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Quality of Life in the Perspective of Agricultural Sociology: the Case of Ukraine

The fundamental economic and social changes have been taking place across the entire post-communist region, the changes in the structure of demand having particularly affected the local agricultural production. Sociology of agriculture begins from the premise that the causes of the most of social changes in rural Ukraine lie in the structural transformations. In my presentation I will concentrate on the origins of "sociology of agriculture" in relation to quality of life concept and work-related life satisfaction studies.

This may not seem exceptional, but Ukrainian sociologists have paid little attention to rural sociology in general and quality of life researches are not numerous so far. The agricultural production is mostly studied from the perspective of political, economic and agrarian reform with the main focus on the institutional change (as for example, A. Shatokhin, V. Tarasenko, J. Allina-Pisano) and analysis grounded in general on the economic and statistical data.

Different aspects of quality of life are presented in the works of present-day Ukrainian researchers, such as E. Golovakha, N. Panina, V. Pilipenko, I. Pribitkova, M. Kizim, who have contributed to discussion of social implications of the economic transition in Ukraine. The most recent research of the quality of life in Ukraine by the group of researchers under the leadership of V. Bakirov and V. Nikolayevskiy have underlined the close relations between the values of the current way of living and expected living standards in the future. The rural population is presented in the sample, and work-related aspects of quality of life are also analyzed. This project has been completed in the cooperation with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. It has not focused on separate sphere or industry.

The most rational way of measuring quality of life in research of specific social group in relation to occupation and industry is by means of methodology designed to analyse social and cultural characteristics of the group. In the case of QoL, the research on the relation to agricultural occupation domains, the indicators should be designed according to the following principles:

1. They should extend the area of enquiry from original question (incorporating, for example, the non-agricultural aspects of the rural economy and society) in order to fit into the mainstream of rural-sociological enquiry.
2. They should be based on the combined analysis of objective processes and conditions with subjective perceptions of the quality of life.
3. Historical dimension of the group: experience should be taken into consideration, as well, as perceptions for the future, especially its social functions and stratification differences.

This represents not merely a branch of occupational sociology, but a new approach to rural sociology and quality of life research. Thus although the sociology of agriculture offers no starting for the theory to resolve the problems confronting sociology (including rural sociology) today, it does address important substantive and theoretical issues.

I work over the research concerning the perceptions of the QoL within the group of young agricultural professionals. As I know it, there is no comparable research on either the post-communist states on the interface of between the change in the socioeconomic opportunity structure, individual career choices in favour of agricultural occupation, and perceptions of the quality of life. My research is expected to contribute to the structuration approach towards the current change in social structures of the Ukrainian society. Because of its case-study nature, previously understudied social groups could be investigated.