

Global embedding as a response to socio-spatial marginality – Entrepreneurial strategies and the perceptions of well-being in the declining rural spaces of Hungary

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The integration of emerging (post-transition) economies into the global/European division of labour along with the shrinking systems of collective consumption run by the nation-states enhanced socio-spatial inequalities at European scale and also within national boundaries in East and Central Europe. The recent crisis highlighted the vulnerability of new market economies and reinforced trends towards polarisation that manifested *inter alia* as the marginalization of various social groups through labour, gender and ethnic relations and the production of marginal(ized) spaces.

In our paper, we take a relational view of marginalization. On the one hand, we consider it as the “product” of institutional practices and underlying discourses that marginalize social practices, identities and their spaces outside the realm of Neoliberal capitalism; on the other hand, we interpret it as a weak bargaining power in the market processes and a limited access to public goods provided by the shrinking state that reproduce poverty – making it increasingly segmented and exclusionary. To reveal the complexity and the multiscale nature of social relations that produce socio-spatial marginality, we focus on the strategies and everyday practices of local actors in declining rural spaces in Hungary, primarily, on those of local entrepreneurs. In our analysis, we shall reveal the diversity of responses (by size, sector, historical trajectories, etc.), the layers of their relations linked to various scales, and the ways they exploit local resources to tackle marginality.

We shall argue for that, i) the various forms of social marginality produced by the institutional practices of Neoliberal capitalism are interlinked, reinforce each others and perpetuate social and economic decline of the studied rural spaces; ii) the group of local agents is strongly polarized in terms of financial, relational capital and knowledge/skills that enables them to respond to their marginal status; thus, not all of them are powerless; iii) the latter group combine various local and networked assets in tackling marginality (e.g. by entering national/global markets), by which, they produce new marginalities locally. iv) The above processes are reflected by the perceptions of being “well” or being “marginal” by the residents that gives an into the social construction of marginality.

The analysis rests on series of empirical studies i) focused on responses to perceived marginality in four declining rural regions in Hungary (2013; 78 local interviews); ii) and on revealing the conditions of subjective well-being through a questionnaire survey (4000) in rural areas hit by a “well-being deficit” chosen through a two-step multidimensional quantitative analysis.