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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE HOMESTEAD AREAS OF THE GREAT PLAIN

Introduction – a brief description of the change in the situation of the farms

The issues concerning the origin of the farms and the evolution of certain farm types in the macro-region of the Great Plain located in the Carpathian Basin are still debated at many points. Nevertheless, in spite of the diverse approaches there is a universal consensus that the evolution of the currently known homestead areas took place in the environs of the traditional market towns, and the majority of the farms may be defined as a settlement type developed on agricultural bases. (MAKSAY, F. 1971; KRÚDY, M. 1931; MÁRKUS, I. 1943; GYÖRFFY, I., ERDEI, F. 1976; MENDÖL, T. 1963).

The “Renaissance” of the farms on the Great Plain may be dated to the decade prior to the Second World War when (as estimates indicate) the number of those living on farms was 750-800 thousand of the population of the Great Plain exceeding 3 million (BECSEI, J. 2002). Following the political and socio-economic processes taking place in the 1950s, the grounds for the existence of the farms changed rapidly and the transformation and degradation of the farms (“tanya world”) began. The greatest change was caused by the conversion of the structure of agricultural holdings during the socialist period (conversion into cooperatives), land exchanges and re-parcelling. Since many of the farms were surrounded by lands used for large-scale farming, and the lands given in exchange usually lay far from the farm, the supreme advantage of the farms – a place for living and working – disappeared. Consequently, production in the environs of the farm became mostly impossible, and therefore the period of land offers and abandonment began. As a consequence of the conditions of the time, not only thousands of farms ceased to exist but the relationships between the farms and the surrounding settlements had also changed. Some of the farmers got jobs in the towns, thus the way of life provided by the settlements and the

opportunities offered by the farm houses contradicted each other – therefore, everyone who could manage to do so gave up living on the outskirts (BECSEI, J. 2002).

By the 1990s the society of the homestead areas on the Great Plain was very close to falling apart, and the number of inhabitants on the farms fell to 150-200 thousand (MILTÉNYI, K. 1997). Following the transformation period, many thought that the new property structure developing as a consequence of the compensation procedure may reinvigorate market gardening on the farms and through this the homestead areas may be also renewed. This, however, was not the case and the situation got even worse when the population living on the farms did not get into the local governmental bodies due to the peculiar features of the Hungarian electoral system, and thus their ability to vindicate their interests remained very low. Following the millennium, a segment of the farm society became very strongly segregated and peripheral (CSATÁRI, B. et al. 2005; FARKAS, J. – KOVÁCS, A. D. 2011). At that time, to many it seemed that the fate of these forms of settlement, farming and social life boosting of century-old traditions have been doomed. The situation of the farms became impaired by the twenty-first century, their former indisputable region-forming and population retention roles have faded, and the future of most of the residents became uncertain.

There are, nevertheless, such rural regions where the homestead areas survived all challenges... The scattered settlements survived relatively in high ratio especially in those regions of the Great Plain where the natural and production capacities and opportunities for the particular socialist holding form, the “tolerance” of the specialised cooperatives or of the county level politics were ensured on some level. Thus, in spite of the unfavourable processes, the scattered settlements on the Great Plain playing an important role in the conservation of the rural farming methods are still present as a defining and characteristic settlement form in the landscapes. Even so, – in our opinion – the farms may become very important settlement system constituents again in many regions of the Great Plain, and may become depositories of the modern sustainable rural farming and living.

Our paper – based on the above starting thoughts –, on the one hand,

intends to provide an insight into the rural development support scheme which is important for the farms on the Great Plain; and on the other hand, (based on a specific regional study) it intends to outline the related problems and opportunities of the market town with the most extensive homestead areas (outskirts) on the Great Plain.

The rural development support schemes for the farms on the Great Plain – an introduction in brief

In the Hungarian legal system there are 109 legislations in force or repealed (from the laws to the directives of the Ministry of Rural Development) which include either the word “tanya” or any of its forms. A considerable part of these documents is linked to the years around 1990 since at that time, during the period after the transition, the conversion and the settlement of the ownership system were founded, including the acts on compensation and on cooperatives, or the land act. In the mid-1990s – when the essential necessary legislative context for the operation of the market economy was created – the development of the sectoral regulation began, which took into consideration the special conditions of the “tanya” world (for example, in the cases of the hunting act or the child protection act).

By the end of the 1990s, as part of the accession process to the European Union, the harmonisation of the agricultural subsidy systems and the preparation of the farmers began. Within the framework of this, the forms of aid charged on the national budget included the area payment and the setting-up of young farmers, and at last in 2003 the agricultural environmental management programme was initiated. These, though, did not directly target the farmers on the scattered settlements, but by providing the referred resources those who lived on the outskirts could also get access to various financial subsidies. Their value is not negligible, since in 2005 the number of plants with centres on the outskirts using area payment on the area of the Duna-Tisza közti Homokhátság (Danube-Tisza Interfluve) was 8 024 – constituting approximately a quarter of the farms located in the region concerned (Tanyakutatás, 2005). The SAPARD pre-accession programme can be also linked to the accession process which, in principle, ensured resources for the Hungarian agricultural and rural development between 2000

and 2006, and/or enabled the establishment of the future institutional system. In the SAPARD, and then in the subsequent rural development programmes, in the AVOP (Agricultural and Rural Development Operative Programme, 2004-2006) and in the ÚMVP (New Hungary Development Plan, 2007-2013), the farms were listed as beneficiaries; nevertheless, no comprehensive development programme was designed for them. From among the subsidies available under the second pillar, the agricultural environmental management belonging to Axis 2 should be mentioned, in which we find the farming payments for "tanya" within the horizontal target arable land group of payments, which used to serve the survival of the values related to this settlement form specifically.

The Decree 96/2005 (II.25) of the Hungarian Parliament on the National Development Concept was an important stage in the legislative system, in which the scattered settlements were regarded as important resources related to local conditions, and which set the revitalisation of these areas as its aim. Unfortunately, in respect of their renewal, no real substantial progress has been made apart from the research and planning activities. In 2009 the Decree 49/2009 (V.27) of the Hungarian Parliament on the conservation and development of farms and homestead areas invited the Hungarian Government to prepare a summary report about the situation of the scattered settlements and to elaborate an overall integrated action programme based on them, in which it makes proposals for the future subsidy programmes.

Following this, after the elections in 2010, the new government elaborated a National Rural Strategy for the 2012-2020 period, which includes the development of the homestead areas as a regional complex rural development programme. This defines four strategic dimensions in addition to the conservation of the heritage of the farms and the description of the situation, which is regarded difficult in several respects: 1.; preparation of new surveys and plans, 2.; allocation of substantive direct resources for development, 3.; diversification of the activities on the farms and 4.; the integrated settlement of the outskirts with farms (from public security to infrastructure).

Following the publication of the strategy in 2011, the Government announced the Farm Development Programme which was continued in 2012 and in which the local authorities with farms on the outskirts and other organisations, and single farmers could participate in the tendering. For the first target group (mostly local authorities) the promotion of the market access of the farm products and the support of the construction and improvement of the dirt roads on the outskirts, and the subsidies received for these purposes proved to be the most important. The majority of the farmers submitted tenders and gained supports for the renovation of the residential buildings and the non-residential buildings used for farming purposes, and the development of the farms. National resources were used for the financing of the programme, which in the case of the farmers was paid on the basis of the EU *de minimis* regulations. More than 400 tenders received almost two milliard HUF support in two years. The volume of this programme, however, is still not enough to bring about rapid changes on the homestead areas of the Great Plain. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that at last both the politics and the policy take steps for the conservation of this typical and important settlement form on its own merits.

The current situation of the homestead area and its development in an agglomeration zone characterised by suburban outskirts – the environs of Kecskemét²

The region presented below has served as a pilot area for many regional surveys in the past ten years. The reference basis of the description below is constituted by the researches in this field coordinated by the IRS-CERSHAS Great Plain Research Department (formerly known as Great Plain Research Institute of the Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences) in which the authors of the present paper had an active and organic role.³

² By Kecskemét area we mean the former (demarcated by the administrative division which was in force until 31 December 2012) micro-region of Kecskemét with its 17 settlements.

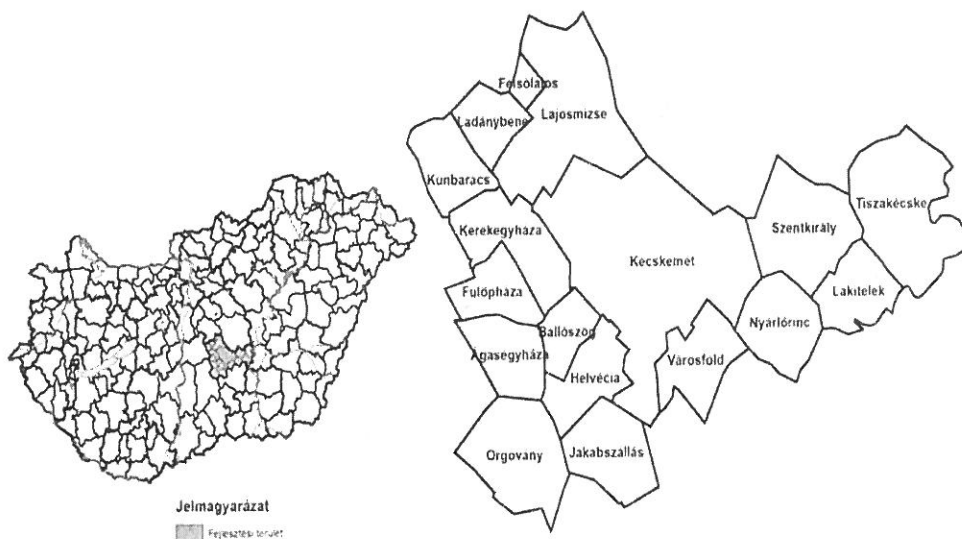
³Tanyakutatás [Research on 'tanya'] 2005, Kecskemét-Méntelek tanyakutatás [Research on

Mosaic homestead area

The conditions characterising the diversity of the “tanya world” on the Great Plain have also developed on the settlements in the environs of Kecskemét. The outskirts located in the northern corner of Bács-Kiskun county have formed a long-time well-operating – agricultural-trading-community – system creating a balanced existence for the market town and tanya relations. In this rural region on the Great Plain the primary factors showing signs of the disappearance of the farms for a long time included the arrangement of farms into villages, the large-scale collectivisation, the general prohibition of building on the outskirts, or the backward nature of the infrastructure on the outskirts. In the past decades the unfavourable processes became more and more observable due to several reasons; the problems related to settlement environment – both in terms of the physical and social sides – appeared more and more sharply. Though, a few attempts were made in the region to renew and assist traditional farms (e.g. farm caretakers, housework assistance services, home guard), part of the endeavours taken for the revival of the functions and traditions on the outskirts got stuck on the level of planning.

With respect to Kecskemét and its environs, the changes were further complicated by the significantly changed circumstances of the real estate market, as a consequence of which the number of the new building sites in the inner areas decreased. Thus, in the 1990s the local governments – especially in the case of the county seat – satisfied the demands for building sites mainly by the earlier inherited lands prepared for construction. Neither the local government nor the investors took any serious initiations to create new sites (due to the high costs and uncertain profitability of expropriation and construction of public utilities).

the tanya in Kecskemét-Ménfőcsanak] 2009-2010, A kiskunsági tanyák jövőképe – Tanyakollégium [The Future Image of the tanya – Tanya College] 2010, A Kecskeméti kistérség tanyaprogramjának megalapozása [Laying the Foundation of the Tanya Programme of the Kecskemét micro-region] 2012, Bács-Kiskun megye területfejlesztési koncepciója [The Territorial Development Conception of the County Bacs-Kiskun] 2012)

Figure 1: *The affected homestead areas*

Source: CERSHAS 2012

Therefore, the lack of sites in the inner parts, and the consequently high property prices urged more and more of those who intended to build their own houses to find alternative solutions. As a result, (mainly on the confines of Kecskemét) the demand for creating building sites from own resources in the peripheral parts of the town with farm properties – buildings used for permanent living – in the outskirts increased. The hundreds of new family houses built on the outskirts were mainly located directly along the roads or at the head of the dirt roads leading to the main roads. These garden cottages with exclusively residential functions cannot be regarded as “tanya” in a real sense, though their problems are closely related to the issue of landscape use on the outskirts.

The zones in question therefore still provide living space for many but in a rather diverse form representing very large differences regarding the settlement environment and the standards of living. Today, families living on farms for generations, and the social layers moving out during the past two decades sustain this peculiar settlement type; nevertheless, in the case of the latter we cannot speak about traditional farms but only residential areas on the outskirts. The number of inhabitants on the outskirts has been

continuously decreasing in the environs of the smaller settlements, while the number of population definitely increased on the outskirts of the central town of the region and on the directly neighbouring settlements. As a consequence of the migration between the outer and the inner areas, the population on the farms of the region is spatially heterogeneous and significant differences can be observed between the individual zones. The varying tendencies have changed the spatial structure of the region very oddly and visibly as well; moreover, the more cautious regulation of the needs and expectations appearing in the suburban farm zones, and the use of principles and methods corresponding to the modern urban planning also emerge. Many think that exactly for this reason the "issue of farms" located on the boundary of the inner and outer areas today is more of an urban issue.

In the Kecskemét area, therefore, such unique agglomeration processes could be witnessed as a result of which the traditional market town and the outskirts of the neighbouring settlements – mainly as a consequence of the diverse physical features and the spatial structural differentiating effects related to the historical development – have become very diverse by today. Nowadays, the tanya zones located in the region can be divided into several units with varying genetics and diverse features. Accordingly, different problems and potential intervention alternatives can be delineated, that is in order to determine the possible development trends, the mosaic nature of the outskirts of the region and the heterogeneous character of the societies living on the farms must be taken into consideration.

Thus, the signs of progressivism, or the signs of the renewal of farms, and the symptoms of erosion appear simultaneously on the homestead areas around the towns: the danger of social disadvantages, deserted farms, and the "loss of landscape proprietors". Many of the elements of progressivism can be observed, including the raise of the level of education, the operation of the farm caretaker network, the strengthening of the market farms, and the popularisation of bio-farming, agricultural, riding and green tourism. These positive changes, however, are not such that could have brought about a radical change in the living conditions of the farm population on the regional level. Besides, the number of the landscape-friendly and environment-conscious "classic farms in the Kiskunság region" involved in agricultural

activities is very low today, and the situation of the cumulatively disadvantaged farms has become critical. In the case of some outskirts lands the living standards of the inhabitants are very low, have terrible accessibility, and the properties in the continuously deteriorating built-in environment are used mostly by socially excluded families. The ratio of deserted and ruined farms has been increasing for years, reaching approximately 20% by today.

SWOT analysis of homestead areas in Kecskemét *micro-region*

Strengths

Good geographical position, excellent transport network links
Easily accessible settlements, major cities and a regional centre with advanced services
Rich in natural resources
Ecosystem services
Positive human ecological features - quiet environment of the residential zones
Cultural heritage sites and the diversity of the built environment
Farming traditions
The traditional "kiskun" scattered farms preserved the complex culture of the traditional lifestyle
The diversity of the farm production is preserved to nowadays
The protective role of farm communities - neighbourhood relations
Well-functioning scattered farm caretaker service network
Regular monitoring of farms by the

Weaknesses

Lack of infrastructure (rural roads in poor condition, farms without electricity)
Aged rural building stock
Land registration and cadastral maps do not reflect reality
Missing resource map
Loss of the markets of rural products, the sale problems of farm products
Lack of regional co-operation
Ad hoc nature of additional activities (egg, food processing, tourism)
Low entrepreneurial activity amongst the farmers
High percent of inactive population
Conflicts of interest between the large farmers and family farmers
Outmigration of the population living in traditional scattered farms, aging
Extreme spatial differences of the outskirts in the state of socio-

local	Civil	Guard	economic indicators
Families who are open to farm life			30-40% of the scattered farms
Traditionalist initiatives			inhabited by elder or by disadvantaged and socially deprived families
			Growing number of vulnerable and excluded people
			Public safety is very bad in some districts
			Depreciation of farm communities
			Part of the farm population is inactive
			Under-representation of agricultural intellectuals

Opportunities

Increasing demand for healthy food
 The European rural development focusing on nature conservation, preserving rural landscapes, and on the harmony between the settlements and the environment
 Development of local identity of communities is also an EU priority
 The country's agricultural and farm policy favours the family farming model
 The National Farm Development Program subsidies
 The small-region cooperation has a framework for the regional and rural

Threats

Climate change, aridity
 Sales problems of small farmers are constant
 Large farms shrivel the traditional "kiskun" scattered farms
 Ill-considered land use, land degradation
 Homogenization of the diverse landscapes
 Inefficient environment protection
 The development work of local municipalities concentrate in the inner settlement area
 Strengthening the sleeping town nature of these settlements

development	Continuation of the de-classing process
Increased interest in the alternative forms of tourism	Intensification of social exclusion and segregation
Spreading good practices to bring local products to the local market, grants to promote the creation of producer-merchant verticals	The intensification of social conflicts in the farm population
Eco-living, natural farming and organic production possibilities	Further deterioration of public security
	Persistence in the peripheral position
	Loss of a significant proportion of scattered farms, some outlying farms' complete abandonment

Source: own elaboration

Possible rural development trends for the farms in the region

It may be generally established that from the perspective of the complex sustainability of the studied homestead area, the preservation of the respected cultural landscapes and settlement environmental systems, the harmonisation of the tasks related to life on the outskirts in the local governmental and civil spheres, and the creation of the social power being able to perform the duties related to the outskirts, in addition to the strengthening of the community organisations based on partnership promoting all of the above are of primary importance.

In the Kecskemét area – as on the outskirts of the settlements with farms in general – the sustainable or value-conserving agriculture has an essential role because of the dominant land using forms. In the case of farms, it is especially true that agriculture is on the one hand a sector producing high quality goods, and on the other hand an activity promoting the preservation of the physical, scenic, cultural-historical and social values. The researches conducted in the region in the past decades all emphasise that in the areas which are peculiarly sensitive for drought, one of the bases for landscape sustainability may be ensured by the maintenance of the lands used for

traditional tanya farming since the special farming methods linked to the tanya (e.g. horticulture) enable the mosaic landscape use fulfilling the needs of the local conditions.

The objective to make the less developed peripheral regions catch up and the strengthening of the social communities living on the outskirts are closely related to the improvement of the conditions of farming. In this respect, several attempts have already been made earlier in the region. In the environs of Kecskemét the operation of farm caretaker services, the housework assistance equipped with a signalling system, the maintenance and repair works of the dirt roads and agricultural access roads on the outskirts, the construction of cycle paths on the outskirts, and the "promotion of the market accession of farm products" also supported by the national Farm Development Programme can be regarded successful.

When outlining the further alternatives, nevertheless, the moral (legal, "equality"), social (community, self-respect) and material (water, food, protection, security) aspects of the development philosophies related to the communities of the homestead areas are still very important. The problems of the outskirts in the region cannot be narrowed down to only one factor, such as the farms without electricity, the terrible dirt roads on the outskirts, the profitability problems in the agricultural sector or the endangered public security. The problems related to farms require a complex solution covering the environmental, social, cultural, community and economic aspects as well. Based on the above, three main rural development priorities should be defined for the homestead areas in the region: 1; conservation of the values of the rural environment, 2; improvement of the town-village-tanya relations and 3; the local identity and the development of the communities. The extension of the cooperation related to farms in the region and the strengthening of the identity consciousness and the human background of the local communities may get an important role in these trends – since the improvement of the environment and quality of life of the communities concerned, presumably, mainly depend on the communities which are capable and willing to work for themselves.

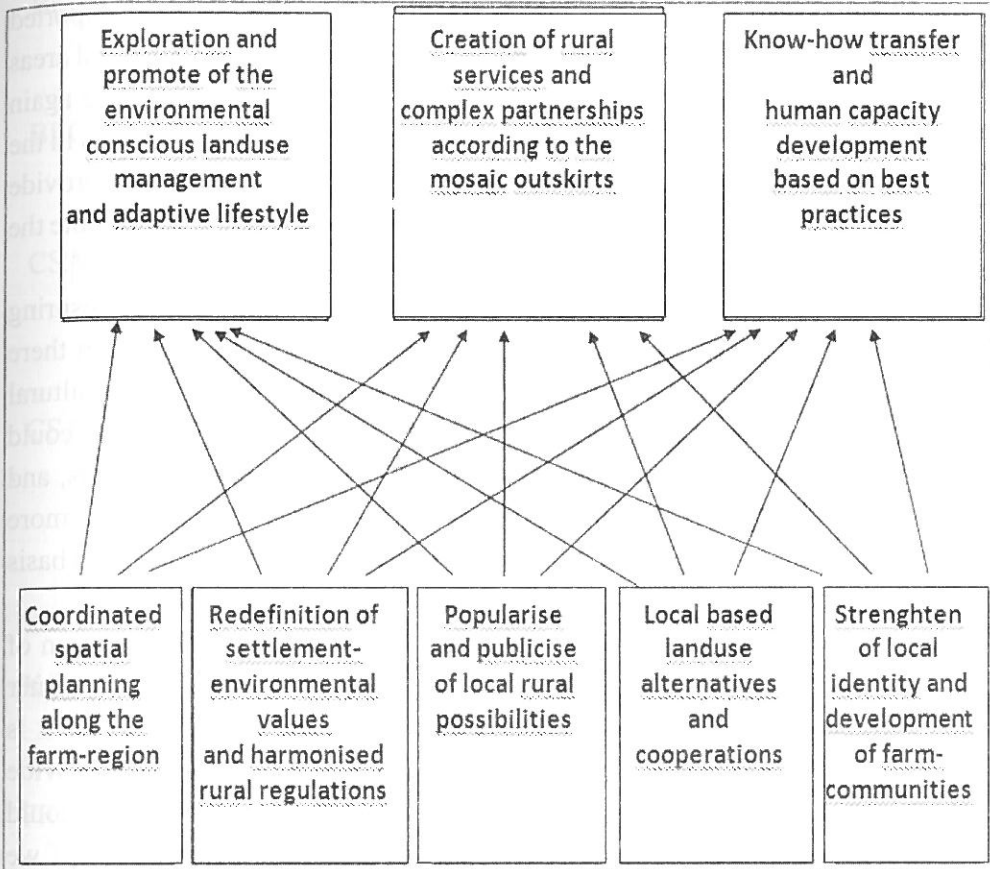
The farm development strategy of the Kecskemét area defines mainly long term objectives. The areas of intervention aligned with the strategic

priorities, nevertheless, may include concrete interventions and programme proposals which can be implemented in a shorter term. These proposals can be added to and further improved in the function of the institutional and financing conditions on the regional level for the next period. These could include, for instance,

- Creation and operation of a regional farm development expert group
- Mass catering based on local agricultural and food processing
- Marketing of local products and “micro-regional brand building”
- Development of production-sales sectors built on the farming activities on the homestead areas
- Operation of a cooperation programme with a sample farm, scientific consulting and processing cooperation together with the College of Kecskemét
- Making a cadastre and monitoring for the values of the farms (Development of eco-tourist cycle routes)
- Organising “vision-to action workshops” for the farms in the region
- Organisation of a series of programmes entitled “Micro-regional tanya forums – Tanya development evenings”
- Radio talk shows popularising the farming life model
- Programmes and exhibitions demonstrating the values of the environment, awards acknowledging the farmers’ work
- Creation of festival traditions for the farms in the micro-region
- Communal works on the farms
- Organisation of an equestrian home guard service

In view of the above – on behalf of the local regional development – one could mainly outline strategic rural development proposals which handle the potential areas of intervention on the level of the region and correspond to regional potentials (Figure 3).

Figure 3: *The most important development directions of the outskirts in Kecskemét micro-region*



Source: own elaboration

Summary – closing thoughts

The 'tanya' (farm) is the most appropriate settlement form for the natural environmental conditions of the Great Plain. Accordingly, the architecture and farming of the homestead areas is diverse and variegated, and the relationship between the communities living on the farms and the landscape and nature is close and special. In the representation of the harmony between man and environment the way of life on the outskirts has serious traditions. Nevertheless, it is also very important that the ideal farms are in compliance with the European development model of sustainable development, integrated rural development and multifunctional agriculture. In this context

the homestead areas, therefore must be regarded as a unique value in the landscape, settlement structure, farming and culture.

In our opinion, the modernisation and consciously supported rehabilitation of the outskirts and homestead areas on the plain and rural areas with natural values and good agricultural conditions in Hungary have again become an especially important task. The farms are the key settlements in the survival of the well-kept, looked-after, "inhabited rural areas" which provide opportunities for several complementary activities that may even promote the broadening and renewal of the farming activities too.

If the conditions for keeping the population in place and for ensuring the socio-economic renewal of the homestead area are provided, then there should be a hope for the strengthening of the functions related to the cultural landscapes of farms and for the initiation of new functions. The "tanya" could become the scene of organic farming producing healthy food products, and could provide an opportunity for an alternative lifestyle, a change to a more natural way of life as opposed to the urban lifestyle, and could serve as a basis for the tourism based on landscape and traditions.

It is difficult to draw up a general vision since the differentiation of the outskirts is perpetual. In most places, supposedly, the 'tanya' in its former sense and traditional farming methods on the farms are neglected but it is quite certain that one can find new roles and ways of supply which provide for the viability of the farms. A homestead area modernised in this way could be an excellent example for the engagement of tradition and renewal. If we "join" the social needs for sustainability of the farms capable of renewal to the above conceptual trends, then it is hardly disputable that the outskirts of the region concerned could become excellent fields for the European rural development.

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