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Analysis of local development in Romanian and Hungarian villages

Abstract: Over the last decade we have been conducting research activities in many village research camps and accumulating knowledge about the development of different villages. There is a gradually strengthening assumption that the development possibilities in the analysed villages will be affected significantly by the condition of the local society. In the study, we primarily focused on the experiences gained in the Romanian and Hungarian village research camps, where we were studying the local society and the history of development of the villages. The main question was whether their development was determined by strategy, good luck and good position, or by the quality of the local society. The following methods were used during the research: processing and analysis of data available at the site and in databases, questionnaire surveys, interviews and participant observations. In case of statistical data, we relied primarily on the applications of the National Spatial Development and Territorial Information System (TeIR) and on the databases of the Territorial Statistical Data System (T-STAR) operated by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO). With the help of the development history of the settlements, we drew general conclusions about the functioning of endogenous resources and social capital. We concluded that without a strong local society the local development initiatives could fail.

Keywords: local development, rural development, social capital

The paper summarises the experience of summer research camps. The organization of village research camps at Szent István University began in the early 1990s. On the one hand, the camps provided an opportunity for students and trainers to gain direct experience in researching local societies and economies and, on the other, the surveyed villages got a systematic, science-based mirror of their situation, social problems and opportunities.

An important feature of the one-week camps is that students, trainers, or high school students with different interests, closely cooperate with the endogenous village residents. The results of the research are always published in a volume made available to the local residents. The villages have been studied primarily in terms of development. One of the most important research questions was (and still is): how local society is tailored to engage in rural or local development? and what social problems hinder this development? The study of local society, also heavily relies on earlier research on social capital, anomie, quality of life and value research.

The work in the village research camps was preceded by several research questions. Examples of such issues included: What is more important in the development of villages: local society or inherited socio-economic conditions? (Or to what extent does the latter determine the current functioning of the local society?) What role does local cooperation play in the success of the villages? What is the role and relationship of NGOs, entrepreneurs, municipalities and “local heroes” in the development? (There is an assumption that habits and social responsibility of local entrepreneurs, heads of institutions, and “local heroes” greatly influence the success of a village.) Can strong community participation and social capital compensate for the inherited disadvantages and contribute to development? How do local conflicts affect development opportunities? In the course of our studies, we also accept the Gusti’s Law of Parallelism that there is no single phenomenon in the life of a society, no single manifestation of life, which is isolated, independent, and self-explanatory (Gusti, 1976).

Literature review

The approach and the methods of village research in Hungary changed a lot over the decades. The researchers in the 1930s explored the village’s problems from a sociographic point of view. After the Second World War traditions of village research were revived especially among ethnographers. At the end of the 1980s, there was a significant change in the approach and method of research. According to various authors (e.g. Ludescher, 2009), at this period, the sociographic method lost its importance.

The organization of research camps at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences started at the former Department of Agricultural Sociology. These

village research camps focused primarily on the development path and possibilities of different villages. One of the most important research questions was (and still is): how local society is tailored to engage in rural or local development? and what social problems hinder this development? During the study of local societies and economies, we also heavily rely on earlier research of social capital and quality of life.

A wide range of literature (e.g. Orbán–Szántó, 2005; Hanzel-Kassai, 2014; Kulcsár, 2017) suggests how social capital plays an essential role in sustainable rural development. Where social capital is weak, there are conflicting values and a lack of trust, which hinder any economic or social development activities. Social capital was first used in international literature at the beginning of the 20th century by Lyda Judson Hanifan (Tömpe, 2007), but it only became widely known in the 1990s. Since then, social capital has been given many different definitions (Fukuyama, 2001), but there has not been a generally accepted one yet. Based on the concepts of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), Putnam (1993) and Fukuyama (2002), social capital is a mixture of relations, trust, civil and social activity, and norms regulating social behaviour.

The authors emphasize the opinion of Zoltán Bíró, who highlights the importance of local identity, and the status and functions of local communities. He states that their development is important not only for researchers interested in the social processes of the region. In a resource-deficient region, external support, stimulation and support for development processes are important for local development. But, they are as important as the inclusion of endogenous capacities. To gradually begin to develop and organize themselves for settling in a peripheral situation today, the existence or absence of these local-scale community reserves may be crucial (Bíró, 2002).

Applied methods and data

We researched predetermined topics in the village research camp. The main topics of the camps have changed partly, but some topics stayed permanent over the years. The following methods were used during the research: processing and analysis of data available on-site and in databases, questionnaire surveys, interviews and participant observation.

In the course of our research, we relied primarily on the applications of the National Spatial Development and Territorial Information System (TeIR) and on the databases of the Territorial Statistical Data System (T-STAR) operated by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), and the Hungarian State Agricultural Compendium (ÁMÖ) and Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INS). Census databases also play an important role in demographic research. Local databases consist of local government registers, state as well as church registers. We used Excel and SPSS for analysis.

In the questionnaire survey, we questioned one member of the household. Sampling is done in a systematic, random manner. Representativeness is also ensured by the appropriate sample size. This means that, depending on the size of the village, the research covered every household, every second or every third household. Frequency distributions were calculated from the data obtained during the research, and the results are presented using diagrams and tables. While analyzing the relationships between metric variables with the help of cross-table analysis, we conducted correlation calculations.

In addition to quantitative research, the collection of qualitative data was equally important. The questionnaire survey revealed who was the authoritative, decision-making, opinion-forming personality of the village. During the interviews, we were primarily looking for the most prominent person in the village. Participant observation is the observation of everyday life, work, consumption habits and participation in holidays. Experiences are grouped at the end of the camp days.

Research results

Vețca (Székelyvécke)

Vețca is located in Romania, in the county of Mures, in Transylvania, Romania. The majority of the population of about 400 people is Hungarian. Vețca is the centre of Vețca community encompassing three villages: Vețca (Székelyvécke), Sălașuri (Székelyszállás) and Jacodu (Magyarzsákod). The demographic conditions of the settlement are unfavourable. Over the past half-century, the number of births has plummeted. The mortality rate was well above the live birth rate, so the population of the village is constantly decreasing. At the same time, immigration has affected the village. All of this led to a distortion of the age structure and ageing. The unfavourable age composition is also related to unemployment and a higher proportion of dependents. The vast majority of the village population is economically inactive: pensioners, housewives or dependents.

The older or disadvantaged inhabitants of the village find it difficult to adapt to the circumstances and many of them are doubtful, uneducated and, as a result, it is quite difficult for them to make decisions. But there are (some) traditional values that hold the community together. Relationships within families or among friends help them cope with the difficult living conditions. A community with a high degree of social support can easily overcome crises. On the other hand, collaboration and cooperation remain on a low level.

The most important development opportunity is the program for village preservation and tourism. The resources for that development come primarily from external sources, and in case of failure, this program could face serious difficulties. Developing tourism is not an easy task, as it cannot be operated

without the involvement of the local community, which, in this case, is not yet ready for the task. To sum up, the impediment for improvement lies in the failure to solve the following problems: second homes and rooms for rent purchased by Hungarians, low interest in establishing new businesses (entrepreneurship), lack of infrastructure, lack of micro-regional cooperation and relying mainly on external resources.

Mădăraş (Mezőmadaras)

Mădăraş is a commune centre with 1300 inhabitants, 20 km from Târgu Mureş, in Transylvania, Romania, too. During the socialist period, the population of the village decreased dramatically. Recently, the demographic situation is also characterized by stagnation, with a relatively low birth rate and high death rate, in addition to positive migration balance.

In Mădăraş the changes began in 2001, upon completion of the development plan of the settlement. The Plan made important and well-grounded proposals regarding the development of the village. One of the most important objectives, restoration of self-government, was implemented in 2004 after a two-year struggle. Another important development proposal was the improvement and stoning of the road network. Important progress has also been made in farming. Experts have correctly proposed dairy cattle breeding which already had traditions in Mădăraş. Another important factor was the formation of the farmers' association.

Women usually play an important role regarding development activities, but the position and the possibilities of women are determined by cultural constraints. According to the local standards, a woman's place is in her home and leaving the village is frowned upon. As a result, these socio-cultural rules make it almost impossible for women to commute and work in urban centres.

We also considered the state of the local society rather weak. Cooperation between individuals was very weak, people were not satisfied with the services, and they were not involved in local decision-making. The supply of services is poor, the low level of education is associated with a low-income situation and a lack of innovation, and local management works with low efficiency. In the village, social inequality is on the rise.

In summary, Mădăraş development problems are the following: the developments started with external help, improvements were made primarily through the introduction of external information, local community is indifferent and envious, distortion between the municipality and the development association, the disadvantaged situation of women and a strong influence of party politics.

The village with a population of 321 is a peripheral settlement. It is located north to Huedin (Bánffyhunyard) in Salaj County and administratively belongs to Almaşu (Váralmás). In the second half of the 20th century, the population of the village was mainly reduced by emigration to urban workplaces and forced urbanization. Currently, the rate of migration processes has decreased, with further loss of population caused by extremely low birth rates and increasing mortality rates. Overall, the current demographic situation in the settlement shows a negative picture of the future.

Our research has highlighted that the social capital of the community is very high. The general trust in foreigners in Jebucu is much stronger than in the Hungarian settlements participating in the 2005 International Comparative Value Assessment. The situation was even better in case of the strategic trust (the trust in family members and friends). The overwhelming majority of the population trusts their relatives and friends, and because of social support, it is easier to survive the more difficult times. Our survey revealed that personal contact is common among members of the community. This is not surprising, as in a village that small almost everyone knows each other and they often talk to each other.

The central element of the local development was the establishment of the Bethesda Children's Home and Diaspora School Centre. After that the local primary school was reopened with 8 classes, creating 12 jobs for the village. In 1997, construction of a new school building has begun as well, which was completed in 1998. The Bethesda School Centre opened in 1996. To provide for the its needs it was paramount to create different economic units (horticulture, dairy farm, mill and bakery). These operate partly independently under the Bethesda Children Home, providing economic self-sufficiency and supplying the area around the village with various products.

We can conclude that development required more than one factor for success. On the one hand, some local heroes devoted themselves to the community and launched the developments. Actors initiating the development had strong external ties and strong initiative. But then, there were also external supporters and resources. Thirdly, the local community had and still has resources that could also be relied upon.

Cserhátszentiván

Cserhátszentiván is a disadvantaged settlement located in the south-eastern part of Nógrád County, Hungary. In 2015, it had 118 residents. In the last decades, significant social and economic problems have arisen in the village. The most serious of them include unemployment and the deterioration of the local community life. A significant proportion of the population has a low level of education, migration of young people with higher education is typical of the village, and as a result, the local community is ageing.

The situation of the local society in Cserhátszentiván is determined by three distinct groups, the indigenous village people, the indigenous village people of noble birth and the new settlers. The different values and ways of thinking were also revealed during the questionnaire interviews. Without cooperation between the indigenous people and the new settlers, the development of the settlement is not possible.

Agriculture has always been an important sector of the economy of Cserhátszentiván, but it has not provided an adequate livelihood for everyone. As for the structure of farming, there is a shift from field crop production to grazing live-stock breeding and beekeeping. The transformation into a holiday village or the use of holiday homes in the absence of local resources is possible only with the help of external resources. Indigenous people, in the absence of adequate incomes, have been unable to make old houses suitable for rural tourism.

In the case of Cserhátszentiván, the inherited economic and social conditions and the situation of the local society negatively affect the development opportunities. The level of cooperation between local and micro-regional actors is very weak. The low level of human resources, the weakness of civil organizations, the distorted social structure all contribute to the dominance of distrust and envy in the examined settlement. In the triangle entrepreneurs, NGOs and local government, NGOs have more roles in Cserhátszentiván. The operation of existing foundations is typically linked to the new settlers.

Bátya

Bátya is a village in Bács-Kiskun County in Hungary with a population of 2094 in 2011. In the 1990s and even more in the 2000s, the number of births was extremely low. The trend also continued after 2011. The increase in the proportion of immigrants may, theoretically, increase the number of villagers, however, a quarter of the interviewed persons replied that they want to leave the settlement in the future. The migration targets were very diverse, with no clear direction except for the neighbouring city Kalocsa. There is a certain degree of immigration in Bátya, too. In the middle of the last century, those coming from other settlements came mainly because of marriages, and nowadays the cheap houses attract some young people. Due to the proximity of Kalocsa, there is no problem with commuting.

The study explored the characteristics of trust as an important component of social capital in Bátya. The results of the questionnaire survey in 237 households show that general trust for foreigners – compared to previous research results in other settlements in Hungary – is very weak. The research has also highlighted that the trust in the local community is usually limited to their family members and friends, which means that we have found very positive results in terms of strategic trust.

Bátya belongs to the characteristic villages that differed by their horticultural production from the villages practising general agriculture. The main products here are paprika, garlic and head cabbage. With the help of intensive horticulture production, new entrepreneur group emerged in the village that plays an important role in the decision-making process of the village.

Izvoru Crişului (Körösfő)

Izvoru Crişului is a commune centre along the road E60, next to Huedin in Romania. From the forties to the fifties, declining birth rates and emigration led to a decline in the population and a major population drop occurred in the 70s and 80s. In recent decades, the natural decline has been a typical process with mild immigration surpluses. Low birth rates have and will have significant negative consequences. The age structure of the village is getting older, it will be difficult to provide the appropriate number of classes at school, and in the longer term the active, working-age population will decrease. In 2011, there were 958 residents in the village.

The history of Izvoru Crişului's development is not typical, but it is not a unique case either. The ethnographic literature also describes several cases when some of the villages dealing with farming were also performing a craft or artisan activity. This change of livelihood strategy at the turn of the 20th century also relied on internal and external resources, which fortunately strengthened each other's impact. The craft industry has transformed the local society, but the role of basic values, family, religion, school and national identity has not changed.

The strength of social capital can be described as relatively good. In Izvoru Crişului the strategic social capital is stronger than general trust. The situation is worse in the case of anomie, the insecurity in the villages can be caused mainly by a lower level of education and secondly by the division of the local society.

The biggest problem of the villages, and especially of the Hungarian majority villages, is the social and political division. It can be seen that in Izvoru Crişului, but also in other villages, it is necessary to develop rural development strategies and to facilitate the existing development processes. This will be very difficult, though, because of a weak local society, low civil activity, extremely poor communication, poor human resources and low cooperation.

Conclusions and implications

Examining the role of social capital and values in the development in the examined settlements raises further questions. For the time being, we cannot answer the question of whether strong social capital causes development or, conversely, it is a consequence of development. In further exploring the role of local social capital, we need to pay attention to people that have resources, power and prerogatives in a given settlement, and how they are embedded in the fabric of local society.

The results of the research carried out in the research camps are diverse, but some general conclusions can be drawn. These can be related to the use of social capital, civil society, and the characteristics of those involved in development. The following table summarizes the main results of the research. The villages are different in terms of the actors of development, planning, the use of external assistance, the situation of partnership, the aspects of social participation and sustainability. The level of development of the villages can be evaluated with the help of the presented analytical model.

Table 1. Characteristics of the local development

	The main actor in the development	Development plan	The role of the external resources/ aid	The role of partnership	Participation and social involvement	Sustainability
Mezőmadaras / Madaras	The head of civic organization	+++	+++	--	-	+ -
Székelyvécke / Vetca	Mayor, entrepreneur, the local hero	- +	++	+-	+-	+
Zsobok/ Jebucu	Protestant priest and civic organization	++	+++	++	+++	++
Körösfő/ Izvoru Crisului	Mayor and partly the local council	- +	+	--	+	+ -
Cserhátszentiván	New inhabitants	- +	++	--	-	+-
Bátya	Mayor, local entrepreneurs	+	++	-	- +	++

Source: own study.

Table 1 shows that the community of Jebucu is the most suitable for participating in developments, while Cserhátszentiván is the least suitable at the moment. In Vetca, the lack of local resources was one of the most important problems. There the development opportunities were represented by the village renovation, village landscape preservation and tourism program. Starting tourism is not an easy task as it cannot be operated without the involvement of the local community, which is not ready for this task.







In Mădăraş we found an interesting correlation between the lack of water supply and the situation of women. Divide and dissension could hinder the

local development process very much. This was equally true in Mădăraş and Cserhátszentiván. However, the fact that many local initiatives, programs and development attempts have not been used properly is the responsibility of the local community itself. If the local community fails to get involved in the development it will perish, fail or remain stagnant. In similar cases, we need to think about ways to activate the local community, strengthen local identity and establish a partnership between actors inside and outside the village, i.e. how to revitalize the village.

In Jebucu, on the other hand, the strength of social capital has helped to implement developments and integrate external resources. In the vast majority of the population, strong confidence and social support make it easier to survive more difficult times. Several factors needed good co-ordination for the development. Some local heroes devoted themselves entirely to the community and launched developments. But then, there were also external supporters and resources. Thirdly, the local community has had resources that could also be relied upon.

Table 2 analyses the settlements in the crosstab of the resources and the state of the local society. Using the experiences and data gained in the research camps, we placed the villages in the table. Villages in the box with strong local capital and endogenous resources are in the best position and settlements in the box with weak social capital and dominantly exogenous resources are in the worst situation from the development point of view.

Table 2. The socio-economic characteristics of rural development

Type of economic development	The state of the local society	
	Strong	Weak
Dominantly endogenous	 Zsobok/Jebucu	 Körösfő/Izvoru Crişului  Bătya
Dominantly exogenous	Székelyvécke/Vetca 	Cserhátszentiván  Mezőmadaras/Mădăraş 

Source: Own contribution based on Kulcsár (2017, p. 126).

When thinking about the development of a settlement, we often think of infrastructure deficiencies, low level of services or bad demographic conditions. Few people think that it is also vital examine the trust, the cooperation and connections of the local society. In our opinion, this is important because if the cohesion of the local society is weak, potential or real conflicts emerge. We suggest that the very first task within the local community is to restore

trust, respect for each other, and then to restore and build actual civil activity. When the community will be able to engage in dialogue inside and outside, obtaining the necessary resources will be a minor problem.

Summary

In the research camps – among other topics – we focused on the role of social capital in the rural development. Summarizing the views of Bourdieu, Coleman, Putnam and Fukuyama and others we concluded that the social capital is a mixture of trust, relationships, norms of social behaviour and civil society activity, which strongly affects the local development process.

This paper analysed the development progress and possibilities of six different villages in Romania and Hungary. One may conclude, there is a connection between the state of the local society and the inherited socio-economic conditions, but without strong local society and social capital, the community is not able to use its resources.

As it was demonstrated, in the development of villages, the role and relationship of NGOs, entrepreneurs, municipalities (local governments) and “local heroes” are of great importance. Social responsibility and activity of local entrepreneurs, heads of institutions and “local heroes” could greatly influence the success of a village. As strong community participation and social capital could compensate for the inherited disadvantage and contribute to development, the local conflicts, tensions, party interests could undermine the best development possibilities.

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