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## Artists in Slovakia as a part of urban mobility process

### Abstract

Our article concerns the phenomenon of mobility of artists from city to countryside in the context of rurbanization, often seen as a chance to revitalise the countryside by urban traces. Nowadays, the countryside environment changes its functions and forms, from the agricultural production to the object of consumption mainly in the developed countries. From this perspective, it is interesting to observe how the artists' mobility manifests in the process of rurbanization but also how the countryside can make a mark on the artists. In de-tails, we focus on the nature of changes to the artist's production, distribution and consumption of works of art, and the nature of changes to the artist's way of meeting with other artists. We set up our research on the method of case study of a painter Jozef Šarman, who lives in the small village nearby Bratislava. Drawing from a semi-structured interview we came to the conclusion that some of the observed features have changed meanwhile others have not. This study can develop in further research of other artists for better understanding of a process of transition between city and village and to identify more concrete processes of changing social contexts.

### Key words

Mobility. Rurbanisation. Visual artists.

### Introduction

Rurbanization nowadays can have different meanings depending on the cultural and socio-geographical conditions. In the third world countries, it is seen mainly as an opportunity to modernize the villages. In European environment, it can have different motives and functions. For example, in Spain this trend is driven mainly by economic reasons of people living in the cities. The economic crisis catalysed the movement of citizens described as a migration from city to village, on the other hand the same crisis is "breathing new life and entrepreneurship into some nearly abandoned areas."<sup>1</sup> Pattern of rurbanism, often referred to as a neo-rural life-style, represents a chance for the inhabitants themselves "to revive the principles of self-sufficiency, moderation, and

<sup>1</sup> MINDER, R.: The Country Beckons Spaniards as Jobs in Cities Grow Scarce. [online]. [2017-9-20]. Available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/13/world/europe/spains-economy-sends-city-residents-back-to-country.html?pagewanted=all>>.

closeness to the land"<sup>2</sup>. From other perspective, in Italy L. G. Pedrazzini talks about the necessity to "pre-serve and improve the competitiveness and sustain-able development of the marginal urban areas . . . both in public policies for its protection, management and planning and on the part of the private players whose activity has an impact on it."<sup>3</sup>

In a different context in the former socialist Czechoslovakia - before 1989 - the village was associated with a label of "countryside modernization". Modernization was essential for the socialist regime. The aim of the development policies conceived back then was to minimize the differences between the town and the countryside. It was necessary to remove significant differences between urban and rural areas both in terms of physical infrastructure as well as the way of thinking, which at that time was perceived as backward and reactionary<sup>4</sup>. As Pavel Pospěch pointed out, nowadays many authors discuss the rural restructuring or postproductivism of villages. By that they mean refraining from understanding of the countryside as a place of exclusively agricultural production, instead, recognizing the countryside as an object of consumption. This can be observed in villages that are becoming more residential and recreational. As the restructuring factors could be specified also the changing way of life and system of values, and

the increasing proportion of urban population which is moving into subur-ban communities. This has a positive impact on commercial potential of rural tourism and re-gional cultural economy.<sup>5</sup> The process of restructuring of the village by bringing new urban characteristics can be perceived as an integral part of broader context of rurbanization.

Therefore, moving of people from city to countryside can have different motives and functions. The economic necessity is not the only argument why they change their place of every-day life. The countryside can become a desirable place also for various communities of artists, or for solitaires, to whom it is a fount of ideas and inspirations. On the other hand, their mobility to the countryside and their staying, living and working can be a stimulus for the process of rurbanization itself.

This leads us to our topic of artists who leave the city and move to the countryside. In history as well as in the present days we can find many examples of artists who followed this path. The classic one is Paul Gauguin, who changed a few places. From Slovak environment, we can mention Slovak national painter, Martin Benka, who exchanged the rush of the big city for an authentic life in the region of Orava. Today we can find also many artists who prefer to move to the village for some period of time, for example Andrej Dúbravský<sup>6</sup>, or even for whole life e.g. Fero Guldan<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> HOLLERAN, M.: The neo-rurals. [online]. [2017-8-15] Available at: <[https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/neo-rurals-spain-lost-generation-economic-crash-rurbanization](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/neo-rurals-spain-lost-generation-economic-crash-rurbanization)>.

<sup>3</sup> PEDRAZZINI, L.: Rurban Landscape. Milan : Lalitotipo, 2011. p. 1-7.

<sup>4</sup> HRUŠKA, V.: Proměny přístupů ke konceptualizaci venkovského prostoru v rurálních studiích. In Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review, 2014, Vol. 50, No. 4, p. 581-601.

<sup>5</sup> DELÍN, M., POSPĚCH, P.: Komodifikace venkova a utváření identity regionu. In Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review, 2016, Vol. 52, No. 2, p. 209-235.

<sup>6</sup> Young successful Slovak painter who has decided to move from USA to Rastislavice, a little village in Slovakia where his grandparents used to live. He spent there 3 months working on his works of art.



Studio in Kvetoslavov. Source: author

Methodologically, we decided to concentrate our research on one case study of Slovak painter. Among many artists we have chosen an important one - Jozef Šarman, living in a small village near Bratislava. In our interview, we focused on the main question which is mapping the trend of mobility of artists, who moved from an urban to rural area, and its influence. In more detail, we focus on the questions of why do the artists leave the city, if and how does the artists' production, distribution and consumption of artworks change, and if and how does the artists' way of meeting others change.

### Case of Jozef Šarman

Jozef Šarman is a Slovak eminent painter. He is also a member of the Club of Artists and Theorists in Slovakia, and member of other important institutions. He featured at many exhibitions in Slovakia and all over

Europe for example in Italy, Austria, Poland, etc. He was born in 1950 in a little village of 350 inhabitants, in Moravia, called Držková. J. Šarman attended an art school in Prague. After finishing his studies, he went on to pursue his career as a conservator-restorer of historical buildings and sculptures. His path brought him to Bratislava in Slovakia, where he was practicing the restoration work<sup>8</sup>. When he turned to making his own creations, he found out that Bratislava was having a disturbing effect on him. He described the main reason for leaving Bratislava and moving to countryside with the words: "there were too many different energies and it was confusing me. I was uncomfortable with it."<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, he set out to search for a new place where he would find the calmness, the silence and the peace. All of which he met in the village. In the beginnings of the 90s, he bought a building, an old pub that

7 Famous painter who decided to move into the area of the Little Carpathians, close to a small town Svätý Jur, not far from Bratislava. There he's been living and working for almost 30 years.

8 Dobré obrazy. [online]. [2017-7-21]. Available at: <<http://www.dobreobrazy.sk/josef-sarman/>>.

9 RUDYJOVÁ, M. [2016-6-20]. Kvetoslavov. Personal interview.



ŠARMAN, J.: Pri Dunajskom rameni - oil - 60x74 cm.

he reconstructed for use as a studio. The studio is located in Kvetoslavov, a little village about 20 km away from Bratislava. In the interview, Jozef vividly described what it looked like. When he arrived, the village was an entirely different place. There were only five houses, old ladies used to sit in front of him on a porch, the crow of a rooster used to wake him up every morning. Only a few cars and 3 trains a day used to pass through the village, nothing else.<sup>10</sup> After moving to Kvetoslavov he became able to invest 90 percent of his time into creating artworks. With time, he learned the habit that when he needs to “civilize” himself, he goes to his flat in Bratislava, where his wife takes care of practical issues. Then when he needs a break “that artists also need in their lives”<sup>11</sup>, he attends parties, exhibition previews, and symposiums.

According to Šarman, the trend

of migration from the countryside to the city is stable, and static. As he explains further, he sees the tendency in Slovakia that there are also other artists who would like to move to the countryside, but there are several reasons why they do not. The main obstacle is financial drought- it is too expensive to buy a house in a village that could be restructured into a studio, and that would still be relatively close to Bratislava or to Vienna – cities that according to him are necessary to retain artistic connections.

He sees the difference in the process of creating artworks in small studios in Bratislava and in the current place in the village. While he lived in Bratislava, he rented a studio. He kept working there for some time, but the place did not work out for him. His process is an immense joy for him, and sometimes a huge mess, too. His process needs depth, space and philosophy. The result cannot be done in a day, or in a week, it takes a whole life, because all his experience is employed in the process, even if he makes a painting in just 3 hours straight. The main

problem with Bratislava was that there was always something to take his attention away. Trams passing by, honking horns, constantly somebody bothering. The same acknowledges A. Du-bravský, when he decided to stop working in the dark studio without windows in Bratislava, and rather, rent a house in the village.<sup>12</sup> In the countryside, Šarman feels more isolated. He taught others to communicate with him via e-mail and to meet only on Friday and Saturday. He explains: “When I paint, a window is open, there is music playing and I am painting.” The advantage is that he can work at any time he decides, often at night, too. He says: “I wake up at night and I am delighted.”<sup>13</sup>

To him as an inspiration serves environment, landscape and nature, but he paints cities, too. As he says:

<sup>12</sup> NÉMETH, J.: Ako vypestovať rajské záhrady bez postrekov. [online]. [2015-11-4]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/260255/ako-vypestovat-rajске-zahrady-bez-postrekov/>>.

<sup>13</sup> RUDYJOVÁ, M. [2016-6-20]. Kvetoslavov. Personal interview.

“nowadays it is not a problem to take a car and go into the nature or into the city. It is all about the feeling that it is easier to apply oneself when you are not being interrupted. It does not mean that there is no place for music, for example, when he is creating. In fact, it serves as a barrier against the outside world.

Jozef made use of abstraction. He often uses the combination of acrylic with oil. He notes about his work: “It is easier to make magic with oil. One can make great alchemy with it – different shadows, shades, half-tone. Oil provides more room for expression because it does not dry as quickly as acrylic.”<sup>14</sup> and he adds: “The painting itself consists of 50 grams of paint and a bit of canvas. But the art is to turn these 50 grams into something interesting, and to enjoy it.”<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the question: whether the way of distributing of his artworks changed, he responds no rather than yes. He has his gallery owner who puts his artworks on display. So, the quantity and the quality of the distribution improved substantially, but this fact is not related to his relocation. Although he lives in a rural village, he exhibits mainly in the city.

Another point of our interest was the possible change of reception of his artworks. If and what changes about the actual type and composition of the audience. Regarding the composition of audience, he has a broad spectrum of visitors and long time customers. They are mostly educated people who have a connection with art. He notes there are also a new-rich whom he calls

cultural barbarians. During the interview, he pointed out a case when he was at the vernissage, and one lady said: “the frame does not go with my couch.”<sup>16</sup> It offended him so much that he does not use frames anymore. He sees positively the tendency that also young people, even teenagers started visiting events. However, the change of type of audience and its change of attitude towards his artworks, the artist does not ascribe to change connected to the moving to countryside.

Our next area of interest was whether he has established relationships with residents, or may-be with a local public authority. As he says, he knows and frequently visits few persons, who have a connection to art. Regarding the local authority, he is good friend with the mayor of the village and his wife, who support art. Nevertheless, their relationship does not influence public externalities like local cultural policy making, and so on. Others see him as something weird. Šarman heard them drop: “he does nothing and has money”<sup>17</sup>. He thinks they are mostly original villagers. And for them someone who does not work is somebody odd. The same problem is reported also by his friends from Czech Republic. The artists are perceived as strangers and bizarre people. He uses a metaphor: “Villagers’ philosophy is very difficult, unpredictable. They are as the earth, as the cattle, with which they struggle all their lives.”<sup>18</sup>

Last question regards the form of association with other artists. Because of the fact that during the staying in Bratislava he did not

<sup>10</sup> RUDYJOVA, M. [2016-6-20]. Kvetoslavov. Personal interview.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem

<sup>14</sup> RUDYJOVA, M. [2016-6-20]. Kvetoslavov. Personal interview.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem

<sup>16</sup> RUDYJOVÁ, M. [2016-6-20]. Kvetoslavov. Personal interview.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem



frequent the community of intellectuals, also known as the café community, typical milieu for artists, we cannot answer the question of how the way of association or meetings with other artists has changed. Since he moved to Kvetoslavov, he's been meeting other artists most often by traveling to symposiums and exhibitions. He has many friends from the Czech Republic and from Poland. They meet 5 or 6 times a year, at these events. Sometimes it is his place that turns into the meeting point. Younger artists turn up at the events increasingly often. Even if they live in various places they always find the time to meet in person. Mail or phone communication is used only for practical information.

Conclusion

In general, by his own account, leaving the city and moving to the countryside has changed quite a lot of things. Lifestyle is much simpler, and less complicated than in the city. But beyond the material elements, such as gardening, silence hours, living-space, there are also the intangible elements, for example the feeling of liberation. Joseph sees the city as shackles, from which he was able to free himself and go in pursuit of freedom. "If I do not have thoughts, I am mentally exhausted, empty, so I go to the garden, get tired physically, and that helps me to restore the activity of brain cells and I am ready to make new creations."<sup>19</sup>

We were analysing the part of the process of rurbanization, the process of bringing the element of cities to villages, introducing and accepting the characteristics from one environment to another. Above

all else, we focused on social group of artists, in particular on the study case of painter Jozef Šarman. When answering our question, we can say that some elements stand out more than others. There is a considerable change in the production, in the lifestyle of artist, and also the relationship with residents and local authority is different. On the contrary, way of the distribution and type and composition of the audience seem untouched by changing the environment. We can presume that the unchanged way of distribution can be related to the proximity of big cities. The above-mentioned findings compel us think that maybe the process of rurbanization can take a variety of forms and can only affect certain human activities and others omit. This research is a first step and could continue with other artists for better understanding of a process of transition between city and village and to identify more concrete processes of changing social environment.

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