

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN PERIPHERAL AREAS IN WESTERN UKRAINE

Aleksandra SYNOWIEC

Silesian University of Technology, Faculty of Organization and Management; aleksandra.synowiec@polsl.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0001-8251-2322

Purpose: The objective of this study is to present historical and cultural heritage as a development asset for local communities in peripheral areas in Western Ukraine. The author analyzes how chosen local communities make attempts to use historical and cultural heritage in order to reestablish local development resources.

Design/methodology/approach: In order to achieve the objectives of this paper, the methods of content analysis and virtual ethnography were appointed. The study involved content analysis of secondary data (literature and available reports), ten online semi-structured interviews with local activists, youth workers and workers of the sphere of culture conducted in June 2020 and netnographic study online communities representing chosen research sites.

Findings: The question of peripheral areas development concerns the mobilization of local resources and given examples illustrate, that this process has already started in Ukraine. Analysing the role of cultural and historical heritage in local development in the context of current political, economic and social framework, provides an interesting outlook on the processes of social change and community development. Cultural and historical heritage as an asset contributes both to socio-economic conditions improvement and community building processes.

Research limitations/implications: The limited amount of data collected for this study and limited research methods appointment determines the classification of this study as preliminary. The research question is current and the in-depth study of the issues is needed. Nevertheless, findings contribute to research on social change processes.

Social implications: The rural – urban development disparities in post-Soviet countries are still remarkable, therefore research focused on analysis of overcoming development divisions contributes to the question of social change processes in former Soviet countries.

Originality/value Theoretical and empirical identification of cultural and historical heritage on community development in peripheral areas.

Keywords: local community, historical and cultural heritage, local and regional development, Ukraine.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss the role of historical and cultural heritage as a tool in building potential of local and regional development in Ukraine. The issues of cultural and historical heritage use in terms of an asset of local revival are examined referring to the cases collected in chosen local communities in Western Ukraine using netnography (Kozinets, 2012; Jurek, 2013) as a one of the research tools. The author analyzes how chosen local communities in peripheral areas make attempts to use historical and cultural heritage in order to reestablish local development resources.

The study entailed content analysis of secondary data and virtual ethnography study of online communities representing chosen existing research sites. The source material is based on already existing data, which consists of selected literature of the subject, available reports and legal acts, research conducted by international and domestic NGO's as well as the authors study concerning the processes of social change in rural areas in Ukraine (Synowiec, 2018; 2019). The author refers to the communities in Khmelnytskyi region, where the research on post-communist legacies and patterns in everyday life was conducted (Synowiec, 2018; 2019). The course of the presented study was expanded by ten online semi-structured interviews with local activists, youth workers and workers of the sphere of culture conducted in June 2020 by means of the Internet communicators. The empirical data was analyzed and interpreted on the ground of the categories selected by the author. Due to the limitations of this text, fragments of the respondents' statements are not quoted, but only the interpretation of the obtained data is given.

The netnographic study involved also an ethnographic approach: content analysis of the websites and social media profiles of local communities with regard to the issues of cultural and historical heritage both material and non-material. The method of virtual ethnography was appointed mainly due to the current situation with COVID-19 pandemic.

The research question, both in the context of the analyzed literature and the author's own study, seems to be important, up to date and certainly require a broader perspective. Last but not least – new efforts to disseminate knowledge about cultural heritage in the conditions of the worldwide pandemic are certainly noteworthy. They require new ways of communication, new formats, as well as improvement of digital skills. The latter aspect seems to be particularly important in case of the peripheral areas development.

2. Framework of the study: main concepts definitions and methodological approach

Despite the technological development of society and changes resulting from globalization processes, both *locality* and *community* remain areas of analysis in the field of social sciences. Nowadays *locality* is an important concept not only from the ethnographical point of view, but also represents a touchstone determining theoretical frames, research perspectives and fields of research; linking traditional sociological perspectives with postmodern approaches (Kurczewska, 2006, p. XI). The interest in locality as a social phenomenon and a subject of analysis has been changing however the concept of locality successfully returned in the 80s due to the importance of locality in the process of social change. Since then locality becomes a dynamic and global problem associated with the activities of individuals, groups, institutions, policies and social processes (Goszczyński, Knieć, Czachowski, 2015, pp. 19-20). Locality is one of the most common descriptive and analytical categories in sociology (Majer, 2011, p. 27). In traditional perspective, locality is strongly related to local community as they both have “common Latin etymology *localis*, meaning a specific place or location; local therefore stand for assigned to a place” (Jałowicki et. al., 2007, p. 15). Majority of the concepts of locality refer to the significance of territory and space for establishing group identity. Apart from the territory, the most common definitions of locality include the social and psychosocial aspect. (Goszczyński, Knieć, Czachowski, 2015, p. 11).

The local community can be understood as a social group that is therefore “a social community associated with a given territory, which created an internal organization and whose members remain in social interaction” (Gniazdowski, 2006, p. 4).

Due to the political, economic and social changes taking place in former Soviet countries the questions of locality and community development is still up to date. The problem of community development is widely discussed in sociological literature (Kaleta, 1998; Gorlach et al., 2005; Weryński, 2010; Bukraba-Rylska et al., 2013; Rakowski, 2016). In this context mobilization of internal resources becomes a one of the most important challenges. Local resources are defined here as “the resident’ ability to organize and mobilize resources to achieve consensually agreed goals” (Weryński, 2010, p. 164).

Analysis of the role of cultural heritage in local and regional development in post-Soviet Ukraine in the context of current political, economic and social framework and particularly the decentralisation reform, provides an interesting outlook on the processes of social change and community development. Regardless of both nationwide and international discussion about decentralisation reform barriers and limitations, it is still perceived as a keystone for social change incentives and social capital revival in order to overcome Soviet legacies, such as the administrative-territorial organization and the distribution of the responsibilities (Myshlovska, 2015, para. 4).

Referring to the category of periphery, it should be noted that in the scientific literature there are several ways of defining. The main criteria include: 1) the geographical criterion, i.e. the distance between the center and a given area, accompanied by the demographic criterion, i.e. the lower density of population; 2) the economic criterion illustrating the level of economic development, domination of resource economy, low level of infrastructure and innovation; 3) the political criterion – which takes into account the religious, cultural or political differences of the inhabitants of a given area; 4) the criterion of socio-cultural dependencies, i.e. diffusion of innovation from the center to peripheral areas (Tuziak, 2011, pp. 101-102).

In case of this study, mainly geographical and economic determinants were taken into account. The author focuses on rural or rural-urban communities with regard to the ratio of the rural population within the administrative boundaries of a given region, distance from a large urban center and distance from popular tourist attractions. Western regions with the highest rate of the rural population (for example Zakarpattia with 63%, Chernivtsi and Ivano-Frankivsk with around 56% of rural inhabitants in relation to urban dwellers) were excluded from the focus of interest, because at the same time they remain very attractive tourist destinations, what affects the use of cultural heritage in more commercialized way. Eastern Carpathians, Transcarpathian Ruthenia, Volhynian Polissia are the regions with great tourist potential while Polish tourists traditionally visit Lviv, historical locations around Ternopil' and places associated with Henryk Sienkiewicz novels (Kruczek, 2008, pp. 194-195). Therefore touristic places do not fully meet economic criteria of what is and what is not the periphery. The choice of more peripheral communities was also influenced by less aggressive – if compared to flagship places in western oblasts – use of so-called ethnic marketing, understood as commodification of a local tradition, its attractive packaging and selling (Comaroff, and Comaroff, 2011). However, as noted by social anthropologists, the choice of research site is always burdened with the arbitrary point of view and in fact it is impossible to find a typical or statistical place (Trzeszczyńska, 2012, p. 55). Thus, to achieve the objectives of this paper the author decided to go back virtually to the communities in Khmelnytskyi region, which were studied under previous scientific project (Synowiec, 2018; 2019). For decision justification two reasons were considered: 1) criteria of peripherality; 2) previous familiarization with the research area and facility to reach interlocutors.

Socio-cultural perception of peripherality is related to the particular context. “Defining a place with the adjective ‘peripheral’ entails a number of negative associations - apart from terms that are relatively neutral, such as ‘located far from the center’ or ‘small’, they bring to mind highly evaluative opinions (Kukołowicz, 2018, pp. 66-67). Assigning different values in order to identify cultural relationships between center and periphery, urban and rural or local and mass is still of great importance (Kukołowicz, 2018, p. 65). Not only in Polish context, the social construct of rural areas is built upon *cliché* categories of peripherality, an “inferior” place with no access to culture (Rakowski 2016), conservatism and backwardness (Shuldiner 2020), lack of agency among inhabitants and resistance to social change (Synowiec,

2018). The adjective 'rural' has a pejorative connotation and often becomes a simple label, social stigma (Goffman, 2007) that reflects the stereotypical division of society into groups of higher and lower status (Bukraba-Rylska, 2013).

Cultural and historical heritage is understood as both material (movable and non-movable items of cultural property such as historical sites, buildings, monuments, museums) and non-material (customs, traditions, cultural memory) (Kukułowicz, 2018, pp. 68-69).

Cultural heritage in post-Soviet area, as highlighted in *Cultural Code for Eastern Partnership* report (2015) can become an effective tool used for "the promotion of key values: human rights, freedom of expression, historical memory, intercultural dialogue, democracy and others" (p. 4). Significant impact of cultural heritage as a development instrument is underlined both by policy makers, international organizations and domestic NGO's. "Ukrainian society is in the need of forming and practicing the culture of open and responsible social dialogue, which is essential for mutual trust, respect, understanding and cooperation" (Cultural Code for Eastern Partnership, 2015, p. 26).

With regard to the complex problems faced nowadays by inhabitants of rural areas, it becomes increasingly important to mobilize the resources of the local environment for self-development (Kaleta, 1998, p. 7) and improvement of life quality in peripheral areas.

3. Culture heritage and local communities development – findings

Due to international obligations and internal Ukrainian regulations, the state is obliged to protect objects that constitute a cultural value. "The protection of cultural heritage influences the formation of the nation's mentality, ensures the continuation traditions and values transfer, and supports the development of society" (The condition, problems and prospects for the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine, 2018). As far as material heritage is concerned, the legal system of regulations in the field of historical heritage protection includes: the Constitution, the Civil Code, the Land Code of Ukraine, two special bills on the protection of cultural and archaeological heritage and several dozen other legal acts. The document mention the number of 130,000 objects of cultural heritage remaining in the ministerial register (The condition, problems and prospects for the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine, 2018). However, many relics of the past of the non-ethnic inhabitants of Ukraine – mainly Polish and Jewish – decay without funds on refurbishment. Much of the remains of the former Polish cultural heritage in Ukraine is constantly deteriorating or disappearing. The reasons are as follows: lack of state finance for renovations, funds donated by Poland are too meager to meet the needs, the low level of conservation work, lack of awareness that heritage of cultures inhabiting the area of contemporary Ukraine is in fact a common heritage (Konończuk, 2017).

Dealing with the issues of the non-material historical and cultural heritage on the local level is connected with overcoming communism legacies. Memory have become an important field of research interest due to multidimensional processes of social change taking place in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 in terms of the process of knowledge production (Tismenau, 2000). Reestablishing national identity in post-communist countries may sometimes lead to a kind of pathology – Bobrownicka (2006) argues, that “the more mature the nation is, the more it demonstrates the ability to autocratic objectivism, to liberate itself from the convention of mythologized thinking about its past. It mostly does not happen especially to nations full of complexes and insecure (rightly or wrongly) and therefore willing to succumb to the populist slogans of demagogic compensation or claims (p. 7).

Like many similar places in Central and Eastern, the studied communities can be metaphorically called “places without memory”, i.e. places where absence of past has destructive impact on local identity and sense of belonging (Trzeszczyńska, 2012, pp. 77-79). According to the interviewees, a priority in rural and semi-rural areas development is to find innovative solutions to create appropriate conditions in social, cultural and spiritual spheres. In their opinion culture and subjectivity are crucial for contemporary Ukrainian countryside. One of interlocutors expresses explicitly that during transition period, culture in rural areas was an abandoned sphere due many reasons such lack of finance, but also the dominative role of Russian pop-culture in media sphere, lack of interest in domestic “culture products” and negative associations with folklore of local communities.

Historical and cultural awareness as a part of culture has to be restored after years of oblivion and displacement from official memory built upon Soviet narrative. According to people involved in the civil activities, building awareness of cultural heritage contributes to the integration of the local community and create social bonds between generations. For example in one of the research sites, a former noble house was nationalized and assigned for different purposes after the October’s Revolution, i.e. for the local committee of communism party premises, school or hospital. The memory of the place was successfully erased, and the previous form of culture was wiped out, but the process of memory restoration has already started within events familiarizing the community with old traditions. As one of the interviewees underlines – the awareness of roots among inhabitants is essential for the real transformation of rural areas in Ukraine. This process can be named as symbolical return to the place, i.e. “regaining its subjectivity, what is related to the will to participate as part of intentional cooperation and in the spirit of community solidarity” (Łaguna-Raszkiewicz, 2015, p. 181). The interviews show that local leaders are focused on supporting the socio-economic development of the community by renewing cultural traditions and mobilizing local resources. According to the interviewees, community development can be realized through the deep analysis of possibilities and potential – including human resources. The cultural and historical heritage undoubtedly contributes to the development opportunities. The share of tourism industry in the structure of Ukraine’s GDP has been constantly growing. Only in 2017, 39.6 billion UAH was transferred to the Ukrainian budget from tourism and related industries (services, food, transport), and investments in

tourism reached the amount of 7.9 billion UAH (Ukrinform.net, 2017). The western region in Ukraine is leading in rural tourism development – here the largest number of farmsteads is located. Rural tourism may support the rural areas development in several ways as follows: 1) increasing income and employment rate in rural population; 2) improving living conditions in the countryside; 3) establishing positive image of Ukraine; 4) improving the infrastructure of villages; 5) supporting preservation of historical and cultural heritage (Diuk, and Burlaka, 2018). Socio-economic transformation has brought unwanted effects such as loss of status, pauperization, degradation for many social groups, including rural dwellers. Till the adoption of regulations on land privatization, state farms operating in Ukraine provided not only employment, but supplied local communities with social facilities, organized transport, housing and even cultural life (European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2013). Rural tourism is one of the possible ways of local communities development and successful management of cultural and historical heritage becomes an important asset. The content analysis of virtual exemplification of communities portraits in Facebook social network shows the increasing need of managing local resources (including cultural and historical heritage) in terms of attracting tourists attention.

Categorization of interviewees statements allows to distinguish four aspects of historical and cultural memory revival to be considered: 1) the quality of culture products available nowadays and the ability to target audience with historical and cultural content; 2) use of information and communication technologies in order to popularize historical and cultural “product”; 3) difficulties in undertaking issues of Polish and Jewish heritage in Ukraine; 4) depopulation of countryside and youth out-migration to the cities or abroad. The material heritage of non-ethnic Ukrainian groups, as it was already mentioned, is being destroyed or deteriorated, as such, in the peripheral areas there is a significant problem with the co-called material base. What was highlighted in the interviews – local leaders find many formats of cultural and educational activities outdated and ineffective. According to the interlocutors young people are excluded from decision-making processes, including the preservation and restoration of historical and cultural heritage. Thus, the way to address the community with the issues of cultural heritage should take place through the announcements in social media and direct communication, like searching for people who are ready to share their own family stories in the context of community history. Another way of presenting cultural heritage in attractive way involves information and communication technologies (ICT) – the range of activities may include: mapping historical sites with QR codes, organizing workshops on family archives, workshops on traditions and customs of different ethnic groups, workshops on Hebrew language, virtual excursions to historical sites and cemeteries, introducing basics of genealogy, organizing workshops on documental theatre etc.

Peripheral areas in post-Soviet counties have been struggling with a set of problems requiring solutions, ranging from living conditions improvement, through issues related to the protection of the natural environment and cultural heritage, to the issue of social involvement and a change of approach in thinking about the local community organization. “According to

many researchers, local communities are the main subject and animator of a particular process of change, called local or endogenous development, because the role of intra-system factors is emphasized in there (...)" (Jałowicki, Szczepański, 2002, p. 19).

One of the interlocutors emphasizes the importance of small communities development in order to establish the overall picture of Ukrainian transition. Peripheral areas cannot remain discounted from both the worldwide and nationwide discussions on smart development – “Without making the village smarter, the nation cannot grow and be progressive” (Fajrillah et al., 2018, p. 5). As underlined both in interviews and content analysis of virtual material – culture and historical heritage is perceived as an asset, contributing to community development in two ways: first – supporting tourism industry development and though improving life quality; second – building social bonds within the community.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to present historical and cultural heritage as a development asset for local communities in peripheral areas in Western Ukraine – mainly in rural areas. The author referred to the examples of using historical and cultural heritage in chosen local communities in order to reestablish local development resources. Presented study is of preliminary character, however the data collected during the research process enable to identify the directions for further analysis.

The course of study and collected materials revealed that historical and cultural heritage can be considered in terms of development asset in two dimensions: 1) as a factor contributing to the socio-economic development of peripheral areas and 2) as an important aspect of the community building. Historical and cultural heritage is regarded as a strength that should be used in order to minimize or overcome the main barriers or rural development in Ukraine, such as high unemployment rate. In turn, reference to the historical and cultural heritage is considered as an effective tool contributing to the intercultural dialogue, collective memory restoration, and civil society reconstruction. It is also important to arouse the interest in historical and cultural heritage among the inhabitants of rural areas - to show it as an alternative of economic activity.

The main prospects for further research with regard to the presented results may involve research on socio-economic performance in rural areas, such as entrepreneurship, rural tourism, and heritage tourism. Also the role of the leaders of local communities in peripheral areas, their motivation and willingness to act for social change appears current and important question, especially taking into account modern discourse of sustainable development.

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