

## **Doctoral (PhD) theses**

### **Along the intersection of disciplines: Presentation of the urbanization process of Vámospércs between 1990-2019**

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## **The objective of the thesis**

The smallest *hajdúváros* Vámospércs, is located in Eastern Hungary, Hajdú-Bihar county, in Nyíradonyi Járás, about 20 kilometers from Debrecen, the county seat, and 10 kilometers from the Hungarian-Romanian border crossing in Nyírábrány.

My dissertation covers several goals: on the one hand, it fills a gap in the life of Vámospércs, located in Hajdú-Bihar County, since no research has been conducted in the settlement since 1995, or in the region. At the same time, countless social changes that need to be researched by several scientific fields have taken place. The main goal of the city's cultural specialists is to create an identification guideline specific to the city and to build a unique image of Vámospércs. They mostly went back to historical roots, looking for the city's identity and self-reflection. Many attempts have been made and are being made to define what is "Vámospércs", what separates Vámospércs from the neighboring settlements. The building of the image is exhausted in calls and events, and in the use of exact historical figures and facts; such is the shape of Bocskai and the settlement of hajdús, hence Vámospércs hajdúváros, even the smallest hajdúváros in the line.

My research was greatly helped by these elements discovered in "Vámospércs", but with the methods of social geography and ethnography, I investigated the social processes of the city in the time interval between 1990-2019. After the change of regime, Vámospércs received a municipality with an independent budget, so the liquidation of the then 70-year backlog could begin with independent decisions and at a pace. The changes that took place during nearly 30 years were not published in scientific publications, only the Vámospércs Hírek, the local press, reported how Vámospércs, which once had the status of a large municipality, became a city and a small micro-regional center in its specific district. With my research, I explored several aspects of development into a city and urbanization. My primary goal was to bring into ethnography the kind of paradigm shift of how the recent past and the present can be researched with interdisciplinary tools, and to prove that the tools of ethnography are suitable for the ongoing and social processes should be explored. The research did not only move mainly along cultural lines, but also along industrial, infrastructural, and economic lines. Development into a city, urbanization cannot be explored, described and explained along a single line, it is necessary to see the settlement as a whole, and since a settlement consists of many components, between which a strong relationship and even interaction can be observed, not a single slice can be ignored.

On the other hand, with my almost 4 years of research, I also aim to help the work of cultural specialists. I thoroughly visited the residents to see how they view Vámospércs, what

they see and feel as a city, or what they miss. I tried to be a kind of communication channel between the cultural institution and professionals working in other institutions. During the field period, the first museum of Vámospércs was also founded, so I was also able to explore the issues of concern to local specialists. By the way, my goal was to spread the word of the city, to draw attention to the fact that the small regions and districts of Eastern Hungary have undergone enormous changes thanks to an internal pressure, to not limit themselves to the county seats, and also to the external opportunity, since the European Financial resources helped and continue to help local governments through their accession to the EU in 2004. I presented my research at domestic conferences and workshops, where the feedback from the audience was that the topic, the problem statement, the exploration and description of the processes are relevant and have a place in science. Through the conferences, I managed to publish quite a few publications that present my research and the topic, i.e. I managed to get Vámospércs into the scientific circulation, help the research areas with additional questions, and my already achieved results serve as a source for further studies.

I achieved my goals: I gathered the changes of the last 30 years to make up for the gap and recorded the development of Vámospércs, its yield, results and recent past as well as its present in the lines of my thesis. My main goal with my work was to prove the legitimacy of the tools and methods of ethnography in the issues of the 21st century, and I succeeded. Publications about Vámospércs are available in print and online, so the developments and innovations of the last 30 years can be read not only in the articles of the monthly newspaper Vámospércs Hírek, but also in studies and book excerpts with the description of relationships revealed by scientific methods.

### **Delimitation of the topic**

Vámospércs' becoming a city and its development followed a predestined path since the Trianon decision. By shifting the border to the west, large cities remained on the Romanian side, which took on and fulfilled the main administrative, economic, commercial and population responsibilities. Szatmárnémeti and Nagyvárad are two connected cities that played a decisive role in the life of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and Hajdú-Bihar County. With the establishment of the new border line, the spatial organizing forces had to rethink the functions, tasks and strategies of the remaining cities in Hungary. Townships, villages, and large villages were left without a center, they became border settlements and could only be connected to the blood circulation of Hungary through the big cities that were further away from them, and the county seats became the cities that provided for the villages that sometimes had no stone roads in terms of health, commerce, education, and employment. A huge

responsibility and duty fell on Nyíregyháza and Debrecen. Vámospércs was also in this situation, he needed Debrecen's help in many areas. Due to the border dictated by the Trianon decision, Vámospércs was in a unique and advantageous position compared to its neighboring settlements. It has a railway line for passenger and freight traffic, and it is crossed by one of the county's busiest highways, Highway No. 48, which essentially connects Debrecen with the Hungarian-Romanian border crossing. In the first round, the main task of Vámospércs was to ensure the supply of the neighboring settlements, since they no longer had a common municipality with Újléta, and therefore no common economy. Not only Vámospércs, but also the municipalities and large municipalities of the micro-region have realized that through cooperation and association they can move forward in development and become somewhat independent from Debrecen.

Among the settlements of the subregion (Nyírmártonfalva, Nyírac nád, Nyírábrány, Fülöp, Újléta, Bagamér and Vámospércs), Vámospércs had the geographical advantage and position to develop into a city as the gateway to Debrecen and provide the region with institutions and services that can only be found in the shire-town. The leaders of the city called for Vámospércs to be given city status again, to become the organizing force and service provider of the small region, to be the settlement that exempts Debrecen from certain supply duties. In 2001, it was declared a city in the framework of the so-called city status donation wave, but it had to go through a difficult development path in the 1990s. The utility development, the telephone network, service providers and surfaced roads - some points that prove that the local government at the time had a lot of work to do in terms of modernization.

The period of granting city rank is a well-known area already researched by social geography, since Vámospércs is not unique in this respect. At the beginning of the 2000s, this administrative step was at the national level, and several large border villages were affected by the acquisition of city status (Hajdúsámson, Komádi, Nyírlugos). The title of city provides privileges, so it guarantees the chance of institutional and economic growth. The development and development of Vámospércs as a city was also necessary in order to serve not only itself, but also the settlements in the region. In the time period of the research (2016-2019), the results of this were already visible. With the re-opening of the Hungarian-Romanian border, Vámospércs also plays a transit role, which makes everyday life busy. At the same time, it still has shortcomings due to urbanization, although more and more people from across the border or from neighboring settlements choose the city as their place of residence. There are sustaining forces in the life of Vámospércs, but there are also absorbing forces, which result in the residents who continue their secondary school studies in Debrecen not returning to the settlement.

In my research, which is the subject of the dissertation, I examined the social, economic, institutional, infrastructural, industrial and agricultural changes that occurred between 1990-2019, focusing on the direction of change in the society of Vámospércs in the last 30 years, and whether they became "city dwellers" during this time under. I reflected not only on the exact facts, and on the measurable and visible events that are the stages of the city's development, but I also asked my focus group informants about how they see their own settlement, whether it is already a city for them, what is urban in it and what is not, and the effect of large-scale development on the local society, the nature of transit through which the closed community of Vámospércs begins to become open and passable.

The topic is unique from the point of view that I was only able to refer to the literature of related sciences, I did not really find similar research or results in the field of ethnography. Culture, image, managing culture, experiencing culture in new arenas - these were all new challenges for my research. The topic demanded that the investigation be multifaceted and not approached from just one aspect. This is how I scrutinized the development path, from the point of view of what situation Vámospércs was in according to the Trianon decision, and how it exploited its geographical and administrative advantages. In addition to Vámospércs, Nyíracsaád and Nyírábrány also competed for the city status, several settlements in the sub-region. In the end, due to reasons of progress, Vámospércs emerged as the winner and regained the status of a city on July 1, 2001. Thus, not only Vámospércs, but also the sub-region could begin to grow.

### **Outline of the applied methods**

The diversity of the topic and its various questions and problems, as well as the construction of a new paradigm, required me to apply almost all the research methods of ethnography. My research is deductive, I took the general laws as a basis and the given guidelines when creating the hypotheses. These regularities were limited to the research results of social geography, agricultural science, and sociology. In terms of the time dimension, the investigation of the urbanization of Vámospércs is cross-sectional, because even though I returned to the field several times, I only researched a certain period in the life and living history of the settlement. The stay in the field was preceded by a visit to the libraries, where I collected the literature on the topic as widely as possible, and I also used Internet sources as a basis. The latter was a means of information on legislation. During the research and during the writing of the thesis, several social media pages of the city of Vámospércs helped me, such as the past recall group, where I found scanned photos of the settlement before the 2000s with detailed descriptions.

After adequate literature preparation, I prepared the 14-question questionnaire, which could be accessed online. I worked with almost all of the question types, in an effort to get a nuanced picture of the urban attributes of Vámospércs. The number of questions consisted of both open and closed questions, scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire opened with three demographic questions. Interviews started based on the results of the questionnaire. Of course, I also wove the questions from the questionnaire into the interviews, as a kind of feedback. In all cases, the interviews were in-depth interviews lasting several hours. I selected the informants through stratified and expert sampling, and set up focus groups from which I selected key informants. Thanks to my detailed knowledge of the place and population, I was able to easily decide who the informants were that I could ask about the specific topics, i.e. the topics of the in-depth interviews, which were explored in semi-structured interviews. All the interviews were topic-specific. Consequently, the questions of the semi-structured interviews included general questions, which I asked each informant, and in the second half of the interviews, I looked for the answers to the specific questions in which the given interviewee was competent. The specific topics cover the following themes and areas: agriculture, commuting, infrastructure, social life and townscape before the 1990s, and cultural life and mission after the 2000s.

I not only collected the information with questions and a questionnaire, but actively and intensively used participant observation. I participated in local cultural and community events and events, and I helped them where I had the opportunity. I took notes at the mayoral openings and during the speeches of cultural experts. I thematized the events occurring and taking place in the settlement, at which I was not only present, but also followed the pre- and post-event life before and after the event. I took a lot of photos of the city's streetscape, buildings, and events, and as a result, I also traveled to the settlements of the small region, where I also recorded the spatial structures of the large municipalities, drew a map as a note and visited the institutions that are decisive in the everyday life of the given settlement. Of course, there were also interviews that were not recorded on a dictaphone, when I traveled and walked around the city with locals, i.e. the residents of Vámospércs, thus helping me to get a detailed description of how they view Vámospércs, their city. After the events in question, I wrote down what I heard from memory.

By using the methods extensively, I managed to get a comprehensive, well-defined picture of the economic, social and cultural processes taking place between 1990-2019. My research is exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory at the same time, since my primary goal was to explore certain development points, stages, and details of urbanization, and as a result, I also created a description. From the information and data from the questionnaire, the semi-

structured in-depth interviews, and the participant observation, I provided an explanation for the revealed and described urbanization processes.

### **A thesis-like listing of the results**

I will present the results of the research by topic, which are as follows: Vámospércs' internal development, infrastructure, agriculture, institutionalization, microregional role, cultural life.

#### *Domestic development*

By inland development, I mean primarily the settlement image and the recreational spaces that have been created in some parts of Vámospércs. The buildings and residences show a kind of view of the opening of the world. After 1990, the number of Kádár blocks was reduced, and in their place multi-storey, or so-called American-style houses took over the main direction of the settlement image. As described in the dissertation, Vámospércs presents a chronological map based on the residential buildings. The age of regular cube houses ended and the era of one-story residential buildings with Mediterranean roofs and wrought iron fences followed. Public institutions and other office buildings have also undergone renovation, which now lend a modern shape to the city skyline. The municipality created spaces and parks suitable for recreation and free time, following the changed way of life. Kondipark, recreation parks were created by draining former inland water areas. In the center, an umbrella installation has a refreshing effect on the overall image of the settlement, and the free teka reserved for the population ensures cultural refreshment. Smaller restaurants, taverns, and shops further increase the quality of the constantly bustling center of Vámospércs.

#### *Infrastructure*

In my opinion, this is the most obvious part of the development of Vámospércs, which is followed by institutionalization. The telephone network and public works mentioned in the former articles of Vámospércsi Hírek are a completely natural and basic thing in the life of the city for the 21st century. A central sewer network, asphalt roads, traffic lights, built-in internet and TV service providers, bicycle paths - just a few of the results of the last 30 years. In terms of transportation, neighboring settlements and the county seat are also easily accessible from Vámospércs by bus and/or train. The municipality has created all such infrastructural elements in the life of Vámospércs, which serve not only the local residents, but also the residents of the surrounding villages and large villages, and even offer the opportunity to settle in the city.

### *Institutionalization*

Vámospércs already had a kindergarten and a primary school even before the 1990s, but at the same time the school's standard of care expanded. It became the first elementary art school, as well as an evening high school, where it is possible to obtain a high school diploma. There is still no independent, full-time high school in the settlement, but since Debrecen is close to the city, further education is solved. In the field of cultural institutions, the Cultural Center and Library not only has an extensive collection, but also provides permanent and regular programs for the people living in the local and surrounding settlements. The Hajdú Visitor Center is an absolutely 21st-century museum, which, in addition to its interactivity, also provides opportunities for museum education sessions. In addition to cultural institutions, public administration and healthcare are also important, serving not only Vámospércs, but also the sub-region. Anyone can take care of their affairs in the government window, and the most comprehensive care is provided in the outpatient center, from ophthalmology to cardiology. Institutionalization really raised Vámospércs into a city and made it the center of the micro-region.

### *Micro-regional role*

Vámospércs not only provides for itself and serves its residents, but also takes care of the surrounding settlements, so the residents do not have to travel to Debrecen, it pretty much exempts the county seat, and centrally supplies six villages/large villages. As a result, he managed to travel an extremely dynamic path.

### *Agriculture*

In the field of agriculture, manual work is becoming more and more obsolete, replaced by higher mechanization of field-works. Taking care of a vegetable garden or keeping small livestock is no longer the priority in the lives of households, but the purchase of produced, ready-made products. The society of agriculture is made up of farmers, farmers with silver and gold ears, primary producers who farm according to strict laws and regulations.

### *Cultural life*

The cinema was replaced by the theatre, where plays by various troupes can be seen. Programs linked to seasons, historical or anniversary events enrich the offer throughout the year: Pálinka and wine competition, carnival ball, Hajdú days, sky-high pasuly festival, exhibition openings, adventure tours - just a few of the programs that have been integrated into the cultural life of Vámospércs, which is not only for the people of Vámospércs, but also offers



recreation and cultural enrichment for the residents of the surrounding settlements. In the programs and events, the image that the cultural professionals try to build with the appropriate methods is deeply embedded, thus strengthening the past, history, tradition and uniqueness of the city.

In the thematically listed areas, I have presented the already matured and explored results. Vámospércs started out as a large village and suffered from a lack of basic institutions and a serious infrastructure. It took nearly 20-25 years for it not only to develop into a self-sufficient city, but also to play a decisive role in its own environment.



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### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian book chapters (2)

1. **Sándor, V.:** Várossá lett falvak: kistérségi központok kialakulásának folyamata.  
In: Az Intercisa Múzeum Évkönyve 4. Szerk.: Balogh Pál Géza, Buza Andrea, Keszi Tamás,  
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2. **Sándor, V.:** Szuhafő településnéprajza.  
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Róbert, Marinka Melinda, Kavacsánszki Máté, Debreceni Egyetem Néprajzi Tanszék,  
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In: Voyages and Travel Accounts in Historiography and Literature. Vol 2. Connecting the  
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### List of other publications

#### Hungarian book chapters (1)

7. **Sándor, V.:** Megváltozott kisvilág.

In: Háború és Katonasors. Szerk.: Marinka Melinda, Györffy István Néprajzi Egyesület :  
Debreceni Egyetem Néprajzi Tanszék, Debrecen, 324-342, 2020, (Néprajzi Látóhatár  
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