

Operational Structure of the Hungarian Royal Agricultural Schools - the Example of Somogyszentimre

Abstract

The purpose of the study. Exploration of a major milestone in the development of small towns. Presenting the role of education through the example of the agricultural vocational school in Somogyszentimre, a settlement attached to Kadarkút.

Applied methods. The analysis of literature ranges from a review of education policy to factors driving the development of small towns. The study heavily relies on archival research instrumental in shedding light on the everyday life of the educational institution, and the identification of factors demonstrating a unique and innovative approach. The biographies of individuals affiliated to the institution have provided an equally valuable contribution.

Outcomes. The dominance of agriculture has permeated the socio-economic history of small towns in Somogy county in all spheres of existence. Small town economies and societies were greatly enriched by their commercial and industrial functions (industrial plants), the right to hold fairs, and educational institutions connected to agriculture. The educational institution by virtue of its students, teaching staff, owners and patrons was a major trigger of development in small towns. Agricultural vocational schools besides providing theoretical training also familiarised students with novel and innovative practical approaches. This type of approach was embraced by small town farmers, generating an innovative, development-oriented vision that still characterises the majority of small towns in Somogy county today.

Keywords: agricultural, small town, education, innovation, development

1. Milestones in the development of small towns

Throughout history, cities have played a prominent role in the European settlement network. Urban development, urban inequalities and urban history are highly researched issues in contemporary social sciences. The role of cities in social reproduction, the dissemination of high culture and economic growth is a unique manifestation of the allocation of political power. Urban development in Central and Eastern Europe represents a unique development trajectory within Europe¹. A dominance of metropolises (mainly capitals) and a quasi-absence of counterweight cities are distinctive features of the region's settlement network. Large cities and metropolitan areas are overrepresented in research agendas due to the abundant availability and richness of data. Nevertheless, the analysis of small towns may fill a significant research gap in contemporary urban literature. Our ability to classify distinct development trajectories and phenomena into unique categories indicates a well-discernable process worth analyzing, identical city-shaping forces appear to prevail in the case of larger and smaller cities alike. Disparities manifest themselves rather in the bifurcations of the development path.

Small towns make up a significant proportion of the Hungarian population: concentrating, in overall, one-third of the urban population; in my view, their unique development path accounts for their successes and failures. The image of small towns carries a positive connotation when identified as the centre of the countryside, associated with rural romanticism and cultural identity², and a negative one when treated as backward, peripheral, inferior. The category of

¹ Enyedi Gy. (1998)

² Burdack J. (2013)

small towns is not fully coterminous with population size, due to its threefold interpretation as a settlement size-, a functional- and settlement hierarchical category.

I have identified three main factors underlying the existence of over 70,000 small towns (under 10,000 inhabitants) in Europe in the contemporary era. Firstly, endogenous constraints stemming from historical factors (former rural status); secondly, a failure to comply with external requirements: many cities have been downgraded to this category due to depopulation/emigration/depletion of functions; thirdly, external influences: the global urbanisation boom in the 20th century, the successive waves of urbanisation after 1990 and 2000, respectively. Seven development factors were identified in the course of the analysis of small towns of the South Transdanubian region³. These milestones have contributed to the urbanisation of settlements and to maintaining the pace of their development, and would include the settlements' public administrative role, the path-dependence of their economic structure, constraints of natural and economic geography, institutions for training human capital and the societal changes required for maintaining the demographic potential: i.e. education and embourgeoisement. The focus of the present study is on education, more specifically, the role of Hungarian Royal Agricultural Schools as lower vocational schools, which played a particularly prominent role in the life of small towns.

2. The importance of agrar-education

In the history of education dating back to over a thousand years the institutionalisation of agricultural vocational training is a relatively late phenomenon. There is no evidence of historical linkages such as those between guild-based apprenticeship and commercial training based in towns and cities.⁴ In the field of agriculture the peasantry was responsible for the transmission of knowledge that was passed from father to son. Prior to the 17th century the acquisition of the practices of agricultural production remained the privilege of the family and the local communities. This type of intergenerational knowledge transfer operated uninterruptedly and in parallel to institutionalised frameworks. The institutionalisation of vocational education was intended to promote on one hand, the implantation of innovations into practice and the acquisition of the basics of modern farming, and on the other hand, the wider transmission of the experience-based knowledge of successive generations. Agricultural vocational training in Hungary occupied its rightful status only in the decades following the German Reunification, becoming henceforth, owing to state intervention, the intellectual backbone of a key national economic sector within institutionalised frameworks. Its 'integration' into the domestic system of education was not unproblematic, due to its failure to meet the imposed requirements even as an autonomous discipline. There were serious hiatuses in basic theoretical education (mathematics, soil science and biology were omitted from the curriculum, the frameworks of chemistry courses were too narrow), and the curricular position of practical training was inadequate⁵. Post-1867, agricultural vocational education was transferred to state responsibility, which resulted in a qualitative upgrading of education. With the adoption of the People's Education Act (Art. XXXVIII of 1868), public education achieved a significant progress by making basic agricultural education compulsory in all of its institutions. Outside the curriculum and training, the biggest deficiencies were the absence of qualified teaching staff with adequate skills in farming. The introduction of a three-tier system of agricultural education was proposed in the 1860s by Pál Sporzon⁶: the creation of practical agricultural schools as an integral part of primary education;

³ Horeczki R. (2020)

⁴ Surányi B. (2018)

⁵ Wallenhausen Gy. (1996)

⁶ Sporzon P. –Kodolányi A. (1867)

the establishment of so-called economic schools in secondary education as an attempt of merging theory and practice. In the vision of Sporzon an economic academy would provide the basis for higher, theoretical and scientific education, as the country's unique institution representing the superior scientific and institutional frameworks of agricultural training. The agricultural school presented hereby was originally conceived as a lower school, i.e. an institution specialised in practical training, transformed into a secondary school later on.

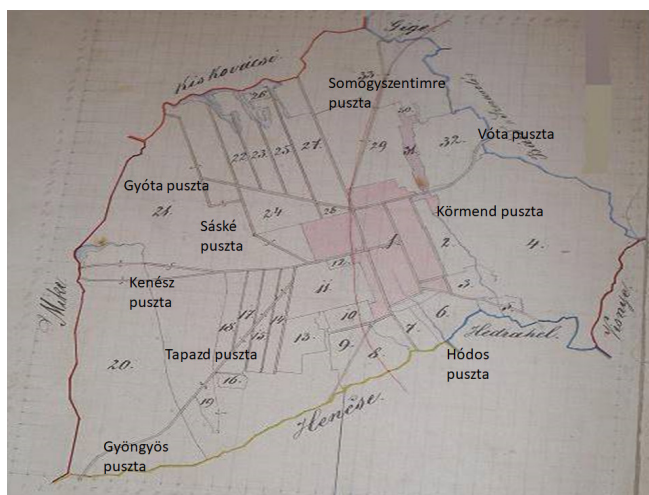
3. The Hungarian Royal Agricultural School of Somogyszentimrepuszta

Kadarkút occupies a central position in Somogy county situated at a 25 km distance from the county seat and bordered by three towns (Kaposvár, Szigetvár, Nagyatád). The landscape is a typical Transdanubian hilly area with a highly fragmented surface. Kadarkút has a dual classification as a micro-regional unit where the Zselic with its predominantly loess and clay soils meet the sand-covered territory of Inner-Somogy⁷. Somogyszentimre steppe is located in the northern part of Kadarkút, in the vicinity of the road leading to Kaposvár (Figure 1). It was a populated area even in the 16th century, inhabited by 20 families. The land is suitable for agricultural cultivation and infrastructure is well-developed. The personality of landowners and the presence of suitable conditions provided the background for the establishment of an agricultural vocational school. In the decade of the foundation of the school the landowners of Kadarkút (Table 1.) were mainly large landowners and the bene possessionati (wealthy medium landowners). Antal Somssich and Imre Majtényi owned the most important manors, covering over a thousand acres of land.⁸

The Minister of Agriculture Pál Széchenyi, Count of Somogy county invoked the need for the establishment of agricultural schools. In line with Sporzon's ideas, the schools would provide training for estate stewards and private farmers, arming their students with both theoretical and practical knowledge. Large landowners in Somogy county joined the initiative by setting up a foundation to support the idea. The foundation operated for 6 years with an annual budget of 150 forints that catered for the needs and training of 30 pupils. The venue was provided by a large landowner, Emil Márffy on the Somogyszentimre steppe near Kadarkút, which enabled the opening of the school in 1886.

The landowners that created the foundation and thus the educational institution were⁹ Count Pál Festetics, Count Imre Hunyady, Count László Jankovich, Counts Dénes Széchenyi, Ferenc Széchenyi, Imre Széchenyi, Pál Széchenyi, László Széchenyi, Count János Zichy, Gyula Jankovich, József Inkey, Béla Kund, Béla Márffy, Emil Márffy, Sir Antal Freistädter, Vilmos Freistädter, the Mernye Holy Teaching Order, Satzger Keresztély, Otto and Rezső Biedermann, Pál Somssich, Count József Somssich, the Nagyatád Farmers' Circle, the Somogy County Economic Association, Mihály and Sándor Véssey, Adolf Hirsch and

Figure 1. Borders of Kadarkút



Source: own editing by MNL SML XV. 2.

⁷ Reiszig E. (1914)

⁸ Kaposi Z. (2019)

⁹ MNL SML V. 261. 1-4.

Manó Meller; each entitled to a single vote based on their contributions. The contribution of Prince Miklós Esterházy, Count Tasziló Festetics and Bishop Zsigmond Kovács of Veszprém to the foundation's annual budget entitled them to two votes.

Table 1. Landowners of Kadarkút, first half of the 19th century

Name of the Landowners	Land area of the estate
Antal Somssich	1978 acres
Imre Majtényi	1080 acres
György Jankovich	425 acres
Kristófné Sárközy	377 acres
Sándor Spissich	365 acres
József Márffy	212 acres
István Spissich	212 acres
Lajosné Sárközy	189 acres
Jánosné Nagy	164 acres
Julianna Novák	94 acres

Source: own editing by MNL SML V. 261.

The founders' rights included recommending, approving or opposing the admission of students. The larger landowners clearly saw this as a positive development given the shortage of suitably qualified and experienced estate managers at the time. The names of the founding landowners are quite impressive, representing almost all of the major landowners of the county and the surrounding areas. The descendants of the Márffy and Jankovich families still live and work in the villages of Hencse and Hedrehely in the proximity of Kadarkút.

After six years, the number of founding benefactors had fallen to a third¹⁰. It appears that the rest of the landowners were longer in demand of professional training with all their candidates having completed the two-year training course¹¹. The remaining patrons who continued to fund the scholarships were big farmers owning estates in the immediate catchment area of the school (50 km radius). The Diocese of Veszprém and the Somogy County Economic Association also remained among the patrons. In addition to grants, it was also possible to apply for self-financed and state funded places. The number of state-funded places was 10-12 for each agricultural school. During the first ten years of its operation the Somogyszentimre agricultural school had 135 graduates. The school put a great stress on the provision of both theoretical and practical training courses. The first headmaster, János Karáll spent only two years in Szentimre and resigned from the leadership of the institution after a conflict with one of the founders. The second headmaster, Géza Hauer headed the institution for 12 years. His directorship saw the completion of construction works, and the institution shifted to full operation. The orchard, nursery and vineyards were also planted under his leadership. He also introduced innovations in education, lobbying for the organisation of evening courses for local small farmers and the compensating the shortage of grant sponsored places with state scholarships, henceforth, prospective students had recourse to three sources of funding: private, public or grants from the foundation.

¹⁰ The patrons: Count Imre Hunyadi, Count Dénes Széchenyi, Count Pál Széchenyi, Count Imre Széchenyi, the Bishop of Veszprém Baron Kárló Hornig, Gyula Jankovich, Emil Márffy, Manó Meller and their descendants, the members of the Holy Order, and the Somogy County Economic Association.

¹¹ MNL SML V. 261.

The mandate of the next director, Imre Lukácsy, also terminated after 2 years during which he had assumed too many commitments, aiming to realise too much in too short a period of time, but unable to do so due to financial and other constraints, which ultimately led to his dismissal. Dezső Bognár served as headmaster for 14 years until his death, engaged in the construction of student residences and the renovation of staff housing, despite the considerable financial difficulties impeding his work. The number of founding patrons had steadily declined over the years, just as the number of self-financing pupils. The institution experienced persistent financial difficulties due to the loss of foundation aid, which could only be compensated by state subsidies and revenues from the larger livestock farms (pig and cow farms).

4. Innovations in daily life

The students performed farming activities under the constant supervision of their teachers. They ploughed, sowed seeds by hand and with seed drills, and worked with manually operated and animal-powered equipment just like ordinary laborers. Gardening work was performed under the supervision of the gardener: tree planting and care, sowing, etc. In the stables, animals were regularly looked after: they were fed and other activities were also performed. At the beginning of each assignment, students received instructions on the given tasks and working methods, and with due attention paid to preventing work overload or damaging their health. The agricultural school's activities included horse breeding, cattle, pig and poultry breeding, and beekeeping.

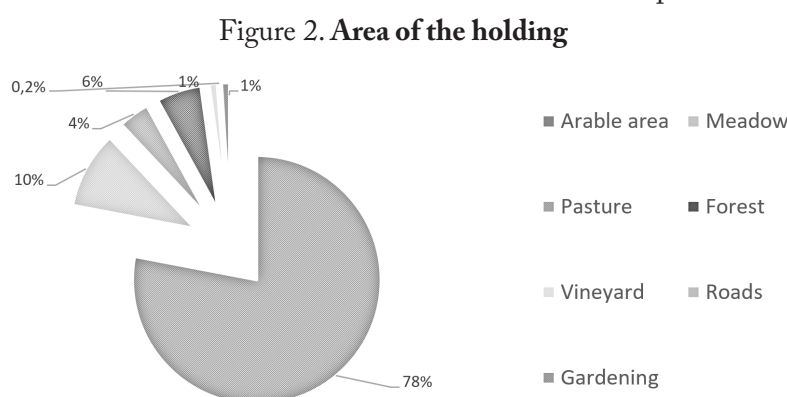
Agricultural vocational education strived to keep pace with the restructuring of the domestic agricultural sector and the qualitative upgrading of production. Varietal conversion in livestock farming, including cattle, has significantly contributed to the development of dairy farms. This has raised demand for professional training in dairy farming. Prior to 1890, the only opportunity for students to master the skills of dairy farming was offered by agricultural schools.

The activities of the school's teaching staff were not limited to developing the professional skills of students alone, they also organised regular training courses for small farmers. They visited the surrounding villages and gave lectures on pre-fixed days. The lectures were mostly devoted to creating the necessary conditions for ploughing and sowing, crop and livestock production. In the places where the lectures were given, they soon realised that people were not only in need of useful advice but tangible support as well. Thus, the school expanded its activities, baptised as of 1924 Somogyszéntimre Agricultural Vocational School for Economic Control Officers. By the 50th anniversary of the school's foundation, the number of graduates had reached 1500 and the number of vocational subjects had tripled. Courses were also organised on a permanent basis to provide further professional training for folk teachers.

This spirit of innovation was also reflected in the operation of the holding as well as the spatial outlay of buildings. The school's premises encompassed over 572 acres of land comprising medium-compact sandy loam soil ideal for cultivation. A multi-stage crop rotation method was applied that also responded to the needs of livestock production and familiarised prospective farmers with all types of crops (fodder, leguminous and other plants). Farmers also received instruction on sowing yarn and industrial crops, the basics of the cultivation of tobacco, hemp and sorghum, a tradition surviving to our days. Only a few tobacco dryers are still in operation in Csököly. The territorial structure of the holding underwent substantial changes during the 50 years of its operation. The study farm was traversed by the Kaposvár-Barcs railway line, enabling the rapid transportation of produce to the county seat. By the year of its cessation, it had acquired an ornamental garden, a huge forest park, a fish pond and impressive livestock. The cattle farm generated important revenues for the school. The pig herd consisted of mangalica swine, 2,000 of which were delivered to Kaposvár annually. The fish stock was sold in the nearby

markets, while eggs from poultry farming were sold in the county seat. The school's test farm was recognized as exemplary across the county.

The dairy farm for raising cattle from Bonyhád served dual utilisation purposes. Originally there were around 20 cows and their reproduction, but their number steadily increased. The horses were used for daily work, and students were assigned the care of nearly 20 stallions and mares. In the autumn of 1890, the school purchased Cigaya dairy sheep, which yielded higher revenues than the Merino breed (from the sale of not only its wool but also its meat and milk and being less fodder consuming). The average annual number of sheep was over 200. Pig farming was launched in the spring of 1891 with the purchase of Yorkshire swine known for gaining weight more rapidly. The purchase of swine allowed for the utilisation of the by-product (whey) from the dairy farm as an excellent feed-material. Poultry farming was also a vital component that included raising Langshan hens (over 1 000), Emden geese (nearly 50) and ducks (nearly 300). The innovative approach preceding its epoch was manifest in the number and types of livestock animals and laid down the foundations of modern and profitable farming. Infrastructural facilities



Source: own editing by MNL SML V. 261.

were also permeated by the spirit of innovation: water for the automatic water supply system was obtained from the underground drainage pipe of the humid area of the nursery, which supplied the cheese factory and the dairy farm with excellent water. The cheese factory processed milk provided not only by the school's holding but the nearby farmers as well.

In 1935, after 50 years of operation, the school's lease contract expired and was not renewed by the then owner, Elemér Márffy who took over the running of the flourishing holding himself. However, he did not reap the benefits of the developing estate for long, as in 1945 it was parcelled up and distributed among the farm servants¹². On 17 March 1945, a government decree was issued on the abolition of large estates and the allocation of land among the peasantry. The abolition of the large estate system was believed to trigger the democratic transformation of the country, the establishment of the system of productive smallholdings and private landowners registered in the Land Register¹³.

5. Summary

The 19th century development of Kadarkút already demonstrates the presence of specific traits underlying its centrality in later years. The Hungarian settlement benefiting from favorable economic and natural geographical assets, situated at the western foot of the Zselic along the Kaposvár - Barcs local railway line already had its own district administration, post office, telegraph office and railway station by the end of the 19th century. Over time it developed into an administrative and educational centre and the village acquired the function of a road transport hub. The foundations of progressive education were laid down by the Royal Agricultural School of Szentimre established in the northern part of the village, which operated for fifty years.

¹² Répay L. – Puskás B. (2005)

¹³ Szakács S. (1998)

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