

DELIMITATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF RURAL AREAS IN HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT – The present study relies on the outcomes of a complex rural research programme based on the cooperation between the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian National Rural Network. A specific part of the research has been designated to study the state of Hungarian rural areas within the European context, to analyse processes of divergence of Hungarian rural areas and to define potential types of rural areas with their specific needs. In this paper, a new typology of Hungarian rural regions is presented together with the outcomes of relating case studies. The territorial basis for the delimitation and typology of rural areas was composed on LAU 2 level, “járás” (i.e. districts, new units of public administration established in 2013), supported by current statistic data and GIS methods. The identification of the characteristics of our eight newly defined region types and the verification of the preconceptions regarding these types were assisted by fact-finding case studies. The case studies relied mostly on local data, documents, field surveys, focus group discussions and technical workshops. All research activities and methods were focusing on one principal question: *how are rural areas in an East-Central European country reshaping and fragmenting today?*

Keywords: rural restructuring, spatial differentiation, classification of rural micro-regions, rural development

INTRODUCTION

Rurality as a concept and rural areas as complex environmental systems are in the focus of several scientific disciplines. The term “rural area” primarily refers to a spatial unit; however, its content also implicates a number of environmental-natural-landscape related, social-cultural and economic references (Agarwal *et al.*, 2009; Bryden and Hart, 2001; Cloke, 1985, 2000; Horlings and Marsden, 2014; Kovách, 2013). Therefore, in accordance with the different approaches, the researchers and experts dealing with the topic interpret the concept in different ways. However, in spite of the differences, all agree that the studies conducted in rural environments raise not only theoretical and methodological questions but may also serve as a basis for regional development interventions. Ultimately, rural studies may contribute to the achievement of social objectives (Brunori and Rossi, 2007; Newby, 1980, 1985). All these are confirmed by the strategic documents of the OECD and the EU states in which the preservation of rural values and the improvement of rural living conditions are considered as key priorities. Based on the results of the research on Hungarian rural areas conducted in 2013, the present paper is compiled around two main lines. First of all, an attempt for the delimitation and classification of the Hungarian rural areas is introduced and, secondly, our empirical results are presented, giving a closer understanding of the rural processes in Hungary. In the case of our research focusing on rural restructuring, we were most of all looking for the drivers behind

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the rural changes and we laid emphasis on revealing those factors which may play a determining role in the sustainability and socio-economic development of the rural areas.

The main objective of our research was the redefinition of the rural areas in Hungary. This delimitation was conducted bearing in mind the appreciation of the rural areas, relying on previous scientific experiences, and in accordance with the planning needs emerging for the 2014-2020 EU budget period and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. During our work, a number of methodological issues and policy related dilemmas emerged, partly related to the National Rural Development Programme and the changes due to the transforming Second Pillar, and partly related to the new Community-led Local Development (CLLD) integrated development tool. The development policy aspects played an important role in drafting the preconceptions for our classification, since it is essential to see to which direction the Hungarian rural policy might move and which aspects should (or must) be taken into consideration when creating a type of region. While we tried to create a new definition for the term *rural*, we are aware that it is impossible to create a perfect solution that would be acceptable for everyone.

A NEW ATTEMPT FOR THE DELIMITATION OF THE HUNGARIAN RURAL REGIONS - METHOD USED FOR CLASSIFICATION BASED ON A HYBRID (LOCAL-REGIONAL) APPROACH

A significant proportion of the principles and considerations described in the available literature include philosophical approaches and concepts which contribute to the better understanding of the processes taking place in the rural areas but cannot be applied in a rural development operative programme due to their complexity. Therefore, we sought to create a definition for “rural” which is compatible with the known European Union regulatory recommendations, takes into consideration the previous solutions of the Hungarian policy, and its everyday use is simple and obvious.

From the aspect of regulations, according to Article 50, Chapter II of the Recommendation on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the concept of rural areas should be defined on the programming level by the Managing Authorities of the countries concerned (EU, 2011). Consequently, we did not have to take into consideration a legal element which is obligatory from the side of the European Union. In principle, therefore, the classification of the former New Hungary Rural Development Programme’s⁴ could be used during the 2014-2020 funding period, too. Yet, we decided on a new delimitation, because some elements of the former methodology could not be applied in a newer classification. While the percentage of the population living outside the boundaries of the continuously built-up areas could be an important indicator of rurality, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office did not have published this data on the settlement level in the 2011 census, and only the obsolete data from 2001 could be used. Furthermore, the total exclusion of the Budapest agglomeration area settlements from the rural programmes was a matter of concern, since in the case of support for subsistence farms the holdings in this region should definitely get a significant role. Another important reason to include the areas from the agglomeration of Budapest is that the support of agriculture is an adequate tool for restriction of the urban sprawl, which endangers the traditional landscape of the city hinterlands. Along the above described principles and considerations, we elaborated a region and settlement based “hybrid” rural space category definition which is based on the new district system. When creating our concrete definition, we accepted the principle of the previous rural development programme that all settlements with less than 10 000 inhabitants are rural. At the same time, we also took into account that the European Union did not exclude the towns from among the beneficiaries for the EAFRD CLLDs in its plans for regulation for the 2014-2020 programming period. Based on this, we did not consider the number of inhabitants being maximised in 10 000 as a rigid limit. On the basis of all these, we summarised the definition of rural districts as it follows:

- any districts are rural which only consist of settlements with less than 10 000 inhabitants,

⁴ The New Hungary Rural development Programme (NHRDP) was the name of the rural development operational programme for the 2007-2014 planning period.

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- those districts are also rural where the number of inhabitants in the central town is higher than 10 000, but the population density of the district is below the Hungarian average (107 people per square kilometre) (inter alia, such traditional market towns and their surroundings on the Great Plain as Hódmezővásárhely and Karcag, or the towns of districts with hamlets like Kaposvár and Zalaegerszeg).

Table 1. Basic statistics of the Hungarian rural areas on the district level

| Data | District with settlements where the number of population is below 10 000 | Urban centre with more than 10 000 inhabitants and low population density | Rural areas in total |
|--|--|---|----------------------|
| Total area km ² | 26 018 | 47 802 | 73 820 |
| Area km ² (%) | 27.97 | 51.39 | 79,36 |
| Number of inhabitants (2011) | 1 353 593 | 3 096 521 | 4 450 114 |
| Number of inhabitants (% , 2011) | 13.59% | 31.1% | 44,69 % |
| Average population density (people per sq. km) | 55.56 | 64.77 | 60,28 |
| Number of districts | 61 | 75 | 136 |
| Number of settlements | 1 092 | 1 421 | 2 513 |

Source: 2011 Census

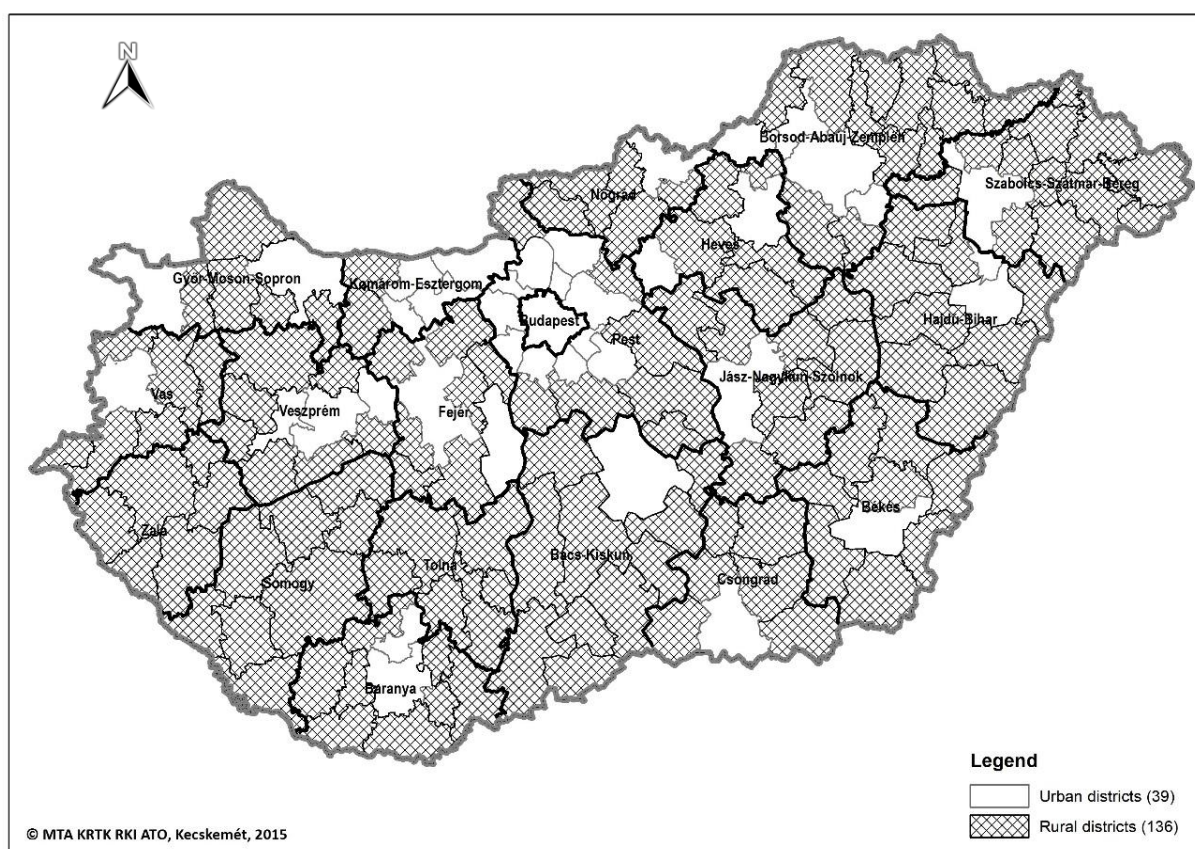


Figure 1. The spatial distribution of the different rural and urban micro-regions

It should be noted that the direct comparison of this delimitation with the ones used during the previous rural development operational programmes is not possible since the categories were founded on different bases. In our present recommendation, the number of settlements concerned decreases considerably, as well as the ratio of the area regarded rural (although to a lesser extent) which is still close to 80%. At the same time, the ratio of the rural population remained the same (45%) which in overall suggests that the application of the new definition could increase the territorial concentration of the use of grants, and thus it is supposed to allow for a more efficient use.

CREATION OF COMPLEX REGION TYPES FOR THE HUNGARIAN RURAL DISTRICTS

The next important step in our research was to divide the rural areas (districts) into categories that assist planning, strategy formulating and operative work. The methods using dimension reduction (e.g. the use of factor analysis) are predominant both in the Hungarian and in the international literature. We, on the one hand, have methodological concerns about these methods; on the other hand, our experiences show that they produce almost the same results using similar basic data. Therefore, we intended to proceed on a different course and we chose the aggregative approach also applied by Ballas and his fellow researchers (Ballas *et al.*, 2003). In our case, it means that on the basis of complex indicators, we categorised the districts into complex region types using a decision tree. Besides, we also kept in mind the model elaborated in the EDORA research programme (EDORA, 2011, in which the categorisation was built around 3 or 4 thematic units. Nevertheless, we did not intend to produce an exact adaptation of the EDORA method. Partly because the issue of accessibility is not that critical in the case of the Hungarian districts as in the European context, and partly because it is totally different to create 12-16 region types for the more than 1000 territorial units of the European Union than for a much smaller country where the creation of so many categories would not lead to clear results. Based on the results of Terluin (2001, 2003) and others, we tried to involve such novel indicators in the creation of our complex thematic indicators which also measure the social cohesion of the rural communities and their network embeddedness.

In our typology, we intended to list the rural areas into categories along four main themes:

1. on the basis of the environmental condition which is one of the measures of the post-productivist values,
2. based on the social capacity,
3. considering the state of the economy, and
4. in accordance with the role of agriculture in the given region, i.e. in relation to the “agricultural dependence”.⁵

We completed the categorisation of the Hungarian districts along each thematic unit, but when determining the final region types – to reduce the number of the potential region types – we created complex indicators from the different territorial indicators. We compressed the social capacity and the state of the economy from the above listed four themes, and we also simplified the evaluation of the environmental condition. In the final version, two complex indicators were determined: one expressing the social-economic state, and one the agricultural dependence. For the environmental status we added the expression “with considerable environmental value” to the names of the region types for only those districts where the ratio of the NATURA 2000 areas and the special areas of conservation exceed the national average.

In the case of the two complex indicators, due to the differing units of the components, we used min-max normalisation. As result of that, each component took their values in the 0-1 interval (the most favourable data taking 1 and the least favourable taking 0). Within the specific complex indicators, the normalised data of the partial indicators were totalised and this produced the regional values for the specific thematic indicators. In the case of the indicator expressing the social capacity and the state of the economy - since originally the score for the social capacity was calculated from 14 indicators, while for the state of the economy we used only 7 indicators - the latter was weighed with

⁵ The set of indicators for each theme are provided in Annex 1.

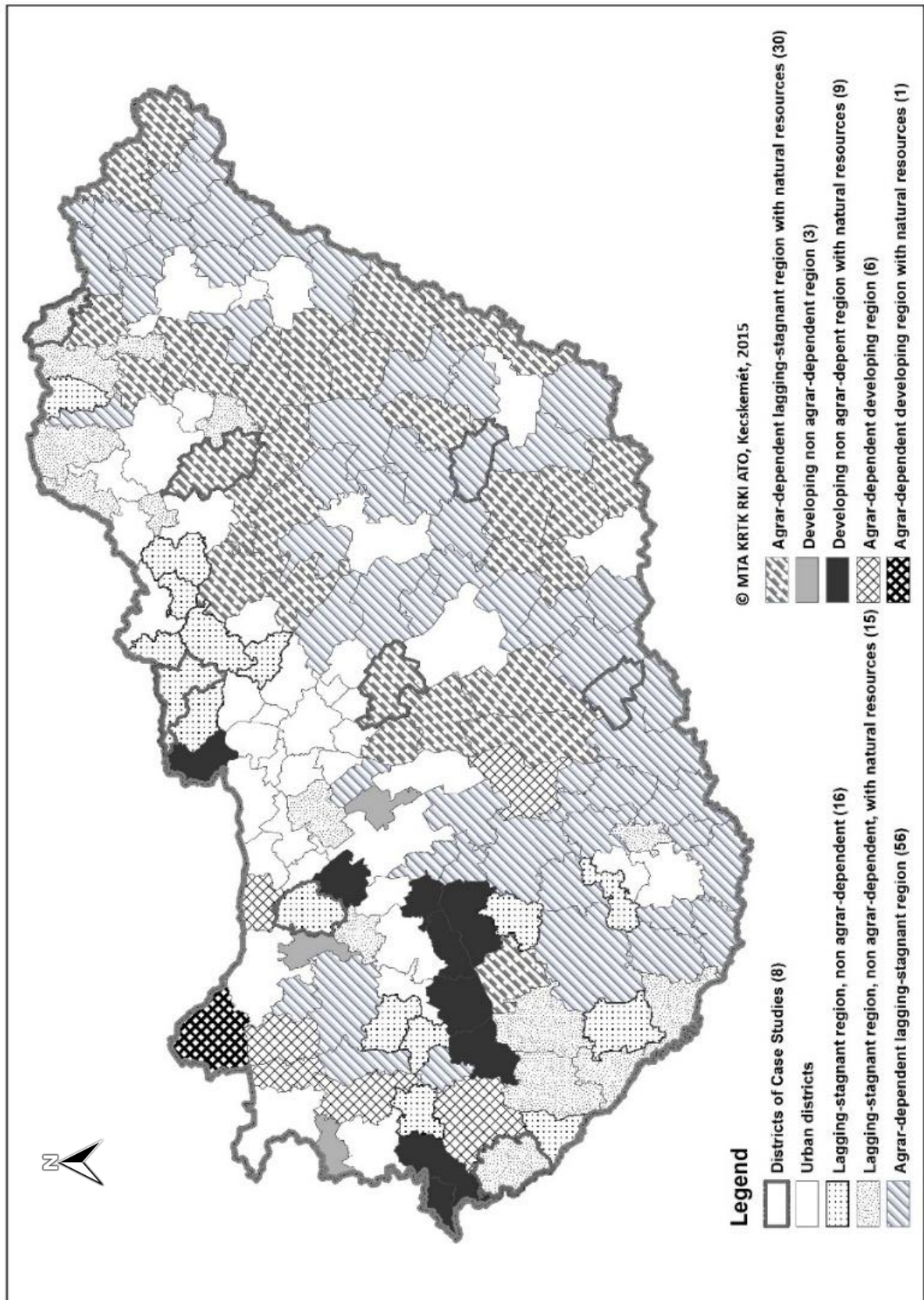


Figure 2. The complex rural micro-region types of Hungary

double value during the addition. The aggregated score was divided into three categories with the “Natural Breaks (Jenks)” classifying option of the ArcGIS from which those falling into the lagging behind and stagnating categories were contracted when creating the final categories. We were forced to use a similar method in the case of the agricultural dependence where the strongly and the average dependents constitute the “agriculturally dependent” category. The reason for the compressions was that using our original ideas still produced too many categories (as many as 12-18) which we intended to reduce partly for better analysing and partly for practical applicability. Finally, we listed the Hungarian rural areas into 8 categories in total (Figure 2 and Table 2).

Table 2. *Basic statistics of the complex rural micro-region types*

| Data for rural districts | Lagging behind-stagnating region with weak agricultural dependence | Lagging behind-stagnating region with weak agricultural dependence, with considerable environmental values | Agriculturally dependent lagging behind-stagnating region | Agriculturally dependent lagging behind-stagnating region with considerable environmental values | Developing region with weak agricultural dependence | Developing region with weak agricultural dependence, with considerable environmental values | Agriculturally dependent developing region | Agriculturally dependent developing region, with considerable environmental values |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|--|---|---|
| Number of types | 12 | 11 | 49 | 26 | 7 | 14 | 13 | 4 |
| Area (km ²) | 4 990 | 5 772 | 26 795 | 17 288 | 2 523 | 6 172 | 7 504 | 2 776 |
| Area (%) | 6.76 | 7.82 | 36.30 | 23.42 | 3.42 | 8.36 | 10.17 | 3.76 |
| Number of inhabitants (2011) | 250 601 | 282 371 | 1 671 116 | 950 013 | 166 214 | 404 876 | 517 608 | 207 315 |
| Number of inhabitants (% , 2011) | 5.63 | 6.35 | 37.55 | 21.35 | 3.74 | 9.10 | 11.63 | 4.66 |
| Population density (people per sq. km) | 52.325 | 48.263636 | 64.042857 | 56.830769 | 70.528571 | 66.671429 | 67.007692 | 74.2 |
| Number of settlements | 269 | 281 | 743 | 357 | 124 | 315 | 357 | 67 |
| Number of urban settlements | 13 | 15 | 88 | 47 | 11 | 23 | 22 | 11 |
| Number of inhabitants in the urban settlements (2011) | 87 867 | 135 114 | 915 704 | 549 929 | 64 604 | 190 367 | 289 316 | 119 384 |
| Number of inhabitants in the urban settlements (% , 2011) | 3.74 | 5.74 | 38.93 | 23.38 | 2.75 | 8.09 | 12.30 | 5.08 |

Source: own calculations

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE RURAL AREA CATEGORIES AND ITS MAJOR RESULTS

During our research, we completed the validation of the region types on the district level with the preparation of regional case studies. The fieldwork allowed us to study the factors of differentiation and their effects on the development of the regions and their development potentials by in-depth analysis. We chose one district from each category taking into account also their geographic location and tried to cover practically every NUTS2 region of the country. In the end, the districts of Balassagyarmat, Dabas, Jánoshalm, Kisbér, Lenti, Mezőkövesd, Sátoraljaújhely and Szarvas were selected for the preparation of case studies.

Each case study consisted of the description of the geographic location of each district, the review of the settlement environmental, social and economic characteristics, spatial structural conditions, most significant resources, and the introduction of the most important processes and changes taking place during the past twenty years and even today. In addition, we also detailed the role of local organisations, identified the reasons for the successes or failures on the regional and settlement levels, summarised the particular local visions, concerns and development experiences. Finally, the case studies also gave a detailed picture about the most significant rural problems as well as the specific difficulties.

Methodologically, each case study processed the statistical data, the literature, the former and current development documents, and other secondary sources related to rural development available for the regions and their settlements. In the overview of the completed and ongoing tenders, we also recorded the implemented and the possible future interventions. The analysis of the above mentioned sources were complemented with a fieldwork collecting the experiences and opinions of the prominent experts working in the districts. The almost 70 in-depth interviews with the specialists, white-collar workers, local decision-makers, mayors, representatives and staff members of organisations involved in rural development, and local entrepreneurs, were followed by focus-group and workshop talks, and thus the research could rely on current opinions and up-to-date information.

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF HUNGARIAN RURAL AREAS

Our own researches confirmed that the rural areas has considerably transformed during the past decades in Hungary. The general restructuring processes characterising the European rural areas can also be observed here, like the weakening of the production function of the rural areas, the diminishing contribution of agricultural sector to the rural economy, the increase of the weight of the tertiary sectors, and the “division” of the agricultural sector itself on one hand for large farms with good productivity, with high level concentration of the land and intensifying specialisation and on the other hand for small family farms becoming more and more versatile. The traditional rural communities also disintegrate and transform in the Hungarian rural areas, the values change, though this process started much earlier, in the socialist period. During the past decades, we can definitely experience the signs of the appreciation of landscape preservation, of the environment, and of the local culture. It seems, however, that those new phenomena that accompany the transformation are much less present in Hungary than in the more developed countries of Europe. The signs of counter-urbanisation were observed only on some rural settlements which are in special situation, and typical rural gentrification processes are not really apparent in the Hungarian rural areas. The growing significance of recreation and tourism is evident, but we found only few regions and settlements that could definitely profit from this process. We could find some farms almost in all regions which kept in mind not only the economic competitiveness but – in line of the responsible thinking of “post-productivist” philosophy - the preservation of the environmental, cultural and community resources and values. However, this might be regarded rather exceptional and not a behaviour characterising the Hungarian rural economy in general.

The rural issues of the studied areas became even more complex and problematic during the past twenty years. Unfavourable economic and social processes became predominant in a most of the settlements situated in different regions, and thus permanent conflicts developed. One of the main causes of this problem is the collapse of the agriculture and the rural industry (meaning by this the co-

operative sidelines and the rural sites of the socialist large undertakings) after the political changeover and transition to a market economy. The general crisis in agriculture has doubtlessly played a determining role in the disturbances following the change of regime and it is still prevalent since it affected all rural areas deepening their economic and social problems. The fact that the rural industry, which was technologically underdeveloped anyway, became unviable and ceased to exist, substantially aggravated this declining process. The urban recession and the crisis also became a rural conflict factor in some ways, since the narrowing of the urban workplaces resulted in the rural unemployment. The common consequence of the above-mentioned factors was the more and more social pressures on the studied regions. Severe labour market imbalance evolved, including the lack of workplaces and incomes, underemployment, inactivity and unemployment, the outmigration of people with higher educational qualifications.

Many communities received financial support – mainly from EU funds - to attain their objectives; still it seems that the huge amount of money did not initiate a general development, the economy of the studied rural areas as a whole could not be set on a development path. The development funds mostly remedied the infrastructural deficiencies, and improved the built environment of the settlements (which was, of course, necessary and beneficial), but the stabilisation failed on most of the settlements. At some places, the earlier planned investments did not prove to be well prepared and disproportionately consumed the shrinking financial resources of the settlements. Thus, the situation of certain village municipalities gradually deteriorated with the consequence of becoming indebted. Settlements with no considerable own revenues got into a critical situation. It became evident that in spite of the initial hopes, the rural municipalities in Hungary could not develop with such intensity as in Western Europe.

According to the majority of the interviewed experts, the handicap of the Hungarian rural areas in general can be regarded serious even in Central European terms. Nevertheless, the future of the rural areas – owing to the diverse natural-environmental and cultural heritage – offers much more opportunities than it was thought earlier. Besides the negative phenomena, nevertheless, there are also forward-looking processes. For example, the chances for self-organising were exploited by many settlement groups. In the fragmented self-governmental system, the municipalities of the tiny villages understood the need for cooperation, though primarily with a view to common interest reinforcement.

DIFFERENTIATION, REGION TYPES

The local actors mostly agreed with the final results of the classification of districts. Typically, they argued against the term of “agricultural dependence” as a distinctive characteristic in relation to the classification into the region types. In their opinion the agricultural holdings and farms play little role in employment, and they are not determining actors of the local economy either. The observation is indeed justified, but we intend to mean a kind of “relative” agricultural dependence in our category. In fact, we can hardly find today districts which depend on agriculture in economic terms. Nevertheless, in the “agriculture dependent” type regions agriculture still plays a crucial role in the local identity and in forming the landscape.

During the fieldwork, our most important experience was that the differentiation of Hungarian rural areas on district level is not as strong as we presumed on the basis of the statistical data processing or as it was indicated by scientific evidences in Western Europe. The characteristics of the selected districts first seemed to be different, since both their geographic characteristics and locations were all different. The regional actors themselves, however, saw their own situation very similarly. Almost all areas regarded the good qualities of the natural environment and the favourable geographic location as one of their most important strengths. Also, on many places the rich historical and cultural heritage, the favourable agricultural conditions and the local civil activity were regarded as important resources. In contrast, almost all districts listed the weaknesses of the poor condition of the road network, the low stage of manufacture agricultural products, the lack of workplaces and high unemployment rate, the lack of capital, the fragmentation of development funds, and the unfavourable demographic processes. From among the rural development potentials, all districts stressed the appreciation and long-term role of the alternative agriculture, the forms of organic farming, the social

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co-operatives and the special local products and local value chains. As the topmost threats everywhere were mentioned the continuation of unfavourable demographic processes, outmigration, aging, decrease in the number of inhabitants, and the strengthening of segregation and social exclusion.

The interviews, document analyses, regional SWOT analyses and other experiences of the field surveys all confirmed that the majority of the problems in the Hungarian rural areas are not region-specific. The problems and the nationwide processes behind them, the historical factors and the effects of these all are substantially similar for most of the districts (even though they are located far remote from each other). Economic backwardness, social segregation and peripheralisation appeared in almost every district. Falling behind could be avoided mainly in the suburban zones which lay closer to the poles, and in certain isolated micro-regions where the initiatives relying on the local factors got access to considerable external sources, too. The different grants, in that sense, played a role both in the polarisation and in the closing-up processes.

The case studies also called attention to the fact that the differences within the districts – between settlement groups or settlements – sometimes are more remarkable than between the districts. The problems generally experienced in the rural regions appear even in the “most developed” regions, but maybe less intensively or only concentrated in some micro-regions. It happens very often that the relatively high development level of the district centre “improves” the average data, while the farther lying settlements suffer from serious problems. Our experiences suggest that the centres of the rural areas, namely the small and medium-sized towns, are not able to fulfil their territorial organising role.

The territorial differentiation, beside the geographic determinations, was defined mainly by the differing social needs of certain localities, the adaptability of the communities, the reactions to challenges, and the absorption capacity of the settlements. Certain settlements (or smaller settlement groups) could become sustainable and relatively successful, while other settlements – even within the same district – are lagging behind both in economic and social sense. On those few places where the rural values became appreciated, the local communities gradually strengthened, the subsistence agriculture or production for the local market became widespread and the eco-conscious entrepreneurial forms became popular. The negative phenomena mostly accumulated in the zones with no considerable towns. In these, in European terms extremely “powerless rural areas”, we faced the diminishment of competitiveness, the ever greater deterioration of the demographic indicators, the problems of marginalisation and segregation, and settlement environmental conflicts related to peripheralisation.

DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES IN THE STUDIED DISTRICTS

A kind of duality can be observed in the development routine of the rural settlements in Hungary, which often appears within the same region. The rural micro-regions/settlements with more favourable geographical location and better accessibility are definitely rely on external resources, and see the guarantee for development especially in “invitation” of industrial investors and in applying “investment-friendly” local policy. On some settlements that are in special situation, this development strategy brought doubtless successes. According to the experiences, the primary criteria for these successes required a few charismatic leaders who made most progress not only in attracting the enterprises, but also in building local communities, and promoting and operating external co-operations. On the small settlements lying farther – or isolated – from the main roads, and in contiguous – in some cases cross-border – micro-regions this kind of development is impossible. On these settlements, communities try to follow other development philosophy. The development model that relies on external sources mostly implemented by foreign actors is regarded hazardous and temporary. Unfortunately, however, at the moment, the development policy “relying on internal resources” has only a weak record of results. Something began to move on in a few settlements but it is far from sufficient for the recovery from their hopeless situation. A good example for the failure is the rural tourism which has enabled the anticipated results only to a limited degree.

In the studied regions we found only very few example of “mixed” development practice which built both on internal and external resources, and found the balance of the various resources. Regions with excellent natural conditions (good quality land, environmental values, favourable

climate conditions, in some cases geothermal energy, etc.) were not able to utilise their advantages upon its merits. Although the development of certain elements of the technical infrastructure (especially in the fields of telecommunications, gas supplies, wastewater or waste management) improved the quality of life, it could not become a real development factor. While the condition of the elements of the transport network with a European or national significance improved, it explicitly deteriorated in respect of the lower network elements. It is a disadvantage especially for the rural areas lying farther from the main roads.

Substantial production traditions, special expertise typical for certain regions are hardly ever used, and the unique ethnographical, cultural and historical traditions – although strengthen the local identity consciousness – have only a limited impact on development. The organisation of the civil sphere – which appeared in some areas – could not be converted into social capital either. It seems that the biggest problem at present – and especially in the long run – in almost all rural regions is caused by the depletion of the capacities of the human sphere and the lack of “in situ” financial capital. In most places the first problem is “faced helplessly” since it cannot be solved on the regional or local level from own contribution. Since the local financial sources required for the developments are also missing, the development of the districts is vigorously determined by their ability to involve external financial sources. The almost only practical method for this today is the use of EU funds, even for the financial subsidisation of external investments or capacity building. Only very few of our rural settlements are successful in it. Our research has shown that the project-based approach and the bureaucratic procedures often set back the local creativity and innovation. No wonder that there is no substantive difference between the local concepts, the proposed developments are very similar, and that the ad hoc development solutions are adjusted to the actual tenders.

During the fieldwork, we found only very few examples of real cooperation between the settlements. It seems that the dissension of the town and its surroundings remains one of the most serious contradictions in the development practice. The “urban” and “rural” concepts and developments often “progress side by side”. This phenomenon was further reinforced by the duality of “regional development” and “rural development”. The urban-rural dependence, and at the same time urban-rural conflicts, is real contradiction of the development of the rural areas since the rural city centres themselves would require considerable resources so as to perform the region organising task.

CONCLUSIONS

When carefully looking at the transformation and differentiation of the rural areas, it can be seen that there are numerous intermediate categories between the different extremes of development, sustainability and lagging behind. Moreover, rural life may have numerous aspects and interpretations. It is a matter of opinion, but the rural area – howsoever we interpret it – became a very diverse, incessantly changing, complex spatial category in Hungary. According to our results, there are many similarities in the situation and development tendencies of the Hungarian rural areas. Nevertheless, looking at the details on the level of micro-regions or settlements groups we may find such differences which resulted in specific local resource combinations, such as the quality differences in the peripheral situation.

Our research also confirmed that the district level, LAU 1 spatial category level, is not the most suitable framework for the description of the differentiation of the rural areas. The current administrative division cannot form as a basis for the rural development either. In fact, the Hungarian rural areas are much more characterised with a kind of fragmentation and a mosaic-type division than a differentiation covering administrative spatial units. The spatial categories for the districts created on the basis of statistical data, therefore, can provide only a comprehensive framework for the illustration of the differentiation. This fact highlights the importance of the differentiation between the settlement categories and of their roles fulfilled within the settlement network. This must be regarded in the development policy, since – as we observed – the strategic objectives and developments setting territorial cohesion into the foreground also intensively contribute – in a paradox way – to the widening territorial disparities and to the formation of a mosaic-like look. The contradictions within the aid schemes and the effects of the differences in the available internal resources induced a very

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complex process that further strengthened the diversity of rural areas from environmental, economic and social aspects, too. The other projects conducted within the framework of our rural research programme also confirmed that the subventions strengthened the territorial cohesion at a much smaller degree than expected – indeed, in certain cases had the opposite impact.

Based on our fieldwork, we think that it is not the time for a complex rural development activity differentiated on a regional basis due to the social and economic macro problems in Hungary, the missing parts focusing on rural problems within the sectoral strategies, and the planning capacity and development behaviour of the local actors. The development of the Hungarian rural areas could be accelerated if not only the tenders in the field of rural development provided assistance in solving the typical rural problems but all of the EU financed programmes should take into account the peculiarities of the rural areas. Within the framework of the rural development programme, the best opportunities for the differentiation are provided by the thematic sub-programmes in which the regions and settlements where the given supports are available can be obviously determined. Since some of the rural development objectives in Hungary cannot be supported from EU funds – or just certain elements can be supported – therefore, a national financing is necessary by all means which could complement the objectives listed in the Community programmes.

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