

Ivana Lempelová – Rusyns

Rusyns? „Is it somewhere in the East of Slovakia, near the Ukrainian border?“ „More or less ...“ this is my answer to the question I have been asked many times. If I want to specify them more closely, I find it difficult. However we - the off springs of the male and female Rusyns - behave subconsciously in the same way. We can be obstinate and stubborn and we are not happy to admit our fault. On the other hand we are hot tempered, noisy and we like to enjoy ourselves.

The people of seven evacuated villages – Ruské, Dara, Starina, Poľana, Smolník, Zvala and Ostrožnica - who became the victims of the water dam, have had for all these years a feeling of injustice. They nurture this feeling inside. Sometimes I think it is their life style. Simply to be in an exile. It is in them and they did not manage to get rid of it. People connected with nature and land since their birth suddenly had to give it all up and leave, mainly to the town. Can anybody imagine the feeling of helplessness and loss of identity our mothers or grandfathers carry in them? And how much of this is circulating in our blood – in the blood of their daughters and grandsons?

I feel sorry that our descendants will have even less of this. At least our parents and grandparents constantly try to keep customs and traditions. Not artificially or forcibly. They simply feel like that. The question arises if we will also feel like that. If we will be willing to explain our children why it is done like that, why we have our Christmas dinner also at the beginning of January, if we will teach them to speak the language? Are we able to live like Rusyns? What does it mean for us?

Memories have an enormous significance for evacuated inhabitants of villages. They are both a source of their vital energy and a spring of their life tragedy. An abstract world where the forever lost home revives. From the material things only a torso is left. Maybe only a piece of land, overgrown by grass where the parents' house stood once. A patch of land, where they took care of the garden or the field. And also something else. The cemeteries. On their original place. Fortunately these were preserved by the former regime. Tiny compensation for all this are the urbariats of former villages and the association of the evacuees. Once a year, in the summer, the representatives of former villages organize the so called meetings of the original inhabitants connected with a church event. Apart from this the evacuees meet once again - on the occasion of All Saints day.

The project: „RUSYNS – Lost Homes“, which included a collection of old photographs, slides and films, opened my eyes and widened my view of the surrounding world. Paradoxically mainly the world which lies literally „under my nose.“ It opened a door for understanding of the unknown and enabled me to see what had been hidden before. I would have never thought, that I would get to know „my“ people through the optics of camera. To come to my own family and say: can I take a photo when you are doing this or that? I took photographs of all this with a feeling that it would be looked at by somebody for whom these things are strange and unknown. And through our photographs he will get to know and understand the people who have lost everything. And also those, who are part of a greater group – the Rusyns.

The photography has an enormous testimonial value and ability to grasp what can not be expressed by words. And therefore this project has an ambition to depict the real life of the Rusyns and bring it to wider public.

Maybe we can confute some attitudes and confirm some others. It all depends on people who will look at the photographs.