

Mitja DURNIK

The antiurbanism phenomenon

Title of work: *Protiurbanost kot način življenja*

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The book *Protiurbanost kot način življenja* (Antiurbanism as a way of life) discusses why Slovenes wish to live in less densely populated areas and also maintain traditional values. In the introduction, authors Matjaž Uršič and Marjan Hočevar indicate that residence location does not necessarily determine an individual's participation in local activities, activities normally associated with the urban lifestyle. Due to new developments in transportation and communication, people can live an urban lifestyle despite their physical distance from urban centres. People living in the inner city often do not fully exploit their city's potential, perhaps even having a negative attitude towards the urban lifestyle. In the core of their introduction, the authors argue that the social and spatial aspects of urbanisation do not necessarily impact the cultural processes within that context – the “blut und boden ideology” (urbanism or acculturation). Therefore, the authors introduce a distinction between the concepts of the “blut und boden ideology” and urbanisation. This is to stress the difference between processes that illustrate urban population increase and those that illustrate the emergence of social links. They argue that a rise or concentration

of population and changes within the employment structure alone cannot provide a comprehensive framework for defining the concept of urbanism, something that creates important changes in lifestyle and the quality of social relations. They perceive changes in the quality of social relations as a dynamic process, which simultaneously integrates demographic, social/spatial, communicative and cultural aspects. At the same time, they agree that there are many “partial definitions”, each offering further avenues of research into the phenomenon of urbanisation. One of their important initial findings is that “residence location in and of itself does not provide a sense of identity or guarantee participation in activities by individuals living the urban lifestyle” (p. 9). This may be understood in the sense that physical distance from the city centre does not necessarily limit participation in an urban lifestyle. Life in urban centres may not exploit the opportunities that urbanisation has allowed for. The authors emphasise that “the question of an individual's choice of lifestyle is more important than how residence location can alter lifestyle choices” (p. 9). They conclude the introduction by creating the distinction between “new localism” and “new urbanism” (when defining or resolving problems in the connection between individuality, locality and social mobility) as diametrically opposing concepts. The concept of new urbanism is controversial due



to the extensive activity in territories where the construction of settlements with a low population density is planned. New localism refers to an interim step on the way to building modern communities (individualisation), falling within the broader context of an awareness of links inwards (to the community) and social impacts.

In the second chapter, the authors try to define an intermediate space that is neither rural nor urban. Where does it typically emerge and evolve? Is it the opposite of urbanisation? Suburbanisation, as described by the authors, means decentralisation of urban systems and a breaking of territorial boundaries. The process of suburbanisation creates lower population density in large urban centres. Within this context, suburbanisation also means “the consolidation of specific entities with distinctive lifestyles” (p. 13). Thus, suburban areas gain increased importance.

How can we define the concept of urbanism? How is it measured? In the third chapter, the authors define urbanism as the antithesis to rural ways of life and as “a part of the value system of the individual, an

element of collective identification and the individualisation of lifestyle factors such as the need for physical space or openness to change” (p. 17). Some authors see urbanism encompassing interactions of varying intensity (e.g., Lefebvre). The idea of urbanism as a way of life is one of the most controversial ideas in the field of urban sociology and urban studies. The authors expose a fundamental dilemma in the double meaning of “spatiality”: to what extent is space defined as a social product, and in what ways can it be defined as the factor that determines the creation of a particular society? Urbanism may also be described as that which lies at the core in the development of social processes. What is then the antithesis of urbanism? The authors argue (in methodological terms) that, “in the anti-urban value system, the relevant research question is how to redefine mechanisms set up to remove the negative effects of society’s artificial methods of integration and spatial organisation” (p. 23).

In section four, the authors emphasise that the population of urban centres in modern European cities is declining. This leads to a discussion of temporary residences – their segmentation and the combination of primary and secondary residences. Modern cities increasingly facilitate space for visitors rather than serving as a permanent residence location. It makes sense then to discuss the creation of new circulation patterns or principles and “new spatial aggregates”.

In the fifth chapter, the authors attempt to explain the beginnings of Slovenia’s anti-urbanism process. As they note, Slovenia may be characterised as having a non-intensive urbanisation process due to the ab-

sence of any large city and the compact nature of the area – dispersed patterns of settlement and smaller urban areas. During the communist era (at the end of the 1970s), as the authors note, Slovenia was labelled with a process called *pseudo-suburbanism* whereby traditional or spontaneous sub-urbanisation did not find a place in the way that was typical for large cities in the western/capitalist countries. Traditional sub-urbanisation (caused by excessive concentration of population in city centres) presupposes an expansion of cities in the hinterland, but in the case of Slovenia this did not happen. They mention Szélenyi’s concept of under-urbanisation as the reason in eastern and central Europe during the communist period for the discrepancy between the rate of growth in industrial jobs and urban population growth. This “concept” is to some extent applicable in the case of Slovenia as an example of the specific urban development of one post-communist nation. Authors that have described the process of suburbanisation also compare western capitalist societies with communist ones. The discrepancies are explained by the following argument: “The processes of suburbanisation in capitalist societies emerged as a result of congestion of cities, the changing nature of the economy, the increase in availability and the consequent shift of population and production to the suburbs. On the contrary, the process of suburbanisation in communist societies was, due to political, cultural and socio-economic factors that limited urbanisation, characterised by a ‘missed’ phase in the context of the super-saturation of cities” (p. 52). As the authors note, in the communist societies, suburban areas were gradually developed without an antecedent to the intense urban development. As mentioned, the

Slovenian case of suburbanisation is a specific development phenomenon due to the absence of a significant metropolitan area. During the period of industrialisation and in the period after the Second World War, urban areas in western countries that developed through these three periods – urbanisation, suburbanisation and de-urbanisation – are now approaching the period of re-urbanisation (new population growth in urban areas). In this context, Slovenia is approaching only the de-urbanisation period. The authors explain the phenomenon of ideologies as a way of life and as a spatial effect. In this way, an ideological concept for the “blut und boden ideology” is described as that which appeared in the context of the lack of a nation-state and at the same time strong social cohesion. The question is how to define the social construction of national space. In the context of a generally accepted view of the construction process, the authors determine it as building a space to include Slovenian farms, mountains and the idyllic countryside. Then at the same time they introduce the concept of pastoralism in defining the rural ideal, this acting primarily as a scheme for the context of an urban population.

In the sixth chapter, the authors present the results of studies related to the specific life attitudes of urban Slovenians. One of the findings suggests the truth of the well-known fact that Slovenians were hesitant to adapt to city life, preferring life in less densely populated, rural areas. Research indicates that the majority of respondents wish to maintain a way of life that includes having homes that are spread out, having an exemplary infrastructure and sufficient access to services. Respondents were also willing to protest a density of infrastructure or produc-

tion activities. A classic paradigm, one revealed in the studies, showed that an “ideal residential area” is represented by “homes with a yard and in less populated areas”. The studies also showed the unwillingness of people to move from their existing living environment.

In the seventh chapter, the authors point out that the number of economic entities in suburbanised areas in the countryside around major Slovenian towns has grown since 1990. Furthermore, they noted that trends of suburbanisation in Slovenia were complemented by the spread settlement model – dispersed construction of new homes and poor use of the old. Finally, they note that suburban areas around Ljubljana and Maribor (for example) are mainly populated by young families with preschool-age children. This is an indicator of the trend whereby the younger population chooses to live in suburban areas, whereas those living in urban centres grow older. As the authors argue, the Slovenian dynamic of suburbanisation has changed from “the initial partial phase (i.e., migration of population from urban areas) to a phase of multifaceted suburbanisation” (p. 99). Therefore, in conjunction with the suburbanisation of lifestyle, economic changes are taking place. In this context, there are important factors that encourage suburbanisation. Underdevelopment of the real-estate market, a characteristic of Slovenia, and an underdevelopment of the transport infrastructure and transport services affect the suburbanisation.

The authors close the discussion by stating that the process of suburbanisation blurs the distinctions between town and countryside, with rural areas becoming increasingly urbanised and the city losing

its central role. The aforementioned dispersed settlement system would yield positive and negative effects: positive in terms of higher standards for residential facilities, rural economic development and the preservation of local autonomy, and negative in terms of burdening the natural environment, the high cost of infrastructure expansion and the disappearance of landscape “identity”.

As a final evaluation of this work, the authors have in an original way

uncovered one aspect of Slovenian society using the concept of space. It is important to examine various aspects of Slovenian life in order to discover further avenues of research. In conclusion, it can be said that the authors have well encompassed the “melancholy in your own garden” aspect of Slovenian life.

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DEMOCHANGE – Demographic change in the Alps: Adaptation strategies to spatial planning and regional development

Project premises

Population aging is one of the most important demographic changes facing western societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The Alpine region is faced with an accelerated process of population aging due to:

- Out-migration of young (innovative and promising) people from remote rural areas to urban areas;

- In-migration of older people (from urban areas) to attractive, tourism-oriented areas, seeking tranquillity and proximity to nature during their retirement years.

Europe and other continents face aging trends and other demographic changes that either influence aging (such as population movements) or are influenced by aging (such as the educational or economic potential of the populati-