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Hopes and Visions

*Business, Culture and Capacity for Imagining Local
Future in Southeast Serbia**

Abstract: Knjaževac and its surroundings represent a local region that shares the destiny of the 'global south'. The inhabitants perceive the region as neglected and forgotten by the state and political structures from the Belgrade 'center', claiming that Knjaževac is one of the poorest and most underdeveloped regions in Serbia. Nevertheless, in the last couple of years some fresh business and social development projects have been initiated, which has opened up prospects for imagining a new future for the local community.

The aim of the paper will be to present the current state of affairs in the domain of economic development in the region and to point to the cultural dimension of that process. Following Appadurai, I argue that economic development can not be accomplished without the capacity to imagine the future, and this capacity, in turn, gets stronger as development plans gain their real effects.

I will try to show how new business actors use common traditional cultural forms, such as belief in the skills and the power of fortunetellers, in imagining and legitimating a sense of self. I will also point to the other ways of evocation and "capturing" of the orientation toward future, as "project-oriented" thinking and acting of the local NGO, and "visionary" capacity related to civic activism.

Key words: Knjaževac, regional inequality, local development, economy and culture, hope

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*"If you can find hope in the region of Knjaževac, then maybe there is
hope for entire Serbia"*

A woman originating from Knjazevac region

If an ethnography of the 1990ies in the ex-Yu region could be described as being predominantly about "tears, fears and despair", as is suggested in the title of the one of the anthropological contributions from the period, and if the previous period was marked by the rule of the "nationalism"/"antinationalism" analytical vocabulary and explanatory paradigm, then the time came to brake that paradigm for the sake of different explanations and more profound understanding of the postwar, post-Yugoslav, postsocialist experience of the newly born societies. On the one hand, the analytical field of ex-Yu studies became too exhausted as a consequence of constant employment of the same analytical paradigmes. On the other hand, the reaserchers still attracted to study (in) the region would find this strong and dominant discourse on the region as a serious obstacle to production of fresh and novel research perspectives. Eventually, the research on ex-Yu region was threatened to end up in endless perpetuation of theoretical accounts on ethnicity, nationality, war, tradition, ethnic hatred, barbarism, with no apparent future neither for the societies and communities studied, nor for the research community which was entitled to study them. Paraphrasing Frederick Jameson, who was speaking about the challenges traditional concept of culture faces in the context of intensive social and political changes on the global scale, I would say that both "the researchers and the researched" were in danger to loose, as Jameson said, "capacity for imagining the local future". Or, put another way, we were all together almost to loose hope.

Therefore, this paper, as the project altogether, is intended to open up a fresh perspective in analysis of ex-Yu region, focusing on the issues, projects, institutions, activities and processes that enable both the members of local communities and the researchers as their temporary co-inhabitants or visitors to imagine "local futures" and participate in the multitude of practices aimed at producing it. This will hopefully make a significant contribution to the rethinking of the social and cultural processes characteristic for the region and possibly offer a new kind of its representation both in academic circles and in a broader public.

In an attempt to broaden the understanding of socio-economic transformation processes in Southeastern Serbia, namely in the region of the town of Knjaževac and its immediate surrounding, analytical categories of hope and post-socialism will be employed. Southern Serbia historically counts for one of the most undeveloped parts of Serbia. Due to poor infrastructure this region has been cut off from the "centre" and this geographical distance has in the mean time been transformed into an image of "remoteness" and "backwardness", objectified in a saying "the more south you go the sader it gets" ("*što južnije to tužnije*"). Apart from being just an external objectification, this also

gradually turned in to an internalized picture, which sometimes was used as a bitter explanation of their economic and social "destiny". This further served to justify the inertia they have fallen into and to naturalize the deep inequality between "them up in the centre" and "us down there".

I will show how this "spell" was partially broken by new economic initiatives after 2000 and in which way these initiatives could be seen as bringing hope to the region and fostering "imagination of local futures". The view demonstrated here corresponds with insights and explanations in literature of "everyday economy" in post-socialism, as reviewed by Chris Hann, which stresses "creativity of actors" and their reliance on "traditional cultural resources" while they deal with problems of decreasing sociality and trust in the state, brought with post-socialist transformation (Hann 2005, 549). I hope that it will also offer some fresh insights in that it will stress the *contextual pragmatic reason* of the new economic actors who are viewed as contemporary producers of novel cultural authenticity and whose activities are seen as to actively employ tradition and not merely uncritically reproduce it. In that way, traditional culture, understood as a set of ideas, values and norms will be transformed from the "limited source" for recreation of contemporary culture, and will be viewed instead as an "unlimited resource" that can be employed in creative engagement with the challenges brought about with the profound social, political and economic change. The material for the study was collected during several field trips to the region, taken regularly every summer from 2002, as a part of scholarly student fieldwork, which I was supervising with other colleagues.¹

Knjaževac and its Surroundings

Knjaževac is a picturesque medium sized town with approximately 20.000 inhabitants, situated in Southeastern Serbia, in a wider region known as Timoč-

¹ Students under my coordination and supervision were collecting information on socio-economic changes in the region, focusing on its cultural aspects. Using the opportunity of being in the field, I was conducting my own research on most noticeable economic actors in the region after 2000 and the attitudes towards wealth, especially "new wealth" and new wealthy people. This certainly did not make for an "ideal" fieldwork situation, for we were not able to spend an entire year "in the field", just a week of intensive research per year. Nevertheless, considering the specific situation of doing fieldwork "at home", and the repeated and regular visits to Knjaževac where we established firm and stable relations and became familiar with several important actors, and "waited for" every summer, it could be said that this research methodology is as close as it can be to the fieldwork "proper", as known in a Western academia, in the present circumstances

ka krajina, administratively belonging to the Zaječar county. Its vividness is - among other things - due to a preserved old town centre (*stara čaršija*) and due to four small and picturesque bridges in the very centre of the town, across the river Timok that divides the town in two parts. Because of this, poetic names as "Serbian Venice" or "Serbian Amsterdam" circle among the older (and more "urban") inhabitants, recalling the time between the two world wars when the canal was cleaner and the river deep enough to enable boats floating along it, with music bands providing entertainment to then still tiny, leisure middle class.

The municipality of Knjaževac occupies an unusually wide territory – with its 1202 square kilometres it is the fourth largest municipality in Serbia. It consists of 85 villages and the town of Knjaževac, as its administrative, political and cultural centre. Some of the villages are really remote, situated high in the mountains, and they are almost uninhabited, or inhabited solely by a few very old people. The municipality borders with Bulgaria. Stara planina (Old Mountain) represents a natural border between two countries and, contrary to its previous premium importance for heavy industry, based on intensive mining, today it is a rich resource for newly developing tourist industry. In addition to this, nature has been truly generous to this part of the country, providing it with dense forests, several thermal springs and spas, three rivers that meet in the vicinity of Knjaževac and with generally mild climate that is favourable to growing of vegetables, and particularly to wine production.² Within the Knjaževac community area there are several sub-regions whose area and borders rather reflect geographical and traditional ethnographical subdivisions (today already part of the common knowledge) than any kind of administrative regulation. These are: Budžak (the Kalna area), Zaglavak (the area around the river Trgoviški Timok, towards Stara planina), Timok (Timok river valley, from Knjaževac to the village Minićevo), Tresibaba and Tupižnica.

Period between the two world wars was marked by a significant economic development of the town, due to the opening of various craft shops and fo-

² Knjaževac was indeed rich with so called "natural resources" and opportunities. This kind of representation of the community resources was very characteristic for Yugoslav socialism in general. Generations were brought up with an idea that "Yugoslavia is famous for its 'natural wealth'", and "the crystal blue Adriatic sea, high mountains, numerous minerals, fertile plains" were examples of that. In the changing economic and political context of postsocialist Serbia, the resources that once were source of national and regional pride, now reveal the problematic and traumatic faces of the transformation in process, fostered by a rising importance of ecological issues and a newly discovered ecological responsibility, itself part of the transformation. The extreme (and irresponsible) pollution of rivers, air and land, exhausted mines, improper closing up of an uranium mine in Kalna are some of the current issues that came to the fore during our latest field trip in the summer 2007.

undation of the first industrial enterprises. Until the end of the WWII regional economy was divided, as it was the case in the rest of Serbia as well, between crafts and industry in cities and towns and agriculture in the rural surrounding. The rural economy was based on the principle that the peasants should be able to grow and cultivate all sorts of agricultural produce on their small parcels. In the first instance, it was aimed to provide all what was needed for the household. Only when the needs of the household were provided, the rest would be taken to the market, to be exchanged for money which would buy what couldn't be produced. This, in Weber's terms, "earth to mouth" economy was the dominant way of economic organization well into the 20th century, and some of the old people who remained in the villages still keep to it. Many of the villages are situated on the outskirts of the Knjaževac area, on the hill sides or close to the top of the Stara planina. Their "remoteness" of the centre, both local, regional and national, made that most of the facilities and services that were "normal" for the rest of the country were not available to them until the last quarter of 20th century. For example, Donja Kamenica, which is relatively close to Knjaževac, was connected with the town with driving road and got waterworks just after the WWII, while electricity was brought to the village Crni Vrh, high in the mountains, only in 1979. It is understandable then that traditional social structures and some forms of religious and magic beliefs and practices saved their strength and influence long into the 20th century. In Timočka krajina in general and also in Northerneastern parts of Serbia known as Homolje, traditional narratives on the efficacy of magical practice are particularly alive, as the practice itself.³ They survived "second modernization" (in fact, different waves of modernization), and continued to exist, creating fascinating hybrids of thought and action that deny (and subvert) any simple analytical dichotomies and clearcut divisions between rural, traditional, village, peasant and urban, modern, city, middle class life.⁴

After the WWII, following the wave of industrialization of the country, migrations from villages to towns started. Pouring out from the poor villages,

³ On different magical practices recorded in the wake of WWII, see: Kazimirović, 1998 (1940), and for contemporary city based para-religious movements, during 1990ies, see: Radulović, 2007.

⁴ Particular theoretical and methodological importance of this fact could be measured when it is taken against background of dominant ideas in the history of Serbian ethnology. As well as many contemporary intellectual projects in 19th century Central and Eastern Europe, Serbian ethnology was founded on romanticized representations of peasants and village life, that held strong long into 20th century, and still isn't entirely abandoned in some strays of the field. For detailed analysis of ideological foundation of Serbian ethnology, see: Kovačević 2005, Naumović 2005; about the significance and implications of the position of "double insider" in Serbian ethnology, see: Naumović 1997, 1998.

masses of people migrated to the would-be-industrial towns, to be transformed into socialism's working class. Knjaževac became a centre of different industry branches, and got several new factories, producing and processing: machines (IMT), furniture (Tina), textiles (Branka Dinić), food, namely cheese (Džersi) and wine (Džervin) and leather and women shoes (Leda).

Today inhabitants of Knjaževac tend to describe the period of "socialist development" as the time of the biggest prosperity and "good living", although from present point of view they have certain reserve towards the idea of socialist planned economy and its consequences for the regional economy. This is to say that from the perspective of post-socialist stagnation (or in temporal terms, "stillness") they try to locate the moment when the intensive dynamic of socialist development and industrial rise (which they perceive as a progressive "movement") first stopped and then took on reversed direction. They also try to figure out why that has happened. This odd mixture of speculation and reflection, infused with suspicion, fears, unfulfilled hopes and positive facts actually gave rise to stories about "blocked development", widespread in the region. One example of these stories, that will serve to illustrate the interconnectedness of economy and culture will be presented in the following section of the paper. Nevertheless, the socialist period still serves as a reference point against which actual comparisons regarding quality of life are made. If anything, during socialism the inhabitants felt that they had "perspective". Factories worked with "full capacities" (in a degree they could in a planned economy), the employment rate was high as was social security, and Knjaževac became host of an important event – an annual cultural festival, aimed to gather, perform and "celebrate" the creativity of one of the most important social and political categories in socialism – youth. Considering it all, Knjaževac could be said to represent a metaphor of socialist utopia, materializing both its productionist paradigm and its future driven orientation embodied in "youth", understood as a "bearers of future".⁵

After having entered the cycle of "chrisis" in the second part of the 1980ies, Yugoslav economy and society never recovered, except of short period in 1990 under the reformist government of Ante Marković. Nineties in general were shocking experience for the economy of this region, as in whole of Serbia. All of the once prosperous state owned enterprises, so called "giants" ("giganti"), started to collapse one by one. Economy entered the cycle of stagnation coupled with social and emotional despair brought by the war and social anomy. Thanks to the vicinity of the state border with Bulgaria and Romania, the population turned to the alternative economic strategies, that invol-

⁵ More on the symbolism of youth in socialism, see in: Roubal 2000, on the discourse on youth and practices of Pioneer organization in Yugoslavia during 1950ies, more in: Erdei 2004.

ved illegal activities as smuggling along the border line. Depending on the type and quantity of commodities that represented the main object of trade, economic and, later, social differentiation emerged between, say, those who were "breaking through embargo" on petrol and medicines, and those who were mainly providing everyday necessities as basic foodstuff and stockings. As it happened in many places throughout Serbia, the initial economic advantages gained through the engagement in illegal activities of larger scale and/or in unregulated business environment of the nineties, have legitimated new social hierarchies and brought about new social stratification. This was achieved by using ties with politicians and maintaining strategic good relations with ruling political elites, regardless of the party affiliation. As a result, equality as a social ideal and regulating principle in socialism vanished, emptying place for the appearance of new Big Men, particularly visible and remarkable figures in smaller towns and villages, who apparently out of the blue became the main owners of various facilities, real estate and newly privatized enterprises.

Period that followed the "democratic turn" in 2000 hasn't brought brighter colours to this rather gloomy picture. The local authorities were "democratic" in the sense that they belonged to the political parties which outruled the regime of Slobodan Milošević, and the new republic government has proclaimed its undecidedly "European orientation", but being far from the centres "up there" where political and economic prospectives were designed and projected, inhabitants of Knjaževac and its surrounding felt no significant movement. During the field trip in 2003 we were told that "things have never been as bad as they are now", that "everything stands still" and that "nothing is going ever to change here". It was a year when a modernist energetic prime minister Zoran Đinđić was assassinated, and these statements probably could be connected with the prevailing mood in Serbia at that time, echoing the fear of untransparent future. However, even at those difficult times, we recorded a foundation of new economic enterprises and initiatives; majority of them were burgeoning in the "traditional" industrial fields of the region, as textiles, furniture, food, vine and wood processing. These new initiatives, framed by an intensive activity of the alternative centre for regional economic development Timok club (Timočki klub), have created a new spirit that opened up a forward looking perspective for the town and its surrounding. What was probably critical for this change, and simultaneously contributed to its realization, is the fact that the actors whom I describe in the paper (and many others as well) somehow realized the unproductivity and obsolescence of the "passive hope", similar to the Crapanzano's notions of "paralyzing hope" (2003), switching instead to the "pro-active hope" that requires their active engagement in the change, including the production of hope itself.

Economy and Culture: Can Hope Help in Fostering Business

As so many contributions in the field of anthropology clearly evidence, it is not possible to engage in analysis of economic life of society without acknowledging its social and cultural constituents. From Malinowski's extensive descriptions of the elaborate ceremonial, religious and political aspects of a Kula exchange, to debates on the cultural embeddedness of human rationality, there is a continuous debate in a discipline over the complex relations between economy and culture, economic and cultural. The activities of economic actors are driven by social and cultural norms and values, and it is impossible to divorce these two aspects. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that it is not possible to understand economic behaviour and phenomena without social, political and cultural context within which they are situated. The latest developments during the 1990ies, based on the late modern transformations of economy and its increasing uplifting to the global scale, brought this connectedness even more to the fore. Economy is becoming increasingly "culturalized", securing its growth on the production and exploitation of human wishes, desires, fantasies, longings and hopes. On the other side, culture has been produced and reproduced through new technologies, and thus inseparable from the directions and flows of global economy. Dynamic of economic-cultural nexus can be illustrated by a local legend from Knjaževac region, which tries to explain the underdevelopment of the region. This legend is recorded in many different localities, with different actors but with the same central "plot" – economic exploitation of the region by a distant (ethnic, national) Other – offering cultural explanation of certain historical-economic facts.

Investigating relations between the changing economic circumstances and the creation of new identities, we visited a little town called Podvis in 2003. In the past, Podvis was an important regional mining centre and its citizens are still very proud of it. Their communal identity was strongly marked not just by the character of production and its social and cultural valuation, but also by distinctive culture that was connected with this activity. Between the WWII the owner of the mine brought many foreign employees, engineers and miners, to Podvis and they gave a specific multicultural and urban flavour to this small town. Inhabitants stress that he has brought "culture" (theatre, cinema shows) and "civilization" (electricity, railroad to Knjaževac) to the town. The inhabitants like to stress the quality of life they used to have, intensive cultural production, leisure activities etc. They were particularly proud of the multicultural quality of the settlement and its local community life. After the WWII mining was a highly valued profession, being metaphor for hard work and domestic primary industry. However, today these are just memories of the "happy times past", which the leaders of the community try to use in or-

der to transform the town into tourist site. During several conversations we have had with people from Podvis and neighbouring administrative centre Knjaževac, we have noticed appearance of the same story explaining not only the "bad luck" (in developmental sense) of Podvis, but also the very harsh economic conditions of this part of Serbia, that laments over itself as being forgotten, abandoned and left over by the people "up there, in Belgrade".

The story offers an explanation why the mine in Podvis was closed in 1968, ten years after the great catastrophe in 1958, when 60 miners died in an explosion. We have been told that closing the mine had nothing to do with its production results and quality of the minerals. On the contrary, they say, it was a clear political decision made in favour of the Slovenes. This alleged political plot was accomplished by replacing the samples of the minerals from Podvis, which were, as they claim, of superb quality, with samples from Slovenian mine, just before the analyses that were to control the quality of the minerals. After the analyses were completed, it appeared that the quality of the minerals from Podvis (actually from Slovenia) did not match required standards to justify further exploitation. As a result, the mine in Podvis was closed, and the mine in Slovenia continued to work – according to this story – on the basis of the quality of minerals from Podvis.⁶ In that way, the story ends, economic supremacy of Slovenia in Yugoslavia was once again secured, at the expense of the poor South-eastern part of the country.

In another article I offered an explanation of the relation between this legend (seen as a contribution to the generation of the context of Slovene-Serbian relations in domain of everyday economic activities) and national identity formation processes after 2000, using Žižek's concept of "stolen pleasure" (Erdei 2007). Here I would like to use it to another end. Firstly, to make a point about the importance of temporal aspects of socio-economic change.⁷ This will help us to understand the significance of the conceptualizations both of the past, present and future and the impact their relation will have to the actual economic and social change. In that way the multitemporality of the social change will be recognized, and the importance of the time frame(s) into which we dominantly invest our capacity for imagination, our hopes, desires, and that therefore eventually provide social and material context of our present living will be brought to the fore. For example, in all the interviews with entrepreneurs from Knjaževac in 2003, the interviewees were not able to imagine and speak about their future plans in long term time frame. However we ap-

⁶ The same story is recorded in Stara planina, this time as an explanation for closing the uranium mines in vicinity. Again the "villains" were the Slovene.

⁷ In this respect, for the context of socialism, see: Verderi 2005; Appadurai 1996, stresses temporal dimensions in explaining cultural phenomena, in the context of liberal economies of late modern societies.

proached them, they refused to speak about it, claiming that "they cannot dare to predict what can happen in more than six months". During our last visits (2008 and 2009) this perspective changed, and their capacity to make long term predictions has increased, which is visible in a lot of lively stories about finding strategic partners, developing the product and improving marketing activities. This change can be related to several things that surely include relative stabilization of legal, financial and administrative frameworks that at the very beginning were seen as major obstacles for foreseeing the business development, but it is also possible due to the realization of the first really successful and sustainable business activities of theirs. For example, after long running of family wood processing business, one of the families bought out a company from Niš, that operates in the field of construction, thus laying ground for connecting business operations.

Secondly, I would like to pose a question about the possible relations between hope and public action. As narratives on "blocked development" could have been used as "logical" and "historical" explanation of underdevelopment, they could have also legitimized passivity and therefore perpetuated the economic and social circumstances that initially raised them. In other words, these narratives could have contributed to nurturing of the "passive", "paralyzing" hope Crapanzano mentions when he speaks about Southafrikaners waiting for something to "happen" (Crapanzano 2003, 18-20). Therefore, the question could be: could a reversed and more pro-active perspective have the same, although opposite, effect; namely, to motivate people to aspire and then strive to materialize the projected.

Identifying Actors of Economic Change after 2000

There are several economic actors that became visible and important in the local community after the democratic turn in 2000. I have chosen to focus on three of them. All of them embody changing social values and represent new types of economic actors, while at the same time their newly developed subjectivities represent a peculiar hybrid of the "old" and "new" beliefs and ideas. Firstly, there is a non-governmental organization "Timok club" (Timočki klub) that has grown out of the local Democratic party, as its civil "child". Although the leaders and activists of Timok club would never publicly claim their familiarity with the Democrats (though they do not deny it in the informal conversations), this fact is well known in the town. Today, after more than a decade of organic growth, they function as an alternative centre for local and regional economic development, constituting the "safety belt" to possible political turbulences in the local government. In that way they guarantee that regardless of possible political changes in the local government and in

spite of various turbulences that are characteristic for the Serbian political scene, economic transformation and burgeoning of the various business and social initiatives would proceed with minimum disturbance. Secondly, shortly after 2000, various small businesses have started to be established under government auspices, as a part of post-socialist transformation of economy from large scale socially owned companies to multitude of small and middle scale private enterprises. Government created a micro-credit system to entice all who had business ideas or were willing to take a risk, to actually start businesses. One type of newly founded enterprises was family business that was particularly promoted in the regions where the crush of the big state owned factories left whole families unemployed. The example for this type of economic actor will be the family Sokolović⁸, from the small village near Knjaževac. Their story is significant because the rumours circulated throughout the region about their enormous new wealth that was, allegedly, obtained due to the divinatory potentials of the patriarch of the family, Pavle Sokolović. Thanks to the power to foresee future events he had allegedly founded and excavated an "old", "ancient" treasure that later served as a foundation for further accumulation of wealth. Speaking in public, Pavle resolutely denies any mystical source of his "initial capital", attributing it to many years of hard work of the whole family "up in the mountains", where he was born and where his parents originate from. Still, he admits that he has some kind of "mystical power", the nature and character of which he is not able to verbalize easily. On an occasion when we discussed his unusual "talents", Pavle told me, in a rather confidential tone, that he, indeed, uses some of his "mystical powers" to protect his family, both in business and in other areas of life, raising my interest in an unexpected embrace between business and religious/magical belief.

Finally, I have chosen an interesting actor who cannot be easily classified. In spite of having his own small business (car spare parts shop), and therefore representing an economic actor, he is primarily seen here as a social actor who "found refugee" in the political party to increase the probability of achieving his goals and to realize at least some of the multitude of developmental projects. Mika has a long history of active engagement in the development of local community that reaches back to socialist times. He alone has imagined, designed and promoted several projects aimed primarily at reactivating the local thermal spring in his home-village, just a few kilometres from Knjaževac, which he sees as a great opportunity for the development of medical and sport tourism. Contrary to the entrepreneurs, he only had a lot of "dreams" and plans about future development and communal change, in that respect repre-

⁸ All the names used in the text are changed in order to protect the privacy of the people who accepted us in their homes and their lives and agreed to share with us their stories, life experiences and plans, for which we herein express our deep gratitude.

senting a perfect individual projection of socialism's future driven perspective and utopian vision. Although he eventually decided to provide organizational and even institutional support for his vision of future development of local thermal spring, by finally enrolling to the Democratic Party and becoming part of the local authority structures, he nevertheless never fully turned his back to traditional forms of legitimating success, revealed in his narratives of mystical blessing he was receiving for his projects.

Timok Club (Timočki klub): Framing the Economic Change

Timok club was founded in 1997 with the mission statement to *raise sustainable and environmentally secure development of the Timok region and to improve life conditions of its inhabitants*. It was founded a year after the ruling socialists and radicals (who at the time were acting as severe opposition to the Milošević socialists) won the local elections in Knjaževac in 1996. Activists of Democratic party then decided to open alternative channel through which they would be able to initiate and pursue activities aimed to democratic and economic transformation of the region, independently of the ruling political structures and their economic policy and planes. This crucial strategical decision meant that alternative channels of financing could be provided (mainly financial support of international foundations) for people to start small businesses on their own, without significant state support. With an important autonomy from "the centre" that was gained that way, people were also faced with demand to reconceptualize the whole area of conducting business – from getting initial business ideas, through developing a business plan, to building financial discipline and making business activities sustainable. Gradually growing into promotor of regional economic transformation, Timok club has also been very active in strengthening democratic institutions and political transformation processes in Southeastern Serbia. They were working on grass-roots level, in villages and homes of people that were interested to start business and also were organizing various events to promote ideas of local and regional development and social activism. This kind of work certainly contributed to the changed political landscape after the next local elections in 2000. For the first time in the newer history of multipartism (since 1991) the "democratic coalition", led by Democratic party, won in the municipality of Knjaževac. Finally the project of economic and social transformation of the region could be turned into official policy, or at least not at odds with it as was the case before. Their activities have gradually evolved from initial NGO capacity building projects and small business program support, to projects dealing with fragile groups (children, refugees). Small business program support gave birth to the first Business Incubator in Serbia, aimed to offer insti-

tutional, legal, organizational, professional support to the newly founded firms for free, in the first six months of their "life", provided the excellence of the business idea proposed. This project represented an operationalization of cross-border regional cooperation, and was designed and initiated before "regional cooperation" became one of the leading tropes of "pro-European" government policy. Through their recent activities and projects Timok club became leading organization within the Timok Krajina region on Promotion of Local Partnership among public, private and NGO sector. Until now there have been realized more than 30 different projects with more than 6.000 beneficiaries from 12 countries. The most recent projects, developed in last couple of years, are directed towards establishing and maintaining local intersectoral partnership (between the local authorities, business and NGOs) and local community development (promotion of tourist resources of the region). Their growing importance and scope of activities in local community and the region could be measured not just by evaluating the activities, but also by comparing their office premises at the beginning and now. From a dark, not so spacious room in a basement of a building on the outskirts of the town centre, today they moved to occupy an entire floor in a renovated building in the very centre of the town. They share this spacious, bright and very modernly furnished house with other organizations dedicated to local development, functioning both as their unofficial leader, and an official coordinator of a high-budgeted project of Promotion of Local Partnership. Timok club is an example that decentralization could be a successful path to empowerment, for they did not follow the habitual NGO organizational pattern after 1996 to establish a local branch of a "major" Belgrade centred NGO, that could have turned them into a mere transmitter of the policies created elsewhere. This bottom-up strategy turned to be wise, for it positioned them as a most influential NGO in the region and also provided a frame within which local political and economic actors could meet, generate ideas, exchange and realize them.

Pavle Sokolović and Sokolović family: Business Endorsed by Magic

Pavle Sokolović (1938) is a founder of a saw-mill business that is now run by his two sons, with an intention to be further developed into a more complex family business. Sokolović family today lives in the small village in the vicinity of Knjaževac, where they moved from one of the most remote mountain villages in the mid 1970ties. Pavle says that he started the saw-mill business in the mid 1960ies when they still lived in their home village, and he claims that the business was successful – they were exploiting from their own land and forest and had stabile network of clients. Apart from that, Pavle also had a job in the state owned firm. He and his father were working hard which enabled the family, as they put it, to have "a decent life". Their story suggests that by working that hard they managed to acquire a substantial property. Alt-

though they generally refuse to speak about themselves as "wealthy people" – if asked, they would rather say that "well, we have something" (*"pa, eto, ima se"*) – there are moments when it is important to emphasize that what was perceived by a local community as their "new wealth" in fact had a long and decent history underlined by hard work and family sacrifices. It is important to them to be clear that it didn't come out of a blue, and therefore it is measured and described by Pavle and his elder son, as "having been transported from the mountain village to their present home in 16 tractors". They do suppose that it could have raised suspicion among the villagers when they, as non native villagers, came down closer to Knjaževac and started the saw business soon after. Contrary to the situation in the local economy, their business has flourished during the nineties. Rumours were heard that they had had good connections with the ruling Socialist Party, and that they enlarged their fortune by being exclusive supplier of the successful furniture factory from a neighbouring town, managed by a prominent member of that party. When faced with stories like that, the Sokolovićs deny them, claiming that all they accomplished is a result of a superb quality of their work. Today they own the well equipped saw-mill still supplying local and regional furniture factories. In the meantime, Pavle – the family patriarch – has retired, and left the business to his sons, who continued to develop and even widen it. They bought a construction firm in Niš, and now are trying to develop a network of smaller firms that would function as suppliers in various areas of construction work. Nevertheless, the case of the Sokolović family shows the widespread belief in Knjaževac and its surroundings that business skills do not suffice for the business success. There has to be something more than "pure business", "pure rationalism", "logical business schemes", if the enterprise is to flourish. "Something more" could be a divine blessing inherited from the ancestors, a good spirit that comes in return of the good deed done long ago, a reward for moral behaviour, or simply a good luck that accompanies good-natured man. In the Sokolović family, Pavle serves as a "spiritual protector". Sometimes he uses his alleged "divinatory skills" in the forms of business advices to the managers of the firm (his sons), but he mostly provides spiritual protection to business activities through intensive activism in the local church and religious community. The whole family regularly hosts two communal events, at the occasion of village and local church patron saints. In the village where they live and where their business is situated, they participate and rather regularly sponsor the village celebration of the St. Ivan, at July 7th. In the village of their origin, up to the mountains, they organize the feast for the villagers and for the employees of their firms at the place of their "family cross", deep in the fields, at the Repose of the Virgin Mary day, at August 28th.

Pavle decided to retire and to leave the business to his sons in the year when his mother died. She was known in the village as a woman very dedica-

ted to the church (women like her are popularly called "crkvarke" in the local community). After retiring, he was able to more actively engage in local church activities and it was also the moment when he recognized that he has some magical capacities, that he vaguely describes as "some power" ("neka sila"). He is convinced that the great deal of success of their family business is due to some kind of spiritual protection, that was provided first by his mother and now by him and he is determined to keep on with it. On the other hand, Pavle is aware that spiritual protection doesn't work alone either. Therefore, he is deeply involved in some very practical work concerning the renovation of the local church, that demands much of the "earthly" skills and activities as economizing, socializing, lobbying, funding and organizing work. Explaining how much work and financial means is needed to complete the renovation of the village church, a project he has been engaged in for years now, he revealed his plans to establish contacts both with expatriots in diaspora and with NGOs, contemplating about the possibility to write a "project" which will bring the necessary financial support. Thus he serves as a kind of mediator between the spheres of business and morality. Dividing his devotion between the family run business and local religious community, he is able, on one side, to provide financial support to the church and to mobilize the small and old religious community. On the other side he provides morality to the family business activities, in a social context where business is, at bottom, viewed as a corrupt and immoral activity, which threatens the "innocence" of culture. He stands on both sides – capable of being "in touch with the future" through alleged divinatory experiences and also through communication with potential donors who could finance the new road to the village church and complete its renovation.

Mika: Personal Energy plus Vision plus Party Support plus Blessing

The case of Mika differs from the previously described actors in that he is more engaged in elaborating many of his ideas and plans related to the thermal spring in his home village, than with developing his own business. The shop serves to cover basic expenses and to provide for medical insurance and allocations for the retirement fund, while in fact its more important function is to be a gathering place for the people interested in his ideas and visions, and more recently for his party colleagues included in realization of those plans. Mika is a middle aged man, strong in appearance, very energetic. He is eloquent, particularly when it comes to presenting the ideas he has been developing for decades now. In that respect – in the energy and interest he is ready to invest in the public issues, and a kind of restless social activism – he reminds to the typical "socialist social activist". Socialism, being itself a future driven orientation, cherished that kind of social visionarism, but – unfortunately –

could not support the materialization of such visions. Mika's biography confirms that he indeed was a "man of the system". He was a Party member, member of various socialistic organizations, worked in a state owned firm, and has a history of engagement in local community. He has always had a vision of local development, and that hasn't changed. While showing to the visitors thermal springs near his home, it is clear that he sees further than majority of the villagers and people in his surroundings. On a skinned field he envisions a modern hospital, muddy bathing places turn into pools with medical thermal water, abandoned restaurants are full of visitors and village economy prospers from medical and sport tourism. As a visionary, Mika believes that it is possible. Nevertheless, like Pavle, whose case we presented earlier, he knows that several elements contribute to success. In his case, he is aware that clear vision and huge enthusiasm (which could be thought of as a kind of faith) do not suffice. To additionally support his vision Mika enrolled to Democratic party, became local MP and chief of local office (*mesna kancelarija*) in his village. He hoped that it would increase his social capital and that, along the lines of party alliance, investments would pour into the community from other places. Here he demonstrates the same kind of pragmatic reason witnessed in the case of Pavle, for he doesn't hesitate to use all the possible resources that could be mobilized for achieving what he considered a personal achievement but also a public good. Nevertheless, in a situation when the investments into the spring were held back due to reorientation to the development of tourist facilities in Stara planina (a plan of development that was actually supported by the second strongest political party in Knjaževac, at the moment when the leader of the party launched a development investment project at a national level), Mika turned to an additional means that supposed to lend legitimacy to his visions – namely to mystical blessings. Spicing the story about his vision of local development by episodes in which he receives "mystical blessings" for his visionary efforts by anonymous "old and wise man" who visited him in the store, he employs the widespread belief in necessity of "spiritual" protection of any effort. In that way he tries to present his plans and his project in some sense more substantial, "truer" in local understanding, than the rival project (which is supported by the rival political party in the local community).

What connects these various actors is that through their ideas, imaginations, projects and activities they open up/keep alive the capacity for imagining local future that was blocked during the war in 1990ies, and severely damaged during the period of so called 'unblocked transition' (M. Lazić) in the first years after the 'democratic turn' in 2000. They also give us opportunity to argue for the efficacy of the concept of "active hope", which we found in their narratives about change and in their restless business and social activism. Instead of waiting for solutions or aid (be it foreign or domestic, international or national) from someone else, they turn to the resources available to them,

which are around them, and use every cultural and social resource they can (regardless of its possible current evaluation as "traditional", "obsolete", "backwards") in order to imagine and legitimate a sense of new economic selves, as active economic players in new circumstances. By doing this, they also create tools for both social and economic survival and provide for the creation of "aposteriori cultural authenticity" (Miller), within harsh contingencies of transitory society and economy.

Concluding Remarks: Have We Learnt Something from the Knjazevac Case

There are a range of hopes and their different sources that were opened up after the 2000 on which different actors build their visions of future and orient themselves. Different actors rely primarily on one social or cultural resource in their "imagination of the local future", develop varying expectations from the future, but they are also open to combining these resources and creating interesting hybrids. Timok club develops expectations related to the normative and institutional "normalization" of the change, which means that they hope for the more market oriented economy that will value, support and promote small businesses, entrepreneurship and individual economic initiative. All of that will help Timok club's mission to *raise sustainable and environmentally secure development of the Timok region and to improve life conditions of its inhabitants* to come closer to realization. They lay their hopes into the state's declared European orientation, but even more into their own possibility to foresee the future development possibilities of the region and to provide international support for their projects. Entrepreneurs develop the same expectation, yet in some cases complemented with an appeal to a different, more "traditional" sources of hope: religious-moral dedication (businessman and fortune-teller Pavle) and mystical powers which bless the entrepreneurial idea. Social and political activism could be inspired and lead by an emancipatory ideal of social progress, characteristic for socialism (visionary Mika), and different combinations of them all in fact produce and maintain the hope as a "real possibility" in the sense Bloch uses it, providing for different, active meaning of the concept.

The combination of different sources of hope employed in the business sphere by different actors, and their instrumental relation towards these sources, allows us to rethink existing conceptualizations of post-socialist business actors, as thoroughly modernized and rationalized actors. We were faced with examples of combining conventional economically "rational" business practices with various allegedly "irrational" traditional ideas and practices. I would rather to escape conventional explanations of the like "inconsi-

stencencies" – the one which would emphasize either an essential "irrationalism" of the non-capitalist actors (economic view), or the other which would insist that this "hybrid" is a product of "uncompleted modernization" (a modernization, or "right value" thesis, in domestic context particularly popular among a branch of Serbian historians). I would also prefer to avoid romanticizing the fact that the new economic actors heavily rely on tradition, claiming that in that way they actually preserve tradition when faced with an unifying and homogenizing capitalist economy, which might constitute a more traditional ethnological argument. I would argue instead that they are actors that are acting reasonably in a complex and changing environment, and that they formulate most pragmatic solutions to deal with this situation. In that way they demonstrate a power of what I would name *contextual pragmatic reason*, using all possible resources to optimize their survival in an uncertain world. Therefore, they also constitute their new subjectivities as "actors", those who act upon circumstances, and not "waiters", those who "wait" things to happen, for the better or the worse.

I would suggest that an important aspect of the everyday economic activities of the actors presented here, although not as explicit as other aspects, is related to trust and social solidarity building. This could be read from the expenditures of the Sokolovićs on apparently "non-productive" rituals and festivities, which is a practice widely recorded in many post-socialist societies (see Brandtstadter, in Hann 2005, 550). Apart from being, as Hann says, "an investment in personal relations" as a consequence of "deep lack of trust in the state" (ibid), these are also activities aimed to promote and strengthen social solidarity, once a highly valued personal and social quality (both in peasant society and during socialism) and now perceived as threatened and vanishing social value. Similar interpretations connect cases of alleged "ritual extravaganza" with the ideals of social equality. Timok club's Business incubator, although seems to be a more straightforward business activity, constitutes a familiar case. Their experience confirms the more widely recorded benefit from the incubator: firms, "due to a closed structure of an incubator, are more apt to engage in social relationships. The ability to foster closer social relationships places the firm in a better position for fostering trust and gaining significant business process knowledge" (Studdard 2006, 213).

Finally, there is a question of the production, or in this case the reproduction of values. We can pose a question whether activities fostered by hope actually produce more hope in that way establishing hope as social value. Or put it another way: can visions transformed into activities and strivings, finally become values. If the answer is yes, and I have some reasons to believe this is true, activities that open up a future perspective and help to "imagine a local future" will constitute, openly or not, explicitly or not, an agenda of public action in which the issue of hope could be a prominent one. In that respect, ac-

tors (be it collective or individual ones) may accept "responsibility for hope" as part of their political project, social responsibility or citizens duty.

Hope is usually accompanied with its silent companions: fear and despair. However paradoxical it might seem, a pro-active hope needs those feelings as something against which it will be articulated, and gained strength. Really, there is no active hope without struggling with feelings of fear and despair. In order to produce a pro-active hope, all the actors involved in development of the region and all its inhabitants have to deal with many contradictions, among which the most pronounced is that between ever raising ecological awareness that shed new light on some old problems and revealed new ones as a catastrophic water pollution in 2007 and development plans that rely on "untouched nature". Nevertheless, just dealing with these contradictions and acting upon them will provide for a pro-active hope. In that respect, in Knjaževac case hope could be understood as a kind of method – applying a practical reason which frames everyday behaviour, activities and decisions, and could be found in an idea that whatever happens things have to "go on" and one has to "keep walking".

Finally, if we are, as Crapanzano says, "all caught", then this research inspired and lead by a notion of hope, will itself open up a possibility to imagine a "(local) future" for a major part of regional ethnology and anthropology, still burdened with its romanticist heritage and therefore prone to easily slip into "autochtonization" and "primitivization" of both the studied communities and their inhabitants.

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Ildiko Erdei

Nade i vizije: biznis, kultura i kapacitet za
zamišljanje lokalne budućnosti u jugoistočnoj Srbiji

Knjaževac i okolina su lokalni region za koji se može reći da deli sudbinu "globalnog juga". Stanovnici vide ovu geografsku, demografsku, socijalnu i kulturnu oblast kao nerazvijenu, zanemarenu i zaboravljenu od strane državnih i političkih struktura smeštenih "tamo gore", u beogradskom "centru", koji

predstavlja žižu svih zbivanja i mesto donošenja svih važnih odluka. Međutim, u poslednjih nekoliko godina primetni su izvesni pomaci u ekonomskom životu mesta i okolnih sela, koji se očituju u različim svežim ekonomskim inicijativama, što je stvorilo mogućnost tesnije povezanosti između ekonomskih i kulturnih praksi, i ojačalo kapacitete zamišljanja lokalne budućnosti. U radu će biti predstavljen presek najznačajnijih ekonomskih inicijativa i biće ukazano na njihovu kulturalnu dimenziju.

Sledeći Apaduraja, želim da pokažem da se ne može planirati niti ostvariti uspešan i održiv ekonomski razvoj, ukoliko se u njega ne uključi kreiranje, podsticanje i negovanje kapaciteta zamišljanja budućnosti, koji će, istovremeno, jačati ukorak sa realnim efektima razvojnih planova i uspešnih praksi. Nastojaću da pokažem kako novi ekonomski akteri, na primer novi preduzetnici iz ruralnog zaleđa Knjaževca, upotrebljavaju tradicionalne kulturne forme i resurse, poput verovanja u predviđanja i moć vidovnjaka, kako bi izgradili nov osećaj sopstva i podržali svoje novopokrenute "biznise". Takođe ću ukazati i na druge načine prizivanja i "vezivanja" budućnosti, kao što su "projektno" mišljenje i organizovanje jedne NVO organizacije i "vizionarski" kapacitet povezan sa građanskim aktivizmom.

Ključne reči: Knjaževac, regionalna nejednakost, lokalni razvoj, ekonomija i kultura, nada

Ildiko Erdei

Diseurs de bonne aventure et visionnaires —
sur les affaires, la culture et la capacité d'imaginer
le futur local dans la Serbie du Sud-Est

Knjaževac et ses environs sont une région locale dont on peut dire qu'elle partage le sort du "sud global". Ses habitants perçoivent cette région géographique, démographique, sociale et culturelle comme sous-développée, négligée et oubliée de la part des structures étatiques et politiques situées "là haut", au "centre" belgradois, qui représente le foyer de tous les événements et le lieu de la prise de toutes les décisions importantes. Cependant, au cours de ces dernières années certains progrès dans la vie économique des petites villes et des villages environnants sont perceptibles dans de toutes nouvelles initiatives économiques; cela permet une association plus étroite entre les pratiques économiques et culturelles, et renforce les capacités de concevoir l'avenir de la communauté locale. Ici sera présenté le bilan des initiatives économiques les plus importantes et leur dimension culturelle sera mise en valeur.

En suivant Appadurai, je souhaite démontrer qu'il n'est pas possible de planifier ni de réaliser un développement économique efficace et durable, à moins d'inclure dans ce développement la création, l'encouragement et l'essor des capacités de con-

cevoir l'avenir, qui, à leur tour, seront renforcées par les effets réels des projets de développement et des pratiques efficaces. Je tenterai de montrer que les nouveaux acteurs économiques, en l'occurrence les nouveaux entrepreneurs de l'arrière-pays rural de Knjaževac utilisent les formes et les ressources culturelles traditionnelles, comme la croyance en des prédictions et le pouvoir des visionnaires, pour se construire un nouveau sentiment de soi et soutenir leurs "affaires" nouvellement entreprises. Je vais également rendre compte des autres manières d'aspirer à l'avenir et de se l'"appropri-er", comme le sont une approche "axée sur les projets", l'action d'une organisation non-gouvernementale et la capacité "visionnaire" en rapport avec l'activisme civique.

Mots-clés: Knjaževac, inégalité régionale, développement local, économie et culture, espoir