

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF SOCIETY'S RENEWAL



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INTRODUCTION

Renewal of society is a crucial point of Latvian reality because of depopulation, territorial polarization and shrinking processes during last decades. Therefore, this is the main issue of the project of the National Research Programme for the period 2014 – 2017. 5.2.4. "Renewal of society through reducing the risk of depopulation, through demographic development and strengthening links with the diaspora for the transformation of the Latvian economy".

The term "renewal of society" asks for detailed explanation and interpretation as it is a relatively wide and unclear subject of theoretical and empirical analysis. The presentation includes main theoretical concepts about the term and stresses social aspects of society's renewal process in Latvia.

METHODS

Literature studies, document analysis, observation, analysis of interviews.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Renewal –

1) extending the period that has been effective or useful. The act of extending the period of time when something is effective or valid; the state of being made new, fresh, or strong again (An Encyclopedia Britannica., 2013);

2) recreation of something that has been lost. It is important because sometimes change should involve recovering or recreation of the past. The most important thing is to help people cope with current challenges (Runciman, 2012). The question is – to what extent consider past? What is realistic to recreate?

Theoretically and practically, there are two main approaches to renewal of the society: demographic renewal (establishing population amount and structure) and social renewal (increasing of human and social capital, promoting of cooperation, establishing of culture activities etc.).

The 'social question' is not something which has suddenly appeared at this stage of human evolution and which can be resolved by a few individuals or by some parliamentary body, and stay resolved. It is an integral part of modern civilization which has come to stay, and as such will have to be resolved anew for each moment in the world's historical development. Humanity has now entered into a phase in which social institutions constantly produce anti-social tendencies. These tendencies must be overcome each time. Just as a satiated organism experiences hunger again after a period of time, so the social organism passes from order to disorder. A food which permanently stills hunger does not exist; neither does a universal social panacea (Steiner, 2000).

The basic values of society's renewal are free cultural activities, individual responsibility and freedom to carry out individual aims: *"..the only way to renewal, to a really healthy economy and healthy system of justice, is to create free space for the good impulses and aspirations living in humans to come to the surface"* (Steiner R., 2000, Williams N., 2008, Matherne B., 2005 at al.)

Renewal of society includes creation of new social practices that inspire and maintain individual and collective ability to cope with their problems. It includes developing the capacities of what will be most needed in society and the new economy — creativity, adaptability, critical thinking and the ability to communicate and collaborate (Institute for Social Renewal, 2013).

The renewal of society is also linked with the cultural environment preservation and development as one of its affecting dimensions. Cultural environment includes both tangible and intangible cultural phenomena, as well as social aspects. Cultural activities directly affecting public participation, cooperation between the population, the development of creativity, promote inclusive society, health and society renewal. Cultural heritage is environmentally creative (Concept study..., 2012),

The analysis of empirical materials (collected by Zenija Kruzmetra and Dina Bite, 2015) show that, hypothetically, cultural activities play the main role in the processes of renewal of Latvian society, especially in places and territories where other resources (employment, access to different services) are lower. Creation of culture is a certain way of surviving through which people quite often develop their small entrepreneurship (revitalizing of old traditions, celebration, teaching of new skills). The supply of free time activities is very wide and massive in nowadays Latvia. That is not the question of free will; they are forced to do it. Despite the fact, it can bring new social practices, social and economic innovations and cooperation forms in future.

Considering real situation when regions are losing population, there are some local governments that have changed their focus from quantitative increase of the population to increase in the quality (skills, human capital), which is good for the cultural development and local government's appreciation of population.

Local governments are changing their relations with local inhabitants – most of local people are not just taxpayers, not only goods/money producers or impersonal fillers, but a creative resource for innovative actions playing important role in sustainable development.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1) Renewal of society has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions that include demographic solutions and recognizing of social and cultural aspects;
- 2) Considering ideas of endogenous development, each society must create its own strategy for renewal and for coping with existing challenges;
- 3) Social and cultural aspects are more sustainable in long term perspective as they come from "bottom-up";
- 4) For Latvia, the very visible and stressed resource are cultural activities, that is a chance to develop new social and economical forms. Cultural activities generated and implemented in rural areas are an extremely important resource for population maintaining and attraction, increasing of social capital and, as a result, renewal of society. The open question is – what balance will be found between social, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions?