



## Ethnicity and Landscape

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**Abstract:** In this work we make a summary on the possibilities and limits of assigning a landscape evaluation form to a specific ethnic group in case they still live on the examined area or already left it. We make a review on the types of the landscape elements that because of their evaluation can be connected to a given ethnic group. We examine the possible forms of the landscape transformation force of the different ethnic groups. Apart from literary works we make our conclusions with the help of studying some Szekler and Saxon villages in Romania as pilot areas.

**Keywords:** special ways of land use, special ways of plot arrangement, landscape perception, interdisciplinary study, "Szekler landscape", "Saxon landscape"

### 1. Introduction

The roots of this study go back to 2005, when the Department of Landscape Ecology of the Technische Universität München and the Department of Landscape Planning and Regional Development of the Corvinus University of Budapest started the Firtos Project [1]. In the frames of this project several studies were made on the Firtos micro-region located in the south-western part of Harghita County in connection with land use, water management, rural tourism, architecture, possible forms of the agriculture, botany etc. Also some diploma work was written

as well during this project, for example on the wildlife, on water and wastewater management and on micro-regional development.

As an impact of our field trips in the Firtos micro-region evaluated from this project the ETHLAS Group from 2008. Several participants became a member of this group we met according to the Firtos Project, but we have new members representing other disciplines as well. As first steps the ETHLAS Group defined what we mean ethnic group and ethnic landscape [2].

“Ethnic Landscapes are areas that are perceived by one or several ethnic groups in a particular, often characteristic way. This perception is often connected to the characteristics of the area, which are the result of activities and interactions of human and natural factors.”

As a final aim the group would like to run a project of comparing the evaluation and the specialities of Szekler, Saxon and Romanian villages located in Romania. This work created at the Department of Landscape Planning and Regional Development of the Corvinus University of Budapest comparing a Szekler and a Saxon village located in Transylvania is a kind of pre-study to help to create the proper method and avoid the main problems of a following project.

Last, but not least during a common landscape evaluation research in the Hungarian part of Burgenland highlighted some problems we probably have to take into account working on this project as well.

Our first questions were the followings we try to answer this time:

- Q1: Do the different ethnic groups have landscape evaluation force? If yes, how does it appear in the landscape?
- Q2: How to examine these forces? What are the possibilities and limits of the examination?
- Q3: How to separate the force of different ethnic groups speaking the same mother language?

## **2. Materials and Methods**

To this pre-study we had to choose a Szekler and a Saxon village located in Transylvania. According to the opinion of the participants of the ETHLAS Group [3] we wanted to choose villages with as similar natural and social givens as it was possible. We choose a Szekler village from the Firtos micro-region located at the south-western border of Harghita County called Kőrispatak (Crișeni) and a Saxon village from the southern border of Mures County called Trappold (Apold).

As both villages are located at the border of counties, they have a peripheral place in the settlement structure. Their relief givens are quite similar: they are situated in valleys of 200 m with hills of 600 m around. There are 60-70% semi-natural vegetation and approximately 10% arable land around the villages in each case.

None of the settlements have a thousand inhabitants. Kőrispatak is a bit smaller with 700 inhabitants than Trappold which population is above 850 people [4]. Trappold looks back a bit longer history, as it was mentioned in a diocese brief in 1309 [5], before 250 years of the first written mention of Kőrispatak in 1566 [6]. The presence of Gipsy inhabitants is also a common point of the history of the two villages.

The main difference is the fact that while still Szeklers living at Kőrispatak, Saxons already left Trappold till 1990's and Romanians moved in instead [4].

The viewpoints we took into account in this work:

1. The type of the relation between the given ethnic group and the landscape: we created two main groups according to the presence (for example the Szeklers in Transylvania or the Hungarians in Burgenland) or the lack (for example the Saxons in Transylvania or the Szeklers in Burgenland) of the given ethnic group at the given landscape.
2. We sorted the landscape elements according to their permanence in time. The more or less "permanent" elements became the settlement structure, the plot arrangement and the architecture of the historical part of the settlements, and the extensive forms of land use. The new parts, the new plots, the new buildings of the settlements and the intensive forms of land use creating the group of the so called "temporary" elements.
3. We separated four levels of the analysis: settlement structure, land use, plot arrangement and architecture.

Our main data sources were the different kind of maps (historical ones and satellite views, national and regional maps as well), monographs, information from inhabitants and experts, and first of all field work.

### **3. Results and discussions**

In the followings we share the main results of our analyses on the four levels we mentioned above: at first the settlement structure, then we are focusing on the land use around the villages and the plot arrangement inside the settlements, finally we have a look at the architectural elements that have an impact on the settlement character.

#### *Settlement structure*

We mentioned that both of the examined villages are situated in valleys with medium-high hills around. As you can see in Figure 1., according to the relief

givens and the river that runs through it, Kőrispatak basically has a longitudinal shape with a high street at the northern side of River Küsmöd, and with more little crooked streets south from it. Though if one goes through the village, can have the impression as it would have only one street.

On the other hand, Trappold has higher human impact with a much more compact shape, with its fortress church in the centre. Around the fortress church there is a longitudinal main square, and the more or less equal streets diverge from there. It can be seen that this village was a carefully planned one. None of the structures have major changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Figure 1: Settlement structure of Kőrispatak (left) and Trappold (right).  
(Source: mixture of the III. Military map and the GoogleMap by Adrienn Egyed)

### *Land use*

This level was the hardest to analyse because of more reasons. On one hand, the climate has a major effect on this level and that overwhelms the ethnic specialities. On the other hand we only have literature of the specialities of the Saxons those left Trappold decades ago. The fact that we saw on our field work and that may be possible to see at Figure 2. is that the land use is more efficient at the Szekler example, for example they run up a special kind of corn called ‘alakor’ for creating straw hat that is a special product of the village.



Figure 2: Land use of Kőrispatak (left) and Trappold (right). (Source: Adrienn Egyed)

At Kőrispatak the specialities evaluated for a long time, while at Trappold the Romanian inhabitants live only since a few decades at this location, there are more plots of lands out of use and some question marks may still appear in the landscape.

### *Plot arrangement*

The looseness of the Szekler villages and the compactness of the Saxon ones can be seen also at the plot arrangement. A Szekler house can be located several ways on the given plot according to the relief givens and the importance of the road: it can be built in a freestanding style, next to the sideways border or next to the border in the front as well. It is usually perpendicular to the street, but this is also not a so strict rule, there can be find exceptions as well. The garners are usually parallel to the street, but with the other farm buildings they can be located also in a very various way.

In contrast to it, according to the Saxon style, the plot arrangement has its strict rules, too. The house stands perpendicular to the street with no front garden. The garners are parallel to the street in every case creating a wall to the front and to the backyard as well, as they stand next to each other.



Figure 3: Plot arrangement of Kőrispatak (left) and Trappold (right). (Source: Adrienn Egyed)

Controversy to the Szekler traditions, on a Saxon plot it was possible to build a second house in order to live more generations on one plot. Instead of that Szeklers divided their plots. Figure 3 shows this difference: the Szekler Kőrispatak with the various, sleazy plot arrangement creates the impression of an irregular settlement structure despite of the dominance of the high street, while the Saxon Trappold shows a more strict settlement structure with the similar plot arrangement than in the reality.

### Architecture

Traditional Szekler and Saxon houses of Kőrispatak and Trappold can be seen in Figure 4. The most typical Szekler house is made up three rooms and has a terrace in the middle of the longitudinal axis. The front room has two little windows looking to the street. Saxon houses are usually wider and have three windows looking to the street.

Apart from the house the typical gates of the two ethnicities have to be mentioned. These gates also show the different basic habit of the Szeklers and the Saxons. There are three different type of the traditional Szekler gate depending on the richness and the lifestyle of the given family. Even the biggest and most decorated Szekler gate has some tracery, while the Saxon gates hide everything inside.



Figure 4: Traditional houses of Kőrispatak (left) and Trappold (right). (Source: Adrienn Egyed)

The materials that were used are also different in the Szekler and in the Saxon example and also reflect the looseness and the closeness character of the villages and the ethnicities. Szeklers used much more adobe and wood than Saxons, who preferred stone and brick. If we take the example of the gates, the Szekler gates made entirely of wood were much more tracery and close-to the nature, than Saxon gates made of a mixture of tracery wood and solid stone.

All in all it can be seen that the Szekler Kőrispatak seems to be more accommodated to the natural givens on all the levels we examined, so even the 100% man-made elements fit perfectly in the landscape. In the case of the Saxon Trappold the human effects appear generally in a stronger way and reflect the dominance of the humans on the landscape. The only exception is the level of the land use, but it is in relation to the Romanian inhabitants of nowadays and not to the Saxon ethnicity that already left the area.



#### 4. Conclusion

In this work we focused on three main questions:

Q1: Do the different ethnic groups have landscape evaluation force? If yes, how does it appear in the landscape?

Ethnicities definitely have a special landscape transformation force. This force is the strongest on the lowest level (architecture). On higher level even the similar elements can create a different settlement character because of the different arrangement. The given micro-climate has a stronger force on the land use than the ethnicities, though the connection to the given land appears in the rate of the maintenance of the landscape, the structure of the products and the special products that may appear.

Q2: How to examine these forces? What are the possibilities and limits of the examination?

The hardest task is to examine the landscape transformation force of an ethnicity that already left the given area. The examination of „permanent” landscape elements can help a lot during the research.

Q3: How to separate the force of different ethnic groups speaking the same mother language?

It is also very hard to separate the force of different ethnic groups speaking the same mother language. Linguistic and folklore studies can help to fill the gaps of results of the usual methods.

#### *Outlook*

We can declare that it is needed to continue the research on the connection of ethnicities and landscape. The help of other disciplines is also essential to complete the usual landscape architectural methods. In order to examine the land use pilot settlements are needed with various natural givens, because the similar micro-climates can overwhelm easily the specialities. Romania is a perfect place for these researches, because of the several ethnicities living next to each other.

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