

# **Legacies and Green Innovations of Post-socialist Demos in Slovakia**

Juraj Buzalka, Professor of Social Anthropology, Comenius  
University in Bratislava, Slovakia

# Content

- Legacies of Transformations
- Alternative Innovations
- Sustainable European Demos
- Example of social change via wine transformation

# Legacies of Transformations

- Based on the study of postsocialist transformation in Slovakia, but implications have been wider for the postsocialist EU
- The reactionary populists have built upon the legacies of extensive and ecologically harmful state-socialist industrialization,
- Populists have been questioning the ecological development alternatives, led by the liberal urban elites and primarily associated with the EU project
- The reform projects since 1989 have been mostly focusing on the urban setting while the country transformation has been left to be dominated by the large-scale industrial agriculture, inherited from state-socialism – currently run by the oligarchy.
- The anti-green hybrid war: one of the most emblematic operations of hybrid war before elections of 2023 in Slovakia has been concerned with brown bear.
- The plot concerned the security close to most common human settlements in the country, the rural dwellings. The questioning of official state-sponsored and established protection of the environment has been a part of the hoax. It also included the populist attack on ‘the dictate of Brussels’ and supposed distance of the European Commission from the needs of simple rural people.
- the result: progressive EU sponsored green transformation has been considered particularly alien by the bulk of overwhelmingly rural Slovaks, supporting anti-EU populists

# Alternative Innovations

- The ongoing transformation to the carbon neutral Europe allows to rethink the popular pattern of postsocialist development
- from the top-down adoption of Western-originated projects towards the search of autochthonous tradition of eco-social transformation
- the central popular idea of rural development, based on the autochthonous tradition of small-scale agrarian modernization and ecological movements of late state-socialism against the communist state.
- The countryside is capable of progressive change, if mobilizations and policies adequately address the bulk of citizens of post-socialist European Union who believe in, feel the value, and identify with the country
- How to save the liberal democracy vis-à-vis the populist reactionary hijacking of the state; the only possibility of progressive change by originating it in the rural setting.
- Need for drafting of policies strengthening the resilience capacities in the field of diversity and food security of Slovakia; countryside has been dominated by the oligarchy

# Sustainable Demos

- The fit with social and cultural parameters of small-scale responsible production can facilitate social change
- The empowering of post-peasants via rural transformation might bring a decline in support of reactionary populism
- if the people of the country are represented by the reformers,
- if they are provided with livelihood opportunities in the setting they value and consider their own,
- and if 'post-peasants' are incorporated into the political vision for a green future.
- These conditions have not been fulfilled yet
- The example of possible progressive development: small-scale wine making analyzed as the process of contextual social and cultural production of meaning and community.
- Wine connects diverse people with the past and projects the future, based on the idealized sustainable independence of a peasant.

# Wine and Democracy - the pilot case

- the approaches from social anthropology and rural economy as a representative study of regional development and democratic emancipation.
- brings to light the idea of progressive development of East Central Europe (ECE) in the part of a society commonly associated with socio-economic underdevelopment and the success of reactionary populism.
- By studying and collaborating with self-organized small-scale wine makers across Slovakia, the research explains the potential for the participatory policy building within the transformation towards carbon-neutral Europe.
- the undiscovered social and cultural value of small-scale wine making and similar kinds of insufficiently supported agricultural production for the development and emancipation of the post socialist countryside.
- helps to express the needs of people, frequently addressed by the populists, within the framework of sustainable development and consumption: wine making has valued the opposite of the industrial production - the local and the authentic.
- The social and cultural quality of wine serves for defining the case for a progressive transformation under the EU green deal because the major segments of Slovak society transformed from the peasant to the late industrial settings by reproducing and valuing ideas and practices of small-scale, localized, independent livelihood despite and along with the industrial food chain, communist or capitalist