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The processes of differentiation of small villages
in Hungary

PhD. Thesis

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1. Choice of topic, scientific foundation

It's not a new phenomenon – and in the case of several villages has been a very easily recognizable process since the beginning of 20th century – that the number and rate of settlements under 500 inhabitants is rising in the settlement system of Hungary. The decades after 1970s are the most significant ones.

Small villages can be found especially in those regions where the number of other low populated villages is significant. This fact highlights the possible extension areas and on the other hand it proves that the increase of these villages has been caused by the decrease of population of villages between 500 and 1000 inhabitants. The small villages form complex areas altogether 8 per cent of total territory of Hungary, especially Western and Southern Transdanubia and in the Northern Hungarian counties (*Figure 1*). Every third settlement has less than 500 inhabitants, so it's a very important and inevitable task to analyze the social and economic features of them.

At the same time, this group of settlements has never been homogeneous. The rate of difference has changed a lot of during its short history and the importance and order of the factors that caused changes, too. In the 1950s and 1960s the basis of difference was the economic function, however in the 1970s and 1980s it depending on the measurement of settlements and other joint factors like fundamental provision and advanced stage (Beluszky 2006). After

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the political regime change lot of areas of society and economy has changed, forming consequently the spatial and settlement structures. It means that geographical location has become more important than measurement of settlements (Tolnai – Dövényi 1995, Enyedi 1996, Juhász 1997, Nemes Nagy 1997, Bajmócy – Balogh 2002, Beluszky 1999, 2006). The inducing factors of the increasing inequalities among settlements were the following: general recession of economy, increasing unemployment and inactive households, changes in job market and the appearance of new forms of poverty (Kovách 2002, Andorka 2003). Due to the new context the small villages are less prosperous and there are lot of different route of development among them. In our research we have focused on the analysis and presentation of these inequalities and differences. The number of small villages has been increasing for decades continually and it caused an increase in the number of geographical researches in this field, too. Part of the studies called attention to the negative consequences of the former state development policy (Enyedi 1985, Mohos 1996). Several researches were conducted about unfavourable demographic processes (Csapó 1991, Vuics 1993). And a lot of studies were carried out about the types of settlements (Beluszky 1977, Beluszky – Sikos T. 1982, Tóth 2000, Bajmócy – Balogh 2002, G. Fekete 2006). The studies also highlighted the local social problems, the bad features of social, institutional and traffic systems (Enyedi 1980, 1985, Kőszegfalvi 1985, Erdősi 1985, Bank -

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Rudl – Szentmarjay 2004). The political regime change had a lot of effects on the villages due to the economic changes like unemployment, relationship of settlements and the decreasing importance of agriculture (Dövényi – Tolnai 1991, 1995, Nemes Nagy 1993, Csatári 1991, Kovács 1999). There has been a lot of publications about the functions of local authorities and the tourism in small villages (Somogyi 1995, László 1996, Hajdú 1997, Bajmócy – Balogh 2002).

At the same time most of the studies deals with small villages as homogeneous group but only some of them are about the different features and dimensions like hierarchy of settlements, geographical location and complex regions of small villages.

2. Research methods and aims of study

The study gives an overall view on the most important reasons, factors, structural units of small settlement growing processes. Besides it gives a lot of information about the inequalities and it tries to separate the main types of them. The aims of study are the following:

- The analysis of time and spatial factors of the increasing number of small villages.

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- Summary of the most important political, administrative and economic events connected to small villages between 1950 and 1990.
- Survey of relationship structures of small villages and basic social and economic features of them.
- The separation of different groups of small villages according to several indexes.
- The analysis of the special features and roles of the following factors that modify the inequalities in different ways: measurement of settlements, geographical location and spatial zonality.
- The separation of types of small villages according to cluster analysis.
- The survey of the economic and social problems connecting to the local communities of small villages.
- The possible geographical processes in future.

The following three examination methods were used to find out the rate of enaquilities:

1. First, we used several kinds of indexes. The selected 39 indexes were divided into 7 index-groups: *I. Poulation, II. Demography, III. Economic status, IV. Financial status; V. Tourism, VI. Traffic, VII. Conditions of life*. Each settlement was rated according to the indexes, then as index-groups, and finally there was

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an overall rank. We standardized the indexes according to the scores of each settlements. The most favourable village got 100 points, the least favourable village got 0 points. The datas of the other settlements were evenly distributed. We added the index scores up as index-groups, and ranked the settlements from 1 to 1030. These gave the final development rank of small villages in Hungary. On the basis of the examined indexes, the settlement with the most points is the most advanced village, the settlement with the least points is the least advanced village.

2. Secondly, we made a cluster analysis with SPSS 13.0 to determine the types of small villages.

3. Finally, we tried to prove the differentiation through empirical examination. In spring, 2006 we sent questionnaires to local authorities of all the small villages in Hungary, that has less than 500 inhabitants. Most of the questions were closed, but some of them were open. We tried to survey the opinion of the mayors about general economic and social situation of there villages. The answers helped us to clear up differences and get to know more about the possible development schemes and the best features of that certain village. We got back 445 questionnaires of the total 1030 sent to the mayors. It means 43,2 per cent. The result is good enough on the level of counties and statistical districts but it cannot be used for analysing more regions at the same time because as regards some

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statistical districts are not representative. This is why we could only make surveys on county level.

3. Results of study

3. 1. The differentiation of small villages according to social and economic indexes

The rate of development shows significant regional and measurement by indexes. From the first 100 villages on the list there are only 12 ones that can be found east of the Danube. Their average population is 393.

1. *Regional differences*: The most developed small villages can be found near Lake Balaton where they can make profit from tourism and in the most prosperous Middle- and Western Transdanubian Region where the job market and salary conditions are excellent. There is another group of settlements namely the ones that lie near big cities and consequently they are geographically easily accessible. They are becoming suburban settlements. The least prosperous 20 small villages can be found in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Baranya counties. They have two main types: the least populated, aging ones (they have the worst values in all the indexes) and the gradually rejuvenating settlements where the most of the

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young population belong to a gipsy community. Their self-governments have a lot of problems. Most of their income in the budget is spent on social benefits and institutional costs. And they can only rely on state financial support.

2. *Differences in measurement*: The level of development is higher if the population is bigger but the index-groups are not the same in every case. You can see a positive correlation between the measurement of settlements and the socio-economic status. At the same time some index-groups are not connection with the number of population like economy, finance and tourism. As regards, traffic especially the number of bus services is influenced by the measurement. As regards conditions of life especially the number of shops and infrastructural-institutional systems are influenced by it.

3. *Rural regions*: Those settlements that have less than 500 inhabitants form groups or small regions in some parts of the country. There are 5 types of statistical districts depending on the rate of small villages: 1. *Almost homogeneous districts of small villages*: the rate of small villages is over 70 per cent. 2. *Small village dominant districts*: the rate of small villages between 50 and 70 per cent. 3. *Statistical districts with characteristic of small villages*: the rate of them is between 20 and 50 per cent and there are at least 5 small villages in the area. 4. *Statistical districts with non-characteristic of small villages*: the rate of small villages is under 20 per cent and there is at least one small village in the area. 5. *Districts*

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without small villages. The growth of the number of small villages in statistical districts doesn't mean in every case a bad quality of life in the local communities. The most dominant factor even in the case of small villages is the geographical location. The worst effect of the high number of small villages in a statistical district is that the traffic conditions become problematic.

3. 2. The study of the differentiation of small villages by cluster analysis

We got altogether 6 clusters: for main and two subclusters (*Figure 2*). The subclusters contain only few villages and reflect a special situation inside a main cluster, so they are not independent types rather exceptions.

The group of *relatively underdeveloped small villages* (*cluster 1*) contain every second village that has less than 500 inhabitants. Their economic and traffic conditions and the quality of life in them is worse than the average level of small settlements. They can be found mostly in Ormánság, Tolnai-Hegyhát, Cserehát, Zemplén and Külső-Somogy. There is a special group inside the cluster called „*Tiny villages*” (*cluster 1/A*). They are very small, underdeveloped and the quality of life is very bad. The traffic conditions of them are problematic, too.

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Relatively developed small villages (cluster 2): The population is relatively big, their economic and financial status is quite good. The conditions of life and the traffic system is better than the average. There are 90 settlements in this cluster. Almost all of them are in Transdanubia, especially in the west and in the middle of it. The *most developed small villages* form a subcluster here (*cluster 2/A*). The quality of life is very good in them. Their socio-economic status is excellent, too. The only common index they share is the very high personal income tax per person. The rate of migration is positive and a lot of residents are entrepreneurs.

Gipsy overcrowding small villages (cluster 3): There are 37 of them in the northeastern and southwestern regions of Hungary. The age-structure is very young, but at the same time the economic, financial and life quality indexes are the worst.

Small villages with average values (cluster 4): This is the second biggest cluster. Every third examined settlement belongs to it. This is the defect that this type occurs in almost every county, it is more dominant in Western Transdanubia.

3. 3. The differentiation of small villages according to the opinions of local governments

It is advisable to examine the results of the empiric examination if we want to know what kind of phenomena and

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processes are the most important factors for the everyday life of people living in small villages. The answers given by the leaders of these settlements can be more important than any other indexes (*Figure 3*). According to the mayors the following problems are the most serious: bad financial conditions of self-governments, unemployment, incomplete infrastructure and bad traffic conditions. These problems result in the moving away of residents and the quick aging the population because mostly old people remain there. Naturally these processes are not the same everywhere. They are different in every region. In the most small villages of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Baranya counties the migration is positive because of the gipsy emigration despite the growing poverty and high unemployment rate. Unfortunately this is not a positive process because it makes the disadvantageous of these settlements even more stronger and it conserves them. In the other parts of Transdanubia these problems are not so significant. In the western areas the rate of unemployment is low, but at the same time the local community is aging, the migration from small villages are expressive and the population is decreasing. The optimistic opinion of mayors about the future of their villages depends on the rate of development of them. If the different factors of development seem to be excellent the mayors think that they have done a good job and they don't think of the consequences of outside factors like state settlement development and funding, or economic status of the country.

4. Possible use of study in practise and research fields in the future

The differentiation of small villages is significant. That is why it is a bad idea to treat them in the same way. The socio-economic development rate of them, the life quality of the local population are determined by the geographical location. Consequently this situation makes it necessary to use a spatial methods and not the more traditional Hungarian branch-type development policies.

The increasing of number of small villages is going to continue in the future especially in those counties where we can find the biggest number of settlements under 500 inhabitants. Development plans have to pay attention to this fact.

The systematic rural development has had 50 years of tradition in Western Europe. The english-speaking territories are the best at it. The country, as a geographical expression became fashionable in Hungary in the 1990s. Nowadays a lot of studies are carried out about it. It would be nice to see that the settlement developers deal with small towns and their hinterlands as functional units.

Most of the small villages especially the aging, outnumbered settlements (where the gipsy population is growing). Especially in

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Southern Transdanubian and Northern Hungarian small village districts are not able to develop or they are not even able to maintain their present conditions. That is why they need consequent state-funding even if this support is not at all money-saving for the state. It is very important to involve the self-governments into the decisions, too.

The possible research fields in the future:

In order to make the Hungarian settlement policies more similar to the western rural development it is very important to make further studies.

It would be necessary to make similar studies in middle-european countries that have the same or similar settlement structure, for example Slovakia.

It would be useful to examine such villages that are above 500 inhabitants with the above-mentioned methods to see the differences and similarities.

Another study could be made according to other examination indexes or aspects because we could probably find other types of development schemes like suburban and touristically prosperous settlements.

5. Publications in the theme of dissertation

- BAJMÓCY P-BALOGH A. 2002. **Az aprófalvak turizmusa –kiút vagy zsákutca?** In: Kutatás a turizmusban. A turizmus aktuális kérdései Magyarországon. Pécsi Tudományegyetem Turizmus Tanszék, Pécs, pp. 195-209.
- BAJMÓCY P-BALOGH A. 2002. **Aprófalvas településállományunk differenciálódási folyamatai.** Földrajzi Értesítő, 2002 3-4. pp. 385-405.
- BALOGH A. 2004. **Az aprófalvasodás idő- és térbeli sajátosságai Magyarországon.** In: Abonyiné Palotás J. – Komarek L. szerk.: 40 éves a Szegedi Tudományegyetem Gazdaság- és Társadalomföldrajz Tanszéke, pp. 113-119.
- BALOGH A. 2004. **A környezőségek településközi kapcsolatrendszerei a Nyugat-Dunántúl aprófalvas térségeiben.** I. Településföldrajzi Konferencia, Szombathely, pp. 46-60.
- BALOGH A. 2004. Vidéki és elmaradott terek Magyarországon. II. Magyar Földrajzi Konferencia, Szeged (CD-ROM kiadvány).
- BALOGH A. 2005. **Small villages as economic units.** Nemzetközi PhD.-konferencia, Miskolc, pp. 229-234.
- PÁL V.–BALOGH A. 2005. Geographical question marks in state of health and health services of small villages. Nemzetközi PhD.-konferencia, Miskolc, pp. 373-379.
- BALOGH A. 2005. **A határmenti aprófalvas kistérségek településrendszerének néhány jellemző vonása.** Határok és Eurorégiók Konferencia, Szeged (megjelenés alatt).

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- BALOGH A.** 2006. **Az aprófalvasodás folyamatának főbb jellemzői Magyarországon.** Földrajzi Közlemények, 2006. 1-2. pp. 67-79.
- BALOGH A.** 2006. **Az aprófalvak pénzügyi helyzete.** III. Magyar Földrajzi Konferencia, Budapest (CD-ROM kiadvány).
- BALOGH A.** 2006. **Az aprófalvas önkormányzatok kérdőíves felmérése.** III. Településföldrajzi Konferencia, Szombathely (megjelenés alatt).

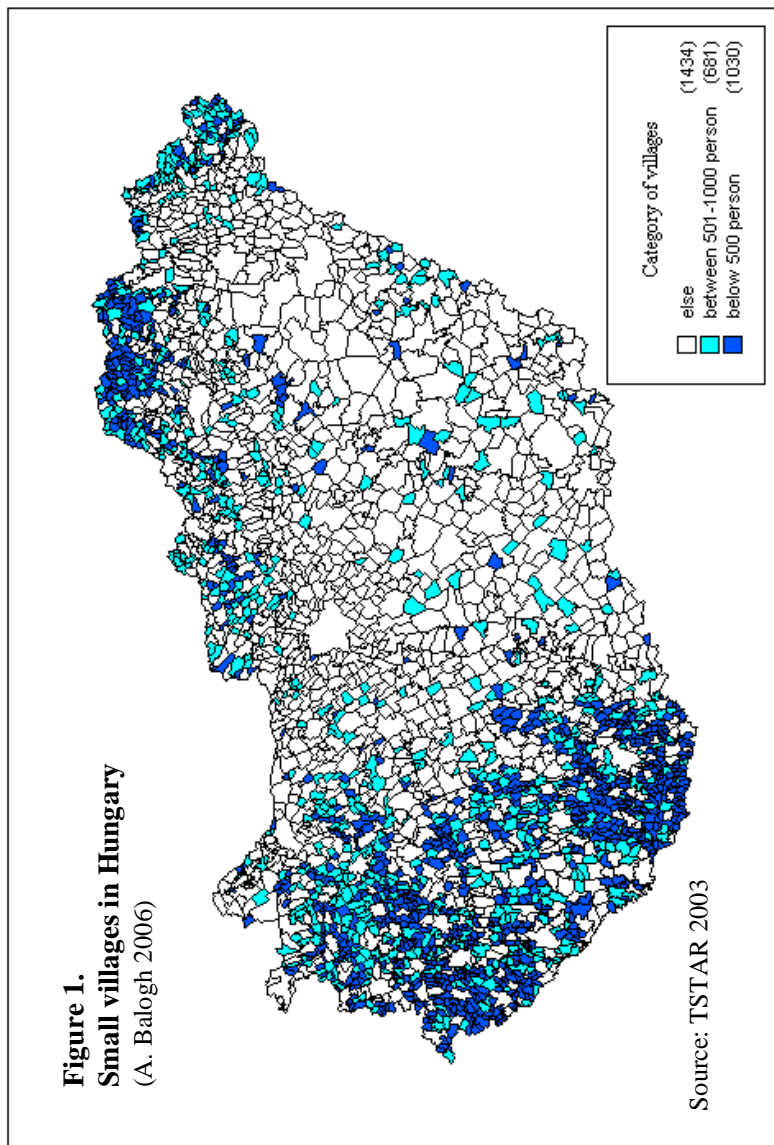


Figure 2
Types of
(A. Balogh)

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Source: TSTA

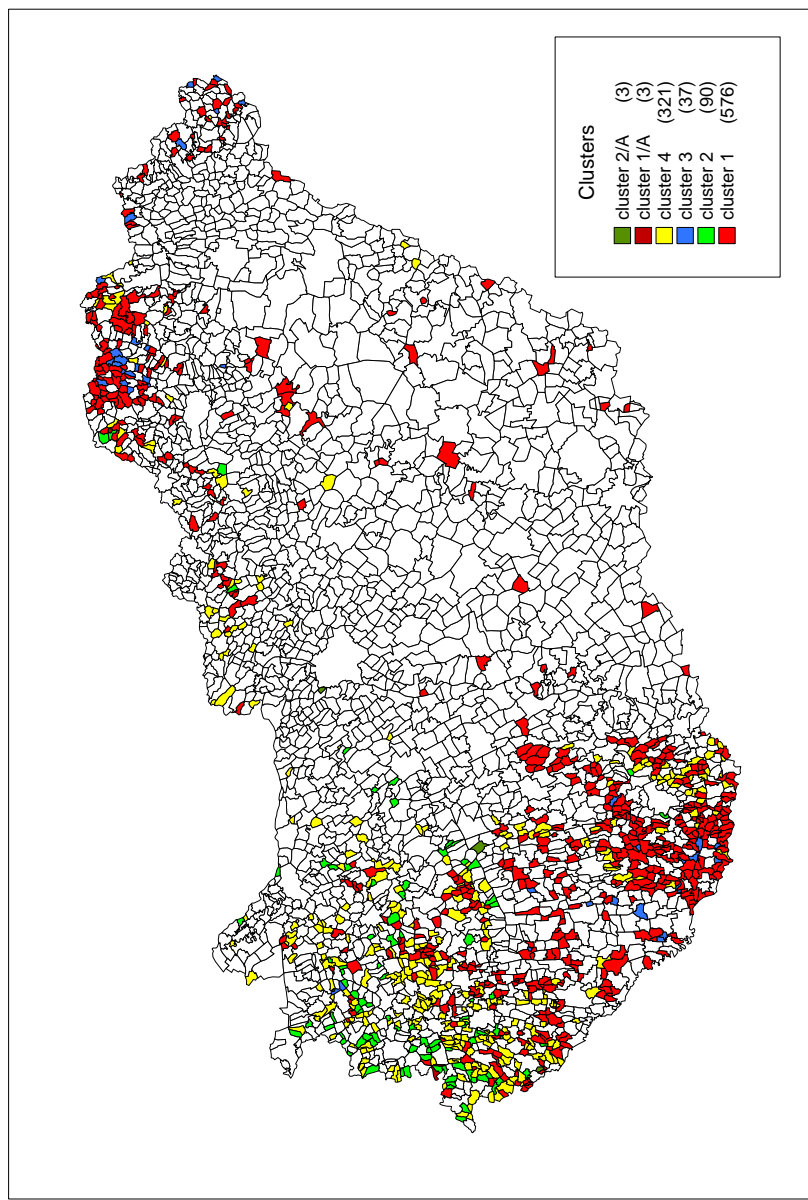


Figure 3.
The most important problems in mayors' opinion
 (A. Balogh 2006)

