

Theses for Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

In attracting villages Young graduates in the villages of the Észak-Alföld region

Noémi Loncsák

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ibolya Czibere



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

Doctoral School of Human Sciences

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I. Aim of thesis, outline of the topic

The future of small villages has become an important social science issue, as their population is steadily declining, and they are characterised by underdevelopment and marginalisation. Young generations of intellectuals play a major role in shaping the future of a settlement, and the social composition and basic characteristics of those who stay and move there will have a major influence on how the structure of a village will change. Geographical mobility and migration are at the main point of current social policies and everyday discourses. While only a few empirical researches is produced on the population of small, de-suburbanised villages, where depopulation is an increasingly common social phenomenon. As with all types of migration, there is a counter-current of migration from villages, with a group of people choosing to live in small settlements.

The target group of this dissertation is young people under 40 who, after graduating, have moved to a small village, where they imagine their future. The aim is to find out the widest range of decision factors, to establish typical life paths based on the interviews, to identify and characterise villages attractive to graduates, to explore the effects and counter-effects of the migration or return of young graduates to small villages.

There may be different triggers for the movement of people, and the most basic tools to describe and explain this movement are provided by the theoretical apparatus of migration. The purpose of this review of migration theories is to capture and present all the trends that can explain the migration of young graduates to municipalities and contribute to the understanding of their decision-making mechanisms. Theories of migration are necessarily complemented by additional theories, as a whole they are not able to explain the migration decisions of young people from urban to rural areas, nor do they address factors that may be most likely to encourage the target group of the research to choose a small village as a place of residence after graduation. In the dissertation, theoretical clusters such as lifestyle have been set up to complement the theoretical apparatus of migration with factors that, by accounting for individuals' lifestyles, values, needs and wants, are able to describe more accurately their movements to small villages in the Észak-Alföld region and to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the decision-making mechanisms.

Of particular relevance to the research topic of migration to villages is the process of what Enyedi (2011) calls "deurbanisation", which is a result of a higher level of development, technological opportunities, and the displacement or distancing of economic units, which together can create new roles for rural spaces. Although in our country the suburbanisation

process is dominant, smaller settlements, villages and small towns are increasingly becoming the destination of internal migration processes, a kind of reorganisation identified by Balogh and Kovách (2021). Bálint and Obádovics (2021) also draw attention to the disappearance of the equalisation of internal migration balances between settlements in their latest Demographic Portrait, highlighting the growing gains of municipalities over cities. The more and less favoured areas for migration are emerging among small settlements, so the characterisation of the research field and its social presentation is an important element. In this thesis, we have focused exclusively on the conceptual category of small villages, leaving aside the complex phenomenon of the countryside.

Since the village typology of Beluszky and Sikos (2007), no comprehensive domestic categorisation of small villages has been developed, but their analytical aspects and selected indicators may need to be reconsidered in the context of the transformation of today's rural spaces. What are the factors that may lead to the rise or fall of a village as a result of the emergence of new needs and demands, and what are the new/old variables that will shape the more and less popular migration destinations among villages. Although this is not the objective of the present doctoral research, however, taking stock of the migration motivations of migration theories and adding lifestyle dimensions to them could provide a basis for this type of future research and typology.

The population retention capacity of villages has become an important objective of rural development in general, but existing local developments are not presented as incentives for migration (Tóth 1982, Matolcsi 1982, Csatári 1986, Balcsók-Becsei-Szarvák 2014, Székely-Krajcsovics 2017). We also discuss the real estate market as a possible motivation for young people to migrate in the process of residential choice in villages.

The thesis discusses the research topic in two major theoretical units, the first major theoretical group being the relevant aspects of international migration theories, complemented by the historical and theoretical dimensions of lifestyle, lifestyle and milieu studies as a central explanatory factor of youth movements.

The migration process studied in the doctoral thesis can be considered as internal and recurrent migration, based on the typologies available (Tilly 1990, Pungas et al. 2012, Huzdik 2014), it can be the result of individual or group decisions, it can be career forced mobility, circular or chain migration. The following findings from the Ravenstein tradition (Ravenstein 1876, Lévai 1993, Massey et al. 1993) can be highlighted: the basic motivation for the migration decision is economic; people living in rural areas are more prone to migrate; return migration of young people can be interpreted as a counter-current to general rural-urban migration;

migrants always seek the shortest distance; and that there are push and pull factors in the decision of young people.

Neoclassical economics approaches include, in addition to individual rationality based on wage differentials, the question of labour market opportunities (Harris-Todaro 1970) and emphasise the issue of educational attainment and the spatial patterns of skilled labour flows. In addition, micro theory takes account of failure and psychological costs, which complement the migration decision balance. In addition, self-selection theory suggests that the proportion of skilled, graduated workers in the sending and destination areas may be important (Massey et al. 2007). The new economics identifies the household as the basic unit of migration, with the aim of preserving and increasing common livelihoods and reducing risks. With NELM (New Economics Labour Migration) theory, the issue of security is included among the decision factors, and migration as a consumption item which introduced as a further research alternative. Network theory focuses on the importance of the relational dimension in migration, and our research should look for the 'patrons' of individuals' migration, the individuals in the migration envelope of youth, and whether their network of connections might have encouraged them to migrate from the city to the village (Choldin 1973, Tilly 1990, Gödri 2010, Sik 2012).

The theory of human capital may be of particular relevance in the context of the graduate target group, where individuals seek the highest return on their investment in knowledge capital, which may influence their migration decision (Mincer 1974, Ördög 2013). The developmentalist approach draws attention to the receiving and sending areas, the study of which is essential for the doctoral research topic (de Haas 2010). Developmentalist views attribute the potential for development of regions to the skilled labour force, and young people's awareness of the local impact of their own migration can influence their migration decisions.

As a new type of migration, amenity migration presents a participant-selective migration process, with a central element of migration of those with higher social status to rural areas (Abrams et al. 2012, Moss-Glorioso 2014, Lennert-Farkas 2018). The main research question that can be asked in relation to migration is whether and to what extent theories of migration choice can explain the type of migration studied in this dissertation? Furthermore, are work and income motivations also primary in the migration process of young people to villages?

The other major group of theories, based on the early stages of research, is the differentiating effect of lifestyle, which is intensifying in modern capitalist societies and influences all aspects of life, the values and choices of individuals (Utasi 1984, 2005). Concepts that can be found in early thinkers and that offer scope for further reflection in the context of the doctoral thesis are fashion, symbolic goods, taste, habitus, status and the experience society

(Weber 1987, Bourdieu 2002, Baudrillard 1988). The presence of fashion or other trend-like processes in the everyday life of the target group, as well as the impact of the rural environment, which is presented as a narrowed form of experience-seeking, on the conscious choice of graduates, and whether it represents a kind of experiential rationality.

The objective and subjective elements of the social milieu can lead to different lifestyles in a village compared to a city. On the other hand, and this could also be a research hypothesis, young people who choose to live in a village may have different ways of thinking and behaving. To what extent is norm-tracking present in the target group, and can elements of an integration milieu or a lifestyle milieu be identified based on their age group and their level of higher education (Hradil 1992, Schulze 1992, Éber 2008, Tardos 2008). Furthermore, a historical overview of milieu and lifestyle research will help in the development of measurement instruments for the empirical study of the doctoral programme.

The majority of domestic research derives lifestyles from the elements of consumption, through which types are constructed, and therefore the next part of the lifestyle chapter is an overview of the main motifs and research findings in the sociology of consumption. Consumption acts as a social organising force in the lives of young people, and the dimensions of consumption are therefore of crucial importance in the construction of typologies. Among the studies of consumer trend groups, Töröcsik's (2016) groups for domestic conditions and one of the new consumer groups she has created, the creative class, stand out.

Domestic representatives of lifestyle and lifestyle research draw attention to the choice of the unit of study, the present research programme focuses on the individual, on individual choice. The exploration and understanding of preferences can be a starting point for understanding the choices of young graduates, influenced by origin, childhood, family, cultural environment and peer groups.

The lifestyle inspiration model is also of particular relevance to the research topic because it identifies the pace of life as one of the main factors influencing the formation of lifestyle groups. In this research, I want to investigate the pace of life of young people in villages and the presence of the dimension of traditions that may influence their lifestyle and thus their decision to migrate (Töröcsik 2003, 2016).

The theories and methods presented in the lifestyle chapter, like the migration theories, cannot universally explain the migration of young graduates to villages, but, by complementing each other, they may be able to build a new research theoretical construct that can serve as a tool for understanding and analysing the process. The initial hypothesis, which can be linked to lifestyle, is that the lifestyle of young people plays a role in their decision to migrate. Another research

question is: what is the impact of lifestyle, needs and wants on the choice, can we find common characteristics and value preferences among young people? What is the pace and rhythm of life of young people moving to villages? In our globalised world, do localism and local values have an impact on young graduates?

II. Outline of the methods used

The research aim of the doctoral thesis is to understand the motivations of young graduates, to explore their decision factors, to identify and characterize the villages attractive for graduates, to explore the effects and counter-effects of young graduates' migration to or return to villages. The aim is to identify the most typical motivations for not choosing a city as a place of residence. What does a village mean for them? What characterises of their lifestyle? What are the incentives to stay or be attracted by the living space in the villages? Some of the research questions are designed to look beyond the traditional framework of migration decisions and motivations, to bring in new elements of structure and group formation, such as lifestyle and related categories, to explain the phenomena associated with migration in our individualising society.

The broader field of research is the villages of the Észak-Alföld region, which can be categorised as villages according to the legal status of 1 January 2017. The choice of municipalities was made using a staged stratified sampling. A total of 12 small villages were selected according to different indicators, with the common characteristics of having a population of less than 2,500 inhabitants and a share of graduates in the population of more than 10 percent according to the 2022 census.

The target group of the research are young people under 40 years old with a degree living in the small villages. The selection of the interviewees was done using non-probability snowball and maximum variation sampling methods in the previously selected villages. Local experts, key informants and further recommendations from the interviewees were used. A total of 45 semi-structured interviews were recorded. The interviewees were 14 men and 31 women. In terms of their age, the youngest interviewee was 24 years old and the oldest 39. They were typically in a couple with a child or children in the household, but there were some young people who were currently living alone.

In terms of methodology, the doctoral research was essentially based on qualitative techniques. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Data analysis and documentary analysis were used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the villages.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of decisions and motivations, the interviews also included alternative research elements to the more common narrative questioning. Halfway through the interview, a list of values was provided to explore the young people's values, giving them the freedom of association and interpretation to take a stance on each value, interpret it and say how influential it is in their own lives, what they think about each value. In a subsequent phase of the interview, as an alternative measurement method, we also wanted to use the subjects' imagery, primarily to show, through images of their choice, how they interpret what a town means to them and what they associate with a village. In designing the research process, we followed the methodological guidelines of grounded theory, along which the structure of the data collection and interviews was constantly changed in order to achieve a saturation point in each of the dimensions we wanted to explore and to obtain sufficient information on all the factors influencing young people's choices. The theoretical grounding was not based on the classical grounded theory (Glaser-Strauss 1967), but rather on the approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998), which requires a preliminary comprehensive literature review to formulate the research questions, with sufficient scepticism of existing theories. We created the categories as a result of a multi-stage coding process, following the threefold logic of Strauss and Corbin (1990) within the grounded theory in this analytical strategy.

III. A summary of the results in thesis form

1. Researched types of young graduates choosing villages as their place of residence

One of the main objectives of this thesis was to establish a matrix for the typification of young graduates who choose to live in villages, the most relevant elements being: the place of childhood, the integration of the settlement, the values that determine their way of life and the central element of their life organisation. Four main types were identified on the basis of their motivations for migration: the *cohabitants*, the *familist*, the *lifestyle migrants* and the *arrivals*. For each type, national and international theories have been assigned in the last subsection of the research findings, which have helped to better understand the characteristics of young people and which have been complemented by the conclusions of the current empirical data collection on the lifestyle and values axis. The results suggest that young people with a degree typically migrate to a village not for economic reasons, but rather, in summary, to improve their quality of life, with economic rationality less dominant in the process, and not in the hope of higher direct future benefits. Instead, the young people classified in each of these types have different motivations in terms of identifying the decision to live in a small village, and their

patterns and indicators of subsequent living arrangements differ. The *arrivals* seem to be related to the gentrifiers (rural migrants in the process of gentrification), with the striking difference that the group of young people in this study does not aim to transform the rural space, but rather to shape their own lifestyles and ways of life to the norms and customs of the selected villages. The other group, of urban origin, is called *lifestyle migrants*, whose migration to villages and motivations can be seen to fit in with the movements that result from the process of welfare migration, and whose lifestyle is therefore very close to nature or aspiring to it, with post-material elements common in their values. The two types of rural origin, called *cohabitants* and *familists*, are very similar in their main characteristics, except for the degree of integration in the settlement, and in this respect the degree of local attachment and the extent of their network of contacts are different. The *cohabitants*, based on the characteristics identified in the present research, are part of the rural group (locally integrated) identified in the national integration studies. These young graduates are traditional in their values and attach importance to the family, they are also linked to cities in their lifestyle, but they have always imagined their life in a village or rural community, and they typically hold local decision-making positions. Familists, the largest group of young graduates from rural areas, are associated with family-centred ideologies and lifestyles, with children and family as the dominant element in all areas of life.

2. Migration theories and the impact of lifestyle on migration decisions

The results suggest that the motivations implicit in migration theories explained or contributed to the choice of rural residence of the young people studied in very different ways, and that their migration decisions were not uniform or typified solely along these theories. Because of the differentiation of life paths, the same elements acted as motivators for some young people and as barriers for others, and the theories did not lead to regularities in the understanding of the migration of young graduates to villages. The young people could be grouped according to their own subjective perceptions of what was important to them in their decision, but values and lifestyle provided a suitable toolkit for answering the question of why these young people chose to live in villages and why they preferred small villages. In the world of villages, the young graduates interviewed spoke of the possibility of creating a living environment that was more attractive to them than the lifestyle available in the city, which most of them had experienced before. Specific lifestyle elements were identified in the way they went about their daily lives and in their routine activities, which were typical of each type of target group studied. While the target group's consumption and preferences are not really different, and are not in the

main more restricted than those of people living in cities, they describe a specific rural milieu that only a small village can offer, both in terms of the external conditions and the values and norms that guide their actions. They adapt their needs, which are primarily elements of leisure and cultural consumption, to the alternatives available in or from small villages, which in many cases means a reduced choice, but this does not mean that they give up, nor do they express this as a negative in their experiences. The attachment to the rural space and the value system associated with it is reflected in some form in the early socialisation of the majority of young people. However, these are not idyllic images. Connectedness to local communities, the integration of young people into local society, also emerged as an important element in the set of characteristics of young people.

The values and narratives of the target group were made visible in the study of young people's value orientations, but a comparison with those of people living in the same city in the same life cycle was not part of the objectives of this research. The values and value orientations revealed had an impact on the lifestyles and livelihoods of young graduates who chose to live in villages. The importance of security, the need to follow traditions and customs, to live in harmony with nature, to experience a certain level of religiosity, to consume culture, all appeared in the young people's values. The typology of values is not unique, with modern and more traditional values appearing among young people, just as they are likely to appear among young people living in the city. However, in both cases, the young people interviewed identified the world of villages as the ideal place to experience these values.

With the pluralisation of life paths and lifestyles, the way in which young graduates today want to live their lives and the values that are important to them seem to be decisive in the process of choosing where to live, and even more so in deciding on the type of settlement where to live, and should be interpreted in conjunction with the motivations for migration discussed in classical migration theories. The young people surveyed subordinate all economic and network motivations to the lifestyle elements they wish to live. For them, migrating to or returning to small villages means experiencing a better life and a higher quality of life. It would be premature to distinguish between the two theoretical apparatuses examined by examining the migration of a single target group, but the present research findings suggest that values and lifestyle elements are the primary factors and that the consideration of other elements of motivation for migration is only part of the decision process when choosing a place of residence.

3. Slowness and villages

The research also looked for a common factor among young graduates that links them in their thinking about villages, whether there is an element in their very differentiated set of characteristics that they share a common view of rural spaces. Along the lines of the value preferences and lifestyles of the young graduates surveyed in small villages, slowness in a global context can be identified as an attractive factor for those who choose to live in a small village. In most cases, this is the result of a conscious decision to live a slow lifestyle as a desirable goal, to escape from an accelerated urban lifestyle or to maintain and preserve a pace of life that is considered familiar. According to Parkins and Craig (2006), slow living is not just an abstract concept, but a practical response to an accelerated global culture that aims to improve the quality of life. The concept of slow living, characterised by a conscious slowing down of everyday life, is gaining ground as a response to the fast-paced, consumerist nature of modern society (Osbaldiston 2013). Osbaldiston, in the final summary chapter of his edited volume *Culture of the Slow* (2013), highlights how accelerating capitalism can fuel an intensified desire for slowness and tranquillity. Just as, he argues, the rise in consumer demand for technology can paradoxically reinforce the credibility and proliferation of slow narratives. All the authors on this topic point to the movement character of the phenomenon and the focus on the middle class' way of life and the opportunities that their position offers them. According to Thomaz and Prado (2023), in their systematic literature review, slow living is a concept that is still emerging and under-researched in the academic literature. Sasaki (2018) was the first to compare in a large sample survey the subjective sense of well-being and its variation among people living in rural areas, those living in cities and those migrating from urban to rural areas, and to identify several influencing factors and explanatory variables among the elements of social and environmental capital. His results showed that rural residents on average report higher well-being than urban residents, despite lower average incomes. The young people surveyed who made a one-way migration, from an urban area to a rural area, were measured as mostly aged between 20 and 40, not seeking an increase in material wealth, but looking for durable human communities and a living environment characterised by nature. The research also showed that for respondents living in villages, factors such as engagement with the natural environment or elements of social capital (e.g. friendship with neighbours, trust between residents) have a positive impact on subjective well-being, increasing their sense of well-being. The same variables were not found to increase for urban residents. In our own study of young graduates, subjective well-being was not specifically measured, but as reported in the interviews, almost all interviewees like their current life very much, they consider it ideal, when

asked to imagine a desired future, all of them mentioned their current lifestyle as an ideal goal, which they have already achieved. Along the lines of the interview findings, all young graduates show a desire to slow down and live the life they want, and they identify small villages in the North Great Plain region as the location for this. The findings of the international literature cited are identical to the characteristics of the lifestyles of the target group we have identified. The concept of slow living may be worthy of future domestic investigation if we believe that it is becoming a trend.

Summary

The results of the doctoral research aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of urban-to-rural migration, a phenomenon identified as a counter-current to migration processes. We analysed the motivations and types of migration of young graduates from small, low-population villages in the North Great Plain, in order to understand the individual and social reasons and factors that can capture and explain the process more precisely, in addition to the more rational decision factors. The choice of villages or desurbanised rural areas as a place of residence may also be of particular relevance to the future of villages and their depopulation. The research also focuses on the value orientations, lifestyle and pace of life of young people in rural areas, which have not been the subject of much interest in the social sciences to date.

The novelty of the research lies in the study of lifestyles and values in a small village context and its integration into the set of motivations for migration decisions. Several alternative data collection and analysis procedures have been adapted in the research methodology, the use of which could be a starting point for other social researchers, helping to deepen similar qualitative studies. The implementation of multidimensional typification, in a similar way to cluster analysis used in quantitative techniques, is a scientific methodological novelty. The research also aims to contribute to the discourse of contemporary village and rural studies by integrating elements that have not been previously addressed in the national literature.

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Subject: PhD Publication List

Candidate: Noémi Loncsák
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of Human Sciences
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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (3)

1. Kovách, I., **Loncsák, N.**: Kettős társadalmi integráció Gyöngyösön.
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2. **Loncsák, N.**: Területi immobilitás mint lehetőség és perspektíva a falusi fiatalok életében.
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4. Czibere, I., Kovách, I., **Loncsák, N.**: Hungarian Farmers and the Adoption of Precision Farming.
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6. Szerk. **Loncsák, N.**, Nemes-Zámbó, G.: Debrecen-kutatás 2018-2019: Városkutatás Sorozat - Hallgatói Műhelytanulmányok I. kötet. Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 88 p., 2022.
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Hungarian book chapters (4)

8. **Loncsák, N.**: Gyermekes szegénysége egy magyarlakta romániai térségben.
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9. Molnár, É., **Loncsák, N.**: A kárpátaljai gyermekek helyzetének jellemzői.
In: "Átlagosan élünk..." A kárpátaljai magyarság gyermekes háztartásainak életkörülményei. Szerk.: Czibere Ibolya, Loncsák Noémi, Gégény János, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 72-91, 2017. ISBN: 9789633186572
10. **Loncsák, N.**: Gyermekszegénység a kárpátaljai magyarság körében.
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11. **Loncsák, N.**: Kárpátalja társadalmi, gazdasági, demográfiai jellemzői: a falvakban élő magyarság helyzete.
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12. **Loncsák, N.**: Magyar fiatalok Erdélyben.
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14. **Loncsák, N.**: Három ország egy határtérsége.
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17. **Loncsák, N.**: Szegénységi lét az ukrajnai magyarság körében.
Juvenilia. 6, 193-208, 2015. ISSN: 1788-6848.

Total IF of journals (all publications): 1,2

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