

## Why is sustainability unsustainable? The chances of environmental farming and community enterprises in a micro-village region

“The problem is not that this or that thing, which would serve personal or public good, does not take place, but the trouble is that it is impossible to happen.”

(István Széchenyi: Credit)

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**ABSTRACT:** To understand the chances and difficulties of the development efforts meeting the natural and social conditions of sustainability in the domestic agrarian sector, we have to consider a wider socio-historical context that is hardly dealt with in the literature on rural development and ecological farming. This study tries to achieve this aim relying on the conclusions of our field research carried out in the Órség, a region in Western Hungary. According to our experiences, the villages that have suffered deep injuries during the drastic changes over the last sixty years have been divested of their middle class and give home to mainly commuting or inactive people and communities disarranged by mass migration, thus they are not in possession of the tools necessary to reveal and utilize the local resources. The family farms have been destroyed by the marketing, administrative, tender call and other limitations, the unfavourable price relations and the fact that the domestic products have been ousted from the local markets. They market their surplus products primarily in local bartering, that is in the grey economy. The farmers' knowledge has fatefully been devaluated during the last decades and, since they are aging and dying, it is disappearing. The lack of trust between the winners and the losers of transition, between the natives and the immigrants and the memory of fresh injuries obstruct cooperation and disrupt communities. The enterprises built on local traditions and local resources must face the pressing economic reality created by the agrarian politics of the former period. Most of the initiators are immigrants from cities (or people returning home) or “ideological” entrepreneurs. Amongst the circumstances presented in the study they often get isolated or their failures make them give up their plans. Contrary to the expectations, the previous twenty years have not brought about the strengthening of the private enterprises in the agrarian sector but their collapse. Today's rural society and economy primarily depends on the system of state redistribution and the local stakeholders' relations that determine the operation of the system and are both bureaucratic and informal.

**KEYWORDS:** sustainability, rural society, domestic farming, landscape economy

## Object and scenes of the research

The research conducted by Our Common Heritage Research Group operating at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest<sup>1</sup> was aimed at examining the possibilities and obstacles of sustainable rural development. We wished to get knowledge of the activity, the motives, the social background and the reception of the stakeholders of environmentally friendly farming experiments and community building endeavours. It was clear from the very beginning that it was not enough to examine the personal strategies and attitudes but the social, cultural and economic circumstances had to be understood as well, because the shift to new technologies and new ways of coexistence does not finally depend on the individuals but the readiness of the closer and wider social environment to receive these. With our research we wished to connect to enterprises being in operation or organized in order to gauge the chances of ecological and social sustainability in rural Hungary in practice, by analysing their successes and failures. We hoped that our results would contribute to the creation of a Hungarian model of sustainable rural development policy.

The only question we kept in sight during our work concerning the situation of the examined regions and the changes happening there: is there a chance that rural society can find answers to the drastic changes going on in our days in consonance with the requirements of ecological and social sustainability? As shown below, in order to detect this, we have had to consider a wider context.

In order to control our local experiences we chose sites differing in many aspects. We conducted field researches in four regions: the Órség, the Middle Tisza Valley, the Bereg and Nógrád County. They are common in having valuable and sensitive natural endowments, and we were curious to know if these endowments were possible to be utilized in rural development.

The situation of the Órség is determined by its location next to the Austrian and Slovenian borders. During the fifty years prior to transition the iron curtain forced stricter control and heavier isolation upon the Western borderland than it did on the other parts of the country; and after the transition the very same conditions – the nearness of other countries and the more or less untouched natural environment – brought sudden and drastic changes in the composition and lifestyle of the population and the farming conditions. Therefore, in this region we can study the enlarged picture of the impacts of the changes having spread all over the country.

In Nógrád County we visited a settlement where the population saved the local school with unusual resolution and success from the consequences of the school merging campaign of the previous years. A solidary local society capable of enforcing their interest is, unfortunately, rare in today's Hungary. Examining its operation undoubtedly belongs to the field of sustainability since this latter definitely demands the revitalization of communities.

<sup>1</sup> The research was supported by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism.

In the Middle Tisza Valley we visited the centre of a promising rural development experiment. This initiation connected the restart of traditional flood plain farming to the building of alternative sales possibilities. Our task here was to present the work done by the pioneers of sustainability from the aspect of the stakeholders and the other groups of the village society.

In the Bereg region, too, we examined the development of similar community initiatives in a traditionally poor area, where the nearness of the river Tisza and other natural endowments provide the possibility of switching over to environmentally friendly farming.

The following study is built on the experiences of the field work done in the Órség region. We researched ten Órség settlements; we visited almost all the places from where we had received information, during the preliminary data collection done with the snowball method, on economic or cultural activities meeting our aspects. The number of the population of the villages we visited, namely Bajánsenye, Ispánk, Kercaszomor, Magyarszombatfa, Nagyrákos, Órimagyarósd, Pankasz, Szalafő and Viszák, is under 500. The only settlement in our research with a town status was Óriszentpéter with 1300 inhabitants. We made more than forty interviews, and classified the interviewees into five groups:

- Family farms and agricultural small and medium entrepreneurs,
- Partakers of cultural enterprises,
- Mayors,
- Experts in rural development and environmental care,
- Young village people.

## Preliminary remarks on sustainability

According to a widely spread opinion, development is sustainable in case today's people satisfy their needs in a way not obstructing the future generations to do the same. This definition seems to be incompatible with an ecological approach of the issue. The concept of sustainability has no direct connection to the so-called needs. It may not have, since the two notions come from two different fields of knowledge. And the cited sentence can be read in a political document, the so-called Brundtland Report<sup>2</sup>, and is not a scientific definition but the slogan of a global action programme.

The concept of sustainable development is, in case we want to use it in the description of a (natural or social) living system, is tautological, and so useless. We call the processes going on in a living system development only as long as the resources necessary for the renewal of the system are available at a rate being in balance or exceeding growth in the system performance (which means it is capable of performing more numerous or more complicated tasks, it extends the applicability of its

patterns, etc.). When these processes endanger, destroy or consume the existence base of the system, be it energy, knowledge or the capability of self-regulation, we will not speak of development but of decline, crisis or even collapse. In brief: development is development as long as it is sustainable. Something unsustainable is by definition not development. Self-destroying growth (e.g. in cases of conquering empires, cancer cells or agricultural monocultures) is a pathological phenomenon: it is not development and it is not sustainable. But why should it be sustained? So before forming our opinion on sustainability, we had better decide on the question whether our civilization is developing or declining. Do the present processes of growth and expansion increase the intellectual and natural resources and the rich diversity and harmonious co-existence of natural and cultural forms of life necessary for renewal, or do they play an opposing impact?

The question is not at all theoretical. In case we want to evaluate its operation, or rather, in case want to make strategies in order to influence it, we must surely know whether our aim is to sustain a certain system or to terminate it and reorganize its elements along other principles of operation.

Concerning the needs, first of all we must remember the unfortunate fact that it does not tell much about the vitality (sustainability) of a historical formation whether it satisfies its subjects' needs. Whose needs? And what kind of needs? What are the actually accepted needs? These are relevant questions in history. Some social groups' distress or discontent may offend our decency but has no connection to the question of development. Many times it is exactly the most dynamic development periods of a social system when the most elementary needs of some (looted, oppressed, sweat, declassed, etc.) groups remain unsatisfied; this, although opposing our taste, can be development.

The future generations do not have needs but rights. It is not possible to compare their unpredictable 'needs' to those of today's people. Their rights, however, are possible to know and are already described: it is the common heritage of human kind that it is their due. This heritage contains the rich diversity and variability of the biological earthly world at the standard known by us and having remained almost unchanged since the appearance of human kind up to our days. It also includes our cultural heritage in its diversity, and the knowledge growing from one generation to the other the preservation and transmission of which is our unquestionable obligation. It is not without use to emphasize this in a period when the concentration and efficiency-principled selection of knowledge destroys irreversibly local knowledge and cultural traditions that is our intellectual heritage, at a rate similar to the amount of the genetic information, which was accumulated during millions of years, getting lost with the disappearing species. The descendants' rights offer a much more definite point of orientation in our work than the obscure concept of needs or sustainability. All the activities destroying the world of nature or our knowledge are illegal and sinful.

But working with the concept of needs is also a blind alley because alternative economists have already pointed out that its general use is a mistake. It is not

<sup>2</sup> This report was entitled *Our Common Future* and made by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, under the Norwegian Prime Minister, *Gro Harlem Brundtland's* leadership commissioned by the UN General Assembly.

the needs that the development of our civilization has come to an irreconcilable discrepancy with, but the actual way of their being satisfied. Human needs have changed little throughout history, and they are easy to define: understanding and consideration from others, safety, freedom, health, food and shelter. It is the ways they are satisfied that have changed through history, and show great diversity.<sup>3</sup> The heritage of human kind, especially biodiversity, is not primarily endangered by the amount of needs but by the method of their satisfaction. Joyless wasting destroying our environment, health, relations, quality of life and our political institutions, as well, that is the present system of consumption constraint probably offers not more but less people the feeling of living a sensible life than other ways of 'needs' satisfaction could. This must be strongly stressed also because the greatest drawback the supporters of the so-called sustainability can cause to their targets is saying that we inevitably have to sacrifice for the future generations. In fact there is no need for sacrifices. There is no need for renouncement: what we need is to reclaim the conditions of a sensible and lovable life; not only for the future generations but possibly for the present ones, as well. Let us not believe and not make others believe that something good is – bad...

Sustainability, however, is a very relative notion since changeability and ending are essential elements of each natural and historical process. Still, human being builds his environment (to build means to complete, enrich or improve) in order to protect and preserve what he loves.<sup>4</sup> Being unwilling to use 'love' as a technical term is in vain, it is a fact that forced communities that are based on violent subordination and the exploitation of subsistence resources are short-lived, they can only be sustained by the increase of brute force (e.g. conquering empires, economic growth based on the exploitation of nature, etc.), and leave long-lasting devastation behind them. According to the lesson of history the sustenance of dynamic balance between the elements of the "ecological complex"<sup>5</sup> is only possible as long as the decisive majority of the acting participants is resolute and makes reasonable efforts in order to sustain this balance. Each culture is such a comprehensive network of "sustainability" strategies, and may best be characterized by the object of the partakers' devotion and love (scale of values). The desperate – since hopeless – efforts of mere self-subsistence are typical only in the era of the decline and collapse of a culture. "The perhaps most important ecological experience is the dauntless largeness that dares to love the world sentenced to suffering and death" – Erazim Kohák, the Czech eco-philosopher says. So instead of sustainability it is better to speak of the love of life: "Life is about truth, goodness and beauty, about the sea-gull flying over the gulf and not drowning into oil stains. About the mother elephant gently taking care of her babies and

<sup>3</sup> On the concept of needs see e.g. Ekins–Max–Neef (1992).

<sup>4</sup> See the explanation of the concept of "building" in the context of human existence in Martin Heidegger: *Building, dwelling, thinking in Schneller* (2005).

<sup>5</sup> We use the expression ecological complex after the Chicago School of human ecology; according to Duncan (1959) its elements are: the population, the physical environment providing for the population, technology allowing subsistence and the social organization allowing the application of technology.

not escaping from poachers. About human kindly protecting the Earth, and not destroying it drowning of eagerness" (Kohák 2000: 99).

The decay of our home on the Earth, the oikos of human race demands the creation of a scale of values and life strategies that give the main role to the understanding of personal responsibility held for the integrity and rich diversity of the more-than-humane world. This makes everything that we do and how we do it with nature a moral question: technology and the institutional system of producing goods. According to Hans Jonas in a technological civilization "where activity is replaced by production morality must penetrate into the field of production where it has stayed out from so far, and it must do this in public politics. Politics has never ever had to deal with questions demanding such a wide perspective. The changed nature of human's activity actually changes the nature of politics itself" (Jonas 2000: 150). The aspects of ecological sustainability make the technocratic idea of 'welfare', hoped from the network of increasing the amount of products and the system of their distribution in one way or another outdated. They demand the original sense of politics to be restored: they keep public debate and consent on the content of public good necessary. The state and market institutions are insufficient for that. The essence of ecological politics is to restore the autonomy of local, trade, cultural and other communities and the self-organization of the civil society. Emancipation does not mean the extension of rights but the reduction of the defencelessness of man against the rule of non-transparent and uncontrollable networks, mechanisms and 'necessities'. We can fulfil our inevitable responsibility held for our earthly home and descendants only as parts of autonomous communities. These communities, however, need the financial means of autonomy: the basic condition of sustainability is an economic attitude based on local resources and being aware of the fact that the legitimate objective of economic activity is not an increase in productivity measured by global indicators (productivity=profit=power) but by the enrichment of local communities and the improvement of life quality. Therefore, it does not 'use' its environment but preserves it, does not 'consume' it but participates in it – cultural and natural – life. Against growth it prefers the preservation of human scales, concerning freedom it lays stress on devotedness to others' freedom, and it keeps in mind that the basis of solidarity can be nothing else but mutual trust and understanding, trust in the possibility of understanding, the essence of dialogue. If not so, 'sustainability' would be a mere technical question, though it is not. It is a political philosophical and finally an ethical question.<sup>6</sup>

And now let us see what we consider as factors of development (*that is sustainability*) in rural development today.

- The increase in the role of the activities relying on and strengthening local knowledge and local work culture.
- Farming that utilizes the local natural endowments but does not exceed in utilization the renewal capability of these resources.

<sup>6</sup> I speak of the ethical and political theoretical consequences of the ecological worldview elsewhere, e.g. Lányi (1999, 2003 and 2009).

- Advantageous conditions for small enterprises, e.g. family farms, since in general these do more diverse farming burdening the environment at a lower rate, employ more people as compared to their sizes, build on local knowledge at a greater extent, and their strengthening is in direct relation with the strengthening of local society.
- Food self-subsistence: this lessens the defencelessness of the local society; provides more work possibilities and healthier food, and through the reduction of unnecessary transportation it decreases environmental pollution.
- The strengthening of local communities. Environmental protection and human co-existence need self-confident communities able to cooperate.

### Migration processes and their impacts on local society

Ecologically committed researches usually focus on the human–nature relations, and their attention is directed to the stakeholders' future, not their past. Agro-economics is interested in the components of economic performance, and gives a subordinate role to the socio-historical or ecological context. Rural sociology gives an authentic description of rural Hungary but most of the researchers are, consciously or not, devoted to an out-of-date modernization concept which often makes them blind to the alternative ideas and the marginal phenomena that are otherwise possibly important in connection with the rural future, but do not fit into the usual schemes. The specialists of transitology have so clear ideas of what (should) have happened in Eastern Europe after 1989 that they are very late in recognizing what has actually happened. It is improbable that the following pages can add too much to the enormous amount of knowledge having gathered in these four fields, however, we may, relying on our field experiences, attempt to find interconnections between the various systems of aspects.

Concerning the impoverishment, decline and lack of future of rural society – especially that of the micro-village regions –, most of the explanations are restricted to economic and economic policy trends, and blame or defend market competition or the domestic or European agro-politics. Others reprove village people who are unable to adapt to the changing conditions. However, their behaviour is impossible to be understood without considering the elementary – though rarely mentioned – fact that the Hungarian village society is a truncated society. It is a society having been deprived of the factors necessary for normal operation. As a result of political preconceptions, the 'black holes' in the collective memory and the culture of silence – that is of reticence – both the researchers and the village people are reluctant to speak, and the younger generations perhaps do not even know about the enormous devastation that the repeated waves of the great cattle-truck age migration had caused in our villages.

Independent of their evaluation the landowner and office-holder nobility played a decisive role in organizing and managing rural life. They transmitted cultural samples, represented local interests outwards and upwards, as well, and last

but not least they allowed the subsistence of services and handicrafts that were built on their 'luxury consumption'. In the Órség region the local people are still keeping the Sigray family in their memory: their name is connected to a church built in Hungarian art nouveau style and to considerable charitable activity. They escaped abroad away from Soviet occupation. Some time earlier, in 1944 and before, the Jewish population was carried off and fleeced in this region, too. The two-storey buildings of Óriszentpéter were probably and the Novak plank mill, now giving home to the Culture Stable, was surely owned by a Jewish entrepreneur. The Jews had a decisive role in buying up the crops, in the processing industry based on this and in giving credit to agriculture traditionally lacking capital all over the country. They were predestined to fill this position by the fact that for a long time they had been forbidden to settle in the towns of regulated rights, and to buy landed property. In today's agriculture the tragic absence of crop traders and creditors does not only remind us of collectivization and the awkwardly implemented privatization but of the victims of the Holocaust, as well.

However, the decisive moment of destroying rural society arrived a bit later, in the era of communist dictatorship: with the annihilation of the landowner peasantry. In the Órség villages the first wave of collectivization was preceded by the displacement of class enemies. József Saád's researches (Saád 2005) revealed the fact that most of the 'kulaks'<sup>7</sup> deported to the labour camps in the Hortobágy had been taken there from here, the area bordering Yugoslavia and Austria, so this mopping up mainly served the cleaning of the borderland that is war preparations. Their intimidating effect reaches far beyond the several families concerned: fear, suspicion, and irreparable injuries poisoned and are still poisoning human relations in the long run. *"The bigger farmers were deported or taken away. Then the co-operative came. The only problem was that knowledge, diligence and the several hundred years old family traditions were also taken away with them, so these co-operatives went bust in some years. This long village had 1200 cows. The grapes and orchards were also cut as the kulaks were taken away"* – our host remembered. The forests were also cut; there was need for wood. The valuable species were substituted by pine trees. Each of the traditional forms of living became endangered. And at first those returning home from the labour camps were not even let to enter the borderland, they settled elsewhere, many of them for good.

The demographic data tell little of the drop-out of some groups of the rural middle classes. For example, in the Órség the number of the gentry, the Jewish and the landowning peasantry growing bourgeois altogether was not very high: it is their role played in the local society life which has proved to be irreplaceable. The peasant middle class able to cultivate the land escaped or became declassed; they disappeared in the anonymous crowd of the cities where they were not taken as class enemies any more. This is what happened to most of the survivors of the Hortobágy camps – their lands were in most cases passed to others' hands – but

<sup>7</sup> A word of Russian origin meaning a landed peasant.

first of all to their children, who learnt the historical lessons. And later they were followed by those deprived of all of their properties in the second, even crueler wave of collectivization between 1959 and 1961. *"It was those people who gave the character of their communities that were gone, and in my opinion this is why these communities behave as flocks of sheep today"* – a local forester says.

Since the Ottoman conquest our villages did not experience losses – in human lives and material things – comparable to those between World War II and the sixties. The beheading of the village societies, and then the forced labour done in the co-operatives organized with autocratic methods divested the local societies of the capability of self-organization and independent farming. It is the consequences of all this that makes their descendants suffer these days. In addition, domestic sociology mixed up mobilization with mobility, and even with 'upward mobility' for a long time. There were hardly any authors doubting that moving into the cities and substituting agricultural work for industrial or service sector activity meant development and improvement in the village peoples' lives. Brute force or not, they thought that people having become townsmen or at least commuters in the socialist era were fortunate, and these changes served the country's good. In fact, many of these were definite cases of declass or escape from political persecution. Teréz Kovács published astonishing data: in 1960, the year of the organization of the co-operatives, 970 000 changes of – permanent or temporary – home addresses, meaning a movement to another settlement, were registered (Kovács 2000). The extreme number hid the escape of the farming society from aggressive collectivization. Every tenth Hungarian citizen...

But even the 'rise' of the low-educated rural proletariat into city proletariat brought about a lot of losses. The loss of the usual environment and identity was in most cases accompanied by the thinning of family and relative ties. The workers' hostels and later the blocks of flats ("the rocket-launchers of labour force" as György Petri, the poet called them) received the former inhabitants of servants' quarters, but their urbanization got stuck at a very low level. Although industrial work was evidently considered superior to agricultural work for a long time, this concept has never been proved. And the main features of the lives of those commuting or having settled in the city outskirts were rootless and self-exploited even according to sociology and literature of that era.

It is true that modernization means urbanization. However, urbanization does not necessarily mean the concentration of the population in cities. It may as well mean the contrary, like in Western Europe, the spreading of the advantages of urban civilization, the urban services in the villages. In Eastern Europe the planners and commanders of forced industrialization did not choose this way for their peoples. The only aim of mobilization was to fulfil the labour force demand of the swelled industry. There was no need for real urbanization to achieve this aim, and there was no money to urbanize the small towns. We can as well say that it is not urbanization but its absence that gives explanation to the mass migration directed towards the industrial centres: the growth in the relative backwardness of the villages which made the young escape.

This trend – which was heavily supported by the development policy withering away the settlements specified as 'functionless' beside the planning desks – affected the micro-village Órség region, too. After 1975 each year about 6 per cent of the actual population, and about 5 per cent after the transition left the examined ten villages, despite the fact that the non-agricultural work facilities (a clothing factory, the brick-works, a tile plant and an assembly plant) available in the near towns and forestry, together with the emergent household farming (cattle-breeding, fruit production, etc.) gave living to all people capable of work. This was, however, insufficient to keep the young at home. In the years following the transition the pace of migration showed a slight slow-down. The enormous changes going on in agriculture did not seem to influence this trend, although the decline of agriculture affected this region, as well.

The performance of the domestic sector fell to 38 per cent of that preceding transition, and produced only 5 per cent of the GDP. Its traditional markets collapsed both within and outside the country. The special Hungarian way of the privatization of cooperative properties excluded most of the village people from the possibility of gaining subsistence from agriculture.<sup>8</sup> The families lacking the knowledge and experiences necessary for independent farming were given small plots of land with no equipment, money or market contacts. The rural elite's enterprises, through which the biggest part of the cooperative property was transferred to limited companies and other successor ones, offered jobs to a little part of those employed until then. And in processing industry and food trade international companies gained monopolies, and broke the prices, while production costs were continuously growing, so the price margins opened wide again.<sup>9</sup>

Owing to these processes the prime source of living of the Órség people, which was animal husbandry collapsed, the animal stock was radically reduced, and the sector became insignificant. However, in the 90s most of these people could find jobs as commuters in the neighbouring towns. The proximity of the Western border boosted the industry of Szombathely, Zalaegerszeg, Szentgotthárd, Körmend and Zalalövő, and it was probably for this reason that the collapse of agriculture did not have a tragic impact on the local people. In her case study on the Órség village, Nagyrákos in 2005, Piroska Szabó estimated the proportion of commuting workers around 80 per cent (Szabó 2005). Of course, this number might be a lot lower in the villages of less favourable transport possibilities.<sup>10</sup> After some time many of the commuters moved into the cities, and they visit their villages only at weekends, which contributes to the aging of these settlements. However, the number of local jobs is continuously decreasing. It is the dramatic development of the previous years that the industrial plants of the region have closed down one

8 In the 90s the number of the paid workers in the domestic agriculture decreased by about 600 000. Beluszky – Sikos (2007: 95).

9 Concerning the main processes of rural transition and their scale professional literature dealing with the topic agrees independently of the differences in the interpretations. See: Harcsa–Kovách–Szelényi (1994), Fertő–Mohácsi (2001), Szalai (2001), Laki–Gazsó–Pitti (2008) or the studies of Imre Kovách et. al. in Kovách (2002).

10 According to Beluszky and Sikos's data (ibid.), in Hungary 60–70 per cent of the earners in the small villages are commuters.

by one, or have dismissed most of their employees. Today the former commuters add to the unemployed. The impoverishment of the villages is further worsened by the fact that the complementary incomes, having more or less stabilized the subsistence level of the villages in the decade of agricultural collapse have disappeared or diminished: compensation money, selling the properties salvaged from the cooperative, early retirement or disposing of the estate properties 'accumulated' during the previous decades to which Harcsa, Kovách and Szelényi call attention in their above-mentioned study.

The loss in the number of population caused by emigration was continuously counterbalanced, though not fully substituted by immigration which will be spoken of later. (The region experienced a positive migration balance only between 1998 and 2000, when the immigration willingness which had – contrary to our expectations – decreased in the nineties, but started to suddenly rise again. It is interesting though, that it is the immigrants of the nineties that play a more important role in the lives of the villages and our interviewees' memories.) All in all, in contrast to our expectations, more people had moved to the Órség in the 70s and 80s then later, only that emigration was even higher. Until 1995 a moderate natural growth in the population lessened the migration loss. Still, the number of the Órség population has steadily been decreasing. In our ten settlements there were 5 176 people living in 1975, and only 3 686 in 2008. What is remarkable concerning the more or less constant migration data is that the negative trend in births becomes the prime reason of the decrease in the number of population from the late 90s on – and not before –, while emigration loss lessens to some extent. This is because the migration movements of the first decades naturally concerned the young generation, and today the aging of the villages produces drastic fall in the number of newborn children 'by itself' and the increase in the relative frequency of deaths. The decline in the willingness of young men to get married – mentioned by several interviewees – seems to be a special Órség phenomenon. They said its reason was the spreading of double-home and rootless lifestyle. And for those staying at home it is the lack of paying work and stable subsistence necessary to founding a family which makes it difficult to build their nests. The girls seem to be more astute, they get married in the towns, and so the village, of course, loses them and their children. Earlier, many of them chose their husbands from the border guard force. *"The girls are more mobile, a bit more intelligent, they study and then leave"* – we have heard. *"The boys don't study, don't leave and don't find a pair..."*. The younger ones are unable to compete with the Austrians buying the lands and the valuable old houses. *"All of these houses are bought by Austrians or people from Budapest. The local people don't really buy houses here. Those who are able to leave, usually go away because they are unable to find jobs to earn a living here."*

As a result of the rapid decline in the number of new born children many schools have been closed in this region, too. Today there are operating eight-class primary schools only in Óriszentpéter and Pankasz. The children of the other

villages – except for the pupils of some still operating lower classes<sup>11</sup> – sit on the buses every morning, and travel to the schools of Óriszentpéter, Zalalövő or Körmen. The decreasing budgetary normative supports demand growing municipal resources in order to maintain the local primary school: in case the municipality decides to maintain the local school they will have to cancel practically all other development aims. But for whom do they develop if there will be no children, the parents in Pankasz, who were able to convince their mayor of maintaining the school, say. The families with children usually move to settlements where there is a school. The children attending primary school in other settlements are very likely to leave their home village when they grow up. The centralization of schools, which is a deceptive practice and is underlined by pedagogical arguments having been refuted several times in the professional literature, serves three real targets. They are the 'modernization' of the Hungarian settlement structure said to be uneconomical and unreasonable, the increase of the importance of a new but constitutionally non-existent public administration level, the multi-target small regional cooperation and Roma integration.<sup>12</sup>

The latter one is served as badly as possible. In the merged schools, where the number of Roma children exceeds a certain proportion, the majority parents worrying about their children's studies usually find ways of taking their children to farther or foundation schools. In most cases, however, it is exactly the poorest Roma children suffering the toughest integration problems who do not get to the centralized institutions. Pankasz is the only settlement in the Órség where the number of Roma inhabitants is relatively high, they were settled here when the brick plant was built. The plant is now closed, but the Roma people are still earning their living from cutting wood or other works, and co-living causes no problems either in the village or at the school. The Roma problem can only be solved locally, because it depends on the willingness of the local stakeholders to cooperate (Miklóssy 2007). Central intervention and centralization can only damage this process.

As already mentioned, from the 70s an immigration process showing the opposing direction of the emigration flow also unfolded in the Órség region. While many of the young natives left their place of birth, some townsmen became attracted by the silent and evocative Órség villages hiding in the almost untouched natural environment. Amongst the intellectuals of Budapest it became trendy to buy a house in the Órség. Many decided to move to the Órség for good. Some of these people were looking for an adequate site to change their lifestyles totally which included agricultural work, perhaps even animal keeping. However, the experiments of self-subsistence or bio-farming rarely proved to be successful, the necessary knowledge or capital was missing in most cases. Others – artists, programmers, etc. – earned their living by tele-working or some kind of creative activity related to no specific place, but these have hardly been able to make

<sup>11</sup> Classes 1–4 in the Hungarian public education system.

<sup>12</sup> See about this topic Váradi (2007), Hermann–Varga (2006), Horn (2006) and Kapornai–Bíró (2008).

close contacts with the local people. The new settlers, having lost faith in urban civilization and hoping to accomplish their lives and to restore their spiritual peace became committed Órség people, sometimes even more committed than the inhabitants, however – but perhaps exactly for this reason – peaceful coexistence hardly ever turns into real cooperation between the new ones and the natives.

It is remarkable that after the transition both emigration and immigration showed a declining tendency as compared to the 80s: everyone tried to find a living in the place they had been living, hoping they could succeed this time. Around the millennium the number of those longing to move to villages from cities grew again. Some of them use their real estates in the Órség only for spending their holidays; this group includes Hungarians and Austrians as well as other nations.<sup>13</sup> In Magyarszombatfa, Szalafő and other villages nearly all of the heritage buildings dominating the village landscape are owned by city people, most of them foreigners. The presence of holidaymakers could, owing to their spending capacities, play a stimulating impact on the local economy, in case there were goods to sell.

A considerable group of ‘vagabonds’ is made of the Austrian, or perhaps German or Dutch tenants, in fact landlords, who have, according to careful estimations, obtained one third of the lands by ‘pocket contracts’<sup>14</sup>. They do not employ Hungarian workers, and do not spend too much time in their landed properties in Hungary. Most of them do intensive farming, and cleverly make use of the possibilities offered by the domestic support system. Their presence is a source of serious tensions: they run up the land prices (at a European scale it is still very cheap for them), the local people are unable to compete with them, and so those wishing to develop their farms, or the younger ones planning to start their enterprises these days, are not able to buy lands any more. The farmers are right when saying that the government has left them alone. They, too, have knowledge of the methods applied in the EU member countries which allow the purchasing or renting of arable land only in case the buyer or renter has a local residence and agricultural skills gained in the domestic language (Tanka 2003).

In the previous two decades the Órség region experienced two considerable migration processes at the same time: urbanization and counter-urbanization. While an increasing number of the village people having lost their jobs and subsistence have been moving to cities, they have been replaced by the children of the middle class or intellectuals leaving the crowded, noisy and eroded cities, those who have discovered the beauty and spiritual values of the rural environment and the positive effect it exerts on their health. The question of their integration will be mentioned later, since the immigrants are important players in the initiatives aiming at the renewal of the Órség, especially in the field of culture.

So apparently we have arrived to the Órség in a critical period characterized by fundamental changes in the composition of the population:

- The last generation having good knowledge of agriculture is dropping out of work, and it is a question whether they will be able to pass their knowledge and farms to their descendants who will be forced to make a choice by the worsening living conditions.
- How the younger generation, many of whom have recently lost their town jobs, will react to the fact that the commuting – household farming lifestyle becomes unsustainable: they will move away or create new possibilities of living in their villages; it is to be decided these days. However, the interviews made with the young people concerned show embarrassment and reveal gaping and insurmountable gulfs between their wishes and their possibilities. Nevertheless, it is clear that it is not that they lack patriotism but it is the villages that lack economic and cultural vitality.
- A considerable part of the houses and land properties has gone into foreign ownership, and most of the ‘new landlords’ have again arrived from the other side of the Austrian border.
- Tourism, too, is a migration phenomenon. The population of the Órség nearly doubles in summer. The holidaymakers are present in the Órség in many different ways: as transients, returning holiday makers or house owners. They, however, do not take part in the life of the local society – or the local society does not take part in their lives –, and also the local people have a very low share in the profit made from tourism, their activity hardly extends over letting out rooms.

The consequences of the two migration processes of opposing direction are rather specific. Many of the native people spend their working hours far from their homes, in the towns, and at home they only deal with their families and the household works. The ‘vagabonds’, as the locals call the newcomers, also commute in various ways between their former or present urban homes, engagements or friends and the Órség. It is clear that most of the people are not really at home in their villages, they share their time and attention between several places, and spend plenty of time travelling. A ‘society of the absent’ has evolved: in most of their time the people are ‘absent’ from the places they must reach that day (workplace, school or public institutions). It is quite natural that they do not take part in the local social life, they are away too much, and they are happy to be indoors when they get home. But their reasons for coming together are also lessening: their interests and contacts attract them in differing directions, and they have less and less common affairs. It is not surprising that the local people’s personal meetings are decreasing in number, and so the local communities are gradually wasting away.

<sup>13</sup> On the world phenomenon of disurbanization, its domestic appearance and the types of migrants see e.g. Kovács (2000) or Csíte-Kovács (2002).

<sup>14</sup> Secret deeds of sale contracted despite the law forbidding the alienation of arable lands to foreigners.

## Conditions of farming<sup>15</sup>

What do the Órség people earn their living from? We cannot avoid this question, although we lack the precise data necessary to answer it. Our research, with respect to the sustainability aspects presented above, was practically restricted to two forms of enterprise, namely family farms and community building initiatives, and we chose our interviewees in compliance with this concept. The chances of the enterprises serving sustainability are, however, very much influenced by the general development of economic conditions of which the interviewees painted a rather contradictory picture. Summarizing our observations we may say that each of the traditional forms of their subsistence has become threatened. Still, we did not find signs of catastrophe, the reason of which is that these people are used to and are able to build their households on even more resources and activities than it is usual in other regions. Those trying to stand on two feet will fail, but in case the family farm has four or five feet, they are still able to survive.

Let us survey then the sources of subsistence.

The main agricultural branch in the region was cattle breeding for centuries. According to one of our data providers, an expert in this field, the pasturing way of animal keeping was at least as typical of the Órség as stabling, so the renouncing of pasturing cannot be explained by tradition but by the present miserable circumstances. Animal husbandry was one of the most important activities of the household farms even in the cooperative era. The well operating milk-collecting system and the sound meat industry contacts – and the cooperative infrastructure in the background – made the sector profitable. In the 90s all these favourable conditions disappeared and between 1991 and 2000 40 per cent of the animal stock vanished (in our ten villages their number fell from 1061 to 627, and within this the number of the cow stock dropped to one half which indicates the decline of the milk farms). The reduction turned critical after 1994, the year of cooperative privatization, and has been continuing ever since. In the examined villages the average number of cattle kept in one village was around 100 in the transition period, and this number is under 10 today. A telling exception is Órimgyárosd, where there was no production cooperative but a professional one. Cattle keeping has been continuously sustained here, and the reduction of the livestock remained low, while in the outer Órség villages of similar conditions cattle almost disappeared already in the 90s. (It indicates the present difficult conditions that in the village having strong traditions in animal husbandry, where in earlier times the professional cooperative provided work for the whole village, these days the cow farm gives subsistence to only a few families. Paying employees, a herdsman or pasturing is not possible any more.)

The procurement prices forced below the production costs, the farmers being exposed to unstable market contacts, the lack of up-to-date equipment and the reluctance of the young generation to maintain animal keeping which is labour

intensive and demands strict family labour division, all these have quelled the interest of even those who began to keep animals with the necessary knowledge and at a rational plant size after the cooperatives had been wound up. *“I had all the necessary equipment: a tractor, a plough, a harrow, a combine, a mowing machine, a seeding machine, disk harrows, so everything”* – a pensioner remembered. They had 24 cows, kept hogs, and the hayfield and plough land was enough, too. They had to sell everything. *“My husband became ill when the truck had taken those beautiful cattle away. Our heart ached and we turned sick.”* They had no choice. The milk collecting system was terminated; the price of the milk did not cover even the production costs, if there was anyone to buy the milk at all. *“There has been no milk hall for years. We gave the pigs 150 litres of milk a day. They pay HUF 48 to the miserable farmer and make those miserable people drink water.”* Today they produce as much as they consume. *“If we did not produce everything in the garden, we had no pigs and poultry, the pension would be enough for nothing. My son will then sell our lands and live on that money for some time...There’s no work here. First the young ones just take up jobs elsewhere, and then they move away. They don’t plan to have a family here.”*

Those few villages of the outer Órség where there had never been a cooperative constitute some telling exceptions, where specialist cooperatives have been established and in that framework livestock and land remained in the hands of the families. Here the successor of the specialist cooperative survives, it is a production and sales coop, and has a significant number of livestock. (It is characteristic of the difficult conditions that in a traditionally cattle breeding village where once upon a time the specialist cooperative gave jobs to the entire village currently only a couple of families are maintained by their stock of cattle. Employees, cowherds and pasturing cannot be financed anymore.)

In another village there is a fattening pen operating with 900 pigs and just one employee. The veterinary couple running the enterprise do most of the work themselves because this is the only way it pays. The independence of such enterprises is very much limited: it is the same partner (the ‘integrator’) who provides them with young animals, and perhaps even with nutriment, who will buy up the fattened stock – at a very low price.

The readiness of the inhabitants to keep animals has fallen so much that the Órség National Park, which is interested in the re-cultivation of the grass-lands, could hardly find more than one or two farmers daring to join the heifer keeping programme initiated by the National Park and offering a considerable support. And the owner of the new milk processing plant being built in the middle of the Órség is planning in order to get a supply of constant quantity and quality, to bring the milk from Slovenia. (Where agrarian politics differ quite a lot from our domestic one, and the family farms are prospering.)<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The agricultural conditions in the Órség are analyzed in more details in a case study entitled *Mosaics about Farming in the Órség* and written by Zsuzsanna Györke and Enikő Varga within the framework of this research.

<sup>16</sup> According to some information gained after closing the study, this plant buys milk in Hungary, although not in the Órség but from a farther away.

One of the exceptions is an older farmer who keeps ten cows, and provides milk for three or four villages; in the evenings, after milking the cows, he takes the fresh milk to his clients' houses himself. Usually, the milk of the typically one cow kept in the household is exchanged in local bartering, just like pork, chicken, fruit, vegetables, brandy or honey. So food self-subsistence within the families and the villages is realized to some extent, however, it does not incite the local people to boost their economic activity, because the income gained or saved this way has no considerable proportion in the family budget. Many of the older ones keep animals, bees or cultivate their orchards or vegetable gardens only for pleasure, habit or nostalgia. Some say that local people prefer buying the milk and dairy products at the TESCO hypermarket to buying them from the neighbour native farmers.

One sort of the still existing family farms is owned by farmers who maintain their enterprise for reason of loving work, nature or animals, of respecting traditions, so for ideological reasons, we could say. They produce traditional products: pumpkin seed oil, honey, fruit brandy, goat milk cheese, buckwheat or spelt. Make no mistake we are sure of the importance of these enterprises that are for the moment 'uneconomical' from a market aspect. Agriculture has always been more than just business. It has been and still is a choice of lifestyle and the continuation of valuable traditions. So choosing it is a matter of taste, conviction and life strategy, and profitability is – within certain critical limits – only one of the several aspects considered.

Unfortunately, the household economy producing for the market one way or another – the engine of the rural boom of the 70s and 80s – has practically disappeared, and its ruins are vegetating in the neighbourhood barter relations or the local grey economy. Under the changed circumstances farming started on shoelace patches and in lack of initial capital and modern technology was impossible to be viable, and was unable to develop and be modernized. Each of the interviewees mentioned the perversities of the privatization of cooperatives as the explanation of all this. Agricultural politics then should have urged keeping the cooperatives together and reforming them or should have brought the small agricultural ventures into positions allowing them to stay alive amongst market conditions. None of these were done: the new land distribution has become the source of unjustifiable advantages and handicaps. *"The man of the Órség, this is what I already regard myself, is not a lazy type"*, a bio-farmer settled in the Órség decades ago says. *"He cultivates what he has in his garden, he keeps trying, but it's impossible to live on this. Earlier, it was the forest that gave additional income. There was always wood enough to sell, one's child was building a house or studied, it came in handy. Then the thing called compensation came, but it was something else, a dirty trick made on the people. And we can talk about this, too, it explains why things are going worse in the Órség than before. Indeed, the working possibilities were not more, only those basic facilities were more numerous. For example, you had 5 acres of forest which was almost two hectares. Then came the cooperative, took it, and then you could submit your compensation demand. I also submitted ours. You see, I had*

*one plot. But someone came here from the city, with a suitcase full of compensation tickets and 94 names. He bought the tickets of the local people for a song. And he lifted 94 disks when the local one lifted his only one. Now, when dividends are paid for the forest he takes his 96 units, while the local man takes one."*

People giving their recollections agree that the best plots of soil, the bank supports, the tool park and the business contacts of the cooperatives were passed, as a result of the activity of the Land Distributing Committees, to the companies founded by the former cooperative, state and party leaders, and the majority began individual farming under hopeless conditions<sup>17</sup>. They were aware of this fact, and that is why, in addition to the farmers being inadequately informed, the speculators buying up the compensation tickets had a very easy game to play. According to the farmers' memories: *"the leadership of the cooperative designated the committee who would distribute the land and which plots. There was a part given to the members and there was a compensation part. The cooperative gave compensations from the patches not demanded by any of the members."* As we heard it in an interview in a neighbouring Göcsej village: *"the local people experienced that anything they did, ten of their ribs have already been broken, and my grandfather was beaten to death at the edge of his land; the laws will always give rights to the stronger one. Those three families who have bought theirs back were given back ten per cent of their original estates in the course of compensation; the director of the cooperative was given ten times as much..."*

The interviews made it clear that of the injuries of past it is the perversities connected to privatization that play the most intense impact on the people's minds. These are the sources of hatred and distrust still existing today and many times alienating village people from their leaders, and at the same time giving explanation of the leaders' failures. The peasant society perhaps became resigned to the collectivization of their land relatively more easily – when the state treated everyone equally – than they do to the fact that strangers, moreover very well known strangers, get possession of their former property.

In the year of cooperative privatization the small producer registration found 112 private entrepreneurs of chief occupation in the ten villages examined in this research. By the millennium this number fell to 83. We have no fresher data, but our interviewees and the rapid decrease of the animal stock leave no doubt that this tendency has continued since then. The number of the employees can be a good indicator of the profitability and the size of the farms. In 1994 114 farmers employed 18 workers. In 2000 only 9 permanent workers were employed by 83 farmers.

<sup>17</sup> This is why we cannot agree with the opinion that the dispersion of the cooperatives served the "pushing of the dangerous cooperative leaders into the background". (We have cited Csité–Csurgó–Himesi–Kovács (2002) but this opinion is rather widely spread.) The opposite is very possible, too, namely that the managers of state and cooperative properties thought that it was high time – in Hungary as well as in the Soviet Union – to transform public property into private property, to bargain it away and to sell it at an extremely low price in a way allowing them to become the winners of this process in opposition to the stakeholders of the spontaneous re-formation of the bourgeois layer. If one pays attention to the politicians' actions and not their slogans or declarations, it is difficult to avoid this perception. And this is why there is no peasantry in Hungary today. It existed in the 80s, and wanted to exist more and more, to get modernized and to become a self-conscious 'post-peasant' class, whatever it means. It is not the logic of development that obstructed this process but the raw facts of power: anyone can make sure of it by examining the fresh and hardly healing wounds caused by political intervention in the region.

Today the biggest enterprise of the Órség employs thirty people. This is a floriculture, it plays in the European top field, has stable business relations abroad, and so has a high turnover. The business established during the transition period is managed with vocation and proficiency. It is, however, a proper example of ecological unsustainability. The propagating material is brought from the Netherlands, the peat-soil from Lithuania, the plastic foil from Italy, the truck is German, and the plants are taken to the consumers, the Hungarians as well, through a logistics centre in the Czech Republic. This is the only way of fighting the challenges on the international market, the arguments of the owner are impossible to be refuted.

The owners of the bigger – 2–300 hectares – lands grow arable plants, primarily cereals, and most of them are Austrian. The dominance of crop plants is not explained by the natural endowments that are little advantageous for those here, but by the domestic agrarian politics. The most support resources with the least work are available this way – even if the buckwheat sowed for the sake of the agro-environmental support will be ploughed under to nourish the spring crop. And if no crop has yielded, the lively foreign entrepreneur will still get a nice sum for game damage, it is said.

According to the estimates of an officer in agro-administration, there are 600 hectares of land lying fallow in the Órség. These also include the uncultivated hay fields having turned into bushes. Still, in some villages people complain of land shortage: the biggest part of the fields is forest or an area invaded by trees, and the soil possible to be ploughed is already in private hands, although the owners in many cases fail to cultivate them.

The decay of family farms and the tragic decrease in the number of town jobs have been parallel processes of the previous years. The consequences of this situation are not yet visible. Many have hopes that tourism will substitute for the missing income. Those being able to let their houses or rooms are likely to get a permanent income from spring until autumn. And those doing this at a higher level, open an inn or a restaurant, can be sure they are investing in the most successful business of our days. However, the income gained from tourism distributes among the villages and their inhabitants rather unequally, and are much lower than they could be. The tourism of the Órség is not at all 'invented', and beside the rooms let for rent there is nothing stimulating the guests to stay here for a longer time, and spend their money.

The proximity of the Austrian border does not only attract Austrian tourists – and Austrian tenants – but also makes the Austrian labour market available. The younger generation of the Órség villages is fond of undertaking occasional work in the neighbouring country, work that demands neither professional skills, nor the knowledge of the language.

The farming facilities that are poorer than those in other regions of the country (because of the clayey soil, the many forests, and the shortage of arable land), have also forced the local people to take up jobs at the national public service

networks, the railways, the border guard force and the electricity or gas service companies. At the moment the biggest employer in the region is the Órség National Park<sup>18</sup>, which has a somewhat problematic relation with the local people. Although the national forestry company employs less and less people, the (outsourced) wood producing companies contracting with forestry offer work. And the re-privatized forests being distributed among plenty of owners do not only provide fire wood for the winter. Many families supplement their income by selling wood when they run out of money. Others, quite a few, grow pine trees (for Christmas) on their estates which is a rather sound source of surplus income.

The last but not least important source of income in the family budgets is social insurance and social benefits. First of all pension, since the rate of the old in our villages is permanently growing as a result of the emigration of the young. At the border guard force the age exemption pension is possible to be asked for from the age of forty. Other, less fortunate people will be in need for regular social aid after having lost their jobs, or are supplied with disability benefits with regard to their failing health. Within the framework of the public work programmes using governmental resources, the municipalities employ the permanently unemployed. Thus the importance of social insurance and social policy is increasing. The interviews made with the mayors of the small Órség villages prove the estimates according to which two thirds of the small village population is made of inactive people of active age and of pensioners.<sup>19</sup>

However, the growth in the number of the unemployed does not relieve the lack of labour force in agriculture. There were hardly any applicants for the tender call announced for young farmers. Because of the incapability of the applicants, the National Park has been unable to fill some of the agricultural work positions. Several small entrepreneurs have complained about not finding reliable workers. The milk plant mentioned above transports its workers from far villages. All this indicates the rapid disappearance of agricultural knowledge and the low reputation of the sector even among village people two generations of who were taught that 'digging the soil' was an indicator of obsolescence and was inferior to urban work. And it also proves the well-known fact that the decay of the permanently unemployed people is unpreventable, and they become incapable of working.

From the interviews made with labour market entrants and teenagers it became clear that the youngsters attending higher education are at least as devoted to their home villages as their less educated mates, perhaps even more; they are aware of the advantages of rural life; they have, however, no chance to return home. They cannot afford the double lifestyle becoming more and more popular amongst urban intellectuals; it can only be a future plan for them. And the number of intellectual jobs in the villages is lower today than it was a hundred years ago. The fragmentation of the husbandries and the gradual liquidation of agriculture made the presence of technical

<sup>18</sup> Currently, it employs 61 people in full-time jobs, and the employment of 16 of them is financed from the public work programme.

<sup>19</sup> According to the data published by Pál Beluszky and Tamás Sikos in 2007 (Beluszky–Sikos, 2007) this proportion exceeds 60 per cent in the settlement with a population under 1000.

and agricultural intellectuals unnecessary. Now it is only the bigger settlements that can afford employing teachers, a priest, a cultural organizer, a notary or even a doctor or a pharmacologist. Due to the lack of the intellectual stratum and the middle class possessing adequate spending power and interest enforcement capacities, the various services disappear and so rural life quality degrades. The differences between cities and villages are not being reduced like it has happened in Western Europe, but are growing into a gulf. Now the only thing left in order to seal the fate of the villages is to obstruct the accessibility of towns by destroying the mass transport networks which is being done in our days by closing down branch railway lines, making the services rarer and omitting the reconstruction of the highways. The village people, however, do not have a choice; they will stay since they have no other place to go to. In Hungary, the number of urban working facilities will not increase in the near future. And the infrastructure of the urban or suburban settlement network has not yet been able to handle even the migration shock of the previous decades. Therefore most of the village youngsters should be able to find sufficient life possibilities, subsistence and conditions allowing for founding families in their home villages.

This is precisely what is at stake of a rural development policy with a vision, building on local resources and peculiarities that is of 'sustainable' rural development. In the Órség – and most of the rural regions – it is agriculture and the related activities that would best meet the previously listed criteria of sustainability. This is mainly explained by the advantageous natural endowments, but is also supported by the recent world economic processes. We do not only think of growth in the demand pressure which will sooner or later result in the increase of the price level. The continents' economic equalization – which is rapidly moving forward – will soon have a restrictive impact on world trade. There will be no sense in inter-continental food trade which will turn uneconomical owing to the growth in fuel prices. In case they can, the continents and countries will return to food self-supply which is urged from an ecological point of view already today, and discover its advantages: they will again get better quality food from controlled resources. In this situation Hungarian agriculture may regain its domestic market, and its products may become popular in other European countries, as well. In case agriculture will still exist in Hungary. In case it will still be in Hungarian hands. Still, each of the interviews made in the Órség tell us that there is not the slightest interconnection between the present possibilities and the future prospects.<sup>20</sup>

So far we have mainly talked about the internal obstacles of agricultural enterprise, and have mentioned the shortage of professional knowledge, land,

<sup>20</sup> Those speaking of overpopulation see another kind of future. And there are many of them. Péter Mihályi, a neo-liberal economist urges the direction of the "redundant" rural population, especially the one reproduced by poverty to a growing extent into cities as well as László Laki L. who is committed to the victims of social injustice. Also, András Csité and Imre Kovách regretted in their *Rural Story* cited above that the reforms in the agrarian sector "did not dissolve rural overpopulation and obsolescence". Overpopulation – compared to what? The loss of subsistence is not a proof of overpopulation. We might, as well, speak about the overpopulation of our cities, since the young entrants to the labour market fight similar problems of employment. And moving misery to cities will not terminate backwardness; this was surely proved by socialist industrial policy.

credit and up-to-date technology. We must, however, also speak about the external impediments killing the enterprises.

The sales limitations set for the family farms are practically impassable, so they fulfil their silent function which is nothing else but terminating this form of farming, which is acknowledged and supported all over Europe, and is absolutely necessary for the population retention capability of the countryside.<sup>21</sup> They are only allowed to market raw products, so selling homemade marmalade, cheese, sausage, ham or brandy is a crime even at the producer's own place. This breaks the attractiveness of rural tourism into pieces. They are not allowed to sell their products at public programmes or fairs because they are not able to pay the price of the sale licence, and they would not meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Service and other bureaucratic regulations the satisfaction of which would demand high extra costs of them.

At the Órség fairs we could meet local farmers only in exceptional cases, most of the hucksters were professional retailers with commercial products possible to be bought anywhere in the country. The buffet service appearing at the cultural festivals does not sell – may not sell – local products either. But in the centre of Óriszentpéter, along the streets, Chinese underwear is sold from paper boxes all through the summer. From spring to autumn the holidaymakers are supplied by two greengrocers with partly foreign vegetables and fruit transported here from the Bosnyák Square retail market in Budapest, while the local fruit trees are cut. Of course, local products are impossible to be bought in the local shops of two international food trading networks. There is no market in the Órség although tourism would probably abundantly pay for it. It is said that there is no demand for that: the local people and the holidaymakers are equally used to the always unique artificial food, or satisfy their needs in the grey economy. So the local farmers are deprived of all of the sales facilities, and so are the tourists and the holidaymakers of local tastes. This situation reacts on the economy: the product impossible to be sold will disappear after a while, the farming families will produce meat, milk, marmalade, brandy or dried fruit only in the amount their relatives consume. Our trader interviewee trying to deal with bio-products has found no partners for his enterprise during the previous years in the region.

Referring to the EU regulations in connection with the sales limitations is general but false. The EU frameworks do not obstruct the Austrian, the Slovene and the Italian farmers. That is because most of the countries, for their own well-known interests, have accepted local regulations withdrawing the production and small volume sale of the traditional local products from under the effect of the strict Union regulations. The Hungarian government has, in spite of the farmers' and their representatives' repeated request, omitted to do this, and so has opposed the principals of the Cork Declaration accepted by Hungary, as well. The family farms sentenced to death are not rivals to the investors buying up ten thou-

<sup>21</sup> The regulation amendments put in force subsequent to the closing of the manuscript, on 1 May 2010, brought about considerable changes in this field. See about these in the relevant study of this volume.

sands of hectares of land in Hungary any more, neither to the international sales networks flooding the market with low quality and unhealthy mass products.

The very same type of discrimination is present in the system of governmental calls for proposals. The agricultural entrepreneurs are excluded from competition for the development resources with complicated and unclear regulations. The limitations punish agricultural activity, or the settlement or plant size, or their participation is impossible because of the amount of the own contribution or the absurd and hardly satisfiable bureaucratic conditions of submitting the applications.

The support of agricultural enterprises, the schools and the social institutions were precluded from the Leader Program, which is to assure the self-governance of the local society in the development decisions, saying that some of the calls for tenders of the New Hungary Rural Development Program (NHRDP) include these targets. Connecting the Leader and the NHRDP also made the autonomy of the local Leader Associations formal. Their decisions are supervised by the county-level Agricultural and Rural Development Offices that have been established only for this task, and lack the necessary field knowledge and human capacities, and in the contested questions the last word is said in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. None of the applications submitted last year<sup>22</sup> have been decided on by this autumn, and it is very likely that the amounts allotted for the tender applications (submitted last year) will not be paid this year.

A considerable part of the Órség enjoys environmental protection. Therefore, beside the area-based grants the easiest way for the local farmers to get some extra resource is joining in the agro-environmental programme. However, most of the farmers think that the related obligations are harmful for farming and senseless.

The young farmers can also get state support in case they take the family farm over. Willingness remains under the expectations in this field, too. From this fact it is clear how the young farmers evaluate the future of the family farms operating in an inhumane regulatory environment, under several discriminations, with poor technology and lacking ready capital.

All in all, we may state that we have found balanced and harmonious circumstances in the Órség. There is no work, but there would be no suitable worker, either. There is no free land, but there is enough lying fallow. There is no demand for local products, and it is lucky enough that there is not, because there would be no products to satisfy it. And if there is no demand and no supply, what would the market be for? If the family farms are disappearing, what sense would a regulatory system advantageous for them make? The family farms have been excluded from most of the calls for proposals, but it is better this way, since they could not get through the labyrinth of the tender bureaucracy, could not afford the own contributions and would go bankrupt because of post-financing.

## The resources of non-cooperation

The most important factor of rural development relying on its own resources and endowments and so being capable of prospective thinking is solidary local society. According to Manuel Castells (Castells 2006) the relativization of nation state frameworks leads to the appreciation of local identities, especially concerning the population let alone or disadvantaged from a cultural and/or economic respect. However, local communities have been greatly destroyed – not only in Hungary – by globalization and migration, and the spontaneous collaboration of the poor for defending their own interests, if they are able to unite at all, will not bring them new identities, Castells says, in case they do not have a common target, and own prospect reaching over mere defence. As an example of such community and identity creating “project” he mentions the local environmental movements, and hopes that the strengthening of ecological self-consciousness brings about the renewal of local societies’ identities. These generally mobilize traditional local knowledge and can refer to obviously common and local interests since environment is always in place.

We chose the scenes of our field work in this spirit: we looked for settlements having groups organizing for cultural, economic or environmental objectives. We presumed that these three dimensions are inseparable within the concept of sustainability. In the Órség it was the cultural events mobilizing the community that captured our attention. The cultural association operating in the regional centre organizes two festivals each year, where beside the rich and high level artistic programme the main attraction is the introduction of the Órség manors. The very same team publishes a monthly paper and operates a community radio. A similar cultural centre was started by an actor settled in another village. One of his colleagues, now the mayor of a neighbouring Göcsej village, is having a new church built of wood with traditional methods for the dying village. Not far from here, a devoted expert is collecting and saving the slowly disappearing native fruit tree species. Owing to his initiation and with his enthusiastic help some villages have planted fruit gardens in their fields which preserve the local species as gene banks for the descendants. Other villages invite the visitors to log pulling in spring or a pumpkin festival in the autumn. We suspected living communities to be hiding behind the recalling of traditions and the readiness of the organizers.

When getting in closer contact with these enterprises we have faced embarrassing experiences. The local people keep away from the big regional cultural events, and although these are not at all merely tourist alluring occasions, the visitors hardly include others than holiday makers and tourists arriving only on hearing these events. Of the open mansions introducing themselves, the family farms make the minority against the immigrant artists. The native farmers – some of them ‘vagabonds’ themselves and some of them devoted local patriots – are rather exceptions since most of the family farms keep away from publicity as they have been pressed into the grey economy. The leaders of the central settlement of the region support neither the monthly paper nor the festivals the programs of

<sup>22</sup> The year of 2008.

which, according to their opinion, do not interest their voters. *"I have heard that this is my business and my friends' who come here for that"*, the festival organizer says. *"In their eyes this has no importance or value... and they'd better not be hand in glove with me because it won't make any good when the elections come"*. The local leaders prefer the Órség market instead, a market which has not a single local peculiarity, it is full of beer tents and the products of retailers travelling throughout the country. True, more local people attend this event – as consumers of course, since they are not allowed to be present as native farmers, and it is also improbable that they would be able to pay the extremely high stall money (app. HUF 14 000 a day). (All the less since native producers are forbidden to sell processed goods in Hungary, unlike their Slovenian, Austrian or Italian colleagues for whom this is a natural right.)

At Whitsun, at the concert opening the Blossom Festival in the reformed church, which gave a unique experience, we saw none of the teachers and students of the local school,

it was only the families taking their children to school to Szombathely who brought the kids. The local primary school organized an excursion for the day of the event announced months ago. Earlier, the organizers themselves failed to pay enough attention to popularize the programmes organized with enormous work year by year. They hoped that their offer: *"let a festival be and let us be together"* would attract the local people and would not need advertising. It is also a painful experience for them to see that the immigrant community having attended the cultural events earlier has also slowly disappeared as if they had adapted to the local people, and today *"everyone is his own guru"*, they do not need a spiritual community.

Other enterprises stimulating tourism also failed to take root. The initiations started by successful tender applications (e.g. the unique Batthány-Strattmann educational path built for blind people) deceased as a result of the lack of interest of the local settlements. In the village recalling the tradition of log pulling year by year, the organizers face more and more difficulties each year when trying to win others' cooperation to participate in this lively and funny march. Church building, culture stable, stable theatre, monthly paper or local radio, all these are done by 'vagabonds', and most of their supporters and audiences are not local people. *"This has slowly faded away, I must say"* – a mayor coming from far says. *"This process is arriving to its end. The village communities do not live at all, the traditional village festivals are only shows for tourists... For the families having moved to the cities their house of birth is just a weekend house the same way as it is for the urban people."*

The Göcsej forester's nice idea of planting native orchards, "fairy gardens", was also embraced by a mayor whose flat and company are located in a city. Also, the Hungarian born master trainer of the Austrian hand ball national team is the mayor of a near village where he has established a sport camp meeting the demands of quality tourism. All this would be no problem; on the contrary, we could greet these as the replacement of the expelled and still missing rural intelligence. However, in most cases the gulf separating the vagabonds from the native people

seems unbridgeable. It is not an adversary attitude but apathy and careful but invincible mistrust. The newcomer is welcomed, an immigrant farmer explains, *"in case he accepts the position of the stupid Budapest man, this, actually, can go on forever... as long as the local man feels that he is worth more than this townsman, as long as he can treat this that this has somehow got here, and will go back once, and until then he just laughs at him from behind the curtain, how he stumbles about with the lawn-mower..."*.

It is easy to understand the existence of the communications gap, but it is difficult to bridge it. The artists, new age prophets, the pioneers of lifestyle experiments, who have fallen in love with the Órség are all secret or public self-implementing people who were dorks and outsiders in the urban society, as well. The picture they had of rural life was sometimes far from reality, but they probably did not want to get closer to the local people when moving to a village but to themselves. And those trying, in the spirit of ecological sustainability and a switch over to a healthy lifestyle, to do traditional methods of farming, started something the locals have had to give up during the recent decades through no fault of theirs. No wonder if the newcomers have not found local partners. Neither is it that the low-educated people accustomed to the scum of mass culture did not want, or could not even match to their ideas of authentic folk culture and traditions what the immigrants had brought about with them. Behind the community enterprises we can find plenty of willingness to better the world, but can find no communities. The quality of implementation, from the church in Magyarföld through the spectacles of the stable theatre in Viszák to the programmes of the Blossom Festival or the Hétrét Festival hits the highest level; however, the Órség audience does not participate in its own cultural life. Also not because these cultural initiations, in case they had the ambition to address the local community, suffered of an organic problem: they were strangers, they were vagabonds. And the Órség people do not trust urban strangers and vagabonds any more.

They have good reasons for that. The origins go far back into the past. *"Batthány took their nobility, the emperor took their religion and the kolkhoz took their lands and animals"* – someone stated. Many people friendly and world bettering intentions have already made endeavours here. The locals were offered people's power, then market competition economy and free trade again, as well as other miraculous nostrums, lately heritage protection, natural values and bio-farming. The very same strangers who explain them how they should live in their own land will, this or that way, get these lands and houses which can be changed into 'folk' heritage only by strangers. Many strangers came, and many strangers cheated them, at least this is what the Órség people say. But perhaps there are other reasons of their careful reserve, too, reasons that are not connected to strangers. History has made them distrustful of each other. Those once displaced and their displacers, the organizers of cooperatives and the descendants of the small farmers beaten to death at the edge of their lands live in each other's neighbourhood. And everyone knows who lives in whose house and who holds possession of whose land. In the borderland it

was an obligation to observe each other and give reports, and it was a question of subsistence or honesty to help the escapees over the border. They learned to keep silence and conceal, and they also learnt that it was not worth cooperating in order to better their lives; those trying to do so would experience reprisal and be punished cruelly. But it was worth striking a bargain with the actual power at others' expense or even making use of others' misfortune. (Actually, it was not necessarily the family owning the biggest land that was taken to the Hortobágy but those registered in the list by the council chair...)

All this is difficult and painful to understand by the bio-farmer, environmental expert, culture organizer or artist who tries to make approaches to them with the best of will. It is even more difficult to convince the Órség people that these new initiations would perhaps serve their good. Even if it was so, it is somehow injurious and humbling if someone is told what to do and what not in his own land by outsiders.

### The outposts of sustainability

The main feature and at the same time the paradox of most of the initiatives meeting the conditions of sustainability (described in the second section of this study) in the Órség is that their role players generally start a new life or farming by modifying their career and meaning the essence of this new life as vagabonds, on emotional bases or with an intellectual commitment. We call it a paradox because earlier we supposed a close inter-connection between sustainability and local knowledge and local communities. Considering, as we have found that the previous decades have broken all continuities in the lives of the Órség villages, the population has been partially replaced, and the traditional structures have fallen apart. The newer and newer changes of drifting power, the migration flows of opposing directions dispersed the communities and destroyed the traditional forms of thinking, cooperation and subsistence. It is primarily not the local people but those arriving or returning from the cities that search an answer to the challenges of the millennium in reviving the rural traditions of the natural forms of living and environmentally friendly farming. In this study we have tried to reveal the reasons of this. Beside the socio-historical processes we must also consider the domestic agrarian politics afflicting ruthlessly the family farms that are advantageous from a sustainability aspect, and flourish all over Europe. History explains the lack of knowledge, property, trust and self-confidence necessary to start anything and the economic environment explains why the path we should keep "sustainable" according to theoretical considerations, while our observations prove that in the domestic practice it is not, is unviable or risky for the few who would be capable of starting independent enterprises.

Why is sustainable unsustainable? And how is it possible to be made sustainable? In the following part we examine these questions through the examples of some initiatives in the Órség. As it will become clear, they have a common feature:

the sustainable alternative does not derive from a tradition or the current circumstances spontaneously or with naive self-evidence, on the contrary, it is a result of conscious commitment. It does not necessarily mean successful adaptation to the given conditions. Our heroes are rather motivated by the conscious rejection and constructive criticism of these conditions. Our observations have proved our supposition that the domestic outposts of sustainability differ from their foreign colleagues in possessing a high level of intelligence and a low level of incomes. And if so, at least this is something we are keeping an unbroken and continuous tradition in, let us just think of the diary writer István Széchenyi's indignation: what nonsense it is that inventions implemented for rational reasons and for self-interest in other countries demand self-sacrifice in Hungary.

The Ferjanczs<sup>23</sup>, husband and wife, are excellent examples of these 'ideological' entrepreneurs who naturally did not want to do farming but to live when having chosen the Órség as their place of living. They wished to make use of the possibilities promised by the more harmonious, independent and natural village life to the electrical engineer and his wife who were in their twenties. From a bird's eye view their story is a success, a Pyrrhic success story full of fight against the tide. *"We are the biggest farmers here in the village. Everyone has sold all the animals, all the lands, buys I don't know what at the Tesco, and we are doing our farm, and it works."* They wished to implement the idea of food self-supply primarily in their own household; this was the main motive when establishing their farm, exactly when most of the villagers tried to get rid of agricultural work. *"Then in the middle of the 90s no one wanted plough land. People, part of the farmers, thought they would sit in a 36 degrees nutriment solution, watch TV and then would be bloody happy. So they wanted to get rid of this rubber-boots misery. Village people have been hoping to move to a town of at least the size of Körmen until this very day. And townsmen would actually escape from there. This is what I always say of globalization that no one feels good where he is. It's bloody well done. Everyone would like to do something else."*

They also bought a goat but *"the poor animal bleated alone so much"*, and then they understood that animals do not like to be alone, so they brought the goat a pair. They became fond of goats; they raised the stock to a hundred, but later had no power to do it, so they gave it up. Currently, besides letting rooms, they keep cattle extensively, that is in a pasturing way which is advantageous from both the animals' and the meadow's respect. Sixty hectares of meadow or hayfield sustains the farm, it is about the size offering safe subsistence for a farmer's family in Europe today. The Ferjanczs do not know this safety. In case they did not get indebted, they would not be able to buy the machines necessary for farming. The domestic agrarian support is just part of what a Polish or Slovene farmer can get, the market is dominated by multinationals, even the villagers buy there, there is no reliable work force, and the regulations keep the farmers dreading, it is impossible for them to think of developing their farms. *"We've tried to exist in*

<sup>23</sup> All personal names in the study are fictitious names.

*this simplest variation. Exactly because we know that we cannot step higher because if we try, we will be killed.*" Although Ferjancz is the leader of the local farmers' circle, he is resigned when speaking of the possibilities hiding in cooperation. "This is a wild world", he says about their situation, "because a Danish farmer can go on holiday, because in the cooperative it will be organized and he will be substituted for a week. Everything works there, and nothing works in Hungary. You see, in Hungary everyone is let alone, it is such a place... There is no labour division, no trust, and no one does the tasks delegated to him, everyone just tries to keep tricking..."

For most of the vagabonds arriving from cities in the 90s, the Órség was a promise of the possibility of changing their lifestyles. Being the escapees of urban civilization – and not the least of their own walks of life – their taste and spiritual search predestined them to become the subjects of community building, alternative lifestyle-creating experiments. The anthroposophic community having settled in one of the smallest Órség villages operated as a spiritual workshop, and in a certain period of time it attracted many people from all over the country. However, their internal conflicts later led to disruption, which is a frequent symptom of these lifestyle experiments. The sustenance of the 'experimental' communities living more or less intra-group lives amongst unusual circumstances is very much dependent on the leaders' charisma and the companions' trust, and it is exactly these that are attacked by the unexpected difficulties appearing during the change of the form of life. Looser threads connected several initiatives to their presence the main actors of which were immigrant intellectuals. Actually, the cultural enterprises of the Telehouse in Óriszentpéter (Hétrét Festival, Blossom Festival, the monthly paper and the radio), the experiment of developing and then producing an environmentally friendly car were some of these, but important steps were also made in the field of bio-farming. There was a marmalade plant of medium size established, which will perhaps be overtaken by an ambitious and well prepared young team. One member of this group tried to found a bio-apple juice plant, but this experiment failed because he was unable to create the necessary contacts with the local producers. The apple supplied was rotten, his workers left him and his endeavour to create a cooperative was rejected by saying "no need for a kolkhoz!"

The urban intellectuals having settled in the Órség could do a lot in favour of renewing the local communities but, as presented above, they do not live with but beside the local society and the deep differences in the mentalities and lifestyles seem impossible to be bridged during one generation's life. The recipient society lacks the necessary openness, readiness to cooperate and self-confidence. It is not easy to decide which group is more homeless: the citizens searching and finding shelter in the Órség, or the commuting natives who are cut off from the traditional forms of living, and are watching the 'occupation' of their villages with apathy. Anyway, the situation is rather frustrating for both sides, and this does not make their co-existence easier.

The enterprises of the newcomers are often attended by misunderstanding and mutual mistrust and injuries. Primarily when they step out of their own world and

address the local society with their initiatives. The story of an immigrant artist who grew up in a farm in the Great Hungarian Plain, but made a career in the capital is very instructive from this aspect. It was the land that first attracted him, but a tale-like episode made him understand that he has stronger threads connecting him to this region. In the neighbouring village he found an old woman whose family had built, with their bare hands, the house where he was born a decade later.

However, the little cultural centre he established at his own house in the middle of the small Órség village first elicited more aversion of the village people than sympathy. His several years' efforts brought a break-through only when he started to support an initiative not wishing to 'give' but to 'give back' something to the village. A forester in the Göcsej, as a result of a decade's work, possesses a uniquely rich collection of native fruit trees, about 500 species. He started his work when he saw how the local people, or rather the new owners of the old gardens and estates cut off the old orchards yielding all year round. The aim of the collection is "to create our heritage here, at a small scale, for the people who will make an effort and look into this heritage, and it will attract them, and they will try to preserve it. This region has an extremely rich heritage, and it can make not the slightest use of it" – he said. Diversity would have a very practical sense: other sorts of apple or pear yield in the summer or the autumn, others stay fresh until the winter ends, and other types are suitable to make vinegar, dried fruit or brandy from. "In case someone comes and turns this into value, it will be a precious thing, if no, it will be overgrown with weeds." The rich diversity of species indicates the very early presence of fruit improvement. "We destroy the results of those centuries in some decades' time."<sup>24</sup>

This artist spoke about this initiative to the mayor of his village, and in addition, the remarkable collection included many grafts cut from the trees of this village. The plan was born: an orchard would be built of the species being native in the village or its neighbourhood. The mayor provided the estate, opposite the cemetery, where the garden holding 2–3 year-old trees speaks of the promise of resurrection expressively. Beside more than fifty young trees there is a board telling the perhaps never ever heard name of that species and the name of the local or emigrated family whose child has undertaken patronage of the given tree. Hopefully, the example of the "Fairy Garden" will be followed in other villages, too. It may save the slowly declining orchards. In case a movement could be started in order to search and register the indigenous species, this could create a practical chance of connecting to the home and the traditions, primarily for the youth. And since there is a well equipped brandy making plant operating in the village, and the traditions of marmalade making and fruit drying are still alive in the Órség, this enterprise could be a successful example of enriching and utilizing the environment at the same time.

Unfortunately, we are very far from this. In Hungary it is forbidden to sell any products not made of a sort of fruit registered by the Fruit Tree Registration

<sup>24</sup> The most acknowledged experts of this topic used a similarly bitter and worrying voice when speaking at the Open Day at Parliament in May 2009, see especially Dezső Surányi and Tibor Szabó in Ángyán 2009.

Institute. The registration procedure is not only very expensive and complicated but is also absurd since the pressure for standardization opposes biological diversity which is based on the unidentifiable diversity of varieties which resist all standardization. The results of the decade's long work of this forester, the orchard established in the Zala county village and primarily its propagation is rather suspicious and more or less illegal. And it would bring about serious consequences if any marmalade, dried fruit or brandy made of these preserved species would be marketed<sup>25</sup>. Nevertheless, people do not usually grow useful plants for love or patriotic enthusiasm. *"Everyone in Europe is protecting his heritage, except for us. The Croatian, the Slovene and the Austrian welcome us with their sausage, bread, wine and brandy. They somehow make profit of that. Here we need this and that many licenses from the Hungarian National Public Health and Medical Officer Service. The registration of just one species of fruit would cost about HUF 250 000"* – he says.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore the owners of an existing bio-orchard – some villages further – do not even think of selling their products. This lover of the trees, too, is a forester who settled in the Órség when he was young, in 1963. Together with his wife they started bio-farming when they retired, twenty years ago, because of their commitment and professional interest and for joy. *"Land demands an internal inclination so that you are fond of what you do. This is what love is for, I can't really explain it... spring comes and the smell of the earth, and you feel that you have to do it, you must sow it. There was a young man who said – nice what I was doing, but what would his profit be of it? Well, your health, you blockhead..."* The Fazekas couple only have a vegetable plot since non-chemical production needs more hand work and time, and they are not young any more. They sell their surplus only at houses, and although his wife's marmalade has, he proudly says, a fantastic fame, they have never applied for bio-certification and have never planned to develop their farm *"because then the various legal, public health, tax and social insurance sweeps appear, not to mention the others, who will impede the starting of this... We have no certification but this is a question of trust, people know we really sell them bio-food. If there were someone with HUF 10–15 million and about ten hectares of land, and would be forty, a strategic thing could be done"*, but it takes three years until a farm turns non-chemical, and another two until the product gets the certification. And those around forty do not see any perspective in agriculture any more, which is, knowing the circumstances, nothing to be surprised at. Their children, too, live in Budapest.

It is an engineer having returned to his village who continues the tradition of his grandfather, the best known pumpkin seed oil maker. His farm is one of the 'open mansions' possible to visit during the Hétrét Festival, but he sells his product

<sup>25</sup> See footnote no. 17.

<sup>26</sup> The impact of the regulations and market trends sentencing the native domestic fruit tree species to death are widely known, the logical counter-measures still fail to be brought. The future generations cannot see the results of the centuries' long cooperation of human and nature in the Carpathian Basin; the anti-life and short-sighted farming of just one generation deprives them of their heritage. An expert of this question estimates the number of disappearing native species around 500: "Beside the favourable plantation statistics there are about 500 native species the partial loss and technological manipulation of which may cause the rehabilitation of our agro-environment to become almost impossible" (Surányi 2005).

only at his house, as well, and receives guests who have registered in advance. So the price of the oil-press and other equipment cannot be cleared this way, and the joy given by the farm is stolen by fear because of the credit. He could not afford the luxury of quality production in case he did not stand on more than just one leg: "in civil" he works for a foreign company. It is obvious that amongst the present circumstances increased production, the development of their ventures and the legalization of their products would be a source of losses and enormous amounts of administrative work for the enterprises producing traditional or bio-quality products, so these possibilities are not included in their plans.

With the climatic and soil conditions of the Órség the most profitable form of agricultural activity has always been forestry and animal husbandry: these have offered safe subsistence for the local people. The re-cultivation of the forests destroyed in the 50s and 60s, the restoration of the composition of the wood stock, the introduction of up-to-date management and cutting methods and the removal of the foreign and invasive species (often attended by the fierce opposition of the local population: acacia grows quickly and burns well) are the tasks of the National Park. Forests still play an important role in the economic life of the Órség as a number one possibility of work (the Park, forestry and wood production ventures), as families' money-box (private forests), and last but not least, as a tourist attraction. However, we have found no example of sustainable or community enterprise built on the services offered by the forest. We have understood that furniture can be made of the prime quality wood produced here only in Italy, and then sold at a high price in Hungary, while there is no furniture production in the region, and even the coffin producer plants have closed. It seems that the Hungarians are not capable of doing anything more valuable than a plank or something containing more added value. Also, we are not surprised that the tile and brick production of the Órség which was rich in cheap clay and cheap but qualified labour has had to collapse over the last two decades full of busy building activities. We are only surprised that a country having given up almost all producing activities and buying everything from abroad still exists this or that way. This is Hungarian miracle. What we live on. Anything we do not have to give a bill about.

The plants growing wild and in extreme abundance, bolete and herbs can only be acquired for free, in case one is treated or given as a present. The secret of good bolete growing places descends from father to son, the fields yielding herbs are not grazed by cows any more, but organized collection or production of herbs is not done anywhere, although there are people who have the knowledge of these; and any time the future of the Órség and the missed possibilities of living are talked about, this is always mentioned: yes, something could be done about herbs in this natural botanical garden...

Most of the villages still have one or two young farmers who are not scared off by the numerous difficulties of animal husbandry, and do not want to believe that animal stock would disappear and humans move away from this beautiful land and from these inherited stables and meadows. They have the disposition and would be

ready to continue cattle keeping, which they do as a complementary activity and at a small size as native farmers today, as their main profession, in case the circumstances would allow them to do so. They have taken or are taking over their parents' farm, their family possesses the equipment necessary for their start, and they have learned the profession and the love of animals at home. Almost all of them are the children of small-holder families. Some of the parents had been taken to the Hortobágy, and then they returned. Here, in the Órség, animals were always possible to be kept around the house. Those thinking of milk farms would like to do the marketing themselves because they only see a chance of sustenance in case they are independent of mediator trade. However, they are reluctant to do common marketing (sales cooperatives); they lack the trust and the good knowledge of others which are necessary to undertake a risk community. It is also true that the risk of cooperation is higher in agriculture than it is in other sectors. The equipment of the milk collector, the refrigerating house and other means are still there in the region. They would instead buy milk automats to be placed in the neighbouring towns: both the seller and the consumer would come off well. They would not yet cooperate with the plant recently established in the region; those half a dozen farmers together could not provide the daily amount of milk necessary for cheese production there.

Nowadays meat purpose animal keeping seems more profitable than milk purpose keeping. The latest regulations at last distinguish between the butcheries dealing with small volume production and the service of native farmers and the big slaughter-houses, and this makes it possible for them to sell the carcass meat, and later perhaps processed goods, as well, themselves. Their plans, however, consist of careful development made step by step, this is what someone recovering from a serious illness is ought to do. It is probably the experience of successful cooperation that may bring the trust necessary for uniting and starting common ventures. In the region there are also private entrepreneurs, milk cooperatives with considerable animal stock and even a family growing feeder grains at a large scale and on several hundreds of hectares. These enterprises, however, are not interested in cooperation, they have their own channels of distribution and this or that way they get on in the split between the growing production costs and the decreasing procurement prices. The thing bad for the family will be bad for the animals hardly leaving the stable in their lives, as well. Some of the young farmers thinking of developing their cattle farms are the same as those having participated in the cattle programme of the National Park earlier. Some of them have a full time job at the National Park. They are considering the possibility of a new programme of placing cows with calves or sucking calves to farmers, the agro-environmental and the land base supports (in Hungary the total amount of the two support is not too much) and the application possibilities supporting the start of young farmers. After the professional consultation organized within the framework of our research they decided to prepare the economic model of sustainable cattle farm, and they may even start one day...

## Changes in the social structure

Relying on our field experiences we may risk taking some suppositions on the nature of the changes that have taken place in the structure of the rural society since 1989. The political turn put the restoration of private property, the freedom of private enterprise and the creation of real market economy on the agenda on the one hand, and the reduction and reinterpretation of state contribution in the economy on the other. Concerning rural society, according to our observations made twenty years after the transition this programme has not been implemented. The realities of domestic and international power relations condemned most of the endeavours to create the dominance of private enterprise and market conditions to fail.

At the beginning of the 90s, there were several plants, built partly on local peculiarities, operating in the Órség: they produced bricks, tile stoves, roof tiles, plank products, coffins and clothes, and there was an assembly plant operating as the branch production line of the cooperative, which received orders from all over the region. These plants have all been closed down since then. At the same time, international companies have settled in the neighbouring towns, and employed labour not employed any more locally. These companies, however, have dismissed plenty of workers during the previous years, and some of them have been liquidated. Of course, the commuters became the first victims of changing business policy. So the revival of private enterprise in the industrial history of the region seems to be a transitory episode. No serious industrial enterprise has remained in domestic entrepreneurs' property, and the multinationals have retreated.

As far as agriculture is concerned, from the 70s on economic private ownership was restored though in an ambiguous and semi-legal way and in small scale in the household farms, cooperative branch enterprises and specialised cooperative groups, and created quasi market conditions in the crevices of the economy of shortage. However, the career of the entrepreneurs of the 'second' economy broke after the transition and the privatization of the cooperatives all over the country. Instead of the peasants' turning into a bourgeois stratum there came an agrarian crisis. The losers of the privatization of the once forcefully collectivized landed estates were the local farmers, while its winners were the financial investors and the leadership of the state-cooperative 'first' economy. Small peasantry was ousted from the market, and has again retreated to the grey economy where it had vegetated during the communist dictatorship. There are hardly any capitalist agricultural plants able to employ wage-workers in the region. The number of private entrepreneurs producing for the market, operating either individually or within the framework of a sales cooperative is extremely low. These trends definitely talk of the repression of market economy. People doing agricultural work as a supplementary activity usually produce for self-subsistence (nature husbandry), or sell their products on the local market of mutual favours (reciprocal exchange relations).

The family farms do not belong to the competitive sector; they are the survivors of archaic peasant farming. The lack of capital and wage-work and their

inability to join in market competition makes it impossible to confuse them with capitalist small entrepreneurs.

The biggest employer of the region is the National Park. The number of employees of the municipality institutions, the public service companies, the national forestry and the border-guard forces together surely exceed the number of those employed in the competitive sector. (There are no precise data on the commuters having lost their jobs.) We must also consider here the non-profit ventures subsisting almost only from budgetary support. Of course, the state sector includes public workers, those gaining regular unemployment or disability benefits and the pensioners who also are the beneficiaries of social insurance (and by the way were state or cooperative employees through most of their active lives). An interposition is taken by the forced ventures outsourced, for austerity or statistical reasons, from the state companies, like the wood producer limited companies working for the state forestry, who serve their former employers, only they are not paid any contributions after them.

The picture is even clearer in case we do not consider the number of employees but that of the entrepreneurs. The number of capitalist ventures employing several workers and producing for the market is extremely low. A horticultural venture. Some restaurants. A pottery plant. A milk farm. The new cheese plant. All these are far too few in a region counting six thousand inhabitants.

The state's economic role, however, extends further, because economic competition in Europe today, especially in agriculture, is not primarily going on for the consumers, but for governmental and state-distributed support. The central redistribution of the development resources determines the fate of the settlements and settlement groups the same way as it did in the era of state socialism.<sup>27</sup> Soil does not bring crops but area-based, agro-environmental or other grants. The post-state system is not capitalist, and of course it is not socialist either. In its economy it is not the rules of market competition that prevail, and neither is it the proleptic wisdom of the central planners. It is collective irresponsibility and corruption. This system is called the system of calls for applications. Rural Hungary is the society of applicants. The domestic small and medium-size enterprises left alone in market competition had no chance to survive. Also, the local authorities that are condemned to permanent budget deficit and are systematically and methodically underfunded can only dream of real independence. As a consequence of the impoverishment of the middle class strata and the absence of intellectuals, the cultural enterprises have a very low share of business income in their subsistence, they live on tender calls. The state budget itself would immediately collapse in case the state wanted to fulfil its constitutional obligations related to the various services, and would not make its own institutions compete and apply for the resources necessary for performing their basic tasks.

There are no responsible persons in the society of applicants and announcers of calls for tenders. The state washes its hands: the responsibility of deciding does not burden the public officers. The applicant cannot start an enterprise or a service in case he is not able to catch a nice call for proposals, so he can only start an enterprise or offer a service in case it fits in the calls. The calls for applications are written by anonymous bureaucrats, who are not possible to be taken to account, and are inexperienced in the local and professional problems on several hundreds of pages and in a language impossible to be understood by outsiders. Writing applications and reading the calls for proposals is a new field of knowledge: it is the privilege of the proposal writer businesses. The proposals do not present the real plans of the applicants; no one is interested in them. The applications are declarations of intention which prove that the applicant is ready to implement the target deigned to be supported by the announcer of the call for proposals, and defers to its administrative requirements and pleasure impossible to fulfil. The decisions are made by occasional boards, the decision makers are not personally responsible, and they are not at all interested in making good decisions. So they decide along formal aspects or the political, economic or family pressure put on them: this is where the social capital accumulated with so hard work can be converted into cash. The identity of the decision makers is unknown for the public, so they are impossible to be called to account. Of course, they are very well known by the consigners and the insiders. Thus the decisions on the proposals are made in the field of forces of favours and return favours, blackmails and interest calculations which stands exactly as far from the open competition of performances as it does from rational planning, although it may not be called dictatorial. It is a new, peculiar system of power practice the precise description of which is still to be done by political science. All in all, the fate of rural Hungary is decided on in the calls for proposals.

Excepting cases when a dynamic and ambitious person takes the place at the head of the community. An important lesson of our researches is that the importance of mayors in successful initiatives is beyond all comparison greater in villages than it is in the cities. Among the mayors of the Órség we can also find a folk tale-teller, a philosopher, a logistic entrepreneur, a master trainer and an actor. Most of the mayors are well prepared and devoted to the future of their villages. Some of them are the descendants of once respected farmer families, and some of them were the local leaders of the socialist state and economic apparatus. They also include people having left their village and then returned back home and even 'vagabonds' whose financial or social positions have been strong enough to fight the lack of confidence faced by the man arriving from far. Civil society has fallen into pieces, and the world of the relations holding the village together, even of those traditionally dividing it, has also decayed. The three main groups of the population – the inactive ones (the old, the unemployed and the disabled), the immigrating vagabonds and the commuting employees – do not really make themselves heard in the local public life for various reasons. Practically, there is

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Vági 1982.

no public life; there are only family relations and strong and initiating personalities the leadership of whom is simply accepted by the village.

We do not consider the dominant role of persons and personal contacts either good or bad; we take it as something given. We try to inter-connect it with economic redistribution depending on the political – or rather power – decisions. We do not want to judge but to understand the system of obligatory services, stipulated favours and privileges gained in return for political fidelity. We are measuring the distance between the twofold – state and civic – social structure and the post-peasantry society vegetating under the former one. Has the distance grown or lessened until the age of Ferenc Erdei?<sup>28</sup> In case we search for a historical parallel, we will find one. We think that the confused private relations having settled upon the organs of the weak state and being fed by that are kept alive by the money arriving through the channels of central redistribution. However, the command of this is not any more a state privilege, and does not depend on the spontaneous market processes either, but the sub- and super-ordinate relations having already become consolidated, the political alliances, occasional bargains and first of all the formal and informal social positions of the stakeholders which they are unable to change by themselves but are reorganized every fourth year, owing to parliamentary elections, without exerting the least influence on the essence of the system. There is no market economy being built on the ruins of state absolutism in the rural areas. The gaps having evolved subsequent to the retreat of the central state are being filled by the elements of a new type of vassalage.<sup>29</sup>

Translated by Gabriella Farkas

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<sup>28</sup> Ferenc Erdei was a prominent researcher of the peasant society in the 1930s and 40s.

<sup>29</sup> Imre Kovách speaks more carefully but comes to the same conclusions in his study entitled *The End of Post-socialism* which is the introductory writing of the volume entitled *Power and Social Change*. He speaks of the creation of the "new system of redistribution", and thinks that the groups of the reorganizing political class are fighting for the rights of controlling redistribution and privatization, but it is in their common interest (and that is what makes its members a class, namely a political class) to exclude other social groups. The means of this is maintaining the dependent position of publicity and civil society, and the obstruction of the initiatives aiming at social self-organization. Kovách, however, supposes the existence of an economic elite independent of the political class, and in 2002 he even expected this economic elite to control the political elite and to limit their power, perhaps as a consequence of Erzsébet Szalai's elite researches that elicited keen reactions. During the almost decade's time having passed since then it has been proved that 1) post-socialism has not at all ended: the political class has been keeping their redistribution monopoly amongst the multi-party circumstances undisturbed; 2) the economic elite created by redistribution and privatization and the political class financed by the economic elite make one unit within which permeability and convertibility between political and economic positions are actually unlimited.

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