

## BOOK REVIEW

**Vajda, András.** (2019). *Változó létformák vidéken: Egy Maros menti falu gazdasági-kulturális szerkezetének átalakulása*. [Changing life forms in rural areas: Transformation of the economic and cultural structure of a village in the Maros/Mureș Valley], Kolozsvár – Budapest: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság – L'Harmattan. 327. ISBN 978-963-414-614-8; 978-606-9015-14-8 (Dissertationes Ethnographicae Transylvanicae)

Reviewed by **Ákos Nagy\***

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The publisher of the János Kriza Ethnographic Society launched its latest series, titled *Dissertationes Ethnographicae Transylvanicae*, in 2018. The series includes doctoral dissertations and basic ethnographic-anthropological works. The latest publication of the series is the volume of András Vajda, which analyzes the economic and cultural structure of the author's home village, Sáromberke/Dumbrăvioara, located at the meeting point of the Transylvanian Plain and Szeklerland.

Following an introduction to the topic, presenting the antecedents and subject matter of his research as well as sources and methods and an outline of the expected findings, the chapter about the theoretical framework – first published in 2019 as part of the Kriza Könyvek series, in a volume of studies titled *Változó ruralitások. A vidékiség mai formái* [Changing Ruralities: Today's Forms of Rurality] – provides a comprehensive picture of the transformation of the Romanian village after the EU accession. It examines rural communities and changing localities, farming strategies, transforming and diverse, parallel, and chronologically separate mentalities in an ethnographic-anthropological approach.

This is followed by a presentation of the research field itself, with a special focus on the geographical and cultural context. The latter is especially important in the case of Sáromberke/Dumbrăvioara because the village is located in a border and contact zone, thus forming a kind of transition between the Transylvanian Plain and Szeklerland. However, in the absence of striking ethnocultural features, this fact has so far escaped the attention of researchers.

From the detailed chapter presenting the evolution of the economic structure, we first get to know the social factors influencing these developments, thereby getting an idea of the structure of land ownership and agricultural activities, as well as about the development of livestock and the production tools of the village. This is followed by a presentation of agricultural and commercial units, associations, cooperatives, and various interest groups, large agricultural holdings and agro-industrial establishments, as well as commercial and service units. Next

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\* Kriza János Ethnographic Society, Romania. E-mail: [na.nagyakos@gmail.com](mailto:na.nagyakos@gmail.com)

comes an account of the institutional endowment of the settlement (state and municipally maintained institutions, service units, educational and cultural institutions, Church facilities, sports associations and facilities, non-governmental organizations). The part presenting the industrialization (industrial facilities of the Teleki estate, gas industry, construction industry, wood industry, metal industry, baking and milling industry) is followed by the subdivisions describing the construction of the infrastructure and the motorization and mobilization processes, which show how these shaped the economy and the immediate environment of the settlement.

The chapter on social change begins with a demographic summary and identifies and presents three major periods: from the settlement becoming an independent estate to the liquidation of the Teleki estate, the period of communism, and the period after the 1989 regime change. The subchapter describing the transformation of the social and occupational structure reveals how the settlement developed in this regard, with serfs (villeins and cottars) becoming smallholders and day laborers, and later the peasants becoming commuter workers. This part of the volume also sheds light on the processes that took place after the regime change in 1989. The author addresses the issue of women's employment and the changes that have taken place in their social and economic role as well. Of course, various forms of temporary exits, migration processes, and mobility – significantly influenced and defined by historical events – are also present in Sáromberke/Dumbrăvioara. These are illustrated in a short subsection of the volume. This is followed by a description of literacy and cultural life. The institutionalization of school education, literacy, and educational attainment, and cultural institutions and cultural life are addressed in separate subchapters. Considering the author's previous research on folk writing, it is only natural that his monograph also includes the personal and public use of writing. Thus, he discusses the use of writing in public spaces and the information centers of the village, as well as in various profane and sacred spaces, along with the use and functions of writing within the private spheres of life.

The last major chapter, presenting the transformation of the built environment and the distribution of plots, begins with the description of the development of the settlement structure. Then, dealing with the “modernization of the peripheral areas,” the author presents the wave of emigration that started in Marosvásárhely/Târgu Mureș and reached the settlement in the 2000s, along with the process of suburbanization and its consequences. The development of a number of residential buildings is introduced by presenting the antecedents covering the period between 1784 and 1910, after which the author outlines the findings of a 1940 survey by András Mózes. Finally, the period after the fall of communism and the regime change is also presented. A separate section deals with the changes in the quality of houses and housing itself. It sketches the transformation of the structure of residential houses in Sáromberke/Dumbrăvioara, their supply, and the use of interiors. This is followed by a section analyzing in detail the evolution and change in the number and functions of economic and outbuildings: stables, pigsties, grain storage, eaves, wells, various versions of smaller pens, ovens, and summer kitchens, as well as garages, which are relatively new in the rural setting. The subchapter on the development of the structure of the site is followed by a description of the local aspects of a very interesting and rarely researched/presented topic. The author analyzes in detail how the attitudes of people living in rural environments have recently changed towards smells and sounds. Even though smells and sounds are present in all cultures and are closely related to the development of economic and cultural life, in the last decade these have often become sources of conflict.



The author summarizes his work in the chapter *A gazdálkodó gyári munkásoktól az urbanizálódó parasztokig* [From Farming Factory Workers to Urbanizing Peasants]. Here, he states that the settlement still reflects its former agricultural character in terms of morphology and structure. However, the former living space of the population set up for agricultural production is gradually beginning to take on an urban appearance. In these spaces, locals are increasingly living according to urban lifestyles. Today's spatial structure reveals an imprint of the slow transition process, from which the peculiarities of the changes of the last century can also be traced. This section is followed by a list of informants, a rich bibliography, and appendices of various maps, photographs, and documents, the latter providing monographic completion to the volume, along with the tables, population pyramids, and bar and pie charts found in each chapter.

András Vajda's book is not only a well-structured, comprehensive work that explores the economic and social development and transformation of a village community in the immediate vicinity of a large city, presenting the topic in an accessible way, but also a scientific work that serves as an excellent model for researchers and local historians who examine similar issues and intend to present a settlement in detail.

