

Olga Supek-Zupan

OUTLINE OF A RESEARCH IN A CROATIAN VILLAGE

Summary

This article represents a theoretical and methodological outline of a research undertaken in a village about thirty kilometers southwest of Zagreb. The village is given the pseudonym »Vinogorje«. The major task of the research is to identify different types of exchange that go on within the village, and between the village and the larger society. The concept of »exchange« is taken in both its socio-economic and cultural-symbolic aspects. Since the research has not been completed yet, the present outline represents an »unfinished product«, i. e., it is neither a pure theoretical construct without concrete ties with the reality to be investigated, nor a complete, thought-out interpretation of a facet of contemporary everyday life. It reflects the present stage of the author's experience, generated through a continuous alternation between the phases of empirical research and reflection.

In an attempt to contribute toward the clarification of the relationship between the socio-economic and the symbolic in culture, the author grounds her project on two hypotheses:

1. that the cultural »superstructure« is not just a reflection of »infrastructure«, and that this relative independence makes cultural diversification possible;
2. that the cultural expression of a local community in the moment of investigation is a synthesis of the synchronic and the diachronic; in other words, it is the synthesis of the place, role, and meaning which the locality assumes within larger society, and the historical and cultural heritage — local as well as general.

In accordance with the above hypotheses, the research techniques include both observation of contemporary processes (by the method of participant observation among others) and historical research (in the archives and of already published sources).

Two methodological principles have been respected as much as possible: the distinction between the subject and the object of the research has been diminished, and the illusion about the »objectivity« of the author's interpretation has been abolished. The first is realized through the more or less egalitarian interview situations where the questioning in fact turns into an exchange of experience and views between the researcher and the villager. Also, the research results will be accessible to the villagers (at least to part of them) for criticism. The second is achieved by an explicit exposition of the author's own value orientation and position (so that her interpretation can be put in the proper context), and by an engaged stand toward the cultural phenomena under consideration and criticism of their negative aspects.

Nacrt istraživanja jednog prigorskog sela

The analysis of different types of exchange is undertaken on two levels: the socio-economic and the symbolic, though in reality, of course, in all spheres of human existence these two aspects are inseparable.

The data that have been gathered up to the present are subdivided into four major categories: types of economic relations, groups of people that cooperate in work and exchange labor and services, cases of symbolic behavior and exchange and value statements and orientations. The data are not presented extensively in this article. Rather, the author gives a rough account of what kind of data she has collected in each of the four categories, and provides some typical examples.

The first category discusses cases of cash and non-cash, market and socialist types of exchange and their importance, indicating that some elements of all three economic systems (natural, market and socialist) co-exist in the village today.

The second category includes information on kinship groups, (particularly those which make up work teams), relations between neighbors, and the hamlet and village identity.

Next group consists of data on phenomena which seem to have a more expressed symbolic component, which manifest the village as a social world, past and present, through unique cultural forms and contents. This group is subdivided further into: generalized reciprocity (the flow of presents and services) and ritualized behavior (individual and collective, from personal charms to church ceremonies and the village Mardigras events).

Finally, the last group of data discusses dominant values (normative and actual) as expressed by the villagers and as observed by the author.