

**Thesis of PhD Dissertation**

**The Village Seminar of Patak College (1931–1951)  
and its antecedents**

Ákos Bartha

Consultant: Lajos Timár CSc



University of Debrecen

Doctoral School of History and Ethnography

Debrecen, 2012

## I. THE PURPOSE OF THE THESIS, DEFINITION OF THE CHOSEN TOPIC

“I see the reduced model all that happened in the populist movement, in Sárospatak. Everything was found here, on a local basis, which was later proceeding throughout the country: scouting, village seminar, village exploration, village work, talent rescue, adult education centre, literary evenings.” Gyula Gombos, one of the most important follower and researcher of the populist literature made this confession in his work *A harmadik út*. His opinion seems to be confirmed in many looks by reminiscences, studies, different contemporary publications and sources. These report a consistent village work in Sárospatak, entirely the liquidation of theology in 1951.

I tried to introduce the village seminar in my paper from links of the above mentioned interconnected model. The self-education fellowship founded by the theologian students in 1931 was one of the most important elements of the model. It was working in a very complicated historical era: between 1931 and 1951. On the one hand the community preceded his age by this, since the sociography turned into fashion only in the second part of the thirties (for a couple of years) in Hungary. On the other hand they outlived his contemporaries, because the social research became an undesirable phenomenon from 1948.

An important task was to find the identity of the seminar among the contemporary intellectual groups. To this, it has been looked necessary to outline the “agrarian question”, as a relevant element of the public discourse in Hungary between the two World Wars. The ideological identity is not so simple, as the citation would foreshadow it, since the seminar was basically growing out from of the conservative scouting, further the leader (Kálmán Újszászy) expressed an interest in philosophy, especially in existentialism. Therefore I had to examine the scouting in Sárospatak and – as far as my abilities allowed it – I had to have an insight into the philosophical bases of the seminar.

I felt my limited prospects not only here. The overall exploration of the village seminar hardly could be completed without an interdisciplinary project involved ethnographers, church historians and sociologists. That is why I reduced my exploration to the roots of the village seminar, the quantified results of the active era and the sociographies made by the community. I discussed in detail the students’ labour camp in 1935, which was the first attempt of this kind of public work in Hungary. The camp received serious attention from the press and from the politicians. I also emphasized the border situation of Sárospatak.

Although the traditional hinterland of the College was destroyed by the decision of Trianon, the Uplands' contact has survived in all eras, and the seminar played a considerable role in this.

The manifoldness of the seminar collection (regarding the sociography results) has been illustrated in my paper and a main aim was to place the manuscripts in the contemporary village exploration's writings. First of all, it is necessary to lay down that the populist-conservative duality meant a value classification (articulated by the policy) for a long time. In this scene the conservative writings were the lame "spurious sociographies" and the populists had the valid, high quality, "progressive" ones. It is clear that making this qualification reverse is impossible, but after a review I pointed out the characteristics of the texts focused on the distinct motivations. I tried to find answers for the question: how worthy to read and to use the different works? Finally, locating the manuscripts of the seminar in this co-ordinate system was also intended. However, after processing the sources I realized that this cannot be achieved – for reasons described later –, so I opted for introducing a new category: "amateur sociographies".

## **II. SOURCES REVIEW, METHODOLOGY**

The primary source of my thesis – Faluszemináriumi Kéziratok – can be found in Sárospatak Református Kollégium, Tudományos Gyűjtemények. Beside other writings, the boxes include the worked out results of the seminar collection. Mostly from regional historical viewpoint Tudományos Gyűjtemény Adaléktára can be an important source, with reports, shorter papers, statements and statistics. I gained important data under my Sárospatak researches from Tiszáninneri Református Egyházkerület Levéltár as well. From the College's Nagykönyvtár I used reports, local periodicals and other regional historical publications. It should be noted that I would have hardly been able to succeed without the assistance of the employees in Tudományos Gyűjtemények.

In order to improve the base of the comparative analysis, I decided to include sources from Debrecen. The documents of the youth associations of the College can be found in Tiszántúli Református Egyházkerület Levéltára. The library of Debreceni Egyetem Földrajzi Intézet has numerous sociographic writings and it attracted less attention so far. Also Egyetemi Kézirattár turned into a valuable research ground for me.

From Magyar Országos Levéltár (Budapest) the lithographs, a slight size folder

concerning Országos Széchenyi Szövetség and documents together with microfilms from Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal proved to be useful too. The latter material helped tracking of the pastors' careers, primarily after 1945. The village statistics made by Belügyminisztérium („Közigazgatási tájékoztató lapok”, 1925) and Folklore Fellow's collection from the beginning of the 20th century were used from Néprajzi Múzeum Etnológiai Adattára. In Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár I utilized contemporary writings, which cannot be found elsewhere.

In 2011, I was researching for a few months in Kassa and its neighbourhood as well. Among the collections I definitely have to remark Kassa urban library (Verejná knižnica Jána Bocatia v Košiciach) and Kassa scientific library (Štátna vedecká knižnica v Košiciach). Here I could use regional journals which were difficultly to access in Hungary.

From among the printed sources the ethnographic selecting compiled from Folklore Fellows collection (*Néphit szövegek*) was valuable for the first chapter of the thesis. Memoirs – like Lajos Szabó's (*Utolsó szalmaszál*) and Rácz István's (*A semmi partján*) – made the picture of the seminar era (1931–1951) more colourful, in the company of some manuscripts. The most important published sources were the considerable size texts from Kálmán Újszászy, beside the large press material. The press sources can be found in three thematic blocks (nationwide, regional, transborder) in the bibliography of the dissertation. I have to mention the outstanding Újszászy memorial album (*Újszászy-émlékkönyv*) as well, which is not only a source publication with the professor's writings, but also contains studies concerning him. Here to be noticed: related the wider topic not unambiguous, what we may treat as a “source”, since the same sociography rightfully can be booked as a study, as a source, as a memoir and as a literature work.

As an outcome of the problem above, maybe it is worthy to allow a train of thought regarding the paper's (and also the author's) approach. No doubt that history developed its frameworks, its source-focused methodology and his optimism in the 19th century. The classic historian ethos represents the faith for the cognizability of the past and the bases of this optimism were the sources. In the second part of the 20th century a doubt (being formulated from more directions) affected the historians in these establishments. This pointed out some problems and dangers of sources and opened novel ways for new theories. However, the critics of the postmodern historiography warn rightfully that the orientation to the text theories, text analyses and rhetoric formations may turn the historians for substitute activity

instead of making substantive statements. Indeed, after the dynamic era of the lingual/cultural turn, a new era probably has already started in the West.

In my opinion, historiography is partly a hermeneutic work, which demands the reinterpretation of the vocational discourse. Since deciding proportion of the sources – similarly to the results – are written as texts, some other disciplines should be involved. Nonetheless, these novel approaches did not substitute, but complemented the source interpretation in the dissertation. In the three thematic units the chronological and the descriptive–analyzer parts alternate each other. Accordingly, the style of the paper is not uniformed. I intended to provide source based, reader-friendly interpretation, not finding necessary the usage of royal plural.

Using internet is essential nowadays, that is why I aimed utilizing the available information on more ways. The exact Web places and the time of downloads are reported in the bibliography, reducing the extent of the footnotes.

### **III. THE SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE DISSERTATION**

The populist sociography was coming into existence because of historical reasons in the thirties. As a result of the authoritarian Horthy era and the global recession the writers showed up social aspects of the economic relations. Although, the populists were diverse politically after 1945, their works were considered as valid documents of the previous period. Of course this happened after deep selections, neglecting their contacts at the conservatives or on the right wing. The politics made any sorts of unbiased judgements impossible for a long time.

As Bulcsu Bognár noted, the problems brought up by the populists (the lordship-policy, the peasantry's crisis, the social integration, the role of the middle class, the political leadership's questions) are both key issues of the Hungarian society development in the modern age. At the same time the dissertation illustrates that the main aim of these works primarily was not to give alternatives, but to attract attention for the problems. Although the populists helped the exploration of the troubles and started the country's self-knowledge literature, they abandoned proposals for the real solution. Furthermore, the civil organisations and the social policy were not mentioned by them, or only some rows were devoted for these phenomenona, because they did not expect improvement from this way. The common views

of the populists were that they all rejected the Horthy era's "Neo-baroque" society structure. The "double identity" meant a serious problem to them, since the majority of them was only able to realize the problems of the folk, by emerging from the folk themselves. The paper is also raising this question (by using results from cultural anthropology) and bringing examples from more known works as well as from sources from Sárospatak.

Important to see that not only the populists set the radical agrarian reform as their goal in the age, but although a number of political–intellectual groups, whose sincerity for the reform are questionable. In any case the "agrarian question" turned into a public discourse due to the interest of the politics and the rural sociological workshops, in different ways according to the different ideological–political tastes. In this question everybody (the government-side, the left wing and the right-side radicals) had opinions and of course the forming "third way" as well.

The serious social situation and its concerns to the lordship-policy did not avoid the interest of the conservative political elite. We may call everybody (for example: the social advisers, the public health experts, the politicizing social scientists) "official village researcher", who made the sociographic activity as an official work. Their loyalty for the Horthy system was due to their existential dependence. This faith did not mean uncritical attitude therefore, but the radical agrarian reform was a taboo for them. They kept the large estate as the best place for the agricultural workers. The large estate was the base for their economic rehabilitation concepts; this was that playground, where they thought crisis is solvable, or at least reducible. They often cited – many times rightfully – the "unscientific", "intuitive" village exploration methodology of the populists. Indeed, they may have used all the benefits of the institutional research in their work. Economic arguments were primarily proved by them in the debate as a result of their agrarian roots. The tendentiousness had characterized them as well, although the agrarian reform in 1945 mostly justified the sceptics.

Count Pál Teleki had serious merits in the official village exploration, and also necessary to mention his name first as a key figure of the Hungarian scouting, which sounded the affection of nature and "the volk". The quotation marks sign the already mentioned colonial attitude that was not only believed by the conservatives, but also by the urbane intellectuals' majority. Fatherly spirit and pathetic tune pervade this mentality. At the same time the conservatives kept this population – because of their reproducibility – the best sustaining rank of race and the perfect reservoir for the soldiery. According their interpretation, the folk must be lifted up with different government measures and with the

help of the rural intelligence (priests, teachers and doctors). Defending against the “red propaganda” was a main target beside the realization of the modern expertise. There was an important reform conservative theory – inherited from the liberal era – that treated poverty as a potential danger for the politic and economic situation, so it handled the phenomenon as a moral quality.

However, not only politically motivated authors were busy with society descriptions, but some leaders of the villages as well. The local schoolmasters and priests did not have literary aims and did not want to make politics into any directions. However, it does not mean that their works would be any better, or more objective. The main shortages of the “amateur village researchers” are the followings: they had no sociological qualification (nor some populists) and they missed to find the reasons for the social inequalities, that the populist sociographers have done so deeply. However, some members of the local intelligence recorded conscientiously the villages’ important happenings (“the village's life”) and the local organizations, which were fallen out from the populists’ perspectives and also from the official authors' interests. Thus writings from the amateurs may not only be interesting for the local historians, but also these are important sources regarding the rural associations in the Horthy era. Furthermore, they can give new additives in many looks for the lifestyle of the villages.

To sum up: populist sociography, writings of the official village exploration and texts of the amateur village researchers are narratives that are not excluding, but complementing each other and inform us from the rural Hungary between the two World Wars. Moreover, somewhere they did it a bit forward – as we can see in Sárospatak.

At the Village Seminar, which can be considered as an amateur researcher group, we can realize the duality of the populists (radical reformers) – official in several cases, although the College huge traditions in the exploration of folk life. This attitude found his frameworks in Széchenyi Association and Folklore Fellows at the beginning of the 20th century. The reform conservative young students (Széchenyi Association) affected the Village Seminar on the one hand with the realization of the village work in a seminar, on the other hand with his field work and also with their folk's library. The influence of Folklore Fellows was materialized mostly in the method of the ethnographic collection. In this manner, the workshop of Kálmán Újszászy has not forgotten, but referred them as a predecessor of the Seminar.

The direct basis of the seminar was scouting, which became an emblematic movement of Horthy era. Five teams were working in Sárospatak, but the grammar school's Hegyaljai Erő, the theologian's Timótheus and the teacher training college's II. Rákóczi boy scout team were superior to them. The theologians were the connecting link to the seminar, although all communities oriented progressively to the folk life. An important join point was the leader of the seminar (Kálmán Újszászy) as well, who just got to Sárospatak, when the scouting was established in the city. Additionally, he was playing a key role in the Bodrog-bank work. Further, the Village Seminar studied the Hungarian society primarily from the works of István Weis (*A magyar falu, A mai magyar társadalom*), and that was another join point to the "official village research", since the conservative social scientist's ideas left a trace on Újszászy's theoretical conceptions.

Nonetheless, Újszászy's culture conception has been not only linked to the conservatives, but also to the populists and to the new ways of Reformed Church (theology of Karl Barth). As a philosophy teacher, the professor paid attention for the religious and intellectual tendencies of his age (awakening movement, existentialism), developing his own point of view. The most important landmarks: opposite to Ferenc Erdei, he kept villages not historical creations, but a determining base of national culture. Accordingly, the national culture can be only developed by the expansion of the (transcendent-definiteness) village and the (immanent-minded) town. Újszászy emphasized that this must happen *simultaneously* and *separately* at the same time! All intention to unite these factors leads to the destruction of national culture. Thus Újszászy distanced himself from the populists, who believed in the embourgeoisement of peasantry (Zoltán Szabó, Imre Kovács, Ferenc Erdei before 1943) and also from those populist authors, who was thinking the problem can be solved by the Marxism (Péter Veres, József Darvas, Ferenc Erdei from 1943).

Újszászy's theory was built on the dialectic of individuality and collectivism. He looked at his age as a national based renaissance of the collective forms and his ideal became the religious human, who lives for his national community. The leader of the Village Seminar emphasized the educational aspect of their endeavours, separating again the workshop from others (Turul Association, populists, and officials). Approximately these thoughts meant the ideological foundations of the seminar. The frameworks, the characters, the research methods and finally the results were also affected by Újszászy's theory, which has been already evolved in the middle of the thirties. The "opened stability" and the spiritual bases explains the uniquely long duration of the seminar at the Hungarian scale.

The Village Seminar was founded as one of the pioneer social workshops in Hungary. They came into existence after a request of the students in 1931, although Újszászy's role cannot be questioned. At the bases, the influence of (theologian) Zoltán Szabó also must be emphasized. He realized the reduced (geographical and social) prospects of the College and made the „Poor's School” more village oriented. Finally, Szabó's role is also evident at the foundation of scouting in Patak. The main target of the Village Seminar was to let the future rural pastors have more information about the scope of their activities (Hegyköz, Hegyalja, Bodrogeköz). They tried to get this goal with sociographic measuring (mostly in their congregations), and also with spiritual and material folklore collections. Further, they ran popular travelling libraries and made village works, sometimes cooperated with other associations (Village Association, Széchenyi Association).

The members recognised the village literature in Sárospatak and they were prepared for the field-work and discussed the results here as well. The sociology papers were made ready based on the more successful surveys. Although on the College's “Wednesday Evenings” all tendencies were represented, the group sympathized with the populists, thus they were on the side of the agrarian reform. The chapter, presenting life of the College students fixes this, pointing at some other local effects of the contemporary common talk (Jewish question, situation of the middle class) as well. At the same time the young identification beside the reform was difficult to keep on the official career (ie: István Fűrész), although the agrarian reform in 1945 made the question pointless.

I presented in three chronological chapters, why the Village Seminar was one of the most organized, most consistent and the longest serving (collection developer) rural sociologist's group in the country. The early years took until the First Vienna Award (1938), and that were – in parallel with the nationwide tendencies – the “high days” of the village research in Sárospatak. The labour camp in 1935, which was the first attempt for a labour camp in our homeland created the largest reaction around the seminar. Another sign of success was the active attendance at a village worker's congress in 1936, because this conference was arranged by Széchenyi Association and it was chaired by count Pál Teleki. Since Sárospatak is approximately 10 km from the border, in the second subsection (1938–1945) I examined the local effects of the border-changes.

From the Village Seminar documents before 1938, I concentrated primarily on the illegal border crossings, especially for the directions of the “escapes”, the approximate proportions, the typical procession and the aftermaths. Spontaneous happenings changed the

seminar works at the time of the border-corrections, then the city (new flag of Kassa) and the students (church renovation in Nagykázmér) persistent Uplands' activity was discussed.

At the seminar period after 1945, I focused on the pastors' (particularly the post-seminarists') life under the new era, involved results of the inviting applications (1947/48). On the whole, beside the numerous tragical fates we could find real success stories (Imre Bertalan, László Harangi, Sándor Ráski) as well. However, I had to also mention the unsuccessful story of reorganizing Village Seminar into a country museum or landscape institute. After the turn of 1948 were born the "production sociographies" and the factory researches, both can be kept unique in the Hungarian village exploration's history. The reports and circular letters justified the changes of the collections and the direction of the work in all eras, since the collection was ongoing through governments, borders and power structures. I represented the quantified data in tables.

## PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE THESIS TOPIC

### Studies (8)

*Az érem két oldala: hivatalos falukutatók – népi szociográfusok [Two sides of the coin: official village researchers – populist sociographers]*, Jászkunság: az MTA Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok Megyei Tudományos Egyesület folyóirata, 2008/1–2, 136–161.

*Hivatalos Falukutatók* (recenzió) [*Official village researchers* (review)], Szkhonion: a Debreceni Egyetem BTK–HÖK művészeti és szakfolyóirata, 2008/1, 88–92.

*Szaktudomány vagy szépirodalom? Szociográfia a Horthy-korszakban [Science or literature? Sociography in the Horthy era]*, Debreceni Disputa, 2010/4, 48–54.

*Magyarország első Nemzeti Munkatábora – a sárospataki diákok útépítése [The first labour camp in Hungary: the road construction by the students from Sárospatak]*, Sárospataki Füzetek: a Sárospataki Református Teológiai Akadémia kiadványa, 2010/4, 59–81.

*Falukutatás, falumisszió vagy falumunka? A sárospataki faluszeminárium és a két világháború közti magyar falukutatás [Village exploration, village mission or village work? The Village Seminar and the Hungarian village exploration between the two World Wars]*, Zempléni Múzsá: társadalomtudományi és kulturális folyóirat, 2011/1, 26–37.

*Egy dokumentum a sárospataki faluszeminárium (1931–1951) történetéből [A document from the History of the Village Seminar (1931–1951) of Sárospatak]*, Sárospataki Füzetek: a Sárospataki Református Teológiai Akadémia kiadványa, 2011/1, 97–104.

*Adalék a sárospataki faluszeminárium (1931–1951) felvidéki vonatkozásaihoz. Kapcsolatok az első bécsi döntéstől 1945-ig [Additional information to the Uplands' relations of the Village Seminar in Sárospatak (1931–1951). Contacts from the First Vienna Award until 1945]*, Szemelvények ötszáz év magyar történelméből, szerk.: ANTOS Balázs–TAMÁS Ágnes, Szeged, 2011, 117–131.

*A falukutatás filozófiája. Újszászy Kálmán két világháború közti eszmerendszere és a falumunka [The philosophy of village exploration. Újszászy Kálmán's conception between the two World Wars and the village work]*, Hitel: irodalmi, művészeti és társadalmi folyóirat, 2011, december, 96–116.

### **Presentations (3)**

*Földreformtervezetek a két világháború közti Magyarországon [Agrarian reform plans in Hungary between the two World Wars]*, Kárpát-medencei Fiatal Politológusok Konferenciája, Debrecen, 2008. 11. 22.

*A sárospataki faluszeminárium felvidéki vonatkozásai [The Uplands' relations of the Village Seminar of Sárospatak]*, Szemelvények ötszáz év magyar történelméből: PhD-hallgatók országos konferenciája, Szegedi Tudományegyetem, Történelemtudományi Doktori Iskola, Szeged, 2011. 04. 08.

*„Interdiszciplináris régiókutatás” a kiépülő diktatúra árnyékában [„Interdisciplinary region research” in the shadow of the developing dictatorship. The Village Seminar of Sárospatak between 1945 and 1951]*, *A sárospataki faluszeminárium 1945 és 1951 között*, Interdiszciplinaritás a régiókutatásban II.: Fiatal kutatók nemzetközi konferenciája, Debreceni Akadémiai Bizottság székháza, 2011. 11. 30.

### **Studies under publication (5)**

*Utak a földreformhoz és a megvalósult földreform: adalék a magyar földbirtokpolitikához (1890–1920) [Ways to the agrarian reform and the realization. Additional information to the Hungarian lordship-policy (1890–1920)]*, Történeti tanulmányok XVII. kötet – Acta Universitas Debreceniensis Series Historica LXI. kötet, Debrecen, 2012 (?), 18 p.

*Csoportkohéziók és széttartó narratívák. Egy társadalomrajz a két világháború közti sárospataki diákságról [Group cohesions and divergent narratives. A sociography from the students of Sárospatak between the two World Wars]*, Educatio, 2012, 8 p.

*Népi szociográfia a népiek előtt? Egy korai falurajz a sárospataki faluszemináriumból [Populist sociography before the populists? An early village study from the Village Seminar of Sárospatak]* = Studia Historica Debreceniensis I., szerk. LUKÁCS Anna, Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi és Néprajzi Doktori Iskola, Debrecen, 2012, 12 p.

*Iskola a határon. 20. századi felvidéki életutak és dokumentumok a sárospataki Faluszemináriumi Kéziratokban [School on the border. 20th century's lifes and documents from the Uplands in Faluszemináriumi Kéziratok, Sárospatak]*, Mediárium: A Kölcsey Ferenc Református Tanítóképző Főiskola Kommunikáció- és Médiatudományi Intézetének folyóirata, 2012/4, 21 p.

*„...S a buborék felszáll...” A kollégiumi népkutatás hagyományai Sárospatakon, a faluszeminárium megalakulása előtt [„...And the bubble goes up...” The traditions of village research at Patak College before the foundation of the Village Seminar]*, Néprajzi Látóhatár, 2012, 53 p.