

Social Cohesion in Suburban Neighbourhoods: the Case of Prague

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ABSTRACT

In the past, there was a large debate on the social cohesion and the importance of neighbourhoods in metropolitan areas. A great contribution to this discussion was the formulation of the “Community Question” by Barry Wellman. He introduced three distinctive concepts of community: the community saved, the community lost and the community transformed.

In recent years, sociologists focused their studies mainly on the character of the community transformed and the non-local ties (especially in connection with the development of the internet community). However, I assume that neighbourhood is still important in people’s lives and that consequently the evaluation of the local level is still very important.

This paper focuses on the social cohesion and the nature of social ties in suburban neighbourhoods. Many scholars speak about the crisis of community in modern society and blame suburbanisation as one of the main processes deepening this crisis. Though it is clear that with the development of modern technologies the ties within neighbourhoods have weakened, it could be said that significantly important social ties could be still seen even in such newly built localities.

In the Czech Republic suburbanisation is a dynamic process that is a considerable influence not only on the socio-spatial structure of Prague metropolitan region but also on the social environment of affected neighbourhoods. The empirical study is based on unique data from an extensive field research, which was realized in May 2006 in 9 localities.

Czech suburban development usually takes place within an existing settlement; newcomers have a significantly distinct character compared to the native inhabitants (higher social status, different lifestyle etc.) and consequently they bring new resources and qualities to the neighbourhood. In this study I evaluate changes in these neighbourhoods: how newcomers create local ties and integrate into existing social structures. In reality, it is seen that suburbanites tend to integrate to the local communities; they develop new ties with their neighbours and also show a significant level of civic engagement and political participation. From my research it would seem that Prague suburban neighbourhoods show traits of the community saved.

Key Words: community development, social cohesion