

# One Village, One Family: Social Cohesion in Rural Slovakia

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## Abstract

This article is focused on mechanisms associated with the social cohesion of Roman-Catholics in rural Slovakia. The article presents an analysis of ethnographic data gathered during field research in a municipality situated in the White Carpathian mountains between June 2017 and July 2019. The data was collected from 38 residents of the selected denomination in semi-structured interviews. The primary aim of the article is to identify factors that help maintain social cohesion and factors that undermine it in the specific Slovak rural community. The data analysis was based on the grounded theory method and was performed with the aid of Atlas.ti. It revealed that the help of friends, family, and neighbours, as well as family gatherings, religious tolerance and baptism are factors that contribute to the maintenance of social cohesion. Factors that undermine social cohesion are divorces, the mobility of local inhabitants, ongoing industrialization, consumerism, and the transformation of traditions.

## Keywords

social cohesion, ethnography, rural Slovakia, religion, cooperation

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## Introduction

In the view of Rhys Andrews, the historical, socio-economic and population changes and movements that have occurred in rural areas over the past century have posed a serious challenge to the vitality and cohesion of rural communities (Andrews 2011: 535, also Andrews 2015; Andrews – Jilke – Van de Walle 2014; Fraser et al. 2005; Nelson 1999; Torsello 2005). Although Andrews refers to developments in rural England, similar trends can be observed in rural parts of Europe in general and in Slovakia in particular, in which the social cohesion of rural communities is undermined by various factors, including labor migration, changes in kinship relations, the transformation of subsistence strategies and of traditions, and the arrival of new residents (Rochovská – Majo – Káčerová 2014; Rochovská – Majo 2013; Gajdoš – Pašiak 1995; 2008; Ondrejko – Majerčíková 2006). However, in the life of rural communities, there are not only factors that undermine social cohesion, but also factors that are indicators of social cohesion and that support social cohesion, including cooperation with family and kin and with friends and neighbors, meetings with friends and family, community services, organizing social and cultural events, and spending leisure time together (Avery – Hermsen – Kuhl 2021; Schiefer – van der Noll 2017).

Religion and religious rituals are strong factors that indicate and promote social cohesion (Bahna – Talmont-Kaminski 2022; Sosis 2003; Sosis – Ruffle 2003). In classical works of sociology and sociocultural anthropology (e.g., Durkheim 1964 [1912]; Malinowski 1954; Turner 1969; Rappaport 1999) the understanding of the functions of religion and ritual differ in many aspects. However, they agree that religion and ritual promote prosociality, moral behavior, and a willingness to help or sacrifice for the benefit of others. They also advocate the idea that religion and collective rituals contribute to maintaining group cohesion. This notion is reflected in contemporary social science research in general, which may stem from the influence of the above-mentioned authors, and from interest in issues related to religion and cooperation. Shared religious activities, rituals, and religious social norms strengthen the social cohesion of the group that shares them and are an effective tool in promoting intra-group solidarity and cooperation (Henrich – Henrich 2007; Norenzayan 2013; Richerson 2013).

Following recent research on social cohesion, the primary aim of this article is to identify factors that help maintain and undermine social cohesion in a specific rural community in Slovakia (e.g., Andrews 2011; 2015; Andrews – Jilke – Van de Walle 2014; Avery – Hermsen – Kuhl 2021; Friedkin 2004; Schiefer – van der Noll 2017). Social cohesion is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with multiple-indicators (Friedkin 2004). However, based

on an extensive literature review of research on social cohesion, Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) identified three essential features of social cohesion, which will constitute a loose framework for this analysis. The first is the quality of social relations, the second is the identification with a social entity, and the third is the orientation towards the common good. Each of the three essential qualities includes other properties (Schiefer – van der Noll 2017: 585).

## Field research

The ethnographic field research was conducted in the municipality of Nová Bošáca in western Slovakia. It lies near the border with the Czech Republic in the Považie region of the district of Nové Mesto nad Váhom, in the upper part of the Bošáca valley (Kravarčík 2010). Nová Bošáca was founded in 1950 by separating the dispersed settlements from the Bošáca municipality. Before 1950, the dispersed settlements were referred to as *Bošácke kopanice* (dispersed settlements of Bošáca) with the central part called Predbošáčka. The main reason for the establishment of the *kopanice* (dispersed settlements) in the 17th century was the lack of agricultural land (Kukuča – Klement 2017; Kukuča 2016; Kravarčík 2010; Kravarčík et al. 2000; Ochodnický – Dzurák 1994).

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, *kopanice* had already grown so large that in certain years, their population exceeded the population of Bošáca, under whose administration they belonged. During this time, the idea of separating Predbošáčka from Bošáca began to spread among the inhabitants (Ibid.). The first efforts to create Nová Bošáca as an independent municipality date back to the 1920s. However, the municipality was not officially established until July 1, 1950. In the following years, it was necessary to build the basic infrastructure.

As far back as the seventeenth century, the dispersed settlements had a permanent character, which means that the inhabitants mostly lived there all year long. Since the end of the twentieth century, many inhabitants have sold their properties, which have been converted by their new owners into recreational facilities such as cottages and chalets. The interaction between the newcomers and the local inhabitants has produced several interesting social phenomena that are linked to the research of social cohesion (Uhrin – Bužeková 2022), such as the evaluation of the credibility and trustworthiness of the newcomers by the local inhabitants.

At present, the village has 1,150 inhabitants, of whom approximately 800 are Roman Catholics and 250 are of the Lutheran faith, i.e., members of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia. The predomi-

nance of Roman Catholic inhabitants has been prevalent since the establishment of *kopanice*. Until 1968, the Roman Catholic inhabitants of Nová Bošáca attended the Roman Catholic Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in the village of Bošáca. In 1968, planning and preparation for the construction of a new church began in Nová Bošáca. The building of the Church of Saint Cyril and Methodius was completed in 1971. In Nová Bošáca, there is no Lutheran church. Lutherans attend church services in the neighboring village of Zemianske Podhradie, which is approximately 5 kilometers from Nová Bošáca (Ochodnický – Dzurák 1994; Kravarčík et al. 2000; Kukuča 2016).

Since the second half of the seventeenth century, the mode of subsistence has been characterized by agricultural activities (Kukuča 2016; Kravarčík et al. 2000; Ochodnický – Dzurák 1994). In particular, the cultivation of less demanding crops and vegetables (rye, wheat, oats, barley, millet, potatoes, cabbage, legumes, vegetables, clover, and alfalfa for cattle) and fruit trees (plums, apples, pears, cherries, and nuts). Cattle, goats, sheep, and horses were the dominant livestock. Nowadays, some inhabitants keep animals, from chickens and geese, to cattle, goats, sheep, and horses. Some inhabitants work at the primary school, the kindergarten, the municipal office, and the house of social services, which was established in 1994. At present, the majority of working-age inhabitants commute to work in Trenčín, which is 34 kilometers from Nová Bošáca, or to Nové Mesto nad Váhom, which is 18 kilometers away. Food processing, engineering, and heavy industry enterprises are located in those cities. Children also commute, as there is no secondary school in the municipality.

## Research methods and data collection

The fieldwork was conducted in Nová Bošáca between June 2017 and July 2019. There were several research stays in the village, the length of which ranged from days to months. The data collection methods were participant observation and ethnographic interviews, which are considered standard methods in ethnological and anthropological field research (Spradley 1979; 1980). The ethnographic data were collected during longitudinal ethnographic research focused on the relationships between religion, kinship, and cooperation, in which 38 residents of Nová Bošáca participated. The selection of informants was random, using the snowball sampling method, based on asking a few key informants to recommend someone they know who could be interviewed (Bernard 2006: 192–193). These ethnographic data were processed using standard domain analysis methods, and the results were published in several articles (Uhrin – Bužeková 2022; Uhrin 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022a; 2022b). The qualitative data analysis in Atlas.ti

was subsequently performed on the sample, selected according to the criteria of primary ethnographic research described above. This means there was already an existing corpus of previously recorded and transcribed ethnographic interviews available, which we then subjected to analysis.

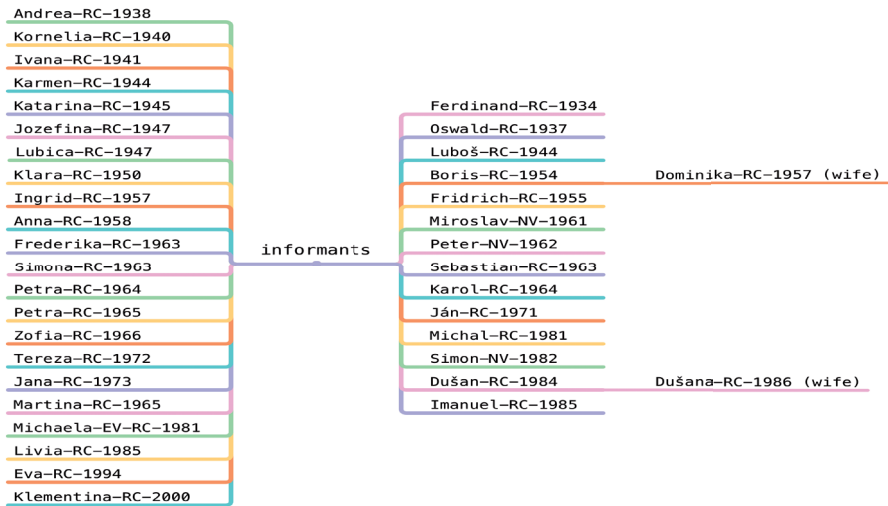


Figure 1 Research sample (n = 38). Source: Authors' own data.

All of the research participants declared themselves Roman Catholics. Of this number, 25 were women and 13 were men (see Figure 1). Only three men in the research sample considered themselves “non-practicing Catholics”. From an emic perspective, “non-practicing Catholics” can be characterized as persons who received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and church marriage, but do not actively participate in the religious life of the community or collective rituals such as Sunday services. All three informants were married to women of the Roman Catholic faith. None of these men declared themselves to be non-believers. The age of informants ranged from 30 to 80 years. When quoted, the following code was used to identify the informants: pseudonym-denomination-birthdate (e.g., Dominika-RC-1957).

With regard to research ethics, this study followed the basic principles of anthropological research, as defined by the American Anthropological Association and the Code of Ethics of the Ethnographic Society of Slovakia (Etický kódex 2016; Principles 2012). It was conducted with the approval of the local municipal authorities. All informants who participated in the study gave their consent. Having been apprised of the objectives, nature, and character of the research, they took part voluntarily.

## Data analysis

The data analysis is based on the principles of the grounded theory method (Strauss – Corbinová 1999; Kusá 2021). Firstly, each of the 38 audio recordings was transcribed manually and then imported to Atlas.ti Mobile 1.8 and coded there.<sup>1</sup>

The coding was done in three steps. Initially, during the first revision of all transcripts (n = 38), the *open coding* was done. This consisted of assigning a particular code (i.e., analytical category) to the partial sections of the text, which was based on semantic similarity between the quotations. The basic unit of analysis was set to one paragraph (i.e., one replica of the informant). In this way, a “coding frame” containing 18 codes related to 482 quotations was created. This coding frame was gradually refined and updated to reflect the contents of quotations.

The next step was *axial coding*. This step consisted of establishing logical connections between the codes. For this purpose, a model of the grounded theory paradigm was constructed in the form of a semantic network. This model helped to interpret the quotations because it displayed the semantic relations between partial codes. Only the codes with a groundedness of 5 or more were considered relevant and included in the model.

Finally, a codebook containing quotations from all the coded documents was exported to the desktop version of Atlas.ti 9 EDU, and there the *selective coding* was completed by automatically arranging the codes according to their “groundedness”. The groundedness reflects the number of quotations linked to a particular code. For the subsequent data interpretation, only the code with the highest groundedness was selected, because it was directly related to the objective of this article.

In the paper, we do not work with the density of codes but with their groundedness. We chose this approach because this indicator gives a better indication of the content of the analysed narratives. We did not examine the interconnectedness of the variables. Our aim was to illustrate with the transcripts of the text analysis which information from the dataset was the most significant and meaningful. The structure of the following section of the text reflects the results of the coding, where the most embedded codes are used as titles of the subsections.

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1 Analysis in Atlas.ti and coding was carried out by author Miroslav Horák. Ethnographic research was conducted by author Michal Uhrin as part of his research for his dissertation thesis. The interpretation of the results of the analysis and the writing of the article were done with the mutual and equal cooperation of both authors.

## Results

This section contains the interpretation of quotations from the transcripts of interviews with research participants. The interpretation is derived from the model of grounded theory paradigm (see Figure 2). The text in square brackets that is sometimes included in the interpretation was added by the authors.

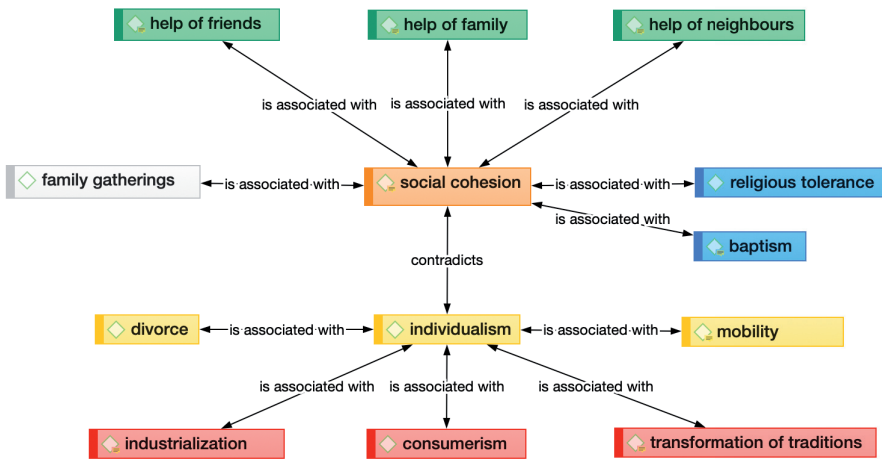


Figure 2 Model of the grounded theory paradigm. Source: Authors' own data.

The data analysis demonstrated that social cohesion in the Catholic group in the village is fostered by: cooperation with family and kin (the help of family), cooperation with friends (the help of friends), cooperation with neighbors (the help of neighbors), and meeting with friends and family (family gatherings). Each of these categories contains a number of activities that may or may not be directly related to religion. Another identified factors were religious tolerance and baptism, which are part of religious life and promote intra group cooperation and social cohesion. On the other hand, as shown in the semantic network, the research participants considered individualism to be the main factor undermining social cohesion, with which they further associated divorce, mobility, industrialization, consumerism, and the transformation of traditions. In the following text, we will first focus on the categories that promote social cohesion and then on those that undermine it.

## Factors supporting social cohesion

An important aspect contributing to the social cohesion represent the meetings of friends and family (family gatherings). Families and relatives in the research area meet on an almost daily basis. The frequency of visits is influenced by work and school commitments, and by the time of year. The agricultural work and manual work people are involved in also influences the frequency and purpose of visits. The nature and purpose of visits also depend on whether they take place on work days, weekends, or during the holiday or festive season. Various activities are associated with visits during Christmas or Easter, among others, which can usually be categorized under the label of traditional folk culture (for example, Botíková – Švecová – Jakubíková 1997; Horváthová 1986). Research participant Michal provided the following characterization of visits and relationships among close family and friends:

*“Whoever wants to come for a visit, comes. Some close family members and friends do not call in advance. They don’t call and ask, ‘Are you at home? I’ll come.’ They get on their bike and come. They don’t ring the doorbell. They don’t come in through the front door. They get in by the back door, because they know it’s open. I’ve had the opportunity to experience that directly. I was at somebody’s house, and out of nowhere someone’s sister showed up. Nobody here rings the front doorbell. Only strangers ring the front doorbell. They come in through the back door. One day I was lying in my shorts, and my wife was taking a shower. My close friend came to our house, and I didn’t even notice. He was turning out the light. The wife was washing her hair. She yells at me: ‘What are you doing?’, and I didn’t even know what was going on. ‘I’m not doing anything!’ My close friend was in the hallway turning off the bathroom light. He visits us regularly.”*  
(Michal-RC-1981)

In this statement, there is also a reference to trust between close friends. Close friends and family members do not have to enter through the front door, ring the bell or announce their requests in advance. Even these ordinary acts of everyday life are manifestations of social cohesion and help to maintain it. On the other hand, such behavior is not expected of unfamiliar individuals or of individuals whom respondents do not consider to be close friends or family members. Visits from family members are not to be refused. Refusing visitors can only be done in the case of unknown individuals, ostracized persons or persons with whom the respondents do not have positive relations.



Kinship relationships ensure social cohesion not only at the level of individual families. Respondents refer to relatives with whom they maintain close relationships based on trust with the emic term *make kinship / making kindred relations* (*rodinovať sa* in Slovak). However, this term is used by the village residents not only to refer to close and distant relatives. It is also used when describing relationships with close friends, associates, or colleagues. If respondents declare that they are *making kinship / making kindred relations* with someone, they indicate that they maintain close interpersonal relations with that person or relatives. Frequent cooperation and mutual trust are characteristic of such relationships (Uhrin 2020; 2022a; Botíková – Švecová – Jakubíková 1997). Research participant Kornelia's statement is illustrative of this tendency: "*We are family. I am your friend, you are a friend of mine. Such relations make it better.*" (Kornelia-RC-1940)

The concept of *making kinship / making kindred relations* together with other types of cultural kinship, such as godparenting and the confirmation of parenthood, strengthens the social cohesion of the group (Apáthyová-Rusnáková 1974; Kandert 1974; Jakubíková 1997). The difference between these two types of cultural kinship lies in the association of godparenthood and confirmation of parenthood with religion, whereas the concept of *making kinship / making kindred relations* is not explicitly associated with it. Godparenthood and confirmation also illustrates the interplay between religion and social cohesion at the level of kinship.

Respondents compared the quality of kinship, interpersonal and cooperative relationships in rural and urban areas. They reflected positively on relationships in rural areas during their lives in the research locality, and contrasted them with interpersonal relationships in cities. They referred to cities located in the vicinity, such as Trenčín, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Bratislava, Nitra, Trnava, and even cities in the Czech Republic. In terms of their main characteristics, they considered relationships in the countryside to be more trustworthy, more selfless, and more sincere. In general, they described interpersonal relations as being more harmonious, i.e., characterized by greater cohesion. In the statements of the research participants, these comparisons do not apply only to the city/village or urban/rural dichotomies. In their view, interpersonal relationships in villages near the cities mentioned above also display the same characteristics as these cities.

*"Families here are more cohesive than in the cities. For example, [when I was living] in the city, I didn't have any relationships or friendships with any of the neighbors. There were eighteen of us living in the apartment building. I only had one single neighbor who was nice. We would even get together occasionally and would chat. And*

*then each to their own... But, like, going to somebody's place to talk, or whatever. I never cared about that [when living in the city]. But here [in the research locality], there's this neighborly and friendly thing. In the evening, we call each other and say come over. We're going to have coffee or a barbecue. Sometimes we don't even get a chance to take a break. Everybody is calling. We reminisce, and we talk."* (Anna-RC-1958)

Respondents identify families and family members by their surnames and nicknames. In general, the identification of people by surnames and nicknames is an important aspect of life in rural Slovakia (Apáthyová-Rusnáková 1990; Kandert 2004; Švecová 1971; Ušák 1973). In the research locality, surnames and nicknames are one of the symbolic markers that indicate the categorization of people: affiliation to the Lutheran or Roman Catholic Church, belonging to the kinship group or a locality of origin in the sense of dispersed settlements. The absence of kin relationships with local inhabitants of the village, partly indicated by surnames and nicknames or lack thereof, affects the acceptance of the new residents as "full members of the village community" by the respondents.

### **Cooperation between families, neighbors and friends**

Cooperation with family and kin (the help of family), cooperation with friends (the help of friends), and cooperation with neighbors (the help of neighbors) are one of the most important factors supporting social cohesion. The types of cooperation identified in the research locality that focus on the specific mechanisms that support their functioning such as kinship, direct and indirect reciprocity, reputation, social norms, ethnic psychology and religion, have been analyzed in detail elsewhere (Uhrin 2020; 2022a). In this case, the data analysis revealed that respondents consider cooperation with related and unrelated individuals, including neighbors, an essential part of everyday life. The people the respondents consider to be neighbors are not only individuals who own a real estate near their properties (for example residential buildings, agricultural and farm buildings, meadows, fields, etc.). They perceive neighbors to be all villagers with whom they declare positive relations and cooperation. As pointed out by Škovierová (1990; 2001), and as our research further confirms, the spatial, social or communal forms of the neighborhood do not necessarily coincide. The research participants also referred to cooperation with members of the same and different religions. Partners for cooperation are not selected based on their religious denomination. Cooperation with

members of the same religion often occurs only in the domains related to religious life (Uhrin 2022a: 66).

The nature of cooperation in the locality is influenced by social, cultural, historical, economic, and ecological factors, as well as by the distance of houses from the village center and the mountainous character of the dispersed settlements. Assistance with agricultural work is often directly reciprocated in the near future. Such reciprocity includes accepting help with farm work and repaying it by following local social norms. The principle of reciprocity in the broader sense is applied across many activities, from mundane everyday activities, such as borrowing food or doing light physical work, to physically demanding work, such as building a house or other residential or farm buildings. The research participants interact with many residents living in the locality on a daily basis, as well as with relatives who live outside it (Uhrin 2022a: 69–70; 2020; Uhrin – Bužeková 2022). Mutual assistance, cooperation, and group solidarity was also manifested in critical and life-threatening situations such as natural disasters (e.g., flash floods and fires – Lettrich 2016; Škovierová 1994) or specific events that occurred during the period of socialist regime (for example, the collection of contingents by state authorities – Torsello 2005; Uhrin 2021).

Another factor that should be considered as evidence of social cohesion in the statements of the research participants concerns taking care of other villagers. This care relates to helping the elderly and residents with physical or mental disabilities with manual work, and with work requiring certain technical, most often computer-related, skills. However, several research participants also stressed that the villagers help anyone who needs help. Such statements were related to those residents with whom they associated excessive alcohol consumption or other violations of social norms. The belief in the necessity of mutual help and cooperation in almost every activity and aspect of life is evident in the statement made by the research participant Oswald:

*“Everyone needs everyone here. One day I need someone’s help, then they need our help. That’s how it works. That’s how we somehow feel committed to each other. People are used to helping each other. In the past, they would have a piece of land to be plowed completely by hand. If there were only two or three of them, it would take a lot of time, so the neighbors would come and help.” (Oswald-RC-1937)*

Social cohesion is also manifested in care for the public spaces of the municipality, such as roads and economic and agricultural buildings. During the socialist regime, these activities were referred to by the name

Action Z. The letter Z stands for the Slovak word *zadarmo*, which may be translated as for free, but officially the Z stood for improvement or enhancement (*zvelebenie* in Slovak). Nevertheless, the term “free” was used in everyday life. The permanent program Action Z was announced in 1958 and promulgated by the document “Beautification of Towns and Villages by Citizen Self-Help.” This programme could be roughly described as communal work, done without monetary or other material compensation. This means that in most cases no wages were paid to the workers and volunteers (for details, see Knapík 2012: 122–124; Franc 2012a: 157–158; 2012b: 158–159). During the socialist period, a community center with a municipal office building, a post office and a house of mourning were built as a result of Action Z. In a few dispersed settlements belonging to the municipality of the village, grocery stores were also constructed by the joint efforts of inhabitants under Action Z.

Action Z officially perished in the aftermath of the political regime change in 1989. Even so, communal work done for the benefit of the whole village without monetary or other material compensation persisted in the form of care for communal spaces or property. Another outstanding example is the partly self-help renovation of the primary school and kindergarten building in the early twentieth century. The inhabitants of the village said they worked without financial remuneration. They also provided working tools and a variety of building materials. Some stages of the renovation were carried out by professional workers and companies. A significant part of the building material was provided by the municipality. The interviewee Miroslav described Action Z as follows:

*“Action Z, Z as in for free. They announced it over the public broadcast system. On Saturdays, I used to help and fetch bricks. We wanted to have a community center [so] we used to go to help. We wanted to have a kindergarten [so] we went to help. Nobody forced us, but we went to work. The cultural center, the school, and other buildings. We were working completely for free.” (Miroslav-NV-1961)*

## Religion as a mechanism promoting social cohesion

Religion is another mechanism that promotes social cohesion. Within the area of religion, there are several factors that could lead to the strengthening of social cohesion, one of which is participation in collective rituals. As Bahna and Talmont-Kaminski (2022) state, one of the functions of rituals, as an intrinsic part of religion, is social regulation, or the integration of

the individual into the communal social order. Collective rituals, such as attendance at Sunday worship or a church marriage, thus contribute to social cohesion (Maňo – Xygalatas 2022; Uhrin – Bužeková 2022; Sosis 2003; Sosis – Ruffle 2003).

Some recent experimental studies suggest that religiously motivated prosociality may be restricted to members of one's group and even be associated with hostility towards members of other religions (Lang 2014). However, according to several respondents, interpersonal and group relations between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals are perceived as positive. For the most part, the respondents did not talk about conflicts. Nor were conflicts observed during the two years of fieldwork. When the respondents mentioned conflicts in their narratives, they took the form of minor confrontations at the individual level. Moreover, these conflicts did not stem from religious matters, but mostly from disagreements relating to other aspects of life not directly linked to religion. The absence of conflict may be because the respondents perceive the differences between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals as, metaphorically speaking, differences in kind rather than differences in degree. However, identifying the exact reasons for the apparent absence of inter-confessional conflict would require further longitudinal empirical research.

Religion as a mechanism promoting social cohesion is also indicated by the construction of the Roman Catholic church, which was completed in the 1970s. Despite the unfavorable political, social, and economic situation, the villagers managed to complete the construction of the church by their own efforts. This whole process of constructing the church, like Action Z, was carried out with a great deal of effort and the contribution of labor, construction, and financial resources by the inhabitants of the village. The building of and care of the church can be classified as an investment in public goods (for details, see Kukuča – Klement 2017; Uhrin 2020; Uhrin – Bužeková 2022; Kandert 2004).

### **Factors undermining social cohesion**

According to the data analysis, the most significant factors that undermine social cohesion are individualism, high rates of divorce, work and social mobility, industrialization, consumerism, and the transformation of traditions. When comparing current and past cooperative and social relationships, the research participants highlighted the following points. First and foremost, in contemporary society these relationships are characterized by individualism, which is manifested at a micro level as a perceived decrease in the quality of cooperation among the local inhabitants and

a reduced willingness to provide selfless help. Selfless help is defined by the respondents as help, for which the helper does not explicitly require financial or other types of compensation (Uhrin 2020; 2021; 2022a; 2022b). The provision of assistance relates to a variety of activities ranging from daily or seasonal work activities to house construction, as well as help in the case of emergencies such as natural disasters. Nevertheless, as is well known, and as we argued in the previous section, issues of cooperation require more detailed analysis, especially because they bring into play mechanisms such as direct and indirect reciprocity, prestige and reputation, kin selection and kin psychology, social norms, punishments, and moral emotions (Norenzayan 2013; Richerson 2013; Henrich – Henrich 2007). At this point, these mechanisms are not the focus of our attention. An important conclusion of the analysis lies in the respondents' claim that negatively perceived transformation of cooperative relationships undermines mutual cohesiveness, trust and the quality of personal relationships, i.e., social cohesion (for more details, see Praženicová 1992; Rochovská – Majo 2013; Rochovská – Majo – Káčerová 2014; Torsello 2005; Škovierová 1994; 2001). Research participant Martina's description demonstrates the above-mentioned tendencies.

*“People are still compassionate, but there used to be more of it. Even neighbor helped neighbor. Now it's different. Sometimes a friend would go to help a friend on his construction site in return for only food and some liquor and worked all day long. Now it's different. The tradesman has a construction company, and he calls his buddies and gives them something in return. Now it's more for the money, but there's still a lot of them that go to help, friend to friend. It is still to be found.” (Martina-RC-1965)*

When comparing the quality of interpersonal and cooperative relations in the city and the countryside, the research participants reflected on labor and study-related migration to cities. In the village itself, there is only a primary school. To go to secondary school and university, residents travel to the neighboring villages and towns. Some people are employed at the primary school, the kindergarten, the municipal office, and the social services home. Migration refers not only to migration from the village, but also to the village. The nature of migration into the village has a different character. With the increase in labor migration to cities since the 1950s, the number of unoccupied houses has grown. In some cases, these have been bought by inhabitants of the surrounding towns and converted into holiday cottages and chalets. Some of them, who are referred to here in emic

terms as *new settlers* (*novo-usadlíci* in Slovak) and *cottagers* (*chatári* in Slovak) by the residents of the village, have gradually become integrated into the religious and non-religious activities and the community collective. On the other hand, some *new settlers* and *cottagers* do not participate in the cultural, social, and religious activities of the village and are perceived as foreigners. Therefore, this migration clearly acts in a manifold way. However, it is a factor that plays a role in undermining social cohesion (for more details, see Uhrin – Bužeková 2022). Moreover, as Andrews (2011) discussed in this context, along with issues related to poverty, socio-economic disadvantage, and social heterogeneity, the arrival of new immigrant groups in some rural areas can disrupt long-established norms related to social interactions. In such situations, rural residents are confronted with people who perform different social and cultural practices.

Perceived disagreements at the level of romantic partner relationships and high divorce rates were identified as other factors undermining social cohesion. Related to this is the reflection on long-term partner relationships not cemented by marriage in the church. Furthermore, concerning divorce rates, respondents point to higher rates of divorce and dysfunctional marital and partner relationships in urban areas compared to those in rural areas. According to the respondents, the tendency to prefer long-term and same-faith marriage partners, i.e., religious endogamy, contributes to social cohesion. Even though research participants talked about this preference and illustrated it with concrete examples from their own families, they also talked to a lesser extent about the occurrence of interfaith marriages, which, in their view, can cause conflicts between family members (see Uhrin 2022b for details). Thus, on the one hand, marrying a person of the same faith may contribute to social cohesion, while, on the other, marrying a person of a different faith may potentially undermine it.

Another identified factor undermining social cohesion was the transformation of traditions. We are aware of the problematic theoretical and methodological dimensions of the concept of tradition in social science research (see Boyer 1990; Bužeková – Jerotijević – Kanovský 2011; Tužinská 2006; Uhrin 2019). However, in this paper, the word traditions refer to those phenomena that the respondents themselves identified as traditional and changes in which they claim have transformed interpersonal relations in the area. These statements refer in general to the life cycle and calendar cycle ceremonies (Beňušková 2017), and in particular to changes related to, for example, wedding ceremonies. The respondents reflected not only the decreasing number of marriages, but also the decreasing number of guests, or the overall changes in the wedding ceremony (Beňušková 2020: 34–40; Jakubíková 1997: 161–188). Several factors mentioned in this section,

including migration to and from the locality, and transformation of kinship relations and traditions, are articulated in Eva's statement.

*"In fact, everyone is family with everyone. It's just the young ones that stay here... They have partners, and they stay here. However, nowadays young people come here. Families are starting to buy land and build here. With the wedding, for example, the young ones were getting married, so the families helped each other and they were committed to each other, and after the wedding, there were bonds between those families and they were already going to, like, to help each other anyway. It was like that."* (Eva-RC-1994)

Another aspect of the transformation of traditions relates to the cultivation of crops and livestock. As mentioned above, respondents reflected upon the changes in the nature of cooperation and changes in the hospitality of the helpers during work or after work. They also perceived negatively the increasingly frequent use of professional services in agricultural and farm work and, in some cases, in the organization of wedding ceremonies (Rochovská – Majo 2013; Rochovská – Majo – Káčerová 2014; Slavkovský 2002; 2011; Uhrin 2021; 2022a). Under the transformation of traditions, we can also include the transformation of kinship relations. These are related to changes in the place of residence after marriage, i.e., changes related to the residence of the newlyweds, the frequency of meeting relatives, the quantity and value of gifts exchanged, and changes in kinship terminology (Botíková – Švecová – Jakubíková 1997; Ondrejčovič – Majerčíková 2006; Skalník 1999).

## Conclusion

Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) identified three essential features of social cohesion, each of which includes other properties (Schiefer – van der Noll 2017: 585). In the case of the quality of social relationships, the other properties are the quality of social networks, trust, acceptance of diversity, and participation. All of these factors appeared in the results of our analysis as factors promoting and indicating social cohesion. The second factor, identification with a social entity, emerged in the results of the analysis in the form of the identification with residents of a particular locality or members of a religious group. From the perspective of the research participants, group solidarity and identification with a social entity was also expressed in the respondents' statements regarding positive and close-knit interpersonal relationships based on trust and mutual help, in



relation to both religious and non-religious aspects of life. The third factor, orientation toward common goods, is associated with a sense of responsibility, solidarity, and compliance with social order. All three phenomena mentioned above were found in the ethnographic data in the form of cooperation, mutual help in times of need, and care for disadvantaged citizens. In addition, social cohesion was also evidenced by investments in public goods in the form of Action Z and community service. Action Z raises questions for further research with regard to whether the respondents are assessing the current situation or constructing an ideal image of a cooperative community through nostalgic memories. Future research could also target the perspectives of different generations on factors promoting and undermining social cohesion.

The perceived factors undermining social cohesion are probably related to the transformation of rural areas in the post-1989 period. According to Rochovská, Majo, and Káčerová (2014), the year 1989 marks the beginning of the political-economic and social transformation of Slovak society. This transformation affected several areas of the social, communal, family, and individual lives of rural inhabitants (Rochovská – Majo – Káčerová 2014: 42–43). In this sense Andrews points to the need for more in-depth qualitative ethnographic research on issues of social cohesion in rural settings (Andrews 2011: 555). Andrews speaks primarily of the relationship between social cohesion and migration to and from rural areas. However, as we have attempted to show, longitudinal qualitative ethnographic research with a focus on social phenomena at the micro level has the potential to contribute to an understanding of social cohesion during a period of rural transformation.

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