

Thesis of PhD Dissertation

**Land question and colonization policy in
Transcarpathia in the era of the first
Czechoslovakian Republic (1919-1938)**

Imre Szakál

Consultant: László Pallai, PhD



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

Doctoral School of History and Ethnography

Debrecen, 2015

I. The purpose of the thesis, definition of the chosen topic

Transcarpathia - the political and historical region has appeared only in the 20th century. The main causes of this appearance were the peace treaties, which closed World War I. But there were a lot of other processes and events which took effect on this territory, and contributed to the maturation of a new political region. The period between the two World Wars, when Transcarpathia was integrated to the first Czechoslovakian Republic, had a very important role in this process. The Czechoslovakian government had a lot of provisions, which took very deep effects on the political and social life of Transcarpathia. One of these provisions was the land reform of the first Czechoslovakian Republic. This measure included the colonization policy among others. The colonization in case of Transcarpathia means settling down people in Transcarpathia from other parts of the Republic. These people were mostly Czechs or Ruthenians, and their settlements were established in Hungarian ethnical territory. There are at least twenty settlements in Transcarpathia, which were affected by the colonization policy.

The fact of the colonization policy is known, but the process of these measures is unexplained. During the research period I have tried to present the nature of the Czechoslovakian policy in our region, the specified process of the colonization, the ways of the establishment of the colonies, and last but not least the economic, social, and ethnical effects of this policy.

The topic of the research was not sufficiently studied before. Nowadays the Transcarpathian historical researches concerning to the interwar period mostly pay attention to the ethnic relations, but not to the economic and social conditions. There were researches in Slovakia that explained the process of the colonization in South-Slovakia, but there were not researches concerning to Transcarpathian colonization before.

The objects of my thesis are the following:

1. Studying the results of the first Czechoslovakian land reform in Transcarpathia.
2. Collecting the plans of the colonization in Transcarpathia.
3. Describing the methods and process of the colonization.
4. Presenting the economy of the colonized settlements.

5. Studying the history of the colonists and the colonized settlements after the First Vienna Arbitration.

6. Studying the ethnical effects of the colonization, and the local reception of these measures.

II. Sources review, methodology

The research is based on wide-ranging sources which can be found partly in Transcarpathia, partly in the Czech Republic. During the research project I have used and studied the materials of the State Archive of the Transcarpathian Oblast, the National Archive of the Czech Republic, and the National Library of the Czech Republic. We could find very important, but mostly unsettled finding aids in the State Archive of the Transcarpathian Oblast in regard to the topic of our research. The Fond number 36 is the main documentary holding which contained 3755 finding aids. These are all documents of the Sub-Office of the Czechoslovakian Land Reform Office in Uzhgorod. Most of the documents from the period between 1919 -1938 regard to the land reform and colonization policy in Transcarpathia. The organizational system of the Transcarpathian archival documentary holding raised some difficulties, but it was possible to find some very valuable documents for the research, which could help us to explain the specified process of the colonization and the land reform.

The most important parts of our sources were the documents of the National Archive of the Czech Republic. There are two fonds in the documentary holdings of this archive in Prague which I have studied. The first is the number 705/3, this contains the general documents of the State Land Reform Office and the Ministry of Agriculture regarding to the colonization. We could learn a lot of information about the general process of the colonization, the plans and disciples of this policy. There are also many documents about the ethnical effect of the colonization. The second fond is the number 705/5 includes documents in regard to the land reform and colonization in Transcarpathia. The fond contains the documents about every large estate of Transcarpathia between the two world wars, and documents in regard to every settlement, which was affected by the colonization.

The document holding of the Slovak National Archive in Bratislava was also useful. There are two fonds which contain documents about the process of the colonization policy. The first is the fond of the State Land Reform Office's Sub-Office in Bratislava, and the second is the Colonization Office in Bratislava. We could find useful information about the individual colonization and about the general process of the policy in the above mentioned finding aids.

I used some historical literature which can be found in the National Library of the Czech Republic. I have found memoirs about the specified process of the

colonization and monographs written in the last few years by Czech and Slovak historians, that explain the policy of the first Czechoslovakian Policy in Transcarpathia (Podkarpatska Rus).

It is important to mention the finding aids of the Hungarian National Archive. I have studied the protocols of the Council of Ministers, the documents of the Office of the Prime Minister, and the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I have tried to synthesize these sources during the research period, and thanks to that I can describe the process of colonization more clearly than before.

III. The results of the research

We could draw up the following research with the help of gathering and synthesizing of the information of our sources:

1. I have successfully described the peculiarities of the land reform in Transcarpathia. The land reform affected approximately 285 settlements, and more than 100 land owners in Transcarpathia, among others: the Schönborn's latifundium, the Teleki's estate, estate of Odeschalchi Zoárd, etc. The citizens had an opportunity to apply for the confiscated estates, and they got small properties. The government parallel with the subdivision had begun the colonization policy on one part of the earlier estates.

2. I have collected several plans of the colonization. The Czechoslovakian government wanted to settle Slavic people to the territory of Transcarpathia from the beginning of 1920s. These people were partly Czechs, Moravians, Slovaks, and mostly Rutheniens.

3. The process of the colonization had two ways. The first was settling by the state. The second was the individual settling. The settling by the state means, settling several groups of colonists in existing settlements, or settlements, which were established by the Czechoslovakian government. It is difficult to follow the process of the individual settling, because it meant the colonization of only one family, or only some person in different settlements in Transcarpathia with individual purchase of land and estates.

The number of the settlements which were affected by the colonization was not exactly known in the relevant literature. We could specify the number of settlements with the help of our sources.

The results of the colonization policy we can see below:

The result of the colonization organized by the state

No.	Name of the colony	Year of the establishment	Number of the settled families
1.	Sztázs	1923	21
2.	Svoboda	1923	66
3.	Gát	1924	13
4.	Hunyaditanya	1926	25
5.	Oroszi	1926	5
6.	Pusztakerepec	1926	14

7.	Újbótrágy	1927	35
8.	Bótrágy	1928	41
9.	Déda	1929	3
10.	Beregsom	1929	35
11.	Eszeny	1929	19
12	Tiszaújhely	1930	8

The results of the individual colonization

No.	Name of the colony	Number of settled families
1.	Ungdaróc	11
2.	Eszeny	38
3.	Badó	13
4.	Ardó	25
5.	Beregszász	10
6.	Pusztakerepec	4
7.	Akli	67
8.	Oroszvölgy	40
9.	Puskina	82
10.	Szászfalu	15
11.	Szinyák	12
12.	Nagydobrony	26

4. During the research I have collected a few sources about the establishment and the economy of the colonized settlements. The first settlers usually arrived in the autumn on the years of the establishment, they had done agricultural works, and went back to Czech or Moravian territories. The construction of the colonies had begun in spring, when the families arrived. The constructions were fast, and mostly very expensive. Every family got different credits. It was necessary, because the families had to pay for the fees of the subdivision, for the building operations, and all of the necessary supplies for the agricultural works. One part of the credits was non-refundable, like the credit for the building operations. The families had to pay back another part of the credits with interests. All types of the credits were long-term, but the

colonist did not have capital when they arrived, accordingly they could not pay back their debts.

The Czechoslovakian government tried to develop the new colonies. There were some directions of the development first of which was the economic direction. The State Land Reform Office and the Office of Legionaries helped to the colonists with credits, and they gave instructions for the agricultural works. The people of the colonies grew hop, turnip, sugar-beet, and raised cows, swines. Thanks for the help of the government the families could use relatively modern devices for the agricultural work, for example tractors. Despite the credits, and the exact instructions, the turnout of the colonies was not profitable, because the colonist did not have sufficient capital for the adequate investments, and most of them did not have experience at agricultural works.

The second direction of the development was infrastructural. Most of the colonies were affected by the soil improvement and the drainage works. The Czechoslovakian state made great efforts to build roads, and an electrical system for the colonies.

The third direction of the development was cultural. The government built schools, and organized libraries, or at least mobile libraries. New schools were built in Sztráz, Szvoboda, Bótrágy, Beregsom, and libraries in Szvoboda and Beregsom.

5. We have information on the history of the colonists after the First Vienna Arbitration from the finding aids of the Hungarian National Archive. The Czechoslovakian government had started the evacuation of legionaries before November 1938. One part of the Czech colonist, and officers had to escape, because the Hungarian soldiers and people pursued them. It is interesting, that the Hungarian government did not evacuate the Ruthenian colonies, they were allowed to stay in the colonies. It was necessary, because the renewed Hungarian authorities tried to consolidate and peacefully reintegrate Transcarpathia to the Hungarian Kingdom.

6. One of the most important parts of my PhD thesis is the studying of the ethnical effects of the colonization. We know from the sources that the subjects of the colonization were mostly Czechs and Ruthenians. The Czechs were legionaries, and they were settled down to Sztráz, Szvoboda, and Beregsom, Bótrágy. The colonization was organized by the Office of Legionaries which was established and maintained by the Ministry of Defense. The officers of the government chose the estate, taken into consideration the military strategic conditions. After 1925, the government had begun

settling Ruthenians from the Carpathian Mountains which territories are called Verhovina, and were the poorest regions in the Czechoslovakian Republic.

The colonization of Ruthenians from the Verchovina was more extensive than the colonization of the legionaries, and that was the main difference between the colonization policy in Southern Slovakia and in Transcarpathia. The colonization of the Ruthenians had two general causes. The first was the social and economic situation of the Verchovina, which was caused by the great poverty, and the general unemployment. The second cause was the fact that the Czechoslovakian government tried to consolidate this part of the Republic, with the help of the positive discrimination of the Ruthenians in the course of land reform. The government ordered in 1925, that at least the half of the colonist must be Ruthenians. The official sources of the Czechoslovakian government tell us, that this way of the colonization was unsuccessful, because the Ruthenians did not want to live on the lowland territories, and they did not have experience at arable farming. Because of the economic crisis, and the failure of this program, the colonization of the Ruthenians became rather expensive.

The public complained about the colonization. The Hungarian opposition frowned on this policy of the Republic. They said that the Hungarian peasants did not get enough properties, and that with the colonization of the Czechs and Ruthenians the Czechoslovak government tried to impair the Hungarian ethnic territory in Transcarpathia. The Ruthenians also complained about the colonization because the government was not able to solve their problems with the help of this policy. The measures of the colonization could not change considerably the ethnic structure of Transcarpathia's lowland territory. Although the regime changed in 1938-1939 partly liquidated the effects of the colonization, after 1945 the new Soviet regime continued the colonization, mostly on those territories, where the Czechoslovaks had begun. As a result of this policy there are a few settlements in the Hungarian territories in Transcarpathia, which have Slavic people. This fact always causes tension between the nationalities.

If we try to summarize our sources, we could say, that the Czechoslovakian state had some purposes with the colonization policy. The first was definitely the military strategic purpose, therefore they carried out the colonization of the legionaries. The second purpose was the consolidation of new territory, therefore they tried to establish Ruthenian colonies on the lowland territories. The colonization policy definitely had economical purposes, though they were not successful.

From a different point of view, the colonization policy was a tool to strengthen the unity of the Republic such as language, or economical, or educational policies of the Czechoslovakians Republic. After the World War I Czechoslovakia appeared on Europe's political map as a mosaic-state. It included political territories, with no similar historical, social and economic development, full of ethnical tensions. The Czechoslovakian government had to develop unity between the pieces of the Republic. Most of the measures which concerned to Transcarpathia aimed at this goal, the colonization policy too. They tried to consolidate the Ruthenian people of Transcarpathia, and with the legionaries and officers, and border guards who were settled down, providing the unity and the peace of the first Republic. Despite all their efforts it seemed to be unsuccessful.



Registry number: DEENK/64/2015.PL
Subject: Ph.D. List of Publications

Candidate: Imre Szakál
Neptun ID: DAGS3L
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of History and Ethnology
MTMT ID: 10037817

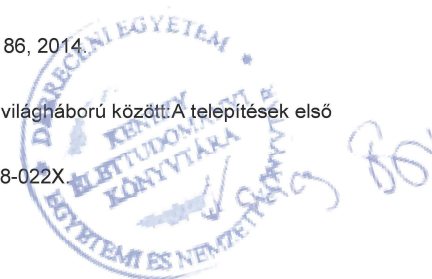
List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book chapter(s) (2)

- Szakál I.:** Telepítéspolitika Kárpátalján 1919 és 1939 között a Kárpátaljai Területi Állami Levéltár forrásainak tükrében.
In: Principium : pályánk kezdetén. Szerk.: Lukács Anna, Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi és Néprajzi Doktori Iskola, Debrecen, 127-142, 2012. ISBN: 9789634735786
- Szakál I.:** "Nem tehetnek ők sem róla, hogy közénk kerültek": Az első Csehszlovák Köztársaság kárpátaljai telepítéspolitikájának néhány aspektusa.
In: "Így maradtok meg hívivőnek...": in memoriam Soós Kálmán: tanulmányok Soós Kálmán emlékére. Szerk.: Szamorovszkyné Nagy Ibolya, PoliPrint, Ungvár, 165-178, 2012. ISBN: 9789662595222

Hungarian scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (2)

- Szakál I.:** Az első Csehszlovák Köztársaság telepítéspolitikája a mai Kárpátalja területé: Tervek és gyakorlat.
Regio : kisebbség, politika, társadalom 22 (2), 147-186, 2014.
- Szakál I.:** Csehszlovák telepítéspolitika Kárpátalján a két világháború között: A telepítések első szakasza: állami letelepítések. Az első kolóniák.
Debreceni Szle. 21 (2-3), 111-119, 2013. ISSN: 1218-022X.





Hungarian scientific article(s) in international journal(s) (1)

5. **Szakál I.**: Az első Csehszlovák Köztársaság telepítéspolitikája revíziójának kísérlete Kárpátalján
1938 és 1944 között.

Fórum Társadtud. Szle. 15 (1), 75-86, 2013. ISSN: 1335-4361.

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

19 March, 2015

