

Post-modern values and rural peripheries

Additional remarks on a study
Éva G.Fekete
Associate professor
University of Miskolc, Hungary

The concept

Although, currently, there is a heated ongoing debate on whether post-modernity exists at all, and if so, how it should be interpreted, there seems to be a consensus that in the second half of the 20th century – after capitalism had passed first two stages (i.e. free competition and monopoly capitalism), and entered its multinational or consumerist phases – a radical change occurred in (1) the values that define the organisation of production and society and (2) the global perception of the world (Jameson 1991). Post-modern approaches have also been applied to the interpretation of the process of area development. The two types of interpretation (the modern and the post-modern ones) can be illustrated through the comparison of opposites.

Differences and changes in focus can be detected simultaneously: differences can be found in the direction, patterns, spatial manifestation and participants of area development; changes in focus can be identified (1) in the role that (a) order and disorder (Lyotard 1984), (b) the resultant otherness, (c) science and (d) education play (Sarup 1993) as well as (2) in the status of women and children in the social hierarchy.

Table 1
Modern and post-modern characteristics of area development

Modernity	Postmodernity
• Linear progress	• Cyclicity
• Growth	• Sustainability
• Economic needs	• Human needs
• Technological basis	• Community and human foundations
• Resource and capital intensity	• Resource and capital extensity
• Funds and intellectual capital	• Social capital
• Place	• Network, identity

• Concentration	• Deconcentration
• Common sense	• Emotions
• Top-down control	• Bottom-up control
• Monoliths	• Diversity
• Safety/Security	• Self-expression
• Xenophobia	• Tolerance
• Representative democracy	• Participation-based democracy
• Actual space	• Virtual space
• Masculinity	• Feminity

Source: Based on Faragó 1991, a version edited by the author

The post-modern interpretation of the area development has offered new perspectives especially with regard to the evaluation of the development potential of rural peripheries.

Exhibiting merciless realism, the Modern Age (Klages, 2007) – which is an ‘heir’ of the Enlightenment, is based on the rule of the reason and the primacy of industry, believes in the omnipotence of technical and technological progress and economic growth, aspires for order and strives to follow universal truths – doomed rural areas unsuited for industrial development to depression, excluding them from actual area development processes. Since the late 1950s, useful knowledge (Lyotard, 1984) has taken priority over scientific knowledge, IT has gained ground in both economy and daily life and the generation of information has become a fundamental factor of area development. With the use of information technology gaining ground, place, unlike identity and networks, has lost in importance (Lyotard 1984). At the same time, new scarcities (e.g. clean environment, cultural and spiritual impulses, democracy based on participation, self-realisation and emotions) brought about by a former era of industrialisation and modernisation added to the prestige of the areas which offered natural and cultural diversity (also as values of daily life (Harvey 1989)) and showed lower concentration, in terms of population and the density of built-up areas, than urban regions.

Table 2

Market demand contributing to an increased prestige of rural peripheries

Demand for	Economic sector concerned
1. healthy food	agriculture
2. fresh water	agriculture
3. alternative energy	agriculture
4. natural raw materials	agriculture
5. housing and second homes	construction industry, maintenance,
6. recreational services, hospitality	tourist industry, health care, agriculture
7. fine handmade works of art crafted by artisans	culture

8. cultural and intellectual products	culture
9. information services	culture
10. logistics services	freight forwarding and warehousing
11. child- and eldercare	social services
12. environmental industry, recycling	environment protection
13. land protection	environment protection

Edited by the author

As a result, rural areas, which used to be treated as ‘basket cases’, gained in importance. An increasing number of city dwellers cherishing post-modern values and leading a post-modern way of life are emerging in rural space: as persons with real property in the provinces, who intend to find permanent residence in the provinces, as ‘weekend residents’, as tourists in pursuit of recreation opportunities, as consumers purchasing other services of the provinces and as entrepreneurs intending to utilise the identified old/new resources of the provinces. Interest based on postmodern values is being transformed into market demand, which offers a business opportunity for rural peripheries insomuch as it can improve the livelihood and living conditions of the population there. (Ray 1998) This means that rural areas may, with the town and country relationship re-defined (Buller-Hoggart 2001), converge with the rest of the country after centuries of backwardness.

This is the basic assumption that has ‘given birth’ to and is the engine of this study. Our objective is to better understand and assess the new opportunities offered to rural peripheries by post-modern development. While assuming that post-modern development does offer an opportunity of convergence, we are also convinced that following the traditional patterns of modernisation will not lead to the much awaited convergence of rural peripheries. Modernisation, the characteristics of which we listed above, has led to a loss in prestige of these areas. Due to the very fact that they have not undergone modernisation, rural areas have significant potential for a path of development that relies on rich environmental and cultural heritage and its utilisation in a manner that this heritage is preserved. The fact that the quality of life rather than increasing economic efficiency and performance is taking centre stage is a favourable development. It is still a moot question whether, replacing mass production offering stability in an era when it prevailed and bureaucratic organisations, small businesses offering flexibility and diversity, the new forms of governance, changes in the hierarchy of things that characterises modernity, the acceptance of the emergence of already accepted

things in a new form, access to knowledge and information and social capital key to development emerge, can emerge and emerge to a satisfactory extent in rural peripheries.

A further characteristic of post-modern development, which bears great relevance to rural areas, is that it also embraces former values and has a fondness for traditional values, which are based on community, reciprocity, respect for nature and a holistic approach and which have remained probably more intact in the rural space. (It should be noted, however, that it is the very characteristic which is also a threat posed by post-modern development inasmuch as it strengthens fundamentalism (Bouscher 2006).) The resources (assets and procedures) that post-modern development prefers can generate area development in a consumer society only if they can be transformed into goods. The question is, however, who will cause such transformation to occur and how it will be caused to occur. Local residents and ‘settlers’ can both meet this challenge. For instance, rural England offers a number of examples of how the businesses run by former city dwellers, now members of rural communities, rely on local resources. (Webber – Curry - Plumridge 2008)

Purpose of the research

We wish to study the attitude of rural peripheries to post-modern values, especially to environmental and cultural resources and participation-based development; ultimately, we intend to study the feasibility and viability of the path of development based on post-modern values in such rural areas that are parts of the Hungarian cultural heritage.

Object of the research

The feasibility and viability of a post-modern path of growth for rural peripheries that have only been partially affected by modernisation, i.e. whether they can seize the opportunities that arise and, if so, to what extent, depend on a number of factors. In order to be able to assess how realistic a post-modern rural scenario is, we have to study four major issues:

- 1. To what extent does the composition of rural societies encourage the emergence of postmodern values?*

Past research evidenced that materialistic attitude, which is the most typical characteristic of modernity, was less common in the younger and better educated population. However, it was

also found that financial capabilities, the level of economic development and individual wealth were interrelated in a special, non-linear way. (Inglehart 1997) We further assume that those who work in the services sector and have better access to IT equipment and extensive networks are more responsive to non-materialistic values. If the number of commuters is high or there are former urbanites in the neighbourhood, a post-modern way of thinking is more likely to evolve.

2. *To what extent do postmodern values already constitute part of rural societies?*

Literature reveals that the rejection of a materialistic approach, focus on self-expression rather than security and the priority of environmental and cultural considerations over materialistic ones are among the most important post-modern values. It follows that environmental awareness, respect for cultural heritage, the importance of identity and, as part of self-expression, attempt at direct participation in shaping the world are also among the characteristics of post-modernity. Increasing financial security over the course of modernisation and a new perspective to post-modernity have re-evaluated the socio-economic role of women. The acceptance of disorder replacing order and the rejection of the opinion that otherness is, by definition, bad and, hence, must be stopped lead to higher tolerance, and re-evaluate the way the aesthetic and the beautiful are perceived. Related to a rise in the importance of information, the proliferation of networks and, hence, the operation of communities strengthened by both virtual and real shared identity have also become a pre-condition for success in a post-modern era.

3. *How do rural societies respond to the arrival of urbanites cherishing postmodern values and a postmodern way of life? Can they embrace (internalise) the values that 'outsiders' represent and seek, or are conflicts inevitable?*

Conflicts based on differences between the values cherished by the urban population and those cherished by the rural population often stem from their different attitude to nature and cultural heritage, their differing ways of life, taste, manner of work, difference in the interpretation of personal relationships and unfamiliarity with traditions. The question is how these different value systems will affect each other in the course of first their encounter, then their coexistence, and whether a learning process based on on-going interactions evolves. The manner of coexistence and the ability, or rather, inability to co-operate also affect local power

relations. Our experience reveals that urban settlers with better education may soon become local leaders.

4. Can rural local residents detect and recognise new demand, and can they offer a selection of goods and services that accommodates such new demand?

Demand, which is strengthened by post-modern values and which affects the traditional functions of the provinces as well as new functions that can be created on the basis of the potential of the rural space, urges the manufacture of new goods and the provision of new services. New demand is characterised by a high environmental and cultural content and the strengthening of diversity and spiritualism. Typically, it relates to the production of healthy food, provision of housing for the new settlers, provision of tourist accommodation, catering facilities and programmes for tourists, the manufacture of unique artefacts, child- and eldercare and farming that helps maintain the environment and the landscape. Technology relies heavily on local knowledge based on familiarity with traditional techniques and technologies. However, reviving old techniques alone is not enough. Marketability requires that both goods and technologies be adjusted to current needs and capabilities. Such transformation means and pre-supposes innovation.

Research methods

In order to answer the above questions, we launched a research project last year. We studied the population in 6 Hungarian and 2 Transylvanian (Romanian) small regions. Small regions have ties with large regions. The sample that we had created consisted of 2 small regions in the Great Hungarian Plain, which has unique cultural roots, 2 from hilly Transdanubia following a West European path of development, 2 from the mountainous Highlands and 2 from Transylvania, which is considered to be at a lower level of economic development and where Hungarian cultural heritage is safeguarded and preserved by ethnic minority Hungarians. Within the large regions, of the two small regions, one is always more open than the other and handles some tourist traffic; whereas the other is a smaller and more traditional rural region where agriculture is dominant. We have selected small places in order to utilise the advantages arising from their transparency.

We are also planning to conduct a questionnaire survey in the course of the research. We have expecting a total of 440 surveys. The selection of respondents in the individual small regions is based on age, sex and the economic sector to which they belong.

Cluster of questions planned to be included in the questionnaire survey

1. Personal particulars: sex, age, economic sector, education, length of time the respondent has been a resident of the place for, identity, networks, availability of IT equipment
2. The presence of postmodern values: materialistic behaviour, environment awareness, tolerance, diversity, self-expression, attachment to community, participation, protection of cultural heritage, networking, identity, aesthetics
3. The social inclusion of newcomers, and the perception of their role: areas of activity, relationships, perception, acceptance of otherness, role, encouraging the influx of new settlers
4. Business potential in postmodern values: identifying new business opportunities, preferred and rejected ways of utilisation, involvement and personal participation
5. Ability to produce and sell postmodern goods: local conditions: knowledge, means of production (assets), labour and basic material; sales channels: at the producer's place, locally, at specialist shops, delivered to the homes of city-dwellers, in the city (at the local market), through the mediation of an integrator organisation and bulk buyers, via the Internet.

The survey will be supplemented with a series of photos, enabling respondents to rely on the following categories broken down by basic socio-geographic functions (Partzsch 1964) while selecting from among photos showing traditional, modern and post-modern elements:

1. The home (the natural setting/neighbourhood where the home is, the street, the house, garden, the room)
2. Work (industrial, agricultural, clerical)
3. Education (a room at a kindergarten and at a primary school, a library, learning methods)
4. Services used (shops (retail outlets), groceries, clothes shops, hospitals, old people's homes)
5. Transport, communication (means of transport/communication)
6. Leisure time activities (tourist destinations, accommodation, restaurants, sports, hobbies)

7. Living in a community (neighbours, friends, companies of friends, exchanging gifts)

Prologue

The survey will be conducted in spring 2009. I will be glad to update you on the results at the next RSA meeting in Pécs, which is quite close to one of the areas that our research will involve.

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