



Twenty-Five Years in Collective Consciousness from Hungarian Perspective

Research Note on Demographic Changes and Economic
Development in Orbaiszék, the Eastern Part of Covasna County

Lilla SZABÓ

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
szalilla@gmail.com

Abstract: Since the collapse of communism, Romania and its rural areas have been going through a major migration process that has been affecting both the economic capacities and the demographic growth of the countryside. This paper examines some of the root causes of demographic and economic changes going on in the eastern part of Covasna County called Orbaiszék (in Hungarian) in the post-socialist transition period (1990–2015). It also focuses on how the Hungarian community sees the last two and a half decades compared to the period before 1989. The outcome of the field research carried out in three villages, i.e. Harale (in Hungarian: Haraly), Pava (Páva), and Peteni (Székelypetőfalva), in 2014 and 2015 emphasized that population decrease, poverty, unemployment, and state desertion increased people's vulnerability to social exclusion. The developed survival strategies include work migration, multiple job-holding (where possible), self-supplied food production, and reliance on social aid. The survival strategies introduced so far do not show a long-term solution for developing viable strategies and sustainable economic growth; the transition period has still lots of issues to solve before coming to an end.

Keywords: change, transition, demographic, economic power, ethnic group, migration, poverty

Introduction

More than twenty-five years after the fall of communism Romania is still facing major challenges regarding implementation of economic, social, institutional, and legal reforms. Transition from socialism to capitalism, the transformation from a socialist system to a market economy happens very slow and in some cases obstructed by those in power.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the main demographic and economic changes of the post-social transition period as well as the causes of poverty and migration in the eastern part of Covasna County. It also presents the way Hungarian people from the so-called Szeklerland region remember the former era and the way they see their present life. The study includes some of the results of the field research carried out in three villages from Covasna County, i.e. Harale (Haraly), Pava (Páva), and Peteni (Székelypetőfalva), during 2014 and 2015. The field study carried out in Harale and Peteni consisted of two main parts. First, the inhabitants were asked to complete a questionnaire which had 34 questions grouped along four main topics: family, household, farming, and relationships. A mixed questionnaire was used, questions were both open- and close-ended. Second, the responses given had been summarized, and then interviews were done in all the three villages. In this article, I will present a summary of the field research.

The research was focused on revealing the ethnic, religious, social, and economic structure of the villages as well as the effects of modernization and globalization processes going on after 1990. The focused and semi-structured interviews, completed by participant observation, aimed at revealing public consciousness and remembrance of the last decades. I have also used the results of earlier ethnographic-anthropologic researches carried out in the area, especially the results of the field research realized in Pava. I recorded five interviews in every village between 2014 and 2015. The subjects of the interviews were usually chosen from among the local elite; where there were no elite in the village, I took an interview with the people responsible of the village or the people who were ‘looked up to’ by the other villagers, whose deeds, decisions, and attitudes were an example to follow for the rest of the community. By local elite I mean here the best-educated and best-trained people of the local community, while people who are ‘looked up to’ are that group of people who exercise the major share of authority or influence within the community even though they are not highly educated or trained. These people usually try to do their best in order to serve the community and their common interests. The two expressions are close to each other in our view, the only difference being that people who are ‘looked up to’ nowadays are not necessarily the best-educated people; some of them gained authority due to their economic potentials or to their skills.

I also interviewed people who had moved from the villages but still went back to visit or work the gardens. They looked at the processes going on with the eyes of an outsider, and they were eagerly revealing details unnoticed during the research. The data obtained from the questionnaires was compared and completed with the data and the statistics made by the local governments, the National Institute of Statistics – Romania, and the data published in Hungarian publications.

The studied field, Orbaiszék, lies in the eastern part of Covasna County, historically considered the seat of the Orbai Szeklers. The region is geographically

well-defined: in the eastern and southern part, it is bordered by the Carpathians, in the west by the river Râul Negru (in Hungarian: Feketeügy), while in the north is neighbouring Kézdiszék, the northernmost part of Covasna County. Covasna County was organized on the territory of the former *Three Chairs*¹ (Háromszék). The name itself shows us that it historically consisted of three different *chairs*: Sepsiszék, Kézdiszék, and Orbaiszék, which were geographically defined units. The chair denominations are still used by the Hungarians and Hungarian-speaking Roma inhabitants.

The second section of the paper deals with the definition of the transition period and its different manifestations in former communist countries, including Romania. Transition is also highlighted by how it deals with ethnic issues and the solutions found and applied to the occurring problems, and/or the way they were treated by the governments. It also describes the reaction of the minority groups to the government policies and outlines the special situation of Covasna and Harghita counties in representing interethnic issues during the last decades. The following two sections analyse the demographic and economic changes characteristic to the transition period in the above mentioned villages. The last section concludes the topics and results discussed in this paper.

We must state that it is not our aim to thoroughly analyse all the root causes of migration and the cause–effect relationship between demographic and economic changes, but to give a description of the last twenty-five years based on collective consciousness and to connect memories to the ongoing changes.

Transition in post-socialist countries

After the collapse of the communist regime, Romania – as most of the former communist-socialist countries in Eastern Europe – was facing the problem of building new legal and institutional systems which would respond to the needs of a democratic society and market economy. The uneven development of Eastern European countries shows that some countries succeeded more than the others in building new legal and democratic systems (Kyvelidis 2000). Political and economic elites in Central and East European countries reacted differently to the new situation they were facing. Serbia, for example, held a distinct position regarding the process of socio-political and economic transition: the first phase of the transition period (1991–2000) was disastrous for the country due to an unstable political situation (civil wars for the Yugoslav secession) along with a major economic crisis. The political changes in October 2000 brought along substantial material and institutional progress. Although transition reforms in Serbia have progressed, their political legitimacy is rather poor since veritable

1 Chair is a historic denomination for a smaller administrative unit.

social consensus has not been reached on the key issues (Vujosevic, Zekovic, and Maricic 2012).

The legal and economic development and the adoption of reforms in most East European states are due to Western economists who played an important role advising the ‘shock therapy’. It assumed rapid price liberalization, privatization, legal and economic reforms; a leap towards capitalist institutional and market arrangements. In adopting shock therapy, Eastern Europe has managed to a larger extent than Russia and the Asian bloc states, meaning that it allowed the flow of private investment and the advent of Western businesses into the region. In the same time, the West was urging East European states to break with their communist past (Kyvelidis 2000).

The Eastern European states internalize the institutionalization of constructed world models with more efficient Western states, isomorphism playing a major part in their development. The whole process leads to more legitimacy in the eyes of the developed capitalist world. To the extent that the state’s effectiveness could be enhanced, the reason would often be that states are rewarded for being similar to one another; the process was helping most of the states in their European Union accession. This similarity can be used in interstate transactions, in attracting career-minded staff, in being acknowledged as legitimate and reputable, and in fitting into administrative categories that define eligibility for foreign aid and investments (Kyvelidis 2000). Economies in Central and Eastern Europe (comprising Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, former East Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia) performed best in introducing market economy and social reforms due to their relative wealth during the socialist era, to their recent history of pre-socialist mature capitalism, and their geographic and cultural proximity to Western Europe. The Balkan states (Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and the states of former Yugoslavia except Slovenia: FYR of Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia) had less cultural, geographical, and historical connections with Western capitalist states. Their revolutions were ‘bloody’ (in Romania) or delayed (until 1992 in Albania), and the successive political systems were captured by elite or regional interests, while the Balkan states are characterized by widespread poverty, organized crime, and political instability (Bezemer 2006).

The preface of a recent publication on post-communist Romania analyses communism under Ceaușescu characterized by a cult of personality based on clientelism (Sum 2015). It also states that the communist regime in Romania did not only cultivate a chauvinistic form of nationalism that was anti-Russian and anti-minority but was also characterized by extreme isolation, centralization, and economic mismanagement during the socialist rule. These characteristics also describe a part of the communist legacy the country is still struggling with.

Nostalgia for the former totalitarian regime both on cultural and individual level is seen as the manifestation of a fundamental mutation produced by communism

and then by transition. The antidote to frustration in post-communist states is *democratic happiness*. Romania, though, is characterized by unhappiness and hopelessness, which reflect the result of the incoherent and unstable legal system, endemic corruption and weak infrastructure, doubled by the lack of coherent country strategies (Ficeac 2015). The continuous waves of migration (millions of individuals) – especially among the taxable population – mass tax evasion, and incompetence for absorption of European funds have contributed to the decline of the pension and welfare system, the healthcare system, the education system, and all public institutions in general. Thus, democratic happiness can only be achieved by the consolidation of the democratic system (Ficeac 2015).

Studies showed that most Romanians admitted that a generation would need to pass before the transition might be considered complete. This new generation is firmly pro-democratic based on their participation in the 2014 presidential election or in the 2013 protests against the Roşia Montana mining project, which mobilized tens of thousands of young people (Stan and Vancea 2015). The positive examples of citizen participation still raise concerns about the challenges the Romanian political system faces. We can mention among them corruption, which continuously exists under a weak justice system, or the minorities who still face indifference and discrimination before the state. Salat and Novák (2015: 75) affirm that “although the relationship between the Romanian state and the Hungarian minority remains critical to political stability and democratic consolidation, the medium- and long-term impact of Romania’s minority regime will also depend on its potential to address, with the tools of diversity management, the challenges faced by the Roma community”. Another major issue is raised by the administrative capacity of the state, with the healthcare, education, and welfare systems in a constant crisis.

Referring to the Tismăneanu Report, Ficeac states that “communism lasted for almost seven decades in the Soviet space and over four decades in the European countries that had entered Moscow’s sphere of influence after World War II, and its effects of the collective consciousness have been much stronger and longer lasting” (Ficeac 2015: 9). The Final Report of the Tismăneanu Committee outlined that “communism in Romania fell only officially on 22 December 1989. Unofficially, structures and especially communist methods and mentality continued to exist under different forms, representing manifestation forms of the old regime, transfigured but not fundamentally transformed” (Tismăneanu, 2006: 636). It has been ten years since the publication of the Report, but most of its suggestions are still waiting to be implemented. This slow transition to the democratic way of life as well as facing the communist past show us that Romania might have adopted some of the requirements of a market economy but not implemented the social-administrative reforms so necessary to ensure the minimum requirements of a decent way of life for its citizens.

Discussing the perspectives of the Hungarian minority in Romania, Salat expresses his concern about the effects of nation-state practices and discrimination, which (1) centralizes power and decision-making in such a way that all major decisions are made by the majority according to their interests, (2) promotes such language and education politics that favour the members of the majority, and (3) supports migration towards territories inhabited by minorities among the members of the majority. All these procedures are completed by positive discrimination whose effects are felt in the so-called ethno-business phenomenon. Referring to the results of the Ethno Barometer 2000, the chances of the Hungarian community to cope with the integrating policies of the Romanian state are very low (Salat 2005). The statistics of the censuses in the 21st-century Romania supports Salat's views as far as the Hungarian community is concerned. The analyses of demographic processes show that besides natural growth and net migration assimilation has also had a great effect in the identification changes of the Hungarian community (Kiss and Barna 2012).

Szeklerland (mainly Covasna and Harghita counties), one of the most mediatized regions of Romania, raises many questions on both sides. Scholars writing in Romanian or English mostly avoid discussing ethnic issues regarding Szeklerland as it is a very sensitive topic and mostly present in political discourses. The fact that the majority (Romanians) living here is a minority and the minority (Hungarians) form the majority in Szeklerland is an oddness that is hardly perceived in other parts of the country. Political discourses mostly deal with majority–minority relations without analysing the causes and effects of the ongoing processes. Researchers studied the traditional way of life (Biró 1998, Bodó 2000, Gagyí 1999), ethnic relations (Anăstăsoaie 1999, Anghel 2015, Dorondel 2013, Bodó 2002, Jakab and Pozsony 2011), ethnocultural diversity (Horváth and Nastasă 2012, Kiss, Fosztó and Fleck 2009, Zăloagă 2015), historic traditions (Ambrus 2012, Bárdi and Hermann 1998, Egyed 2006, Imreh 1979), and demographic processes (Kiss 2010, Kiss and Barna 2012) going on in Szeklerland and Transylvania on a large scale, but there has not been carried out a complex research on the post-socialist period.

Demographic indices

The last 25 years have spectacularly put their fingerprint on the countryside. The demographic decrease between 2002 and 2011 is 7.3%, which ranks Covasna County among the least shrinking counties of Romania, the national average being 12.2% (Kiss and Barna 2012).

Between 2014 and 2015, I conducted a field research in three villages of Orbaiszék: Harale, Pava, and Peteni. The main reasons for carrying out a research

in these villages was to study the interethnic relations and processes going on in the last decades. I have chosen three villages that lie relatively close to one another, though each of them can be accessed in a different way. Harale lies at the feet of the Carpathians and can be accessed by taking a minor road, Pava lies by the county road, while Peteni can be reached by taking a minor road towards the plain of the River Feketeügy. There is one bus leaving from Harale to the neighbouring town of Târgu Secuiesc in the morning and coming back in the afternoon. There is no public transport to connect Peteni to any of the neighbouring villages or towns: locals use their own cars and horse-driven carts when travelling. Pava, now part of Zăbala (Zabola) village, is easily accessible both by bus and by train. I consider it important to know how these villages can be reached as it contributes to their development on a large scale. All the three villages show a drastic decrease in the number of their inhabitants as the chart shows below (Varga 1998, Pozsony 2010, Pozsony 2011, Szabó 2015).

Table 1. Demographic description of the three villages (no of people/years)

Village	Harale				Peteni				Pava	
	1966	1992	2011	2015	1966	1992	2011	2015	1966	2010
Total population	393	274	215	201	266	160	149	154	865	828
Hungarians	392	272	209	170	266	102	139	76	786	344
Roma	0	0	0	30	0	58	0	78	0	392
Romanians	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	79	92
Other	0	0	6	0	0	0	8	0	0	0

Source: The data used for 1966, 1992, and 2011 come from the official data of the population census published by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics; the data from 2010 was collected during the field research carried out by the ethnography students from Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj; the data shown for 2015 were collected during my own field research. I have used the census data from 1966 as a reference point because it was the last official data referring to the village of Pava as an independent administrative unit. The village became part of Zăbala in 1964 as the result of a major territorial-administrative reorganization going on in Romania.

The data shown above have their logical explanations and reasons in the course of time and history besides the bad condition of roads and the lack of public transport. We will consider each village separately.

Harale, famous for its coopers making wooden, staved vessels had fruitful economic relations with Moldova and other parts of Romania, which is still preserved in the name of the road connecting Târgu Secuiesc with Focşani called Cooper's Road. The village became part of the village demolition programme in the 1980s, which was the reason why many people sold their houses and moved to the neighbouring town.

It was in the 1980s when they were planning to demolish small villages... They [note: the Gypsies] bought the houses very cheap, for 5–10 thousand lei.² There were many people moving to towns, the inherited houses were also sold then in order to get some money (63-year-old man).

That was the period when ethnic Roma people started to buy houses in the village and settle down. By 1990, only four coopers were carrying on the traditional crafts and by 2015 there had left only one. The 2011 census data presents a continuous decrease in the number of the inhabitants and by 2015 the number of the people living there had dropped almost to half in less than 50 years, young people continuously leaving their home for the more developed parts of the country or abroad.

Industrial centres attracted the people from here to Braşov, Târgu Secuiesc, and the children who inherited the houses do not want to come back; some of them only come home for the weekend. They do not get involved in country life. They do not sell the house and their property, but their children will not come to live here for sure. They will sell it! (63-year-old man).

According to our field research, the family structure of the village shows the following results: about 47% of the inhabitants are elderly, 24% consist of families where more generations live together (children, parents, grandparents), 12% form a nuclear family (parents and children), in the case of 10% of the total inhabitants, we have found that grown-up children stay together with their parents, 3% are young married couples and 4% shows cases where more families stay together. The family structures presented show that the process of population ageing is a persisting phenomenon in this village. The local kindergarten and elementary school also indicate this process as they are operating with one kindergarten group and one class running with major age-group.

Peteni, traditionally an agrarian settlement, was the first village in Orbaiszék where collectivization was successfully imposed already in the 1950s. The collectivist structure brought well-being to the whole village, it ensured the material background for their children to study further. Old people remember it with nostalgia:

[...] it was Canaan during communism. We did not have to pay any duties, nor give in crops; they shared among the people everything that had been produced. It was possible because those who did not enter collectivization had to give in goods instead of everybody else. They were forcing them this way to enter collectivization (80-year-old woman).

2 Around \$22,000–45,000 according to BNR currency exchange rates (www.anrp.gov.ro).

There were big parties at the mineral water spring. The band was playing, we were singing and dancing. It was different from what we have now. They watch TV now, nobody goes out (82 year-old man).

However, starting from the 1970s, most of the youngsters did not return to their home village but stayed in the newly built factories in the towns of Braşov (Brassó), Sfântu Gheorghe (Sepsiszentgyörgy), and Târgu Secuiesc (Kézdivásárhely) after finishing their studies. City life and the newly built block of flats attracted the young generations, offering them a totally new way of life. The inherited houses in the countryside were sold, which is how the first Roma families could buy houses in Peteni towards the end of the 1970s.

They started to move to Târgu Secuiesc, they sold the house. The one where Józsi, the Gypsy, lives was sold this way. It was really cheap. They gave the house to Józsi, the Gypsy, for the price of a set of furniture because they needed to furnish the block of flat in Târgu Secuiesc (80-year-old woman).

The process of migration to neighbouring towns continued after 1990; there is a constant drop in the population number due to the lack of new-born children. During our field research, we have studied the family structures of the village, which resulted that 57% of the population are elderly living alone or with their spouse, 12% form a nuclear family, and in the case of 31% of the population more generations live together. We must also mention that only 54% of the houses are inhabited in the village, 46% are not inhabited or, in some cases, are used during the weekends. The demographic development of the ethnic groups living here shows opposing directions: the Hungarian ethnic group is characterized by population ageing, while the Hungarian-speaking Roma ethnic group forms a fast-growing community. The kindergarten and the elementary school are totally maintained by Roma children.

Pava, now officially part of Zăbala village, was traditionally inhabited by falconers. During centuries, the occupation has lost its importance and the locals got involved in forestry and agriculture. According to non-official data from 1992, there lived 873 Hungarians and 102 Romanians (Bartos 1996). The Hungarian-speaking Roma community members were also considered Hungarians in this dataset. The research carried out in 2010 numbered 344 Hungarians, 392 Roma, and 92 Romanians (Pozsony 2011). We can state that the demographic movements in the village have revealed a fast-growing Roma community and a declining Hungarian and Romanian population.

The ones who study further never come back. I do not wonder. There is no place to work for them (58-year-old man).

The local kindergarten is maintained mostly by the Roma community: 80% of the children going there come from Roma families. The number of Hungarian and Roma pupils studying at the local elementary school is built up in two equal parts.

There are 11 children in the first grade, six Hungarians, and five Gypsies. In the third grade though, only two out of eight are Hungarians (48-year-old woman).

Hungarian and Roma children go to general school to Zăbala as well as Romanian pupils who start their elementary studies there. Because of the very small number of children, the elementary class in Romanian language was closed down in Pava 10 years ago.

Post-socialist transition is rooted in the last decades of the communist era. The industrialization process that started in the 1970s together with the village demolition project had long-lasting effects on the countryside (Mungiu 2010). The real impact of village modernization can only now be assessed as we study the present demographic and economic situation. As we have seen above, the three villages show three different ways of development though they have a lot in common. The migration process that started with the industrialization had long-lasting effects. Educated young people and their children have never returned to their villages, they stayed in the industrial centres where they could acquire a higher social status or at least offer more comfortable circumstances for their children. These children were already born in the city and it became their natural habitat. After 1990, the migration process continued; as unemployment rates were raising, young people migrated to cities or abroad in order to live a decent life. In parallel, talented children went to study at specialized schools, and then at universities. After finishing their studies, they have tried to find a well-paying job in the city, and the majority has never returned home. The once fruitful communities turned into helpless and powerless ones in the case of Harale and Peteni. The fast-growing number of the Hungarian-speaking Roma community indicates the direction of the development these villages are heading to at present. The case of the village Pava shows a more sophisticated ethnic condition. Although it also witnesses a total change in its ethnic proportions and undergoes the loss of educated people, the fast-growing Hungarian-speaking Roma community shows a bigger effect on the village than in the previous cases.

Restitution processes and economic power

In 1991, people could claim their land, forest, and other properties back. In Szeklerland, most of the land and forest was inherited by Hungarians, though after claiming the properties back much of them were sold to whoever was able to

pay for them. In the first decade of the post-socialist transition period, economic power was held by Hungarians in Orbaiszék, (Pozsony and Anghel 1999), but it gradually went over into the possession of the Romanian and the Roma ethnic groups (Szabó 2015).

In the villages we were studying, restitution processes started with the issue of the 1991 restitution law. All three communities managed to claim their lands and forests back, except for *Pava*, the largest village among the studied ones, which had altogether 646 hectares of land according to the 2015 official data, out of which 67% arable and 33% meadows. When we compare the data originating from 1879 (Pozsony 2011 – quoted data gathered by Ferenc Kozma in 1879) to present conditions, we realize that the whole territory, both land and forest, has undergone major changes. The territory of the village was 3,640 hectares in 1879, which had decreased to 1,116 hectares by 2015. The arable area decreased from 711 hectares in 1879 to 433 hectares in 2015, while the meadows increased from 119 hectares to 213 hectares. The most stunning change occurred with the forest, which lay on 2,565 hectares in 1879 and only 470 hectare was given back to the people by 2015. Due to the 1964 territorial reorganization of the country, the bounds of Pava decreased in favour of the neighbouring Covasna town; the 1968 administrative reorganization of the country annexed most of the territory of the Vrancei Mountains (Háromszéki Mountains) to the neighbouring Vrancea and Buzău counties. Thus, the previous owners have to travel to the seats of the neighbouring counties in order to claim their forest back. Due to administrative problems, they have had little success until now.

The old-new owners cultivate their lands, except the elderly and the people who inherited land but do not live in the village. These people let their land for money or crops. As there is no major farmer in the villages of Harale and Peteni, the tenants are mainly Romanian farmers coming from Zăbala, the neighbouring village. The members of the Hungarian community live on their pension and on agriculture. The members of the Roma community have not inherited any land; most of them live on social allowance the government ensures as well as on the allowance received after their children or they work in Hungary and come home only occasionally. “Some go abroad to work, to Italy or Germany. But they come home.” (63-year-old man, Harale), and there is only one entrepreneur family in Harale dealing with second-hand clothing.

Extensive farming is not widespread among local farmers, only four people cultivate bigger lands than 20 hectares, and other three are farming on a territory of between 15 and 20 hectares including their own land and the leased ones in Pava. People live on agriculture and raise livestock mainly for family purposes. For 37%, the major income for the members of the Hungarian and the Romanian community in Pava is ensured by the pension they get, 10% work in agriculture, 20% work in factories, 19% take seasonal jobs, 10% are employed in services,

and 4% are intellectuals (Pozsony 2011). As the above proportions show, most of the people let their land, some take seasonal jobs, and only a small proportion has a secure income.

The young go to work to these foreign factories, the trousers factory and the wheel factory. The latter is in Sfântu Gheorghe, there is a bus coming to take them. Mainly women are going. Some men go to the forest to work in logging. Many of them work abroad. In Hungary, Germany... (58-year-old man)

You can hardly find someone to take care of the animals. They go to work to Hungary, but do not count that they get the same payment as home. It is very difficult to do anything here (35-year-old man).

As far as economic power is concerned, all three villages show similar tendencies: Hungarian community members are too old to cultivate their land or do not have the necessary machinery to work on a larger territory, so they let their land to the Romanian farmers from Zăbala. Pava, which is numerically larger, has more Hungarian farmers who try to work the land and also lease it from older people. It is important to mention that Zăbala is the administrative centre of Peteni and Pava villages, with a numerous Romanian community whose members are also involved in the local administration. Their possibilities for extensive farming were relatively higher after 1990 than those of the Hungarians; the restitution processes resulted large land and forest properties for many members of the Romanian community, in many cases due to their position occupied in the Local Commission for Land and Forest Restitution and also due to the fact that they had had the necessary material background for buying properties from the Hungarian community members.

Most of the people involved in agriculture in the above examples work the land only on a small scale in order to provide for their families. The ethnic Roma people live on social allowances, though the three Roma communities show different stages of development: the Roma of Peteni are very poor and live under miserable conditions, having large families; the Roma of Harale live in decent conditions and are supported by the ones working abroad; the Roma of Pava have acquired good living conditions in the last 25 years and also try to put their fingerprint on the village, but only in a territorial sense so far.

Although all the three villages have their own natural or traditional resources to establish an attractive living, they do not have the power or the leader to help them carry it out. The cooper from Harale organizes a camp every summer where they teach how to make utensils, casks and barrels, and other accessories out of pine wood. It is a popular initiative, but it takes place only once a year and does not exhaust all the possibilities the village and their inhabitants can offer. Peteni is rich in mineral springs and has a mineral water basin equipped with a

sauna house. It is not popular among tourists as it is poorly advertised. Pava lies right at the foot of the Carpathians and very close to Covasna spa. There is also a mineral spring in the upper part of the village and a quarry that has been closed down. Shepherds and people involved in forestry benefit from the proximity of the woods, but inhabitants rarely do so for recreational reasons. Every year on 26 December, a hiking tour is organized by the youngsters of Zábala and Pava, which is very popular among people. Last year, around 150 inhabitants participated in this one-day hiking. It shows that there is a real demand for taking part in social occasions; it only needs to be organized.

Conclusions

Twenty-five years after the collapse of communism people do not believe in change any more. The last decades have shown them that the changes they were looking for so eagerly would never come. Most of the inhabitants of the Orbaiszék region remember the communist era as a period of well-being and order, which they totally lack in present times. Although they admit that the former regime had its negative effects on people's lives, not all the three communities experienced the bad sides of communism, and time has made them forget the misfortunes they had had. What people really miss from older times is the *sense of community*, the occasions when they could be together. All of the interviewees remarked that individualization has become stronger among youngsters and even among middle-aged generations.

The Hungarian, Romanian, and Roma ethnic groups living together have responded differently to the ethnic and demographic processes going on in the three villages, as follows:

The changes have contributed to the decrease, weakening, and ageing of the Hungarian population as well as to the increase of the Roma ethnic group. Although there have not been visible and fundamental changes in the number of the Romanian population, their influence and role in state institutions have significantly intensified.

The constant rise in the number of the Hungarian-speaking Roma community ensures the maintenance of Hungarian-language education. We can witness in most of the villages that Hungarian education is sustained by the growing number of Roma children.

The economic power of these villages consists of the dimension of the land claimed, the land given back, as well as the ownership of the machinery used for cultivating land. The economic strength of village life is made up of the ownership proportions of the forest, the arable lands, the meadows, and the livestock raised; their ethnic division and cultivation outlines the economic

sphere of interest of the village. The main sources of income and the occupation of the population show not only the economic power of the given settlement but also underline demographic indices. Most of the agricultural entrepreneurs are of Romanian origin who lease the lands of the elderly Hungarian farmers not only in their home village but also in the neighbouring villages. Romanian and Roma communities have taken over the economic power; the economic resources have been mainly transferred to ethnic Romanian people, but they could not replace the educated leaders of the community in the traditional sense of the word.

The number of those working abroad is constantly rising not only among the Roma nationality but also among Hungarians. Smaller enterprises can hardly find proper workforce for unskilled jobs, while Hungarian unskilled workers hope to earn as much money as the members of the ethnic Roma group abroad.

The continuous economic changes have brought uncertainty in the life of the people and accentuated the role of money. There is a tremendous shift in values: in the 1990s, local communities were contesting for economic power, meaning the ownership of land, and for territorial ethnic representations (Pozsony & Anghel 1999), whereas today power has undergone a change in meaning referring only to money. We must also state here that unemployment rate has shown a hectic scheme in Covasna County in the last decades: in December 1991, the rate of unemployment was 3% and continuously growing, in February 2002, it was 13.5%, and in December 2005 it was 4.9% according to official data.³ It is also important to mention that the industries developing in the region offer workplaces mainly for women, a fact which contributed to the shift of the traditional role of men and women. The effects of men working abroad and their children growing up without having a father model in their lives will be felt later.

The post-socialist transition period still has a lot to solve, local communities still try to reinvent themselves and find the surviving strategies which can respond to the present conditions and circumstances. A viable example of surviving strategy is in Tövishát (Sălaj County), where land owners have restarted subsistence agriculture, in which they focus on growing enough food to feed themselves and their families (Biczó 2013). We can also find similar tendencies in the Orbaiszék region, though on a smaller scale, which shows that people are trying to find viable strategies for the future.

3 <http://www.anofm.ro/statistica>.

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