

Theses of PhD Dissertation

Agricultural Production and Agrarian Society in Hajdúnánás
from the Second Half of the 1930s to the End of the 1970s

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History and Ethnography Doctoral School

Debrecen, 2015.

1. Objectives of the Dissertation, an Outline of the Subject

Before reviewing the theses of the doctoral dissertation, main points, methodology and the results I am to describe the direct antecedents and objectives of the work and my reasons for selecting the topic.

The geographical focus of the PhD dissertation is Hajdúnánás, a small town, the habitants of which turned towards agriculture after the settlement of the “hajdús”. From that time their livelihood and subsistence were relied upon the harmonious unity of crop production and livestock breeding as well as traditional farming, rather than warfare. The customs of traditional farming, built upon age long experiences were inherited through generations. Urban life and the world of farms (lying on the lands in the margin of the cities), which were regarded as the centres of farming, seemed to be coexisting very well next to each other until the twentieth century put an end to this lifestyle.

Before the regime change a co-operative system dominated the Hungarian agriculture and only in traces did traditional rural milieu filter through the frames of large plant - based collective farming. Story telling of the elderly relatives, memories of the family about the old times and its decomposition, about land distribution and forced collectivisation, about agitation as well as the hardships of livelihood, played a role in the fact that my scholarly interest has turned towards the Hungarian agrarium without doubt.

The significant reforms carried out in the agriculture during the twentieth century, reshaped the whole of the economic management on the system level several times within a short period of time, and all these processes invited radical social changes. The cardinal inducement of these changes was beyond question politics, that is to say, the radical political turns which affected all fields of life in the period after the World War II.

Traditional agriculture was built on the system of large estate, in which, due to the large scale differentiation, masses of people were forced to make their living out of agricultural seasonal work, day labour and temporary jobs. Acquiring a land of one's own, becoming an independent farmer was only an unreachable dream, however, after the first world war the opinions that demanded for the lower layers that came out at the largest segment of the agrarian society, that is the majority of the Hungarian society, to gain lands of their own.

The land distribution of Nagyatádi served for channelling the tensions, but in 1945 an extensive agrarian reform alongside with the distribution of large estates became realistic politically as well. In Hajdúnánás and generally in the Great Plain there were no classical large estates, therefore the confiscation and compensation of estates larger than 100 acres, those of war criminals, civilian persons who were claimed to be war criminals, the churches and other institutions of legal entity served as the basis of land distribution.

Nevertheless, the long awaited agrarian reform resulted in a the procreation of a number of unviable estates, since the majority of the new holders did not have the appropriate tools, machinery, livestock, seeds and know-how, to be able to carry out efficient farming. After the communist takeover however, the aim was not to provide the above mentioned conditions, and to support of individual farming. The unconcealed aim of the sovietisation of Hungary in the case of agriculture was obviously to adopt the Soviet kolkhoz system, the directives and joint management.

The world of socialist large plants, the system of sovkhoses and kolkhozes was alien to the way of thinking of the farmers in Hajdú county, who were used to the frames of individual farming, therefore with all their might, they were exerting resistance to the ever rising campaigns of collectivization.

The Rákosi-era, as well as the Kádár-era after 1956, was seeking to control and regulate the country's life totally, including the agrarium and the agrarian society. There was no alternative to the large-scale agriculture in that particular political environment, and it became clear for every one after the fall of the revolution. The resistance went on for a while, but the third wave of collectivization, carried out in a similar method as the previous ones was fully successful.

It was not easy to put the co-operative system into operation, and owing to the difficulties of the subsistence, the manifestation of the repugnance towards were intensifying in the beginning. Following the

reorganization and the rationalization of the system, the members of the co-operative had a stronger voice in important decisions, and all these factors together made a more efficient production possible. The standard of living was rising gradually, and the attitude of the members towards large-scale farming changed.

This phenomenon was tangible in Hajdúnánás too. By the 1970s, 1980s, the previously hated co-operative became a natural scene of rural life, the setting of the everyday life, work and entertainment, of the available cultural and educational opportunities of the local community.

In November 2011 I took part in the organization of an exhibition with the title “Outcasts” in Hajdúnánás. The aim of the project was to commemorate the sufferings of the town during the 20th century. The most traumatic historical events, Holocaust, the Soviet oppression and the deportation of innocent civilians, the years of the Rákosi-era, as well as the local events of the 1956 revolution and war of independence and the ruthless sanctions that followed, were each presented separately. The last traumatic period on display was collectivisation, which as far as its significance, methods and brutality are concerned shattered the life of the citizens of the town just as hard as the previously mentioned ones.

II. An Outline of the Applied Methods

The objective of the doctoral dissertation is, apart from giving an insight to the 20th century sufferings of the town, is to review the path of the Hungarian agrarium and the agrarian society on the national as well as the local level, from the end of the World War II to the 1980s.

The eras are embraced in a rather unusual way in this essay, inasmuch it does not consider 1945 and the end of the World War II as its starting point, but it goes back to earlier periods and does not stop research at the end of collectivization, the co-operatives and state farms gaining monopoly status in the Hungarian agriculture. It expands the usual age limits and gives a profound insight into the production output of the Hajdúnánás co-operatives that they reached by the 1980s as a result of continuous technical and technological development, but most importantly, of the more mature mechanisms of organizational operation and income distribution which integrated the economic aspects and the interests of the farmers in a more efficient way.

This way it finds its way to widen its perspectives and to introduce the profound changes that went through in the Hungarian agriculture in the half century between the 1930s and the 1980s. The study aims at describing the complex effects of the problems that originated from the total structural reform of the agrarium on the system level and the traumas that the agrarian society had to suffer. A major question was during the research that following a

collectivization that caused so much meaningless suffering, which was carried out with totalitarian methods, abuse, and aggression by those in power, how could co-operatives become an integral part of the life of rural Hungary. How could local people feed on nostalgic emotions towards large-scale farming after the regime change, when the collectivised large plants remained the same kolkhoz-like creatures that followed Soviet patterns, poisoned the members' lives, made their existence impossible, abused their workforce all the while – just like they did at the time of the waves of collectivization? When and how did the former well-founded disinclination turn into acceptance at first and then into a new kind of identity?

The above, fundamental questions can be approached from different angles, however, they require the application of various methods to answer. The literature of the topic is significant too, as far as the newer or the older publications are concerned, despite the fact that the elimination of the co-operative system took place only a quarter of a century ago. Owing to the early difficulties and the change of attitude that appeared in practice as well by the second half of the 1960s, the articles of the contemporary ex-economic experts, some of whose writings highlighting the problem served as an excellent supplement to our previous knowledge.

The knowledge of the literature and the use of contemporary works of the authors however, merely provided a take-off for the introduction of the operation of the co-operative system. It was at least as important to search for the primary resources of the topic in

archives, as well as to take the opportunity provided by “oral history” as long the witnesses of the period are still among us.

Processing the resources of the archives and making use of the interviews made with the national and local leaders of the co-operative system can without doubt be considered to be the fresh findings of the dissertation. Furthermore, a number of new observations and comparative analyses and important consequences originate from the statistical data that have been academically processed for the first time to this depth as regards Hajdúnánás and the surrounding “hajdú” towns (Hajdúböszörmény, Hajdúszoboszló).

Placing local history into a wider interpretive perspective as well as analysing local events on a national scale are present all through the whole conceptional structure of the essay and are palpable not only in the parts describing the operation of the co-operatives, but also the history of collectivization, as well as the years of the communist regime, the 1945 land distribution, or the Second World War and the preceding years.

All these give way to conscious and well-planned shifts between local and national events, on both micro and macro levels. In my opinion the two are inseparable from each other, and even if there are differences, variations of tones, which may be interpreted as local colours, the interference and interdependence between the two levels are undeniable.

III. Listing of the Findings

We started the review of the processes that were taking place in the agrarium and the agrarian society with the situation before collectivization and the description of the significance of land distribution. The dissertation also presents the organized acts causing the most ordeals in the 20th century history, behind which there was definite governmental will.

These are processes in which the state turns against its own citizens to existentially destroy them, humiliate them, cast them off society and, finally, to take its victims lives too. The dictatorships that committed all these sins to the different groups of the society were very different, however, they had something in common: the technique they were using to exercise power. These traumas had a great impact on agrarian society, intensified the process of disintegration and were associated with the persecution of the “kulaks” and later with forced collectivization.

In the focus of the dissertation was Hajdúnánás, a small town in “hajdú” region, where the above mentioned governmental terror hit with a mighty power. This settlement deserves this intense attention particularly it became a target of each of the above mentioned historic crimes, partly because of its ethnic – religious content (significant Jewish community), partly because of its location (the early appearance of the Soviet armies coming from the East), and last but not least, because of its agrarian character (persecution of the kulaks,

collectivization). The town was hit by two world wars during the 20th century, and suffered further losses with the deportation of the Jewish community, which was considered to be an integral part of the local society. The century-old unity that characterized the former social structure built on traditions, and peaceful coexistence broke.

The sufferings of the local people were not ended by the World War II, moreover, the sovietisation that started after Rákosi had gained power made their worst nightmares come true. The essay describes in details the tortures of the locals who were compartmentalized into the “kulak” category, and the collectivization that in many cases happened with force and physical aggression. The “kulak list” of Hajdúnánás contained 222 names, but many more people fell victims to the brutality of the system. This is where the governmental terror got connected to the reform of the agriculture, which, at the end of an extremely long process, led to the large plants becoming decisive and strong, which did not mean that at the same time production got successful too, but at least it was a very important step on the way there.

Hajdúnánás people were used to individual farming. Although they concentrated in the town, in their daily lives the surrounding farms played a very important role too. They did not break away from the land, the animals, the traditional methods of farming that they inherited and learned from their fathers and great grandfathers. The collectivization and having the Soviet model forced on them, which was coming from the East and was alien to them, meant the end of

their old world order. They resisted hardily, protected their lands, animals, machinery, properties, and the collective farming forced on them by the authority was totally alien to them.

Additionally, the first co-operatives were dysfunctional, they could not provide even the livelihood of the members, therefore the word “kolkhoz” became the synonym of misery, starvation and exploitation. It took a lot of agitation, blackmail, physical abuse and three collectivization waves for the large plants to grow determinative in the Hungarian agriculture. Following the fall of the 1956 revolution, the resistance of the rural society broke, and the repeated collectivization campaign finally succeeded. The socialist agriculture built on co-operatives and state farms eventually became the way to the future.

The first years of the Kádár-era were spent with the consolidation of the authority that was facing legitimacy problems and retaliation. After the collectivization of the agriculture, the control of the agriculture was held by circles who did not learn anything from the serious mistakes of economic policy made during the first two attempts. The governmental terror, which, eventually wrecked the individual farmers and constructed the socialist agriculture, was unable to appropriately organize the operation of the economy and to make the rational decisions that would have provided wider opportunities for the individual interests. Politicians who fully identified with the dictatorship, like Imre Dögei, were solely able to copy the Soviet pattern subserviently.

The turn in the agricultural policy needed new times and new people, agricultural experts who understood that acting without the farmers (that is, in this case the members of the co-operative), what is more, acting against them, it is impossible to carry out efficient farming. To be able to make use of the advantages of the structure of large plants and collective farming, it was essential that every one, even the members doing the actual work should be interested in the success. Hungarian agriculture could become a successful sector and the productive potentials of the agriculture could rise significantly, when the directives of Lajos Fehér received an opportunity to realize his concepts.

These facts have been proven by the detailed examinations carried out concerning Hajdúnánás and the co-operatives of the county. During the research, the sudden marginalization and later the disappearance of the individual farmers, and expansion of the co-operatives in parallel, became an extremely conspicuous phenomenon. This phenomenon was extremely prominent in the case of every type of plant. The yield of the 1970s producing extraordinary results was just as prominent regarding both the crop production and the livestock breeding. The changes were palpable in economy organization that lay behind the processes. The technical and technological development was particularly explicit in the growth of mechanization (independent co-operative machinery), as well as in the possibilities in chemicalization, which were facilitated by the development of the

chemical industry (the spreading of fertilization, the use of herbicides).

The significant rise in the amount of crop and the crop yield in the county was obvious in the case of almost every important crop taken under examination, with the sole exception of those types of plants that lost significance either because of the transformation of the structure of sowing (e.g. spring barley), or due to the modified requirements of livestock breeding (e.g. oat). Besides crop production livestock breeding also flourished, particularly sheep-breeding and swine-breeding, while the decrease of the number of horses was a result of the decreasing demand for yoke-power, thank to the improvement of mechanization.

However, the general tendency did not prevail to the same extent, the essay reviewed the local features of the co-operative sector in the case of Hajdúnánás, as well as Hajdúböszörmény or Hajdúszoboszló. It was apparent that the individual farms held on even after 1956 for a few years. Observing the processes of expansion of the co-operatives and the decline of the individual farms the large shifts in timing on the local level were conspicuous. Hajdúnánás differed from the two other “Hajdú” towns from this respect too, since the data showed in the case of several sectors of the branch (e.g. growing of wheat, autumn and spring barley, sugar-beet, sunflower and lucerne) that the individual farms here presented excellent crop results even in the 1960s, while by this time elsewhere the small plants had become completely insignificant.

The examination of crop results between 1962 and 1980 however was unambiguous in proving why agriculture had become the most successful sector of the national economy by the second half of the Kádár-era without any doubt, which, owing to its efficiency in production and its ability of income generation, contributed to the increase of the standard of living of the members of the co-operative. The development gathered speed in the 1970s especially. The co-operatives of Hajdúnánás did not belong to the frontline of the region, they particularly could not compete with the efficiency of the Hajdúböszörmény large plants, but their crop results and yields were showing a continuously improving tendency and provided more and more secure living for their members.

The reason for the choice of topic for the dissertation was partly the contradiction that lies between the co-operative system that provided an ever growing standard of living for the members of the co-operative from the beginning of the 1970s, and the unconcealed violence that that caused never healing, sensitive wounds in the people of Hajdúnánás in connection with the early times of collectivization. However, local processes had to be placed into wider perspectives, therefore national events and tendencies on the county level were also emphasized.

Dealing with violent collectivization, events like the persecution of “kulaks”, the constructed trials, or 1956 and the ruthless sanctions that followed came into the picture as well. The dissertation had to give space to these events too, despite the fact that its main focus was

above all collectivization and the history of the socialist agriculture after 1956.

The agriculture and the agrarian society went through a highly radical transformation in the period from the beginning of the Second World War to the end of the 1970s. The land distribution meant the expansion of the private property, the forced collectivization on the other hand was equal to its total annihilation. The methods and tools of the construction of the co-operatives and large plants, due to the activities of the agitators and the difficulties of the livelihood were in the beginnings the symbols of the dictatorship.

From the 1960s however, when the system consolidated and gave more space to autonomy, and individual initiatives, the attitude towards co-operatives changed. The crop results improved, the income of the members of the co-operatives rose, the living grew easier and the co-operatives became secure workplaces and natural frames of rural life. These phenomena were present in Hajdúnánás as well, and they determine the attitude of local people to the period of the co-operative system up to our days.

IV. A List of Works Published or Under Publication

1. Co-operatives in Hajdúnánás. Debreceni Szemle 2007. 2, 206-221.
2. The Social Background of the Agricultural Training in Debrecen and Pallag. In: Emlékkönyv ifj. Barta János 70. születésnapjára. (Eds. Imre Papp, János Angi, László Pallai) Debrecen, 2010., 367-386.
3. The History of the Hungarian Agrarian Higher Education from the Period of the Neo-Absolutism to World War I. In: Tanulmányok Ujváry Zoltán 80. születésnapja alkalmából (Eds. Máté Kavecsánszki, Márta Szászfalvi) Debrecen, 2012., 41-54.
4. Notes on an Exhibition. The Historical Background of the Exhibition “Outcasts” Hajdúnánás. In: „Kitaszítottak”. Emberek, sorsok, politika a XX. század közepének Magyarországon. (Ed. László Pallai) Hajdúnánás, 2012., 163-196.
5. The Violations of Law of the Rákosi-regime and its Local References in Hajdúnánás. In: Princípium Pályánk kezdetén (Ed. Anna Lukács) Debrecen, 2012., 21-38.
6. Meanings of an Anniversary: Semicentennial History of the Co-operatives of Hajdúnánás. In: Nánási kalendárium és helytörténeti olvasókönyv. (Ed. Tamásné Rigó) Hajdúnánás, 2013., 131-155.

7. The Expansion of Agricultural Co-operatives in Hajdúnánás after 1956. In: Vidék és város: ellentétek és kölcsönhatások a 20. századi Magyarországon (Ed. László Pallai) Hajdúnánás, 2013., 157-194.

8. Historical and Ethnographic Aspects of Holidays and Feasts. In: Studia Folkloristica et Ethnographica 57. (Ed. Elek Bartha, Péter Forisek and Imre Csiszár) Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetem Néprajzi Tanszék, 2013.

9. The Meanings of an Anniversary: Semicentennial History of the Co-operatives of Hajdúnánás. In: Nánási kalendárium és helytörténeti olvasókönyv. (Ed. Tamásné Rigó) Hajdúnánás, Hajdúnánási Szellemi Műhely, 2013., 131-155.

10. Demographic Circumstances of Hajdúnánás and Living Conditions after 1945. In: Zemepanské mestá a mestecká v uhorsku v ranom novoveku - Mezővárosok a koraújkori Magyarországon. (Ed. Péter Kónya) Presov, Vydavatelstvo Presovskej Univerzity, 2013., 315-351.

11. The Expansion of Agricultural Co-operatives in Hajdúnánás. Agrártörténeti Szemle 55. 2014. 1-4. 61-82.

12. Heroes of Hajdúnánás in World War I. In: Nánási kalendárium és helytörténeti olvasókönyv. (Ed. Tamásné Rigó) Hajdúnánás, Hajdúnánási Szellemi Műhely, 2015., 68-83.

13. The „Great War” as the overture of the 20th century. The Consequences of the Defeat in the Life of a Town. In: Vidék és város: Az első világháború és a magyar vidék. (Eds. Róbert Barta, Imre Csiszár) Hajdúnánás, 2015., 43-82.

14. Editing and peer-reviewing:

Tavaszi Szél 2014 Konferenciakötet I-VII. (Eds. Imre Csiszár, dr. Péter Miklós Kőmíves) Published by Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége. Debrecen, 2014.



Registry number:
Subject:

DEENK/167/2015.PL
Ph.D. List of Publications

Candidate: Imre Csiszár

Neptun ID: ZT2014

Doctoral School: Doctoral School of History and Ethnology

List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book chapter(s) (2)

1. **Csiszár I.**: A mezőgazdasági termelészövetkezetek megerősödésének folyamata Hajdúnánáson 1956 után.
In: Vidék és város: ellentétek és kölcsönhatások a 20. századi Magyarországon. Szerk.: Pallai László, Hajdúnánási Önkormányzat, Hajdúnánás, 157-194, 2013. ISBN: 9789638935120
2. **Csiszár I.**: Egy kiállítás margójára: A Hajdúnánási "Kitaszítottak" című tárlat történelmi háttere.
In: "Kitaszítottak": Emberek, sorsok, politika a XX. század közepének Magyarországon.
Szerk.: Pallai László, Önkormányzat, Hajdúnánás, 163-196, 2012.

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

3. **Csiszár I.**: A mezőgazdasági termelészövetkezetek megerősödése Hajdúnánáson.
Agrártört. Szle. 55 (1-4), 61-82, 2014. ISSN: 0002-1105.





List of other publications

Hungarian book chapter(s) (2)

4. **Csiszár I.**: A magyar agrár felsőoktatás története a neoabszolutizmus időszakától az első világháborúig.
In: Tanulmányok Ujváry Zoltán 80. születésnapja alkalmából. Szerk.: Kavecsánszki Máté, Szászfalvi Márta, Kapitális Kft., Debrecen, 41-54, 2012. ISBN: 9789630831291
5. **Csiszár I.**: Mezőgazdasági Szakképzés társadalmi háttere Debrecenben és Pallagon.
In: Emlékkönyv ifj. Barta János 70. születésnapjára. Szerk.: Papp Imre, Angi János, Pallai László, Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézet, Debrecen, 367-386, 2010.

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

6. **Csiszár I.**: Hajdúnánás hősei az első világháborúban.
Nánási Kal. Helytört. Olvkv. , 68-83, 2015. ISSN: 1589-1232.
7. **Csiszár I.**: Termelőszövetkezetek Hajdúnánáson.
Debreceni Szle. 2, 206-221, 2007. ISSN: 1218-022X.

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.

31 August, 2015

