DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ TÉZISEI

Kepéné Bihar Mária

Kiskunfélegyháza és a környező települések fóliás kertkultúrájának kialakulása valamint mai szerepének gazdaság- és társadalomnéprajzi vonatkozásai

Doktori Iskola vezetője: Dr. Székely Gábor DSc. egyetemi tanár
A Néprajz-Európai Etnológia doktori program vezetője: Dr. Mohay Tamás CSc.
A bizottság tagjai:
A bizottság elnöke: Dr. Balázs Géza CSc. egyetemi tanár
Hivatalosan felkért bírálók: Prof. Dr. Juhász Antal DSc. ny. egyetemi tanár
Dr. Kocsis Gyula PhD. egyetemi tanár
A bizottság titkára: Dr. Bali János PhD.
A bizottság további tagjai: Dr. Balogh Balázs PhD.
Dr. Égető Melinda Csc.
Dr. Simon András PhD.
Témavezető: Dr. Szilágyi Miklós Dsc.

Kunszállás – Lendva – Budapest
2010
Subject choice

The production of early vegetables (delicacies) is one of the most profitable branches of market gardening. In 2000, Hungarian early vegetable growers had 2653 hectares (6556 acres) under cultivation in almost 40 thousand farms. Thousands of plastic sheet-covered greenhouses blanket the land between the rivers Danube and Tisza, in the middle of Hungary. These plastic covers shape both the management system and the lifestyle of the farmers who work in them. Plastic greenhouse farmers project an image of a successful life strategy.

The focal point of this dissertation is the region centered around the city of Kiskunfélegyháza and the time period between 1960 and 2004.

Research objectives

In researching the practice of plastic greenhouse farming around Kiskunfélegyháza, the first objective was to record its history. How did this practice develop as a result of the jászkun redemptio, the repopulation of the sandy flatlands between the Danube and the Tisza in the 19th century, and the appearance of attendant farmsteads and intensive agriculture? Another objective was to find the original sources of greenhouse gardening knowledge.

Plastic sheets were put to work in gardening in the 1960s, i.e. in the period of collective farming. As a result, the influence of collective farms on gardening practices had to be examined as well. It
was important to understand how the market gardening of vegetables became a household occupation. Another important field that deserved inquiry was the technology of growing produce under plastic. Political, economical and social changes divided the period under investigation into stages that needed to be identified.

The social aspects of the ethnographical issues proved to be at least as intriguing as the economic ones. The organization of labor is a key issue in plastic greenhouse farming. Most farms are organized along family lines. Similarly to other branches of agriculture, plastic greenhouse farming imposes a special lifestyle on its practitioners. Plastic greenhouse farmers have a schedule and value system of their own.

All these ideas lead to a single basic question: what are these plastic greenhouse farmers? Are they agricultural entrepreneurs or post-peasants? And if they still hold some traditional peasant knowledge and values, do these contribute to their success or hinder them?

**Research methods and ethical issues**

The author started to research the appearance and progress of plastic greenhouse farming around the city of Kiskunfélegyháza in 1998. Between 1992 and 2002 she also worked at such farms. Later on her professor, Dr. Tibor Bellon, pointed out to her the importance of researching the ethnological aspect of this subject. Subsequently, she started to conduct interviews to augment her personal observations. This dissertation makes heavy use of the interviews the author made with “plastics farmers” at the 11 towns of the area. She
visited 89 farms. During her field work, she took pictures of the sites, work implements and work processes.

To augment her field experience, she researched and studied all available relevant literature. To build a broad base for her research, the author extended her studies to the findings of agricultural technology and history, sociology, economic geography, and statistics. In addition, the author scoured a number of gardening and regional development periodicals.

Statistics, however, provide meager help in studying plastic or glass greenhouse farming. This farming method is so new and “modern” that statistics did not deal with it before the second half of the 1990s. The first comprehensive and detailed survey of plastic and glass greenhouse vegetable farming was conducted in 2000, under the General Agricultural Survey.

To study the roots of greenhouse farming, including the so-called “Bulgarian gardening” method and cooperative farming, the author used archive sources. Agricultural and ad sections of local periodicals also provided a wealth of useful information. In addition, the internet also proved to be a helpful source of research materials.

From the very beginning, the author had to consider an important ethical issue: the protection or confidentiality of sources. Namely, this farming method harbors professional secrets, as well as illegal practices, such as unreported labor and irregular chemical use. To fulfill the requirements of professional ethics and credibility, the author withheld the names of her sources, using oblique references or fictitious names instead.

Main results and conclusions
Farming methods so widespread and successful as greenhouse farming have deep roots. This dissertation endeavors to summarize and outline the roots and the intensification of agricultural practices on the sandy flatlands between the Danube and the Tisza.

During her research the author identified the following main roots: the jászkun *redemptio*, the repopulation of the sandy flatlands between the Danube and the Tisza in a number of waves, the successful conversion of wind-blown sand into arable land, and the appearance of farmsteads. In addition, the favorable social and economic conditions developing after the peace treaty between Austria and Hungary in 1867 created a broad market for the products of Hungary’s increasingly intensive agriculture. The author studied the contributions of tobacco, grape, fruit, melon, red pepper and vegetable growing, as well as poultry raising to the accumulation of specialized gardening knowledge.

Early vegetable gardening gradually developed in the region as gardening knowledge accrued over generations. Research results also indicate, however, that this development was greatly accelerated by the appearance of German gardening guilds in the area, promoting vegetable farming on the sandy soils, by the appearance of immigrant Bulgarian gardeners, and by the spreading of agricultural education. This dissertation offers a number of new insights about Bulgarian gardeners living around the city of Kiskunfélegyháza.

The author chose to approach the ethnography of gardening from a novel aspect, not researched extensively so far: that of early vegetable production. As a unique result, she identified the process by which plastic sheets appeared in Hungarian gardening in the
period of (socialist) cooperative farming. The basic materials required for plastic greenhouses entered into mass production in the early 1970s. As the new greenhouse growing technologies were developed, they were first handed over to the cooperative farms. By that time the government had allowed the creation of household farms, to which the cooperatives passed on these technologies. Since these household farms had contracts to sell their produce to state-owned trading companies, they were motivated to use and further develop plastic greenhouse technologies.

This dissertation traces the history of plastic greenhouse farming around Kiskunfélegyháza from the appearance of the first greenhouses until 2004, when Hungary joined the European Union. It examines how the political, economic and social changes of the period influenced plastic greenhouse farming and its tools, technologies, business aspects and product structure. It identifies 4 main stages:

The first stage, covering the 1960s and 70s, saw the debut of plastic greenhouses first in agricultural cooperatives, then on household farms.

The second stage covered the 1980s, when plastic greenhouse farming became widespread around Kiskunfélegyháza. The state owned trading companies mentioned above played a huge role here by securing a commercial market for the farmers.

The third stage took place in the 1990s, when a diminishing number of farmers cultivated an increasingly larger area.

The fourth, final stage started at the turn of the century and ended in 2004, when Hungary joined the EU. This last stage showed most forcefully how plastic greenhouse farming could not have
developed and grown without the help of the agricultural cooperatives.

Most greenhouse farmers still prefer to stay on the farm, be close to the land, and keep the work within the family. They profess to be post-peasants, looking at plastic greenhouse farming as a way of life. Most plastic greenhouse farmers around Kiskunfélegyháza have not turned into agricultural entrepreneurs for whom “plasticking” is just a source of income, and who are only concerned with profits. They have not succeed in growing their farms into sufficiently large and technologically developed, prosperous enterprises either. As a result, they are now confronted by a fork in the road before them.

As a new study aspect, the author also examined the environmental impact of plastic greenhouse farming as a production method. This is of interest, because greenhouse farming creates an artificial environment, while traditional peasant farming observes the order of nature. Greenhouse farming thus disrupts man’s relationship with nature, which has created and is continuing to create a number of environmental problems.

The subsequent chapters of the dissertation introduce the workflow, tools, and organizational aspects of plastic greenhouse farming, and outline the response of the farmers around Kiskunfélegyháza to these challenges across the various stages of the development of plastic greenhouse farming. This PhD dissertation also looks at the social aspects of greenhouse farming, examining the place of greenhouse farmers in society, the inner layering of this social group, the relationships of family vs work and community vs individual, and the issues of lifestyle and life strategy.
These chapters helped the author identify the external and internal factors contributing to the success of plastic greenhouse farming.

External success factors include the marketing support received from production cooperatives. Namely, early vegetable gardening was most successful in those periods when the government took the burden of marketing and sales off the shoulders of producers, since, as one of my interviewees said: “you can not be both a peasant and a merchant for long; you need a different blood for each.”

Internal success factors include experience accumulated through peasant life, openness to new ideas, ability to innovate, personal inventions, a strong work ethic, efficient distribution of labor within the family, entrepreneurial spirit, openness to market influences, and looking at agricultural production as a way of life. These internal success factors had already been present in the settlers who tamed the barren sands, and in the vegetable growers who built farmsteads on the sand. This mentality has been kept alive on household farms and is preserved in the lifestyle of post-peasants.

This portion of the author’s research reveals insights which help refine our ideas about the influence of production cooperatives on the lives of peasants and post-peasants. Namely, Hungary chose not to create a rigid Soviet style kolkhoz system, and allowed the operation of specialized cooperatives and household farms, which showed more respect for personal initiative. In terms of this dissertation, this statement means that cooperative farms set back early vegetable growing for a short time only, and subsequently even encouraged it in the form of plastic greenhouse farming. Another
important conclusion is that post-peasant lifestyle is still alive in the Hungarian countryside, and Hungary’s post-peasants have not all turned into agricultural entrepreneurs yet. Post-peasants still face two diverging roads, and their future is still uncertain. But choose they must.
Literature

2002  A homokvidék gazdálkodásának új útja: a fóliázás.

2002  Fóliás kertkultúra Kunszálláson

2003a  Bolgárkertészek és hatásuk a magyar kertkultúrára.


2004  Fóliás gazdálkodás a Duna-Tisza közi homokhátságon.


Magyarlapád és vidéke földművelő gazdálkodása.