

INSTITUTIONS, NETWORKING AND LOCAL CULTURE: LOCAL COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION AFTER 1989 ON THE EXAMPLE OF OLOMOUC, CZECH REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

This article is dealing with the issue of transforming of civic culture in post-socialist town of Olomouc, Czech Republic. After introducing of the theoretical concept and methodology are presented results of an empirical research and comparison with three others towns in the Czech Republic – Český Krumlov, Nové Město nad Metují and Teplice.

1. INTRODUCTION

In looking at the last ten years or so we have been able to observe the changing focus of scientists dealing with the problems of uneven regional development. Still growing interest is devoted especially to the research of social and economic processes leading to increasingly uneven development at the local level. Theoretical sources for this research are taken mainly from sociology and economics. These streams were developed in 1970-s and are connected with the so-called post-fordist debate (Amin, 1994). We can distinguish three main theoretical streams in this period – (neo)marxist, neoconservative and approaches based on the French Regulation school. All these approaches try to find reasons for the economic and social crisis of the 1970-s and propose new approaches in explaining the causes of economic development.

In general, we can stress that Marxist (structuralist) theories can be viewed as oversocialized. They neglect the role of individuals in economic, social and political action. On the other hand neo-classical economic theory does not take into the account the role of interpersonal relations, imperfect competition and views the whole of the economy as only a sum of mutually independent, isolated and rational individuals (*homo oeconomicus*).

Theories based on the Regulation school and flexible specialisation bring a more balanced approach to understanding economic action. They affirm that economic development is heavily influenced by *regime of accumulation* and by *mode of production*. Regional development theories as a spatial application of regulation theory stress the importance of flexibility and learning for successful regional development (Blažek, 1999). Im-

portant theoretical sources for understanding the process of societal learning can be found in institutional economics (Hodgson, 1988) and in the New Economic Sociology of M. Granovetter (Granovetter 1985,1992). According to institutional economists the economic action of individuals is influenced by *habits* and *routines* which are dependent on a set of very different causes (biological, psychological, sociological etc.). These *habits* and *routines* are expressed in existing local institutions. Local institutions are not unchangeable over time and it is crucial to discover the processes that lead to these changes. New Economic Sociology, in turn, operates with the concepts of *networks* and *embeddedness*.

The key notions which regional development theory has borrowed from new economic sociology and institutional economics are high quality social, institutional and cultural structures and non-hierarchical system of mutual collaboration.

2. LOCAL CULTURE, SOCIAL AND SYMBOLIC CAPITAL AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL ELITES IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By the context of a **local culture** we can understand the spatial expression of institutionalised habits and routines mutually connected within a network of contacts. The analysis of local culture then can help us to understand why some regions (firms, individuals and elites in region) are able to use information and knowledge in different ways which, in turn, lead to differentiated economic success (Storper, Salais, 1997). Local culture can also vary substantially from one region to another and so can create uneven “equipment” of re-

gions by **social capital** (Bourdieu, 1977) or, in other words, a well functioning network of contacts and institutions that can be called **institutional thickness** (Amin and Thrift, 1996). Main bearers of social capital are local elites who can substantially animate the development of a region. Local elites are “controllers” of **symbolic capital** that can be changed into real capital. In other words, their symbolic capital is changed into money, power and access to important informations. This enables again the reproduction of symbolic capital.

Social capital is a specific form of capital. It is not included in people but it is a specific feature of the relations between people. The connection between symbolic and social capital, especially in post-communist societies, is a very interesting phenomenon (Keller, 1995, Uhlř, 1998).

3. CIVIC CULTURE – EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH

The term civic culture can be used as a different expression for a presence of social capital in regions. The practical application of these theoretical concepts is the domain specifically of economic sociologists and, in the last ten years, of economic geographers. A pioneering work was published in 1960-s and its name is *The Civic Culture* (Almond, Verba, 1963). Another very influential book was Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (Putnam, 1993) which deals with the establishment of new institutions at the level of provincial governments in Italy from 1970 to 1990. Notions like civic culture, social capital, norms of mutuality and networks of civic commitment are main explaining factors of success or failure of regional governments and regional economies. Political culture also plays an important role. One of the main results of Putnam's study was the discovering of importance of the type of relations among local elites. Where the relations were characterised by horizontal connections it usually implied a rise in institutional and economic operations. In regions where the relations are characterised by vertical, hierarchical relations, lack of mutual trust between citizens and local elites, very often can be observed lack of entrepreneurship and is characteristic for many less favoured regions. Historical heritage of forms of government plays a very important role. Italy and different historical development of northern part and Messegiorno can be nice example. (Putnam, 1993, Vajdov, 1996).

Successful regions are very often an object of study by many geographers and economists. During about last ten years we could find many papers and books, which can be called “**learning regions** studies”. Their authors try to find the most important factors of success stories of these regions. Most authors declare that *institutional thickness* is a necessary condition for the successful de-

velopment of a region. On the other hand they say that development strategies of these successful regions are not transferable. The most important characteristic of learning regions is **the ability of learning to learn**.

In post-socialist countries (incl. Czech republic) is important research of networking and civic culture in post-communist societies. A good example for this research is Schöpfling (1993) who created a typology of post-communist countries according to their respective political cultures. A very valuable study is that of Stark, Grabher (1997) which stresses how the symbolic capital of old communist elites can be used and transformed into new economic power. A very similar work about the transformation of old communist networks into new functioning industrial networks in the Lanškroun region, Czech Republic, is documented in Uhlř (1998).

In the Czech Republic we find an example of this research, the program on the transformation of local communities processed by a team of sociologists from the Sociological Institute of the Czech Academy of Science, Prague (Vajdov, 1996, Vajdov, Kosteleck, 1997). On the basis of the example of three Czech towns and the comparison of one Czech and East-German town the basic principles and patterns of political culture were described. The authors were inspired by success of Putnam's publication.

4. RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH OF LOCAL COMMUNITY IN OLOMOUC

The main aim of my empirical research was to discover the basic patterns of political and civic culture in Olomouc and compare them to similar research undertaken by the Sociological Institute, Czech Academy of Science in three other Czech towns – Česk Krumlov, Nov Msto nad Metuj and Teplice under the supervision of Zdenka Vajdov in 1994, that is prior to the local elections. The aim was similar to that of Putnam's study: to assess how the relatively newly established institutions at the local level, especially local government, were able to gain the trust of citizens, and whether there were some apparent regional differences in this respect. The working hypothesis was that after 40 years of socialism some differences in local culture would emerge.

My research was focused only on citizens, not on elites will represent the target of my future research. The research was carried out during one week at the beginning of May 1999, i. e. a few months after local elections. The sample was 500 citizens of the city, i.e. approx. 0,5 % of the total population (respecting spatial and sociodemographic characteristics of the population). The questions were borrowed from the empirical research carried out by The Sociological Institute. They are displayed in the following table 1:

Tab. 1: Structure of the questioner

Local pol. system	Aspect of attitudes			Participation	
	cognitive	evaluating	emotive		
input	knowing about	influence of subjects on decision making	trust to institutions, personalisation	participation in elections	
output	problems of the town	contribution of loc. authorities to development, right preferences	openness to change	intervention to decision making	
Citizens in system	relevance and competence				

Other variables:
 Sex
 Age
 Level of education
 Economic activity

Source: Vajdová, Kostecký (1997)

a) Attitudes to local policy

Concerning *cognitive* aspects, the majority of Olomouc citizens feels as not sufficiently informed. In this sense, Olomouc is closer to Teplice than to other two towns. It can be explained by its larger population size. People very often do not understand the constitution of the local political system, they do not know the competencies of different actors at the local political and economic level.

Two questions addressed the *evaluating* and *cognitive* aspects of attitudes:

- i) who involves every day life in the town
- ii) what level of trust do they have in public administration institutions

ad i) Local authorities (town council, mayor, local representatives) and political parties governing the townhall have the largest influence on life in the town. Citizens, churches, Mafia, “old communist structures”, but also the NGOs according to the survey the smallest influence on citizens. The influence of “hidden elites” in Olomouc is very small.

ad ii) All institutions and offices have a relatively high degree of trust. In the worst position are state police and finance and labour offices. In this sense, the situation is very similar to the situation in other towns.

b) Participation of citizens in local elections

The fact that research in Olomouc was realised after the election of local authorities in November 1998, the actual preferences for political parties were not so important as before elections in 1994 (comparative research in other 3 towns). For us the enlargement of the time horizon is important. Thanks to it we can see the shift which has occurred during last four years. As shown in table 2, in Olomouc we can observe relatively stable support of political parties. Yet there was a very substantial change in the council since the formerly leading coalition party – Civic Democratic Party (ODS) despite its triumph in the 1998 election was unable to constitute a local council and is now in opposition (similar situation to the one in České Budějovice). Current coalition in Olomouc includes all the political parties except ODS.

Tab. 2: Composition of former and current deputies in Olomouc (45 mandates)

1994-1998	ODS 15	ČSSD 7	ODA 5	UKD 5	SZ,nez. 3	KSČM 8	SPR-RSČ 2
1998-2002	ODS 14	ČSSD 11	US 6	KDU 6	KSČM 6	Ol/21 - 2	

ODS – Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana), ČSSD – Social Democrats (Česká strana sociálně demokratická), ODA – Občanská demokratická aliance (Civic Democratic Alliance), US – Unie svobody (former part of ODS), UKD – Union of Christian Democrats (Unie křesťanských demokratů), KDU – Christian democrats (Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová), KSČM – Communist Party (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy), SZ – Green Party and Independents (Strana zelených a nezávislí), SPR-RSČ – Republicans (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa), Ol/21 – Association (Sdružení) Olomouc 21

Source: Townhall Olomouc

The next question referred to the satisfaction with the work of the townhall and could represent a valuable feedback for the City Council. The levels of satisfaction among local citizens with the work of their local councils are presented in the following table 3.

The best work of the townhall is in Český Krumlov, on the other hand, relatively unsatisfied are people in Teplice. What could be found interesting is, that the level of satisfaction in Olomouc, which was measured almost five years later is still relatively high. If we compare it with the situation at the state level, where there has been a substantial decline in the level of satisfaction and trust in such institutions as the Government, the Parliament etc. This discrepancy might imply a better level of legitimisation at the local level. This is clearly connected with the fact that 88 % of respondents prefer to elect individuals rather than political parties.

If we look at the connection between the socio-demographic characteristics and the attitudes of citizens to different aspects of local culture, it is clear that local culture is substantially influenced by quality of life of citizens. According to these attitudes and socio-demographic characteristics we can distribute citizens into three clusters (Vajdová, Kostecký, 1997). First is the *liberal* cluster which contains liberal politically oriented people who mostly are higher educated, more entrepreneurial, more content with the current situation,

with lower “clientelism” (term used for prevailing vertical connection between people) and a higher degree of trust in other people. Next is the so-called *socialist* cluster. It includes rather left politically oriented people, who expect a higher degree of state paternalism, who are less content with the current situation, have a lower trust in other people and expect a higher level of clientelism. They usually have a lower degree of education and are less entrepreneurial. Finally, the *traditional* cluster, includes people with center political orientation, who are less content than those in the liberal cluster, express strong paternalism, rather stronger clientelism and weaker trust in other people.

If we have a look at the citizens of Olomouc in comparison with other towns (table 4), the most similar situation is in Nové Město nad Metují. It is expected that a higher share of liberal and traditional clusters means a higher level of civic culture and the presence of social capital. In this sense the best situation is in Nové Město nad Metují. A similar situation is found in Český Krumlov and Olomouc, while Teplice scores as the relatively worst case. However, this classification need not necessarily imply better conditions for economic development in one town or another. We must keep in mind that the presence of social capital and civic culture are an essential condition but not a sufficient one for a successful economic development of a locality.

Tab. 3: How the former and current governments of the town contributed to the development of the town (%)?

	Not at all	Partially	Substantially	Definitely yes
Český Krumlov	2,0	16,5	43,1	38,4
Teplice	12,7	52,9	24,3	10,2
Nové Město nad Metují	8,4	41,2	36,4	14,0
Olomouc	7,6	38,7	40,3	14,3

Source: Vajdová, Kostecký (1997), own research

Tab. 4: Population of towns differentiated according to the pattern of political culture (%)

cluster/share	liberal	socialist	traditional
Český Krumlov	36	28	36
Teplice	24	35	41
Nové Město nad Metují	45	17	38
Olomouc	40	25	35

Source: Vajdová, Kostecký (1997), own research

5. CONCLUSION

As the empirical part of my study shows, newly established self-governing institutions embed themselves into the local structures each in a specific way and the level of self-identification of citizens with them is relatively high. A very dangerous process that we can observe is a reinforcement of the *outsider* trend. This can lead to resignation and lassitude in citizens or to the rise in preferences for extreme political parties.

SUMMARY

As the empirical part of the paper shows, newly established self-governing institutions embed themselves piecemeal into the local structures and level of identification of citizens with them is relatively high. A very dangerous process that we can observe is a reinforcement of the outsider trend. If we look at the regional distribution of social capital and compare Olomouc with the other three towns, we can affirm that there are no substantial differences between them. The highest level of social capital can be observed in Nové Město nad Metují, a similar level in Český Krumlov and Olomouc, and a relatively lower in Teplice.

SOUHRN

Příspěvek se zabývá problematikou lokální a politické kultury a jejich možnostmi ovlivnit úspěšnou ekonomickou rozvojovou strategii daného regionu či města. Klíčovými rolí v tomto procesu sehrávají lokální elity a míra jejich legitimace občany. Tam, kde fungují sítě vzájemné důvěry a informovanosti, jsou lepší předpoklady pro rychlejší přizpůsobování regionu rychle se měnícím podmínkám. Cílem studie bylo porovnat úroveň občanské a politické kultury v Olomouci s třemi dalšími městy v České republice, konkrétně s Novým Městem nad Metují, Českým Krumlovem a Teplicemi.

Z uvedené empirické části studie vyplývá, že nově zřízené samosprávné instituce postupně zapouštějí svoje

kořeny i na lokální úrovni, a že stupeň identifikace občanů s nimi je poměrně velký. Velkým nebezpečím však zůstává posilování trendu tzv. *outsidera*, jak zdůrazňují i Vajdová, Kostecký (1997). To může vést buď k úplné rezignaci občanů na veřejné dění (snižující se volební účast) a narůstající apatii, nebo naopak k nárůstu preferencí extremistických stran a hnutí. Důležitým poznatkem mé studie a jejím srovnáním se studií Vajdová, Kostecký (1997) je i skutečnost, že ač byla srovnávána čtyři města z celého území České republiky, neprojevily se z hlediska forem občanské kultury a politické kultury žádné výraznější rozdíly. Lze tedy spekulovat, jestli je to především kvůli poměrně malé územní rozloze státu, značné nivelizaci občanské kultury v době reálného socialismu, nebo menší sociokulturní diferenciaci, než by odpovídalo velikosti území.

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