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AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Economic Adaptation and Individual Livelihood Strategies in a Swabian Village in Satu Mare County

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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the first partial results of economic anthropological research conducted in the Swabian settlement of Mezőfény (Romanian: *Foieni*) in Satu Mare County (Romania). The aim of the research is to describe the livelihood and income-earning strategies among agricultural production groups in local society and to interpret different forms of economic adaptation (individual, household and community level) in the settlement within the context of the post-socialist transformation from a planned to a capitalist market economy.

KEYWORDS

agriculture, economic adaptation, local livelihood strategies, diversification, pluriactivity, post-socialist transition, property transformation

My study summarizes the first research experiences and partial results of a micro-level economic anthropological study.[1] The research, which began in 2018 and – with minor interruptions – was

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[1]The primary data collection, resource exploration and empirical fieldwork was carried out within the framework of the internationally collaborative research project *Párhuzamos ruralitások. A vidékiség (lét)formái négy erdélyi kisrégióban* [Parallel Ruralities. (Existential) Forms of Rurality in Four Small Regions of Transylvania] (K 120712) of the NKFIH (Nemzeti Kutatási, Fejlesztési és Innovációs Hivatal – National Research, Development and Innovation Office, Hungary). The writing of the manuscript was supported by the Institute of Ethnography of the ELKH BTK (Humanities Research Centre – Eötvös Loránd Research Network), topic no. 57001, Lendület grant (LENDULET_2020-56), and by the NKE (National University of Public Service) Central European Research Centre's individual research grant no. 34000/1995/2021.

based on about four weeks of fieldwork and participant observation, focusing on the contemporary conditions of several Swabian settlements in Satu Mare County,[2] with a special emphasis on the economic, social and political changes in local communities after the regime change.

The present study deals with one Transylvanian village among the settlements covered by the research (Mezőfény). The aim of the analysis is to describe the most important economic strategies and income-earning techniques of local groups involved in agricultural production. My study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Which economic adaptation patterns (repertoires) and strategic solutions were developed during the post-socialist years by the families and households engaged in agricultural production in the village under study? What are the most typical contemporary forms and types of agricultural production in local society?
2. What were the major "external" structural (economic, political, social) and/or "internal" local (individual or community level) changes in the decades after the regime change that led individual households and family farms to develop divergent economic strategies or complex adaptation techniques?
3. Is there a more general (systemic) relationship between the individual economic strategies and income diversification techniques of each household?

In Romania – as in most Central and Eastern European countries – the post-socialist economic and political transition, and as part of it the employment and livelihood crisis that unfolded, especially in the first half of the 1990s, encouraged the rural population to use the scarce resources at their disposal (land, labor, capital) in a simultaneous and diverse i.e. a "creative" way. Over the past three decades, this – and a number of other factors not specified here – has led to the emergence of very complex, variable patterns of income accumulation and/or survival strategies on family farms in rural areas (Davis 2001; Peti 2013; Sofer – Bordanc 1998). These everyday techniques of economic and socio-cultural adaptation are usually addressed by international literature as the concepts of "diversification" and "pluriactivity".[3]

A classic and often quoted definition of the former term comes from Brian W. Ilbery. According to Ilbery, farm diversification is the combination and reallocation of agricultural

[2]Between 20 and 27 June 2018, we conducted a questionnaire survey with twelve students in four Swabian settlements in Satu Mare County (Kaplony/Căpleni, Csanálos/Urziceni, Mezőfény/Foieni, Mezőpetri/Petreşti), in about 250 households. Sándor Béres, Zsolt Csordás, Emesz Sár, Teodór Gaál, Veronika Kécza, Réka Kész, Annamária Kiss, Borbála Labancz, Csenge Molnár, Vivien Pajtók, Rita Szabó, Krisztina Tompos (students of the Institute of Ethnography, Department of Ethnography, Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University, the Department of Ethnography, Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen and the Department of Ethnography and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Pécs) participated in the research, and I would like to thank them for their contribution. Subsequently, during the spring and autumn of 2019, I carried out several weeks of fieldwork in one of the three villages, Mezőfény, where I conducted a total of 25 narrative life history and/or semi-structured interviews based on the previously compiled questionnaire database. This paper builds on the synthesis, processing and analysis of the experiences from notes, research observations and narrative accounts generated during the three field studies.

[3]According to Vik and McElwee, the boundaries between the two terms are somewhat blurred, but the literature generally defines diversification as farm-centred income-generating activity, i.e. the category of activity that is formed by the reorganisation of assets and resource stocks within or associated with the farm. In contrast, the term pluriactivity is used in economic geography discourse to refer primarily to capital accumulation strategies outside the farm economy (Vik – McElwee 2011:394).

resources (land, labor, capital) that leads to the emergence of novel enterprises (different from the original agricultural activity of the farm household) within a given farm (Ilbery 1992:102). Among these "non-traditional" (alternative) income-generating strategies, the author distinguishes two major types (structural diversification and agricultural diversification) along with several other subgroups.[4]

Ilbery's model has been criticized for its lack of detail and clarity in connection with the concept. Examining the economic system of Italian farms, for example, Dries and his co-authors argued that off-farm employment (e.g. foreign employment) cannot be excluded from the concept of diversification as it very often provides an important economic background and resources for the maintenance of basic activities on the farm. They argue that a mechanical separation of on-farm and off-farm incomes among agricultural households is therefore not possible since these economic strategies are often not mutually exclusive but rather comprise correlative i.e. interdependent relationships between them at the household level (Dries et al. 2012:8).

Walford, on the other hand, stresses that marketing, processing, the provision of certain services or the intensive relationship between seller and buyer, which Ilbery explicitly considered a specific feature of structural diversification, are also characteristic of some forms of agricultural diversification. As he writes, "unconventional businesses as defined, especially non-food products, do not have established markets, and therefore farmers have to create them or find outlets in unknown areas" (Walford 2003:53).

The notion of "non-traditional (alternative) enterprises" in Ilbery's definition, like the conceptual categories of "traditional" and "conventional," is also problematic since the referential meaning of these terms cannot be determined by objective criteria or can only be determined to a very limited extent. Deciding where to draw the line between traditional, quasi-traditional or non-traditional economic activities (together with the social perception of economic phenomena denoted by these terms) is usually a dynamic process. To give just one example, organic farming, initially described in the literature as a novel form of diversification, is now becoming a more widely known and socially accepted economic practice (sometimes with a history of several decades and with its own "traditions"). This change of status – even without taking into account the details – gives a good sense of the conceptual and theoretical difficulties arising from the historical variability of economic phenomena (Phelan 2014:35; Walford 2003:53).

Partly in the wake of the critiques above, by *diversification* I mean conscious model shifts or shifts in micro-level resource management policies or in the management of individual households. I therefore use the term to refer to everyday strategic actions and forms of economic activity through which agricultural households attempt to adapt to new economic and environmental changes (on and off the farm) by modifying their previous economic behavior and/or current income-earning activities.

"Farm diversification," in my approach, is very important, and yet it is only one possible (particular) component of the economic adaptation of rural households, and from this point of

[4]Ilbery distinguishes between the following subtypes of structural on-farm diversification i.e. diversification other than traditional agricultural activity: 1) tourism; 2) increasing added value; 3) passive diversification. In contrast, he includes in the category of agricultural diversification: 1) unconventional enterprises; 2) the forest farm; and 3) various cases and forms of agricultural contracting (Ilbery 1991:210).

view it is not system-building, but only a systemic element. As the literature points out, the adaptation techniques of family farms can vary widely. They can include: the concentration and intensification of agricultural production by increasing land use or livestock, adding value or even cooperating with other farmers; the specialization of agricultural practices (by redistributing existing capacities); the diversification of agricultural activity, various techniques of formal, informal and illegal off-farm income generation (non-farm employment, farm abandonment, external business activities, increasing dependence on state and EU compensation payments), or even the reduction, partial or total abandonment of agricultural activities (Barbieri – Mahoney 2009; Breustedt – Glauben 2007; Meert et al. 2005; Moreno-Pérez et al. 2011; Oude Lansink et al. 2003; Smith et al. 2017). However, as McElwee aptly points out, we should also consider as part of economic adaptation those seemingly negative (but in the longer term not infrequently profitable) strategies wherein members of a family farm, under external pressure – e.g. an economic crisis – decide to simply do nothing in the given situation (McElwee 2006:187).

In examining these everyday economic adaptation techniques, I take the *process-oriented* approach of Bowler and his co-authors as the theoretical starting point for my study. These researchers conducted a questionnaire survey of 34 households in the North Pennines of England (Bowler et al. 1996). Based on the data collected, it was found that family farm businesses can follow seven typical paths of farm business development. Thus, a local society may develop in the following ways:

Path 1. The "industrial" model of productivist agricultural development based on scale enlargement, intensification and specialization using traditional farm products or services.
Path 2. Recombination of farm resources (including human capital) into new non-conventional agricultural products or services on the farm (alternative farm enterprise type I).
Path 3. Recombination of farm resources (including human capital) into new non-agricultural products or services on the farm (alternative farm enterprise type II.)
Path 4. Redeployment of farm resources (including human capital) into employment off the farm (other gainful activity).
Path 5. Maintaining the "traditional" model of conventional farm production or services.
Path 6 Winding down to hobby or semi-retired farming.
Path 7. Retirement from farming.

Bowler's model thus distinguishes between three broadly defined adaptation strategies and one status quo strategy (adjustment) – the latter being type 5, the maintenance of traditional agricultural production and way of life. Strategy 1 corresponds to the concentration and intensification of agricultural production, the next three (2, 3, 4) to the diversification of the economy, and the last two (6 and 7) to an exit strategy (Dries et al. 2012:9). All of these are systemic elements of an open, dynamic structure: in practice, these households may follow several different behavioral patterns at the same time.

In this paper, I will first briefly describe the settlement and some of the ethno-demographic, social and other features of the population living there, which I consider to be characteristic. In the following, I will deal with the most important economic and social processes of change (collectivization, labor migration, property transformation after the regime change), which, in my view, have determined the situation of agriculture and the local agricultural market in the village over the last three decades. Given this context, in

the second part of the paper, I will analyze the lives and business histories of individual farmers in order to describe micro-level resource management strategies among the residents of Mezőfény and some of the main types of adaptation practices that emerge from them.

THE RESEARCH SITE

Mezőfény (Foieni) is a village on the Satu Mare Plain, belonging to the former Ecsed marshland area, located 10 km from Nagykároly/Carei, in the north-western part of Romania. According to the official census data, the village has a multi-ethnic population: in 2011, a total of 1,840 people lived in the village, of which 68.8% (1,266 people) were Hungarian, 20.8% (384 people) German, 5.6% (104 people) Roma and 3.8% (69 people) Romanian.[5]

The image that which emerges from the population statistics is, however, nuanced by the fact that the population identifying themselves as "Hungarian" is – in keeping with the experience of the field research – mostly made up of linguistically assimilated[6] people with a strong sense of Swabian origin.

Historical records show that the first Swabian inhabitants of Mezőfény moved to the village in 1720 as part of a longer and deliberately organized settlement policy.[7] By the first quarter of the 20th century, however, the majority of these families had developed multiple, complex (Hungarian-Swabian) national-ethnic ties due to intensive acculturation processes and language change within the group. This population has been recorded from time to time in national censuses – from the beginning of modern-era mother tongue and ethnicity statistics to official censuses such as the one above – as representatives of different ethno-linguistic groups, or as members of mutually exclusive ethnic categories. The majority of the inhabitants of Mezőfény, however, still define their own multiplicative cultural-national ties using an intermediate, transitional or hybrid term, "Swabian-Hungarian,"[8] which simultaneously points to the local significance of the Swabian sense of origin and its close ties to

[5]Source: https://nepszamlalas.adatbank.transindex.ro/?pg=etnikai&id=2251; downloaded: 05.11.2020.).

[6]The language shift is clearly indicated by historical statistics. In 1930, 53.9% (998 people) of the village population (1,851 people) still spoke German, 43.3% (820 people) Hungarian and 1.6% (30 people) Romanian (Statisztikai kéziratos közlemények 1940:77). By 2011, however, the proportions had changed completely: only a fraction of the total population (1,840 people), 0.2% (5 people), indicated German as their mother tongue, and 3.4% (63 people) indicated Romanian as their mother tongue. The absolute majority of the inhabitants of the village, 95.3% (1,755 people), already had Hungarian as their mother tongue. Source: http://nepszamlalas.adatbank.transindex.ro/?pg=anyanyelvi&id=2251; downloaded: 05.11.2020.).

[7]Count Sándor Károlyi, the former landlord of the region, played a prominent role in the settlement of the Swabians of Satu Mare, recruiting settlers to his depopulated estates, mainly from the south-western part of Germany (Württemberg) in the first half of the 18th century. As a result of the deliberate settlement policy of the count and his successors, within a little more than a century a total of 31 settlements, partly or entirely inhabited by Swabians, were established in the area of Nagykároly and Szatmárnémeti/Satu Mare. The first village to be settled was Csanálos (1712) and the last was Tasnád/Tăş;nad (1815) (Baumgartner 2012).

[8]For methodological, epistemological and conceptual problems arising from the phenomenon of multiple, divergent ethnic-national attachment and the "external" categorisation and "internal" identification, see: (Beck-Gernsheim 2011; Tátrai et al. 2020).

Hungarian national-cultural identity and enhanced by the ethno-national revival movement after the regime change.[9]

Among the defining events in the history of the village in the 20th century, the deportation of Swabian inhabitants in 1945[10] and the international emigration process that began in the late 1980s are of particular importance. Due to the latter, the population of the municipality decreased by 12.4% (291 people) between 1977 and 1992 and by a further 10.3% (171 people) between 1992 and 2011, with ethnic return migration to Germany undoubtedly playing a major role.[11] According to locals, because of families moving away in the nineties, "there is now a generation missing from the village, as if there is a gap between generations." International migration has also changed the population reproduction capacity of the settlement, which – in the absence of other sources – is illustrated by the enrolment data of the local school. During the 2017/18 school year, the year before my fieldwork, the total number of children enrolled in this school was 135, a drop of almost 56.1% compared to the pre-regime change figures of 1987/88 (See the enrolment data in: Merli 2001:227). This negative overall picture is, however, somewhat nuanced by the fact that in recent years the proportion of people moving into the settlement (mainly from the surrounding urban centers and agglomeration) has been increasing. This trend has significantly reduced the negative demographic trends resulting from natural loss, emigration and ageing, although it has not completely reversed them.

Nevertheless, the external appearance of the village – the built environment, the tidiness of the houses – still gives the impression of a "wealthy" village, typical of Swabian communities, which is attractive to the inhabitants of surrounding urban centers (where property prices are high) and to young people living there. Add to this that the village has a relatively developed infrastructure. The public institutions established before the change of regime (kindergarten for

[9]The complex meanings of the term "Swabian-Hungarian" – articulated through various dimensions of cultural identity, lifestyle and traditional customs – are very vividly depicted in the following interview excerpt. "S.B.: What does the term "Swabian-Hungarian" mean in Mezőfény? T.T: Well, that our ancestors are Swabians, but our culture is Hungarian, because in the late 1800s – let's be honest – a process of Hungarianization has taken place. Cultural attachment means the way we were taught at school: we grew up on Petőfi and Arany, not Goethe. There was a German school between the two world wars, but after the war it never became a German school again. There is one in Károly, but Hungarian education has been kept in Fény. S.B.: And how does the "Swabian" attachment manifest itself in everyday life "apart from the sense of origin? T.T.: Well, in traditions, mainly, and in the way of life. The fact that we eat strudel, for example, or noodles and angel wings (csöröge). Or how you slaughter a pig, the butcher knows the Swabian way - he doesn't roast it, he boils it. Now they're roasting the pig here too. . . And how he marinates it, because he marinates the bacon in garlic sauce in a completely different way. They don't do that anywhere else." (60-year-old man, Mezőfény).

[10]Among the villages around Nagykároly and Szatmárnémeti, after Tasnád and Kaplony, most of the inhabitants were deported from Mezőfény because of their German/Swabian origin. According to the local history of Rudolf Merli, a former parish priest in Mezőfény, 315 people were deported from the village to the Ukraine and various parts of the Soviet Union in January 1945 for the Málenkij Robot (forced labour). Of those deported, 63 did not return (Merli 2001: 140.). In his list of the names of Swabian deported from Mezőfény, another author, Ernő Boros, publishes the data of 320 deportees and 73 people who died as prisoners (Boros 2010:275–278).

[11]For the concept of ethnic migration, see: (Giorgi et al. 1992; Fassmann – Münz 1995; Brubaker 1998; Okólski 1998). According to a household census taken by Rudolf Merli in 2000, a total of 420 people emigrated from Mezőfény to Germany in the first decade after the regime change. The data on the households concerned (names, number of families and family members who emigrated, along with their house numbers) are provided in a list by the author (Merli 2001:340–343).

80 children, primary school, medical clinic, community center, mayor's office) have undergone a complete renovation in recent years. Since the end of the 2000s – mainly with the help of EU funds – the settlement has seen a number of economic developments and institutional investment: a new home for the elderly, a sports hall and sports grounds with artificial grass were built; the reconstruction of the road connecting the village with Nagykároly was completed in 2014; in autumn 2018 – during my fieldwork – a complete reconstruction of the village pavement system, water drainage ditches and public spaces was launched.

According to the local government, in a settlement of around 2,000 inhabitants,[12] only 63 people received social benefits in 2017;[13] of these, only about 20 persons were cumulatively disadvantaged (11 persons in need of home care, 2 persons with disabilities, the others in need of social care for other reasons, such as an unstable family background, addiction, etc.). The vast majority of the claimants – 99% according to the social affairs officer – belong to the Roma minority.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY: COLLECTIVE FARMING DURING THE YEARS OF STATE SOCIALISM

At the current stage of research, there are no accurate and detailed data available for the historical reconstruction of the first decades of the Swabian settlements in Satu Mare County/ Bervebni after 1945 i.e. the years of compulsory deliveries, tax increases, land distribution, confiscation of property and land, "dekulakization," forced collectivization, etc.

However, on the basis of interviews and fragmentary information from the settlement, it can perhaps be said that the socialist reorganization of agriculture (the abolition of private property and autonomous individual economic production) among the national minority (the Swabians of Satu Mare County), who were specifically engaged in agricultural production, took place more slowly than usual.[14] Among the (contemporary) reports of the time, an article in the 12 April 1956 issue of the *Romániai Magyar Szó* (Hungarian Word of Romania) refers to this issue. In this article, propagating the usefulness of collective farming and the economic advantages and "superiority" of socialist large-scale farming, the author reported that in the villages of the Nagykároly district "the transformation of agriculture [to 'socialist' – S.B.] unfolded slowly. Months passed, for example last year and the year before, without the

[12]According to the municipality, there are five households with 1 person, eleven households with 2 persons, eight households with 3 persons and only three households with 4 persons. One of the conditions for receiving the allowance is a month's community service, which varies according to the size of the household. People with children under 7 or with a long-term illness are exempted.

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[14]During the post-1945 process of economic, political, social and cultural transformation in settlements with a mixed ethnic composition, nationality appeared as a kind of disqualification criterion from the point of view of the dictatorial power. In this context, see: (Tóth 2014; Varga 2015).

formation of a collective farm or association in the region. The welfare among members of collective farms in Börvely/Berveni, Mezőpetri/Petreşti, Kismajtény/Moftinu Mic, and the associations of Csomaköz/Ciumeşti and other socialist units, however, has surely given many individual farmers in the village a reason to think. (. . .) Even so, in many municipalities, state and party organizations have only occasionally campaigned for the expansion of the socialist sector of agriculture. And in some places (for example in Mezőfény), on the principle that 'the ice won't break here anytime soon anyway', there was little attempt to organize a large-scale farm." (Deme 1956:3)

However, in the third (last) phase of collectivization in Romania, after the Second Party Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party (23–28 December 1955), the process of restructuring agriculture in this region also gained new momentum. Although a so-called TOZ-type agricultural cooperative was established in the village as early as 1952, according to local memories ("there were not many members, they had maybe like 50 ha in all"),[15] the consolidation and institutional reinforcement of socialist forms of agricultural production in the region – i.e. (a) state farms, (b) collective farms and (c) agricultural cooperatives – intensified during the second half of the 1950s. As a result of this process, 16 collective farms (with 1,991 families and 6,908 ha of land), one agricultural cooperative (with 52 families and 2,007 ha of land) and 60 agricultural associations (with 6,088 families and 13,150 ha of land) were established in the villages of the district of Nagykároly by the end of 1958. By the end of the decade, the region thus had a total of 77 TOZ type agricultural cooperatives, with 7,131 families as members. However, despite rapid and forced collectivization, the total area of land under cooperative cultivation during this period did not exceed 20,265 ha, which represented just over a third (36.9 per cent) of the region's arable land (Kovács 1958:2).

During these years, by the end of 1958 – in the space of just one or two years – four TOZ type agricultural cooperatives were established in Mezőfény, operating in parallel. Membership consisted of 470 families/households, who farmed 1,029 ha of arable land and 60 ha of meadow. These four associations were merged into a single collective agricultural holding in August 1959. (After integration, "another 60 families joined the collective with 117 ha of land".)[16] As in most rural settlements in Transylvania and Hungary, resistance by the local population, protesting against the abolition of private property and autonomous farming, was broken by physical violence, the confiscation of property, and harassment.[17] According to the recollection of one resident in Mezőfény:

[15]The establishment of agricultural cooperatives of the TOZ type was ordered by a decision of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party on 18 September 1951. Hotărărea CC al PMR din 18 septembrie 1950. *Scănteia* [The Spark] (Issue no. 2146) 18 September 1951, 1–2. This form of organisation, in contrast to the collective economy, allowed private ownership (the land, livestock and some or all of the means of production could remain in the hands of the farmers) and only required collective production (the division of land into sections, the joint execution of the main agricultural tasks) (László 2009:60.).

[16]Életerős mezőgazdasági társulásokat [Successful agricultural cooperatives]. *Előre. A Román Népköztársaság Néptanácsának Lapja* [Go Ahead: Journal of the People's Council of the Romanian People's Republic]. November 17, 1959. 13(3749):1.

[17]Violence as one of the most fundamental means for institutionalising communist regime and political power in the context of collectivisation is examined in detail in: (Ö. Kovács 2012; Horváth – Ö. Kovács eds. 2015).

"This was the last village in the area where a collective was founded. In Fény, 3 people were locked up in prison because no one would bend. They were deprived of their land, dispossessed, and had to give it to the collective in Károly, just to be pestered. The kulaks were killed 'to the maximum.' There were some kulaks, one of our neighbors, who farmed on 22 ha of land with a family of six and didn't take home a single bushel of wheat. And then they spoke up, maybe something they shouldn't have, and then three people were jailed. Then, within a month, 80–90% of the village joined the collective." (80-year-old man, Mezőfény)[18]

As a contemporary propaganda report tells us, the newly created "23 August" collective farm "started on its very first day with fixed assets of 82 milking stalls, 131 Merino sheep, 167 horses, 30 seeders, many, many carts, 72,000 lei cash, etc. – the members of economically and organizationally strong associations have formed a collective farm, associations which bear witness to the fact that the real rise and prosperity of our villages can be achieved through socialist agriculture, as the Party has shown."[19]

This organizational framework of local agricultural production (established in the early 1960s) essentially remained in place until the time of the regime change. The Mezőfény cooperative has always been a collective farm with a distinctly agricultural profile, mainly engaged in crop production and large-scale livestock farming (cattle, sheep and pigs),[20] which provided livelihoods for a total of around 340–370 people in the 1970s–1980s. The majority of the employees worked in the primary production sector (240 people in crop production and 80–100 in livestock farming), while a smaller number (10–20 people) worked in the industrial plants belonging to the farm (locksmiths, blacksmiths, carpenters and wheel makers). The technical conditions for industrial agricultural production – combine harvesters, tractors, trucks and other large agricultural machinery – were provided by the local machine repair plant (locally called "Szemete"),[21] which was spatially and organizationally separate from the collective farm in Mezőfény, employed about 20 people and belonged to the national network of machine and tractor stations (more specifically, to the district center in Nagykároly).

From the early 1970s on, part of the working-age population – mainly the younger generation – took jobs at the industrial plants (biscuit factory, textile factory, hemp factory, furniture factory, machine and iron factory, canning factory, milk powder factory, sugar factory) in nearby

[18]In order to protect the privacy of the interviewees, I have not disclosed any personal information about them. I use fictitious first names and sometimes initials to describe them, and at the end of each interview I only include their age, gender and place of birth.

[19]Életerős mezőgazdasági társulásokat [Successful agricultural cooperatives]. *Előre. A Román Népköztársaság Néptanácsának Lapja* [Go Ahead: Journal of the People's Council of the Romanian People's Republic]. November 17, 1959. 13(3749):1.

[20]László Szekernyés, one of the authors of the *Új élet* [New Life] magazine, in his 1971 field report on the economy of Mezőfény, wrote the following: "The farm is not one of the largest. There are 1,400 ha of arable land, 93 ha of meadows, 111 ha of orchards and 38 ha of vegetable gardens. These are the main fields. 850–900 cattle, 1,100–1,150 pigs, 1,500 Merino sheep. The phrase 'model farm' keeps coming to my mind and finally sneaks into my notebook." (László 1971:5).

[21]"Szemete" is the local vernacular form of an originally Romanian acronym (S.M.T. = Staţiuni de Maşini şi Tractoare, i. e. "Machinery and Tractor Station").

regional centers (Szatmárnémeti and Nagykároly), where the population commuted or went to work on a daily basis.[22]

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES FOLLOWING THE REGIME CHANGE

During the economic, social and political transition following the regime change, different factions emerged among local agricultural production groups, which have developed diverse solutions and strategies for economic adaptation over the last three decades. In what follows, I will describe the divergent economic strategies (land tenure and ownership, land use, forms of operation, etc.) of these groups.

Agricultural associations

After the change of regime in 1989, two associations performing agro-industrial activities were established in the municipality. One of them is the so-called Agrofieni (in local parlance: "Nagytársulás," i.e. the Great Association), founded in 1992 as the successor to the former Mezőfény collective farm. The other company is Agromec (known locally as the "Kistársulás," or Little Association). This resulted from the reorganization of the originally state-owned machine station serving the former collective farm and has been in operation since 1996.

Both collective farms in the village were created on the initiative of the socialist-era administrative and power elite (collective farm chairmen, engineers, machine station managers, etc.) who led the predecessors of each respective company. Despite personnel changes in recent years, 5 of the 11 board members at Agrofieni and 3 of the 4 board members at Agromec are members of the pre-regime elite. This *post-socialist layer of agrarian managers* continues to determine the daily functioning of the two agricultural associations, and through them the local labor market and agricultural production: they are both owners and employees of the institutions they have created and now manage.

[22]Levente Szilágyi does not consider the urban labour migration of the population of Mezőfény before the regime change to be significant, since (as he writes) the local "collective farms were capital-strong and profitable, and industrial labour migration to cities was less prevalent than in neighbouring Hungarian and Romanian villages." (Szilágyi 2020:30). My interviews, however, paint a different picture. According to this study, commuting by the local population for employment since the 1970s was motivated by a number of factors: industrial underdevelopment in the village, dynamic population growth, low agricultural incomes, relatively small areas of agricultural land (in terms of population). According to one interviewee – formerly an industrial worker in Nagykároly: "The number of workers in the collective has decreased every year since the 1970s and 80s because young people have gone to work in factories. It was natural for us to have to commute. We completed eight grades in Fény, and then everyone commuted. There was a bus, a proper bus service, and then there was a time when there was nothing, when we walked in the snow in the winter." (60-year-old woman, Mezőfény) This is also supported by historical sources. According to a newspaper article of the time, János Gyarmati, the secretary of the basic party organisation of the Mezőfény farm, for example, said as early as 1960 – after the first year of collectivisation (!) – that "currently, the biggest problem in the village is the employment of labour. The total area of the farm is 1,510 ha, and the number of workers is 1,100, which means that there are less than one and a half hectare of arable land per person. And how are they trying to find employment for their members? János Gyarmati answers in two words: inefficient farming. In addition to cereal crops, they grow labour-intensive and profitable industrial crops such as sugar beet, hemp, poppy, oilseeds, etc. And they try to harvest two crops a year from a large area. (. . .) They cultivate the land in such a way that one ha is worth two for them" (Nagy 1960:2).

Agrofieni is involved in large-scale arable farming on 870 ha and Agromec on 380 ha (wheat, barley, triticale, corn, sunflower, soy, rapeseed). Together, the two associations own and/or farm about 81.1% (1,250 ha) of the arable land in the village (1,540 ha) (Fig. 1).

Three quarters of the machinery needed for agricultural production is also included in the "undivided co-ownership" of the farmers belonging to the two agricultural associations. This fleet of machinery – at the time of my fieldwork in 2018 – consisted of 19 older (UTB, TZ-type) and 9 newer (New Holland, Claas Arion) tractors, 6 (Claas and New Holland) harvesting combines, as well as a number of related technical tools and large machines. Consequently, until a few individual farmers and family farms became stronger in recent years, the two associations ultimately carried out the mechanized custom farming of agricultural land in the village without competition; their monopoly position was thus, according to some, frequently abused. As one agricultural entrepreneur put it: "When the association was the only one with the machinery, every morning we were out at 7 o'clock for some work, begging them to come. The people of Fény were used to it, they were taught to go to bed thinking: it's OK, they'll come in the morning. I get on my bike, I'm out at 7am. Now, is the combine coming? No. Are you coming to sow today? No! It took people who grew up in it, who are now 70 years old, or dying out. It's gone. I'm paying you, my friend to come now because if you don't come, I'll go somewhere else. That's how it works in today's world. We say we have mobile phones, so why should I go out in the morning? I'll call you in the morning to see how things are going. So, we created our own business and bought our own machines." (47-year-old man, Mezőfény)

In terms of their profile, ownership, asset structure and role in local income allocation, the two agricultural associations show several important differences.

Agrofieni, for example, in addition to agricultural production on the land pooled by the owners, also provides various additional services to members of the agricultural association: a mill, a bakery and a slaughterhouse. It also has a large livestock herd (130 head of beef cattle, calves and dairy cattle) and is involved in livestock farming as well. The company has a total of

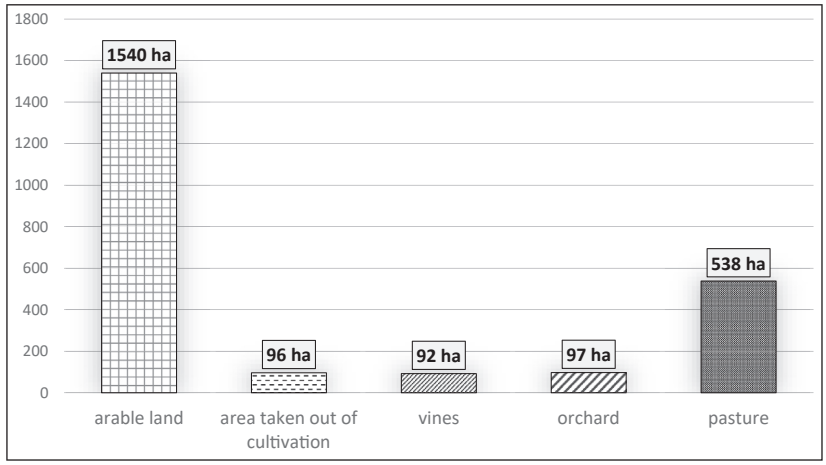

Fig. 1. The distribution of agricultural land by type of farming (in hectares, 2018). Department of Land Affairs, Mezőfény Mayor's Office (drafted by the author)

40 – mostly local – employees (managerial staff, office workers, machine operators, warehouse workers, laborers). Agromec, on the other hand, is involved exclusively in agricultural production. The 15 people working here (agricultural engineers, machine operators, auxiliary staff) cultivate land owned by the farm as well as rented land. In addition, it also provides machinery services (contract farming) for the inhabitants of the village, to a much greater extent than Agrofieni: it uses jointly owned machinery to work around 150 ha of arable land and 15 ha of garden every year for farmers who are not members of the association.

From the outset, the two agricultural associations have been formally registered and have legal status; both are limited companies. An important difference, however, is that while the smaller agricultural association (Agromec) is a community of property only in respect of land pooled for common use and machinery purchased from the annual profits, Agrofieni, as the successor to the collective farm, has the entire asset base of its members at its disposal. Accordingly, Agrofieni – unlike Agromec – not only pays dividends on the annual crop yield or on the rented land,[23] but also gives the owners a share of the total fixed assets "left in" at the time of the regime change, i.e. the total value of the movable and immovable assets (land, parts of buildings, animals, machinery, tools, etc.) to which the former collective farm members were entitled.

In the two farms with industrial agricultural production, the number of retired or non-agricultural members reaches 90 percent. This owner category is dominated by smallholders of between 0.2 and 2 ha, with only a few farmers/shareholders (7–10 people for Agrofieni and 3–5 for Agromec) with holdings of between 8 and 12 ha. The fragmented nature of the landholding structure is illustrated by the fact that Agrofieni and Agromec have around 700 and 200 owners respectively, giving an average of only 1.3 ha per holder (out of a total of 1,250 ha) of the land cultivated by these two agricultural associations.

Several mutually reinforcing factors (political, economic and socio-historical) have played a role in the development of these unfavorable local land market and/or land ownership conditions. One of them was undoubtedly the complex and uncertain legal environment governing de-collectivization, which, like most post-socialist successor states in Central and Eastern Europe, allowed Romania to undergo a controversial economic transition (Verdery 2003; Nölke – Vliegenthart 2009; Swain 2012). An example of this is one of the first land restitution laws in Romania, adopted in 1991 (Law no. 18/1991, Chapter II, Article 8), which formally ("on paper") guaranteed full ownership, but which, until the turn of the millennium, allowed only partial ownership,[24] since it capped the amount of land that could be reclaimed at 10 ha (Sabates-Wheeler 2005:18). For this reason, for example, in the village under study, pre-1945 middle-class peasants (e.g. Swabian families classified as "kulaks" or their descendants) could not start their own private family farming again in the early 1990s with the entire (collectivized or confiscated) land property, but only with a certain part of it.

[23]In 2018, the owners received a share of the crops produced (wheat, corn, triticale), in cash or in kind, at a fixed rate of 30% per hectare, plus 30 kg of sugar and 10 L of oil (also per hectare). The area-based aid is not paid to the owner but to the company cultivating the land (the farming association as a legal entity). According to one interview with a farmer, for 0.74 ha of arable land contributed by the shares and the family, in 2018 the farming association paid/gave to the household a total of 46 lei dividends (for their shares), 30 kg of barley, 17 kg of sugar, 6 bushels of wheat, 6 L of oil, 400 kg of corn.

[24]This was changed by the new Agricultural Law No. 1/2000, which capped compensation for claimants at 50 ha instead of 10 (Sabates-Wheeler 2005:23).

However, the transformation of the German (Swabian) inheritance system in the 20th century also played a decisive role in the fragmentation of the estate structure. Informal strategies to keep family assets together and accumulate them, such as "impartible inheritance" ("the first-born inherits everything, his siblings become his servants"), local endogamy ("we don't marry beyond the railway line"), or class-based partner selection procedures ("land married to land," "property married to wealth") gradually lost their regulatory role in the late 1930s, no longer normatively determining life management practices in local society.[25] In the years before the Second World War, in typically large Swabian households with several children, movable and immovable property was – in contrast to the previous inheritance system – divided among descendants in equal shares, which led to the slow fragmentation of family landholdings, even during the years before collectivization. Thus, the property relationship transformation of the 1990s – i.e. the return of individual private property, family landholdings and land plots – in practice meant the restoration of the small-plot landholding structure of the early 1950s. After the change of regime, this not only made it more difficult, but in many respects impossible to (re)establish independent, viable and economically profitable family farms: "It used to be, back in my grandparents' time, if there were 5–6 children, the older one got the whole estate along with the duty of supporting the parents. I got a house, with the parents, plus the estate. The other kids got nothing; they became serfs. In my father's day, they divided the estate. For example, even now, in the area called the meadows, the plots are so small, 1,000 square meters per plot, with 12 owners, and then it sits fallow because no owner can farm it because of the other." (80-year-old man, Mezőfény)

Since the early 1990s, these historical land tenure and property relations have structurally determined the development of the private producer sector. They have severely limited and continue to limit the external (extensive) growth opportunities and estate size of small and medium-sized individual family farms (Fig. 2).[26]

Accordingly, after the collapse of the communist regime, cooperative economic organisms bringing together individual family farms played an essential role in the maintenance and operation of local agricultural production and agricultural markets as well as their internal mechanisms of operation. The two agricultural associations of Mezőfény have facilitated cooperative members' easier access to economic resources (machinery, credit, training, information, knowledge capital) and improved their bargaining power vis-à-vis larger market players. They have also helped the family farms concerned to productively reduce the high transaction costs resulting from their relatively small size and low production capacity (Liverpool-Tasie 2014; Markelova et al. 2009; Sabates-Wheeler 2002, 2005).

The two farming associations sell most of their agricultural products (cereals, industrial and fodder crops) for cash and a smaller part in the form of barter transactions (non-cash economic

[25]Two different types of succession systems, including "impartible inheritance," which provides for the succession of property to a single heir, and the so-called "equal division," which, unlike the former, establishes equal succession between descendants as a basic principle, are well summarised in Faragó (2008).

[26]According to Biga Agarwal and his co-authors, the very small size of individual farms is a typical feature of agricultural production in Romania. As of 2010, the average farm size was 3.45 ha, and about 71% of all farms had less than 2 ha of land (Agarwal et al. 2021:149). In recent decades, the importance of cooperative, associative or group farming at the national level has therefore not only always been high, but is still growing, in no small part due to the state agricultural policy supporting large-scale farming. According to the authors' data, some 962 new cooperatives were created in Romania between 2008 and 2018 – 77% of which were engaged in agricultural activities (Agarwal et al. 2021:149–150).

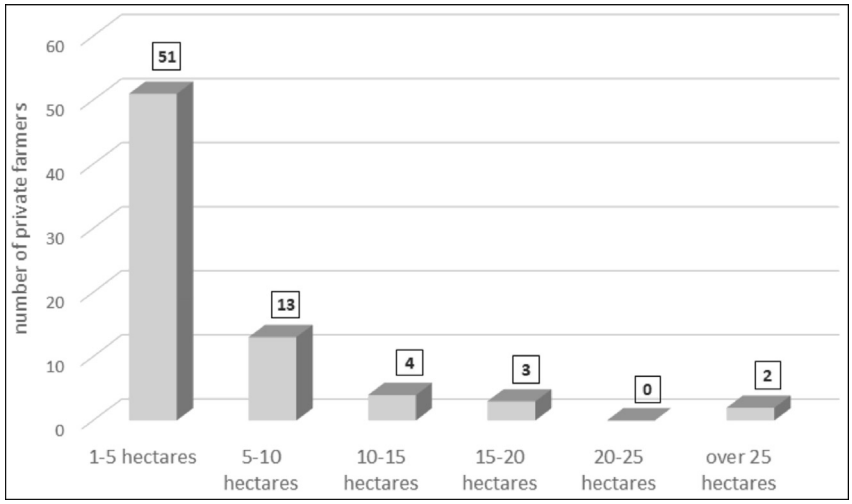

Fig. 2. The number of private farmers with more than 1 ha of land by size of landholding (2018). Department of Land Affairs, Mezőfény Mayor's Office (drafted by the author)

transactions) with individual firms and companies (Humphrey 1985) on the domestic and international free market.

"Quasi-farmers," groups involved in home food production

The majority of owners in the two agricultural associations belong to mixed-income households whose economic activity is characterized by strong pluriactivity. I consider these to be "quasi" agricultural farms since most of the families concerned are primarily involved with the land only *as owners*. They are not actively involved in the effective cultivation of their own agricultural land, or only to a very limited extent, due to their age or for other reasons (e.g. their jobs).[27] Of course, all households in the municipality are linked to some extent and in some form to agriculture through *domestic food production* (backyard farming, garden or orchard cultivation). However, within the agrarian population, the aforementioned category mainly includes families with low levels of subsistence food production and high levels of purchasing from shops and external markets.

The majority of the village population belongs to such "quasi" agricultural households. One of the defining features of these households is that they generate the bulk of their own market consumption (on an annual basis) not from agricultural production – their leased-out land and backyard food production – but from other non-agricultural forms of income (formal labor markets, pensions, social assistance and other income transfers).

This type of income diversification has been described by Meert and his co-authors as an adaptation technique that is generally used by small economies to compensate for disadvantages

[27] According to interviews with company managers, the average age of shareholders in both farming associations is 55 years old.

arising from insufficient local resources and the internal consumption constraints they impose (Meert et al. 2005).

Partial or total abandonment of agricultural activity as a strategy reflecting the lack of local resources (labor, capital, land, technical means) is a phenomenon common to post-socialist rural societies in Central and Eastern Europe (Abrahams ed. 1996; Granberg et al. eds. 2001; Kovách 2012). The decline of agricultural functions in the village and the intensification of post-productivist countryside and agricultural regimes is therefore also a clearly observable tendency in the municipality I studied (Wilson – Rigg 2003).

According to the local government, only less than a quarter (13.4%, 127 people) of the economically active adult population (942 people) in Mezőfény were employed in agriculture in 2011, and almost half (49.9%, 470 people) were employed in secondary or tertiary sectors (industry, services, trade).

The significant decline in the role of agriculture – including subsistence food production – in the income structure of individual households in the village under study is indicated by the fact that important but rather labor-intensive sectors such as viticulture or animal husbandry, which were important for traditional peasant farms, have rapidly declined in recent years. According to the mayor's office, in 2000, 82 ha of vine (12 ha of noble and 60 ha of direct production) were still owned by private family farms in the village. This area had decreased by more than 64% (to 29 ha) by 2017. A part of the abandoned land (30 ha) was bought by a foreign (French) agricultural investor who, after the liquidation of the plantation, launched large-scale blueberry and raspberry production on the purchased plots.

It is also revealing that during the same period (2000–2017), the number of cattle owned by the population decreased by 73.4%, the number of horses by 78.1% and the number of pigs by 50.6%.

The cow herd in the village ceased to exist two years ago. The lease of 550 ha of pasture owned by the local population was granted to two Romanian shepherds, who keep thousands of sheep on the land on the basis of a decision by the village community. The families that still keep cows (in 2018 only 28 households had cattle, 51 in total) cannot afford the grazing fees. Therefore, in recent years, they have switched to stable animal husbandry (Table 1).

In the local community, a total of 75 people outside the association are engaged in crop production, horticulture, viticulture and forestry on an area of more than 1 ha. These private farmers (or, as they are called in the village, *privátok* or *pirivisek*) farm less than 20% of the

Table 1. Changes in the livestock population of family farms (2000–2017). Source of data: Department of Land Affairs, Mezőfény Mayor's Office (drafted by the author)

	2000 (heads)	2017 (heads)	*N*	%
Cattle	271	72	−199	−73.4
Swine	1,560	770	−790	−50.6
Horses	137	30	−107	−78.1
Poultry	7,300	4,700	−2,600	−35.6
Total:	9,268	5,572	−3,696	−39.8

agricultural area in the settlement (370 ha in total) and also form different sub-groups according to various external formal criteria such as the size of the holding, the organization of work, machinery, work mentality, etc.[28]

Post-traditional commodity producing/self-sufficient peasant farms

In my approach, this category includes family farms with a mixed structure (specialized in livestock farming and crop production) whose members are engaged in the production of agricultural goods (both for sale and for subsistence) as their main occupation. There are four or five farms of this type in Mezőfény. Based on life history interviews, the owners of these farms belong to the first generation who lived through collectivization as children or the following second generation (over 55 years old). Members of this group worked part-time, or less frequently, on major occasions (e.g. harvesting), as family helpers on the independent family farms of older relatives – parents or grandparents – that were re-established after the regime change. The management of these holdings was gradually taken over or inherited by the current owners as the older relatives became inactive. As a result, their economic behavior, work mentality, their use of tools and resource-management strategies are still characterized by a kind of "transitoriness" i.e. a combination, mixing or coexistence of traditional ("peasant") and modern elements (Gagyi 2007; Kotics 2006; Kovách ed. 2002; Lovas 2006; Oláh 2004; Szabó 2013; Peti 2019).

Born in the village in 1967, Imre belongs to the group of "post-traditional commodity producing/self-sufficient farms." Until the middle of the communist regime, he and his family made a living from industrial wage labor. In those years, Imre took a job in Nagykároly: initially in the ironworks, later in the furniture factory (from 1981 to 1997), and his wife was also a sewing worker in the same town. The family, including parents and two children, only started farming during the second half of the 1990s at the same time as the massive decline of the region's manufacturing industry. Before that (apart from some backyard farming), the household had not carried out any significant independent agricultural production.

The primary reason for this is that in the 1990s, during the Romanian property restitution process, nationalized family land was returned not to the descendants (in this case Imre and his wife), but to the original owners, i.e. the parents who were directly involved in collectivization and were still economically active after the regime change. As the following interview section shoes, this older age group, while relatively reluctant and late in transferring the ownership and land use rights of reclaimed land and the resulting income to descendants, relied heavily on the labor available within the extended family, i.e. the kinship producer and worker network:

[28]This formal division of everyday farming strategies according to group categories ignores a number of factors, such as the internal heterogeneity of groups and economic behaviours, their hybrid forms, their dynamic transformation over time (even within the lifetime of a single person), and cooperation between different social strata, and is therefore problematic in several respects, the methodological and epistemological dangers of which I am of course aware. (For a critique of groupism in the context of another topic – "ethnicity" – see: Brubaker 2004). The terms I use ("quasi-farmers," "groups involved in home food production," "post-traditional commodity-producing/self-sufficient peasant farms," etc.) are not analytical but descriptive, and basically denote ideal-typical economic attitudes, behaviours and situations. The aim is to examine simultaneously – or, if you like, through one another – the more general (group) level features of individual family economic strategies and more specific traits, which vary according to the idiographic structural, power and social position of the individuals and households concerned.

"Imre: The elderly, my in-laws took the land back in '91 and couldn't work it. They took out these 9 ha 'for us' which they divided between my wife and her brother. Wife: Ah, but when was it divided? We were just helping to farm it, but all the income was theirs, not ours. We didn't even get it when my father died in '97 because that's when it was transferred to my grandmother's name. Because they were so attached to the land. And we were also working on my mother's land, inherited from my father. (. . .) They had the income; we only had the work. It was exploitation in its own way because they couldn't stand it. So it was that when farming was worthwhile, into the '90s, when there was big profit, we didn't farm the land. We just helped out after hours. And then we got something from it. . . Now if they slaughtered a pig, we also ate from that pig, and if there were two cows, we also drank milk, got some weal, stuff like that, but we didn't get any extra money from it. Now that it's ours, now that it's not paid, it's not worth it."

The difficulties of access to land are well illustrated by the fact that even after two decades of ownership Imre and his family still own only the 4.5 ha of arable land, 0.15 ha of vines and 0.45 ha of forest that he inherited – in its entirety – from his wife's parents in 1997. The family has not purchased any new land in recent years; they have leased 5 ha of meadow from the inheritance, where they cultivate grass and green fodder to support their existing cattle.

Over the past decades, the family has sought to compensate for the lack of agricultural land by diversifying into other sectors, supplementing small-scale crop production with large-scale livestock farming. Accordingly, in 2018 – at the time of my fieldwork – the farm had a total of 13 cattle (6 milking cows, 1 heifer and 4 growing calves, 1 fattening bull, 1 dairy calf), 4 pigs (1 sow, 3 porkers) and more than 100 heads of poultry (hens, ducks, geese). Since the beginning of the regime change, the family also had a herd of draft animals, but these (2 horses and 2 foals) were sold in 2015 because "the horse, as the head of the household put it, is no longer worth keeping".

The economy is characterized by partial and multi-level (informal-formal, internal and external) market integration (Szabó 2013). Part of the products produced is used to cover the consumption and needs of the household and the extended family (children and relatives living outside the village). The surplus (milk and dairy products – sour cream, cottage cheese, cheese –, eggs, meat, livestock, vegetables, cereals) is sold mainly on local, internal, informal markets (to neighbors, other villagers or the workplace community) and to a lesser extent on external, sectional or formal markets (the Nagykároly wholesale food market or purchasers and traders).[29] State subsidies are also an important element of the household's income. Every year,

[29]"The milk is sold from home. For example, last night I went to bed at almost midnight because I was making the cottage cheese. Then it was sour cream, cottage cheese and milk, but there was a time when they brought it in to Polipol. My sister-in-law would work there, I would make the cottage cheese, take it to my sister-in-law, she would take it to the factory and the people from Fény would buy it. But that's over, because my sister-in-law doesn't work there, so it's okay for six cows, but let's say if I milk all six, a lot of it goes to the pig, but she'll still give it back to us. We sell one or two of the pigs, slaughter them for the boy and for us. We have the customers for the young meat, the veal, and we weigh it. We've raised it, it was 17 lei, now we're raising it to 20 lei, so there's always someone who says 'oh, I'll buy it for 15 lei elsewhere.' If you can only sell it for 15, then they will pay you live weight now, then it's not worth weighing it. It's better to sell it that way. The reason why it is worthwhile is that if we keep so many animals, there is always fresh meat. I know that we raised them, I know what they fed on; the chicken does not grow up in 6 weeks, but in half a year, and then we always slaughter the rooster, and the hens and the pullets are kept to lay eggs; there are always eggs for sale, so it's a lei here, a lei there, but we will never get rich from it. We sell the surplus." (53-year-old woman, Mezőfény).

they receive EU and Romanian subsidies based on the number of cattle and the greening subsidies, which, in my approach, also constitute a specific form of external, formal, quasi-market integration.

Most of the production process is carried out by the nuclear family (the head of the household and his wife). The elder of the two sons lives abroad (in Budapest), holds a university degree (in psychology and English-Spanish) and has found a job at a multinational company. Their youngest child did not continue his education and is a furniture worker in the Mezőfény factory of the German company Polipol, where he goes to work every day from his new home in a nearby village (Csomaköz). Although their son, who has stayed at home, can only occasionally help his parents, the family occasionally uses foreign labor (mainly for harvesting).

The number of animals kept on the farm has changed dynamically several times over the last decade. This, in my view, suggests that one of the constitutive elements of economic adaptation on the family farm in question was to maintain the flexibility of the production structure. This is supported by the struggle of the family farm to modernize and expand its own machinery and equipment.

Over the last two decades, the household has not been able to finance its expenditure on improving production capacity and technology (i.e. buying new machinery and equipment) solely from agricultural activities, which have a lower income and production value. At the same time, the permanent shortage of agricultural labor in the local labor market and patterns of production modernization, reinforced in part by international labor migration (Faist 2008), have also forced the household towards a certain degree of mechanization in production processes. ("Here, if you don't automate, if you don't improve, you'll be left behind." /54-year-old man, Mezőfény/.) However, in recent decades, the family has been able to generate the necessary financial capital, mostly by selling livestock, the only asset of the household that is of higher value and relatively easy to mobilize. This strategy of adaptation, which ultimately meant a temporary, partial suspension of sectoral diversification within the holding, was accompanied by a temporary restructuring and reduction of the established production structure. In addition, the capital from the sale of animals was supplemented by informal loans (loans within the family or by relatives) and income from off-farm work (e.g. seasonal work abroad) in order to buy the machinery and equipment needed for agricultural production: "I bought my first tractor in 2000, a second-hand Romanian tractor and a trailer. That was the first thing we did, so we emptied the barn, sold all the cattle, and were left with one horse and one cow. Since then, we have repeated this twice more. In addition, for 8 years, I went to Germany every spring for 6 weeks to work for the German peasants, so that I could mechanize. Or we borrowed money, and when I came back from Germany we gave the money back the next day." (54-year-old man, Mezőfény)

The low capital-generating capacity of the farm is demonstrated by the fact that, despite great efforts over the course of more than 20 years – with repeated sales of livestock and almost a decade of foreign employment – the family has only managed to acquire a low value (older and less technically advanced) machine park. In 2018, this stock consisted of a single older Romanian tractor (year: 1997) and its accessories (trailer, plough, mower, collecting and baling machine, fertilizer distributor, seedbed cultivator, bale loader, windrower).

The slow accumulation of machinery and tools over the years and the resulting difficulties were mitigated by the family's relational capital (Esser 2008), embodied in informal networks of individuals and households. Therefore, the first purchases of higher-value appliances were those that were not directly available within the kinship. Until recently, the persistent shortage of

machinery and tools that hampered agricultural production was thus solved through labor exchange (Sík 2012:29–51) and the mutual sharing of resources (machinery, tools), i.e. through economic cooperation and interaction between households: "We worked in such a way that, for example, we had a fertilizer distributor, my brother had a seed drill, he had a disc, we had a seedbed cultivator and then we would go and do the work for him, and then my brother would come and cultivate the land for us, and he would sow it. It worked like that for a while, then it gradually stopped. Because now everybody does their own first." (53-year-old woman, Mezőfény)

Small and medium sized post-traditional subsistence/productive family farms use heterogeneous adaptation techniques that also differ from one another. I would like to illustrate the differences within this category of household farms and some of their more characteristic features with the help of two further examples, which will be presented in less detail than above.

One is the economic strategies is the one followed by Lőrinc, who, like his brother-in-law Imre, also became an agricultural entrepreneur by necessity after his previous industrial job was terminated in 2009. Lőrinc was born in 1959, graduated in 1976 from a woodworking vocational school in Nagykároly, then worked for a short time at the local collective farm, after which he spent 31 years at the furniture factory in Nagykároly (from 1978 until the closure of the factory). His wife worked for the same company as a professional accountant.

The family currently cultivates 10.58 ha of arable land (2.2 ha of wheat, 3.9 ha of sunflowers, 3.1 ha of maize, 0.32 ha of triticale, 0.64 ha of alfalfa, 0.42 ha of potatoes), excluding details. It also has a small forest (0.40 ha), a meadow (0.64 ha) and a vineyard (0.6 ha), so they lease only a minimum amount of land (0.4 ha).

A smaller part of the total land (4.5 ha) comes from the household head's capital assets (divided between Lőrinc and his sister-in-law), while the larger part comes from other family inheritances (the holdings of his affinal relatives: his mother-in-law, father-in-law and his spouse's grandparents). Thus, about 11 ha of arable land are spread over 10 different plots, which makes efficient production very difficult. The average size of the holdings nevertheless allows a household within a mixed production structure to develop a model of the proportions and interrelationships of different sectors that is quite different from the example above. Whereas in the case of Imre and his family we saw that the small size of the holding necessitated a conscious increase in the weight of livestock farming, the opposite strategy is evident here: the structure of production is shifted towards intensive arable farming (cropland management), while livestock farming becomes more of a secondary or auxiliary sector. The livestock on this farm is also significant (in 2018, there were 2 horses (mares), 1 foal, 6 cattle (3 of which were milking cows, 3 calves), 6 pigs (3 porkers, 3 piglets) and a large number of poultry (about 60–70 heads). Most of the food of animal origin (milk and dairy products, eggs, meat) was used as part of the family's sustenance (own consumption), and the remaining surplus was sold in directly available local informal markets. However, unlike Imre's family, the bulk of the household's annual income is not derived from this but from farming specifically for the production and sale of goods, which also means that the family's external market integration (both sectional and formal) is much stronger than in the case of the household presented earlier.

Fundamentally different from these economic strategies (but also within the group of "post-traditional commodity producing/self-sufficient farms") is the example of a third villager, István, whose behavior in the last few years – due to his advanced age – has been characterized mainly

by the conscious dismantling and gradual liquidation of the family farm, in short: a slow withdrawal from agricultural activity.[30]

István was born in 1941, and as a young adult (18 years old) he experienced the abolition of individual private property and the introduction of socialist-style large-scale farming in the village. In 1945, his father was deported to Russia and returned from captivity ill. Even as a child, István had to work hard on the family farm. "I sowed the wheat, . . . in the morning my father set the seed drill, and he said, 'you're going out today, the horse knows where to go, you follow it.' I ploughed up three ha or so, and the next day he hooked up the machine."

He was the only one of his three siblings who was could not continue his education (his brother graduated as an architect and his sister as a mathematics teacher). After finishing primary school, István had to work on the family farm, which he took over fully after the fall of communism due to his father's failing health:

"I wanted to be an apprentice, but my father wouldn't let me. He said, 'you can work for me too.' A carpenter called me, and there was a blacksmith across the street. He was a relative. They told my father to let me go, but my father said, 'I need him too.' Then he divided the land he had, 5 ha and 5 acres into four. 'You'll do all the work and give everyone what is due.' That's what I did for my sister and my brother. I paid them what was due."

During the communist regime, István's first job was at the collective farm in Mezőfény, where he worked as a manual laborer (crop bagger) after 1960. Then, from 1966, he worked for 25 years as a lorry driver ("sofőr") at the collective farm in Nagykároly.

In the 1990s, he was one of the first to start his own family farm on the 3.8 ha of land he inherited from his father. Over the years, he has bought a further 4 ha, which he added to the family's property. (In addition to the aforementioned land, the household also owns 0.6 ha of meadow, 0.30 ha of vines and 1 ha of forest.) More than half of the arable land (3.6 ha) is still farmed by the family (husband and wife). The remaining 3.4 ha of the land was returned in 2016 to the local agricultural association, which, due to the couple's advanced age, carries out all the work on the land on a contract basis and also takes over the storage and selling of the family's produce (cereals, corn, sunflowers).

István has two daughters. The eldest has been living in Germany with her husband and children since 1995. Although the younger one stayed in Mezőfény, she is a bank employee and her spouse works as a civil servant (secretary). Therefore, none of the children are directly involved in the parents' agricultural activities as helping family members. For the more important work, István seeks help from his two grandchildren – the sons of his daughter who has stayed in the village – who have also started farming on their own in recent years. ("The children who stayed at home don't want the land. We give them the benefits, and they come to help whenever they want.")

István's family farm profile for the past three decades has been livestock breeding: in the 1990s he still kept 20 pigs a year and several large animals, and in 2016 – at the age of 75 – he still had 2 horses and 3 milking cows, but sold them in 2018 because, as he says, "I ran out of strength, and when it comes to the sourcing of forage, one person is not enough, and my wife

[30]Thomson and Davidova distinguish three different development paths for small farms. Older, heirless farmers tend to dismantle the farm (disappearance), while other groups of farmers tend to maintain (continuation) or even expand (expansion) their farm and production, which may be accompanied by diversification, pluriactivity and the co-opting of younger people (Davidova – Thomson 2014).

can't load the cart anymore." He also stopped growing labor-intensive crops during this period. He used to grow potatoes on 0.8 ha, which he had to stop in 2017 due to his failing health. ("I started not being able to carry the bag.") By the time of the field survey in 2018, the total livestock population of the household consisted of only 1 dairy cow, 4 pigs and a few heads (20–25) of poultry.

Unlike the two farms presented earlier, the majority of the household's income is derived from the pension of István and his wife (2000 lei/month), which the family supplements with income from crop production. In 2018, the 3.4 ha of land under custom farming, including the area-based aids, generated an annual household income totalling 9,180 lei. This amounted to just over a third (38.2%) of the total amount of the old-age pension (RON 24,000/year).

The family farm produces milk and dairy products for their own consumption (they no longer sell milk to buyers) and sells the surplus from pig farming locally. The small cash incomes thus earned are used to reduce the input costs of farm labor (e.g. hiring day laborers, seasonal workers). The ultimate purpose of agricultural production in their case is therefore not to meet intra-household (residential) needs, since (according to the farmer) the members of the two-person household could live on the amount of the old-age pension without any additional income. Redistribution of the farm's agricultural assets - the distribution of the goods produced or the monetary income - takes place within the wider kinship network, i.e. between the children and grandchildren of the family who have emigrated abroad (to Germany) and those who have remained in Romania (cf. Oláh 2004; Peti 2013):

"My daughter's family is doing very well out there, in Germany, because my son-in-law is earning very well. I never asked how much, but I can see the progress. They bought a house last year, I'm not going to lie, for 340,000 euros, and I sent a little bit into that, but what's my money worth there? I gave them 20,000 euros as a gift. I also gave my other daughter 100,000 lei when she bought the house here in Fény. It's hard to help from here [in Germany - S.B.], because for that much money you could have bought a whole street here, but we're still working to help them. Now we have 4 pigs, and we'll slaughter them when the Germans, my daughter, come home." (80-year-old man, Mezőfény)

Comparing the three economic behaviors, the examples I have discussed (based on the unique internal and external conditions of each household: different material, social, relational capital; farm size, productive capacity, goals; structural position of each family) represent in many respects different forms of economic adaptation and market integration within the group of post-traditional commodity producing/self-sufficient farms. The first was a low cash-flow holding, moderately supplied with production resources, specialized in livestock farming and stagnating in terms of its development potential, with the strongest informal, i.e. local, internal market integration. In the second example, I presented a family farm specializing in arable crops, with a relatively greater orientation towards commodity production and working capital than the first. It was also characterized by economic stagnation, different in the fact that trade in the goods produced was dominated by presence on external, formal markets rather than local ones. The third case, unlike the two previous examples, highlighted a technique of adaptation where owners consciously sought to leave the agricultural sector. Here, the decline in the level of commodity and food production has been accompanied by a gradual disintegration (dis-embedding) of the family's former economic (external-internal, informal-formal market) embeddedness; the production and sale of the remaining goods from agricultural activity are

transferred to quasi-market systems (institutional networks of producers and sellers in the local agricultural association).

One of the common features among the three economic strategies – despite the clearly visible differences – is that the economic activity of the households concerned is not primarily motivated by profit-oriented business aspects, but rather by normative economic practices, i.e. the following of traditional agricultural production patterns based on the principles of private ownership and autonomous land use: "Now, if we sit down and calculate how much everything costs, we bought the wheat for 150 lei per hectare. The amount we sold is paid at 56. And then we had to weed, sow, fertilize, pay for the harvest, everything. If we sat down like this, it would be worth calculating how much it costs, we would realize that it's not worth it. We're often in the red. . ." (80-year-old man, Mezőfény) "If the association leases the land, you get 1,000 lei per hectare of land. But here, for example, someone who works the land, like me, who no longer ploughs or sows, but just goes out and goes: 'plough it, sow it for me. . .,' I get maybe 1,200 lei per hectare, plus the subsidy, 1,500 lei per hectare. If it's in the association, you don't have to do anything with it and you get your dividends. Economically, there's no difference between the two: if you don't want to move, it's better to give it to them. But I don't, because I'm happy to go and cut the sunflower, then the corn, and it's my property." (54-year-old man, Mezőfény)

Agricultural entrepreneurs

In contrast to the previous group, the economic activity of these households is not primarily driven by traditional agricultural production patterns, but explicitly by business- and profit-oriented perspectives. There are 6–7 such agricultural entrepreneurs in the village. Most of them did not start their own family farms after the regime change, but later, after the millennium and in the late 2000s. Their consolidation coincided in part with Romania's accession to the EU and the development of a macro-level system of public support for agricultural production, which is still a very important element of their economic strategy and income.

The following two young farmers, who are also very different from each other, are two distinctive representatives of this agricultural entrepreneurial stratum.

One is Gábor, who was born in the village in 1976. His parents did not engage in significant independent agricultural production, neither before collectivization nor after the change of regime in 1989. His father was an industrial worker (lathe operator) and his mother a post-woman. His knowledge of agriculture, therefore, comes mainly from personal observation and practical experience. (S.B.: "Where did you get your knowledge of farming? Gábor: Simple common sense, nothing else. And you ask questions. What is the best teacher? Experience. . .")

Gábor graduated in 1994 from the vocational school in Nagykároly, where he studied as a field engineer, but never worked in his original profession. From the age of 18 he was a cantor in the Roman Catholic parish of Mezőfény, and during the second half of the 1990s he made a living from craftsmanship (cooperage) as a sideline. After the turn of the millennium, when the new Romanian restitution law allowed for the restitution of forest land over 1 ha and the construction of the gas network in the village caused the market value of forest land to drop significantly, he began to work in forestry. In 2002, he purchased 9 ha of (acacia) forest, 90% of which is by now fully harvested. From this and from his felling services for local residents, added to the sale of an inland plot of land, he earned the cash to start up as an agricultural entrepreneur. In 2005, he bought a small plot of land (1.6 ha) and an older tractor (a 1982 Fiat).

However, it was not until much later in 2011 (at the age of 35) that he started farming as his main occupation. The success of his business is duly reflected in the fact that in less than a decade (by 2018), he had bought a total of 12 ha of arable land, excluding any family inheritance, currently worth 60,000 euros. In addition to the land he owned, he rented a further 15 ha from other farmers in Mezőfény after 2011. In total, he currently farms 27 ha of large-scale arable land and produces cereals and various industrial and fodder crops (wheat, sunflower, corn, rape, alfalfa). His wife is employed full-time by the local educational establishment, where she works as a kindergarten teacher. However, most of the total household income is not derived from this, i.e. off-farm (formal) employment, but from agricultural activity. From the latter, the family's annual income, including state subsidies, amounts to 36,000 euros, of which 41.6 percent (15,000 euros) is net income. ("...I say, that from this [agriculture – S.B.] you can easily support a family. Because a salary of 15,000 euros, if you divide it by the month, you have 6–7,000 lei per month, right?")

The individual life path of the other farmer, József, can be described as a story of emergence from the post-traditional commodity producing/self-sufficient group; in short, successful economic mobility and status change. József was born in 1972 and, unlike Gábor, has a family history of explicitly peasant origin. His grandparents were already smallholders and private farmers; his father – after the second Vienna decision – completed the *aranykalászos gazdatanfolyam*, i.e. the "golden stalk agricultural management course" in Hungary and later worked as a brigadier (in the Mezőfény collective farm). Therefore, József's farming behaviour reflects not only self-taught agro-ecological knowledge, but also the traditional patterns and practices of family farming. ("S.B.: How did you know how to farm? József: I learnt it by the books and from my father, because I used to go with him make hay and to hoe carrots.")

After finishing high school in Nagykároly, he worked for a few years as an ironworker and toolmaker at one of the city's industrial plants, the Unió. Based on the life history interview, the start of small-scale family farming was also not a voluntary choice, but an economic necessity, a forced livelihood strategy. József lost his job in 1995 and so as a result took over the family farm and started farming as his main occupation, but also for other reasons: his father had died in 1991 and his two older brothers had emigrated to Germany in 1988.

Since the 1990s – for two decades – the size of the family farm has remained unchanged: József has been producing goods on the 8.1 ha of arable and 2.26 ha of other land (0.53 ha of meadow, 1.6 ha of forest, 0. 13 ha of vines) inherited from his parents. For a long time, as he had no agricultural machinery or technical equipment, he farmed most of the land with the hired help of the local agricultural association (Agromec). In 2015, however, the family managed to buy more land. As a result, the head of household currently farms 17.5 ha of arable land (7 ha of corn, 5 ha of wheat, 4 ha of sunflowers, 1.5 ha of soy), with his own machinery, which has been gradually expanded over the past decades. In addition, in order to sell the surplus capacity, József farms a further 50 ha under custom farming for other local farmers, for which he is paid by the villagers in cash, labour exchange or in kind (using a fixed proportion of the cereals, sunflowers and corn produced).

On the first family farm, agricultural production is carried out by only one person (the husband), on the second by three members of the family (husband-wife and father-in-law); foreign labor – day laborers, seasonal workers – are not employed, or only very rarely. Both households have a relatively higher value and better equipped machine park and equipment than the average, compared to members of post-traditional agricultural producer groups. In

addition to the most important large equipment (plough, disc, seedbed cultivator, fertilizer distributor, trailer, mower, rotating machinery, etc.), which are also found in other agricultural enterprises, Gábor's farm also has a more powerful tractor (John Deere 6,210, year: 2000) and a combine harvester (Claas Dominator 108 SL, year: 1992). This is the only privately owned harvester in the village (the former was purchased by the head of household in 2016 for 25,000 euros and the latter in 2017 for 30,000 euros).

Unlike Gábor, József started farming independently in the early 1990s with draught animals ("horses"). However, in addition to the most important auxiliary tools and technical equipment (wheat seed drill, corn seeder, ploughs, discs, trailers, etc.), the family's machinery now includes two older Romanian tractors (year: 1974) and a larger-capacity imported tractor (John Deere, year: 1981). The total value of the three machines is approximately 13,000 euros. However, the fact that József purchased almost all of the machines and equipment (unlike Gábor) in a heavily depreciated, worn-out condition, and then renovated them himself (sometimes over several months), manufacturing most of the necessary parts himself as a former machine fitter, is a sign of this household's persistent lack of capital and income: "Year after year we always bought some machine, all old, nothing new. Because there was no money, I always bought second-hand seed drills, tractors, everything, and then I renovated a little bit. I repaired it here, so that I didn't have to buy anything for it. I did it myself, and they were all outdated machines. They're not new machines that I could sow 30–40 ha of land with. (. . .) Here's the hoeing machine, I made that too. I welded the spokes, took the axle from an old tractor for it, bent the irons and welded them together. I worked on it in the winter, and I just bought the hoes. I always take the wheels out of the seed drill because I made the seed drill so that they would fit. The plastic containers of the seed drill are attached to it, and I put them on the hoeing machine and distribute fertilizer with them. I brought the fertilizer distributor from Germany. It's also from the year 1954, it's painted, it's welded. . . we don't call a mechanic, I do everything myself. This here is an old wheat sieve, pre-war, pre-1944, and I'm still using it. I refitted it to a motor because it was hand-driven. I made this weeder myself. I mounted the cistern on the front of the tractor. I fitted the weeder rings on the seeder drill, and as soon as I sow, I'm weeding the ground in one go. I also made the harrows myself, took them to Kálmánd to have them forged, so I didn't have to pay any money for them. They cost much less."

There are also two other full-time agricultural entrepreneurs in the village who are engaged in economic activity alternative to the dominant local sectoral specialization, i.e. the cultivation of arable, industrial and fodder crops. One such farmer is Zoltán ("the gardener"). Since the early 2000s, he has been growing potatoes, peppers, celery and carrots on 2.5 ha of land owned by the village and primary vegetables (peppers, radishes, onions, cucumbers) on 0.25 ha of land in his backyard using a combination of open field and greenhouse techniques. This enterprise is characterized by a self-exploitative work system due to the high labor time and manual labor requirements of gardening. Most of the economic work is done by the family labor force (the head of the household and his wife), as both their children live and work abroad (in Hungary and Germany). For labor-intensive gardening, unlike on the other farms, the family also employs foreign labor (two permanent day laborers) for most of the year.

The other agricultural entrepreneur is Csaba, who farms 37.5 ha using conventional methods in Mezőfény while growing oil pumpkins organically on 30 ha in other municipalities in the region (Bonchida/Bonțida and Kolozsvár/Cluja-Napoca). The family got involved in farming this crop in 2012, not as a planned activity, but ad hoc on the advice of a relative. There are no

major economic and/or social historical antecedents of organic commodity production and large-scale pumpkin growing in Mezőfény.[31] In no small part because of this – and because Csaba unexpectedly gave up his seemingly stable job and business (selling his own pharmacy) – the family is seen by the local public in the village as somewhat eccentric. The situation is further complicated by the fact that organic farming usually requires a special cultivation technology, which is different from local agricultural traditions and free of chemicals, while often being associated with lower yields and higher weed density. In this particular case, this not only goes against local norms of agricultural production, but also fundamentally violates stereotypical community representations of "Swabianism" (i.e. the "careful," "precise," "industrious" farmer). Csaba and his family have therefore had little or no access to land rented from private farmers in recent years. (As one young farmer put it: "They're afraid to lease their land to him, because it'll become weedy. He gets some smaller parcels, but not any bigger area, just the sandy parts on the outskirts.") In 2018, the family owned 7.5 ha of land; the rest of the cultivated land (30 ha) was leased from the village community.

Although the four agricultural enterprises mentioned above have higher annual incomes than post-traditional subsistence/commodity producing farms, their level and form of market integration differs significantly at several points (also when compared to each other).

While the first household (Gábor's family holding) usually limits its trade to external, formal market transactions, the second household sells its agricultural produce on hybrid regional (external formal and external informal) markets: "The soy and the sunflower go to the oil mill in Nagykároly. I sell some of the wheat to Agrotec and some of it I sell on the black market. These truckers take it. . ." (József, 49-year-old man, Mezőfény).

Unlike the former two, the horticultural farmer sells the goods produced in short supply chains, i.e. directly, mainly through informal marketplaces outside the village (the wholesale market in Satu Mare and the farmers' market in Nagykároly[32]) and to a lesser extent through local market channels (door-to-door sales). Finally, the market strategy of the organic farmer differs from the behavior of all three previous models. The household's production is not directed towards external regional markets, but mainly towards international (translocal) ones: most of the pumpkin seeds are sold in natural form by a Hungarian organic producer. The family delivers the product directly to the foreign buyer's premises, using its own vehicle and/or a subcontracted carrier. A small part of the product processed in Hungary (the pressed and bottled organic pumpkin seed oil) is bought back by the family from the company on a producer discount and then sold on local and regional informal markets (with the help of family, relatives and friends) in Romania.

Nevertheless, irrespective of the divergent market integration and strong sectoral specialization of individual private family farms, one of the common features of these small and

[31]The fact that both farmers came from outside the local society, i.e. they were not born in Mezőfény but in other settlements (Zoltán in Hadad/Hodod, Csaba in Szatmárnémeti), may have played an important role in the creation of a production structure/sector specialisation that differs from local traditions. The status of the respective actors (as "strangers," "outsiders") has presumably contributed in no small measure to the fact that the individuals concerned have developed their individual farming strategies relatively independently of local farming traditions and the regulatory norms that govern them.

[32]All year round (from spring to autumn) the family rents and maintains its own stall at the farmers' market in Nagykároly, where the head of the household's mother-in-law sells the vegetables (peppers, tomatoes, carrots, etc.).

medium-sized farms is that they have retained, to varying degrees, some of their peasant character (Szabó 2013). For example, three of the four families, with the exception of the organic farmer, do not have an officially registered business. None of the households has used external grant resources (other than area-based aids) to support these unregistered businesses in recent decades. All the owners concerned see state or international agricultural support programs as an obstacle to individual (autonomous) production and marketing, and they are primarily concerned with the economic and financial risks resulting from increased control ("I have never applied for it and never will. I have heard that many people regret it, controls are coming, the movement of goods must be followed, what goes where, so no one controls me now, and we are fine"). Neither of the farmers keep accounts of the income and expenditure of their enterprise ("I push the paperwork away, I hate it, I don't keep any accounts," "I don't keep any accounts, I only note the dates of spraying, I don't like to write"). The profile of each farm is not determined by a well thought-out, detailed medium- or long-term economic or business plan, but usually by yearly changes in turnover and income, along with the experimental economic solutions and traditional practices that respond to them.

Foreign labor migration: the group of seasonal agricultural workers and other, non-agricultural workers[33]

Economic migration, i.e. the temporary or permanent abandonment of local agricultural production and the local labor market, has a long tradition in the settlements under study and can be considered a widespread and observable phenomenon in the individual household farms, essentially irrespective of the type of farm (i.e. both for larger and for smaller farms with a higher production volume and income).[34] Although I do not have representative data at the settlement level, my interviews and empirical observations suggest that the majority of private family farms living from agriculture are mostly left without a leader and successor due to the inactivity of the older generation and the emigration of young people, who work off-farm (and abroad). From this point of view, it is noteworthy that a total of 15 children were born on the 7 family farms described in greater detail above, and among these, as of 2018, two thirds of the adult age group

[33]The economic activity of foreign workers not engaged in agricultural work, but in the secondary (industrial) or tertiary sector (services), is intertwined with the local agricultural market and processes within it in several ways. (In the economic transition after the regime change, higher incomes from foreign, mainly industrial wage labour – as seen in several of the above-mentioned farmers' life paths – were and still are one of the important external driving forces of the agricultural sector in the issuing municipalities, including, for example, the technical and economic development of private family farms (the purchase of higher-value machinery and equipment). In addition, the costs of entering international labour markets in the more prestigious and higher-paid non-agricultural sectors (skilled and wage labour) in the society of origin are primarily borne by households with more capital, among which the more productive and higher-paid agricultural enterprises and family farms with a higher capacity and income are over-represented in local society.) Therefore, although the analysis of the economic strategies of migrants working in the non-agricultural (secondary, tertiary) sector seems to be outside the narrower scope of this study, i.e. the analysis of the *agrarian* population of the society of Mezőfény, in view of the organic, practical connections between the different economic sectors I will have also have to discuss the latter in the following, however sketchily.

[34]According to the relevant literature, income diversification and intensification of production - given that these strategies require greater capital generation potential - mainly occur on larger family farms, while off-farm pluriactivity and the more permanent emigration and labour migration of the younger generation are more characteristic of smaller family farms (Jervell 1999:109; Ilbery 1991; Meert et al. 2005).

(6 out of 9 people), meaning over 18 years of age, are no longer living in their country of birth but are permanently living or working abroad (in Germany and Hungary). Like their older siblings, some of the minors who have stayed at home (6 people) also plan to continue their studies or work abroad after leaving school. (As one young girl I interviewed put it, "To work hard, to suffer at home for nothing? We'd rather go to university, get a degree, that's worth something, or go to work abroad. Staying at home is not an option." 17-year-old girl, Mezőfény)

Nevertheless, the different types of migration practices seen in the village today (emigration for study, health and retirement tourism, short or longer-term employment abroad, temporary or permanent relocation) constitute complex phenomena and issues that at this stage of the research lack sufficient interviews and empirical data of sufficient quality and quantity to allow a thorough analysis. In the following, I will therefore limit myself to making a few observations and sketchy comments on the subject, with relevance to migration and local resource management.

Unfolding from the life trajectories of farmers and migrants, one such link at a more general level is that past and present patterns of migration to foreign countries, i.e. those emerging in the 1990s and post-2010s, show different features in several respects.

From the late 1980s onwards, for example, one of the most important rhetorical elements in decisions that triggered, sustained and promoted migration and in the community interpretation thereof – apart from the obvious economic motivations – was the emphasis on national-cultural affinities (the "common" German-Swabian or Hungarian language and sense of origin) in the older generation. This is the reason why I earlier described the first period of mobility among the inhabitants of Mezőfény towards Central Europe, mainly Germany, Austria and Hungary (in the chapter on the history of the settlement) using the concept of ethnic migration.

However, the last three decades have also seen the accumulation of a wealth of new knowledge regarding community and individual experiences of labor migration within local society. The loss of status in foreign host countries, the experience of ethnic and economic discrimination, the influence of international capitalist big business (e.g. Polipol, Phőnix and other multinational companies) in the Satu Mare region, or even the strengthening of far-right nationalist-populist movements in the Central and Eastern European countries of origin (Feischmidt et al. eds. 2014) have also shaped new interpretations and perceptions of working abroad (especially in Germany) among the local population: "The Germans don't want to give us any money. The bigwigs come here to earn, not to cultivate their kinship ties: they promise big salaries, but they pay nothing, they just make us work for nothing" (53-year-old woman, Mezőfény); "Germany is not what it was – we know that, we see that. The migrants are in Germany, the city is unliveable. We have a much calmer life here." (60-year-old man, Mezőfény); "Sorry, I'm not going there – to the West – to work. My money and my sweat won't feed the Germans. Maybe it's silly that I'm just a down-to-earth peasant, but I like it when I plough and sow the land and see the future of it. I made it and it grows so well. That's the way I am" (49-year-old man, Mezőfény).

This partly explains why ethnic identity (the Swabian sense of origin), as a symbolic resource that reduces the costs of migration (Fox 2005; Gödri 2010; Pulay 2005; Sík 1996), no longer plays a role, or at least only a very restricted role, in the discourses and everyday interpretive practices of the young people I interviewed.

The second aspect – perhaps more important than the previous one – is that today's migration decisions among younger people are not determined by the mass unemployment of

the post-socialist economic and political transition, but rather by consumption-centered considerations. From the point of view of the age group concerned, the labor migration practices observed in the Mezőfény region are therefore no longer primarily aimed at counteracting the employment crisis, but rather at levelling out local inequalities (asymmetrical property and land ownership, growing income disparities) within a global framework. To this end, foreign employment provides the social groups concerned with alternative economic resources (material and non-material goods), the production, consumption and redistribution of which are currently not available within local society.

In Mezőfény, preliminary experience suggests that contemporary transnational movements for economic purposes, best described by the category of circular migration,[35] take two main forms.

One is seasonal agricultural work abroad (picking and growing raspberries, strawberries, asparagus, carrots and apples, mainly in Germany and France), the social base of which is made up of the more disadvantaged sections of local society without higher education and language skills. Among these workers, the Roma ethnic population is over-represented, but by no means exclusive. Its members (after Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007 and as borders became more porous) have gradually left the local (informal) labor markets, which offered low wages, and migrated to the agricultural markets of Western countries, which offered better financial conditions. In 2018, a French agricultural investor involved in large-scale berry growing in the village employed 16 Roma and 1 non-Roma day laborer in France, where he tried to replace the local labour force missing from his own land with cheaper Transylvanian guest workers. The recruitment of seasonal agricultural workers for Germany is also carried out by a local subcontractor ("recruiter"), to whom dozens of Mezőfény residents have been coming for years. The age limit for both groups is relatively low, up to a maximum of 45 years, because of the particularly difficult physical work involved. "There you have to bend all day, lift the big boxes and work 15–17 h a day or more, 'cause they drive like crazy. 17 h a day is a bit much. And then they come home with 3–4 thousand euros, and they can do something with that money here." (22-year-old woman, Mezőfény)

Roma workers usually travel to these destinations to work with their families, while non-Roma tend to travel alone, spending 3–6 months a year. Income earned abroad is spent within the sending society, in family household economies (paying off debts, buying a house, land or car, renovating and/or expanding housing and purchasing higher value consumer goods). The rapid absorption and utilization ("consumption") of the income from guest work induces new/further migration movements in the families concerned - acting as an institutional economic factor that reproduces migration.[36]

Another type of labor migration is skilled or semi-skilled work abroad (mainly in Germany), carried out by Romanian nationals as employees of various companies, mainly in the food

[35]Migration movements of a circular or commuting nature are described by Stola as "quasi-migration" (Stola 2001) and by Okólski as "unfinished migration" (Okólski 1998). Under these two terms, both authors mainly discuss the phenomena of seasonal, occasional employment and pseudo-tourism (merchant and shopping tourism), in which the refusal to settle, i.e. short-term stays abroad, is a strategic element for migrants.

[36]The factors motivating the reproduction of migratory movements (the asymmetric distribution of economic, cultural and social capital between sending and receiving countries) are analysed in detail in: (Czaika – Vothknecht 2014; Blaskó – Gödri 2014; Gödri 2016.).

industry or trade sector (meat processing and/or packaging plants, warehouses in supermarkets). One of the conditions for employment in these formal labor market segments is formal residence, the cost of which (high property rents in Germany and several months' deposit paid in advance) can only be met with considerable difficulty by the people concerned. Compared to seasonal agricultural work, this type of employment is therefore mainly observed among young people with higher qualifications (i.e. language skills, at least a high school diploma) and a more consolidated financial background. Among the young people I contacted, such stable existential circumstances were characteristic of a 28-year-old young man, who (after two semesters, having dropped out of higher education) has tried his luck in several countries since 2015 (having dropped out of higher education after two semesters). At the age of 22, he first lived in Cambridge for a year – with the help of family connections – working as a manual laborer in a grain storage plant ("granary"). Then (through an international employment agency), together with his girlfriend and several other young people from Mezőfény, he looked for a job in Germany at an online warehouse, where he is currently working in logistics (transport, purchasing). In the case of this longer period of work and expatriation, as reflected in the following interview extract, the motivation was not merely to acquire material goods, but more complex aspects related to lifestyle and *quality* of life, including: (a.) a higher wage earned abroad with shorter working hours, i.e. the amount of free time available; (b.) a household's increased ability to accumulate capital, i.e. a more flexible budget, adapted to the family's consumption capacity; (c.) the higher social prestige and stable labor market position associated with professional qualifications; (d.) the more democratic functioning of public bureaucratic institutions (rational administration without ethnic discrimination, corruption and privileges); (e.) or even the sense of individual security and subjective satisfaction associated with a relatively higher standard of living.[37]

"S.B.: It didn't even occur to you to look for a job here in Romania? M.S.: No. How should I put it. . . Out there in Germany, you do less work for about four times as much pay as I would get for more work at home. (a.) If we want to achieve something, it is difficult from here. Our children should grow up in an environment where they don't always have to worry about money like they do here. We shouldn't have to budget money like we do here, depending on whether we have enough of it or not by the end of the month. If it's the last week of the month, you can't afford more here. (b.) Or if you go to a university here, your child is not guaranteed a job. If he does the same thing out there, the university puts him to work, the university already provides him with a job. (c.) Everything is much simpler there. S.B.: So, you're not coming back? M.S.: No, it's not worth it. Everything is easier there. Whatever needs to be done can be done much more easily than here. The people in the offices are nicer. It's not like if you don't speak Romanian, they look down on you. . . S.B.: But you speak Romanian, that's not a problem for you at home, is it? M.S.: Of course, but if you speak Romanian, people here are still condescending. (d) S.B.: So, it's not just a question of money to live abroad? If they raised your salary here, would you come back? M.S.: No, not anymore. I might think about it, but the comfort would not be there [in Romania - S.B.]."

[37] According to Fred Hirsch, in modern society, more and more products are becoming *positional products* whose function is not to satisfy needs but to demonstrate social status (Hirsch 1976).

The aforementioned young man and his girlfriend spend their income from working abroad (a net total of 2,750 euros per month) in the country of destination, mainly on their own social integration expenses (renting a property, learning German, making deposits to a savings account for a house of their own, and buying certain prestige items, such as a higher value car).

The new norms of life management, consumption and value preferences reinforced by international migration – through social remittances[38] – encourage young people remaining in the sending settlements to leave family farming (based on strong self-exploitation, physical work and economic pluriactivity), which may lead to a further decline and erosion of the importance of the remaining farms in the village. (One farmer put it this way: "In order to create that financial security – I'm talking about ourselves – we have to work a lot: we have animals, we have cows now, we used to have to go to the dairy – even when we were working –, we had bulls, we worked a lot. I think young people today don't want that anymore. Everybody wants to live on what they earn at work from 8 o'clock in the morning, so nobody wants to work extra anymore. . ." (62-year-old man, Mezőfény)

SUMMARY

In my study, summarizing the first experiences of economic anthropological research conducted in a Swabian settlement in Satu Mare County (Mezőfény), I sought to answer the question of how local groups specializing in agricultural production adapted to the changed political, economic and social environment – new property, land and market relations – with the help of everyday livelihood and income-earning strategies.

In the 1990s, the transition from a planned to a market economy – along with economic recession as well as an employment and livelihood crisis – changed the financial conditions and other circumstances of individual households in the village under study, which led to the emergence of a new decision-making cycle (Bowler et al. 1996:289). Accordingly, the local population adapted to the changing economic and structural conditions with a wide variety of rather complex solutions and techniques (Table 2).

In the village under study, one of these techniques, as illustrated in Table 2, was the horizontal integration of individual, small-scale agricultural production (land, capital, means of production) into large-scale (industrial) production. In the early 1990s, this status quo strategy – based on the preservation and maintenance after the regime change of the collective form of farming that had developed during the state socialist era – was mainly chosen by individuals and families with a lack of capital (small land area, few technical tools and low labor force, etc.) or formal employment. In terms of numbers, this quasi-agricultural group is still the largest in the local agricultural market.

[38]The concept of "social remittances" was introduced into the academic discourse by an American sociologist, Peggy Levitt, in order to draw attention to the importance of social transfers, starting from a critique of the economic paradigm of migration phenomena. According to this approach, migrants are transnational travellers who exchange not only material goods, but also novel ideas, knowledge practices and identities as well as cultural and social capital between sending and receiving countries. In this framework, "social remittances" are one of the dominant forms of cultural diffusion, driven by migration at the local level, which can bring about radical changes in the internal structure of both societies, sometimes even in their political institutions, among others (Levitt 1998, 2001a, 2001b).

Table 2. Divergent economic strategies in the society of Mezőfény (2018)

1. Type of farming	2. Economic groups	3. Types of action	4. Adaptation techniques
Large-scale collective production	Agricultural managers	Expressive actions, an "economic policy" based mainly on the acquisition and use of local resources (land, money-land, financial and human capital, labor, etc.)	Horizontal integration and institutionalization of individual agricultural production (land, capital, means of production) – Institutional diversification: processing of goods (bakeries, mills, etc.), provision of special services: "sale," "putting on the market" of surplus capacity (machinery, equipment)
	Quasi-farmers		Reduction of the agricultural holding: – Reducing the level of individual/family agricultural production (partial – total, temporary – permanent abandonment) – Carrying out off-farm non-agricultural activities and occupations – Lease, transfer of the right of use or permanent sale of family land
Individual/family private production	Groups involved in backyard food production		
	Post-traditional commodity producing/self-sufficient peasant farms		Diversification of agricultural production; maintaining farming levels, increasing or temporarily reducing production and commercial capacity:
	Agricultural entrepreneurs		

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

1. Type of farming	2. Economic groups	3. Types of action	4. Adaptation techniques
			– Purchase, lease and/or sale of new land (field, meadow, forest, etc.) – The introduction of new production technologies and alternative crops (different from the economic traditions of the local society) – Agricultural specialization (within or between production structures) – On-farm and off-farm diversification
	Foreign seasonal agricultural workers Industrial workers, factory workers, service sector workers	Instrumental actions, "economic policy" aimed at the acquisition and involvement of external resources (land, money-land, financial and human capital, labour force, etc.) outside the local social structure	Income diversification: channeling in off-farm agricultural and non-agricultural income: – Selling personal labor on a foreign market ("commodification")

The other was the revitalization of individual farming, i.e. the (re)establishment of small family farms or medium-sized agricultural enterprises for subsistence/production. This return to agricultural production (forced, experimental or conscious) has given rise to occupational groups with very different links to agricultural activity: subsistence farmers, self-employed farmers, necessity-driven agricultural entrepreneurs and assisting family farmers, part-time workers, etc. – who have also adopted very different adaptation techniques (reduction of the farm, diversification of agricultural production, maintenance of the farm, increase in production and commercial capacity, temporary or permanent reduction).

Dominant actors in the local agricultural market (the agro-managerial class, quasi-farmers, backyard food producers, post-traditional commodity producing/self-sufficient farms, agricultural entrepreneurs) use these techniques primarily to mobilize, expropriate, acquire or redistribute internal, already existing local resources in the settlement (land, financial and human capital, labor force, means of production).

Even so, there is another form of economic adaptation, different from the previous one, through which the local population (in the early 1990s, mainly members of the social strata who were excluded from public employment and left without significant property and mobilizable financial capital, and later also members of other social strata) tried to channel external markets and economic resources outside the local area. In my view, such instrumental actions[39] can be regarded in the municipality under study as strategies based on the state border as an economic resource, including certain types of labor migration (activities among groups of workers engaged in seasonal agricultural work abroad or in skilled and industrial wage labor).

From this perspective and from a more general point of view, it seems to me that in local societies the economic actions of a population specialized in agriculture form a disintegrated income-generating system (variable almost from family to family/household). In this system, even for a single family, on-farm (endogenous) and off-farm (exogenous) resources and activities are interlinked in various ways: they can complement or replace one another, or one income source and type of economic activity can compete with another.

These forms of economic and income diversification in the years of economic recession after the regime change have created a very flexible, multi-level (multiplicative, individual and community) structure of production, consumption and market exchange of goods, which have allowed the development of hybrid local resource management policies. My assertion is that in recent decades this has increased the resilience of individual households in local society.[40] It has thus helped family/community farms to develop relatively effective solutions to unexpected or unforeseeable events as well as economic and other crisis phenomena.

[39]For the concept of expressive and instrumental actions as strategies for the production of different types of resources, or types of capital, see: (Lin 2001:17–19). In everyday economic actions – "external" (trans-local) and "internal" (local) resources, income-generating activities – they are of course not sharply separated in reality. Even in the case of a single household, we see that they usually do not form "pure" but rather mixed economic structures. As we have seen from the main text of this study, for households involved in agricultural production, off-farm income from the European Union, public subsidies or, for example, temporary income from international employment, is as important a part of family income as income from economic activity on the farm. However, the distinction between the different types is – in my opinion – analytically important, since the aforementioned types of activity represent resource management decisions with different modalities in a given local society. Thus, they reflect rather differently structured networks and economic policy models of production, conversion and the distribution of goods.

[40]The definition of resilience and the related research paradigms are well summarised in: (Székely 2015).

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