

A TIME OF CHANGE: THE MORAVIAN AND SILESIAN COUNTRYSIDE FROM THE ABOLITION OF SERVITUDE TO THE GREAT WAR

Résumé

The main aim of the book is to trace and evaluate the communication and organisational structures that had established the civil, modernising and national discourse in the rural milieu.

The book is the result of a three-year project called *The Transformation and Social Activation of the Rural Milieu in Moravia and Austrian Silesia in 1861-1914*, which received the support of the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic. In the project we sought the most comprehensive analysis of life in the rural milieu in ten judicial districts in Moravia and two in Austrian Silesia (alphabetically: the Jablunkov, Jaroslavice, Místek, Příbor, Skočov, Uherský Brod, Uherské Hradiště, Uničov, Valašské Meziříčí, Velké Meziříčí, Vsetín and Zábřeh districts). In each one we collected information for the seat of the district and primarily for three selected villages. The selected districts cover a range from fertile agricultural areas and hilly areas to submontane clearing agriculture with sheep farming; the selected villages varied both in size (the smallest had only 200 inhabitants, the largest five thousand more) and in the structure of the population's livelihood (in some, agriculture was completely predominant, from some a considerable part of the population went to work in the nearby factories, while some had important industrial enterprises directly in their land register).

We examined the issue of the countryside in the context of entire rural districts, as we see the seats of judicial and political districts as the key channels, as the “forerunners” bringing social change to villages. In these rural towns, local newspapers began to be published, they were the seats of the oldest economic cooperatives and credit unions, associational life was spreading from them, and they also housed the lowest instances of state authorities, which used their regulations to send out important modernisation impulses (education, infrastructure, etc.).

In the area of rural social history, we can mainly find records of the rural “notables” in the source base, while most of the rural society can often be learned about only indirectly. Everyday life is difficult to reconstruct mainly for the lower strata, as they are practically “invisible” in the sources – the vast majority of relevant texts (in newspapers, estates, memoirs, diaries, correspondence and period literature) are the creation of a very narrow strata of the population – of literarily active intelligentsia. For this reason, a more comprehensive research into the phenomenon of social change in the rural milieu is very difficult. Nevertheless, it was precisely the “local elites” who were the key factors of changes, the forerunners, inspirators.

By establishing the local government (after the prologue from 1850, now permanently from the early 1860s) even the rural milieu acquired the right and obligation

to manage its own affairs autonomously, to take initiative. For the rural milieu, where, until then, it was the manorial lords who had decided both about the life of the whole and of the individual, this change was more fundamental than for towns.

More educated individuals could be found more in the centres of judicial and political districts, or in larger villages connected to industry. The link between education and the speed and intensity of the spreading of “civic” culture is clear. In this respect, secondary school and mainly university graduates were a key asset for the rural milieu. During their studies in larger towns they acquired the habit of participating in associational life, reading periodicals and debating. They got to know the changing life of a modernising society, transferring their knowledge and habits to their sphere of activity.

Our probes have shown that, mainly due to the presence of state offices, schools and church authorities, in the small-town milieu (the seats of judicial districts) there were roughly three dozen men with higher education as early as the 1860s and 70s, and their numbers continued to grow slightly towards the last pre-war years. In villages there lived far fewer formally educated individuals; in small villages that had neither a parish office nor a school there might not have been even one. In at least medium-sized villages there was usually a parish priest and a teacher (alternatively, even two teachers, if there was a two-class school). Those better off were the more populous “industrial” villages. The representation of individuals who had completed higher education is, of course, only an imperfect criterion – even from the countryside there are known cases of peasant sons who, despite not getting as far as the school-leaving examination, had completed several years of grammar school; moreover, we must also take into consideration the factor of self-education, which could eliminate the handicap in formal education.

From the above-mentioned facts it follows that the local authorities in villages and small towns often had to face educational and knowledge deficits among their members. At the same time, the agenda that was being dealt with was growing rapidly and the communication with superior state and local authorities was becoming more frequent.

Analysis showed that in the rural milieu it was peasants or cottage owners who were elected to local governments in the largest numbers, which could hardly have been otherwise given the socio-professional structure of the population. Especially in small villages local governments could only consist of farmers. Usually, however, sole traders and craftsmen were also represented, albeit in smaller numbers. The election of the parish priest and teacher was no exception (but neither a rule). What was rarer was the membership of clerks (agricultural clerks or factory clerks if there was a factory in the municipal register).

In the rural town milieu, craftsmen and sole traders predominated in the local governments, and we could also regularly find a larger number of people with higher formal education – teachers and secondary school professors, clerks, members of the liberal professions (mostly doctors and pharmacists; advocates were more likely to operate in large towns), builders and, sometimes and somewhere, even clergymen. In

rural towns the representation of peasants in the municipal committee was neither unique nor exceptional – they were present in the socio-professional composition of the population.

One of the basic duties of the local authorities was managing the municipal property and setting municipal budgets. In the rural milieu the agendas of municipal meetings were very simple, with the individual items usually being recorded in a few sentences, while the whole meeting was recorded on a page or two. The annual budgets of villages tended to be in hundreds and thousands, in small towns or large villages in tens of thousands, and in district towns, in the last pre-war years, in hundreds of thousands.

Infrastructure was very limited in the countryside before the Great War – there was no central water supply or electricity network, though already before the First World War the central spaces (village square) of some villages were illuminated by electric lighting after dark, which was powered from small factory power plants. The most usual and common type of infrastructure construction, adopted by all at least medium-sized villages during the monitored period, was the construction or addition of a school building. Municipalities also spent money on the construction and repair of small bridge structures, the gravelling of roads, and, not infrequently, also the construction of a new cemetery corresponding to the state sanitation regulations. In the countryside, there was mostly no municipal house (the local government held meetings in an inn or school). For health reasons rural towns were already pressured by state authorities to build sanitary-compliant slaughterhouses and a modern water supply. What was very important for economic development was financial infrastructure – the birth of savings banks and credit unions in villages as small-credit lenders can hardly be overestimated.

The rural elites of the constitutional decades followed up on the old peasant “elites” of the serf era (and, in the form of the owner and management of manor farm estates, also on the patrimonial administration) and were gradually, especially in medium-sized and larger villages, enriched by representatives of educated strata or clerks (the speed and depth of this “enrichment” was based on the character of the village, and concerned mostly “industrial villages”). The continuity of the “elites” was also reflected in the continuity of disputes between the “peasant aristocracy” and cotters or landless people, which were transferred to the early days of the constitutional era from the serf era. Their detailed analysis would be very interesting, but we lack enough sources for it. What we do know, at least, is that in the 1860s or 1870s, disputes over the distribution of municipal land, from which the poor strata came up short, were peaking or gradually disappearing in various places.

Towards the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, ideological disputes and disputes over power and prestige often took the form of a clash between the conservative-clerical and progressive camp. In comparison with the urban milieu, national conflicts usually had a smaller or no connection to the local environment (here and there was the possibility of opposition to the Germanisation or, in the case of Cieszyn Silesia, even Czechisation or Polonisation activities in education); mostly they were

more an echo of land-wide/state-wide affairs reaching into the local discourse from outside through the actions of the media and nationalist agitators. Increasingly, even in the rural milieu, public meetings took place (national, church, etc.), demonstration exercises were conducted by members of Sokol, and agricultural experts and teachers held enlightenment lectures. “Delegations” from the countryside participated in major national events (such as the General Land Centennial Exhibition in Prague in 1891 or the Ethnographic Exhibition four years later). In the last pre-war decades, it was already quite common for rural towns and, to a slightly more limited extent, villages to put their signatures to large “national” resolutions and to contribute to “national” collections. In the countryside there were still cultural stereotypes and prejudices, such as the distrust of “city intelligence”, of “masters” and of Jews. Anti-Semitic sentiments may have intensified with a stronger representation of Jews in the local environment and their sometimes problematic economic activities, which were certainly viewed more sensitively by the local community than in the case of the Christian population.

Continued tension stemmed from the local authorities’ position in relation to the supervising political administration represented by district governor’s offices with the district governor at the head. District governors, in accordance with the Imperial and provincial legislation, issued decrees and regulations adapted to the local conditions, which, in many respects, had an impact on the exercise of the municipalities’ independent operation. Even though through today’s lens we see modernisation tendencies in the state’s given actions, which, in the long term, were to lead to an improvement in the lives of the residents of the rural and small-town society, in the monitored period the state generally legislatively defined the “ideal” state of education, social welfare, healthcare, public safety, transport and technical infrastructure, and civic amenities, but it left the funding of these costly realisations (school buildings, hospitals, social institutions, roads, sanitary infrastructure, etc.) to the local authorities. Regarding the implementation of the Imperial legislation into practice, the deputies of Land Diets elected for rural electorates were more sympathetic to the local conditions, being already aware of the state of the municipal finances as well as the mentality of the mayors, who approached indebteding the municipal budgets with loans from banks and monetary institutions with concern.

The given issue was most extensively addressed on the example of the shaping of the public health system in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Idyllic images of a healthy life in the countryside and small town, captured in romantically-tuned novels from the rural milieu or in the fine arts, do not correspond with the high mortality rates recorded in registers and with the reports of medical officers who, at the beginning of the last third of the 19th century, captured the rural population’s low standard of living and poor health. What gave us an idea of the period reality were mainly the materials submitted to the deputies of Land Diets during the long-running process of passing provincial health laws up to the Imperial Health Act of 1870. Not only Moravian deputies, but also members of the Silesian Land Diet were aware of the fact that it was beyond the financial capacity of municipalities to live up to the goals and public health tasks defined by the Imperial Act.

For Moravia and Austrian Silesia we have outlined the path of searching for a compromise between the top health administration officials and the Land Diets, which resulted in the adoption of provincial health laws for Moravia (1884) and Austrian Silesia (1896). The adoption was preceded by the creation of a system of provincial public health subsidies, which became a pillar of the organisation of health services in municipalities. The priority of public health was the introduction of comprehensive prevention and prophylactic measures to improve the health of the population. In practice, this was first and foremost about preventing the spread of infectious diseases, which, at a time of dismal sanitation in the countryside and small towns, was a task for decades. Our research has covered both the pitfalls faced by the health administration (particularly the indolence of the local authorities to build sanitary infrastructure) and the minor achievements that led to improvements in the health of the population on the eve of the Great War. We can talk about establishing hospitals only in small towns, as well as about establishing social care institutions for orphans, homeless people or the elderly. The successes of public health in the countryside include, for example, the construction of modern school buildings, the cleaning of public spaces, the distribution of safe water from walled wells, the gradual removal of dunghills from the yards of peasant homesteads, or the keeping of animals only in objects designed for that purpose, and not in the kitchen.

The public health system also included veterinary administration that aimed to eliminate infectious diseases in livestock breeding and to distribute safe meat and food to markets. Like municipal doctors, district veterinarians encountered numerous mental barriers in the villagers in their line of duty, resulting from the low educational level as well as the deep-rooted tradition of superstitions and rituals of folk medicine. Through enlightenment lectures, doctors and veterinarians influenced the membership of economic associations, whose members they had become beyond their official duties. Through enlightenment activity they were therefore, to some extent, involved in putting legal requirements into practice. Where there was no will to impose even a minimum of state requirements in the field of public health, and where the sanitation conditions could lead to public health threats not just to the local residents, there the district governor’s offices proceeded to penalise the local governments for failing to comply with the legislation. This was, however, merely a marginal solution used in the monitored regions only in isolated cases and always for the benefit of public health.

One of the basic modernisation pillars was education. Country teachers played a very important role. Their activities were far from over with their last lesson at school. They were also aware of their enlightenment role, trying to raise the level of life of the community in which they lived, for example by promoting innovation in agriculture. Teachers were present in economic, savings and credit union associations, contributing to newspapers and magazines. They were often municipal secretaries. In the rural milieu they functioned as the core bearers and promoters of the ideas of nationalism and political directions (for example progressivism), being the driving forces of National Unions (Národní jednota), Sokol, etc.

With the Education Act of 1869 and other laws and regulations, the state created more favourable conditions both for teachers (improvements in pay conditions and

education) and for school-age children (a denser network of schools, improving the condition of school buildings and their equipment). At the same time, it began to supervise school attendance much more strictly than in the past by instructing teachers to submit absentee records to the local school board. This led to a series of conflicts, as the lower classes mostly considered school and school attendance as unnecessary and a luxury, and even an attack on their standard of living – older children who could work and supplement the poor family budget were supposed to sit at school. However, by the end of the century at least a part of the rural population understood the benefits of education as a means to improve their living conditions. Globally, albeit with local exceptions, it can be said that the prestige of teachers in the rural milieu was rising, as the rural society valued more and more the practical benefit of even their extracurricular activities (in spreading knowledge usable in practice).

The root cause of the parish priest's disputes with the teacher often lay in that the "emancipating" teacher rejected the traditional rural social hierarchy, in which the parish priest was the undeniable leader of the community. These disputes did not have to occur, it depended on the nature of both – we know a number of cases where they got along without problems. Conflicts broke out especially in the case of teachers focused progressively, who rejected the authoritative-supervisory demeanor of the local church dignitaries. It cannot be said unequivocally that it was the teacher who would emerge victorious from the disputes. In clerical areas it could (and often used to) be the other way around. The institution of the church resented losing its monopoly on spreading information and interpreting it. Apart from religious education, churches had also lost control over the content of the curriculum.

In rural communities, even in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the clergyman still held a prominent role. Quite a large proportion of parish priests and chaplains understood their role identically to that of teachers, that is, not only towards pursuing their own profession (spiritual care), but also towards the cultural and often economic needs of their parishioners. Many of them operated in and co-founded associations or engaged in the local government. In the monitored period, however, the identity of priests was shaped by the complex strands of relations with their own parish offices, the priestly community, as well as the church hierarchy. The closer to the turn of the century, the more the tension in the clergy grew between trying to reflect the social changes in spiritual practice and resisting "modernising blunders".

The year 1848 also symbolically launched the process of the economic emancipation of peasants. The gains of freedom – both personal and proprietary – were essential to shaping a new type of peasant, both socially and thinking-wise. As František Kutnar aptly wrote, this peasant was, despite all limitations, self-confident, educated, economically more or less independent, and fully integrated into the process of developing a qualitatively new society. In the countryside the new type of relationship among people as well as the new cultural and economic reality was shaped, besides the local government, press and other types of associations, primarily by economic associations.

As early as November 1848, the newly established Ministry of Agriculture issued an instruction which launched the reorganisation of the existing provincial agricultural

associations, opening up the possibility of establishing their branches. Despite its initial ambition, the original intent was somewhat more modest. Nineteen subsidiary economic associations were permitted in Bohemia during the 1850s (in mainly Czech-speaking areas); in Moravia the first nine subsidiary economic associations were formed during the neo-absolutism period. The instigators of the formation of these associations were solely clerks, who, at the same time, represented no small part of the socio-professional, and otherwise rather varied, membership. However, the potential of these associations for activating the countryside was, given their honorary character, only limited.

After 1859, in the context of the liberalisation of the political situation, we see a noticeable increase in the establishment of this type of associations. Through these associations, peasants were fairly quickly becoming drawn into associational activity and, in a number of cases, they already formed not only a passive but also an active part of the membership. In 1861–1868 alone, two tens of subsidiary economic associations were founded in Moravia, both in small towns and in developed villages. It was precisely the densening network of economic associations that were based close to the rural man that made the modernisation of the rural milieu easier. From the late 1860s and 70s, the next phase saw the separation of subsidiary economic associations into independent economic unions, which was accompanied by a further numerical growth in economic companies. In the mid-1890s, all types of agricultural associations in Bohemia brought together over 108,000 members (of which over 63,000 were from Czech-speaking areas), and in Moravia almost 30,000 members (of which more than 22,000 were members of Czech-speaking associations).

The activities of economic associations were many-sided, often creating a multiplier effect, and the representatives of economic associations can be considered as the true carriers of the social and economic modernisation of the rural milieu. The core of associational activities can be observed in three continuous levels: 1. in the field of practical enlightenment presentations for peasants, talks, lectures or peasant exhibitions; 2. in the distribution of print media in the rural society and the creation of specialised libraries, and 3. in the promotion of economic education and individual farming (the purchase of both improved seed and breeding cattle) as well as joint agricultural and industrial enterprise (the creation of economic cooperatives, joint-stock companies, etc.). Nor can we omit the significant social impact of the existence of these associations. Besides the purely economic issue that formed the core of associational activity, we cannot ignore the promotion of school or the so-called defensive associations, especially from the late 1870s and 80s.

In the late 19th century, the activities of economic association officials contributed to a palpable transformation of the social climate among peasants, best exemplified by the massive development of the cooperative idea and the agrarian movement. Many of the more progressive peasants recognised that, in the new circumstances, it was necessary to seek the means to promote common interests, which also included the phenomenon of economic associations. Perhaps few other organisations could have more successfully ushered peasants into an era marked by civil liberties, self-governing ideas, but also free competition and the creation of a global market.

The basic starting point for the economic emancipation of peasants, as well as for their business intentions, was the ability to gather enough capital, or the possibility of gaining a favourable loan. Of the diverse range of monetary institutions established during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, those that were important for the countryside included mainly credit unions and peasant credit cooperatives. Savings banks had somewhat less influence, as they were typically town institutions with a focus on the middle strata. If the so-called civic credit unions were already established from the turn of the 1860s primarily for craftsmen and sole traders in the urban milieu, peasant credit unions appeared with only a slight delay from the mid-1860s. Only before the Cooperative Act was adopted in 1873, fifty-two peasant credit unions were established in Moravia alone. Significantly, these monetary institutions were created directly in villages, i.e. in the immediate vicinity of the peasants. The development of the credit union movement and, from the second half of the 1880s, the promotion of peasant credit cooperatives, the so-called raiffeisenkas, caused the agricultural countryside to gradually develop a network of financial institutions. The extremely popular raiffeisenkas were built on the principle of neighbourly reciprocity, on voluntary free labour. In the Moravian countryside the instigators of these popular institutions were often clergymen or teachers. Whether credit unions or peasant credit cooperatives, they were institutions with a far-reaching multiplier effect both in the countryside and in small towns. They not only provided finances for the economy, but also made it possible to co-finance a wide variety of cultural, school or national activities.

Associations (excluding economic associations) in the Moravian and Silesian countryside showed particularities resulting mainly from the demographic, social and professional composition of the population. Due to the smaller number of inhabitants in rural municipalities, the number of associations established here was lower than in towns, and the associations operating in villages often brought together the focus of variously specialised associations. The oldest associations established in the countryside as far back as the 1850s and 60s included charitable, reading, singing, enlightenment and religious associations. Another frequent type of associations were also veteran associations. From the 1860s onwards, firefighting associations, which were among the most numerous, began to form, and from the 1870s also gym associations (Sokol and Turner Unions [Turnerschafts]). In villages these associations often shaped the awareness of belonging to a higher national cultural whole – the Czech, Polish and German nation. This tendency was reinforced in the 1880s when new types of organisations of a community character, called defensive or protective (Schutzvereine), were born, in practice acting as nationally activating and supportive. Through a network of branches, they sought to develop nationally political and cultural life in nationally mixed areas and in regions that stood apart from political and cultural events and were handicapped both economically and socially. Several such organisations were active in Moravia and Silesia, the most significant being the National Union for East Moravia (Národní jednota pro východní Moravu; 1885), National Union for Southwestern Moravia (Národní jednota pro jihozápadní Moravu; 1886),

Bund der Deutschen Nordmährens (1886), Silesian Nordmark (1894) and Bund der Deutschen Südmährens (1899). As the industrialisation of Moravia and Silesia progressed, workers' associations also emerged in areas close to industrial centres. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, even in the countryside there occurred a political and social differentiation of associations, which became consciously connected to different socio-moral environments – mainly clerical, agrarian or socially democratic.

Political activation was a long-term process of expanding the participation of the population in public affairs and their identification with certain political ideas, parties or prominent figures. This was a gradual and long-term process, accelerated by waves of more intense social communication brought about in our environment especially by the revolutionary years of 1848/1849, the period 1868–1872 and the turn of the 20th century. Besides pursuing one's own economic interests and associating for this purpose, what contributed most to activating the countryside were elections, the most obvious form of “big politics” for the broad strata of the population. However, what slowed down the process of the politicisation of the countryside was the fact that the Moravian National Party (Moravská národní strana) remained the only representative of Czech national politics up until the 1880s. It was therefore not forced into a more intense election campaign in the countryside; the same was true in the German national camp as well.

What contributed greatly to the politicisation of the countryside was the agitation of the Czech national movement, which reached its peak around the turn of the 1870s. At that time, a number of occurrences or events took place that had, until then, unprecedentedly mobilised both the Czech and German public opinion. These included, among other things, manifestations accompanying the transport of the Crown Jewels in 1867, speeches in support of the state-wide declaration of the Czech deputies in 1868, the tabor movement, or the large-scale petition event in early 1873. As most of these political activities were based on local initiatives and not on political representation, the activation of the turn of the 1870s became the first major manifestation of the nascent civil society in Moravia. Civil, not only national – as we have already stated in the introduction, some of the tabor mass gatherings (tábory lidu) primarily concerned social and economic demands, while in a number of others such demands were articulated alongside those of a state-wide nature.

Another thing that contributed to the politicisation of the countryside was the diversification of the political scene that was taking place from the 1890s. Parties were formed defending the interests of various strata of the society, first and foremost workers, peasants and Catholics. As the competition on the political stage intensified, so did the battle for voters.

The politicisation of the countryside was essentially completed by the next great wave of public mobilisation in 1897–1907, particularly in connection with language regulations, the Hilsner Affair and the fight for universal suffrage. This wave was able to draw into public affairs those strata that had so far stayed away – the urban and small-town proletariat and the poor inhabitants of villages. These were the social groups that were the last to be hit while, at the same time, being unsettled by social

modernisation. In political and public life, members of these strata were oriented through naive notions and impulsive ideas; defining themselves in relation to the Jews or inhabitants of other nationalities was identity-forming for these strata, as it suited their need for a simple explanation of the world and society. Of course, this politicisation did not mean that the entire population lived primarily for politics or national discourse, but more that most people could no longer co-exist entirely outside of them. That, too, was a big change.

Thus, the countryside was more and more drawn into “big politics”, and with the expansion of suffrage, this politics also had to reflect the demands and needs of the rural milieu. Rural and agricultural issues appeared in the political programmes of practically all political parties operating in the Bohemian Lands. In the first decades of the gradually developing political life, the population of the rural areas of Moravia and Silesia was first represented by “all-national” political parties – the National Party in Moravia, the German Liberal Party, or the representatives of the Polish Catholics and Protestants. From the early 1880s, the approaches of the individual parties began to differentiate, and detailed programmes aimed at the rural population were developed, more or less in agreement in the description of the manifestations of the economic crisis plaguing the Czech agriculture until as late as 1896, but different in the proposals to moderate or even eliminate it. There was a general consensus among the parties to support self-help activities, which were to be subsidised by the state and provincial authorities. Most parties were in favour of creating a specific legal environment to protect farmers from the downsides of the market economy. Apart from the Old Czechs (*staročechi*), the other parties did not shy away from the idea of a land reform to divide manor farm estates among peasant farmers. However, the specific shape of the reform differed from party to party. The most detailed programmes were presented to the Moravian and Silesian peasants by the Young Czechs (*mladočechi*; members of the People’s Party), agrarians, supporters of clericalism, German nationalists and radicals, who concentrated on the middle agricultural stratum. With the progressing industrialisation of the Bohemian Lands and expansion of suffrage, the Social Democrats turned to the workers, often living in the countryside near industrial centres, smallholders and the agricultural poor. The results of the last Imperial and provincial elections in the period before the First World War showed that in rural areas political parties with political programmes leaning on an elaborate network of associational, cooperative, interest and trade union organisations were the most successful. In the Bohemian environment, they were mainly agrarians, who successfully focused on rich and moderately wealthy peasants. In some areas with an increased religiosity of the population, clerical parties successfully competed with them, while in regions close to industrial centres the agrarians’ competitors were the Social Democrats.

The German policy targeting the rural population differed from the Bohemian one by the fact that the establishment of the Agrarian Party did not take place until 1914, with the representatives of the peasantry being active in the existing political parties until then, mainly the German People’s Party (*Deutsche Volkspartei*) and the German Radical Party (*Deutschradikale Partei*). The German parties argued primarily

over the reform of the tax system and the extent of the need for state interventions in agriculture, with the Liberals being in favour of a smaller scale of interventions, while the Radicals would have liked to burden the state much more heavily, and the Social Democrats even raised the subject of a revolutionary transformation of the economic system.

In the Polish areas of Silesia, the success of the individual political parties depended primarily on the small-scale work in school, economic and cultural associations, or the popularity of the party press.

The phenomenon of social change brought secularisation even to the countryside; most visibly it was the church (primarily Catholic) that was losing its position in the public sphere. The earlier sovereign fields of activity – education, healthcare or social welfare – were gradually being removed from the remit of the church and taken on by secular organisations, whether run by the state, provinces or municipalities. Industrialisation, the shift of the population from the countryside to larger towns and political democratisation were all fundamental circumstances that reshaped the coordinates of political, social and cultural life. To the detriment of the Catholic Church, they were perhaps most significantly rearranged by the liberal lawmaking in the late 1860s. While the liberal, progressive or social-democratic attitudes remained a matter of the urban milieu, due to the influence of the press and some individuals, such as mainly teachers, from the late 19th century they penetrated even into the countryside.

In the monitored period, however, the Moravian and Silesian countryside cannot be described as secularised in the full meaning of the word. Undoubtedly the external political and social framework became secularised – in the form of a liberal constitution, civil law, religious tolerance, and political and opinion pluralism. By contrast, the level of piousness that is crucial to assessing the level of secularisation is difficult to cover with the current state of research. Modern times deepened the feelings of discrepancy between faith, especially Catholic, and scientific knowledge, based on rational and empirical research. However, for the majority of the population, especially rural, this discrepancy did not mean a fatal dilemma, and the two dimensions were thus able to co-exist both in the social lives and minds of individuals. Religion, better than modern rationality, helped to fulfil the need for transcendence, order and emotional perception of the world, resonating with tradition and clearly defined social roles. In turn, modern rationalism and the application of scientific knowledge in a number of spheres of human activity provided practical benefits in terms of improving the standard of living. The privatisation of faith and reduction of religious life to the routine exercise of religious practices was yet to become as widespread in the countryside as it had in towns. In the countryside, infidelity still remained a rare occurrence. Yet the process, during which the sacral, magical dimension of the Catholic Church was being weakened and the secular dimension was being strengthened, was already progressing. This fact can perhaps best be documented by the involvement of Catholics in political and associational life, as well as by the relations between village communities and the parish office, and the first reactions to anti-clericalism in the countryside. In this respect, the turn of the 20th century was crucial.

The preserved archive materials regarding the Protestant milieu in Wallachia have proven that both the Augsburg and Helvetic Churches had a similar stance to modernisation and the associated secularisation and privatisation of life to the Catholic Church.

More comprehensive research into the phenomenon of social change in the rural milieu of the 19th century is, and always will be, difficult, primarily because of the great degree of anonymity of the local society in sources. It cannot, however, be resigned on. We believe that similar research would be needed for the type-diverse areas of Bohemia.

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