THE MAIN POINTS OF THE THESIS

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THE MOTIVES OF HORTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN KECSEKÉMÉT (1880-1945)

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The agricultural development of the Great Hungarian Plain can be characterized by enormous expansion of lands (binding the soil, protection against floods) in the second half of the 19th century. Regarding quality, though the Great Hungarian Plain fell behind the national average of production, this lag was compensated by regions specializing in one plant culture. Kecskemét was also such a specialist: its fame was due to plant cultures that demanded intensive cultivation and special knowledge, and due to amazing agricultural development.

During the structural change, taking place at the end of the 19th century, in agriculture growing of corn and stock raising was thrusted into the background to the benefit of fruit and vine production on sandy soil. This process was going on until the beginning of the 20th century. It was caused by upgrading sand free from phylloxera (profitability of vine production) on the one hand, and the narrowing of corn market on the other hand. Preparations for war in the 1930s and good market of preserving factory products also contributed to this process. In agriculture of Kecskemét the biggest changes were introduced between 1880 and 1930. In the thesis this period is brought into focus, the development of vine, fruit and vegetable production, and the role of social groups in Kecskemét is discussed.

Our aim was to investigate the qualitative change of farming while searching the answers for the following questions.

1. The perception was wide-spread and accepted even in the contemporary press and special literature that the peasants achieved splendid results not alone but with the help of the middle class and under the efficient guidance of superiors of the town. At the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century redistribution policy of the town and later the measured small-holding division and inviting settlers played an important role in agricultural development. Production running on variable sized plots gave a push to further development.

   In what way did different classes of the peasants and groups of the middle class take share of (development) work?

2. What institutions and other spontaneous learning and cultural facilities gave a stimulus to spread special knowledge in the given period?
We can find writings on peasant traditions in special literature and in fiction too. Modes and techniques of production inherited from father to son were completed with more modern methods, new species of plants or tools. While trying them out cautiously, and applying some of them continuously, changes occurred in farming too. It had more reasons. Testing new seed-corn, tool or methods for plant protection and soil conservation could happen in a spontaneous way or influenced by personal recommendation or a newspaper advertisement. It could happen also under a legal obligation: Ministry of Agriculture tried to achieve result in this way. Moreover, scope of knowledge being taught in schools could determine the mode of farming and the positive attitudes towards innovation. However, we also have to take into consideration that as a result of slow changes, different periods in peasant culture lived parallelly and not one after the other.

THE INVESTIGATED REGION AND PERIOD

The area of the town extended as far as Szeged in the south, and from Tisza to Danube, called as 'Kecskemét puszta’. With its 163000 cadastral acre outskirts it used to be the second biggest town and with the population of 76000 inhabitants, the fourth one.

The hired and later gained farmsteads and the town itself are considered the actual field of investigation, so apart from Kecskemét, Szentkirály, Borbás, Szentlőrinc, Felsőalpár, Alsóalpár, Városföld, Matkó, Könsög, Ágasegyháza, Szarkás, Nyír, Talfaja, Úrrét, and further Bugac and Monostor farmsteads.

The investigated period is between 1880 and 1945. It covers the sudden start of development by leaps, recoiling and a second burst of activity in the town. Péter Lestár (1819–1896) was elected a mayor in 1880 whose leading activity had a tremendous effect on development of the town, so it seems reasonable to indicate that year as a starting point.

After World War II horticultural development stopped. Jewish wholesalers who had created export market for vine and fruit production, were carried off from the town. The model farms were being divided into lots.
METHODS

The theme of the dissertation is of historical-ethnographical nature, agriculture historic investigation. Because of its nature and because of the given period, the main sources were special literature on agriculture history, ethnography and also archival documents (Public Record Office of Bács-Kiskun County, Central Archives of Piarist, Archives of Kecskemét Calvinist Church). 1945 as time limit made it also possible to apply the method of ethnographic
fact-finding, that of making interviews. Human’s memory goes back to the 1920’s, that was completed with other sources. One of them is a more hundred pages material collected by Dezső Gaál, a drawing-teacher, and amateur etnographer, coming from Upper Hungary but living in Kecskemét. Moreover, replacing orality, readers’ letters were applied sources from periodicals.

Regarding special literature, the main sources were those that had written up the history of the town and development of vine and fruit production, for example works of Béla Lakos, László Bende, Kálmán Szabó, Györgyi Szüts, and some masterpieces of agriculture history served as indicators, first of all writings of Ferenc Erdei, Lajos Für, Marietta Boross.

Besides these, local intellectuals (clerks, teachers, solicitors) published scientific articles on vine and fruit production of the town in local papers and scientific reviews. In the 1920s and ’40s one of the most prolific authors and specialists of agriculture in Kecskemét was László Gesztelyi Nagy, whose writings on the agriculture of the Great Plain and of farms are also refered to.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In the first chapter, besides presenting literature published until 1945, we also present those recent works on agriculture history and etnography that helped us with research. Then chronicle of the town is discussed briefly, to a necessary and sufficient extent, from the beginning of the 19th century until 1945. Work of Mayors served as a guiding thread for it.

The second chapter, after presenting agricultural characteristics of the given period, sums up state and town land-owning policy, as the latter had primary importance. Besides land-gaining policy and parcelling made for inhabitants, we also present workers’ settling.

Then a survey is provided about natural and structural features of the town and we also discuss history of vine, fruit and vegetable production and its development in Kecskemét in the given period. Then we continue with presenting some aspects of horticultural development (trade, processing industry, development of road-system, safeguarding of interests, co-operative societies).
The fourth chapter investigates social features of agricultural development: characteristics of citizens, structure of estates and industrial units. Then husbandry features of different social classes (agrarian population, intellectuals, craftsmen and merchants) are being discussed.

The fifth and longest chapter surveys the role of town’s leadership after those state provisions that were issued with the aim to develop agriculture. Then those institutions and educational facilities are being listed that made it possible for nameless masses, different peasant and middle-class levels to acquire special knowledge. School education in villages finished with elementary level. Those possibilities in Kecskemét were inquired about that made it possible for smallholders to improve their knowledge about farming after or out of school. To what extent did they contribute to spreading of knowledge? Who took advantage of this opportunity? We observed how farmer’s associations and unions functioned. By investigating local agricultural periodicals of the age, we tried to reveal their effect on spreading reasonable farming methods. After it we deal with the activity and institutions of Danube–Tisza Agriculture Chamber. After presenting the work of farmer’s association, unions, the effect of state, town and private model farms and agriculture fairs are discussed. Next, agricultural, horticultural special periodicals, edited in Kecskemét, and other articles on agriculture are being analysed.

**Results**

The main question of our dissertation focused on motives of spreading new technologies. Conditions that made possible to spread reasonable farming are investigated.

1. The first aspect of investigation was of social character, having a closer look at farming features of different social classes. Since 1880 exemplary role of the middle class and leaders of the town could have been noticed. Owning a vineyard and working on it had become a prestige during decades, just like horticulture. Not only as a source of income was it significant –invariably, it was really profitable due to good farmers– but also as a social prestige giving basis for integration to its owner.
Zsigmond Katona and János Mathiász lived in the first half of the investigated period (1880–1945), two emblematic characters both of public life in Kecskemét and of Hungarian vine and fruit production. Under their inspiration some inhabitants of the middle class and the peasants planted vine-shoot (mainly from Mathiász’s vineyard) on the sand of Kecskemét and the outskirts. Social diversity of horticulture and generosity of the middle class were two features of the period, providing property even for holders owning very small plots.

Between the two world wars, trade, merchants and processing industry were considered as facilitators. At the turn of the century, development was going it’s own way. Support by the leadership was necessary in the future too, and the town was assured of it, though, clue of development was in merchants’hands. Quantity, quality and prices were determined by them, moreover, they interfered in choice of species. Those farmers who had signed a contract with preserving factories, grew only the most suitable species for processing. ’Sand revolution’ continued until the beginning of World War II. Enthusiasm of landowners had flagged by then, they did not take care of vine-growing on sand, rather they invested their money into industry and bank enterprises that were more profitable during the war than a fresh plantation of vineyard. The earlier prosperous vine and fruit culture (from the beginning of the turn of the century until the World War I and between 1922 and 1936) stopped in it’s development, was stagnant, moreover, after 1940, period of decline was coming. Bad weather, elemental calamities, the war, lack of manpower and money at the beginning of the 1940s also contributed to it.

2. Secondly, we investigated possibilities within and out of school system, the role of different farmer’s unions and other associations, and the effect of scientific reviews and periodicals.

Theoretical and practical instruction of agriculture and horticulture was initiated into public elementary school by 38th Act 1868., but it was not realized in Kecskemét in the following decades. It was due mainly to unpreparedness of teachers and to general indifference, at least according to contemporaries. In 1894 a new Act prescribed how to guarantee school garden (nursery-garden) for agricultural practice. Besides practical studies, students could acquire theory from ’Mirror of Agriculture’. In 1896 on the basis of a departmental order, issued by the Ministry of Education and Religion, remedial schools attained agricultural and horticultural education.
Since 1872 Upper Public Elementary School with agricultural special class tried to teach reasonable farming for children of farmers, yet most of the pupils were not farmers’ children. It can be explained with more reasons. The peasants could not or did not want to do without children’s labour force for 3 or 4 years on their farms. In case of not having an own holding, they sent their children to trade or commercial schools or perhaps made sons enter priesthood. On the other hand, at the end of the 19th century – and even at the beginning of the 20th century – traditional, conservative mode of farming, inherited from fathers, was in fashion, new elements could hardly be inserted in. Farmers’ interest is presented from the other side, concerning theoretical and practical knowledge about vine and fruit production: in 1891 half of the pupils came from intellectual families, one quarter had tradesman or merchant parents.

Upper Public Elementary School and its successor the Agricultural School taught farming mainly under the circumstances of Kecskemét. The main aim of the two-year-long Agricultural School was to provide theoretical and practical education for sons of small holders on Hungarian Great Plain, in order to get along with their own holdings. Similarly to Upper Public Elementary School, here also this very class was underrepresented. Young farmers after finishing school did not work in their holdings, rather tried to find a job on bigger estates as foremen. In 1910 the two-year-long training was closed down, half-year-long courses were organised instead. Regarding either duration or length, these were more suitable for farmers. Interest in them was bigger, but still insignificant considering that bigger part of population lived from agriculture.

Agricultural teacher training institution was a special type of schools, founded in 1910. Before its foundation, teachers had been prepared for teaching agricultural subjects within the frame of four-week-long summer courses. Graduated teachers were familiarized with different branches of agriculture, and the life of people. During farm visits and at the market they had met people whose children they taught later on.

We can say that until the end of World War I, in Kecskemét schools, even the new types did not play a significant role in transmitting special knowledge. Periodical entitled 'Homok’ (Sand) could not play a role in propagating science for the very reason of high illiteracy. In this period knowledge of reasonable farming could spread only through national, local orders or informal communication.
The 1920s and 1930s had different conditions both agriculturally and socially. Level of elementary schooling increased, rate of illiteracy decreased gradually. Having seen prosperous sales results of vine, fruit and vegetables, the peasants became more enthusiastic to learn. Since applying each new method, species or tools could have resulted rise of income.

It did not mean though, the peasants became more educated. Although there was a chance for it in the town. School of horticulture founded by the Chamber in 1929, taught only farmers’ sons. In addition to general and special subjects, pupils participated in a strong practical training. After leaving school, most of the pupils worked in their own holdings, or got job as employees. They were also supported by the Chamber. This spontaneous education was considered the most magnificent thing. However, only few farmers’s sons finished school from the neighbourhood.

Interest in special school of vine, that was working in Miklóstelep, was similarly low among inhabitants of Kecskemét. It can be explained by the fact that Miklóstelep was firstly a workplace for residents. As workers, they could acquire everything what they needed in their own vineyard.

In the period until the World War I, Miklóstelep and other vineyards had a tremendous effect on development of wine culture. Every year thousands of people worked in vineyards under the guidance of specialists. Workers could learn reasonable vine-growing while observing its effect on vintage of the following year. These experiences could move workers to apply the acquired techniques in their own vineyard or with other employers.

We can see on the map how the seven big vineyards were situated in the town. Obviously, vineyards were situated to utilize natural potentials, possibly far from each other, since they did not want to be rivals because of the big labour demand. Relatively equal distribution meant equal distribution of workers as well, who lived in the town and worked on modern farms. It is very important from the aspect of our theme, because in our opinion they were those who spreaded the elements of reasonable farming.

Demand of the peasants on learning was satisfied mainly through informal ways all along the investigated period. Rate of illiteracy started to decrease due to school-building action. However, its ’results’ could be noticed just after decades. Similarly to workers – will he nill he – even an ordinary peasant could learn the newest methods from employers. Accepting the usefulness of methods, he might have applied them on his own farm or at an other workplace. Evidently, different courses and agricultural prosperity during the war
helped peasants to turn towards increased production, special knowledge and specialization and also helped to resolve distrust against recorded scientific principles of agriculture.

Associations and farmer’s union – besides safeguarding of workers’ interest – had a significant role in spontaneous education and gaining agricultural knowledge both in direct and indirect way. Courses, lectures were hosted, experiences, knowledge and news circulated both formally and informally among farmers with the same interest. Associations and farmer’s unions were being organized not according to social classes, rather on the basis of regional aspects or according to direction of specializing. The intellectuals and excellent farmers took the lead. We consider associations and farmer’s unions very important because with bringing people together from different social backgrounds, peasants’ way of thinking was influenced by the intellectuals and middle class. Vine and fruit production was a kind of link, building a bridge between peasants and non-peasants and making it possible to circulate knowledge to both directions. Landowners who were not skilled in field-work could also acquire vine-growing from workers easily, such as tool-handling, elements of traditional peasant farming and knowledge inherited from fathers.

We have to underline indirect effect of the middle class, considering the fact, they were more conversant, literate and open towards novelties. This mentality showed example for others.

The effect of associations, farmer’s unions special periodicals and lectures could be felt in more waves (horizontally and vertically). More susceptible holders – mostly intellectuals and merchants – tried out new methods and species they had read or heard about. After seeing results, other intellectuals, merchants, peasants and workers decided on acceptance. Meetings of associations and farmer’s unions were also important as scenes of exchanging experiences. However, information could be obtained in the street, at the market, going home from church, at fairs.

Vegetable production had a more special position than of vine and fruit production, because the former was hardly represented neither in periodicals, nor in safeguarding of workers’ interest. The example presented by German horticulturists in the last quarter of the 19th century, was a model to be followed for poor agrarian labourer, meaning subsistence and chance of emergence. Knowledge was being disseminated in a narrow circle, among vegetable men, their family and workers. It changed with the appearance of preserving factories. Dissemination of knowledge became wider then: contractual farmers were provided
with seed-corn, plants by the factories which also controlled cultivation of bigger lands. It partly lapped the farmers’ group who followed German horticultural traditions.

In sources contemporaries keep on making complaints about indifference towards innovation and associations.

In our opinion, the peasants and farmers’ indifference comes from the tradition that farming can be acquired *spontaneously*, in a more *natural way, within the family* instead of formal, direct way of learning. In ethnographic literature more famous researchers have written about socialization in peasant families, when children are prepared for individual farming. In the process of socialization, models of elder generations were the most important. Parents showed good examples and preactises of farming. Good examples could have different features, for example:

- Had worked well earlier (mostly in the ascendants’ generation, but from 1920s there were methods coming from other places if they had been considered effective)
- Assured certain results in production
- Did not threaten harvest of the following year
- It was profitable
- Did not mean financial burden.

Naturally, the more factors had been proved for a methodology, the easier its adaptation was.

Approved innovations concerned the following fields:

- new plant cultures
- new species
- watering
- fertilization
- use of artificial fertilizer
- division of vine
- inoculation
- protection of plants

Regarding development of farming, we consider the activity of the Chamber very important between the two world wars. Instead of its propaganda work we have to emphasize actions touching small holders’ interest (growing fodder-crops, high-quality seed for reduced price, double production, fertilization and use of artificial fertilizer). We also have to
underline the Chamber’s experiments with the purpos of education and demonstration, and its work of consulting and propagating knowledge. These measures were based mainly on personal contacts. Evidently, involved activity of the Chamber could not effect the whole society of the peasants, but it sowed the seeds of reasonable farming.

**PUBLICATIONS RELATING TO THE THESIS THEME**

**A Kecskeméti Kiskert Szövetség megalakulása és működése (1917–1931)**  

**Közalkalmazottak, köztisztviselők a földeken**  

**Gazdasági ismeretek a népiskolai oktatásban. Tanítók a mezőgazdaságban. Adalékok Kecskemét XX. század eleji mezőgazdaság-történetéhez**  

**Szikra. Adalékok a kecskeméti munkástelepítések történetéhez**  

**Könyvből gazdálkodni. Félévszázad törekvései a gazdálkodás fejlesztésére (Kecskemét, 1870–1930)**  

**Voltak-e német kertészek a kecskeméti piaristáknál? Nyomozás a kecskeméti piarista rendház Historia Domusában (1870–1900)**  