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**PHD THESIS SUMMARY**

**Kepe Zolti**

**THE POPULATION AND ECONOMIC  
DYNAMICS OF THE VILLAGES OF HETÉS  
BETWEEN THE 18TH AND 20TH CENTURIES**

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## **Rationale for subject choice**

The flatlands of Hetés lie in Transdanubia, occupying the western part of the historic Zala County next to Göcsej and rség. This dissertation presents the dynamics governing the population and economy of this region from the 18th century through the end of the 20th century. This subject was chosen because Hetés is small enough, with an area of 50 square kilometers and a population of 1400, to enable a researcher to investigate its development in some depth working on their own. What makes Hetés an exciting subject to study is the fact that its geographical, social and economic unity was suddenly disrupted by an artificially imposed international border in 1920, which then shaped its history throughout the 20th century. The choice of its subject links this dissertation to similar research efforts now endeavoring to restore a unified view of the regions of the Carpathian Basin carved up by artificial borders. Of the 10 villages of Hetés, 4 (Bödeháza, Gáborjánháza, Szijártóháza and Zalaszombatfa) belong to Hungary, and 6 (Bánuta/Banuta, Göntérháza/Genterovci, Hidvég/Mostje, Kámaháza/Kamovci, Radamos/Radmoflanci and Zsitkóc/fiitkovci) to the Republic of Slovenia.

## **Directions of investigation and objectives**

The main objective of this dissertation was to create a unified view of the Slovenian and Hungarian parts of Hetés. As a first step, the

author combed the relevant literature for information about the history and ethnology of Hetés. This was important in order to identify the process by which Hetés has become a region.

The author formulated a number of questions to find explanations for phenomena which required the study of long-term processes to understand. Here are some of the questions asked by the author: How did Hetés interact with its larger surrounding area? What were the reasons for its successes and failures during this process? What types of interactions strengthened the unity of Hetés's population and economy? How did the unnatural border imposed by the Treaty of Trianon influence these interactions? What changes occurred in the population and ethnic composition of Hetés as a function of time, and what historical events and social processes shaped these changes? What political and economic factors drove the populations and economies of the two parts of Hetés apart after 1920? How did the new status of "frontier zone" and the marginalization of the region affect the "twin Hetés"? What were the positive and/or negative economic consequences of the region's division, and did it push either of the halves into an economic vacuum? The population of Hetés's villages has fallen sharply since the second half of the 20th century. What causes have been behind this fall, does it bother the inhabitants of Hetés, and do they have a strategy to cope with it?

## **Research methods and groups of resources**

The author has been researching the ethnology of Hetés since the early 1990s. He wrote his degree thesis about the ethnological patterns of Hetésø villages. Currently he researches the ethnology of Hetés as the in-house ethnographer museologist of the Gallery and Museum of Lendva. In this PhD dissertation he aims to integrate historical ethnology with the research of current trends. The historical chapters of this dissertation are based mainly on written sources. Finding the relevant written sources, including maps, posed a challenge in itself, since they were scattered across four countries: Hungary, Slovenia, Austria and Croatia.

To study the demographics of the regionø villages, the author relied on statistical evidence found in the official publications and online databases of the statistics bureaus of the two countries. Further resources were found in the archives of various museums. The author even managed to locate the hand written notes of Ferenc Bíró and Mária Németh in the course of researching the subject. As a museologist, he had access to artifacts and old photos relating to the economy and population of Hetés.

In addition to collecting a wealth of such sources, the author studied a broad range of literature in order to better understand their context. He pored over libraries of archeology, history, economic history, geography, linguistics, demographics and sociology. He located

useful articles in the periodicals of Slovenian and Hungarian museums. He continues to collect news clippings to this day.

In compiling the portion dealing with the 20th century, the author was able to capture verbal reminiscences. For more than 15 years he has regularly visited Hetés and observed the field in person. He has conducted numerous interviews with the locals and documented their lives in photos. As an ethnology consultant, he helped make a number of ethnological short documentary films about Hetés, and learned much in the process.

### **Main results and conclusions**

After an almost century-long gap, a unified view of Hetés as a single entity is proposed by this dissertation, merging the Hungarian and Slovenian aspects of its history and ethnology. Here are the main conclusions of the chapters describing the natural environment and history of Hetés: Hetés's geographical location and natural resources provided a good foundation for its development as a distinct region. Its natural unity was further reinforced by historical and social factors, such as the courthouse of Hetés, the parish and the cemetery the local villages share, as well as the endogamy of the local population. The organic unity of Hetés is also fostered by a strong sense of community among its population.

The author found that the population of Hetés grew steadily from the early 18th century through the 1930s. Up to the second half of the 19th century, the growth of the population and the local economy were supported by the large farm of the Esterházy family at Lower Lendva. This farm successfully linked up Hetés with the economy of its larger surroundings. In addition, Hetés's location along traditional trade routes also contributed to its success. Lower Lendva's becoming a district seat and the construction of the Zalaegerszeg-Csáktornya rail line under the Austro-Hungarian Empire lifted Hetés into the economic and social mainstream of the Empire. At the same time, however, Hetés stayed secluded enough to be spared the devastation of epidemics and wars, and so its population could continue to grow.

But it could not survive the First World War intact: the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 imposed an international border right across Hetés, cutting it into two parts – one remaining in Hungary, the other absorbed into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Hungarian part of Hetés was stripped of its administrative, economic and religious center, and was pushed to the periphery of the country. The part allotted to Slovenia became 'foreign'; its family, friendship, economic and cultural ties were severed by the border, and it had to adapt to having to live as part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Yet, the population of Hetés continued to grow until the 1930s. Across the border, the authorities settled ethnic Slovenes in the area, boosting the population by 31 percent. The Slav colonization became the first step in changing the ethnic mix of the population. According to the census of 1910, Hetés

was 98.1 percent Hungarian; by 1990 this proportion fell to 73.5 percent. In the Hungarian part of Hetés, the authorities deported a portion of the local population between 1950 and 1953, for political reasons.

During this period, the population dynamics of the area were influenced by the fact that the two parts of Hetés were separated not by a simple border, but by a frontier zone. Hungary isolated itself from Tito's Yugoslavia, and fortified the border with barbed wire and landmines. Special permits were needed to enter the Hungarian part of Hetés, construction permits were not issued, and nobody was allowed to settle there. The populations of both parts were negatively affected by becoming "the periphery". Trade across the border became a thing of the past. Farmers lost valuable fields and vineyards on the other side. They had to make radical readjustments.

In the 20th century migration became an important factor shaping the population at both sides. Voluntary emigration from Hetés started at the very beginning of the 20th century. Legal emigration, however, was denied to those in the Hungarian part of Hetés after WWII. In order to find jobs and secure a livelihood, the population of the Hungarian part of Hetés started an exodus to other parts of Hungary. Most of them moved to neighboring cities and found jobs there or in the oil industry of Zala County. The population of the Yugoslav part of Hetés was allowed to find work abroad, so many went to Western Europe to seek casual and seasonal employment.

In terms of population size, the total population of the Slovenian part of Hetés was 2075 in 1931 and 1153 in 2002. This represents a 44.4

percent drop. Population density was 38.4 persons per square kilometer. By comparison, the Hungarian part of Hetés experienced a precipitous fall of 80.2 percent, from 1351 in 1930 to 267 in 2001. In fact, the Hungarian part of Hetés is on the brink of total desolation. Its population density was 12.5 persons per square kilometer in 2001, while the average for Zala County was 77.

In addition to investigating the population dynamics of Hetés, the author uses the economy as a magnifying glass to find out how the historical events and political changes of the period between the 18th and 20th century shaped the life strategies of the people of Hetés. Inevitably, the research of the economy requires the study of land ownership. The first surveys of Hetés's economy were made in the 18th century. In the 19th century, the emancipation of serfs was the single most important social and economic factor which contributed significantly to the disintegration of large families, and the fragmentation of landed estates into thin strips of land.

The imposition of the Trianon border wrought a significant change in the structure of land ownership in Hetés. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes carved up the landed estate of the Esterházy family, but excluded non-Slavsö from receiving any land. Following WWII Yugoslavia started to organize socialist agricultural production cooperatives, but farmers were not forced to join them and were allowed to retain up to 10 hectares (about 25 acres) of land per person. As the author found, this was one of the key factors enabling the Slovenian part of Hetés to gain the upper hand over its Hungarian counterpart in

keeping its population. In Hungary, farmers were forced to join the newly formed socialist agricultural production cooperatives. The first cooperatives were formed in the 1960s in the Hungarian part of Hetés. Only after the second half of the 1960s were local farmers allowed to own household plots of up to 2 hold (about 0.9 ha, or 2 acres) in size.

In addition to land holdings, the author also examined the structure of production, focusing mainly on agriculture, tending of vineyards and animal husbandry. The author found that forestry, hunting, fishing and handicrafts represented the backbone of the local economy up to the start of the 20th century. Since the small holdings dominant in the land ownership structure of Hetés were insufficient to furnish local families with livelihoods, they were forced to find additional means of support. Water management practices, deforestation and lifestyle changes significantly eroded the roles of fishing and handicrafts during the 20th century. The imposition of the Trianon border and the associated constant military presence made poaching, as well as the picking of wild fruits and mushrooms too dangerous, and these activities tailed off, too.

In summary, the author finds that Hetés was able to provide for the livelihood of its population, link up with its larger surrounding area, and engage the mainstream of the country's economy within the period under study, starting with the 18th century. It flourished even more in the thriving business environment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As a result, its population continued to grow at a steady rate until the beginning of the 20th century. Then in 1920 the Treaty of Trianon split

Hetés into two parts with an international border, disrupting its centuries long unity. The author found no drastic changes in the life strategies of the population of Hetés on either side of the border until the 1950s. After 1950 the erection of the frontier zone and the forced collectivization of agriculture imposed drastic changes on the population of the Hungarian part of Hetés. The locals here embraced migration as their main strategy of survival. In the Slovenian part of Hetés, however, the local population was largely able to go on tilling the land, growing wine and raising livestock as if nothing had happened. They could even complement their local economy with seasonal work abroad. They were not forced to make such major adjustments in their life strategies as their Hungarian counterparts were, so mass migration did not become a necessity for them.

One stereotype of Hungarian public thinking maintains that Trianon borders made those stuck outside those borders suffer a lot more than those staying inside. The example of Hetés shows how this disruption also handicapped those areas remaining inside the borders of Hungary. Although both Hungary and Slovenia are now members of the EU and have joined the Schengen zone, no action plan has been drawn up so far to align the life strategies of the inhabitants of the Hetés region, straddling the common border.

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