

ABSTRACT

As a result of major social changes associated with transformation of the geographical organization of society in the 19th century, a broad debate was initiated about the importance and nature of social bonds in society and their embeddedness in urban and rural areas. The processes of modernization, industrialization and urbanization have fundamentally impacted the spatial organization and the actual contents of social ties. In particular, the role of place of residence in everyday life has significantly changed. Compared to the past, the spatial distance is less relevant for maintenance of interpersonal ties and non-local social relations are of growing importance. This process has been recently enhanced by development of communication technologies and the Internet in particular. The Internet has transferred many social ties into virtual communities without any spatial reference.

The dissertation deals with the consequences of the above indicated changes for the social environments in urban, suburban and rural localities and it is built on the geographic perspective of social network research. The theoretical framework of the research is based on combination of the concepts of social environment and the concept of local community. Further, the conceptualization of the study of local social environment is presented. In addition, the factors undermining the differentiated social environment and the character of community ties in various types of geographical contexts are discussed. The attention is also paid to the importance of population socio-demographic structure for the local social climate. Finally, a significance of the nature of social environment and local community ties for the locality as well as its inhabitants is assessed.

The thesis consists of two parts. The first part introduces the theoretical and methodological aspects of the social environment research and assesses the changing position of local community in society. The second part comprises of six research published papers, illustrating the change of social environment in urban, suburban and rural parts of the Czech Republic after 1989. The aim is to show different types of social environments, spatially differentiated importance of local communities in various parts of the Czech settlement system and factors conditioning the character of local community in diverse types of residential environments. In the empirical research, the main attention is paid to suburban areas.