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OJSTRICA ABOVE DRAVOGRAD

(An example of transformation of a mountainous region)

The cadastralian parish Ojstrica covers that part of Yugoslav Carinthia which is situated north of Drava river on the southern slope of the Košenjak Range. It extends from the bottom of Drava Valley (33 m above sea level) to the top of Košenjak Range (1522 m above sea level). Roughly speaking, there is merely one ridge which descends from the top of Košenjak Range first towards south-east and afterwards towards south. Regarding the agricultural value of natural conditions, the following zones may be discerned:

a) In the top zone where the highest farms are situated (from about 1000 to about 1200 m above sea level), slopes of about 20° to 30° prevail. Obviously their angle of inclination depends on the compactness of the rock. Lich is developed as amphibolite, green slate, and other metamorphous stones. The rocky foundation seldom reaches the surface — as a rule only there where the angle of inclination exceeds 36° .

b) The slate zone which extends on heights from about 700 to 1020 m above sea level, means in relief a series of less inclined slopes (the average angle of inclination being 17°)

c) In the lowest zone, steep slopes with the average angle of inclination of 24° to 32° developed on the amphibolite basis. The farms selected less inclined sites only, hence there is not much arable land.

The situation and the repartition of farms in cadastralian parish Ojstrica, and especially the situation and the repartition of arable and of wood land prove that among natural factors, microclimate and quality of land played the chief part during the initial settlement, i. e. during the hoe agriculture. In areas of higher sea level, crops ripened only in steep slopes on the sunny side with increased insolation. The greater the height above sea level and the sunnier the site was, the steeper lots were therefore included into cultivation at that time, while less inclined slopes were destined for woods and pastures. The agricultural utilization was confined to a certain agricultural technology — the use of the hoe. Already the introduction of the wooden plough eliminated a number of fields from tilling — even entire farms which were not apt to be cultivated by draught-cattle. It is difficult indeed to imagine the entire picture of the socio-economic conditions in past centuries: partly land register data of 1890 as well as a lot of material

evidence (as plowing terraces, fundaments of building in woods, destroyed natural vegetation and prevailing monocultural woodland) allow the conclusion that formerly the population of this area was much denser.

Development of culture (in hectares)

Year	Fields and Gardens	Meadows and orchards	Pastures and alps	Woods	Miscellaneous	Total
1890	96	41	98	407	4	646
1966	73	40	54	467	12	646

These data prove that the progress of reforestation is rapid. During the period under review, 29% of arable land has been grown over by wood. Generally speaking, first of all wood grows over steep pastures, pastures replaced meadows which, in their turn, succeeded fields. However, land register data do not entirely show the real situation: a great part of lots which are entered as pastures in the land register, is already grown over by new wood, and many meadows according to the land register virtually are pastures. Only 70% of the area which is shown in the land register as arable land in 1966, is really tilled. After all, these statements are true in general only, while there are considerable deviations in detail, most of them for social reasons.

Development of ownership structure (size of farms in hectares)

Number of farms in	Size							Total
	0 to 3	3.1 to 5	5.1 to 10	10.1 to 20	20.1 to 30	30.1 to 40	40.1 to 60	
1900	5	2	1	6	11	0	4	29
1966	12	9	1	3	6	1	2	34

The development of the ownership structure is a typical indication of the ever growing crisis of farming in mountainous regions because of the changing values of natural conditions regarding agricultural cultivation of the soil. During the past century, especially farms near the top limit of settled land, as well as farms which were no more suitable for agriculture (totalling 10 farms with an area of 279 hectares), broke down. The later development of their land which became a part of large landed property, went towards reforestation. The great landowners tended towards turning pastures, alps, and part of meadows into woods, but to preserve part of arable land and of dwelling-houses for the needs of wood-cutters. After World War II, these remainders of broken down farms became the property of their former tenants, while the woods were socialized.

Three characteristic phases can be distinguished regarding the changes of land utilization:

a) Until the end of World War I, farmers cultivated various crops and endeavoured to grow as many as possible different agricultural products. The proportion between crops has been rather stable, since the number of people on the farm was adapted to its size. Intensive cultivation was to be found only with small-holders and with cottagers.

b) During the period between both world wars and the first year after World War II, the reorientation of land utilization was rather regular and uniform in the majority of farms. Parallely with the decrease of the number of population, farmers reduce the number of intensive cultures, while they grow some cultures like flax, rapeseed, and the like every other year only. At the same time, farmers try to adapt themselves to the general socio-economic development by internal adjustment, as e.g. abandoning less suitable fields, turning fields into meadows, end extensification, in spite of the use of old, primitive agricultural technology.

c) During the last decade, that level of socio-economic development has been attained which renders possible considerable qualitative changes in land utilization. The rapid decrease of population during the preceding period levelled down the number of population in all farms which henceforth depend everywhere on the manpower of the very family. This fact brought about the condition that land utilization depends in the first place on the size of the farm and on the structure of the family. The smaller the farm and the more numerous the family is, the greater is the intensiveness of land utilization and the polycultural orientation, regardless of the suitability or unsuitability of natural conditions. Smaller farmers are compelled to till less suitable lots without machines, to increase the number of intensive cultures, and to work harder in order to maintain the family. On the other hand, larger farms with a smaller number of population were in a position to increase the utilization of forest as well as cattle-breeding, abandoning agriculture little by little. By the introduction of small machines in the grazing-and-mowing culture and in forestry work, the productivity of work on a greater farm increase rapidly, which still enhances the already existing heavy social differentiation as well as the value of efforts bestowed.

These changes are reflected in the development of the number and of the structure of the population's professions. In 1869, 216 people lived in the Ojstrica region, in 1890 there were 220, in 1931 204, and in 1966 only 137. 63 % of the population are engaged in farming, more than 33 % of which are older than 60 years. The lack of the rising generation and the great share of old people are characteristic features not only in the Ojstrica region, but everywhere in the mountainous regions throughout Slovenia, where small and medium size landed property prevails. The conversion of the Ojstrica population into other professions is a striking social phenomenon.

The sons of greater farmers, after having been employed at Ravne or at Dravograd, soon built their dwelling-houses there with the support of their parents, and so they finally left their Ojstrica homes. In this way, a series of one-family houses emerged on the outskirts of Dravograd, built mostly by people from Ojstrica. On the other hand, the sons of small-holders, cottagers, and agrarian applicants have no possibility of this kind, hence they continue to live at home when they get a job in town. For their way to town and back, they spend up to 4 hours a day.