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Rural Livelihoods in Inter-war Hungary – with Case Studies



ABSTRACT

The issue of land was central to livelihoods in the villages of the Horthy era. The majority of Hungary's agricultural land is under the cultivation of large estates and manors, while the majority of the village population owns small, fragmented estates. Thus, they are dependent on large estates and the natural environment for their supplementary livelihoods, to varying degrees and in different forms. In this paper, after a national overview, I present examples from two settlements to illustrate the rural livelihoods of the period, along which options and strategies are outlined - without claiming completeness. My sources include local historical works, official statistics, periodical press publications, and studies on the social history of the era. The first settlement is Tiszaigar from Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county, which is basically an agrarian proletarian settlement, most of its land is owned by large estates, the population is highly vulnerable to the surrounding large estates. The other settlement, Dudar's location in Veszprém County offers several opportunities for additional livelihoods: the mountainous environment and the proximity of forests provide the population with the possibility of multiple livelihoods.

KEYWORDS

Livelihood, Rural society, Estate structure, Agriculture, Horthy era

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INTRODUCTION

In this article I describe the rural livelihoods of the period between the two world wars. The topic is part of my Phd dissertation, in which I examine rural livelihoods over a one hundred year period, 1920-2020. A key point of this hundred years in terms of livelihoods was the prevailing land issue for the villagers: land reforms, land distributions, expropriations, compensation, the creation of modern agricultural enterprises mark the milestones in this hundred years. And the result of all this is the period described here: the land tenure relations that emerge then form the basis of all subsequent changes, and in many cases, even in the early 21st century, the impact of the earlier period on the well-being of a given settlement can be discerned in the livelihoods of the people in the early 21st century.

The end of World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy opened a new political and social era for Hungary. For the ordinary villager, the situation of land ownership was a key issue, since, as we shall see, there was a marked inequality in the distribution of land ownership between large estates and family farms. Changing this also became a central issue in politics, under pressure from various interest groups. These social and political processes will be described in the first part of this paper, while the second part will focus on the livelihoods and forms of subsistence in two of the settlements I have studied in the period between the two world wars.

Lifestyle, and in particular livelihoods, is the origin of the study. In my work, I use the concept of livelihood opportunities, by which I mean the conditions that enable people to earn an income, to grow wealth and to support their families in a given locality. In other words, the 'palette' from which individuals can choose a strategy in a given socio-economic context. These are influenced not only by macro-historical and economic processes, but also by the social composition of the settlement, its location, its infrastructure and, in some cases, the people who occupy leading positions.

My study is on the borderline between ethnography and sociology. These two disciplines worked together in the „village studies movement” from the 1930s onwards, with similar methodologies and research focus, and the scientific results of this period are an integral part of the treatment and presentation. A significant sociographic, sociological, demographic and ethnographic literature was the result of this period. These included monographs on settlements and landscapes, which, based on sociological research and fieldwork, recognised the relationship between lifestyles and social conditions. This led to research and monographs on various social phenomena: bourgeoisification, proletarianisation, monasticism, sectarianism, other deviant forms of society. All these are indicators of social reorganisation, framed and defined by the various ways of making a living.

National descriptions, collections and directories were of great help to me in connection with the settlements studied, in which data on the settlement series also helped me to obtain specific data related to the village. I relied heavily on data from the 1930 census, broken down by settlement series (demographic, occupational data¹, on the basis of which the percentages associated with each settlement are my own calculations), and on the data collections of the Landowner Directories - the latter of which named the landowners over 100 acres per settlement.² In addition, the Directory of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Hungary from 1924 also lists industrialists, craftsmen and smallholders under 100 acres by settlement.³

DESCRIPTION OF THE VILLAGES SURVEYED

In my dissertation, I examine four settlements, of which two are presented in this study: Tiszaigar and Dudar. For both settlements, there are relatively rich sources from the period under study, thanks to the work of a major research group.

TISZAIGAR

It is located in the Tiszafüred district of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county. It was a so-called agrarian proletarian village, with a strong presence of manorial estates and related forms of livelihood (day labour, manorial servitude).

The research team of the Museum of Ethnography carried out regular, elaborate fieldwork in the settlement during 1949-1950, with the aim of a complete exploration and the preparation of a village monograph. From 1948 onwards, the process of cooperative settlement drew ethnographic attention to the disintegration of peasant life, which made it urgent to carry out a final large-scale survey. Tiszaigar was chosen for this work on the basis of three main criteria: firstly, it is a typical agrarian proletarian village, with $\frac{3}{4}$ of its boundaries made up of large estates, and secondly, it is a village with a wide range of social differences, with all the categories of landholdings that were typical until the 'liberation': large estates of over 100 acres, medium estates of between 20 and 100 acres, and medium and small estates of between 1 and 20 acres.⁴ Secondly, its geographical environment has been greatly influenced by the processes of the last 100 years (regulation of the Tisza, draining of wetlands, etc.); and thirdly, the settlement has changed a lot since the Soviet 'liberation' after World War II, with the cooperative group of farmers in the process of being formed and the large estates having become a state farm.⁵

¹ Magyar Királyi Statisztikai Hivatal: Az 1930-as népszámlálás adatai.

² Gazdacímtárak 1925 és 1935.

³ Magyarország kereskedelmi, ipari és mezőgazdasági címtára. Budapest, 1924.

⁴ VINCZE 1950. 125.

⁵ BALASSA 1955. 503.

The research started in July 1949 and lasted about 1 to 1.5 years. In December 1950 an exhibition was opened at the Ethnographic Museum⁶, presenting the results of the research and Tiszaigar. Each researcher prepared a manuscript of his work, which was summarized and compiled by László Kardos into the monograph of the village. The manuscript was completed by the end of 1951, but it was not published until the change of regime - for political reasons of the time, the work was not published.⁷

DUDAR

It is situated in Veszprém county, in the Zirc district, in the Bakony, in a mountainous area. Its livelihood was less characterised by arable farming and classical agricultural production, with a significant proportion of the population supplementing their income with cottage industry products even in the first half of the 20th century. The village's society is made up of labourers attached to manorial estates, independent farmers and 'entrepreneurs' of the period.

In 1937, a large-scale survey of local society was carried out, and the Szeged Youth Art College organised an international village research camp for English and German researchers. The invitation came from Le Play House in London and the Institute of Sociology's Institute for Field Studies, who had previously carried out village surveys in several European countries, including Slovakia in 1935.⁸

The research was organised by Viola Tomori, herself an active village researcher in villages around Szeged and in Northern Hungary, and Dudar was her choice. In her view, it was a suitable settlement for international study for the following reasons: 1. The ethnicity of the period can be captured in the settlement: Dudar is a Hungarian village of colour in the ring of surrounding Swabian and Slovak settlements. 2. 3. The land tenure relations reflect the land tenure issues of the period: the ratio of small, medium and large estates is approximately balanced - at least a good illustration of the general Hungarian land tenure relations. 4. The enclosed nature of the peasant community, which can be described as traditional, still very much defines the rules of community functioning.⁹

However, the results of the fieldwork were taken home by the foreign researchers. Here in Hungary, for a long time, almost no or very little data were included in the professional public consciousness, since the Hungarian participants mainly assisted the foreigners in their work, and did not themselves carry out any research work. Thus, it was mainly the circumstances and the conduct of the research that were known, but not the data obtained during the research. The work of Gyula Lencsés was of pioneering importance in this respect, as he searched for, translated and systematised the manuscripts, collection notes and photographs of the English researchers in the Special Collections and Archives of Keele University in England. It was thanks to this work that Dudar became truly known in 1937.¹⁰

⁶ BAKÓ 1954.

⁷ BALASSA 1955. 511.

⁸ LENCSÉS 2018. 102–104.

⁹ TOMORI 1937. 270.

¹⁰ LENCSÉS 2018., LENCSÉS 2019.

THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS AND THE FIRST LAND REFORM

After the conclusion of the First World War, Hungary entered a tumultuous phase characterized by political and social upheaval. The final days of the Monarchy and its subsequent dissolution, the initial establishment of democracy, the Gray Rose Revolution, and the Hungarian Soviet Republic unfolded within a relatively short span of a few months to a year or two. These events set the stage for the signing of the Treaty of Trianon on June 4, 1920, which had far-reaching consequences that deeply impacted the subsequent decades, specifically the period between the two world wars known as the Horthy era.

All of these factors had a profound impact on the lives of the rural population in villages and rural areas. The most significant influence on the daily lives of these people was the land question: would there finally be a change that would provide them with a sustainable livelihood from the land? Their lives were deeply connected to nature, agriculture, and, consequently, land tenure policies.

In the first post-war government, the Károlyi government, the land reform law became a subject of intense debate right from the start. Conservative social forces, such as the National Hungarian Economic Association and the Catholic Church, as well as large landowners, sought to exert pressure and only supported the expropriation of estates over 5,000 cadaster acres. They planned for the implementation of the land reform to span decades. On the other end of the spectrum, the social democrats advocated for cooperative farming as the future, even after the complete expropriation of large and medium-sized estates. After lengthy and heated debates, a compromise solution emerged, championed by the Károlyi party and the Smallholders' Party. This solution aimed to strengthen small and medium-sized estates, ensuring the livelihood of each family. The government adopted the first decree on land reform, known as the People's Law 1919/XVIII, on 15th February 1919.¹¹ The fundamental principle of this law was that „the land belongs to the one who cultivates it.” This principle empowered the state to expropriate land (with compensation) that exceeded 500 cadastral acres (or 200 cadastral acres in the case of church land) in order to establish smaller and medium-sized estates. Additionally, the law aimed to create small estates that were of a size capable of sustaining a family and could be cultivated independently. This initiative aims to establish estates ranging from 5 to 20 acres in size. According to the People's Law, families who had previously engaged in farming but lacked adequate land, as well as families of war invalids, prisoners of war, and war widows injured in the Great War, were eligible to apply for land. The newly appointed farmers were granted the land through a perpetual lease, with the option to purchase it at a maximum interest rate of 5%. Additionally, they were provided with favorable installment payment options and a repayment period of fifty years.¹²

Ultimately, only one property was expropriated and divided based on the decree: the property belonging to Mihály Károlyi, the President of the Republic, located in Kápolna. The distribution of further land was halted due to the establishment of the Soviet Republic on 21 March 1919. As per the Soviet government's program, all estates exceeding 100 acres were expropriated and placed under the control of local councils. State farms were also established under the

¹¹ ROMSICS 2005. 118–119.

¹² 1919. évi XVIII. néptörvény a földművelő nép földhöz juttatásáról. 383–412.

supervision of the People's Commissariat for Agriculture.¹³ However, following the downfall of the proletarian dictatorship on 1 August 1919, the issue of land distribution remained unresolved. Given that over 55.8% of the arable land in the country was held in holdings exceeding 100 acres, it became evident that the existing land tenure structure was unsustainable and required a transformation. The National Smallholders' and Landowners' Party, reorganized by István Nagyatádi Szabó, outlined in its 1919 program the need for expropriation of all tied land, including religious, church, and joint-stock company-owned land. They also proposed the expropriation of estates owned by foreign citizens to facilitate land reform. Additionally, the party suggested utilizing large and medium-sized estates exceeding 500 acres, as well as land acquired during the war exceeding 200 acres, for the purpose of land reform.¹⁴

NAGYATÁDI'S LAND REFORM

The new Horthy government faced a challenging task of striking a balance between two conflicting interests: meeting the needs of the impoverished peasantry while safeguarding the interests of the large landowners. It is worth noting that the government leadership did not have any intention of implementing significant changes to the existing land tenure structure.¹⁵ Due to the conservative nature of Miklós Horthy's governorship, he still considered the aristocracy, the large landowners, to be one of his most important social bases, and therefore did not wish to oppose them.¹⁶ However, the more progressive and liberal parties advocated for land reform, which they envisioned as the state expropriating land and granting leaseholds to the peasantry. As a result, land reform continued to some extent, albeit in a limited manner. This was evident through the adoption of Article XXIX of 1920, which focused on the „Declaration of house sites and the formation of small leases in urgent cases that cannot be postponed,”¹⁷ as well as Article XXXVI of 1920, which aimed to improve the distribution of land.¹⁸

The presence of loopholes and inadequate wording in the law resulted in numerous abuses during its implementation. Unfortunately, these abuses disproportionately affected the small land claimants, who lacked the means to protect their interests throughout the lengthy bureaucratic process. In many instances, the designated housing sites were located in uninhabitable areas, such as stream beds, floodplains, wild water meadows, or far away from the village center. Furthermore, access to credit facilities for individuals in these lower social strata was severely limited, burdened by bureaucracy and sluggish processes. The pressing need to address the housing problem resulted in unsanitary living conditions. Makeshift shacks, small huts, and houses with rudimentary walls were hastily erected, and in numerous instances, the newly fortunate homeowners resided in earthen pits.¹⁹ The nature and hierarchical functioning of the enforcement process are well illustrated by

¹³ BARTHA 2010. 174.

¹⁴ TOLNAY 2000. 31.

¹⁵ NAGY 1989. 24.

¹⁶ GYÁNI – KÖVÉR 2001. 381.

¹⁷ 1920. évi XXIX. törvénycikk halasztást nem tűró sürgős esetekben házhelyek kijelöléséről és kishaszonbérletek alakításáról. 1494–1495.

¹⁸ 1920. évi XXXVI. törvénycikk a földbirtok helyesebb megoszlását szabályozó rendelkezésekről. 1918–1962.

¹⁹ WEIS 1931. 39–40.

the fact that authorities often sabotaged the execution, the wording of the law left many loopholes, and it was not uncommon for the estate servants claiming the land to be dismissed from their jobs. Additionally, the procedural costs had to be paid in advance, regardless of the success of the procedure.²⁰ The land reform resulted in an increase in the number of smallholdings, but unfortunately, these smallholdings did not offer a sustainable agricultural livelihood.

In total, the land reform gave 411,500 people access to a total of 700,000 acres of land, averaging only 1.7 acres in size.²¹ Subsequently, due to the aforementioned frequent failures and bankruptcies, a process of redevelopment was initiated. This was primarily because the land provided was insufficient to sustain the farmers themselves, let alone cover the costs of redemption or taxes. Furthermore, the landowners had previously relied on sporadic agricultural work and lacked the necessary tools and knowledge required for effective cultivation.²² Being penniless agrarian proletarians, they were forced to use hired labour to pay for the labour, so that their independent farms often could not bear the cost of it, and they quickly went bankrupt.²³

The land law did not change the land tenure structure in any meaningful way, and the disproportionate distribution of land ownership, which accompanied and deepened the social problems of the inter-war period, remained.

INCOME CONDITIONS

A key feature of Horthy-era society is its deeply entrenched and inflexible social structure. While feudalism and monarchy are no longer present in the legal and economic systems, social change remains sluggish. Social status remains largely determined by one's birth, with limited opportunities for upward mobility.

The income distribution was heavily skewed towards the top, with the top 20% of the population earning five times as much as the other 80%. The top 20% of the population had an average annual income of 1,525 pence, while the bottom 80% had an average annual income of 288.8 pence.²⁴ The majority of the lower 80%, specifically 72% of this group, comprised individuals living in rural areas. Therefore, the rural population accounted for the largest portion of the low-income demographic.²⁵

In contrast, during that period in Germany, the top 0.7% of the population earned just 10% of the total income, while the majority of the population (90%) earned approximately 60% of the total income.

During this period, a relatively impoverished society emerged, characterized by the concentration of economic resources among a narrow elite consisting of large landowners and major capitalists. In contrast, there existed a small middle class and a vast population of proletarian and semi-proletarian individuals, numbering in the millions, who were in opposition to this elite.²⁶

²⁰ BARTHA 2010. 176–177.

²¹ BARTHA 2010. 178.

²² BARTHA 2010. 179.

²³ KERÉK 1939. 219.

²⁴ MATOLCSY 1936. 286.

²⁵ GUNST 1987. 14.

²⁶ GYÁNI – KÖVÉR 2001. 218–220.

LAND DISTRIBUTION, PEASANT LANDOWNERS

The majority of categorical analyses define a homestead as encompassing at least 5 acres.²⁷ However, it's important to note that the size of the farm is just one aspect determining the minimum livelihood requirements. Other crucial factors include the land's quality, its proximity to market centers, transportation accessibility, and the type of crops cultivated.²⁸ For instance, for Bulgarian-style horticulture, a mere 1-2 cadastral acres may suffice, while vineyards and orchards covering less than 5 acres can still yield a decent livelihood. Nevertheless, such smaller farms are relatively uncommon, and most diminutive-sized farms often fail to provide a satisfactory standard of living.²⁹

I don't intend to deconstruct the categories, but it's important to emphasize that the minimum landholding size necessary for subsistence is established at 10 acres. This figure may be close to the lower threshold of what's considered the average subsistence level, as indicated by István Weis in 1931³⁰, along with similar definitions by István Roszner in 1936³¹, and Mihály Kerék in 1934³².

In the distribution of landholdings, a pattern similar to income distribution emerges, with approximately 80-20% shares relative to the subsistence line. Nearly 80% of landholders possess less than 10 acres, which is insufficient for sustaining themselves, necessitating additional income sources. However, despite this, these 81.8% of farms collectively occupy only 17.7% of the total agricultural land.³³

This is arguably the most crucial value for comprehending rural livelihoods: vast populations relying on an exceedingly small foundational element for subsistence - land.

Smallholdings, which are characterized as landholdings of up to 100 acres, make up just 17.3% of all landholdings but encompass 36.9% of the total land area. This category can be identified as the smallholder stratum, where farms are primarily operated as family-run enterprises, relying heavily on the labor of family members. Within this economic framework, human labor is essentially self-exploited to its fullest extent, leaving little output available for expenditure elsewhere. This also serves as a form of self-preservation, to some degree, against external economic fluctuations.³⁴

The data mentioned above, concerning the distribution of landholdings, exclusively pertains to landowners. Furthermore, there exists a wholly destitute stratum comprising former serfs (destitute day laborers) and manorial servants. These two groups live from one year to the next, lacking any means of subsistence that would render their livelihoods even marginally predictable.

The presence of large estates is the root cause of this imbalanced distribution of land and livelihoods. If these estates were divided into smaller parcels and managed as family farms,

²⁷ PALÁDI-KOVÁCS 2001. 201., BEREND T. – SZUHAY 1989. 300., ELEK 1938. 217., GYÁNI – KÖVÉR 2001. 310.

²⁸ KERÉK 1934. 17.

²⁹ NÉMETHY 1940. 273., KERÉK 1934. 19.

³⁰ WEIS 1931. 30.

³¹ ROSZNER 1936. 350–351.

³² KERÉK 1934. 23.

³³ BEREND T. – SZUHAY 1989. 300.

³⁴ SZUHAY 1982. 139.

they could potentially support four times as many families. Furthermore, even in its current configuration, these estates offer only modest living conditions for their workers, which are on a declining trend due to advancements in mechanization and production technology.³⁵

INDUSTRY AND SOCIETY, SUPPLEMENTARY LIVELIHOODS

The persistence of large estates in Hungary can be attributed to the unique economic conditions of the country. In many regions of Western Europe, the rapid pace of industrial development resulted in the early demise of the large landholding system. Industrialization in these areas led to the migration of a substantial portion of the workforce from agriculture to industry, consequently driving up wages and increasing the value of labor. As a result, the large landholding structure ceased to be profitable and began to diminish on its own. This transformation gave rise to medium-sized farms, which are characteristic of Western Europe and often operate as family farms.³⁶ In 1934, Mihály Kerék did not deem it feasible, given the Hungarian circumstances, for large estates to naturally dissolve on their own. This was primarily because the requisite economic conditions were not in place to facilitate such a dissolution. This would necessitate equal competition among various branches of production. „Therefore, in the absence of specific institutions and regulations (such as land tenure policies), the natural evolution of land relations can be disrupted, potentially resulting in deviations that not only pose a threat to the well-being of professional landowners but also undermine the broader national interest.”³⁷

In Hungary, industrialization, albeit on a smaller scale, has enhanced living conditions in certain regions. While industrial production was primarily centered in Budapest (in 1930, 85% of the industrial workforce resided in the capital), there were also small industrial and commercial hubs in the Transdanubian region and the northern areas.³⁸ In many of these regions, industrial labor often served as a supplementary source of income to the meager agricultural livelihood. Sugar factories, in particular, serve as a typical example of such factories in rural areas. These factories typically operated with a minimal permanent workforce but would hire significant numbers of temporary workers, sometimes numbering in the thousands, during the autumn season.³⁹ „In Ács, nearly half of the village relies on the sugar factory for support. During a season, carpenters can earn between 20,000 to 22,000 pence. What’s surprising is that the residents of Ács enjoy a relatively prosperous life. Almost all of the seasonal workers also own land. While some have as little as 2 acres, many have land holdings ranging from ten to fifteen acres. Without the presence of the factory, it’s likely that the people of Ács would be a struggling peasant village, much like many others in this region caught in the grip of the large landed estate system.”⁴⁰

A comparable source of industrial income supplementation in Northern Hungary was the mining district along the Sajó and Bódva rivers. For villages located within a 10-kilometer

³⁵ WEIS 1931. 35–36.

³⁶ GUNST 1987. 19.

³⁷ KERÉK 1934. 6.

³⁸ GYÁNI – KÖVÉR 2001. 209.

³⁹ POGÁNY 2000. 121.

⁴⁰ RÉZLER 1939. 345.

radius of the mines that were in operation, this offered the opportunity for a two-pronged lifestyle. In addition to their agricultural activities, the local population could earn additional income from the mines, primarily during the autumn to spring season, aligning with seasonal agricultural work. Péter Szuhay highlights two key aspects: firstly, the farms of mining peasants were remarkably stable due to the dependable supplementary income. Secondly, these villages experienced consistent population retention, with minimal or no emigration, and in some cases, even witnessed an influx of new residents later on.⁴¹

TISZAIGAR

During the interwar period, Tiszaigar's society predominantly revolved around its interactions with large estates. I've outlined these relationships as percentages using 1930 census data. At that time, Tiszaigar had a population of 1,635, consisting of 678 working men and women and 957 dependents. Among these, 1,279 were categorized as primary producers (including their dependents), 199 derived their livelihood from various branches of industry (encompassing self-employed craftsmen, those who employed assistants or apprentices, and family members assisting in the craft), while the remaining 157 earned their income from other sources such as transportation, public services, domestic service, and so on..⁴² We can observe that the largest portion, comprising 78% of the population, is engaged in agriculture, while a smaller number is involved in industrial and other occupations. When we look at the landholding data from the census, we find that there were only 3 landholders with over 100 acres, 3 in the 50-100 cadastral acres category, and 24 in the 10-50 acres category. The group with land holdings between 1-10 cadastral acres had the highest number of landholders, with a total of 129. In terms of earners in the landholding category (including farmers with less than 1 acre and sharecroppers), the census lists a total of 179 individuals, with helpers and dependents numbering 564. Consequently, approximately 44% of the 1,279 individuals who derive their livelihood from agriculture own land. However, when we break down the data further, it becomes evident that 83% of these landowners own less than 10 acres, necessitating supplementary income from sources beyond their land. The remaining 715 individuals who do not own land consist primarily of farm servants, numbering 113 with 271 dependents, and agricultural laborers, totaling 153 with 174 dependents. There is also a small group of civil servants, comprising 2 earners with 2 dependents.⁴³

The proportion between the penniless and the landowning classes stands at 55-45%. However, even within the landowning group, the most numerous segment is those with less than 10 acres. This group is likely contributing significantly to agrarian poverty because they cannot sustain themselves independently on their land. Therefore, we can conclude that Tiszaigar is an agrarian proletarian village, with a substantial (55%) impoverished and penniless social stratum.

In addition to the census, examining the Land Titles lists could be valuable. However, it's important to note that these lists only record holders and tenants with land holdings exceeding

⁴¹ SZUHAY 1982. 138–139.

⁴² *Az 1930. évi Népszámlálás. II. rész. 76.*

⁴³ *Az 1930. évi Népszámlálás. II. rész. 230–231.*

100 cadastral acres.⁴⁴ In this context, it becomes evident that Tiszaigar has numerous large landowners. However, the majority of them do not reside within the settlement; instead, they own land in other neighboring settlements and are connected to Tiszaigar through their place of residence.⁴⁵ More valuable data for the study of society, however, can be found in the Directory of Trade, Industry, and Agriculture in Hungary from 1924.⁴⁶ The directory also provides information on farmers with more than 10 hectares of land, as well as local craftsmen and other tradespeople, categorised by occupation. In the case of Tiszaigar, it lists 119 persons engaged in a specific profession⁴⁷. This figure is roughly consistent with the census data, with the slight variance of approximately 10 people possibly attributable to changes that occurred during the 6-year gap between the two censuses.

When we consider all of this data collectively, it becomes evident that only a tiny fraction of the most affluent landowners choose to reside within the settlement. Historically, the Széky family has been a prominent presence for centuries, with István Széky and Péter Széky managing their estates independently during this period. While János Hering still resides in the settlement, the ownership of other sizable estates is held by individuals who do not reside in Tiszaigar.

Approximately 22% of the population, equivalent to 356 people, derive their livelihood from non-agricultural activities. Another 34%, accounting for 564 people, belong to the medium, small, or small landowner category, along with their families. The remaining 44%, totaling 715 people, are considered destitute. However, it's worth noting that individuals with land holdings under 10 acres often find themselves compelled to work as day laborers for large landowners in order to generate the necessary income to support their families. Considering this, when we include the under-10-acre group within the penniless category (as those relying on labor on the large estates), it shifts the societal composition: 22% (356 people) still represent the non-agricultural stratum, 25% (415 people) are medium and small landowners, and 53% (864 people) make up the small landowners and penniless stratum.

Ferenc Bakó conducts a comprehensive examination of the stratum of craftsmen and artisans, categorizing them based on their level of dedication to their craft. Through his interviews and recollections, it becomes evident that craftsmen and artisans occupied the higher echelons of the local society. This status was also manifested in their appearance, as they typically did not wear loose trousers but rather well-fitted ones, often opting for shoes over boots. Additionally, in terms of their marriages, they had the choice of marrying a daughter from another craftsman's family or even a daughter from a family of large landowners.⁴⁸

Land fragmentation posed a persistent challenge for the landowning peasantry. Medium and smallholders frequently encountered difficulties in maintaining their land as it functioned as a family farm. Succession often led to the division of these smallholdings into multiple parcels, further complicating the already shrinking land area and making it increasingly challenging for families to sustain themselves. Moreover, these smaller

⁴⁴ *Magyarország földbirtokosai és földbérlői (Gazdacímtár) 1925. 1935.*

⁴⁵ *Magyarország földbirtokosai és földbérlői (Gazdacímtár) 1925. 153., Magyarország földbirtokosai és földbérlői (Gazdacímtár) 1935. 143.*

⁴⁶ *Magyarország kereskedelmi, ipari és mezőgazdasági címtára 1924.*

⁴⁷ *Magyarország kereskedelmi, ipari és mezőgazdasági címtára 1924. 1438.*

⁴⁸ BAKÓ 1992. 49., 15.

landholders had to contend with public charges and taxes, which placed a heavier burden on them compared to larger farmers due to their lower incomes. Adapting to market conditions and modernizing in terms of technological advancements were also formidable hurdles for them. Limited capital made it harder for them to secure loans from credit institutions for significant improvements or land acquisition. Consequently, many of these smallholders found themselves stagnating and eventually deteriorating. By the turn of the century, this stratum had reached a dead end, with available land and opportunities for upward mobility becoming scarcer. In numerous cases, individuals from this group slid down the social mobility ladder, falling into the ranks of agrarian poverty. Some managed to persevere through careful savings, the exploitation of family labor, innovative agricultural practices, and accumulated experience. Children from poorer and middle-class families often had to work as laborers, day laborers, or vineyard workers for local or neighboring landowners, primarily to secure a year's supply of wheat.⁴⁹

Even after the Nagyatádi land reform, the number of small landowners experienced significant growth. The ownership of land created an illusion of independence and upward mobility among peasants. However, this increase in small landholders also led to a substantial rise in the number of agrarian proletarians, becoming the largest stratum. For instance, in Igar, 86 individuals were allocated land, and 13 were given houses. However, the number of people seeking land exceeded 300. The 86 families who received land were distributed a total of 177 acres, averaging approximately 2 acres per family. Frequent turnover of land and leaseholds occurred, primarily because they were often granted to individuals with limited farming skills or lacking the necessary equipment to effectively cultivate the land. „Those who had some supplementary income managed to retain the land allocated to them. However, for those without any additional income, they had to undertake demanding labor for meager compensation. They plowed for 15-16 pence, sowed and threshed in exchange for only half a hundredweight of wheat. Those lacking financial resources had to toil for six days to earn an acre of plowing and hoeing, and an additional two days for each haul. To acquire thirty to forty crosses of wheat, one had to provide labor in six or seven different places, essentially working for an extended period without pay. This imposed a heavy burden on impoverished individuals, requiring them to labor for weeks on end for no compensation.”⁵⁰

In Tiszaigar, smallholders and agricultural laborers faced significant vulnerability to the influence of large estates, particularly during the winter months when employment opportunities were limited. This vulnerability intensified during the early 1930s, amidst the Great Depression, as the local landowners, the Székys, made efforts to retain day laborers in the village to secure cheap labor. To work outside the village, individuals needed to obtain permission from the village magistrate, which was often denied. This practice underscored the pervasive influence of the landlords in the village's public affairs, deeply intertwined with the fabric of daily life.⁵¹ The underemployment of farm workers and landlord's servants left them in a precarious position, susceptible to pressure from the landlords.

⁴⁹ KARDOS 1997. 237.

⁵⁰ KARDOS 1997. 219.

⁵¹ KARDOS 1997. 244-245.

DUDAR

First, let's examine the 1930 census data regarding land ownership in Dudar. Dudar encompasses 4,218 cadastral acres and is home to a population of 1,251. In terms of occupation, out of the 534 earners, 481 are farmers, along with their dependents, totaling 1,132. Additionally, among the earners, 31 are craftsmen, 3 are tradesmen, and 19 have other occupations. What is noteworthy is the absence of large landowners with holdings exceeding 100 acres in the settlement, and there are none with holdings between 50 and 100 acres either. Instead, there are 37 earners categorized within the 10-50 acre range, and the group of smallholders with less than 10 acres is the largest, numbering 131. Consequently, landholders, specifically small and dwarf landholders, including their dependents and assisting family members, amount to 707 individuals. In contrast to Tiszaigar and Milota, where landless agricultural workers were the majority, in Dudar, those who own land, even if it's just a small plot, form the majority.⁵² So here in Dudar, according to census data, 63% of people living from agriculture have all their land, and only 37% have none at all.⁵³

The census data does not list any local landowner with over 100 acres, possibly because the landowners in this area are not residents of the settlement, as indicated in the land registers. Two prominent landowners are mentioned in the Farmers' Directories. One of them is the Count Nádasdy family, whose land holdings have been gradually diminishing over the years. The other notable landowner is Richard Szávózd, who possessed 145 acres at the time of both records.

These directories also list various other land holdings in the village of Dudar, each roughly in similar proportions, ranging from 4,500 to 500 cadastral acres.⁵⁴

The village's livelihood primarily relied on agriculture, but not in the 'traditional' sense. The mountainous terrain limited the significance and feasibility of arable farming, leading to a strong emphasis on animal husbandry. Herds of cattle and pigs were raised in the open countryside, with a communal shepherd overseeing their care, including grazing in the woods and open areas. The herdsman's yearly wages were typically paid by the community, mostly in the form of agricultural products, and the employment contract with the worker was renewed on an annual basis.⁵⁵

In addition to farming, a significant cottage industry developed to supplement incomes and compensate for the poorer land: carting, broom-making, yoke-making, wheelbarrow-making, lime and coal burning, weaving.⁵⁶ The village's proximity to large forests provided them with opportunities to craft wooden tools and implements, including tools, yokes, and wheelbarrows. They sold some of these products directly at local markets and fairs, with Zirc serving as the primary 'market town' for the village. Additionally, they would transport their goods to whoever

⁵² The two figures do not add up, the landlord and landless categories do not add up to the total number of people living from subsistence farming. We do not know the reason, but it is interesting to note that two of the categories do not include earners, but have 4-4 dependents. This total of 8 persons just makes up for the missing few persons, so it may be that these dependents are in fact part of the subsistence population in some form.

⁵³ *Az 1930. évi Népszámlálás. II. rész. 33., 144-145.*

⁵⁴ *Az 1930. évi Népszámlálás. II. rész. 134., Magyarország földbirtokosai és földbérlői (Gazdacímtár) 1925. 372., Magyarország földbirtokosai és földbérlői (Gazdacímtár)" 1935. 345.*

⁵⁵ TOMORI 1986. 83.

⁵⁶ TOMORI 1986. 86.

had a buyer. Another common method of selling their products was through local traders who would purchase the items and resell them themselves. In the early 20th century, the residents of Dudar were known to sell 50,000 to 60,000 birchwood brooms each spring.

In addition to their other sources of income, the villagers also generated revenue by producing and selling hay and lime. This economic activity was facilitated by the nearby forests, which provided the necessary raw materials for coal production, including hornbeam, beech, and ash. Additionally, limestone, abundant in the hilly terrain surrounding the village, was extracted and burned in stone pits. This endeavor required skill and was frequently executed with the assistance of day laborers who oversaw the pits until the burning process was finished.⁵⁷

In terms of tradesmen, we can say that the basic trades are present in Dudar. According to the industrial directory of 1924, there are carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmiths and saddlers in the municipality, as well as a municipal midwife, 3 pubs and a water mill.⁵⁸ In 1937, there was a notable increase in the number of shoemakers in the village. Among them, István Bitmann operated a particularly large workshop, employing 12-13 apprentices during the winter season. He distributed his footwear locally, selling them in a shop adjacent to his workshop, as well as at four local markets and fairs. At these events, he typically dispatched and sold around 250 pairs of shoes. Additionally, he fulfilled orders from customers in distant counties. In 1936, István Bitmann expanded his business ventures by opening a general store, which also proved to be profitable and required additional employees.⁵⁹

In the farming community of the municipality, the middle class enjoys relatively stable livelihoods. The general impression gathered from the surveys is that individuals who are industrious and ambitious can find opportunities to sustain themselves in Dudar. What sets Dudar apart is its reliance on the opportunities presented by the nearby forest. Land ownership is quite tied up, making it challenging to acquire new land, as is the case in other parts of the country. However, the village's proximity to the forest allows those willing to take advantage of communal grazing and supplementary income sources such as lime burning, hay burning, and woodworking to earn extra money and improve their standard of living. It's important to note that this primarily benefits individuals who already possess some initial capital to support their income-generating activities.

At the start of the century, a considerable number of people from Dudar opted for emigration to the United States. In 1905, 48 individuals embarked on the arduous journey, only to later return to their homeland and bolster their economic prospects by purchasing land. Nevertheless, in 1914, the option to emigrate was abruptly revoked, and the chance to accumulate wealth and enlarge family farm holdings was once again thwarted.⁶⁰

As reflected in the census data, the population is predominantly composed of smallholders, owning less than 10 hectares of land. This mirrors the situation across the country, where land holdings continue to fragment due to succession, making it exceedingly challenging for new landowners to embark on a path of growth and development. This difficulty is exacerbated by the challenging economic and social conditions of the era. Dudar indeed has its share of these

⁵⁷ BOROSS – MÁRKUSNÉ 2000. 100–108.

⁵⁸ Magyarország kereskedelmi, ipari és mezőgazdasági címtára 1924. 719.

⁵⁹ SHAND 2019. 267–270.

⁶⁰ BOROSS – MÁRKUSNÉ 2000. 70.

small estates. However, it's worth noting that livestock farming holds significance in this region. Through communal livestock farming and the utilization of shared pastures and woodlands within the community, there's a capacity to produce a modest amount of fodder on the land. Consequently, there isn't a strict correlation between land size and the number of livestock kept.

The most economically vulnerable group consists of those who are entirely without resources and individuals who own less than 10 acres of land. To make ends meet, they must supplement their annual earnings by laboring on larger farms or estates. Unfortunately, their precarious situation is exemplified by the deplorable conditions on these manors. Several accounts have recounted nights spent in stables infested with rats or in cellars that become inundated when it rains, leaving them lying in water. Furthermore, employers exploit their lack of knowledge. While the contract specifies the number of acres they are expected to work for a particular wage, they often cannot review the contract themselves or verify the actual acreage. If they dare to voice concerns about substandard living conditions or seek to measure the land, they risk being dismissed.⁶¹

In terms of modernisation, electricity was introduced in the villages of Veszprém county in the 1930s, in 1937, there were already electric lights in several places. It was not yet common in all households, but in some places it was recorded by researchers.⁶² Researchers have observed that the interiors of craftsmen and tradesmen's homes are more modern and urban in style, yet they do not exhibit excessive or ostentatious decorations that would be out of place in the village setting. In Dudar, there is a growing trend toward factory-made linen, with linen being sold in the three local grocery stores. In the village, only a few women continue to weave linen, while others either weave it themselves or purchase ready-made linen from the store.⁶³ According to the researchers, the village's self-contained nature was already beginning to break down by 1937. In the year and a half leading up to the research period, several new businesses had been established in the village, including a new shoemaker's shop, a grocery store, a grain storage facility, and a milk collection station, all of which were successful right from the start. The grain storage facility is affiliated with a mill in Zirc, where local farmers can deposit their grain for milling. The mill then transports the grain to Zirc, and the resulting flour is delivered back to Dudar. The miller retains a tenth of the flour as compensation. This system is convenient for the farmers and profitable for the mill. Similarly, the milk collection station is a local branch of a company based in Budapest, where milk is purchased at the rate of 9 cents per liter, regardless of quantity. The residents of Dudar were eager to take advantage of this opportunity, and while they may have been short on cash, having a means to monetize their milk was a significant benefit.⁶⁴ The latter two businesses not only benefit the residents of Dudar but also extend opportunities to people in the surrounding area.

Overall, while they maintained a modest and often impoverished lifestyle, and many had to make do with very little, Dudar still provided relatively stable and reasonably satisfactory living conditions compared to national standards.

⁶¹ BREMNER – REITZER 2019b. 241–243., BREMNER – REITZER 2019a. 250–251.

⁶² FARQUARSON 2019. 380.

⁶³ SHAND 2019. 272–273.

⁶⁴ SHAND 2019. 265–267.

SUMMARY

Overall, we've observed that the trends we've seen in the national data are consistent with what's happening in the municipalities we've studied. The social structure aligns with the national average. In Tiszaigar, there's a high level of agrarian poverty and a strong dependence on large estates. They live in a situation of severe vulnerability to large estates, at the level of work and livelihood, as well as at the level of everyday life. Their livelihood opportunities are severely limited and, in this context, their standard of living is very low. In Dudar, the impact of individual ambition on livelihoods becomes evident. Although land ownership is fragmented, as is the national average, and there's a significant manorial estate on the village's outskirts, the proximity of the forest and the natural environment offer opportunities for additional sources of income. Thus, individuals can choose various ways to make a living according to their habits and entrepreneurial drive.

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