly successful struggle for democracy has occurred (Stokes 1993). Central Europe now seems to be democratically consolidated and in Poland for example „*there is a socio-economic division between neoliberal, free market/free enterprise policies and state interventionism in the economy with a welfare state-type social policy. An ideological split exists between confessional and secular visions of political order and is closely entwined with opposing stands on the issue of decommunisation*” (Jasiewicz 1998 p.3). In Polish elections much seems to depend on how well the opposing blocks (Solidarity and the Social Democrats) can maintain cohesion. At the same time, East European politicians seem not dissimilar from their Western counterparts: sophisticated with regard to organisational and bargaining skills, yet driven by ambition and tempted to promise more than they can deliver in expectation of short-term political pay-offs (Pridham, Lewis 1995). Success is down to „*their ability to speak for very different needs and feelings in their populations; [displaying] a degree of political adaptation and survival that has set them apart from many of their contemporaries*” (Bayliss 1998 p.299). All this reflects an underlying readiness of parties to cooperate, despite ethnic and environmental tensions, in the spirit of what Carter (1996) calls the Austro-Hungarian empire’s experiment with flexible federalism.

But not all parts of Eastern Europe can be considered fully converted to West European liberal democracy and there is some evidence in the region to support the view of Meyer and Geschiere (1999) that globalisation and identity can be an explosive combination which does not exclude communalist violence. Where dissident groups have failed to gain power „*unreconstructed former communists will use nationalist attacks on a large ethnic minority to establish their legitimacy and then to consolidate their support during difficult economic times*” (Snyder, Vachudova 1997, p.32). The transition in the Balkans has created some hybrid nationalist-populist regimes (Rupnik 1995) with ethnic tensions dominating the political agenda in some countries to the detriment

of human rights (Offe 1997). Where politics is rooted in ethnicity change and consensus become more difficult: ethnic minorities may well be further radicalised while the mainstream population is left ignorant of the main causes of economic stress. Romania is breaking away from the «protochronism» of the early 1990s (inherited from the later Ceausescu years) when Western-style liberalism and pluralism was presented in some quarters as alien to «indigenous» traditions (Tismaneanu, Pavel 1994, p.405). At a time when the Salvation Front/Party of Social Democracy government was making «promises everywhere» it seemed appropriate exploit nationalism and emphasise the originality of Romanian culture as an alternative to the «spirit of Europe» (Marga 1993, p.21).

In parts of the Balkans there is still a manifest lack of progress with regard to the «escalator» of Europeanisation. Historically prone to «racial xenophobic geopolitics» (Heffernan 1998), pluralism has been constrained by dreams of a nation state secured by ethnic cleansing (Cohen 1995) and reinforced in religious terms by „*myths and symbols spawned under the shadow of three great conflicting historical empires and civilisations ...too salient to be overcome by modern national or socialist programmes of integration*” (Khan 1995, p.471). Lack of a common approach to historiography is highlighted by the varied interpretations of Balkan history by Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic (Albanian and Bosnian) professionals. Although the Patriarchate of Constantinople has tried to mediate, much Orthodox opinion is against ecumenical contacts with Catholic and Protestant churches at present (Groen 1998). Serbian Orthodoxy contemplates a «defiant self-imposed isolation» (Herbst 1998, p.178) insulated from a World Council of Churches where ecumenists are seen forging unity through compromise and hypocrisy. In this part of Eastern Europe, where national politics are not firmly hitched to the EU bandwagon, local community values will continue to exercise a significant moderating influence and, as Liolin (1997, p.190) asserts for Albania, cultural and religious life will continue to make a difference despite ongoing adjustments to prevailing tendencies.

This is especially the case in the Western Balkans where Blumi (1998) argues that nationalism must come to terms with regional identities grounded in the administrative arrangements of the Ottoman period: the vilayets of Kosova, Janina, Shkoder and Monastir. The local triumphs because „*the complex interrelations between market forces, Eurocentric perspectives and rigid academic paradigms have helped submerge notions of specificity, context and depth in a sea of hyperbole emanating from singular locales*” (Blumi 1998, p.566).

This provides an essential background to Gheg-Tosk tensions which have been a destabilising influence throughout the history of independent Albania. The dichotomy was evident in the last century as the Tosks, administered from Janina, looked outwards to Europe while the Ghegs of Shkoder were protecting their autonomy and opposing incursions by the Montenegrin state. And with an eye on the chaos in Albania in 1997, Blumi (1998, p.566-7) emphasises that „*ethnic identity does not necessarily suggest unambiguity*”: there is no „*universalised Albanian polity reacting to pyramid schemes and democratic aspirations*”. Mussolini's wider Albania offered the Ghegs a reprieve from Slav animosity following the intimidation, brutality and forced

expulsions of Albanians by Belgrade, Athens and Sofia. But this created another source of tension between Tosks like Koci Xoxe and Enver Hoxha and the Gheg Balli Kombetar Party for whom „*the very idea of defeating Italy and returning Albanian [Gheg] lands to the same Slavs who had abused Albanian communities in the 1920s and 1930s was unthinkable*” (Blumi 1998, pp.562-3). After the war Albanian villages sympathetic to the Balli Kombetar were «cleaned» of military age men, yet these massive reprisals were unnoticed at the time and even Hoxha assisted the Yugoslav state in Kosova through his assault on Gheg power.

These events set the tone of the Albania’s communist era under Hoxha for „*a systematic championing of the Tosk identity and the destruction of the Gheg’s, helped sustain this incestuous regime: it is the paradox of fragmentation envy and fratricide which keeps Albania together*” (Blumi 1997, p.392). Yet Albania failed miserably under communism in material terms and even now the legacy of classic Balkanisation is not conducive to sustained FDI. Economic penetration has been led by mining enterprises concerned primarily with geological conditions and mine installations rather than location per se. Chronic capital shortage then pushed the Berisha presidency into pyramid funding although the resulting unrest was aggravated by strident regional prejudice. West European and North Atlantic institutions seem ready to confront the local where it loses all self-control (these words written at the time of the NATO intervention in 1999), but the good news is that Balkan behaviour patterns remain locally specific (as the Milosevic ethnic cleansing project in Kosova contrasts with a history of working through the political process in Macedonia) and «apocalyptic scenarios» of regional conflict (Blumi 1998 p.565) do not appear to be appropriate.

3. Regional development

The «local» was by no means eclipsed under communism. Regional leaders might be frequently reshuffled but networks were more durable and while they might be challenged by reformist parties they were reinforced by more conservative regimes. Nevertheless, „*urban and regional planning - like other state socialist policies - was the preserve of politicians, bureaucrats and experts, involving dialogues from which the general public were excluded*” (Harloe 1996 p.14). Now planning and development is becoming more highly contested, involving a wider range of social actors including private sector owners and developers. Moreover, the «local» is being reconstructed by a spontaneous decentralisation following the end of state socialism and communist legacies are merely a part of a complex web of economic and cultural values. Surazska et al. (1997 p.461) argue that a centralised unitary regime needs a welfare system with carefully controlled redistribution of resources; a professional administrative class and a stable party system. But there will be a case for decentralisation when these criteria not satisfied. In Slovenia, regional development problems have arisen through a high level of centralisation in the immediate post-independence period and all this is seen as „*an ever greater obstacle to the sustainable European model of regional development...based on administrative decentralisation and a greater role for endogenous regional sources*” (Plut 1997 p.44). Yet in Hungary power has been

decentralised not just to the regions but even closer to the grass-roots where 3,200 municipalities now have a key role (Wollmann 1977); a process encouraged by those wishing the state to wither as part of a cleansing process to prevent any return to a totalitarian system.

The centre will try and claw back authority but local power will not easily be surrendered. The result will be a wide range of possible strategies with much uncertainty tinged perhaps with radicalism (Sampson 1995). The struggle for control of state assets between different levels of government has enabled some grass-roots organisations to exploit these conflicts and gain a measure of control (Harloe 1996). In East Germany, the three big western utilities RWE Energie (Essen), PreussenElektra (Hannover) and Bayernwerk (Munich) set up Veag (Vereinte Energiewerke AG) by mid-1991. They managed the high voltage grid and were operating most power stations for Treuhand in anticipation of a majority shareholding (75 percent of Veag). There was support in West Germany for the big utilities to buy eastern assets cheaply and achieve high profitability to finance environmental clean-up, with higher electricity prices to encourage energy saving (Bohmer-Christiansen 1998). But there was a conflict with commune interests (as minority shareholders, backed by Land governments and the Social Democratic Party) in regional companies when promised investments fell behind schedule. As a result many municipalities now operate their own power stations in the context of a broad strategy using brown coal for base load, hard coal for middle load and gas for the peak. And the local also projects itself in politically-acceptable ways through image building. This is very much a feature of the competition for investment in East Germany (Herschell 1997) but there is a similar tendency among entrepreneurially-minded authorities elsewhere e.g. Łódź (Young 1997) motivated by a desire to ensure that FDI will «bed down» and demonstrate an on-going commitment to a particular location which may gradually offer useful linkages (e.g. components) as well as an export base.

However a flourishing «Europe of the Regions» is by no means assured. Adjusting to Europe does not always harmonise with local democracy where there is often scepticism over the capacity of a new generation of business organised through FDI and SMEs to achieve full employment and a measure of stability. There is a danger that Eastern Europe will be exploited for its cheap labour costs and less-experienced administration; thereby perpetuating high unemployment, low wages and low levels of job security (Turnock 1997). National capitals are doing well (Dowall et al. 1996) but there are sharp east-west contrasts in regional wellbeing (Gorzalak 1996). In this context Hardy and Rainnie (1996) have raised to question of global capitalism's capacity to cope with the East European periphery. It may be that regional economies will be built on cores of restructured privatised state-owned enterprises backed by small companies (SMEs) in „*sectors with low barriers for entry and extremely high death rates*”, employing only a proportion of those displaced so that „the new localism will simply usher in old fashioned poverty” (Hardy, Rainnie 1996, p.187).

Such misgivings rest on the rather unappetising background of the communist era when help to the poorer regions did not significantly dent the progress of the more prosperous areas (Bachtler 1992). Failure to achieve convergence in Former

Yugoslavia has been linked with the mistake of eliminating private agricultural producers and concentrating on heavy capital-intensive industry and import substitution (Bombelles 1991). However it is also fair to say that the Yugoslav economy was sacrificed to the war effort of the early 1990s when hyperinflation arose through attempts to accumulate capital to finance the budget deficit. Coping strategies emphasised the rural links of the townspeople (Lyon 1996). However where war did not arise there were also aberrations; notably Ceausescu's obsession with «building socialism» in Romania which involved huge energy, housing and navigation projects lacking any immediate financial pay-off. And there is an even longer-term perspective to Balkans economic malaise, for Jackson (1987) sees problems in all post-socialist Balkan states in getting from rapid development to economic maturity: „*development can be judged to have been successful when it results in an economy capable of reasonably stable responses to changing world markets and, at the same time, able to generate rising real output per capita at rates roughly equal to the average of other developed countries. If institutions that permit such a condition have reached a kind of stable equilibrium they can be considered «mature»*” (Jackson 1987, p.393).

In the light of historic development problems South Eastern Europe tends to mobilise people on the basis of national interest and regional identity, backed up by religion; providing some non-material values to alleviate poverty. Nationalism and unbridled localism may absorb the frustrations of peripherality. With great variations in per capita FDI - US\$742 Hungary and 38 in Macedonia to the end of 1994 (Martin 1998) – representing the extremes of investor confidence, it cannot be assumed that EU-inspired structural policies will succeed. Despite ambitious planning procedures for candidate countries funding is limited and the scaling-down of the CAP seems inevitable. It is interesting to evaluate the impetuous development of trans-frontier regions which has been a prominent feature of the post-socialist administrative map. The EU justification in terms of improved cohesion and democracy through the spatial hierarchy of spatial territorial units (NUTS) at different scales will not be realised until generous structural funding gives every community the scope to compete for help. While Euroregions undoubtedly represent a progressive strand in European policymaking, there is a contradiction between permeable frontiers and the need for security on the external borders of the EU as they advance progressively eastwards. Some reactionary signals to the cross-border cooperation bandwagon are emerging from the grass-roots. Polish nationalism is evident in Przemysl where anti-Ukrainian extremists, though not elected to the council, operate in a climate which is unsympathetic to the multi-ethnic traditions of the area (Hann 1998). There is currently much petty trade, but EU enlargement will mean stricter frontier controls which may not be unwelcome to the nationalists. Elsewhere on Poland's eastern frontier the question has been raised as to the future of small-scale trade after EU and NATO enlargement (Iglicka 1998; Strykiewicz 1998).

Academic assessments certainly encourage integration as can be seen in the call for close contact between Eastern Europe and Russia (Kolossoff 1996) and the logic of effective international cooperation for a country like Slovenia positioned on major transit routes and with ethnic minorities in border areas (Bufon 1996). Yet

some Romanian perceptions of the Carpathian Euroregion suspect a hidden agenda on the part of Hungarians (Deica, Alexandrescu 1995) and there are radically different conceptions of Macedonia's role in the Balkans. Prevelakis' (1994) plea for an open Macedonia with international support to realise the potential of a Balkan crossroads («carrefour geopolitique») is supported by Schmidt (1998) who calls on political leaders to promote economic integration to offset the rising nationalist sentiment within Macedonia. But there is also the implication of a Macedonia that is isolated nationally, regionally and internationally, with Greece collaborating only with Albania and Bulgaria (Petraikos 1997). Finally governments have themselves sometimes reacted with caution: the change of government in Romania in 1996 quickly brought a change in policy in favour of Euroregions (Deica et al. 1998), but in Slovakia there is still central government sensitivity over local governments becoming involved in international negotiations on trans-frontier relations while the Polish government is concerned about the advantages that Euroregions along the German border may bring to a part of the country that is already in a relatively strong economic position.

4. Rural development

Rural regions comprise a relatively disadvantaged area in the context of regional disparities (Downes 1996). The historic trend of rural-urban migration was very evident in Eastern Europe under socialism: due to urban-based employment and higher living standards at a time when collectivisation removed much of the satisfaction in looking after the family estate. Migration controls limited movement into large cities but only in Albania were barriers placed in the way of people leaving the rural areas (Sjoberg 1994) and particularly strong efforts were made to maximise rural employment. Meanwhile, the relatively poor infrastructure discouraged counterurbanisation on a western scale (Stasiak 1989). Depopulation has now greatly reduced some rural communities to the point where their sustainability is in doubt, especially of in the Croatia-Slovenia border areas. Despite a tradition of polycentric development people are moving from mountainous areas to heavily polluted valleys and basins; posing a development obstacle at a time when relations between the two states are unsettled (Plut 1997).

Since 1989 there has been a high degree of demographic stability on the whole, for the total population for Eastern Europe (excluding East Germany) of 123.21mln in 1989 was only slightly reduced to 121.84 in mid-1997 at a time when natural increase was very low. Rural-urban migration is restrained, given the job losses in industry, but the position is not sustainable because of the high level of rural underemployment (Borowicz 1996) and a lack of adequate opportunity in the towns. The gap between urban and rural areas appears to have widened over the past decade. There has been a massive structural change in agriculture as land restitution has broken up many of the communist cooperatives and rendered redundant a proportion of the capital investments, for example the substantial buildings erected for storage and stock rearing (Maurel 1996). There has also been a negative effect on many of

the small enterprises in the secondary and tertiary sectors which were formerly controlled by cooperative farms (Enyedi 1996) and which have, in many cases, been forced to close (Varga 1996). A further problem has arisen in agricultural marketing through the changed situation in the Former Soviet Union and need to build new networks appropriate to the present farming structure.

Rural areas attract a relatively low share of new investment, partly due to a poor infrastructure and a restricted range of raw materials. People require a heightened perception of business opportunity and more dynamism in the development of civil society (Ivanova 1995), although rural regions are not too radicalised because of the contentment deriving from land restitution. The local may boil down to quiet resignation but this may well be balanced by electoral instability as the less prosperous peripheral areas «bite back» with a greater readiness to vote not only for a change of government but for more radical alternatives (Surazska, Bivand 1997). Rural planning will become more important for EU candidate countries as part of the programme for structural assistance. It is an important question for the future how far the further decline of employment in agriculture will precipitate a mass migratory movement towards capital cities and regional centres. Action is being taken to stimulate SMEs and to train unemployed young people so that the erosion of local labour resources will not become irreversible. Local authorities along with relevant state organisations and NGOs are trying to improve infrastructure through water, sewerage, gas and electricity and transport and telecommunications services as rapidly as possible, thereby overcoming the marginalisation of some rural areas and improving the prospects for small businesses (Górz, Kurek 1999). This work may well benefit from a measure of coordination.

There have been some quite imaginative domestic initiatives in the aftermath of system change, such as the setting up of a Federation for Mountain Development in Romania which now operates as a commercial company concerned with marketing, technological innovation and diversification (Turnock 1993). Romania's Planning Ministry is much concerned with electrification, piped water supplies and road surfacing; while the Czech Republic's «Programme for Renewal of Rural Municipalities» which has been launched to improve village infrastructure. But further diversification is needed through pluriactivity (Marsden 1990) so that a greater range of income sources can be linked with small farms (Turnock 1998a). There are traditional country industries in rural Bulgaria and much local commerce based on cheap Turkish manufactures, but the end of protected regimes in the mining industries means that new economies must be found. It is the essence of the local that almost «everything is possible» (Sampson 1995) but options are constrained because the European periphery does not have very good scope in agriculture given the nature of the relationship with the EU and membership is unlikely to bring the same benefits through the CAP as are currently available. This is a globalisation anomaly that is potentially destabilising. There is some scope for private enterprise in agriculture given restitution (Turnock 1995) but only in the context of a problematic market situation and path-dependent large-scale farming retained from socialist period

(Meurs, Begg 1998; Stewart 1997) is having to achieve major efficiency gains: note the vineyards Tokaj-Hegyalja and Sopron and the fruit growing of Kiskunsag near Szeged.

The problem varies in scale. Table 1 presents data from United Nations and FAO sources which indicate the size of the rural population, and weight of the agricultural population among (a) the rural population and (b) the total active population. If the three sets of percentages are averaged to produce an index then three groups emerge from the five countries with complete data coverage: Albania has an index of 48.9 for 1990 and 47.2 for 1994, while Poland (30.4 and 27.0) and Romania (28.7 and 27.2) are followed by Bulgaria (21.1 and 20.0) and Hungary (22.6 and 19.7). Clearly there are significant contrasts in the scale of the problem but it is significant everywhere.

Rural areas will certainly modernise through the actions of individuals and there is much empirical evidence to show how this can have a significant cumulative effect. Reduced possibilities for commuting, arising from downsizing in the factories and the reductions in public transport, are leading to greater entrepreneurial activity in the villages in rural services as studies of Romania's Arad County have shown (von Hirschhausen 1998; Ianos 1996). Rural tourism is much discussed as a potential growth industry in post-industrial societies (Krzyszowska-Kostrowicka 1997) and there is a feel-good factor arising from a modest growth of agricultural incomes in Polish villages where the perceived success of the first entrants into rural tourism attract emulation.

Tab. 1. Eastern Europe: rural population and agricultural population.

Tab. 1. Europa Wschodnia – ludność wiejska i rolnicza.

Country	1990						1994					
	A	B	C	D	E	F	A	B	C	D	E	F
Albania	3256	2081	63.9	715	34.4	48.5	#3645	#2289	62.8	758	33.1	45.7
Bosnia-H	*4377	*2644	60.4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	#4484	#2641	58.9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Bulgaria	8991	2940	32.7	539	18.3	12.2	8444	2727	32.3	464	17.0	10.6
Croatia	4778	2184	45.7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	*4495	*1987	44.2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Czech Rep.	10363	2187	21.1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	@10331	@2614	25.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Hungary	10365	3752	36.2	752	20.0	11.5	10261	3745	36.5	496	13.2	9.5
Macedonia	*2034	*852	41.9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	#2163	#867	40.1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Poland	38119	14905	39.1	4676	31.4	20.8	38544	14839	38.5	3613	24.3	18.2
Romania	23207	10606	39.1	2839	26.8	20.2	22731	10297	45.3	1997	19.4	17.1
Slovakia	5298	2188	41.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5347	2299	43.0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Slovenia	1998	987	49.4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1989	991	49.8	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Yugoslavia	*10409	*5080	48.8	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	#10544	#4576	43.4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

A – Total population (th); B – Rural population (th); C – Percentage of population rural;
D – Population active in agriculture; E – D as a percentage of the rural population; F – D as a percentage of the total active population.

Sources: UN Yearbooks; UN Demographic Yearbooks (used for A and B except where otherwise state);
FAO Agricultural production yearbooks (for D and F) *1991; @1993; #UN Statistical Yearbook 1995.

This may be every bit as potent as the despair felt by women unfamiliar with «kin-based enterprises» who have been forced back to agricultural work through unemployment after years of full integration into the central economy (Pine 1997).

5. The environment approach

However, there are two ways in which rural areas might be more powerfully assisted through the planning process, both of which are relevant to the progress of rural tourism. The first concerns the environment. This is fundamentally a national issue linked with EU pollution norms. There is a need for „*a fine understanding of the interaction between national characteristics and the global processes and agencies operating in each country*” (Tickle, Welsh 1998 p.163). Environmental goals have to compete for scarce resources and progress is therefore slow now that some of the key problems have been solved, following intense public pressure in the early 1990s (Enyedi, Szirmai 1998) and some general easement of pollution levels has come about through deindustrialisation. But further progress may depend to some extent on the political clout that can be mustered by leading personalities in Environment Commissions and Ministries (Sloccock 1996). There is also a local dimension whereby each specific «environment-society-economy nexus» (Tickle, Welsh 1998 p.163) may deliver unique empirical material to relate the global with the local. This could arise through local environmental improvement projects based on volunteer labour and also through the way in which managers of transnational companies (TNCs) might negotiate with local «leaders» to find an acceptable regime for inward investment. While TNCs might try and seek out «wild zones» lacking proper environmental assessment procedures, local communities motivated by concern for sustainability might well seek a more stringent environmental audit. Wódz and Wódz (1998) show how the Nova Huta steel plant antagonised the local intelligentsia and spontaneously created the Polish Ecological Club (Polski Klub Ekologiczny) during the first Solidarity era (1980) so that this organisation could then campaign successfully to close the Skawina metallurgical plant notorious for its fluoride emissions.

There is always a risk that an uncompromising stance in favour of investment and job creation will encourage elites and bureaucracies inherited from the communist period to cooperate with quasi-authoritarian governments in order to marginalise environmental groups (ENGOS) perceived as opponents of economic progress through their «unreasonable» demands over environmental quality. Apologists for the «national interest» who might now support nuclear power on the grounds of national self-sufficiency after previously opposing them as symbols of Soviet domination will hardly be comfortable with an environmental movement thinking in global terms (Welsh 1995). And there are various ways in which the environmental movement has been used as a surrogate for wider political objectives not necessarily consistent with its ultimate objectives (Dawson 1996). Tickle and Welsh (1998, p.160) suggest that the Hungarian state co-opted environmental issues „*as a way of defusing wider critiques emanating from the intelligentsia*”, as in the case of the Danube Movement (Haraszti 1990). But such is the nature of the local. The other extreme would be an

effective environment lobby maximising the potential of the available legislation to improve local infrastructure in the interests of sustainability (for example, to rectify the imbalance between water supply and sewerage capacities which generates considerable pollution) and also working to convert arable land to woodland or pasture.

In the Czech Republic, as elsewhere, intensive agriculture has encroached on floodplain areas and there is so much artificiality that restoration is essential. Reclamation of arable land in favour of forests and permanent grassland is needed to stop the „*denaturalisation of Czech rivers and their general ecological status*” (Sarapatka, Sterba 1998 p.145). There is funding for this by Ministries of Agriculture and Environment. More widely, the Czech Republic Agriculture Ministry’s «Agrarian Programme» encourages not only farm diversification but also environmental improvements such as re-forestation, enlargement of grasslands and reduced use of chemical fertilisers. Meanwhile, Hungarian scientists at the University of Agricultural Sciences in Godollo think that intensification can be reduced most effectively by working out the optimum crop combinations in «natural micro- and meso-regions» so that the cropping that is retained will general maximum output. This will be commensurate, presumably, with appropriate rotations and avoidance of monoculture; also with the logic of mixed farming and social considerations regarding rural employment where cropping is substantially reduced (Tirczka, Ferencsik 1998).

Meanwhile the Department of Architecture & Environmental Design at Godollo deplores the destruction of traditional architecture with «industrialised architecture» and the concentration of population in large village centres acting as «industrial living districts» which are not conducive healthy rural life (Ruda 1998, p.93). There have been big changes since 1960 with replacement on such a scale that traditional housing (of 1800-1950 vintage) „*can now be considered as rural monuments*”. New houses involve too much underused space (with «best rooms» which cumulatively represent a large investment) and by tending to occupy the whole breadth of the strip of land tend to be (a) too close to neighbours; (b) less accessible from the land and (c) less harmonious as a complex of dwelling/agricultural units of building. Hence „*the urgent need of revitalisation in our whole countryside regarding the human, natural and architectural environment*” (Ruda 1998).

The author goes on to suggest that sustainable development of rural settlements requires: conventional balance between natural and built environments; retention of historic styles and traditional appearance as well as other aspects of folk life; national and community values; and concern for the «whole» countryside character and culture. With more emphasis on smallholdings at the present time, traditional buildings should be reconstructed and old houses preserved. An example from Poland highlights the opportunity in 1989 to save historic buildings such as Krobielowice near Wrocław and Krzyżowa near Świdnica. Also the Krasków estate near Świdnica with a small but valuable baroque mansion restored through financial assistance from an Austrian company and its Polish partner. Now the building is used for hotel accommodation and catering; also cultural activities (Hybner 1998). Instances of sustainability on which rural tourism depends (Hall 1998) extend on a larger scale to

devastated environments like the Sudeten Mountains (especially the «Black Triangle») where cross-border cooperation is now accelerating the introduction of clean technology (alternative energy sources and priority for agriculture and forestry) to modify the local economy and provide the base for sustainable development (Kachniarz 1998). Where tourism is concerned it is evident that many people on short visits fail to appreciate the risks: hence the need for suitable control measures, including investment in other areas to divert some of the pressure (Swatowska 1998). And tourism also raises serious questions about the sustainability of host communities. There is also an unanswerable case for cross-border cooperation over environmental management of the Elbe Valley (Jansky 1997).

6. The central place solution

A second approach would focus on the cohesion of the central place system as a key to rural growth and stability. There is already significant growth in rural areas close to large cities, especially the national capitals, although the sale of flats for commercial use by their new owners may prevent any pronounced suburbanisation of industrial and commercial enterprises. However, speculative builders see much potential for housing in some suburban locations in Prague (taking account of road schemes) and there has already been growth in towns and villages on the edge of the city to solve the housing shortage. There is also a likelihood that what are presently second homes will become permanent residences: about a fifth of second home owners around Prague are considering this possibility. Housing and recreational pressures may significantly undermine the emphasis on vegetable and flower growing which was prominent in the past. Meanwhile, the success of provincial cities like Győr in Hungary, in attracting inward investment, is stimulating rural communities in the area to draw up their own plans for investment, including golf courses, tourist facilities and restaurants, with encouragement from the Hungarian government's Investment & Trade Development Agency. Villages near the Halle-Leipzig conurbation in East Germany are attracting a growing non-agricultural commuting population (Knappe 1999) and money for the improvement of rural infrastructure is delivered under the «Dorferneuerung» programme (Wilson 1999). Each of the Lander in East Germany has also designated a «Modelstadt» to demonstrate improved housing/living conditions, shopping facilities and office provision. In the Czech Republic a *Programme for Renewal of Rural Municipalities* has been launched to improve village infrastructure.

„Ideally a well-integrated urban hierarchy should enable the major provincial centres to gather development initiatives through their compelling «gateway» functions (deriving from their accessibility, their specialised service provision and their economic-cultural status generally) and disperse these as appropriate throughout their region's settlement hierarchy for the benefit of smaller towns and rural districts where unemployment is often high and where there is a threat of more serious social problems arising from the inevitable consolidation of farm businesses in the future» (Turnock, Muica 1997, p.28). This can hardly be done in a manner reminiscent of a bureaucratic command structure but requires effective networking between regional and local governments in partnership with NGOs.

Kraków Regional Development Agency has been set up to implement a consistent regional policy of economic restructuring and development throughout the region, with attention to infrastructure in small towns and rural areas. Clearly there must be an administrative basis for such interaction and here it is interesting to see a tendency towards larger regions that appropriately complement the relatively small number of large cities exceeding 300-500,000 in population. Romania's 41 counties highlight towns with an average population of only 204.8th and hinterlands with only 348.4th people on average (total 453.2th) and the former Polish system was roughly similar with 50 voivodships centred on towns averaging 216.9th with hinterlands of 556.9th (total 773.8th). But the government's plan for larger regions envisaged only 12 centres, averaging 550.5th with hinterlands of 2.67mln (total 3.22mln) and this scheme has now been implemented with only slight modification: allowing 16 centres with an average population of 465.9th and hinterlands of 1.95mln (total 2.42mln).

It is the role of small towns to „*transmit urban characteristics from the big cities to the rural areas*” (Ianos, Talanga 1996, p.342). So a strengthening of district centres would place individual farmers and small rural communities in better contact with the market and with investment opportunities. Small towns are numerous in the northern part of Eastern Europe and examples of their dynamism are provided by recent research on Jemnice in Moravia (Vaisher, Zapetalova 1998) and on groups of towns in border regions of Poland (Kowalczyk 1997). However, substantial areas of southeastern Europe remain remote from market towns although key villages act as surrogate urban centres to some extent as has been shown in the case of Patarlagele in the Buzau Subcarpathians of Romania (Muica, Turnock 1999; Turnock 1999). The strengthening of these centres, leading to formal urban status, would discourage long-wave migration and help to avoid further erosion of population resources (Ianos, Talanga 1994). This is one aspect of rural planning where an element of continuity might be sought with the former regime; for rural planning in communist Romania aimed at the promotion of some 400 rural communes to urban status and although the plan has now been abandoned the potential for an expanded urban network remains (though without the draconian complement of arbitrary abandonment of the smaller villages) (Turnock 1991).

Hungarian research suggests that small towns in areas of high unemployment could be transformed by local initiative. A more even urban network could achieve a better regional balance, along with continuing progress in education and growth in the tertiary sector (Hajnal 1989); for this encourages economic activity to be „more evenly distributed across the country, than would otherwise be dictated by manufacturing and farming activities which rely on natural, local resources and therefore lead to regional variations” (Nemes 1994 p. 367). However, at the present time some of the small towns may lack adequate services, especially those that expanded under socialism without a proper «small town society» (Csatari 1993). And although no village in Hungary is more than a half-hour journey away from the nearest town there are variations in the quality of transport and services within each small town hinterland (which may involve 20-30,000 people, though usually no more than 15,000 for the newer small towns) (Ferenc 1991). Hungary has particular

accessibility problems in demographically-weak areas of small farms («tanyak»), where central places at the local level are not easily identifiable, and border areas which are a legacy of the imposition of Trianon frontiers after the First World War (Suli-Zakar 1992). The newly-independent Croatia is also preoccupied with a national urban system and the need to strengthen a number of district towns as growth centres (Njegac, Toskic 1999). And Croatia also seeks to restructure functional relationships in border areas where problems arise from the «butterfly» shape of the country and the more tenuous connections with Bosnia-Herzegovina (Toskic, Ilic 1997). A concern for fringe areas is also evident in Estonia (Kliimask 1993).

Small town locations are not always appreciated by foreign investors. They score well in terms of corporate loyalty but not for the import of outside talent. A single large employer in a small town e.g. Electrolux in Jaszbereny (Hungary) can «fire up» community spirit especially when people pull together in a crisis. But small towns are being noticed by investors and places close to interchanges on Poland's emerging motorway system are a case in point. Development is taking place at Grodzisk Mazowiecki in the shape of the Danfoss (Denmark) factory for automatic control equipment for heaters and refrigerators. The company wanted a location close to main transport routes: in Grodzisk it will be close to a planned exit from the A2 motorway. The required 7.5ha site involved numerous owners but the mayor handled the negotiations and production started in 1998. The tax regime is favourable and qualified workers could emerge through courses provided in Grodzisk's Mechanical & Automotive Vocational School. Land prices are increasing and Grodzisk now hopes to become a strong industrial centre. Projected infrastructure improvements include road resurfacing with parking lots, the renovation of facades of buildings with tax exemptions for those who join the project and improved interior decoration in shops. The main traffic intersection on the Warsaw-Zyrardow route is to be modernised, and local roads will be improved eventually after gas, water and sewage systems have been installed.

Small town networking could offer a way forward. „*As the larger cities try to organise the space around them, groups of towns with similar and complementary functions could cooperate to increase their chances in the competition for development resources*” (Nagy, Turnock 1998, p.19). Examples could include the Nagykunsag area east of Szolnok and the small town trio of Battonya, Mezohegyes and Mezokovacsaha near Bekescsaba. Local area networks might focus on a technologically-strong nucleus such as a town offering higher education facilities. With its well-developed network of universities Poland could also be in a strong position. Small towns along the Oder Valley have done well in attracting joint ventures (18 joint ventures per 10,000 pop. in Łęknica, Zielona Góra) – the first investor is usually the catalyst in an area ripe for development in connection with cross-border cooperation (Kratke 1998). But transport and telecommunications are also important so that such towns „*will no longer have to depend so heavily on personal informal channels in seeking to attract small industrial plants*”. Priorities here should include not only integration with transport corridors and international airports but provision of „*logistical centres that strengthen the transport functions of central towns and provide new links between villages*” (Kratke 1998, p. 20).

Returning to the Hungarian small town situation it is evident that information flows have benefitted from an increase in the number of local and district newspapers and radio stations; while cable-television systems now exist in the towns and larger villages. These improvements are important for the flow of information and for social cohesion and identity in each district or locality. „*Civil society is being more effectively mobilised so that each small town, along with the villages in its neighbourhood, can find a basis for cooperation with regard to both economic growth and cultural life. Simultaneously new connections are being established with other parts of Hungary and with foreign countries as the actors in each local economy seek out partners and try to enlarge their market areas*” (Nagy, Turnock 1998 pp.20-1). Larger firms can use the new information technologies to extend their networks at the local or district level, while flexible specialisation through subcontracting and supply networks provides opportunity for SMEs in backward areas to cooperate with business elsewhere. This enhances the central place functions of small towns and strengthens their economic image so that they may attract larger industrial plants and other investments. They can thereby develop their business services and improve living conditions through the widening range of non-agricultural employment.

Improved cohesion will require considerable funding in some countries and despite commitment from the Planning Ministry the scale of the challenge in Romania is huge in relation to the resources available (Salagean 1999). This raises the possibility of a complementary strategy to ensure that communities can fully maximise the potential available to them. It is evident that individual households are finding their own coping strategies but, especially in southeastern Europe, they may be little in the way of institutional back-up apart from what the churches can provide. Further growth of civil society might therefore be achieved through the development of more NGOs to function as intermediaries between individuals and local authorities and ensure an effective community input into local planning. Such organisations are quite well established in the northern countries but are less common in the south. Where agricultural cooperatives have been retained there is already an infrastructure in place but where the former communist collectives have dissolved (and equally in areas where they never existed) rural communities may lack effective leadership and in the case of ethnic minorities fragmentation and isolation may amount to exclusion.

7. Conclusion

Post-socialist East European states are embroiled in a complex transition process which, for the great majority, looks forward to EU membership. Policies must thereby be closely in line with «Copenhagen Principles» while trade restrictions mean that it is not always possible to maximise the potential available for export to Western Europe in line with physical resources and labour costs. Some governments have difficulty in sustaining a pro-European policy electorally, but a decade on from the revolutions 1989 there is much to suggest that Eastern Europe is well on the way to reintegration with the western half of the continent. Although the process involves eastern assimilation of western institutions (EU and NATO, to say nothing of the

influence of global financial institutions) the relevance of these organisations to the post-socialist states and the negotiation of transitional arrangements has avoided some of the tensions of integration generated by the precipitate unification of Germany. However cohesion between the «global», as represented by FDI and programmes for EU enlargement, and «local» environment comprising national and regional policies is by no means achieved and levels of convergence need to be operationalised and checked out through empirical research. The greatest geopolitical challenges evidently centre on Former Yugoslavia, but much of southeastern Europe is experiencing severe economic difficulty. Although political instability should not be exaggerated the flow of investment and the speed of reform are at variance with expectations of convergence in a continent on the threshold of EU enlargement. Rural areas especially provide grounds for concern because their population resources, though much depleted, cannot be fully engaged by agriculture alone and if governments wish to avoid the costs of accelerated rural-urban migration and commuting much more must be done to diversify rural economies. But this is a challenge not just for the authorities but for civil society generally and this means the strengthening of local institutions. Under communism Eastern Europe developed its own form of «democratic citizenship» through dissident anti-institutional political thinking implying an antagonism between the official and the private. But in the new conditions these two realms must somehow be integrated through genuine partnership. This is a considerable challenge but it holds the promise of a more genuinely negotiated future for East European communities and a final solution to the historical «Balkan» problem of deep-seated divergence and exclusion.

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Globalizacja – rozwój regionów i obszarów wiejskich w Europie Wschodniej

Streszczenie

Pomimo zachodzących współcześnie procesów globalizacji utrzymuje się lokalne zróżnicowanie zjawisk społeczno-ekonomicznych. Każda społeczność lokalna odznacza się specyfiką ukształtowaną przez spuściznę polityczną, ekonomiczną i społeczno-kulturową, warunkującą przebieg procesu globalizacji. Opierając się na tym podejściu autor rozważa współczesne trendy w rozwoju regionów i obszarów wiejskich Europy Wschodniej w okresie transformacji ustrojowej. Generalne tendencje takie jak pluralizm polityczny i gospodarczy, prywatyzacja, napływ kapitału zagranicznego, dążenie do członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej, analizowane są na tle lokalnych problemów i uwarunkowań w poszczególnych krajach.

W pierwszej części artykułu przedstawiona została sytuacja polityczna w państwach Europy Wschodniej ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem państw bałkańskich. Przytoczone przykłady wskazują na różnice w przestrzeganiu praw jednostki, grup mniejszościowych oraz w podejściu do zagadnień prywatyzacji majątku

i otwarcia kraju na zewnątrz. Obrazują one także różny stopień stabilności systemu politycznego w tych krajach.

Wnikliwej analizie poddane zostały trendy w polityce dotyczącej rozwoju regionów i obszarów wiejskich po upadku systemu socjalistycznego. Polityka regionalna w państwie socjalistycznym kształtowana była na szczeblu centralnym, bez uwzględnienia potrzeb środowiska lokalnego. Proces transformacji w większości krajów przesunął znaczną część kompetencji decyzyjnych na poziom regionów i społeczności lokalnych (np. Węgry, Polska). Autor podkreśla, iż działania zmierzające do rozwoju regionalnego i lokalnego podejmowane są nie tylko przez władze samorządowe, ale także przez osoby prywatne oraz podmioty gospodarcze funkcjonujące na tych obszarach. Przytaczane są przykłady rządowych i samorządowych agencji regionalnych (m. in.: Krakowskiej Agencji Rozwoju Regionalnego, Węgierskiej Agencji ds. Rozwoju Handlu i Inwestycji), których celem jest tworzenie odpowiednich warunków do lokalizacji inwestycji. Dostosowywanie do „Europy” nie zawsze harmonizuje jednak z lokalną demokracją, którą charakteryzuje czasem sceptyczna postawa wobec nowych inwestycji zagranicznych.

Obszary wiejskie stanowią zasadniczy problem wszystkich państw Europy Wschodniej. Zmiany strukturalne w rolnictwie doprowadziły do upadku państwowych gospodarstw rolnych oraz wpłynęły negatywnie na wiele małych przedsiębiorstw rolnych z nimi powiązanych. Istotnym problemem rozważanym przez autora jest konieczność zmian powiązań rynkowych w rolnictwie i potrzeba budowy nowej sieci współpracy właściwej dla współczesnej struktury rolnej.

Ze względu na niski poziom istniejącej na wsi infrastruktury oraz ograniczoną bazę surowcową obszary wiejskie przyciągają stosunkowo niewiele inwestycji. Największą aktywizacją odznaczają się obszary wiejskie położone w sąsiedztwie dużych organizmów miejskich, szczególnie w pobliżu miast stołecznych. Szybki rozwój zaobserwować można także na obszarach znajdujących się przy ważnych szlakach komunikacyjnych. Miejsca te odgrywają znaczącą rolę w lokalizacji działalności gospodarczej.

Autor zwraca uwagę na znaczenie dywersyfikacji gospodarki obszarów wiejskich oraz na wykorzystanie istniejącego na wsi potencjału, między innymi poprzez rozwój turystyki. Podkreśla konieczność wypracowania nowych form autentycznego partnerstwa między instytucjami lokalnymi i prywatnymi podmiotami gospodarczymi. Wskazuje, że zrównoważony rozwój obszarów wiejskich wymaga ukształtowania odpowiednich relacji pomiędzy środowiskiem przyrodniczym a antropogenicznym oraz zachowania tradycji i kultury regionalnej charakterystycznej dla poszczególnych obszarów.

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