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Problems and Development Concepts for Scattered Farms in Hungary – a Case Study from the "Kiskunság Region"

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Scattered farms are characteristic settlement types of Hungary whose historical roots go back centuries. Most of the farms are situated in the "Kiskunság Region" – an area lying between the Danube and Tisza Rivers. Nowadays, this rural region can be described as having complex settlement-environmental problems, such as the homogenisation of local landscapes, degradation of soils and regress of ecological diversification. The local societies of the farm-regions suffer from multiple disadvantages and exhibit the symptoms of being on the inner-peripheries. This process has accelerated in the last decade and has caused many environmental, economic and social conflicts.

At the same time, according to our latest research, these rural areas with scattered farmsteads are one of the most important elements of agriculture, of rural/ecotourism and of the whole environmental system. So they have huge impact on local and regional sustainability. Our latest results show severe problems, but we found a key factor that the future can be based upon. The absolute majority (90 %) of the respondents of our research "like to live on farms". This means - apart from the numerous difficulties and problems - that the countryside lifestyle nowadays has a rather strong retention force.

Key words: scattered farms, settlement, environmental, rural development, ecotourism, Hungary

Problemi i razvojni koncepti tradicionalnih raštrkanih farmi u Mađarskoj – studija slučaja regije Kiskunság

Raštrkane farme karakteristični su oblik naseljenosti u Mađarskoj čiji su korijeni u dalekoj prošlosti. Većina tih raštrkanih poljoprivrednih gospodarstava, pustara, nalazi se u regiji Kiskunság – području između rijeka Dunava i Tise. Danas u toj regiji postoje složeni problemi međuodnosa naseljenosti i okoliša, kao što su homogenizacija lokalnih krajolika, degradacija tala i smanjenje lokalne bioraznolikosti. Lokalne zajednice poljoprivrednih regija suočene su s višestrukim nedostacima i pokazuju karakteristike unutarnje periferije. Ti su se procesi pojačali tijekom proteklog desetljeća i rezultirali mnogim okolišnim, ekonomskim i socijalnim konfliktima.

U isto vrijeme, prema našem istraživanju, takva ruralna područja s tradicionalnim oblicima naseljenosti vrlo su važan element poljoprivrede, ruralnoga turizma i ekoturizma te okoliša kao sustava u cjelini. Kao takva imaju velik utjecaj na lokalnu i regionalnu održivost. Iako istraživanje otkriva velike probleme, izdvojen je i ključni faktor koji može poslužiti kao temelj za budućnost. Apsolutna većina (90%) ispitanika u našem istraživanju

odgovorila je da „voli život na poljoprivrednom gospodarstvu”. To znači – osim brojnih poteškoća i problema – da život na selu danas posjeduje i snažan privlačni karakter.

Ključne riječi: raštrkana poljoprivredna gospodarstva, naseljenost, okoliš, ruralni razvoj, ekoturizam, Mađarska

INTRODUCTION

Scattered farms form a special and characteristic settlement type in Hungary, the historical roots of which date back several centuries. In their original form, scattered farms developed as a settlement form for agriculture – first with animal husbandry and, later, cultivation through plant production – enabling the exploitation of the area of the Great Plain that became depopulated after the Ottoman occupation. However, it was only from the mid-nineties with the rapid settlement of the outskirts of the market-towns, which served as the population centres, that the spread of the farm style of life and economic system began. In 1930, 30% of the population of the counties in the Great Plain (977 384 people) lived on the outskirts, of which the number of people living on scattered farms was approximately 750 - 800 thousand (Becsei, 1990). The land distribution programme in 1945 was the last such determining event that caused the establishment of a significant number of scattered farms. The next 45 years may be called the phase of deterioration and differentiation in the scattered farm system (Becsei, 2004). During state socialism, farming on the scattered farms was seriously restricted through the law on maximisation of the size of the lands of the scattered farms, the strictly regulated land-use and the prohibition of the expansion and reconstruction of scattered farms introduced on the outskirts (Ónodi, 1990). As a consequence of the unfavourable regulatory circumstances, the scattered farm system was practically liquidated in many parts of the Great Plain, including the Jászság, the Hajdúság and the Nagykunság regions. The number of inhabitants living on the scattered farms fell to an estimated 150 - 200 thousand by the mid-1990s (Miltényi, 1997).

After the change of regime, many thought that the new holdings structure resulting from the compensation process – those who applied were given back their lands lying next to their scattered farms – would serve as an excellent basis for the revival of productive farming on the farms, and also for the renewal of the farm system (Molnár, 2006). This process would have had reality only on the Danube-Tisza Interfluve, since the conditions defined by József Becsei – such as the appropriate land size, land-use/cultivation pattern, and the large number of surviving farms – were available there (Becsei, 2002). However, the development of the viable family farms failed to come about; even so, the former farmers, who were mostly in advanced years, took over the duties and difficulties in the process of compensation, and thus the renewal of the scattered farms did not happen. Later, the need for exploring the situation, development and advancement of the scattered farms, representing a special "subtype" within the Hungarian rural regions, only appeared in Hungarian rural development with the European Union funds in the early 2000s. One of the main reasons for this is that the people living on the scattered farms can hardly enter

the municipal administration due to the peculiarities of the Hungarian electoral system, and thus their negotiating and lobbying power are low, both on the local as well as on the national level (Bódi, 2004).

Following the accession of Hungary to the European Union in 2004, comprehensive research was conducted on the Danube-Tisza Interfluvium entitled "Tanya Research 2005", collaboratively organised by the CRS of HAS and the VÁTI in the spirit of preparation for the 2007-2013 planning period. As a result of these investigations involving 26 000 scattered farms, the types of detached settlements and the processes taking place on the outskirts could be explored. The most important lesson learnt from this research is that, after 1990, the (suburban) farms used only for residential purposes, situated close to the inner parts of the settlements, appeared after 1990 (urban and rural sprawl), and it has become obvious that the number of farms conducting traditional economic activities has significantly decreased. The social structure of the latter farm type changed became aged and segregated. As a consequence, the landscape sustaining and social-economic role of the scattered farms is being jeopardised (Csatári, 2005).

In our opinion – in spite of the negative processes – these farms are important elements of the whole environmental system, so they have a huge impact on local and regional sustainability. It is presumable that some of the scattered settlements will be considered 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 will 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 is at present legislating an act on scattered farms, so there is demand from the Hungarian Ministry of Rural Development for various research projects to provide clear reading and recommendations about this topic. Nowadays, scattered farms are one of the most important elements of agriculture and rural and ecotourism.

MAIN PROBLEMS AND TRENDS IN THE STUDY AREA

Nowadays, most of the farms are situated in the "Kiskunság" – the area lying between the Danube and the Tisza Rivers. This rural region is characterised by complex and serious settlement-environmental problems (Tab. 1). 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. Due to the low level of infrastructure and the poor competitive power, the traditional built-environment has lost its attraction. Existing databases reveal sorrowful data, such as a high rate of unemployment, lack of organised institutional services and a demographic crisis. These processes have been accelerated in the last decade and have caused many environmental, economic and social conflicts. The local society of farm regions suffers from multiple disadvantages and shows the symptoms of being on the inner-peripheries (Csatári and Kiss, 2003; Csatári et al., 2005; Farkas and Kovács, 2007).

Tab. 1 The general problems of scattered farm-regions

Tab. 1. *Opći problemi regija s raštrkanim poljoprivrednim gospodarstvima*

Ecological, environmental problems
• growing extremity of the climate, uneven precipitation supply
• the groundwater is deep under the surface
• degradation of soils
• homogenisation of landscapes
• unregulated architecture not merging into the landscape and wasteful environmental use
• ecological degradation
Socio-economic 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 dominance 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 lack of plans on territorial development

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

Izvor: GPRI Institut Centra za regionalne studije (CRS) Mađarske akademije znanosti (HAS)

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION ON THE AIMS OF THE SURVEY AND THE APPLIED METHODS

Partly based on the needs of the government, territorial research was carried out in the Kiskunság Region of the Great Plain by the Great Plain Research Institute of the Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2009 and 2010. 24 scattered farm-type settlements were investigated in the Kiskunság Region, the area near to Kecskemét and Kiskunfélegyháza (Fig. 1). The sample was constructed based on the statistical data of the various features of the settlements.

The research was carried out during two main periods – in the autumn of 2009 and in the spring of 2010. Nearly 100 persons, mainly university and college-students, participated in the research work. Under the direction of researchers and teachers, they surveyed the outer areas of the settlements and collected data.

During the first phase, an empirical survey including more than 500 questionnaires was conducted, and nearly 100 farmers were interviewed. The aims of the research were to discover the peculiarities of the lifestyles, and the natural, architectural and social environment of the farms on the outskirts areas of the Kiskunság. In addition to that, we tried to find out the views of the local society concerning the regeneration of the settlements and the scattered farms.

In the second phase of the fieldwork in 2010, a second round of in-depth interviews was carried out with the inhabitants of the research area. These interviews were focused on the local development policies of the settlements, giving a very precise picture on the opinion of the local inhabitants.

At the same time "farm-forums" were held in these settlements. Prominent persons, such as local decision-makers and professionals who felt responsibility for the farms, were interviewed and their opinion on the different topics was also recorded. With the exception of a few, in most of the cases local intellectuals, mayors and local government employees were interviewed. During these focus group interviews the following topics and questions were touched upon:

- The past and the present situation of the farms of the Great Plain in general and, more precisely, of the farms of the examined settlements.
- Why are the survival and the renewal of the farms important questions?
- How grave are the difficulties of the families living on farms? Whether the impoverishment of the farms are perceptible and to what extent?
- Do the newcomers, the foreigners settling here, or the minorities cause any conflicts?
- What are the main obstacles in the survival or in the renewal processes of the farms?
- What may be the solution for the farms in the following 20 years?
- How fragmented (age, income and other views) is the society of the farms?
- Is there anything like a "farm society" – and how could it be developed?
- How could the population living on farms be helped more effectively?
- What could the local population do by itself for the renewal of the farms?

This phase of the survey aimed to find out what the local decision-makers think about the situation of certain scattered farms, and what kind of developmental tasks they regard to be the most urgent and the most useful from the aspect of the farms.

Tab. 2 Research steps and applied methods

Tab. 2. *Hodogram istraživanja i primijenjene metode*

Time	Research activity	Method	Number of respondents
2009 autumn	fieldwork	survey questionnaire	500
	1 st interviews with farmers	structured interview	95
	quantitative analysis	Statistical methods with SPSS	
2010 spring	2 nd interviews with inhabitants of the research area	in-depth interview	80
	farm forums with prominent persons	focus group interview	24 focus groups (one from each settlement)

THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The perceived problems, the satisfaction and opinions about the developmental factors – conclusions based on the questionnaires filled in by the inhabitants of the farms

An important aim of the research was to reveal whether the inhabitants of the scattered farms are satisfied with the various factors related to their settlements. The interviewed inhabitants on the outskirts pointed out mainly the lack of local job opportunities, the insufficient medical care and poverty as the major problems of these areas. Furthermore, the out-migration of the youth and the aging of the local residents are also regarded as severe problems. Many of the interviewees phrased that "with the out-migration of the educated young people who plan to have families, the scattered farms lose exactly that social strata that would be of primary importance for the regeneration of the farms". Among the numerous problems the farms have to face, the poor quality of the roads must be also mentioned, as it contributes to the isolation of the farms. This is regarded as the most severe problem out of all the infrastructural difficulties. Many of the interviewees complain about the general embittered personality of those living on the scattered farms, which may originate in the fact that these people have no trust in their future, and they also do not see any opportunities for their life to change for the better. Finally, they also emphasise the problem of criminal actions on the outskirts. "As adequate public safety is missing, even the best development intentions remain ineffective" – said one of the persons asked.

Looking at the whole sample – based on the inhabitants of the scattered farms who were asked – it can be concluded that the majority regarded relationships with neighbours to be good. According to them, the settlements are in good condition and the local education is also adequate. The living conditions and the job of the local leaders to develop the settlements were also positively esteemed. Public safety and the supply of public utilities were judged in a different way. Many expressed their concerns about the lack of purchasing possibilities, and cultural and entertainment opportunities.

On the basis of the answers to the questions regarding the various aspects of the settlements, it may be concluded what the inhabitants regard as the most important fields of development. In accordance with the former references, 75% of the people living on the scattered farms of the Kiskunság Region regard the expansion of local job possibilities to be the task of the highest importance. 70% of the interviewees have the opinion that the medical care provision needs to be improved and 70% of them also think that the road network needs to be developed. The majority would greet with satisfaction improvement in the accessibility of the farms and the development of new roads accessing the farms, as the quality of the dirt roads is rather poor in many places.

More than 50% of the persons interviewed support the renewal of farm agriculture and would not oppose the development of eco-farming (in the event of adequate financial assistance – most of them said). They would support the expansion of social supply (although, in general everybody is satisfied with it), and many would also support reinforcement of the local culture and preservation of the local traditions. In connection with these fields, the majority considers that communal life needs to be revived and that cultural life and entertainment opportunities have to be established. Besides, the role of local tourism is

listed among the elements regarded as important, although on the basis of the answers, it seems that some of the local inhabitants do not regard farm-tourism to be a feasible option.

Most of the examined farms can be characterised as having social problems and subsistence difficulties. There were only a few farms where the locals thought that their own livelihood was on a firm 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 ensurance of a daily living causes difficulties.

For the majority of the people living on the farms, the contacts with the main (or mother) settlement (administration, medical care, education, daily shopping, visiting friends and relatives) are of great importance.

The absolute majority of the interviewees (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 a local binding to the countryside exists as well. Although, the question has to be asked concerning the size of the role of resignation and force of habit in the local binding.

According to the persons who filled in the questionnaires, new job opportunities and renewal of the farm agriculture are the most important developmental tasks that could improve the circumstances of the people living on the farms. In this way, these people

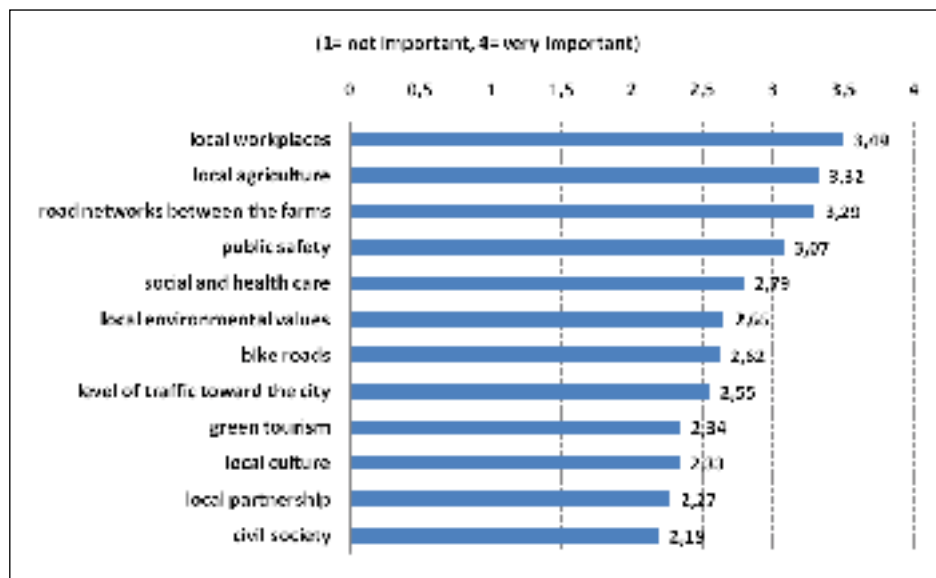


Fig. 2 The most important local tasks - based on the opinion of the inhabitants of the examined farms
Sl. 2. Najvažnije zadaće na lokalnoj razini – rezultati se temelje na mišljenju stanovnika istraživanih poljo-privrednih gospodarstava

Source: based on the survey questionnaires in 2009
Izvor: ankete provedene 2009.

would receive a certain income, which would help them in the fight against poverty and general dissatisfaction, and it would also help to keep the young generations on the farms. The modernisation of the road network on the outskirts – which may also improve the accessibility of the farms and establish public safety – is also rather important.

The situation of the farms according to the leaders of the settlements – conclusions based on focus group interviews

General problems, living standards, infrastructure

According to the prominent persons interviewed, 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. According to the participants of the settlement forums, this is due to the attitude of many members of the young generation born on the farms, the increased interest in urban lifestyle, and then, in certain respects, also due to the urbanisation processes manifested in the specific territorial and social re-arrangement characteristic of the Hungarian countryside. In accordance with more opinions, the degradation of agriculture, and the fact that very many of the inhabitants of the farms lost their jobs, had the outcome that the farms could not sell their agricultural products. The social situation and life circumstances of the inhabitants of the farms are rather polarised; there are rather huge differences between the lifestyles of the families living on the outskirts.

The number of general classic farms is decreasing. The number of the farms specialised in producing agricultural goods is certainly diminishing, though the self-maintenance of the farms remains typical. The number of the farms functioning only as residences has been growing since the change of regime (Fig. 3). The wages of the residents of these farms are mainly provided by some other jobs found on other settlements or in the town. At the same time, there are farms in very good condition as well as those renewed after being bought by foreigners for recreational purposes.

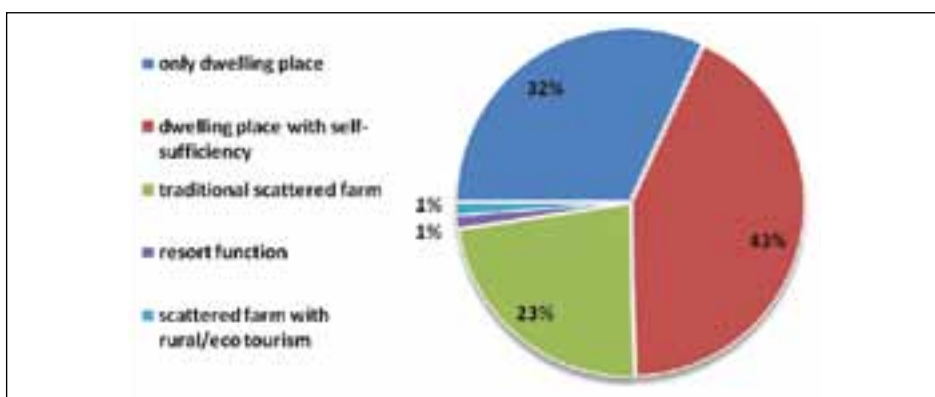


Fig. 3 Function of the examined farms

Sl. 3. Funkcije istraživanih poljoprivrednih gospodarstava

Source: based on the survey questionnaires in 2009

Izvor: ankete provedene 2009.

”The age structure of the population is worrisome” – said some of the interviewed persons. Of the examined settlements, there was only one which could preserve the ratio of the inhabitants living on the outskirts and the inner city. Out-migration and migration to the inner city are characteristic processes of these settlements, and the number of inhabitants is diminishing on the settlements themselves.

Mainly families hit by severe segregation live on the farms that are in run-down condition. ”Super-segregation” is the best expression to describe the situation of old persons living alone on farms, poor people forced out from the inner city and homeless people loitering in ”the world of farms”. Many live among saddening circumstances, in isolation, without having any relationships with their surroundings. Only the farm care service provides some kind of support for their survival.

The infrastructural situation of the farms shows regional differences. The most important elements of the infrastructure (electricity, water supply, roads, and communication devices) can be found on something more than 50% of the peripheral areas of the settlements. On one-third of the examined settlements, the infrastructure is slightly developed or not developed at all (only electricity and the telephone are installed).

Agriculture

The traditional country lifestyle was strongly connected to agriculture, thus it is obvious that the decline of agriculture resulted in unfavourable changes in farm life. Today, only a small proportion of those who live on the farms sees any opportunities in farm agriculture – and only in the event that if sale of the agricultural products on home markets would be supported. Nearly in all the cases of the focus group conversations, the need for change in the legal framework was mentioned. Home market sales should be strengthened as opposed to the more potent merchants and department stores. Bio-production is a rather controversial issue. Most of the interviewed persons regard bio-production (combined with farm-tourism, which provides only an additional income) to be a take-off point in the case of 20-30% of the farms.

Farming Communities

Mutual help relationships, co-operation between neighbours and co-operation with the mother settlement and soldiery communities were the characteristics of the farms in the past. According to various research, these relationships have become weaker. There is communal life – mainly connected to certain institutions (e.g. the Church, fishing or hunting clubs) – on only one third of the farms in the examined area. On 27% of the farms, there is no communal life at all. There seems to be a growing number of families without any country lifestyle background, who do not organically integrate into the farming communities. There are no significant problems with the minorities, whose number is rather low in the examined area. The public safety problems (burglaries and thefts) are in most cases caused by foreigners. According to three-quarters of the prominent persons interviewed, the safety of the farms is a problematic issue. As there is no monetary background on the settlements, self-organised citizen guards try to improve the situation.

The role of the farming communities in the renewal processes

According to the prominent persons interviewed, it is understandable that the time of "bottom-up organisational processes" has elapsed, as the problems of farms and agriculture are too serious to be solved without central, state-level will. In spite of this fact, the above-mentioned persons gave several good examples of farms, but the survival of these farms demands a high price.

CONCLUSION

The sustainability of the farm-regions in Hungary depends on several factors. As to stopping the current unfavourable processes and establishing the future role of the farms, the changes in these areas need to be viewed from new angles. There is no doubt that the preservation of this specific type of settlement is in the national interest. The support of the inhabitants living on 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, along with the maintenance of the traditional farming styles and the preservation of the gene-reserves, the functions of the farms must be extended. On the one hand, farm-regions have to transform into an environmentally friendly residential area by the modernisation of the housing possibilities. On the other hand, they have to become a territorial unit of green farming and rural tourism. As to establishing more balanced development and to increasing environmental safety, the settlements in the region need to have a long-term environmental strategy which – besides the development of the infrastructure – must implement modern farm-agriculture. Furthermore, the expansion of the environmentally conforming agricultural solutions must be supported which, through more successful nature protection and improvement of the environmentally conscious behaviour of society, could well become the base of the local and regional environmental culture.

It is assumed that by the development of the farms, the territory will be more capable of taking steps towards sustainability. This process has to be based partly on its natural resources, traditions, local knowledge and partly on the support system of the EU. Furthermore, a more sensible use of the resources of the agricultural environment would facilitate the establishment of more favourable living conditions and agricultural conditions in the Kiskunság Region. To reach this state, the complete development of the environmental infrastructure, the expansion of the environmentally conforming agricultural solutions, the harmonisation of nature protection and tourism, and the foundation of environmentally conscious behaviour of society are needed. The future of farms and farm regions is determined by the successful preservation of the landscape's values, development of the settlements, assistance in agricultural production (in accordance with the landscape's maintenance ability) and the establishment of investment and service activities.

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