

HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE RURAL AREA OF SLAVONIA AND BARANJA* - THE NEW RURAL IMAGE

Antun Šundalić¹

¹ Full Professor, Faculty of Economics in Osijek, Croatia, antun.sundalic@efos.hr

Abstract

The rural area is most often defined by the type of settlements (village), the dominating profession (agriculture) and by the prevailing social interactions (typical for the community). The “vicinity” of nature is also a significant determination of a rural area. Industrialization and the modernization stimulated by it in the second half of the twentieth century have changed the village image, from the dominating profession and professional structure of its inhabitants to the new qualities of social interaction.

Slavonia and Baranja, as the traditionally most rural regions in the Republic of Croatia, are experiencing changes not just through the marginalization of the meaning of agriculture for the social development altogether, but also through the changes in the rural areas. This can be monitored through changes of the educational and professional structure of village inhabitants, through their comprehension of the quality of life in the village and in the city, as well as through their perception of facilities characteristic for villages and facilities characteristic for cities. The conducted research in twenty villages in Slavonia and Baranja and in the city of Osijek partly confirm these changes, but also deny the hypothesis that the future of this region is without agriculture, at least in the opinion of the examinees.

A part of the results from the research conducted within the project “The post-transitional identity of the rural areas of Slavonia and Baranja” will be shown in this paper.

JEL classification: O15, O18

Keywords: rural area, Slavonia and Baranja, educational structure, professional structure, village, city.

1. Introduction

Modern society is defined by change. Changes are taking place in ever shorter intervals, and they are ever more profound and encompassing. Knowledge and innovation are key drivers of change that is recognized not only as new

* The paper has been written within the scientific project "Post-Transition Identity of Rural Area in Slavonia and Baranja" (No. 010-0792389-1365), headed by A. Šundalić, Ph.D.

technologies, but also as societal changes. It is not only the case that the technology of new production (technical revolutions) alters the man's power over nature, warns C. Freeman, but the new knowledge technology changes the system of relations between social, economic and technical areas (technical mutations), and consequently also the nature of social relations (Lesourne, 1993:134). Nowadays it is frequently emphasized that we live in 'knowledge society' that relies on smart technologies with information as the basic raw material. 'Knowledge workers' are gaining in importance, being more than labour force; rather, they are a 'company's capital' (Drucker, 2007:99). For this reason, education has become an important lever of social stratification and mobility, since it is a systematic way of gathering information and creating knowledge. It is not only individuals and social groups that differ according to the education level, i.e. the quantity of accessible and available information; it is now societies that are differentiated as the ones abounding in information, and those that are poor in this regard.

The importance of having information is also displayed in the new economic paradigm where the global economy is increasingly referred to as the *information/global economy*. Castells argues that the 'networked enterprise' has become a new organizational form of information/global economy. Within the network new opportunities are opening up, whereas survival outside the network is becoming increasingly difficult. In this way, the new operational unit – *network* arises; it is no longer the *company* (Castells, 2000:94-99, 203). According to A. Bard and J. Söderqvist, the advances in *digital interaction technology*, which has become the prevailing communication medium, are certainly a paradigmatic change (Bard, Söderqvist, 2003:10).

The pinnacle of this new value system is *Toyotism*, a concept founded on error-free predictions. This is a new management system aimed at reducing uncertainty, and not at encouraging adaptability. The basis of everything is information, obtaining it in time and using it effectively (Castells, 2000:191).

All these changes are not only a matter of high technology that is changing secondary, tertiary and quaternary sectors of economic activity. They are very much present in the primary sector as well. Agriculture is more than a food-providing activity; it is also used as an indicator of a society's overall development level. Active agricultural population has been on a decrease, although the quantity of food in the world is constantly growing. However, the distribution of food is increasingly unjustified. Such a development of attitudes towards agriculture brings us closer to Kissinger's claim "Control the oil and you can control entire Continents. Control food and you control people." (Engdahl, 2005:13). The knowledge required for the new, GMO-technology driven agriculture, keen competition on the world market, as well as a shift in government attitudes towards agriculture (caused by global integrations), have all played a major role in the process of agriculture no longer being treated as a

‘tradition-defined activity of an area’, as an ‘activity pursued by the lower educated’, ‘activity of underdeveloped regions’ and the like.

These changes are observable in Croatian rural areas as well, in particular in Slavonia and Baranja, the region that used to be defined by agriculture and country life. In this paper we will discuss only the changes in regard to socio-professional structure of village population, and the changes in views regarding the quality of life in the village and the town, i.e. changes in perception regarding the characteristics of village vs. town life. Furthermore, we will outline the changed attitude towards nature which is more and more being exploited and less and less cultivated and nurtured.

2. Research Methodology

A field study was undertaken to find out whether and to what extent the changed reality has been accepted by the local population, and how much the people are still living in the traditional framework of the region. An empirical research (with a questionnaire) was carried out in twenty-three villages of three Slavonian counties (Požega-Slavonia, Vukovar-Srijem and Osijek-Baranja county) and in the city of Osijek, as the only truly urban centre of the region (a combination of a cluster and a random sample). The sample comprised 608 respondents[†], 400 from villages and 208 from the town. The survey was taken in April 2008.

The data obtained in the research was processed in the statistics program SPSS, using the models of descriptive and inferential statistics.

The paper will present some results arising from the research conducted within the project “Post-Transition Identity of Rural Area in Slavonia and Baranja”.

3. Changes in Socio-Professional Structure of Village Population in Slavonia and Baranja

The sample of 608 respondents is structured from a portion of respondents living in villages (400 or 65.8%) and a portion of people residing in town (208 or 34.2%). Tables 1 and 2 show us the gender and age structure of the sample. In the undivided sample the number of women is slightly higher (by 8.2%). This difference is more noticeable in town population (11.6%), which can be accounted for by the fact that men in village households are more bound to their

[†] The sample was chosen in the following way: in randomly chosen villages (probability of choice was proportionate to the settlement size) we made a random choice of households. There we looked for a respondent following the criterion of 'last birthday', i.e. who of the present family members was the last to celebrate their birthday. They had to be over 17 years of age to be included in the sample. In the city of Osijek, households were randomly chosen, and the respondents within a household were also chosen by the 'last birthday' method.

household and farm by the nature of their work, which is less the case in town households.

According to the age structure, the sample is divided into four groups. While the most numerous group in villages are people of up to 29 years of age (28.2%), in the town it is the group between 45-59 years of age (29.8%). The differences being small, however, it can be asserted that the sample is evenly distributed over age groups.

Table 1. Gender structure

Gender	Village	Town	Total
Men	187 (46,8 %)	92 (44,2%)	279 (45,9%)
Women	213 (53,2 %)	116 (55,8%)	329 (54,1%)
Total	400 (100%)	208 (100 %)	608 (100%)

Table 2. Age structure

Age	Village	Town	Total
Up to 29	113 (28,2%)	60 (28,8%)	173 (28,5 %)
30 – 44	111 (27,8%)	46 (22,2%)	157 (25,8 %)
45 – 59	108 (27,0%)	62 (29,8%)	170 (28,0 %)
60 and over	68 (17,0%)	40 (19,2%)	108 (17,8 %)
Total	400 (100%)	208 (100%)	608 (100 %)

Table 3. Marital status of respondents

Marital status	Village	Town	Total
Married	272 (68,0 %)	128 (61,5 %)	400 (65,8 %)
Single	126 (31,5 %)	79 (38,0 %)	205 (33,7 %)
Not stated	2 (0,5 %)	1 (0,5 %)	3 (0,5 %)
Total	400 (100 %)	208 (100 %)	608 (100 %)

With regard to the marital status (Table 3), 2/3 of respondents are married (65.8%). This is even more pronounced in villages (68.0%).

In terms of education, village respondents are slightly lagging behind. This difference, however, is not so pronounced as to confirm the previously prevalent opinion that village population is less educated. Table 4 shows that secondary school is the most frequent education level among the respondents. Nevertheless, this level of education is more present in town population. The percentages for tertiary-level education are also higher in town (24.1% in comparison to 18.8% in villages). The village sample still exhibits a high percentage of people whose formal education remains at elementary school level (almost every fourth respondent, i.e. 23.5%).[‡]

[‡] The sample surveyed here indicates some positive trends in comparison to the Census of 2001, according to which as many as 33% of total Croatian population remained at the primary level of education (see more in Šundalić, 2005:13).

Table 4. Level of education

Education	Village	Town	Total
Primary school	94 (23,5 %)	29 (13,9 %)	123 (20,2 %)
Secondary school	227 (56,8 %)	123 (59,1 %)	350 (57,6 %)
College/university	75 (18,8 %)	50 (24,1 %)	125 (20,6 %)
Master's degree, Ph.D.	4 (1,0 %)	5 (2,4 %)	9 (1,5 %)
Not stated	-	1 (0,5 %)	1 (0,2 %)
Total	400 (100 %)	208 (100 %)	608 (100 %)

The occupational breakdown is given in Table 5. Every fifth respondent is an 'office worker'. In both the village and the town samples this is the most numerous group. In village population it is followed by skilled workers and pensioners, and then by university educated professionals, with farmers ranked fifth (only 8.5% of respondents). Entrepreneurs are equally present in both village and town. The groups of pupils/students and university educated professionals are more numerous in town.

Table 5. Respondents' occupations

Occupation	Village	Town	Total
Farmer	34 (8,5 %)	1 (0,5 %)	35 (5,8 %)
Skilled worker	61 (15,2 %)	24 (11,5 %)	85 (14,0 %)
Office worker	77 (19,2 %)	41 (19,7 %)	118 (19,4 %)
Entrepreneur	21 (5,2 %)	11 (5,3 %)	32 (5,3 %)
Professional/manager	43 (10,8 %)	31 (14,9 %)	74 (12,2 %)
Pupil/student	33 (8,2 %)	31 (14,9 %)	64 (10,5 %)
Housewife	46 (11,5 %)	12 (5,8 %)	58 (9,5 %)
Pensioner	51 (12,8 %)	37 (17,8 %)	88 (14,5 %)
Unemployed	33 (8,2 %)	19 (9,1 %)	52 (8,6 %)
Not stated	1 (0,2%)	1 (0,5 %)	2 (0,4)
Total	400 (100 %)	208 (100 %)	6008 (100 %)

The five tables above reveal small but nonetheless suggestive differences between the village and the town sample. For example, survey takers found it easier to find a male respondent in the village than in the town. This can be explained by the fact that village men are less occupied with activities outside the home in comparison to town. The same was noticed for two younger age groups (17-29 and 30-44 years of age) which are slightly more numerous in the village sample.

The institution of marriage is more present in the village (as many as 68% respondents are married). As for the education structure, the village still shows a high percentage of people who remain at the elementary education level (as many as 23.5%). A noticeable change is shown in Table 5: only 8.5% of village respondents described themselves as farmers. Occupations such as office and skilled workers, and even university educated professionals are more represented. This confirms the thesis that socio-professional structure of

villages in Slavonia and Baranja is approaching the standards of the developed world.

The changes observable as changes in socio-professional structure of village population are reflected also in the *quality of village life*. It is no longer the case that village population believes they are predestined for a different life than people in town. The word 'different' used to mean life conditions marked by poor infrastructure, technological backwardness, traditional life patterns, agriculture as a dominant activity of the majority of village population. Such conditions used to be taken for granted by villagers themselves, whereas their attitude towards life conditions has changed today. To a simple question "Do you think that the village way of life should be made more similar to the way of life in towns?" (Table 6), almost half of village respondents answered affirmatively (47.8%). Among the town respondents, the percentage that gave an affirmative answer to the same question is much lower – 36.5%. With the negative answer there is a reverse situation: a higher percentage of town respondents (52.9%) in comparison to village respondents (41.7%). This can be explained with the more pronounced need in village population to improve life conditions in the village. Those who are against it are either satisfied with the current situation or they wish to preserve village distinctiveness in comparison to town.

Table 6. Approximation of village and town ways of life

Should village and town ways of life be approximated?	Village	Town	Total
Yes	191 (47,8%)	76 (36,5%)	267 (43,9%)
No	167 (41,7%)	110 (52,9%)	277 (45,6%)
Don't know	37 (9,3%)	22 (10,6%)	59 (9,7%)
Not stated	5 (1,2%)	-	5 (0,8%)
Total	400 (100%)	208 (100%)	608 (100%)

However, a more stratified answer about the way the respondents view the village life conditions was obtained from the instrument composed of 11 claims, which was submitted to factor analysis (Varimax rotation) aimed at revealing some latent dimensions of views of village life. The criterion used to compose the instrument was the assumption that the respondents will recognize whether or not traditional social patterns are present, primarily *togetherness and solidarity* (claims 1,2,3,4), if there is a *prospect for change* of village and village population (claims 5,6,7,8), and finally, if there are differences in the *town and village way of life* (claims 9,10,11).

The answer to the question "What is village life like?" was sought through respondents' acceptance or rejection of the following claims:

1. Village people live in togetherness and have trust in each other.
2. Village people are willing to help each other (there is solidarity).

3. People living in one village know each other and establish close relationships.
4. Village life means living in a healthy natural environment.
5. Village life brings traffic isolation to the inhabitants.
6. Village life brings technical lagging behind for the inhabitants.
7. Living in a village does not provide people with the possibility for a professional career.
8. Village environment has a tight control over behaviour of village inhabitants (power of tradition).
9. Village life is no longer determined by agriculture as the main economic activity.
10. Village life has turned into 'sleeping in villages' since people are mostly employed in towns.
11. The way of life in the village has become very similar to the town way of life.

Each claim is followed by a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 means 'strongly disagree', 2 – disagree, 3 – I neither agree nor disagree 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree).

Table 7. shows the frequency of answers 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) for particular claims and their ranking according to the sum of the observed values.

Table 7. What is village life like? (in % for the village sample)

Claims	4	5	4+5	R
1.	28,3	5,5	33,8	6
2.	49,0	10,0	59,0	3
3.	55,8	12,5	68,3	2
4.	55,0	18,0	73,0	1
5.	22,3	5,0	27,3	9
6.	18,0	3,3	21,3	11
7.	25,8	7,0	32,8	8
8.	30,8	7,5	38,3	5
9.	48,3	10,0	58,3	4
10.	26,5	6,8	33,3	7
11.	24,3	2,5	26,8	10

The frequencies indicate that almost three fourths of respondents (73%) view village life as living in a healthy natural environment (claim 4). A large number of respondents (68.3%) ranked as second knowing each other and close relationships between village inhabitants (claim 3). High acceptance (over 50%) is exhibited by claim 2 – solidarity and willingness to help each other (59%), and claim 9 – agriculture has ceased to be the main economic activity in the village (58.3%). The remaining seven claims are far less accepted by the respondents. Thus the fifth-ranked claim 8 (the power of tradition in the village) is acceptable for only 38.3% of respondents. Togetherness and trust (claim 1) as

a village characteristic is accepted by only 33.8% of respondents. Even less accepted are the claims that are in a way 'objections' to the village way of life: less than a third (27.3%) accept the claim on traffic isolation (claim 5), about a fifth (21.3%) accept technical lagging behind as a feature of village life (claim 6).[§] Nevertheless, only one quarter of respondents believe that the way of life in the village has become very similar to the town way of life (claim 11, 26.8%).

One thing should be pointed out in particular, namely, the weakening feeling of togetherness and solidarity in villages (opinions regarding claim 1), but also rejecting the thesis that village life brings technical lagging behind (opinions regarding claim 6). Nevertheless, this has not approximated the village and the town way of life in the opinion of our respondents (views regarding claim 11).

By applying the multivariate statistical technique on the same instrument, for the village sample, we discovered three latent dimensions which provide a more complete picture on respondents' opinions about village life and make it possible to correlate the obtained variables with socio-demographic variables. Factor analysis was used to extract three factors, which were subsequently subjected to Varimax rotation. The first factor contains the claims 1,2,3,4; the second one contains the claims 5,6,7,8, and the third factor contains the claims 9,10 and 11. According to the G-K criterion, each factor has a characteristic value higher than 1. The factors taken together interpret 53.9% of the variance (Table 8).

Table 8. What is village life like, base solution

Factor	Characteristic value	% factor var.	Total % var.
1.	2,30	20,9	20,9
2.	2,19	20,0	40,9
3.	1,43	13,0	53,9

The first factor is comprised of four variables (Table 9) that share an affirmative attitude towards content traditionally associated with the village: togetherness and trust, solidarity in everyday life, closeness in relationships, and healthy natural environment which make village distinct from the town industrialized environment. The idyll of country life is still present in the consciousness of village population^{**}, although it was previously demonstrated

[§] A significantly different picture of village – isolated, underdeveloped, and without perspective – was perceived by the young people of Slavonia and Baranja in a survey conducted in the year 2000, as well as by students at Osijek University. As many as 73.33% of respondents (110 out of 150) identified the village as having these characteristics (Šundalić, 2000:383). The sample, of course, is quite different, but the results indicate the impact of age and education on the opinions regarding the quality of life in villages.

^{**} Rural area is viewed by some as *rural idyll* with a slower pace of life, where people prefer to follow the natural rhythms rather than the market flows. This is an organic community where

that changed professional structure throws this into doubt (Table 5). Although the reality is different, in the villages of Slavonia and Baranja one can notice resistance to changes in people's minds as they wish to retain the fundamental values of togetherness. This factor can thus be called “**Idyll of country/village life**”.

Table 9. Factor 1, Idyll of country/village life, factor structure

1. Village people live in togetherness and have trust in each other.	,75
2. Village people are willing to help each other (there is solidarity).	,83
3. People living in one village know each other and establish close relationships.	,80
4. Village life means living in a healthy natural environment.	,56

The second factor is also comprised of four variables (Table 10). These are actually the claims 5,6,7 and 8 that indicate several ways in which village and its inhabitants are deprived. Traffic isolation is a consequence of neglecting villages in terms of infrastructure, whereas technical lagging behind can be caused by lower education of village inhabitants and by agriculture being a technologically less demanding activity. Such tradition unifies both the job offer and the expectations of village inhabitants, which means there is no incentive or possibility to pursue a professional career, especially for young people. This is why this factor can be named “**Lack of perspective in rural areas**”.

Table 10. Lack of perspective in rural areas, factor structure

1. Village life brings traffic isolation to the inhabitants.	,74
2. Village life brings technical lagging behind for the inhabitants.	,81
3. Living in a village does not provide people with the possibility for a professional career.	,77
4. Village environment has a tight control over behaviour of village inhabitants (power of tradition).	,44

The third factor comprises the remaining three claims (9, 10 and 11). These are variables suggesting a changed view of village life in comparison to the traditional image of village. If the village is no longer determined by agriculture as the main economic activity (variable 1), if village life has turned into ‘sleeping in villages’ since people are mostly employed in towns (variable 2), and if it is claimed that the way of life in the village has become very similar to the town way of life, it can be concluded that village life has significantly changed. For some respondents, the new identity of village means that the village has been “de-countrified” and modernized. This is why the third factor was named “**Equalizing the village and town living conditions**”.

people have time for each other, where they occupy a certain position and have their role. It is a refuge, a kind of shelter from modernity. (Rye, 2004:5)

Table 11. Equalizing the village and town living conditions, factor structure

1. Village life is no longer determined by agriculture as the main economic activity.	,71
2. Village life has turned into 'sleeping in villages' since people are mostly employed in towns.	,63
3. The way of life in the village has become very similar to the town way of life.	,59

One may wonder which factors have an impact on different views of village life. Because of the limited scope, here we will investigate only the possible connection between *the respondents' level of education* and their perception of village life. The results of variance analysis are shown in the next Table.

Table 12. Education and the perception of country/village life

Perception of country/village life	F	sig.
Village idyll (factor 1)	1,51	0,221
Lack of perspective in rural areas (factor 2)	3,69	0,026
Equalizing of living conditions (factor 3)	3,58	0,028

As can be seen from the Table, the respondents' level of education (three groups were measured: primary school, secondary school, and higher education) is statistically significantly connected with the second and third notion of village life (at the level of significance 0.05). Post-hoc analysis indicates that respondents with higher education (university or college), compared to those with primary or secondary education, are less likely to believe in lack of perspective in rural areas, and are more convinced in equalizing the village and town living conditions. This can be a result of their activities outside the village where they live, which gives them opportunity to appreciate the advantages of village life and recognize the disadvantages of urban way of life.

The frequency distributions and factor analysis lead to the following conclusions: response frequencies indicate a growing acceptance of changes in village life; nevertheless, the difference between village and town life remains. The shaped factors suggest that there are three orientations when considering attitudes towards village life. While the first orientation is dominated by a traditional way of life (country idyll, 1. factor), the second orientation is defined by lack of perspective in rural areas (2. factor), and the third orientation is most open in its view that life conditions in towns and villages are becoming more similar (3. factor). The variance analysis has shown the connection between education level and perceptions of village life. Highly educated respondents view the village in a more positive light than those with lower education.

4. Conclusion

Post-transitional *reality of rural area* is increasingly becoming *reality of agrarian area*. The change that has occurred is not in name only; rather, it is profound, caused by permanent processes of industrialization and modernization^{††}, as well as marketization of agriculture, i.e. of village's fundamental activity. These processes have brought about a permanent change in socio-professional structure of village population, their awareness of new values and content of urban environment. This transformation of perceptions has occurred mainly due to growing mobility of previously very static village population, or more precisely, peasant population. The increase in daily migrations, i.e. commuting either to work other than agriculture or to school, has brought new outlook on the future. Younger people sought careers outside the village, and older people started looking for more secure livelihood outside agriculture. In the words of A. Blanc, the new reality is that villages no longer live as rural societies in the memory of the past, preserving natural forms of life, with slow changes and development (Blanc, 2003:202). Today's villages are dynamic environments that have been changing their identity primarily through altered socio-professional structure of their population.

Part of the research results described in this paper indicates the new face of the village, its new identity. Although somewhat 'weaker' than town education structure, in villages there is a significant shift towards secondary education, as well as towards higher education (Table 4). A major change is shown in Table 5: only 8.5% of respondents designate themselves as farmers. A higher percentage is taken by the occupations of office and skilled workers, and even highly educated professionals and managers. This leads us to the thesis that socio-professional structure of Slavonia and Baranja village is changeable under the influence of wider environment.

The extracted factors also suggest 'dynamism' of rural areas, especially in terms of population. They do not share uniform views regarding the notion of village life, its perspective and comparisons to town. Perceptions of village life are threefold: insisting on preserving the traditions, indicating the lack of perspective in rural areas, accepting the approximation of village and town way of life. This third option is more noticeable with population with higher education, which indicates the significance of education for the outlook on the future of both individuals and the village in general.

^{††††} It was Weber who pointed out that industrialization had but destroyed communal households, the backbone of rural communities, as well as neighbourhood communities. Solidarity and reciprocity have given way to profit interest (Weber, 1976:295-297).

REFERENCES

1. Bard, Aleksander – Söderqvist, Jan (2003). Netokracija, Zagreb, Differo, ISBN 953-96545-2-1 1.
2. Blanc, Andre (2003.) Zapadna Hrvatska – studije iz humane geografije, Zagreb, Prosvjeta, ISBN 953-7130-00-2.
3. Castells, Manuel (2000). Uspon umreženog društva, Zagreb, Golden marketing, ISBN 953-212-001-7.
4. Drucker, Peter (2007). Upravljanje u budućem društvu, Zagreb, M.E.P. Consult, ISBN 978-953-6807-27-0.
5. Engdahl, William F.(2005). Sjeme uništenja, Zagreb, Detecta, ISBN 953-99899-4-9.
6. Lesourne, J. (1993). Obrazovanje & društvo, Izazovi 2000. godine, Zagreb, EDUCA, ISBN 953-6101-00-9.
7. Rye, Johan Fredrik (2004). Constructing the countryside: Differences in teenagers' images of the rural, Paper no 3/04, ISSN 1503-2736, p. 1-26.
8. Antun Šundalić(2004). Obrazovanje kao komunikativni medij u vremenu znanosti i inovacija, Osijek, "EKONOMSKI VJESNIK",Vol. 17(2004.), No.1-2, str. 9-16, ISSN 0353-359X.
9. Šundalić, Antun (2000). Uloga ljudskog čimbenika u revitalizaciji slavonskog sela i poljoprivrede, Zagreb, "SOCIOLOGIJA SELA", Vol. 38, No. 3-4(2000.), str. 375-392, ISSN 0038-0326.
10. Weber, Max (1976). Privreda i društvo I, Beograd, Prosveta.