

TEAM WORK AND SELFHELP IN SLOVAKIA IN TIME AND SPACE

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I.

Representatives of various scientific disciplines who have been studying contemporary society have declared a thesis that the ability of a certain social community to co-operate in favour of common benefit is a very precious social capital. Similarly as other forms of capital, social capital is assessed as a very productive one: it enables to achieve the aims which without its absence would be unachievable. In analogy with the notions about the physical and human capital - "social capital" relates to the features of social organisation such as its structure, standards and trust among people. They facilitate co-ordination of activities and co-operation in favour of mutual benefit. Social capital increases benefit from the investment in physical and human capital. (PUTNAM, 1993)

A question why it is impossible to introduce certain forms of co-operation between families or households in some communities despite its objective necessity is a very attractive research issue. In some communities co-operation leads to common benefit in others is ineffective, people have the feeling of being forced to do something and earlier or later co-operation ceases to exist. According to the ability to co-operate and participate in the team-work the social scientists distinguish the following communities:

1. So called civil communities based on trust in honest behaviour of other community members and in which law is kept to. The leaders of these communities are relatively honest and bound to equality. Social and political structures are organised horizontally and not hierarchically. Solidarity, civil participation and integrity are important values in these communities. Democracy is functional in these communities.

2. So called non-civil communities in which the image about a citizen is limited. Participation, membership in social and cultural communities is very modest. From the point of view of inhabitants public issues are to be dealt with by other people - "bosses", "politicians", - but never by themselves. According to them laws are passed to be broken. However being afraid that "the others" might break the law,

everyone of them requires iron discipline. Trapped into these indecent circles everybody feels helpless, exploited and unhappy. (PUTNAM, 1993).

Ethnographic material from various parts of Europe (e.g. from the south of Italy, Sardinia) brings evidence that co-operation is ineffective in those communities which suffer from material shortage and small increase of production. In connection with extreme family familiarism and too strong internal family solidarity any co-operation which does not bring immediate benefit for the family is made impossible. In the effort to provide the family, individuals steal others' property but even easier collective property. Another factor which does not contribute to co-operation is foreign culture domination and unreliability of the government who do not show interest in improving the living conditions of old settlers. In conditions of unstable results of co-operation people do not identify themselves with the local group and so also common economic activities relating to this identification are absent. (NIEDERER, 1974)

Another important factor of a functional co-operation is cultural heritage of the local community. The most successful and lasting forms of co-operation are those which are rooted in the cultural tradition. Even after the change of external, superlocal social and economic conditions and structural change of the local economic system it is possible to build on local co-operation traditions and innovate them. However it is important that the initiative comes from the "bottom" in order to become an integral part of the cultural context. Co-operative associations which are planned and introduced by the government are very often saddled with a certain ideology and the inhabitants accept them unwillingly and do not trust them or even refuse them. This is proved by experiences from the development in so called Third World but also in Europe. (EKSTROMER, 1993)

When looking at current social and economic transformation processes in our country the hottest issue occurs the question in what way these changes will be reflected in the existence and functioning of associations with economic orientation. To what extent will the existence of state-introduced and till not long ago functioning (very often prosperous) agricultural co-operatives influence self-help public activities within the parish. It is also questionable what will be the future of in tradition rooted but violently interrupted influence of associations of economic character such as associations of former serfs, meadow communities, etc.

II.

The tradition of collective cultivation of common estate, co-operation in favour of common benefit (joining of man power, material equipment and skills of people) is deeply rooted in the history of Slovakia.

On the basis of a comparative study of customs-legal institutions of Slavonic nations legal historians (most of all K. Kadlec and later others) have proved that some co-operative association were common at Slavs in the period before their

separation. Work ties (in legal terminology contractual ties) substituted for former kin ties. The principle of collectivism was developed before the principle of individualism which was elaborated in detail in the Roman legal system. This principle was taken over also by other European nations. (KADLEC, 1904: 65) We do not claim that the development of co-operative activities was of continuous character in the last millenium and is directly connected with current manifestations.

Both kin and neighbours community functioned as one economic unit. Even the most developed form of the community of neighbours has preserved along with certain estate unity also common team-work. Co-operation within communities was conditioned also by inefficiently developed, extensive system of farming.

Parish and town property serving for common aims was also commonly maintained, cultivated and dates back to feudalism era. Though *de jure* only free royal and yeomen cities could own property, it can be proved by documents that *de facto* from the early 18th century also serf villages had common property which was dealt with only according the common law. (TÁRKÁNY - SZÜCS, 1981: 521) To this property belonged the public house, a house for parish employees (e.g. shepherd, night watchman), pubs, majority of butchers, parish mill, parish and field roads, wells, etc. (The church, cemetery and sacred places as well as the church school were governed by the Church.)

The development of legal customs in relation to team-work and common property were influenced also by superlocal institutions, mainly by the nobility, Church and state. It is obvious that common, volunteer and in the same period performed labour in favour of common benefit of participating persons has had a long tradition and was firmly rooted in the customs law of our predecessors. Without this tradition the realisation of some activities would be impossible. That could endanger the life securities of the local community members. From the feudalism era there are known historical documents on exploitation of this folk-legal custom for so called public aims, e.g. for the protection against floods, for keeping an army, cart services, etc. This activity was exploited also by landlords for parish works such as digging of canals, draining of moors, tagging of ships against the river streams, etc. It was also utilised by villages and cities for free of charge fulfilling of various services: fire protection, flood protection, maintenance of springs, roads, dikes/dams, village building, watching vineyards, etc. (TÁRKÁNY - SZÜCS, 1981: 620 - 627).

Contemporary historical documents from the Poland territory give evidence that the nobility supported preserving of traditional forms of co-operation and help in serf villages. Some self-help activities provided security and prosperity of their serfs and thus their own security. Historical ethnography in Poland disposes of the documents on team work at pasture maintenance, road works, draining of meadows, building of a church and common building for drying flax and hemp, on co-operation in defence against an enemy, fire, sea, etc. Moreover the

nobility utilised some labour-legal customs in their favour. (BARANOWSKI, 1950 - 51: 686 - 687).

In other bordering countries there is a historical evidence of utilisation of teamwork for public purposes, too. E.g. in Ukraine they called so called *toloku* also for public needs of the parish: for building and repairs of a school, pharmacy, church, road, bridges. (KUVENŇOVA, 1966: 26 - 28) In Bulgaria in Rodopies they used to organise so called *obščestvennija medžiji* or *tlki*, by means of which they usually built something in favour of common benefit: they built roads, schools, temples and bridges. People provided food to the craftsmen, carted building material and willingly worked for free regardless of age or sex. This so called *zadrugnata rabota* was organised during a feast and during doing so the church bells rang or they drummed on tympana - the atmosphere reminded of a wedding day (KRSTANOVA, 1986: 46).

From the half of the 19th century farming with a part of former serfs' fields and meadows were in the competencies of villages. Some parishes started also entrepreneur activities gradually. Parish distilleries were founded and natural sources started to be utilised within the parish bordering area (clay and stone pits, etc.). Villages had more freedom to trade, e.g. to rent, buy, found co-operative associations (TÁRKÁNY - SCZÜCS, 1981: 519).

During that period after the abolition of serfdom co-owning association of former serfs had been established on the basis of common law and legal regulations (in 1853, 1871, 1894). Until the middle 20th century they had been using indivisible and common property of the association. After the World War I meadow communities were established through a purchase of divided forest property of great landowners (so called Šrobar's act from 1919). Members of these communities used their property and participated in its cultivation as shareholders.

III.

Occasions for the team a self-help work common in our country in the first half of the 20th century are characterised in the next part. To distinguish "team work" - which is a wider term derived from the way of work organisation and comprising e.g. help in favour of one farm, we will call these activities as "team-work for association". (ŠKOVIEROVÁ, 1995)

Traditional team-work for association comprised jointly done work at which participation of villagers resulted from participation to a parish, membership in farming associations or leisure associations. They were organised by elected representatives or authorised representatives of these institutions who represented their members also in other collective procedures (e.g. in negotiations with superior institutions, solving property issues, hiring employees, etc.).

Apart from by state recommended ways of team-work organisation, specific procedures reflecting the needs of villagers and their living conditions were used.

The share of work and the form of participation in the team-work were adapted to the largeness of families and their property (in economic associations to the number of shares). E.g. poorer farmers did manual jobs, richer farmers did jobs with a cart, widows, single and physically handicapped people were exempt from the team-work for parish. People from more distant settlements from the village and from places and houses neighbouring with cemeteries did not have to do night watching. In economic associations the number of man days were defined by the size of the owned share.

Although the members of associations and communities did team-work as a duty, team-work belonged among co-operative "voluntary" activities. In the final instance they contributed to the benefit of all association members and were done in their favour. The functionaries of the association were elected by its members and represented their common interest, demanded work and those who absented were sanctioned (compare SZABÓ, 1967: 226).

The system of team-work was adjusted to concrete living conditions of the parish community, i.e. to the type of communities and associations within the parish and their property. Common property of the parish and of parish associations was not everywhere the same. The parish could own fields, a meadow, forest, pasture, buildings (smithy, mill, shepherds' hut, mortuary, hospital, etc.), farming facilities (mill, distillery, etc.), farming animals. Economic communities owned also certain fixed assets and movables (mechanisms, equipment of association rooms, cutlery, etc.). The timetable and system of team-work was adjusted according to the kind of property and competencies of institutions and associations functioning in the parish. They provided protection of the common property, its prosperity, use and contributions for wages of employees and reward for functionaries.

Building and maintenance of parish roads, bridges, parish buildings and facilities, cultivation of common meadow for breeding cattle, assistance in guarding the village, sometimes also guarding of vineyards and the parish bordering area, etc. Members of the association of former serfs used to cut wood together, maintain and plant forest, clean pastures and repair field roads. Similarly and in harmony with the character and needs of the association or community, they did team-work in meadow association, vineyard parish, church parish, etc.

Some self-help activities also belong among team-work. A dominant self-help sign is self-sufficiency of the association, ability or inevitability to manage the necessary working process without participation of hired and paid workers (craftsmen, workers, employees, servants, etc.) and without people from "outside", i.e. out of the co-operative group or parish community. Doing these activities for free, the members of the co-operating group substituted professional work of a craftsman or the work of a permanently paid employee (night watchman, parish servant, shepherd, parish area watchman, gravedigger, etc.) or an institution (a hospital, old people's home, etc.).

From the working activity organisation view there were two basic ways of team-work and self-help:

1. Work done jointly (by all members) at the same time and place (e.g. repair of the bridge, cleaning of a pasture),

2. work of a longer character, which was undertaken by all family farms in cyclic turns (e.g. assistance in nightwatching of the village, delivery of post, looking after beggars, less often digging graves, etc.).

When the economic situation of the association allowed it after finishing of work refreshments for participants were prepared and paid from the budget of the association. Common refreshments strengthened the integrity of the association members and had a great impact also on the participation in the team-work. It also contributed to the creation of a festive atmosphere of team-work.

Common work for the parish was also called *poriatki*, *sporiatki*, *chodeňje s povinnosťi*, - *na d'edinské*, - *na obecné*, - *na spoločné*, *vamaiščina* (east Slovakia), later also *brigádi*. They were usually organised by the parish functionaries represented by the deputy mayor or other authorised member of the parish council. The presence of the representatives of each household was recorded. For the absence at a majority of common work for parish people had to pay a fixed fee (mainly in the sum of a day-labourer's wage).

Generally spread type of team-work was mowing and hay collecting for breeding bulls. Fodder crops for breeding cattle were cultivated on the common or former serfs' meadow. All cow breeders worked there, more rarely all villagers (Rejdová). Division of labour was adjusted to the equipment of farmers: people without a cart used to mow and rake, others then carted hay to the stable of the common parish bull. At some places team-work ended by a common refreshment covered from the parish budget. Where necessary the common meadow was cleaned jointly: wildy growing bushes, weed, rocks, etc. were removed from it. Participation in team-work at hay collecting was recorded and norms were usually set (e.g. an owner of one cow was to mow for a day or cart one wagon-load of hay). Those who did not participate in team-work had to pay a fine to the parish budget - usually it was a fine which equalled to the height of a day-labourer's wage.

Similarly nightwatching was common in each village. All households had to send their representative to do night watching duty (*na vartu*) in sequential order (*sporiatki*, *za šorom*, *za číslom*). Only households without an adult or a healthy man were exempt from this duty. This duty was not compulsory for single and physically handicapped people, families living out of the intravilane of the village in the settlements and manors, houses at the edge of the village or neighbouring with a cemetery. The number of assisting night watchmen during one night and the system of duties was dependent on the size of a village (number of inhabitants) and on local legal customs. Sequence of the duty was announced by passing over various objects: it used to be a stick, a pipe, an

extraordinary crooked piece of wood. Participation was checked by an authorised member of the parish council (in Gemer towns so called *kapitán*).

When the function of a parish night watchman vanished, changing of duties in the night fire protection maintained until the 60-ties, mainly during the harvest period. In some localities this way of watching was utilised at the beginning of collectivisation to protect the property of the co-operative against thieves.

According to the Act from 1890 the parish had a duty to maintain by its own manpower the village and roads and bridges in its vicinity (NOVÁK, 1924: 137 and follow). They used to repair them in summer before the field works (e.g. carting of the grains) or in autumn (before the harvest of crops). This work might have been organised in case of need also during the year, e.g. after a downpour, storm, etc. Representatives of each household participated in roads repairs - each with his own tools. Farmers owning a cart, carted stones and gravel from a defined place, others crushed them and raked them on the road.

In winter the citizens instructed by the parish council went to put away snow from parish roads and when necessary also from the roads connecting individual villages. In more integrated localities no instructions from the parish functionaries were necessary: everybody cleared away snow in front of their house halfway to the neighbouring dwelling - maintenance of a road in front of the houses was controlled by the public meaning.

Repairs of field roads and bridges were in some localities the competency of the association of former serfs. They were done before summer work (harvest). All field roads were repaired, not only those which lead to the urban estate. In some places all village inhabitants participated in this work - farmers, people without a share in the association of former serfs, in others only those villagers who owned lands in a given part of the parish bordering area. They worked under the supervision of the vice mayor, or a member of the association of former serfs committee and in the presence of a parish area watchman. The absence in work for a serious reason was not fined, however public control and responsibility of the villagers towards others did not allow absence without a serious reason.

The duty to establish and maintain an ice-house in the village, mainly for the health reasons, was imposed by state in 1877 and 1893 (NOVÁK, 1924: 216). In reality this facility was in villages rare. In Jelšovce near Nitra ice was cut and broken on the river by people who were fined during the year or who were owing fees to the parish treasury. Broken ice was carted by farmers to the village and stored in a specially prepared pit. After work common refreshments were prepared from the parish budget. The ice-house could be used by each household during the whole year for cooling meat. The parish servant was watching it. In some places common breaking and cutting of ice was organised by publicans or butchers. Participating farmers were rewarded by refreshments. All the year

round they provided each household with ice for the compresses for ill people and other needs.

Carrying out of some team-work, output of which contributed to the benefit of the whole parish, could be done in some cases exclusively by some social groups in the locality. Most often it was the youth - more precisely the community of male youth. A widespread duty of the male youth was cleaning of water springs - so called cleaning of wells in spring. This was done to a certain date: e.g. before the Easter, the Whit. This work of male youth was rewarded by payment in kind. (Besides practical meaning this social activity had no doubt also cult meaning.) In some places male youth who returned from military service were authorised to do duties in favour of the parish. E.g. in upper Gemer they used to guard order in the village and to watch parish fields and forests for a year. In this period they also fulfilled the function of a bellman.

Until the 40-ties the youth had a unique work opportunity in cleaning the ditch in Mochovce near Levice - so called thistle dance. After threshing the youth cleared all ditches in the village and its surroundings from thistles and weed under the supervision of a parish servant. The youth returned to the village decorated with thistle bushes, singing and accompanied by a gipsy band who entertained them while they were working. After a small refreshment in the pub a dance was organised and paid from the parish budget.

From the membership in the association of former serfs the duty to participate in several activities ensued. First of all it was common planting of the forest done in spring on the places cleared during the previous year. The number of man days corresponded to the largeness of the share in indivisible forest. When the share was smaller than the basic part for the calculation of duties (e.g. one eighth of settlement) its owner did not have to take part in planting every year but only every second year or third year.

In some localities, where there was enough forest, the parish or the association of former serfs provided a part of wood as a contribution to the wages of their employees and functionaries. One representative of each household in the village took part in the lumbering. Management of team-work, distribution and pickup of wood was in the competency of the parish area watchman or game warden in collaboration with the association committee. Absence at work was substituted by payment in cash in the sum of a day pay of a worker. In case of need the association used this money for hiring day labourers for work in the forest.

Generally spread common activity in the associations oriented on farming was cleaning of pastures. During announced days all share owners grubbed and burnt bushes on common pasture. This was done as a team-work in all communities which owned meadows: in the association of former serfs as well as in cotter and meadow communities.

Lumbering, sawing and cutting of wood for the needs of a school belonged among common activities. They were done by parents of school age children. When the fuel for the church school was being prepared along with the fuel for the priest and church teacher - cantor, all members of the parish worked together. (Then it was not important where from the wood came, whether from the association, common or church forest).

Within all associations building and maintenance of common buildings and facilities was organised (community houses, storing spaces, flats for employees, etc.). E.g. cleaning and interior decoration of the church had been organised within the church parish. This service was usually performed by girls under the supervision of a bellman or some deeply religious woman from the village.

IV.

After the year 1945 a majority of parish, team and selfhelp activities were violently disrupted especially in relation to contemporary forms of co-ownership. In 1948 the parish property was expropriated by the people's democratic republic. In 1958 the property of former serfs and meadow communities was nationalised too.

During the following decades until 1989 the self-help activity of citizens in favour of the parish was carried out through so called actions "z". These activities were focused on improvement of towns and villages by means of voluntary selfhelp of citizens (in a form of voluntary work) which was supported by financial means from the state budget. The voluntary work was organised by the parish council and all local organisations were participating in it. In the framework of voluntary activities the houses of culture, the houses of mourning, shopping centres, kindergartens, sporting facilities, etc. were built. A majority of activities was focused on improvement of parishes: removal of illegal dumps, planting of greens, trimming the parks, etc. Contemporary evaluation of these activities by the inhabitants is contradictory. On one hand they negatively evaluated wasting of material, long duration of building, stealing of material by the volunteers. On other hand they enumerate with certain pride what had been built thanks to the unpaid voluntary work and evaluate it positively.

After 1989 voluntary work for parish has decreased and even stopped. Inhabitants of many villages are disappointed and embittered by the way of privatization or restitution of property to the maintenance, restoration or building they contributed by their voluntary work as to "parish", "common" property. (In the same village district School Council removed without compensation all kindergarten equipment nevertheless it was bought by the members of the local female organisation for financial means gained from the voluntary work in farming co-operatives). Voluntary work for the parish maintenance and improvement should be replaced by activities of the unemployed who live on the

state dole but this does not always work. The absence of regular voluntary work (spring and autumn voluntary cleaning) is very evident in some localities as the exterior and order in parishes has deteriorated. In this area the perspective of the team-work is seen in certain revitalization after the current damping.

Due to restitution of collectivised or nationalised private property to its owners (or descendants of owners) we can witness re-establishment of co-owning communities (of former serfs, community with joint holders, forest community). However this is a longlasting legislative and social process. Some communities have already formed their ideas on what to do with the gained property - they use it or lease it. Others are only mapping the situation and are in the phase of establishment.

At present selfhelp is a quite vital phenomenon even though under the influence of recent social changes it exists mostly in latent form. It become an inevitability when some society function fails (institutions, state). A self-help group is being established to secure this function, thus substituting and creating or maintaining acceptable living conditions or fulfilling acute needs of its members. (E.g. in mountainous localities where the state fails to provide adequate and speedy maintenance of communications the inhabitants carry out this duty by selfhelp even nowadays. In urgent cases they create from the main road a "live chain" and they hand and "deliver" the basic foodstuffs from the lorry to the shop.)

We have observed that the weakened function of traditional social institutions and the above mentioned changes has resulted in the occurrence of other, sometimes new types of self-help groups and activities (e.g. development of self-help clubs of the unemployed, clubs of people suffering from some disease, etc. - see BÚTORA 1989, SCHRAMEK 1993).

We regard the observation of current transformation and changes in the society and their impact on the way of life of its inhabitants very important from the point of our topic study. We presume that it will throw more light on the solution of the question why and under what conditions is somebody able (or forced) to co-operate with others and how he/she perceives this co-operation and it influences his/her relations within the community.

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SPOLKOVÉ A SVOJPOMOCNÉ PRÁCE NA SLOVENSKU (príspevok k časovým a priestorovým koreláciám)

R e s u m é

Súčasná spoločenská disciplína považujú schopnosť sociálneho spoločenstva spolupracovať v záujme spoločného prospechu za veľmi cenný sociálny kapitál. Tradícia kolektívneho obhospodarovania spoločného majetku a spolupráca pre vzájomný prospech má na Slovensku a v ďalších krajinách centrálnej a východnej Európy hlboké historické korene. Štúdia analyzuje príležitosti na spolkovú a svojpomocnú prácu na Slovensku v prvej polovici 20. st.

Systém spolkových prác bol prispôbostený konkrétnym podmienkam života dedinského spoločenstva (obce) a druhu spolkov a združení v jej rámci, takisto vlastníctvu, ktoré mali, užívali a udržiavali. Prostredníctvom spoločných prác sa zabezpečovala ochrana spoločného majetku, jeho zveľádovanie, užívanie a prispievanie na mzdu zamestnancov a na odmenu funkcionárov. Po skončení práce boli účastníci zvyčajne pohostení, čo zvyšovalo integritu členov spoločenstva a prispievalo ku sviatočnej atmosfére spolkových prác.

Ku spolkovým prácam prináležia i niektoré svojpomocné aktivity. Svojpomocne sa vykonávali jednorázové práce i niektoré práce dlhodobého charakteru, pri ktorých sa v cyklicky opakovanej následnosti postupne striedali zástupcovia všetkých zainteresovaných rodinných hospodárstiev. Spoločným a bezplatným vykonávaním týchto činností členovia kooperačnej skupiny nahrádzali odbornú prácu remeselníka, pracovný výkon stáleho plateného zamestnanca alebo pôsobnosť určitej inštitúcie.

Po r. 1945 prišlo v dôsledku vyvlastnenia privátneho i spolkového majetku k násilnému prerušeniu väčšiny spolkových aktivít. Len malá časť sa udržiavala vo forme verejnoprospešnej činnosti na skrášľovaní obce a zlepšovaní jej vybavenia. Túto aktivitu podporoval aj štát. Druhým prelomovým bodom je začiatok 90-tych rokov, keď sa znovuobnovujú ekonomické združenia. V dôsledku zhoršených ekonomických podmienok a nedostatočného fungovania sociálnych inštitúcií sa vytvárajú nové svojpomocné aktivity. Sledovanie súčasných ekonomicko-spoločenských zmien a ich vplyvu na život spoločenstva je z hľadiska štúdia tejto problematiky veľmi dôležité.