

ANALYSIS OF CHANGES IN THE FUNCTIONALITY OF HUNGARIAN HOMESTEADS

FERENCZ ÁRPÁD*¹, DEÁK ZSUZSANNA*²

¹*Pallas Athena University, Faculty of Horticulture and Rural Development*

²*Faculty of Horticulture, Kecskemét, Hungary*

*Corresponding author's e-mail: ferencz.arpad@kfk.kefo.hudeak.zsuzsanna@kfk.kefo.hu

Abstract: *The issue of the homestead system has become an important factor both in urban and in rural development. We studied the major homesteading area, the sand ridges of the Hungarian Great Plain between the Danube and Tisza rivers. The farms have been divided based on their purpose into economic, residential and uninhabited functions. The proportion and features of these are presented in this paper. The number of farmsteads with traditional agricultural functions has greatly diminished in Hungary. The main changes that can be seen are the expansion of the purely residential functions, the spreading of hobby-farms and the appearance of farms in the hospitality and tourism business. In addition, a large number of them simply became empty or abandoned. The issue of homesteads in Hungary is a complex problem which must be solved at the governmental level by developing targeted programs.*

Key words: *rural development, Hungarian farms, change of functionality*

INTRODUCTION

The most common definition of a classic homestead (or “tanya” in Hungarian) is by Györfly (1937): "Homestead, or as formerly known quarters, refers to the scattered, lonely colonies on the Hungarian plain which today form the centers of agricultural work, and general economic activity. However, the homestead is not an independent form of settlement but with its surrounding estates is a function of a nearby city or a village" [6]. The current legal definition is determined by Section 3 of the LV. Law of 1994 on Arable Lands: "a homestead is established on the outskirts of residential areas for the purpose of agricultural activities (crop production, animal husbandry, as well as product processing and product storage) comprising of residential-, farm and business buildings and of a land area not larger than 6000 m² which are grouped under the same lot number". The farmsteads of Hungary, particularly on the Great Plains, are not just scattered settlements, but represent many centuries of tradition, a form of life merging unique settlement, farming and social practices into one.

Several of today's important tourist facilities were developed from homesteads representing traditional values. They provide a significant contribution to regional development [2]. The grouping and characteristics of farmsteads has been described from several points of view in previous literature. Ferenc Erdei, for example, described the world of the 1930's homesteads mainly from a sociological perspective.

Farmsteads have typical features same as towns or villages. Just as villages are distinct with their own features, characteristic regional styles can also be observed in farmsteads. There are areas where homesteads are aligned in a row reminiscent of a street, elsewhere we see them bunched together which may seem like a very small village but it only consists of one or two houses and a central square is always left empty between them [1].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Great Plain Research Institute of the Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences conducted the research using a unique method developed from geo-spatial techniques suitable for modeling the outlying areas, and by assessing almost 6,000 individual farmsteads. The study is 76% representative, as out of the 104 settlements 96 municipalities supplied data which could be processed and because the contributors participating in the survey did not have exact quantifiable data for each farm. Of the 53 709 registered homesteads 24%, i.e. 13 009 farms, had no data.

The aim of the survey and development program was to improve the situation of homestead areas, especially in regards to the tasks of providing electricity, better infrastructure and provisioning and the reduction of social disparities.

RESEARCH RESULTS

According to the comprehensive survey of the farmsteads located in the Sand-dune micro-region the following assessment can be formulated. Distribution of functions of the farmsteads is illustrated in Figure 1.

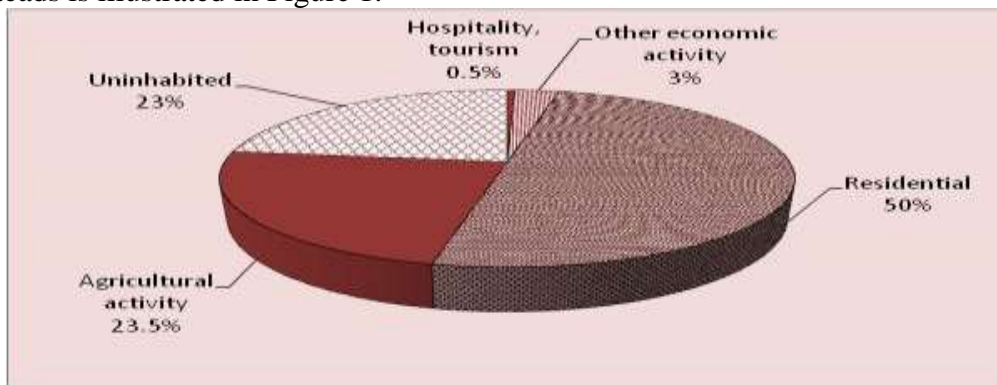


Figure 1. Distribution of Hungarian homesteads per function

1. Farmsteads with economic functions, analysis by type

Economic activity can appear with or without residential function. The figures show that in addition to residential function the second largest portion is made up of farms with an array of business functions. This is the key segment of a viable farm system. On the 9607 farmhouses that represent 27% of all existing and 35% of all working farmsteads economic activity can be divided into further groups depending on size. The relationship is shown in Figure 2.

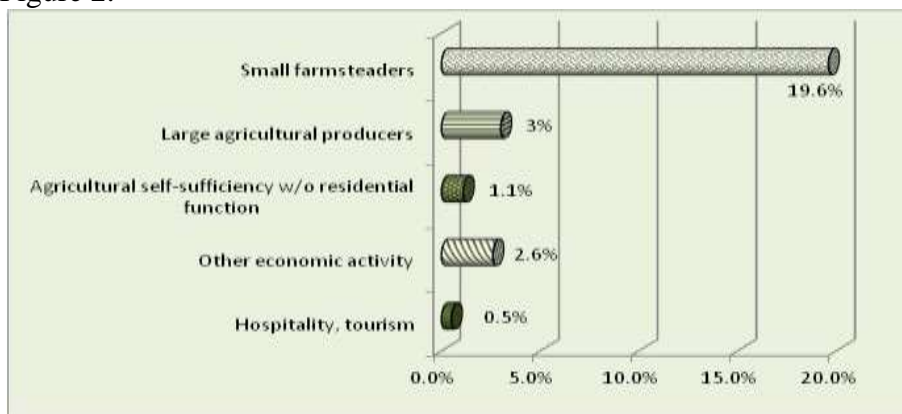


Figure 2. Percentage of homesteads with economic function in the Sand-dune area

Farmsteads with agricultural function

Among the farms engaged in agricultural activities we should distinguish between those that fundamentally produce for self-sufficiency, and those enterprises that continue true large-scale agricultural production. Apart from a few large-scale producers, the agricultural activity on farmsteads is predominantly typified by small-holders. In general, today's Hungarian agriculture is characterized by a low level of mechanization, technological backwardness, difficulties in marketing and lack of capital.

Farmsteads with other economic function

This group is the result of a two-way process. First there are the depots and branches of industrial, commercial, or service companies active in suburban locations. Second, there are those homesteads which their owners use only as production sites but are still somehow connected to agricultural activity.

Farmsteads with hospitality, tourism functions

The significance of spreading these tourist activities lies in the fact that within the farmstead environment new features and jobs were created, as well as an infrastructure (telephone, internet, satellite, gas, water etc.) and service background (accommodations, meals, swimming, horse riding, massage, etc.) was developed that is increasingly able to meet the demands of quality in the agro-, eco- and equestrian tourism.

2. Farmsteads with residential functions, analysis by type

The number of farms studied under the residential function was 17 624 that is 50% of the total surveyed farms. The different type of residential functions for the farmsteads surveyed is shown in Figure 3.

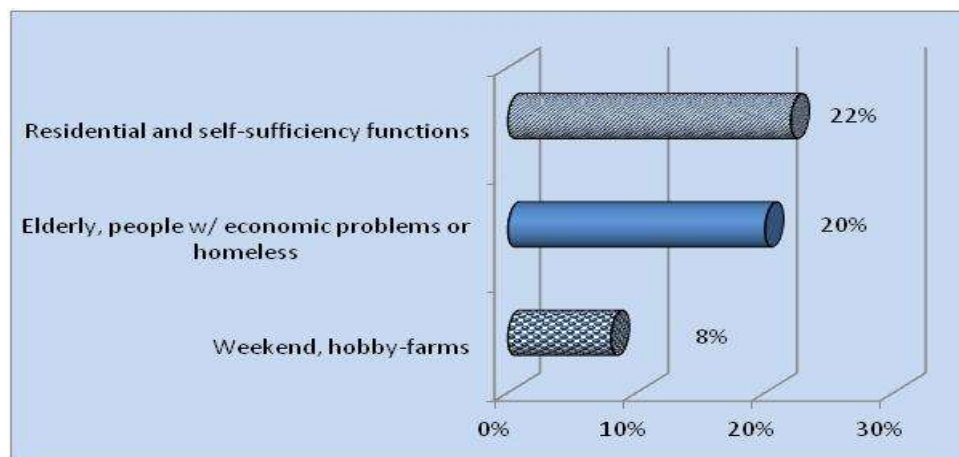


Figure 3. Types of residential functions for homesteads in Hungary

Residential function and agriculture for self sufficiency

Many have chosen the outskirts as a place of residence because of cheap housing. They often move away from city out of necessity and have to be satisfied with the poorer living conditions offered by outlying areas because they cannot keep up with the cost of urban infrastructure.

Elderly and other people with livelihood problems

Residents of many farmsteads are retired people where production can no longer be addressed. From their modest pensions they cannot get the necessary renovations done and in many cases do not even have power installed in the buildings. However, the ties are too strong for them to move in the city. Often older people would want to leave the farm, but

they cannot move away because of the value of the property. This group also includes worker class people with no or very little land who often perceive living on homesteads only as an emergency solution. They are working-age, non-farming homestead residents of mainly young people, or young families with children.

The third group is comprised of poor, deprived people who are marginalized by society for whom these comfortless, dilapidated buildings become hideaways and safe havens.

Weekend or hobby-farms

Among the farms belonging into this category both inherited and acquired properties can be found. They fulfill several different functions such as private rest, recreation, tourism or farm tourism.

12% or 4943 of the surveyed homesteads has by now disappeared, vanished. Almost a quarter (23%) of the still existing farms, 8524, is uninhabited.

CONCLUSIONS

Chances for a sustainable existence for homestead areas have been deteriorating, their environmental status indicators moved in a negative direction. Realignment is fundamentally complicated by their distance from the centers and poor accessibility. These scattered settlements having been left out of the economic circulation are in increasingly difficult conditions. The problems of homestead areas cannot be narrowed down to a single issue such as no electricity, poor rural roads or problems of profitability in agriculture, but they are very diverse in nature with environmental, social, cultural, and economic aspects. Accordingly, because of the correlations between the various problems, a workable solution is only possible within the framework of a comprehensive development program.

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