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**ETHNIC STRUCTURE, ASSIMILATION AND IDENTITY
IN THE HISTORICAL VAS COUNTY**

Theses of the Ph.D. dissertation

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I. Introduction

Today's ethnic issues and the related global and local problems are in many ways in the centre of social interest. There are several approaches to the study of the territorial distribution and coexistence of the ethnic groups with a lengthy list of topics of interest: out of which the ethnic conflicts attract the widest public attention these days. Corresponding to the international migration trends, the possible ways to manage the confrontation between the coexisting ethnic groups with diverse cultural background are assimilation and integration; both are in the attention of professional sectors as well as the general public. Experience so far shows that the most efficient territorial level to settle such conflicts is the local area: the emerging questions need to be answered within the smallest territorial units, as close as possible to the individual or the social unit they live in (on micro or meso level). The ethnic geography contributes to the clarification of the often superficial aspect of such global issues requiring ethnic approach with spatial quantitative analysis and field research.

The western world focuses its attention nowadays on international migration, multiculturalism and the issues these phenomena bring about, however these are less adaptable in the multicultural region of East- Central Europe where Hungary and also its surrounding area (the Carpathian basin) is located. Nowadays this region is just like during the course of history impacted by diverse factors. On one hand it bears the marks of being a so called buffer zone: an enclave between nations and peripheral cultural regions. On the other hand it strives to leave behind the marks of being part of the socialist block in the second half of the 20th century and catch up with the western nations in respect of society and economy. There is no doubt that the unique characteristics of the East- Central European region like the ethnical diversity and the presence of numerous minority groups have a deep impact on its own development. The changing headcount and territorial disposition of the minorities as well as the parts of their identity, assimilation trends and their vision are all part of the topics of research.

As for the geographical frame of my dissertation I have chosen the historical Vas County located at the western edge of the Carpathian- basin. This concept stands for a social and administrative unit which ceased to exist in its original form for more than 90 years ago, but before it was operating for approximately 900 years. Its territory is divided among three countries (Austria, Hungary and Slovenia) and it accommodates four larger (Hungarian, German/Austrian, Slovenian and Croatian) and various smaller ethnic groups, which due to the rhapsodic running of the borderlines leaves

the countries with considerable minority communities. I would like to mention the need to conduct research within the gypsy community as well which have so far been scarce in this region. Vas County does not belong to the East- Central European conflict zones however several factors (the assimilation trends, multilingualism and separation by the borders and the large number of minorities) indicate that research would bring rewarding professional results.

The topic fits well with the series of ethnic research conducted in the contact zones of the Carpathian basin throughout the past decades. There has already been some research done concerning some parts of the Vas County and its ethnic groups, however the complex ethnic research was not concluded yet. The internal and external relations of the nationality groups, the geographic pattern of their territorial distribution and the corresponding historical and demographic processes undoubtedly make this area worthy of ethnical analysis.

II. Objectives

The research basically focuses on the multiple approaches of the ethnic issues through the examination of a chosen sample territory. Its three main objectives are the following:

- Explain in details the current and former processes that affect the ethnic structure: especially focusing on the demographic and migrational characteristics on a territory which was part of the very same state at the beginning of the 20th century but is now divided among three countries.
- Secondly I examine the appearance signs of assimilation of the minorities: including the self -definition of the groups (identity constructions, usage of languages), the relationship among the communities either in majority- minority relations or within the minority group itself (coexistence, separation within a settlement). The question is how we can detect and understand the assimilation of the minorities?
- The third main objective is looking to answer the following question: how the ethnic relations were affected by the changing of powers throughout the 20th century and what are the ruling ethno demographic trends? Is the ethnic development and vision of the minorities that found themselves on the territories of three countries unified or goes in a completely different direction?

III. Applied methods

Methods applied in this thesis mainly represent three different types. The first of them is the analytical method that represents general changes in nationalities, demography, history and religion along with proceeding statistical data, geographical and historical works. This is usually supplemented by ethnical or religious maps. With the help of this method the characteristics and changes of ethnic structure are comprehensively represented.

The above mentioned type of analysis, however, cannot cover the complexity of the ethnic structure; in order to get a more thorough examination, more complex mathematical-statistical methods are required. It is important to emphasize that these are supplementary methods (apart from the calculations concerning dual identity); I use them only to highlight the ethno-demographic trends of the examined area from various perspectives. I do believe that with the help of these methods the past and present ethnic structure of the historical Vas County can be interpreted within a more complex frame. These mathematical methods are the following: the plotting of ethnic diversity, the designation of the dimensional segregation of different nationalities and defining the number of the population with dual identity.

The ethnic diversity index allows the most adequate approach to the ethnic homogenisation of the examined area. In the international professional literature there are various types of methods and indexes from which I chose the index of Simpson method that is originally used in biology to measure the racial diversity of communities (see SIMPSON, E. H. 1949, GREENBERG, S. H. 1956, MAGURRAN, A. E. 2004). This method is not dealing with the numbers or ratio of different ethnic groups; it is rather a probability theory: it examines the probability of two random people of the same region sharing the same nationality. The value of the index varies between 0 and 1, 0 shows a completely homogeneous population, 1 refers to the extreme situation where no two members of the population shares the same nationality (BAJMÓCY P. 2009). However it is important to state that demographic processes are not formed by natural regularities, therefore I only took the technique of the index not the biological background. By using this technique it is possible to clarify the degree of ethnic heterogeneity, we are able to localise areas of mixed ethnicities, and this method can also be used to compare other territorial units.

Another, rather wide-spread method is applying the so called dissimilarity index that is one of the regional inequality measures, with

which it is possible to quantify the residential segregation of various social groups. Measuring it from an ethnic perspective we get information about the dimensional segregation of ethnicities living in the examined area, and indirectly it provides us with knowledge about the ethnic structure. In literature there are many segregation measures; in this dissertation I am using the dissimilarity index, as it seems to be the most justifiable decision (MASSEY, D. S.–DENTON, N. A. 1988). The dissimilarity index shows “the discrepancy from evenness. Its value indicates how much of the whole of ethnicity should move to have an even dispersion in the given area” (GERGELY J. 2009: 113), in other words “what percentage of one territorial unit should be rearranged between the units so that its spatial distribution be equal to the phenomena it is compared to” (NEMES NAGY J. 1984: 71). Its value is between 0 and 100, 0 signifies a case where the distribution of the examined groups is completely even, 100 in case there is a complete lack of mixing.

There are various ways to determine quantitatively the number and ratio of the population with dual identity that is another segment of ethnic structure. All of these could be drawn of the lack of clearly belonging to any of the ethnicities and the presence of this phenomenon in statistics. In other words, if a responder gives multiple answers to the questions concerning ethnic roots, that could be taken as a sign of dual (in some cases triple) ethnic identities. In order to measure this I used the examination of data sets of mother tongue and ethnicity (mother tongue-ethnicity ratio, see VARGA E. Á. 2002), and another calculation method – developed by myself – comparing the responders or majority with the number of ethnicity).

In order to be able to explore the geographical aspects of assimilation, field surveys are indispensable. While preparing my interviews I dealt with ethnicities as communities using and forming their own space, and when dealing with questions about them I contacted people familiar with their life and situation. I studied the recent characteristics of assimilation processes with the help of a rather neglected (at least in social geography) field survey, which is cemetery survey.

Analysing all the captions in a cemetery (epitaphs, first and last names, etc.) is something new in the toolkit of ethnic geography. In abroad, especially in North America, it is the genealogical aspect of the topic that is rather within view, at the same time authors emphasise the connection between funeral memories and ethnicity. In accordance with the point of view of this region, studies dealing with this topic might provide us with important pieces of information about the migration from Europe and the process of population growth of the American continent (BROCE, G. 1996).

CLARK, L. (1987) regards gravestones as representational forms of the differences between ethnicity, religion and lifestyle (occupation, qualification). Other examinations are dealing with a whole range of different ethnic groups having settled in the New World. Most of these studies state that taking into account the diversity (or homogeneity) of the scripts on tombs can refer to the ethnically diverse or homogeneous nature of the given population (MEYER, R. E. 1993).

In Europe it is the Jewish population (in diaspora situation, already assimilated or immigrated) whose left-behind graveyards have been surveyed. Cemetery registers can still be found within the frames of scripts and noted topographic data. One exception is the survey of GOG, S. (2008) dealing with the Lipovans living in a Dobrogea. The author describes the ethnic cemetery of the region as the mirroring “micro-world” of the ethnic, religious and cultural differences.

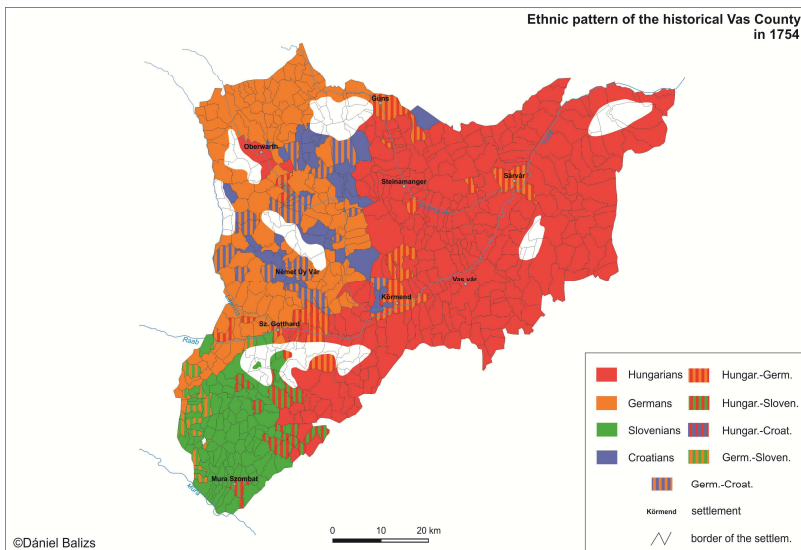
As for me, I do believe that with this method that has been neglected so far, we can get to know a lot about the changes in the ethnic structure of the given settlement, the local characteristics and intensity of the assimilation process. It is true especially if we note down not only the names but also the dates of the tombs. Indeed, this method will never be able to substitute the overall ethnic picture we get from official data, but it might document the assimilation process indirectly.

In the first part of the 20th century, MILLEKER R. (1935), and also KEMÉNYFI R. (2002) along with Gömör and Kishont, and TÁTRAI P. (2010) in the recent past had their surveys in the historical Sathmar County, and the common point of their studies was to create the “ethnic cadastre map” for the selected sample settlements. In order to achieve this, all of them used knowledge of people highly acquainted with the ethnic and religious relations of the settlements. In the historic Vas County any such survey – ie. dealing with the internal ethnic dimensional structure of the given settlements, the maps showing incidental segregation – would not give us evaluable results due to the strong ethnic identity consciousness, the complicated use of language and the advanced nature of the assimilation process (the blurring boundaries between the majority and minority). The field trips, data collections and the handling of literature before the survey made me sure that in order to get the most thorough picture of the ethnic structure of the examined settlements, I should search for the population with dual identity and interview inhabitants, rather than using the cadastre maps. One exception is Felsőőr, where – even until the recent past – the German and Hungarian population’s situation was very definable within the settlement.

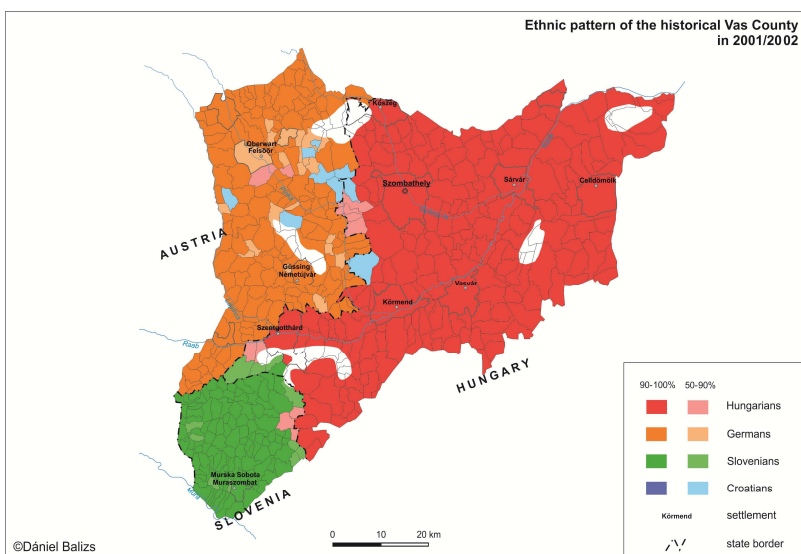
IV. Summary of the research results

There are three main parts in this dissertation. The first part is the ethnic geographical data and the short introduction of works linked to it, along with the general social characteristics of the historical Vas County in the macro-regional territory (Carpathian basin, Central Europe). In the second unit comes the ethno-demographic centred examination of the area. The survey dealt with the formation of ethnic relations of meso level, revealing the ethnic trends and assimilation processes of the historical Vas County region. In the third, large unit I reported on the studies I had made in the region in order to represent the local relations and reveal the attitude and experience of the local population.

- In course of the research I managed to reconstruct the ethno-demographic antecedents of the ethnic structure of the historical Vas County, and I sketched the possible future of the region. We might state that this county has preserved its original ethnic character throughout centuries; after the fixation of language borders the ethnic structure has barely changed, though the ratio of different ethnicities has significantly changed.
- The present territorial structure is the result of the three constituent nations' dominancy in their own home, whereas the ethnicities living on the other side of the border has decreased continuously causing the shrinkage and moving of mixed-ethnicity territories.
- In accordance with the above mentioned facts, the territorial differences of ethnic processes (homogenisation of linguistic "core" territories, diversification of contact zones) within the three constituent nations (Hungarians, Austrians, Slovenians) refer to the same kind of ethnic structure forming, ie. homogenisation.
- All those facts mentioned in the third point are affected by the post-1989 "ethnic revival" in case of the ethnics of Hungary (or rather the Carpathian basin along with Central and East Europe). This revival, after the millennium, has rather been the symbolic strengthening of the ethnicity's significance. There are two statements to make in case of the examined territory: this phenomenon mostly affects the Hungarian part of the area (even though some of the inducing factors are perceived even in Slovenia), on the other hand it is a diversified phenomenon in Hungary: in case of Germans it completely prevails, in Croatia it approaches the state's average, whereas in case of Slovenians it prevails only to a limited extent.

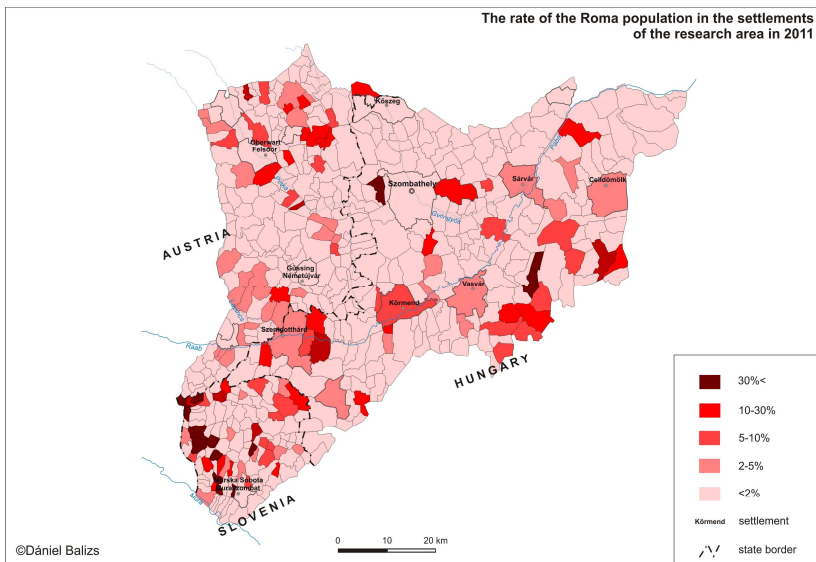


Map 1: Ethnic pattern of the historical Vas County in 1754



Map 2: Ethnic pattern of the research area in 2001/2002

- The gypsies as a dynamically increasing social group gets a rather important role, their estimated population is now around 13.000 people. In case of the historical Vas County we cannot talk about coherent gypsy territory (as opposed to the eastern part of the Carpathian basin), their growth into a significant minority (especially in the Mura region) and their formation into a local majority is a remarkable social process.
- The exact number and ratio of the population with dual identity has been made, and according to the survey on the Hungarian side of the border it exceeds 6.000 people. Their territorial distribution mainly overlap with the spatial distribution of the minorities, their ratio exceeds 25% at most settlements within the examined region.

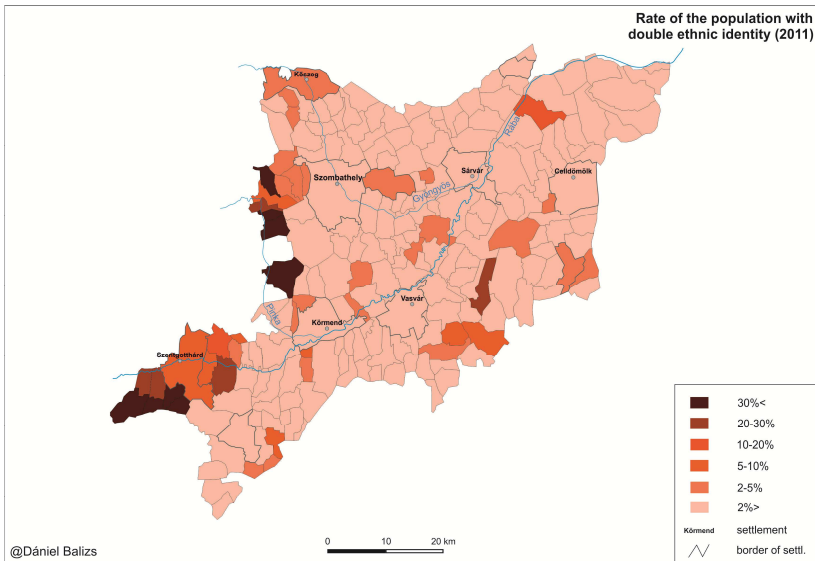


Map 3: Rate of the Roma population in the settlements of the research area in 2011

- A special result is the information I got about the population with immigrant-background in southern Burgenland. The increasing ratio of the immigrants within the Hungarian settlement in Burgenland (currently about 35-40%) does not only improve the vitality of the

minority, but generates rather enduring conflicts between the autochthonous and allochthon groups.

- In case of the minorities (of Hungary), due to the long coming linguistic assimilation and the spread of the symbolic ethnic self-identification, the bonding towards the mother-tongue is now replaced by a cultural, group-consciousness centred togetherness-feeling. In their case the mother tongue-ethnicity ratio has significantly moved in the direction of ethnicity since 1990 (ANH>100). As a parallel process, the ethnic areas have become bilingual in the second half of the 20th century, then majorly dominant bilingual later.



Map 4: Rate of the population with double ethnic identity in the settlements of the Hungarian part of the research area in 2011

- Due to the rather strong linguistic assimilation in some of the ethnic settlements the mentioned ethnicity's presence can be perceived indirectly, therefore we can only clarify ethnic relation by noting down these "hidden (hard to explore)" traces. One way to do this was the cemetery survey, that confirmed that funeral memories can grant important pieces of information about the process and dynamics of assimilation in the examined settlement's community.

- In the beginning of the study, one of the aims was to examine the internal ethnic structure along with the ethnic segregation, however, during the field trips and surveys these aims needed to be changed. In was soon revealed that in the case of the historical Vas County there is no such thing as ethnic segregation, which can be explained by the ethnic identity character of the region's community. It was proved that the increase of ethnic diversity of settlements with ethnic population occurs due to the assimilation of the minority rather than the settling of another (major) ethnicity; this clearly prevents segregation.



Map 5: Internal ethnic pattern of Felsőőr (Oberwart) in the early 21st century
 (1 – Calvinistic church, 2 – Catholic church, 3 – Lutheran church, 4 – Calvinistic cemetery, 5 – Catholic cemetery, 6 – Lutheran cemetery, 7 – Jewish cemetery, 8 – town hall, 9 – district council, 10 – bilingual secondary school, 11 – elementary school, 12 – police station, 13 – hospital, 14 – Roma settlement before 1938, 15 – Roma settlement between 1945-1972, 16 – Roma settlement since 1972)

- The examination of inner ethnic structure was justifiable only in case of Felsőőr, in Burgenland that can be characterised by traditional ethnic segregation. The gist of the examination was to see the territorial concentration of ethnicities that can still be seen, and also to

explore the traces of local multi-ethnicity. It can be stated that in Felsőőr, the relative concentration of different ethnic groups is traced. It should be mentioned that these differences have historical, religious roots, but have lost their importance over the past few decades.

- The diverse ethnic nature of Felsőőr can be interpreted several ways. The recent type of multi-ethnic nature (nurtured by Carpathian and Balkan immigrants' settling or moving) forms the city more obviously than the (in many sense hidden) presence of the linguistically assimilated autochthonous ethnicities (Hungarians, Gypsies). The immigration escalates some of the conflicts, like the conflict between the aboriginal and immigrant Hungarian community. This conflict can be attributed to the different characteristics of the two groups' identity.

On the basis of the results, the main ethnic processes of the historical Vas County are clearly visible, and also we can see how these processes match or differ from the macro-regional trends. The most important question when setting the aims was the differentiation in ethnic relations of the examine area in the different states:

- From the peace treaty closing the First World War up to the 1990s, the relation between the Austrian (southern Burgenland), the Hungarian (Vas County) and the Slovenian (Mura region) counties showed some kind of similarity, same tendencies were going on side by side on the different sides of the border. The main ethnic process was homogenisation with the gradual decrease of minority—this tendency was the same in each country, though due to local factors and happenings their pace differed. The striking manifestation of linguistic assimilation is an inevitable factor of the ethnic changes of our days.
- The important differences could be perceived in the past two decades. The three areas are influenced by processes differing in nature and volume (demography-, migration-, assimilation- and social politics related); and these processes emphasise the differences between the parts of countries drawing a differing ethnic improvement path. The *Austrian* part has become a favourite in the eyes of immigrants from the Carpathians and the Balkan due to the ongoing linguistic assimilation. Because of this process some escalating problems have overshadowed the social discourse about autochthonous ethnicities. The minority politics of Austria that interprets the question of immigration in a peculiar way should deal with this question a bit more flexible. On the Hungarian side the communication towards

minorities should be reconsidered due to symbolic ethnicity and strong ethnic attachment (as part of the ethnic revival), along with the micro-regional expansion of the gypsies. We should not forget about the possible revision of the minority's self-government system (that is unique in a large area scale) and the revision of the lately created ethnic election system. In the Slovenian part of the region the Hungarian minority (enjoying extensive rights) has reached critical point of shrinkage, and the expansion of the gypsy community on the western part of the region has been awaiting official acknowledgement in vain. This generates tension that should be dissolved. We can state that the areas fragmented by borders are moving away from each other from an ethnic point of view, and the differences between the three territories are getting more and more characteristic.

V. Possibilities of using results

Results of this study can be used in various ways.

- Results are relevant in a professional sense, as they could be used in similar studies dealing with either the same topic or examined region. The use of cemetery survey in ethnic geography is especially notable and might be a more common form of surveying in the future. Other future studies might be inspired by the defining of the population with dual identity and the mapping of assimilation processes.
- Cultivating and managing the identity and culture of the ethnicities living in the historical Vas County—and in accordance with that—maintaining the cultural and ethnic diversity for long could not have been imagined without defining the different groups and their opinions along with their attitude. This thesis might also be helpful for answering the practical questions of bilingual education (organising education, determining the direction of the educational development by a possible future vision), and also for expanding ethnic institutions (territorial, cultural and political advocacy).
- Results of this study guide attention not only to the increasing presence of the gypsies in the Western-Pannonian region (so far neglected from a scientific point of view), and of the Balkan immigrants in the Carpathian basin; but also to the questions and problems these migration processes might cause to arise (special educational and integrational programs, conflict management, etc.)

VI. Publications in the topic of the dissertation

- BALIZS D.–BAJMÓCY P. (2013a): *Kvantitatív etnikai földrajzi vizsgálatok a történeti Vas megye példáján*. In: *Területi Statisztika* 53. 5. pp. 457-474.
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- BALIZS D. (2013c): *Identitás és nyelvhasználat a történeti Vas megyében*. In: GALLIK, J. ET AL. (szerk.): *Science for education – Education for science (Tudomány az oktatásért – Oktatás a tudományért)*. Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre Fakulta Stredoeurópskych Štúdií, Nitra pp. 27-38.
- BALIZS D. (2014b): *Asszimiláció és identitás a történeti Vas megyében*. In: *Köztes-Európa* 6. 1. pp. 151-162.
- BALIZS D. (2014c): *Identitásvizsgálatok a történelmi Vas megye egyes etnikumú településein*. In: SANSUMNÉ MOLNÁR J. ET AL. (szerk.): *VII. Magyar Földrajzi Konferencia Kiadványa*. Miskolci Egyetem Műszaki Földtudományi Kar Társadalomföldrajz Tanszék, Miskolc pp. 50-60.
- BALIZS D. (2014d): *Felsőőr átalakuló etnikai és vallási térszerkezete*. In: *Földrajzi Közlemények* 138. 4. pp. 306-321.

VII. Other publications

Publications focusing on the same fields of research

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- BALIZS D. (2011d): *A Román-Bánát etnikai homogenizációja a 20. században*. – Geográfus Doktoranduszok XI. Országos Konferenciája, SZTE Gazdaság- és Társadalomföldrajz Tanszék, Szeged – CD-melléklet pp. 1-23.
- BALIZS D. (2012a): *Etnikai földrajzi módszerek és alkalmazási lehetőségeik a történeti Csanád példáján*. In: PÁL V. (szerk.): *A társadalomföldrajz lokális és globális kérdései*. SZTE TTIK Gazdaság- és Társadalomföldrajz Tanszék, Szeged pp. 242-255.
- BALIZS D.–BAJMÓCY P. (2012b): *A magyarországi és erdélyi városok etnikai homogenizációjának néhány aspektusa a 20. században*. In: *Közép-Európai Közlemények* 5. 3-4. pp. 127-136.

BAJMÓCY P.–BALIZS D. (2012c): *A magyarországi és erdélyi városok etnikai homogenizációja*. In: NYÁRI D. (szerk.): *Kockázat – konfliktus – kihívás. A VI. Magyar Földrajzi Konferencia Tanulmányai*. SZTE Természeti Földrajzi és Geoinformatikai Tanszék, Szeged pp. 22-32.

Other publications

BAJMÓCY P.–HOSSZÚ SZ.–DUDÁS R.–BALIZS D. (2011a): *A szuburbanizáció és a dezurbanizáció motivációi Magyarországon*. In: KOCSIS ZS. (szerk.): *Az 1971. évi OTK és hatása a hazai településrendszerre*. Savaria University Press, Szombathely pp. 181-194.

BALIZS D. (2011b): *A hazai települések népesedési típusai*. In: KOCSIS ZS. (szerk.): *Az 1971. évi OTK és hatása a hazai településrendszerre*. Savaria University Press, Szombathely pp. 151-165.

BAJMÓCY P.–HOSSZÚ SZ.–DUDÁS R.–BALIZS D. (2011c): *New migration trends and their motivation in Hungary*. In: *Geographica Timisiensis* 20. 2. pp. 29-40.

BAJMÓCY P.–BALIZS D. (2014a): *Magyarország településhálózati régiói a 20. század elején*. In: *Településföldrajzi Tanulmányok* 3. 1. pp. 18-35.

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MICHALKÓ G.–KISS K.–BALIZS D.–SZEBERÉNYI J.–VICZIÁN I.–BOTTLIK ZS. (2015): *A „Balkan Wellbeing” koncepció turizmusföldrajzi hátterének vizsgálata*. In: *Mediterrán és Balkán Fórum* 9. 1. pp. 2-12.

MICHALKÓ G.–KULCSÁR N.–SZABÓ O.–BALIZS D.–T. NAGY J. (2015): *The Characteristics of the Leisure Activities Domestic VFR Tourists Engage in, in the Rural and Urban Areas of Hungary*. In: *International Leisure Review* 4. 1. pp. 125-156.