THE ROLE OF THE SCATTERED FARMS IN THE HUNGARIAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

ROLUL FERMELOR IZOLATE IN DEZVOLTAREA RURALA MAGHIARA

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Abstract: *Scattered farms are a special and characteristic settlement-type in Hungary, the historical background of which dates back to centuries. Most of the farms are situated in the „Kiskunság"-area, between the Danube and the Tisza Rivers. Nowadays this rural region can be characterised with complex and serious settlement-environmental problems. We have witnessed the homogenisation of local landscapes, degradation of soils and the regress of ecological diversification for decades. The local societies of the farm-regions suffer from multiple disadvantages and exhibit the symptoms of being on the inner-peripheries. There are several databases on the high rate of unemployment, lack of organised institutional services and demographic crisis. This processes accelerated in the last decade and it caused many environmental, economical and social conflicts.*

After all – based on our latest and recent spatial researches – we think that these rural areas have future in the Great Hungarian Plain. Scattered farms are one of the most important elements of the agriculture, of the rural/eco or green-tourism and of the whole environmental system at the same time, so they have huge impact on the local and regional sustainability. After 2014 the importance of these aspects will increase in the rural development policy of the European Union, which may lead to subsidies to scattered farms in Central Europe. Thus there is a demand from the Hungarian Ministry of Rural Development to know more about this type of settlement. In 2010 a research on 24 settlements were carried out. Out of the settlements many were scattered farms. We had some surveys with the local society, with the inhabitants of the farms and we had interviews with the local experts and prominent people. In our latest research we aimed to discover the opinion of the local societies and create sustainable development-alternatives for scattered farms.

Keywords: *scattered farms, complex settlement-environmental conflicts, rural development, local surveys*

1. INTRODUCTION

Scattered farms are special and characteristic settlement-types in Hungary, the historical background of which dates back to more centuries. Most of the farms are situated in the „Kiskunság" - the area, between the the Danube and the Tisza Rivers. Nowadays this rural region is characterised with complex and serious settlement-environmental problems. The homogenisation of local landscapes, the degradation of soils and the regression of ecological diversification are processes that have been going on here for decades. The local society of farm-regions suffers from multiple disadvantages and shows the symptoms of being on inner-peripheries (Csatári and Kiss, 2003; Csatári et al., 2005; Farkas and Kovács, 2007). Existing databases show sorrowful data regarding the high rate of unemployment, lack of organised institutional services and demographic crisis. These processes have been accelerated in the last decade and caused many environmental, economical and social conflicts (Table 1).

In spite of the unfavourable statistical data, there are numerous scattered farms and farm-regions where depopulation can be stopped and where country lifestyle can be made popular again. Nowadays scattered farms are one of the most important elements of agriculture and rural- and ecotourism. At the same time these farms are also important elements of the whole environmental system, so they have huge impact on the local and regional sustainability. It is presumable that some of the scattered settlements will be appraised in the future as rural environmental potentials and values, as the society's interest and need for the so called "eco-systematic services" is growing. After 2014 this view will be of increased importance in the rural development policy of the European Union and in the agricultural subsidy system. Hungary and Poland try to pass an objective about the preservation of scattered farms at the pending negotiations about the CAP reform. This may help to bring new life to this rural settlement type in Central-Europe. Moreover, the Hungarian government legislates an act about scattered farms in these days, so there is demand from the Hungarian Ministry of Rural Development for various research to make clear reading and recommendations about this topic.

2. THE AIMS OF THE SURVEY, THE RESEARCH AREA AND THE APPLIED METHODS

Based on these demands and thoughts a territorial research was carried out in the Kiskunság region of the Great Plain by the professional

leadership of the Great Plain Research Institute of Centre for Regional Studies of Hungarian Academy of Sciences. 24 scattered farm-type settlements were investigated in the Kiskunság region, the area near to Kecskemét and Kiskunfélegyháza (figure 1.). As the examined sample was created based on the statistical data of the various sections of the settlements, the survey is regarded to be representative.

The research was carried out in 2 main periods - in the autumn of 2009 and in the spring of 2010. Nearly 100 students, mainly from the College of Kecskemét and from other universities participated in the research work. During the empirical survey more than 500 questionnaires were filled in and nearly 100 persons were interviewed. The aim of the research was on the one hand to discover the peculiarities of the lifestyles at the outer Kiskunság that can be experienced still today and on the other hand to find out the ideas of the local society concerning the regeneration of the settlements and the scattered farms.

In the second phase of the field work, longer interviews were carried out. The interviews were carried out only at certain farms and focused on the ideas of the people living there. These interviews offer a very precise picture on the characteristics of country lifestyle and show the local's opinion – mainly in connection with the local development policies of settlements environment (Figure 1).

At the same time, at the "farm-forums" held at these settlements, prominences, like local decision-makers and professionals who felt responsibility for the farms, were interviewed and their opinion on the different topics was also recorded. This phase of the survey aimed to find out how the local decision makers think about the situation of certain scattered farms, what kind of developmental tasks they regard to be the most urgent and the most useful from the farms' point of view.

3. THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

3.1. THE PERCEIVED PROBLEMS AND OPINIONS

It was also the aim of the research to reveal whether the inhabitants of the scattered farms are satisfied with the various factors of their settlements. The inhabitants of the outskirts asked mainly highlighted the lack of local job opportunities, the insufficient medical care and the poverty to be the major problems of these territories. Furthermore, the out-migration of the young people and the aging of the local residents are regarded to be

also severe problems. Many of the asked phrased that "by the out-migration of the educated young people who plan to have families, the scattered farms lose exactly the social strata which would be of primary importance for the regeneration of the farms". Among the numerous problems the farms have to face, the bad quality of the roads has to be mention as well, since it contributes to the isolation of the farms. This regarded to be the most severe problem out of all the infrastructural difficulties. Many of the asked complain about the general embittered personality of those living at the scattered farms, which may originate from the fact that these people have no trust in their future and they also do not see any opportunity for their life to change for better. Finally they also emphasized the problem of crime actions at the outskirts. "As the adequate public safety is missing, even the best development intentions remain ineffective" – said one of the persons asked.

On the basis of the answers for the questions regarding the various aspects of the settlements it can be concluded what the inhabitants regard to be the most important fields of development. In accordance with the former references, 75% of the people living at the scattered farms of the Kiskunság regard the expansion of local job possibilities to be the task of the highest importance. 70% of the persons asked have the opinion that the medical care supply has to be improved and also 70% of them think that the road network has to be developed. More than 50% of the persons asked support the renewal of the farm agriculture and would not oppose the development of eco-farming (in case of adequate financial assistance - said most of them). They would also support the enlargement of the social supply (although in general everybody is satisfied with it) and many would also support the reinforcement of the local culture and preservation of the local traditions. In connection with these fields, the majority had the opinion that the communal life needs to be revived and cultural life and entertainment possibilities have to be established. Besides, the local tourism is listed among the elements regarded to be important, although on the basis of the answers, it seems that some of the local inhabitants do not regard farm-tourism to be realisable.

Most of the examined farms can be characterised by social problems and difficulties in subsistence. There were only few farms where the locals had the opinion that their own living had strong basis, which rather strongly determines the future of the farms and the future of the farm-regions. It is

hard to predict the development and renewal of the farm-regions where even the assurance of the daily living causes difficulties.

The absolute majority of the asked (90%) like to live on farms. Thus, apart from the numerous difficulties and problems, the countryside lifestyle has a rather strong retention force. This is a kind of factor that the future can be based upon. The intention to move away from the farms is definitely low, which proves that the country lifestyle is popular and that a local binding to the country exists as well. Although, the question has to be asked how big the role of resignation and the force of habit are in the local binding.

3.2. THE SITUATION OF THE FARMS ACCORDING TO THE LEADERS OF THE SETTLEMENTS – CONCLUSIONS BASED ON FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

According to the asked prominences, the general situation of the farm-like outskirts of the examined area has been clearly deteriorating in the past few years. The everyday living of the inhabitants of the farms is becoming harder. The number of the general, classic farms is decreasing. The number of the farms specialised for producing agricultural goods is certainly diminishing, though the self-maintenance of the farms remains typical.Today only a small proportion of those who live at the farms see any opportunity in the farm-agriculture- and only in case if the sale of the agricultural products at the home markets would be supported. Nearly in all the cases of the focus group conversations, the need of change regarding the laws was mentioned. Home market sales should be strengthened as opposed to the more potent merchants and department stores. The bio-production is a rather controversial issue. Most of the interviewed persons regard the bio-production (combined with the farm-tourism which provides only additional income) to be a take-off point in the case of 20-30% of the farms. The social situation and life circumstances of the inhabitants of the farms are rather polarized; there are rather huge differences between the lifestyles of the families living at the outskirts.

The number of the farms functioning only as residences has been growing since the change of regime. At the same time, there are farms in very good conditions or renewed, which are bought by foreigners for recreational purposes. “The age structure of the population is worrisome”- said some of the interviewed persons. Out of the examined settlements, there was only one which could preserve the ratio of the inhabitants living at the outskirts and the inner city.

At the farms in run down conditions mainly live families hit by severe segregation. "Super-segregation" is the best expression to describe the situation of the old persons living alone at farms, the poor people superseded from the inner city and the homeless people loitering in "the world of farms".

4. CONCLUSION

The sustainability of the farm-regions in Hungary depends on several factors. To stop the unfavourable processes of the present and as to establish the future role of the farms, the changes going on at these territories need to be viewed from new angles. It is doubtless that the preservation of this specific type of settlement is a national and European interest as well. The support of the inhabitants living at the periphery of settlements is important for the whole society, as the country lifestyle had a significant role in shaping the present image of the mentioned cultural landscapes. Besides, the maintenance of the traditional farming styles and the preservation of the gene-reserves, maintaining the landscape diversity and the functions of the farms have to be extended. On the one hand by the modernisation of the housing possibilities farm-regions have to turn into an environmentally friendly residential area. On the other hand they have to become a territorial unit of green farming and rural tourism. As to establish a more balanced development and as to increase environmental safety, the settlements of the region need to have a long-term environmental strategy, which besides the development of the infrastructure has deal with modern farm-agriculture as well. Furthermore, the expansion of the environment-conform solutions of agriculture has to be supported by the rural development policy of the EU and Hungary.

It is assumed that by the development of the farms, the territory will be more potent to become sustainable. This process has to be based partly on its natural resources, traditions and local knowledge. Furthermore, a more sensible use of the resources of the agricultural environment would advance to establish more favourable living conditions and agricultural conditions at the Kiskunság region. To reach this state the complete development of the environmental infrastructure, the expansion of the environmental-conform solutions of agriculture, the harmonization of nature protection and tourism and the foundation of environmental-conscious behaviour of the society are needed.

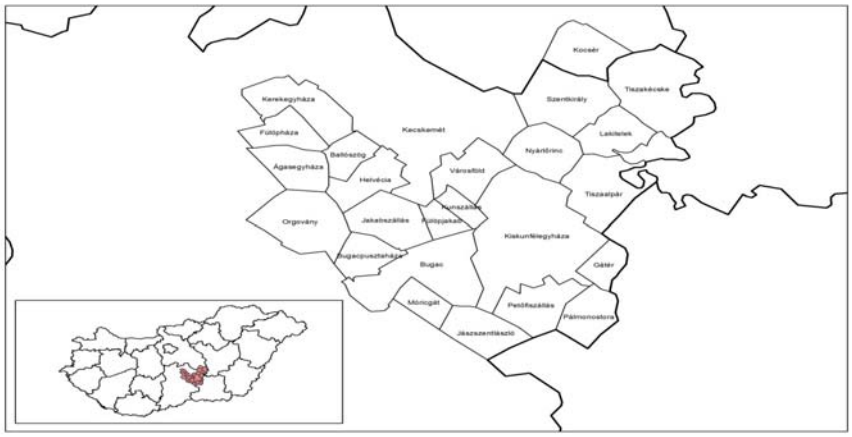


Figure 1. The research area around the middle-sized cities: Kecskemét and Kiskunfélegyháza

Table 1. The general problems of the scattered farm-regions

Ecological, environmental problems
• growing extremity of the climate, uneven precipitation supply
• the groundwater is in deep under the surface
• degradation of soils
• homogenisation of landscapes
• unregulated architecture not merging into the landscape and wasteful environmental use
• ecological degradation
Socio-economical problems
• negative symptoms of the rural society – deprivation, unemployment, ageing, out-migration, social exclusion
• cumulative social stress - poverty, criminality, „segregation”
• a significant decrease in the dominancy of agriculture, the uncertainty of agricultural production
• the “collapse” of the relationship between towns and villages, conflicts of urban and rural lifestyle
• slow infrastructural development
• the lagging behind and powerlessness of the environmental management and planning – the missing plans of territorial development

Source: the researches of the Great Plain Research Institute (GPRI) of Centre for Regional Studies(CRS) of Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS)

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