

Desislava Pileva

desislava.pileva@iefem.bas.bg

Report about the Project
“*Going Bravely to the Village*”
*Migration to the Village – Socio-Cultural Adaptation,
Practices and Challenges*

Migration is of great significance to the contemporary world and societies; it is an integral part of the global and local processes of social and cultural transformation and influences every sphere of the human everyday life – economy, politics, family and social relations, culture, communication etc. (Castles, 2010: 1578). In this context, researchers are facing important scientific fields and new challenges caused by the specific ethno-cultural, socio-economic, geographic-ecological and management factors which shape the appearance of every place and migrant group. In the field of migration, one of main timeless problems are the internal movements.

After the political changes of 1989 in Bulgaria, the so-called “optimistic mythology” which foresees a mass return to the village appeared. In the beginning of the 1990s, the tendency really reversed and for the first time in decades those who have migrated from the villages to the cities are less in number than those in the opposite direction (Кожухарова-Живкова, 1996: 19–21, 48–49). However, those movements were far from the expectations and often end with consecutive re-migration to the city in search of better livelihood, caused by financial and production difficulties in maintaining farming. In the last decade, however, as a result of the increasing aspiration for more eco-oriented way of life in chime with the environment and opposing the urbanization and the urban noise and pollution, among different generations of urban population (in active, pre-retirement and retirement age) a new change in the attitudes towards life in rural areas appeared.

According to the data of the National Statistics Institute of Bulgaria, in 2015 the share of the city-village migration is twice as big as the one of the village-city migration. Namely this data motivated the team of the ethnographic research project “*Going Bravely to the Village*”.

*Migration to the Village – Socio-Cultural Adaptation, Practices and Challenges**, to consider the urban-rural movements as a pursuit of certain lifestyle. In this sense, the main research goal is to identify the factors that provoke people and families in *active age* to change their place of residence, leaving the city and settling in rural environment. This includes the establishment of socio-cultural, environmental and economic preconditions and attitudes, shaping the overall appearance of individual and family perceptions to achieve a better quality of life. The focus is on the forms of adaptation, (non-)combining elements of urban and rural culture, determining the daily and special occasion practices of migrants, as well as their social engagements in the places of residence.

The data is gathered via semi-structured ethnographic interviews, informal conversations and observations, and the fieldwork is audio, video and photo documented. The research is being conducted in villages that are closer to or more remote from the bigger cities in two geographic regions in Bulgaria – the South-eastern part of the country, the region of Dobruzha (the District of Dobrich) and the Central Western Bulgaria (the Districts of Sofia and Pernik). The two regions have different geographical characteristics, respectively plain and mountainous/hilly – which gives opportunities for analysis in a comparative perspective. On the one hand, the two regions further the development of individual farms which contributes to but is also a function of the aspirations for ecological way of living that includes cultivation and consumption of homemade and pure food. On the other hand, these endeavours are a precondition for the development of rural tourism which is determined by the geographical location and the climate and natural features of the two regions.

The field research so far supports, but also further develops the preliminary hypothesis of the team – there are two main groups of migrants in active age, determined by their lifestyle in general. Those of *the first group* choose to settle down in villages near a bigger city (usually their former settlement) where they continue working after the movement. Hence, thanks to their daily commute, the interlocutors stay closer to the urban space on a daily basis. For *the second group*, the countryside combines both the living and the working spaces. This creates preconditions for a more multi-layered change in the lifestyle routine. This group contains, on the one hand, people

* The project is supported by the National Science Fund of Bulgaria (KII-06-M 30/1 from December 13, 2018). It is ongoing until August 2021. The team includes Assist. Prof. Violeta Periklieva, PhD (head) and Assist. Prof. Desislava Pileva, PhD from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IEFSEM–BAS), as well as Assist. Prof. Nadezhda Zhechkova, PhD from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. Active and important participation in the project has Assist. Prof. Ivaylo Markov, PhD from IEFSEM–BAS as a scientific consultant.

who are employed in international companies and organizations but work remotely from their homes. On the other, there are families who develop their own businesses related to the rural environment, in the sphere of tourism and commerce, as well as small and medium-sized farmers who sell their produce in local, regional and even foreign markets. In such cases, the immediate proximity (in the range of 5–10 km) to the regional or municipal centres is not necessarily sought when choosing a place to live. Sometimes business-oriented people even settle down in their ancestral country houses, while those working in the city or home office almost always prefer to buy their own property in villages that meet very specific requirements.

Another hypothesis of the team was also confirmed by the studies so far, namely the reason for the change of residence – in searching for higher quality of life in a quieter place away from city noise and polluted air. This corresponds, on the one hand, to the strife to live in a premises with a yard and a garden with higher privacy from the immediate neighbours. On the other hand, it meets the need to develop small-scale agriculture for their own use only, which in many cases includes pure and naturally growth produce without the use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides.

Typical for all interlocutors included in the study, however, is the daily (in rarer cases weekly) connection with the urban space. This interaction is provoked mostly by the work commitments; but also by the desire to maintain social contacts and to attend cultural events; as well as to carry out some consumer activities (such as shopping, use of medical services etc.). Attendance at kindergartens and schools in the near city is also among the most common reasons for maintenance of the daily commute. Another part of our interlocutors are those living “in-between” the house in the village and the apartment in the city. Therefore, keeping the property in the city could have many interpretations of both emotional and economic connections of the individuals with the urban area. This as well gives the prospect of eventual future settlement back to the city.

The project team hopes that the study will contribute to a better understanding of: urban-rural migration processes; changes in the lifestyle and the standard of living of migrants; the cultural and social influences of migration at micro, meso and macro levels; the perspectives, mechanisms and problems of adaptation, socialization and integration of migrants in the new settlements; the principles and results of the intercultural interaction of newcomers and locals, of urban and rural environment; the nuances in the attitudes and perceptions of the local rural communities; trends and policies for the development of urban-rural migration. The project has been ongoing for the last two years during which the team has conducted a dozen fieldwork researches in the considered areas. At the middle of the next year, the scientific results of the

study will be presented at a round table and a photo exhibition, as well as published in an on-line collective monograph in English. Current information on the work on the project can be found on the website <https://gotothevillage.wordpress.com/>.

REFERENCES

- Castles, Stephen, 2010, Understanding Global Migration: A Social Transformation Perspective, in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36 (10), pp. 1565–1586.
- Кожухарова-Живкова, Веска [Kozhuharova-Zhivkova, Veska], 1996, *Селото – в търсене на оптимистичната стратегия*. [*The Village – in Search of the Optimistic Strategy*], Троян: Аля.