

Themes of PhD Thesis

WINE GROWING AND ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY *Present day micro-analysis of Tokaj-Hegyalja region villages' economy*

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Cultural anthropology started away in the 19th century, parallel with the science fields of economics and economic sociology and due to its scientific distinctiveness it approached the interrelationship of the society with the economy from a different direction. Within anthropology, studying the economy appeared for a long time as its area for analyzing a society or a social group that could not be ignored but was not studied independently.

Institutionalization of economic anthropology started in the first third of the 20th century. Its aim was – especially in case of American anthropology – to follow the scientific stream emerging from the 1960s with the objective of improving the communities of the underdeveloped areas. In its early stages of evolution, it mainly followed anthropology's basic orientation by focusing on the economy of the foreign, remote cultures. Ensminger – one of the most well-known researcher of our present days dealing with economic anthropology – noted that the most important role of economic anthropologists was what they brought to the understanding of less developed economies, for example through reviewing historical perspectives or collecting longitudinal data of the same area or a perspective that attempts to place data in an evolutionary time frame.

However, not only the “primitive” ethnic groups or countries of the Third World can become the subject of an anthropologic research, especially if we want to define them from the viewpoint of the socio-cultural environment and the changes of their economy at the end of the 20th century – beginning of the 21st. Economic operation creates such segments in all cultures that also define groups and communities determined or determinable by their individual inside structure and operational aims.

Although in our days there are still numerous researches published on the economies of non-industrial societies, it is more and more common to find works that analyse not only the folk but also the industrial aspect of the Western or European “own” society, encouraged by economical motivations. The present thesis analysing the social and economic changes occurring after the political system changes involving the wine-makers of Tokaj-Hegyalja region is a case study of this area.

Through its wine culture with particular characteristics, Tokaj-Hegyalja played an important role in the country's and its region's economy for centuries. Secured also in laws, the geographic definition has preserved individual cultural elements and economic activity patterns up to the present days. Traditions, customs and economic activities processed in numerous social science-related and ethnographic works, however, have undergone a significant metamorphosis due to the social and political changes coming off in the last decade of the 20th century. My anthropological analysis studies these transitional processes.

The research unity for anthropology and economic anthropology is not only created by the geographical definiteness and the stage of the specific economic activity, but also by the economic mentality change of the characters interested in wine-growing in relation with society-culture-economy, and the change of outside and inside factors strongly defining the actions of individuals and communities. Economic anthropology offers an insight into mapping up of mechanisms of economic actions, provides the possibility to analyse the procedures and to observe the metamorphosis of the local traditions. In my work, along with these directions I have attempted to study the economic activities and motivations of the Tokaj-Hegyalja region's economic role-players, mainly those who started their own business in the 1990s.

Today, economic operation of Tokaj-Hegyalja wine-production must be interpreted in a context of multi-directional processes having effect on each other. It is within the correlation of these complex phenomena where one can learn the period's changing economic mentality of the wine growing and wine-production, defined and – through sales – still very open segment of the community and their influence upon the traditions and therefore upon the economy.

To interpret the role of traditions in the economy and the relevant mentality change, the thesis starts from the historical events affecting the wine-production of the region. Essentially, the historical events still determine the present wine culture in spite of the drastic changes in the Tokaj-Hegyalja farm brought by the 1990s. As a result of the large wine farms, increasing tourism and new market channels appearing after the transitional privatisation, individual action entered in spotlight instead of the socialist co-operation organized from the top characteristic to the previous regime. Through transformation of social connections and economic structures such questions need to be answered as what importance the wine-growers and wine-makers attach to mutual and individual actions; what strategies they work out to balance the economic and social uncertainties during securing the action of those taking part

in the interaction, or how the tradition plays role in all the above, or how it changes during the above processes.

Theses of the research

Due to a unique micro climate determined by a geographic environment, vine-production in Tokaj-Hegyalja can be defined as a social community carrying out a particular economic activity, all which facilitates the field research and economic anthropological analysis meaning the sine qua non of anthropology. Tokaj-Hegyalja is an area that had several economic prosperity and regression periods during centuries. A certain economic feature can be drawn through examining it in both longitudinal and diachronic way that shapes the economic action reacting to the social changes and produces and shapes a tradition of winery that appears to be a cultural product mainly when it comes to its sale. Therefore interpreting the economic, social and cultural changes happening after the political system change will make the economic system of winery researchable exactly during its transition process, flashing a beam of light on its earlier and present condition and its determinant factors.

Following the chapter describing the historical events in the mirror of winery and the towns, the thesis reviews the reasons for the individual farming methods coming to the front and the reasons for the changes of the traditions along the following main themes.

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Through the centuries, the specific cultural features of Tokaj-Hegyalja wine growing, the production method of the wines characteristic of the area (aszú, szamorodni types) became institutionalized through traditions, customs and rights through. Roots of today's wine culture need to be searched for in the historical events and the answers provided to them.

Reviewing the wine region's historical development is essential to be able to define today's existing economic circumstance. Economic and commercial interest in Hegyalja started in the 14th century, then gradually such vine growing and winemaking methods developed that make Tokaj wine individual and distinguished up to the present. The „extraneous” winegrowers appeared in larger number from the second half of the 15th century, showing a growing importance compared to the Szerém wines. Following the boom of the 16th and 17th centuries, historical and social events of the 18th century set numerous

obstacles to Tokaj-Hegyalja winemaking. The largest rupture in the area's farming was meant by the apparition of the phylloxera, which at the end of the 19th century almost killed all the grape in Hegyalja. The full economic and social sphere in connection with grape and wine culture was affected. The economic crisis not only confined agriculture back but jeopardized the existence of Hegyalja's inhabitants as well. As a consequence the workforce and economic power disappeared and many sold their land. People left the territories that were primarily prepared for vine growing. What they once were country towns, by the period between the two World Wars degraded into out of date, poor villages.

Events of the 20th century also set off rather stagnating and not thriving processes. Following the devastation of the World Wars, the agrarian reform and then the collectivization along with the symbiotic relationship between the state-owned buyer-up companies, the producer's cooperatives and the private gardens determined the general direction that was to be followed by everyone: farming for quantity instead of quality along a centrally controlled „equal economic attitude”.

As a result of natural disasters and economic-social changes, manufacturing and selling the traditional product faced serious challenges by the end of the 20th century. One of the main consequences that are still present in our days was the Tokaj wine losing ground from the Western European markets. Changing of the market and consumer habits aggravated the situation even more.

Still, the demand for stopping the course of the economic recession and repositioning the old reputation of the Tokaj wine is increasing. Its initiator mainly was the system change of 1989. As its result, completely new economic approaches had to be learned and acquired, which were all far from the previous system's economic mentality.



The economic changes that took place after the 1990s had a strong effect on the economic community and the local wine culture. Wine farm owners disposing of investable material, cultural and social capital became individual wine-makers, while organizing the economy was affected by certain outside and inside factors. New economic and social characters appeared in Hegyalja, the patterns of industrial engineering of vine growing and wine-production were re-organized; development of the local farm took off along new directions.

With the radical rearrangement of the land organization and the market loss, production of the whole region changed. A number of owners of small and medium-sized land appeared in wine growing. In the last decades of the 20th century the wine-growers not only had to re-evaluate the economic circumstances of the previous system (regarding both production and sales), but they had to form an essentially new wine culture and sales strategy.

During the process, along with the conversion of the economic structure, serious changes took place within the society's structure and therefore the field of wine-production as well. Economic changes of the 1990s influenced the local economic community as well. The vine- and wine-growing community that was homogeneous before went through a strong process of differentiation. With the help of the available social, economic and cultural capital, differentiation of the groups started; they can be classified by the farm size and activity expansion. Vine-growers disposing of the appropriate capital were able to develop an independent winery and expand it horizontally, adding new businesses.

The changes demanded intense accommodation and rapid reactions from the makers. Success of the economic change were mostly determined by the Bourdieu vine-stock and the interpersonal connections came into play. Individual activity became the main determinant of the economic operation versus the collectiveness of the previous period in spite of the fact that vine growing, winemaking and the dynamically expanding tourism inspired the producers to co-operate.

The transition period of the 1990s created both economic and social recession at the same time. To dissolve them, farmers developed different strategies. Efforts towards developing wine tourism and the foundation of NGOs closely relating to it must be mentioned here. Considering the changes of the economic mechanisms taking place in the last decade, the connection between the individual and collective activity and the different forms and places of the partnerships within the winemakers' economic activity is dubious. In the light of interpretation of the historical events, refusal of the co-operation or disinterest in NGOs (phenomena that can often be seen today) cannot unequivocally be searched for in the prejudice against the constraints coming from above in the previous system. Mentality changes against them may only be defined within the field of the complex social correlations – considering the attitudes shown both for and against them.

All initial actions of the winemakers taken through securing others' behaviour turned for decreasing the situation's uncertainties, which goal they tried to reach through creating co-operational methods and institutions that were different from the co-operatives of the previous

system. This was also served by the innovations that appeared in the manufacturers' economic activities, which mainly materialized in following the strategies of foreign investors settling down and founding large wineries in Hungary and in adopting the Western practice into the domestic environment.

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The individual appearing in economy takes up different roles in certain fields of the economy and society, while their economic actions are driven by their cognitive, cultural, structural and political viewpoints.

Most social events are influenced by economic motivations, which are never free of effects resulting from the foreign and own culture's cognitive, structural and political settings. Most economists assume that the individual is rational, stands alone in the economy and acts under constraint when chooses the aims and tools that maximize their interests and comfort. In contrast with the economists, anthropologists often proceed from the assumption that individuals are in connection with both each other and the society, they set up and destroy relationships and communicate through the language and material things. In fact people are socially engineered individuals communicating and being in connection with others. One cannot talk about isolated individual activity performed without social connections due to the above, not even within the impersonal market trade where the economic relations are also affected by partner connections and the culture.

To be able to interpret the conversion of Hegyalja wine growing after the political change, such fields of the economy, society and culture must be studied that overlap and have an effect on each other. The individual appearing in economy takes up different roles in certain fields of the economy and society, while their economic actions are driven by their viewpoints.

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Historically determined economic action patterns led to strengthening the individual economic behaviour patterns and strategy, playing also down the benefits of the collective action.

As an effect of the socio-cultural changes, economic structure of wine production changed. In the simple-structure wine-makers' community earlier run within the frames of the

co-operatives and the Borkombinát (approx. Wine Factory) a complex stratification process set off with the appearance of the private business structure. The new market with the capitalist approach practically came to be the fuel of farming; players of this market; players of this market became the indicators of these complex processes and changes.

With the political system change, both economic and legal frame concepts and social processes got reorganized. With the system change and disappearance of the co-operative teamwork farmers found themselves alone on a farm, for the running of which they did not have the appropriate experience, neither had they the ingestible capital to modernize it. It was only a small group of them that was able to activate the available economic, cultural and social capital, using them for establishing an independent business.

Parallel with this and following the system change, a row of market-related and non-market-related institutions appeared through the innovations and development of new sales channels. Wine tourism developed as a form of the latter, consumers purchasing on site as a target customer group that can replace the lost market the easiest way. To support this, NGOs appeared to rigorously guard the individual interests (due to this they were hardly effective), as new fields of collectiveness and co-operation. Together with the shape-up of the new strategy, individual and new collective action patterns evolved on the wine farm, calling forth and reevaluating the old family and learned patterns as well as constructing new patterns. Historical determination of economic action patterns led to the strengthening of individual economic behaviour patterns and strategies, playing down the advantages of the collective action patterns.

As an effect of the appearing of large wine farms, increasing tourism becoming more and more valuable, it was the individual action that was emphasized against the collective actions organized from above, characteristic of the previous political system. Nevertheless, both the foreign examples and the newly developing economic and social circumstances also inspired the wine producers to develop different forms of operations. Economy also suggested moving this way making it possible for the small farmers to show up outside the local market only through co-operation.

It was mainly the civilian initiatives and associations that got to a more important role, parallel with which the co-operative type teamwork gradually got put into shade. Shifting towards an intensifying co-operation in the civilian field and a decreasing one as co-operatives was far from going smoothly. The events of the 20th century significantly weakened the social collaboration in towns.



Starting with the appearance of the new economic actors mainly coming from abroad and gaining a leading control and the change of the domestic markets, traditions and wine culture in Hegyalja got re-defined, together with the innovation processes. During this, old traditions were brought back to life equipped with new content and new customs were created, part of which – as they started to be exchanged by the generations – start to be regarded as traditions.

The place and role of traditions must be defined considering the interacting forces of the social and economic processes and innovation. In the past almost two decades through the path finding of the winemakers these phenomena have created new traditions on one hand and brought old ones back to life with a modified content on the other hand, or re-shaped them through inconspicuous small changes affected by outside factors. All this is defined within a new wine culture concept, in relation between the old and the new elements. Its main indicator became to be the spreading of the foreign tendencies and the tourism; this latter developed into the main sales target groups of the wine producers.

The reasons for the changes in the concept of tradition and wine culture are mainly economic: producers had to wrap the wine made using their cultural, economic and social capital into such cover, which increased sales possibilities and the acquirable profit. As a result, re-construction of traditions and customs sets off. Tradition starts with innovation, then it becomes a custom through continuity and finally turns into tradition. The first step of the innovation is fashion and its context with society and economy along with its inner possibilities create the possibility of emerging as a custom. Spreading the foreign trends in the domestic wine production had significant role in all this process.

The longitudinal analysis of the correlation of demand and supply regarding the Hegyalja wine provides information not only about the close interlace and discourse between economy, society and culture, but it also highlights their interactions with each other and other fields of the society. As DiMaggio stated, economic activities get embedded into the culture – which determines people's everyday actions and way of thinking (and impregnates some subsystems of society) – as well as into the social structure.

During the political and economic changes a constant adaptation comes off, which demands that the economic actions are organized according to outside factors – or that they are not organized, as a result of the drastic events of the 19th century. It can also be seen,

especially regarding the events that took place following the political system change that the economic processes can not be regarded as merely outside phenomena as it had been worded by Godelier.

Wine making's tradition creating is in tight interaction with farming strategies. "Self-creation of the past" shows up in tradition's continuous organization, which „are products of actions of subjects living in the present motivated by political or other interests". However all this comes to surface only following sketching up the economic strategy of wine production and closely tied with and motivated by development of tourism. A tight symbiotic connection is consequently organized between production and tourism, which is expressed in restructuring of the traditions.

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