

Takács, György Katalin; Szabó Ábrahám, Izolda; Bakos, Izabella; Takács, István

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ANSWERS OF A RUMANIAN VILLAGE TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES

TAKÁCS GYÖRGY KATALIN¹, SZABÓ (ÁBRAHÁM) IZOLDA²,
BAKOS IZABELLA³, TAKÁCS ISTVÁN⁴

Abstract

Economic and social changes that took place in Eastern Europe in the 1990's, created a particularly difficult situation for the rural population, especially for those who pursue agricultural production. Those developmental differences that previously characterized the regions, settlements are not moderated significantly after the EU accession of Romania either. However, after the accession numerous positive changes have happened, that help the livability of rural areas. The developed land structure, the production structure of agriculture does not serve the economy effectively, it cannot or it can produce real commodities at a limited extent. An economic survey had been conducted at Mezőmadaras in 2002 and with the partial repetition of the development proposal based on the survey in the summer of 2012 the research looking for answers to the questions, to what extent and in which direction the changed the economy of the village examined, what elements of the development concept achieved. The article shows that how the development, creation of the settlement's infrastructure background (road network), the agricultural, sales information, contribute to some farmers' development to commodity producer, and point out that the cooperation is not typical, the tender activity is very low, despite that the rate of livestock farmers is high.

Keywords: rural development, interview,

INTRODUCTION

The determined direction of development of the European Union for the future is the rural development, the reduction of rural areas lag, the improvement of livability of sub regions between 2013-2020. The countryside can not be imagined without agriculture, the agriculture in rural areas - not only as an economic sector, but as the employer of the rural areas – have a great importance [4].

The rural development strategy consider to the rural tourism as an important component. [13, 6]. In our opinion, this can be a true break point if there will exist a solvent domestic demand beside the foreign tourists, however the present and expected economic situation will give less possibility. Other authors express their doubt, pointing out that the rural tourism, without the existence of productive economy, is not able to produce the number of jobs and income itself, which can supply all the people of a community. Tyran deduces with a Poland example that the services' level provided by rural tourism has become dominant in terms of sales after the accession [12]. All the activities, agricultural and non-agricultural, are important on those settlements that can be characterized by low level of employment, that provide workplace and income for the inhabitants. The primary processing based on agricultural production, the forming of marketing channels, the short-term rural tourism (2-3 days), teleworking, elderly care, leisure can be matched to the aims of rural development, but it requires capital, expertise and willingness. The sale of agricultural commodity is an opportunity for producers with appropriate farm size and organization, a number of requirements must be met for market access. [1, 7].

Fieldsend and Kerekes reported a successful English (Chelmsford and Braintree) example and a Romanian view (Bistrita Năsăud County) is added in their comparative study, noting that basically the agriculture is employing in Romania [3].

The education, communication and any other form of cooperation, individuals, NGOs, and governments, that strengthen civil society in rural areas, and promote national and international cooperation have necessary role in rural development. LEADER and LEADER + programs have a

¹ Dr. Hab. Takács-György Katalin, associate professor, Károly Róbert College, Hungary, tygk@karolyrobert.hu

² Szabó (Ábrahám) Izolda, Pro Ruris Society, managing director, Madaras, Romania, szaboizolda@freemail.hu

³ Bakos Izabella, MSc student, Károly Róbert College, Hungary, bakosizabella@citromail.hu

⁴ Dr. Hab. Takács István, associate professor, Károly Róbert College, Hungary, itakacs@karolyrobert.hu

decisive role in strengthening community life. Immediately after the Millennium the civil society organizations at Romanian rural areas was not typical, and the community cohesion was low. [13]. At the end of the first decade of the Millennium the Romanian National Rural Development Program (NRDP) was mentioned as a positive example by Voicilas and his colleagues [15]. Hungarian authors ascribe similar role to institutionalized forms of cooperation, focus on cross-border forms Cross-Border Rural Network (CBRN) [2]. Kacprzak examined the economic aspects of collaboration, producer organizations' role, rural development in Poland (Wielkopolska province) between 2000 and 2010 [5]. He stated that the tender activity was significantly higher at Rural Development Program, on those settlements that were covered by the examined 122 producer organizations.

In order to be able to meet the expectations above, a viable, holdings must be formed that be able efficient agriculture production in a small settlements.

The purpose of this study, to show those economic and social changes that have taken place in a nearly ten-year period (2002-2012) by means of the example of a small town in Transylvania, which includes the period before the EU accession of Romania as well. The knowledge of changes requires, being able to answer the question of what kind of response options can be a rural, isolated small settlement.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Before the EU accession of Romania there was a questionnaire carried out in a small Transylvanian village, Mezőmadaras/Madaras. This village lies in the center of Transylvania, not too far from Marosvásárhely/Tirgu Mures (15 km). [14, 8]. The aim of the research was to examine the economic situation of the habitants and of the society at the same time. To find the way out for the farmers in a small village it is important to know more about the reality. It is important to find those specific tasks that could develop both the local community and the economy as well.

The results of representative survey conducted in 2002 were reported in several publications. [9, 10, 11]. The questionnaire was carried out during the spring of 2002 among inhabitants. There were three questioners. The questionnaires were filled out by them at the farms. The asked families belonged to a random sample, every 6th family was asked in that way. We got 120 appraisable questionnaires back. 443 persons belonged to the inquired families, 34.5% of the total number of habitants (approximately 1300 persons). From them 6% work on farms. In the questionnaires there were more than 30 closed and open, simple or combined questions on property size, its conditions (soil quality, features of the terrain etc.), production structure (plant production, animal husbandry), used inputs, equipments, yield level, post harvest activity, the aim of production and sales possibilities. In the evaluation of the results of the survey we calculated average values, dispersions, medians, minimum and maximum values as well. Over it some of the farmers were interview personally, too. Based on the given results a SWOT analyses of the village was drawn up from economic and agriculture points of view.

Ten years later, during the summer of 2012 twelve deep interviews were made in Madaras among some former interviewed farmers and we compared their economic situation ten years ago with the actual, and try to verify the realization of former recommendations. We made an interview with the leading persons living in village: the priest and his wife (Szabó Andor and Szabó (Ábrahám) Izolda). She is the motive person in the community, organizes several programs not only for the children but for example for farmers, too (visit farmers outside Romania).

We had no opportunity to repeat the whole representative questionnaire, but the deep interviews we carried out personally. The focus of the questions was the agricultural activities in the farms (cultivated area, production structure, animal husbandry, yields, investment, subsidies, etc.) Based on the answers we checked the realization of our former recommendations and finally a comparative SWOT analyses was made of the village to define new opportunities and strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The habitants' number is about 1300 from the able-bodied persons about 30 have a job. The others are farming their lands. Most of the young people do not continue their studies after the primary school. As they are undereducated they lose the possibility to get a job in the nearest bigger town, so they have to make earnings from agriculture. The village has very bad road conditions, especially in autumn and in winter. This causes that the milk produced in the village cannot be sold to the milk industry in the region, there is a small cheese farm, which buys a part of the milk but the producers suffer from sales difficulties.

Results and statements of the 2002 survey

The total agricultural area of the examined 120 holdings was 542 ha. The average farm size is very low compared with characteristic farm sizes of the most European countries. The average is 4.5 ha, the smallest one is only 0.12 ha and the largest one is not larger than 75 ha. The sectoral distribution of the holdings' area: 77.0% arable land, 18.9% pasture, 2.0% garden and 1.1% forest of the total area. The main problem with these farm sizes is that the incomes of agriculture give the only basis of the life of the people in Mezőmadaras. Less than 5% of the residents have non-agricultural activity as well, mainly outside the village, in the regional centre. The qualification of the adults is very poor. Less than a quarter of the people have any skills. This is the reason why any development project requires the training of the farmers.

The quality of the arable lands is not too good. More than 75 percent of the lands are less than 20 AK (golden crown). The quality of the arable land is typically medium 67% of it is 14-20 GC and 23% of it is 20-30 GC value. The pastures have lower quality, the ratio of 14-20 GC is 57.4% and below 14 GC the ratio is 23.6%. In terms of crop production is not favorable that the two-thirds of the arable land take place on a slope, while in case of pasture, the ratio is above 90%. These circumstances, along with the low level of inputs (fertilization etc.) determine the low yields and the insufficient nutrition quality of the fodders.

The main deals of farming are usually arable land and animal husbandry at the same time. Unfortunately their level is significantly low and contemporaneously the production structure does not meet the production aims. It has to be mentioned to understand this, that the assortment and the quality of the grown fodders do not meet the requirement of an adequate animal husbandry. For example the main kept animal species are ruminants but succulent fodders have not been produced on farms yet, pasturage is the characteristic. Because of these facts the yields of the animal husbandry is much lower than in else.

Some other facts characterizing the situation of farms were the following:

- 98 percent of farms produce maize, it is the main plant on the farms, and the average yield of it is 4.9 t/ha.
- 88 percent of farms grow wheat and the average yield of it is 3.2 t/ha.
- Because of the low outputs only a few of the farms are able to produce commodities. More than 90 percent of the outputs of plant production are used in the farms and the households. Tobacco, potato and spring wheat are the main commodity plants, but the rate of them is only 7.2 percent of the arable lands.
- A total of 64 farms (53.3%) say they use fertilizer. 42.5% of the farms use pesticides, typically to the protection of winter wheat and corn, and in lower rates as a herbicide.
- 83 percent of farms keep cow, and the average number is 1.8 cows/farm.
- Livestock production was on a self-produced food base and grazing (cattle and sheep) was important. All holdings kept sorts of hens, but most of them (98.3%) for the supply of their own.

- From the point of view of the animal husbandry, in which dairy is the main activity, the silage production is missed. It causes that the average yield of milking is only a little higher than 3000 litres/year/cow, which is very low.
- The quality of the milk (because of low fat rate, high number of bacteria, dust etc.) usually is insufficient, so the milk is generally inadequate to the purpose of food-industry.
- 87 percent of the milk is sold, mainly to cheese manufacture operated in the neighbouring village.
- There is no food processing activity in the village. Every commodity leaves it as a raw material.
- The mechanization of the farms is low. Only every 10th farm has a tractor and a few sorts of its tools. 32 percent of farms have horses for land cultivation. About 60 percent of farms are based on the own manual work and/or the hired machine work. This low level of equipment is one of the reasons of low plant production level.
- Co-operation among farmers is at a low level. The relatives or sometimes the neighbours hang together. The farmers have bad experiences with co-operation because of the kolkhoz type co-ops, but most of them are ready to try other forms of cooperation, mainly the producers' organization or the machinery and farm helping rings.

Proposal for the economic development of the village

Based on the results of the economic survey of the village, we proposed the development of the settlement's holdings along the following principles:

- the economic structure cannot transform considerably on the settlement, the economic development of a significant number dwarf holdings get happened with the (primarily the quality and quantity of nutrition and feed supply) increase of inputs, and creating group mechanization and sales organization;
- developing a pilot project is proposed to farms with larger land area, which, with the possibility of area concentration, result different specialization, which consequence the production can be continued in greater efficiency;
- taking into account the released labor, the already existing, hidden unemployment, the multifunctional agriculture principles within the economy, we propose the development of the activities integrated to agricultural activities in longer term (rural tourism, crafts, etc..)
- the quality of production, the processing stage (primarily the sale of milk to creamery that operating in the neighbour village) in the markets improve by the change of boundary conditions of the economic development.

SWOT-analysis of the village

We can state that the unemployment was very high in the village, the farm structure was very fragmented: The level of input use in agriculture was very low because of the lack of financial sources. Most of the farmers dealt with agriculture in order to make their own living and the commodity production was only the second reason. From the point of economy of the village that meant no tax-income, no new jobs. As there were no real alternatives for the able-bodied aged persons to get job either in the village or in the neighboring towns they needed to find new strategies. The SWOT-analyses could help in building new strategies for this rural community. (Table 1)

Analyzing the main resources of this small rural community it could be found that the low level of inputs and production once seemed to be strength and in other cases weakness as well. Ecological crop and milk production can be one opportunity for the farmers.

Experiences of the Survey 2012

Visible positive changes took place in Romania as an organic result of integration generating general development in 2012.

Local, measurable changes in the village, the village communities

- The electricity was installed the Szénáságy part of the village, both school has been completely renovated, the Protestant and Orthodox churches got new roof, the road was done from Bánd, the water was installed, although the lack of sewage none of a household were attached to the water system;
- Emigrants from the village remained dominant characters and the Reformed pastor couple, who create a living community with organizing programs continuously, with the emphasis of education and care for each other, the engines of the development;
- The 5-6% of the village houses have been renovated over the past ten years, more emigrated from Marosvásárhely, mostly retired, settled down in the village;
- Pro Ruris Society (formerly Foundation for Mezőmadaras) organizes events and programs (folk music, art, literature and history camps, competitions for children, commemorative meetings of art, historical persons, trainings etc.).
- Information Centre under construction (85% FEADRE subsidy, 15% national subsidy), a building (planning) of a pension has just begun;
- A retired teacher, a teacher couple and a support teacher living habitually except the priest couple.

Table 1 SWOT-matrix of the village from the point of view of agriculture, rural development in 2002

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relatively good agro-ecological environment • good facilities for extensive animal husbandry (ecological production) • manure production and use in the community, low level of artificial inputs • good environment (low level of contamination) • beautiful landscape • leading persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • too fragmented property structure, low average farm size • lack of capital, creditability • lack of machinery / old machinery • low rate of commodity production • low rate of employment, under-education • lack of infrastructure, public transport (surfaced street to Tirgu Mures) • lack of educated intellectuals (except the priest and his wife) • low willingness for cooperation among farmers
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase production of silo-corn, alfalfa – increase of yield in diary • diversification of production structure: poultry, pig, increase the rate of industrial plants • EU or/and national subsidies • to strengthen the village community's activities • to form Producers' Organizations / Machine Rings • growth of the market of the ecological products • join to special agro-turistical routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strict requirements of quality of commercial products • strengthen of multinational food chains / quantity demand • ageing – migration from the village • lack of the extension background • increase of diary sector in the neighboring settlements

Remark: bold what we recognize as same

Economic changes

- The personally contacted holdings - which had been productive ten years before - the change clearly mean the increase of size and assets, beside the individual shape and distribution channel as well, without primary product processing.
- The forage production had changed, the knowledge of ensiling (farmer training, farm visits) increased milk yield (4800-5000 litres/year/milked cows that means a 1000 l/year milk surplus and it sold to the neighbouring village creamery (Theresia Ltd);

- There is still no proper distribution channel for products except milk, which at the appropriate commodity constitute an obstacle for the development for both at the level of individuals and the village community, and the Romanian agricultural sector, in EU context;
- The diversified production structure is not typical and the alternative activities (eg rural tourism) did not appear;
- In each farms visited, the number of livestock increased (such as 35 to 132 or 2 to 14), new buildings and renovated barns with a semi-automated milking systems are typical.
- The surveyed holdings continuously developing and mechanizing. The improvement in machinery accomplishes by individual investments, do not consult with other farmers, the credit-free operation is typical. They have not resort either the investment or the restructuring available EU tender opportunities except the single area payment.

Community Tendering Activity

The tendering activity was examined in reference to the community, by the effectiveness, the aims and sources. The tenders were filled out by the pastor and execute the programs, her enthusiasm formed a vibrant cultural life in the village. Our experience that is successful.

Table 2 Aims of village community tendering activity, effectiveness

Year	Number of winning/submitted tenders	Main tender's goals (winning tenders)
2002	2/2	support for pupils commuting, school accessories (installing electricity, TV)
2003	4/8	art camp, support for pupils commuting, rural development training
2004	9/15	social care, historical camp (Rákóczi war of independence memory) art camp, farmers' club village visit,
2005	13/26	memorial camp (József Attila, informatic training, E-Hungarian point), art camp, social care
2006	21/36	support for pupils commuting, art camp, folk-dance camp, native camp, rural development training, social care
2007	13/23	Kodály Zoltán, Batthyány Lajos memories, folk art, car subsidy
2008	9/21	Karácsony Sándor, Kodály Zoltán, Ungár Mátyás memories, , art camp, personal computer
2009	5/19	Karácsony Sándor memory, art camp
2010	6/12	folk-dance camp, national anniversaries
2011	15/20	phisycs camp, art camp, literature camp, folk-dance camp

Source: Szabó (Ábrahám) Izolda, reverend

The funding sources, except the information center and the pension, are primarily a national foundations, Maros County Council, and foundations from abroad. Among the main goals, the knowledge spread and social functions are the most typical beside the art training. The number of submitted and winning tenders gradually increased, however, the financial, economic crisis, began in 2009, can be detected within the reduction of profitability and the sum awarded. (Table 2)

CONCLUSIONS

Break-out points of the farms are determined by their sizes, the variety of products, the flexibility of production, the market opportunities, the quantity and the quality of the human resources as well. Based on the survey these topics were analyzed in connection with Mezőmadaras and its farms. At first it had been mentioned that the farm structure gives a massive base to the local economy, which determines the feasibility of alternatives on a crucial way. The fact that a settlement for which project and by which amount competes from the opportunities, depends

basically on those, charismatic persons, who take care of all the difficulties and problems of competition for money, besides the information

The EU accession had a positive economic impact of the village, the daily livability improved in every respect. The structure of the economy has not changed, it was not expected, but in many holdings the size increases started, asset quality and production efficiency improved. The primary product processing, the sales channels, the lack of co-production still remains a problem. The farmers do not tender other forms of subsidy except the single area payment scheme (due to the negative experiences of the previous agricultural survival aid). In point of the village community as a whole, the obtaining activity of funding sources is better, although the effectiveness were variable.

However, the results that can be achieved by a settlement depends on many factors. It should be noted that, the development primarily depends on the EU grants existence and its effectiveness, at Community level. The fact that a settlement tenders, for what purpose, on which amount, depend on the charismatic person who take care of all application methods beside the information. In our opinion, the key to the development within a community collaboration is the individuals' attitudes and motivation.

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