

Thesis of the PhD Dissertation

**Artisans of Szeged in the first half of the 20. century
Education and distribution of wealth**

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I.

Objectives and definitions of the subject

In my thesis I examine the life of independent artisans of Szeged in the first half of the 20. century, with special regard to the transformation and development of the trade structure and local characteristics of the training of craftsmen.

The detailed analysis of the family background of pupils studying in the schools of Szeged answers how the change over time of the social mix of these students is reflected in the surge of mobility appearing after the economic crisis, and what the extent of mobility of this social class was.

The second part of the study includes the examination of wealth distribution and everyday life of Szeged craftsmen. I tried to sketch a picture of their social make-up, wealth structure and equipment level with the help of information from Orphanage Courts' inheritance inventories. I studied the methods of wealth accumulations, the proportion of different items, the ratio of real and movable property, the difference between the size of wealth of males and females. I found a particularly rich database concerning interior fitting. One of the determining aspects of the process was the way to approach the changes that occurred in the economic and social standing, lifestyle and education of craftsmen and artisans in comparison with that in the era of dual monarchy.

II.

The sources and methods of research

Archives: documents and minutes of the Szeged Craftsmen's Guild, craftsmen's and tradesmen's inventories, Szeged town's specialist Apprentice Training School's reports, Szeged town Orphanage Court's records, bank documents and the credit rating information reports of Hungarian State Archives. The photographs are found in the Móra Ferenc Museum's History department.

Publications: Annual reports of Szeged Craftsmen's Guild, the town's guides and address lists, the Apprentice Training School's reports, secondary, grammar and high schools' almanacs, national statistics, local papers and craftsmen's own publications. The social group has been examined from different angles by Gábor Gyáni, Zsuzsa L.Nagy, Lajos Tímár. Publications by Tibor Valuch, István Feitl – András Sípos, György Kövér gave me extremely helpful insight into the education system, and the work of Zoltán Tóth and Péter Güntner

helped me in the analysis of wealth distribution of the era. The results of research work by Béla Tomka made international comparisons possible.

III.

List of findings of the study

With 123000 inhabitants Szeged was the second largest town of the country in 1920. Nearly one third of the population lived in the outskirts in agricultural settlements dotted around the town. Between the two world wars about 10% worked in the industrial sector, 57% of these found a living in manufacturing, higher than the nationwide average 45%.

At the beginning of the 20 th century in Szeged I find a highly differentiated industrial structure. Over the first two decades this structure went through a substantial rearrangement. Some long established traditional trades lost their importance, others disappeared altogether, and new ones emerged. The records kept by the tradesmen's guild lists data of 2035 craftsmen in 1909, and 2976 in 1925 in more than 100 various trades. According to the 1931 records 4546 craftsmen were active in 159 different trades. The number of independent craftsmen fluctuated wildly especially during the economic crisis, this figure hovered around 3000 in the following period. The structure of small-scale manufactures is characterized by the dominance of those trades which supplied the town's own consumer market.

At the beginning of the century one emerging trade is ladies' hairdressing, they doubled in number by 1931. No chemists are found in the 1909 records, by 1925 there are eight. The number of locksmiths doubled, machine fitters quadrupled, and – another new trade – electricians grew eightfold between 1909 and 1925, but other trades activated by urbanization, for example bricklayers, painters, technicians also increased in number.

There was a significant growth in the number of blacksmiths and wheelmakers about 1/3 by 1925. The growing importance of crafts associated with the town's agricultural character also meant the spread of professionalism, as it appears from the detailed records, people living in the outskirts required the services of locally based, trained craftsmen.

There was a strong presence of service trades. In the 1931 records for example 56 carriage drivers, 51 cab drivers, 9 laundresses (washer-women), 374 publicans and 6 manicurists are listed.

In the textile industry, within the tailor trade the number of ladies' dressmakers are very high, it trebled by 1925. Within manufacturing industries the textile industry represents an outstanding proportion in accordance with the national tendencies. Gents' and ladies'

tailors together with hatmakers make up more than 18 % of the craftsmen. We have to calculate with even larger number of earners in the clothing trade, since for example seamstresses only appear in the 1931 records, when they number 100.

The change of fashion is the cause of the decrease in the number of boot-makers and slipper-makers, considered a traditional Szeged speciality, and simultaneously the emergence of shoemakers. In 1909 186, in 1931 378 shoemakers were working in the town. The sharp drop in the number and proportion of boot-makers is obvious: from 9% it fell to 1,2% in 1931.

Interior fitting was also influenced by middle-class taste and fashion, which occupied a growing number of joiners. Their number increased from 139 at the beginning of the century to 234 in 1925. At the same time big capitalist enterprises squeezed out some crafts entirely, for example weavers and potters. Paprika processing was a special Szeged trade, it first appears in the tradesmen's guild's 1931 records; until then it was considered a household occupation. 543 workers were active in this special branch of food manufacture, 12,2% of all listed tradesmen. Without taking into consideration this substantial section, it was still the textile industry which occupied the largest proportion of workers, 13,5%.

We tried to visualize the town's belt – like topographical structure by marking the locations of active craftsmen. They were concentrated in the administrative and trading centre; there is no significant difference between other parts of the town. Certain tradesmen, however, especially those who sold their products at market places and fairs, can be found outside the greater circular road. Of 81 slipper makers only 4 were working within the inner circular road, the others were living and working at cheaper locations, without display and shopping area.

The disadvantageous economic effects of the Trianon peace treaty the loss of sources of raw materials and markets traumatized the town, a significant change happened with the establishment of the university and the town becoming a cathedral city. The presence of thousands of students and tutors secured the service sector long-term jobs.

In 1939 Jewish craftsmen made up about 10% licensed members of the tradesmen's guild. At the same time discriminative laws against Jews caused an increase in Jewish apprentices. Their proportion grew from 2% to 4,9% and 10% among boys and girls respectively in the 1940-41 student year. As far as choice is concerned, typically urban trades dominated. Twice as many Jewish girls as boys became apprentices. This trend is the opposite of that of the school's total average. The most popular trade was ladies' dressmaking, followed by photographers, hairdressers, dental technicians and printers, then hatters, beauticians, shoemakers, clockmakers, underwear-makers, opticians, glovemakers, furriers.

Every type of school from elementary through comprehensive, secondary, grammar schools to university were present in Szeged. The proximity of schools were extremely favourable for the inhabitants, as it reduced the cost of education. Tradesmen's children can be found in every type of school. The redrawing of the country's borders at Trianon greatly altered the Szeged schools' sphere of influence, after the loss of the southern territories local pupils gave the vast majority an almost every schools. Among the exceptions were teacher training schools and the high school of engineering.

We examined the family background of students in 15 secondary and 3 apprentice training schools. The total number of pupils from tradesmen's families amounted to between 700 and 1000 in various schools, and this number showed a growing tendency in this period. If we draw a diagram based on schools' reports, we get an approximate picture of the schooling practices and habits of this section of a big town's population, what proportion of these children carried on their parents' profession, or what other type of schools they were educated in.

The results largely corresponds with the average of the national data, most of tradesmen's children were educated in comprehensives, fewest of them went to teacher training schools, although by the end of this period their numbers showed a growing tendency at this level of education as well. The second most attended type is apprentice training, more than one quarter of pupils were apprentices, 4% were learning commerce, 24% various crafts. The proportion of children from tradesmen's families is remarkably high in secondary schools, 21%. If we take into consideration high schools of commerce where pupils could pass A Level Exams after 1921 and teacher training schools, they total 34%, a higher proportion than pupils in apprentice training schools. We have to draw the conclusion that most of these parents no longer preferred their children to follow their trades, but other professions that had no connection with those.

Educating the different sexes separately is quite common in this period. The most popular choice for girls from tradesmen's families was the comprehensive schools, where they outnumbered boys, although boys started to catch up after 1930, their proportion grew from 10% to 22%. This tendency was evident in the higher level of pre-training with boys in apprentice schools. The first girls only class with 654 pupils was formed in the specialized apprentice training school in 1926. Their number dropped until the 1933-34 lowest point of 446 members, after which the number of girls hovered around the 500-600 mark. Half as many girls from these families learnt a trade as boys, about 9%, their number is fluctuating, similarly to the boys. The number of independent tradesmen was constantly changing in this

period, then it dropped by the end. Girls' chances of secondary, mid-level education was one third of that of boys'; 5% achieved it. Their proportion was lowest in teacher training, only 2%. Considering all types of schools, 11% of girls did not choose professions in craftsmanship.

Drawing a parallel between pupils in apprenticeship and students in secondary schools we find very similar figures, during the economic crisis and at the end of this period the number of students actually exceeded that of apprentices. We mustn't however overlook the fact that end-of-year records do not include every pupil who completed their studies, since the apprentices' contract left it possible for them to go independent. In secondary schools a small-scale decrease is occurring until bottoming out in 1940, but the fluctuation didn't avoid apprentice training schools either. On the other hand the fact that 15% of boy students in secondary schools were sons of tradesmen parents gave this group great mobility. 15% of boys chose apprentice training, but all the other types of schools, including secondaries, 22% of boys were studying.

When analysing documents of the Orphanage Court of Szeged concerning tradesmen between 1900-1944, we divided this period into three parts; the years between 1917-1918, 1933-1935 and 1939-1944. In total we processed the inheritance inventories of 235 tradesmen (162 males, 73 females). It follows from the nature of these documents that we gained information about the entire period, since in many cases, data were not recorded at the time of death of one individual, but at the time of youngest heir reaching majority (at the age of 24). Therefore of the data we gathered from the beginning of the century 24 bequests of females and 42 bequests of males fall between 1900-1917.

Establishing the value of items in these inventories for the entire period is made difficult by the fact that with the beginning of the 1st world war the inflation of the money named „Korona” set in, and speeded up at the end of the war with the disintegration of the Austro – Hungarian Empire. The Korona was replaced in 1927 by the new national currency, the „Pengő” (1 Pengő = 12500 Korona). Therefore when calculating the average value of wealth of individuals, we consider 1918, and for the end of the period – with respect for inflation – 1940 the closing year.

Between the turn of the century and 1918 there were wide differences among the wealth of tradesmen. The largest fortune owned by a male (wine merchant) is worth 33252 K, the smallest (builder) is 6,25 K. between the 1st and the 3rd largest (carpenter 9275 K) the differences is fourfold.

The value of the largest fortune owned by a female approaches most males': 20525 K (blacksmith's wife), the smallest is worth 73 K (carpenter's wife)

When calculating the average worth of wealth, we had to put a value to those burdened with debt as well. This way we get a figure of 2270 K for wealth owned by females and somewhat higher, 2388 K by males. According to detailed description of homes also found in these inventories the average value of wealth would only have been sufficient for the upkeep of a temporary, one room flat.

In the following period, between the two world wars, the wealth of males reached much more higher values. The largest fortune of a female (26760 P, restaurateur) is one quarter of the wealth owned by a male. Even the second largest fortune by male reaches 100000P (also a restaurateur). There is a wide gap between the averages of males and females: 9258 P net and 3718 P net respectively.

We found data concerning the average home, too. Among Szeged tradesmen 2 males owned 4 room flats, one was iron structures manufacturer (at the time of his death his workshop a small factory), the other an ageing butcher (+1928). No females owned 4 room flats. 3 males owned flats containing 3 rooms, 2 of them paprika millers (+1927, +1928), and one a joiner (+1928). 3 females also owned 3 room flats, 2 of them during the era of dualism, the third was a member of the above mentioned paprika-miller family, 5 years after her husband's death.

The number of tradesmen living in 2 room flats is not very large either, according to the records of 5 males and 5 females. Among the males there were hairdresser, upholsterer and 3 butchers, among the females we find a hairdresser, a tailor, a butcher, a shoemaker and the wife of one restaurateur, with one exception, these were all trades of higher reputation. Where it is possible to establish the size of homes by the inheritance inventories, 78% of the rest of male tradesmen and 86% of women lived in one room flats.

One quarter of Szeged tradesmen owned no property either before or between the two world wars, but the number of those owning land increased from 18% to 21% between the wars. The average possession were small, 54,8% of land in the outskirts did not reach 1 kat. hold (under 1 acres), not large enough to support a family.

There is a difference between the structure of wealth owned by males and females. Among the males' items directly connected with work take up a larger part, they include the value of equipment and goods. Also their capital is kept safe in different ways, not in savings accounts, but in invoices, shares and not least in stored materials and products. Males more often own land which takes up a larger proportion of the total value of their wealth.

The house played an outstandingly important part among their possessions. Apart from providing a home it was also their place of work, moreover, security for loan applications, and a second source of income when it was let, even more significant than land ownership.

In the era of dualism wealth owned by females is characterized by the larger proportion of personal items: the building itself, and objects of everyday use. This part of their wealth gives a good insight into their lifestyle and living circumstances. Stored goods connected with their trade took up only a very small proportion of their total wealth. Women did not get involved in business activities, after becoming widowed they mostly withdrew from the family trade. Between the two wars this part of their wealth approached the volume of that of males.

At the same time important changes happened in the life of tradesman. The direction and tendency of this change is made obvious by the records of inheritance inventories.

The wealth structure divided between males and females – their value moving in opposite direction – was examined in parallel. The most obvious change is that the proportion of items indicating lifestyle and personal circumstances is largely static, while the structure of items connected with trade (store goods, capital, land) is considerably rearranged. The house, although slightly diminishing, is still the most valuable item, household objects are even increasing in value a little. However, trade-related stored goods drop to 1/3 of their value. Bank savings show the biggest loss: they drop to one tenth. The role of capital is diminishing in every area. The loss of the influence of these things probably played an important part in the fact that a percentage of inherited wealth was mortgaged in spite of the word economic crisis.

The diminishing importance of the value of the workshop among listed items indicates not only the financial hardship suffered by tradesmen, but also the tendency a swiching from producing goods to repair work requiring less equipment.

Since most significant factor influencing a family's lifestyle is the average income per head, we calculated the size of an average family.

According to our statistics the facts are thought – provoking: 23% were singles, the most numerous group. The second largest group is the childless couples with 17%. They are followed by families with 2 children with 16%.

The average number of family members in our samples of trading families is 4,6 which is close to those of labourers, but in fact more than half of these families were bringing up only 1 or 2 children, or were childless.

The link between wealth and social standing is examined through an unique event, the arrangement and cost of funerals. During the era of dualism the dominant factors were gross

wealth and social status. Funerals of males cost more, although there was little difference between males' and females' which is explained by the larger debt burden on the males' wealth. Between the two wars the amount of money spent on funerals dropped significantly in proportion with their income.

Tradesmen chose different strategies within their inherited lifestyles to preserve their positions and a standard of living. One possibility is reflected in the records: changing consumer habits, reducing spending on status symbols (size of homes, valuable objects, funeral cost). Another possibility was intentionally restricting the number of heirs, bringing up fewer children.

Another strategy was to prepare the next generation for greater mobility by education, or helping them learn new trades or professions. The number of students attending various schools in Szeged is a good indication of these efforts gathering pace. The growing number of girls attending schools and learning various trades also demonstrates an important forward-looking strategy.

IV.

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