



When Our Space Closes, It Opens Our Minds

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Abstract. The object of the study is the problem of the ongoing epidemic, which affects the entire society and many fields of activity. Using associative logic, I focused on the approach which states that development based on ecology cannot be learned at school as the key of development is awareness. I presented the topic examining the social factors in three time period sections (Reorganization 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0), and I analysed it using historical sources as well as my previous studies referring to village research.

Keywords: pandemic, Covid-19, Szekler village laws, sustainable development, awareness

Introduction/Topic

My work was carried out in the context of the research on the effects of the pandemic, within the science of historical geography, and it can contribute to the handling of the crisis caused by the epidemic as an auxiliary or background science. It can also make people aware of the importance of reorganization.

In this spirit, the topic of the study is guided by the social problems caused by the epidemic as well as the rules and regulations which include an ecological perspective. These prove that the communities of a given period of time and space were aware of the fact that the survival of the inhabitants of the settlement depended on the ‘right regulations’ which concerned the entire community (Imreh 1983: 5–7). Given their ancient nature and the fact that they were tested during the centuries, we can presume that the deep unity of these regulations were not based on some vision coming from higher authorities, on an irresponsible practice of development through quantity and growth but on a specific ecological perspective which brings benefits to the entire community. In fact, in the crisis caused by Covid-19, all that people need to do is to continue what they realized, applied, and operated during the centuries. If we turn to organic, subject-based community models which respect nature and were matured by the past centuries, it does not

mean a step back, a regression. It can mean a wise search for the right path, a hope to rediscover the respect for the laws of nature.

I examined these social factors, and I will present the topic in three time period sections (1.0, 2.0, and 3.0). I analysed them using the historical sources and my previous studies. I relied on mentality, which assumes functionality, and on interdisciplinarity based on geography as I tried to prove, in my way and with my instruments, that a learning and awareness process can help us handle different processes of life, including a pandemic, if we recognize and apply the best possible solutions. If we run into a dead-end, we do not need more knowledge but recognition, partly renewed knowledge, and, first of all, awareness based on system-oriented, holistic thinking. This holistic, system-based approach includes ecological knowledge as we live in a unitary, evolving, and organic system where everything is interconnected and every change has its reasons and consequences. Sustainability cannot be understood without the recognition of that. If we turn to the system-based knowledge of the Szekler village *tízes*, not only history, local history, and the individual can get richer, but we can also have the chance to realize that we can still live comfortably with less consumption and more saving.

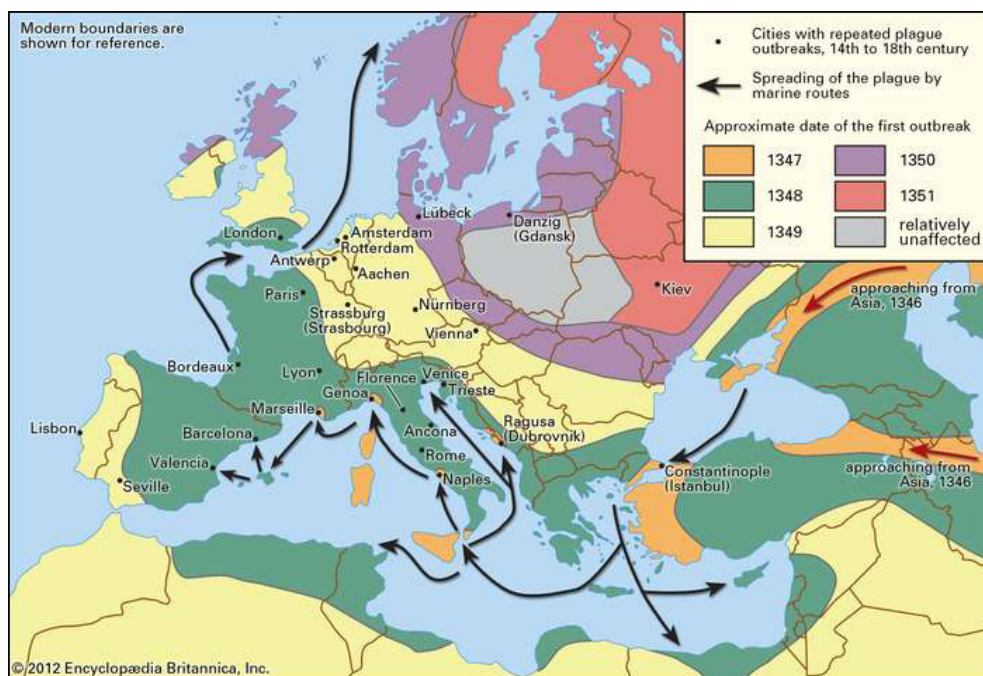
Types of Reorganization after Global Crises

There have been several crises and states of emergency in the history of mankind. However, these were mainly local. It is remarkable that the first phenomenon which can be called global was an epidemic. It was the plague epidemic called the 'Great Death' or the 'Black Death',¹ which started in 1347, in the Middle Ages. According to our current knowledge, this epidemic also originated from China and reached the shores of the Black Sea through India, sweeping through the whole of Europe and other inhabited continents beyond in several waves (*Figure 1*). One of the defining traits of this global phenomenon was also mobility as people, animals, merchandise, and money moved in this space. It is well-known that the plague was carried through the main trade routes by merchant ships as these ships were infested with rats and fleas, which spread the bacteria called *Yersinia pestis*. When they got ashore, these infected domestic animals and people ended up killing approximately one third of the mainland population.

The epidemic soon spread in Szeklerland, too. Between the 14th and 18th centuries, we can keep count of more than 40 plague epidemic waves which reached this corner of the Earth. In many cases, this tiny pathogenic agent decided the fate of families and settlements. The data we have show that the plague killed

1 European writers contemporary with the plague described it first in Latin (*pestis* or *pestilentia*). Later, most European languages used the expression 'Great Death' and, from the 16th and 17th century, 'Black Death'.

38–40% of Szeklerland (Pál-Antal 2012: 3–23). Drought and the subsequent famine made this situation even worse.



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Black-Death>, December 2020

Figure 1. *The spread of the plague in the 14th century*

Table 1. *The total population of Szeklerland between 1614 and 1722*

The Szekler Széks	1614		1703		1721–1722	
	Fami- lies	Persons	Fami- lies	Persons	Fami- lies	Persons
The Szék of Aranyos	950	4 750	1 116	5 580	1 205	5 422
The Szék of Csík-Gyergyó-Kászón	4 700	23 500	5 236	26 180	4 775	16 712
Háromszék	7 000	35 000	9 833	49 165	7 181	25 133
The Szék of Maros	4 400	22 000	5 750	28 750	28 750	19 880
The Szék of Udvarhely	5 150	25 750	6 350	32 250	6 324	22 134
Total	22 200	111 000	28 285	141 425	25 165	89 281

Source: based on data provided by Pál-Antal, 2012; edited by the author

Obtaining, sharing, and spreading information and experience in the Middle Ages was slower than the rate of spread of the bacteria causing the disease. Thus, treatment outcomes mostly remained within the local context although the crisis caused by the disease gradually increased to a global level. Previous experience showed that the first step to isolate the disease and stop its spread, the only rational way, is the quarantine. According to historical data, the first official quarantine was installed in Ragusa, in 1347. This expression appeared here and then, and it acquired its own sense: the Italian word *quarante/quaranta* and the French word *quarante* refer to the period of forty days of isolation (<https://arsmilitaria.blog.hu> – 25.04.2020).

As far as the general consequences are concerned, it may be surprising, but we need to notice that the pandemic of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age did not have only negative effects (the loss of human lives – and it was a biological warfare in the sense that as part of the war technique of the time, the corpses of the people who had died of the disease were sent behind the besieged walls of the castles, or the wells were infected with animal corpses) but had positive effects, as well. The epidemic spread because of the infected drinking water and the generally bad hygienic conditions; so, people urged the construction of canal and water conduit systems, and they improved and enlarged the ancient establishments inherited from the Romans, Indians, or Chinese. Furthermore, in time, more and more researchers and doctors began to study bacteriology, virology, and epidemiology as well as the importance and methodology of washing their hands with soap and calcium hypochlorite solutions and of the cleanliness and hygiene of the dwellings.

Reorganization 1.0

The fight against the epidemic could be observed in its dimension and its geographical expansion as well as in the formation of its nature. This evolution led to a new paradigm in the Middle Ages because the current problems required a cooperative strategy and a reorganization (1.0) – a term borrowed from informatics and military literature. These reorganizations from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age (1.0) did not interfere with the order of nature, and they did not change the natural, dynamic balance of the ecological systems. They counted on the maintaining, supporting, and regenerating capability of the given region. Looking back from the 21st century, it is quite easy to say that it was only natural that, given the historical situation and the technological development, they recognized the maintaining, supporting, and regenerating capability of the given region. However, the content of the locally enacted laws and regulations of the villages proves the fact that they recognized the essence of this approach. The valuable part of the

regulations does not lie in *what* they thought about the ecological systems, the created world, but *how* they thought about it.

Based on historical geography and functionality, we can think that the solutions of Reorganization 1.0 were present in the lives of several groups of people through the responsible rules and regulations. Using their natural reasoning, these groups of people realized that the only way of getting out of the dead-end caused by the negative events to their local scene is to appeal to the concept of the value-organizing regulations. It is well-known that in the Carpathian Basin, in the Szekler village *tízes* and *szeg* (forms of village organization), rules, regulations, and laws appeared. These contained an ecological approach and they prove, through associative logic, that the community of the given age and space was aware of the fact that the survival of the inhabitants of the community 'depended on the right regulations' (Imreh 1983: 5–7), which were responsible and referred to the entire community. 'The right regulations' also applied to the prevention of epidemics and infection and dealing with them.

In his book entitled *The Law-Making Szekler Village*, he points to the fact that the leaders of the settlements, the health inspector, and observance of the village laws had a significant role in preventing the spread of the epidemic. At the same time, he guides the researcher through reading in the records of the villages about the regulations referring to hygiene such as 'the necessity of the vaccine for smallpox, the treatment of dysentery and the spastic, feverish diseases, but mainly the means of curing the plague, then cholera', 'looking after the body', and the tradition of obeying the laws. Therefore, in the Szekler village *tízes* and *szeg*, the order did not refer only to farming and the practice of religion but also to the dispositions concerning the epidemic and human relations. The rules and ethical conventions were not only conceived, but they were strictly applied. A group of village judges punished those who broke the law. Thus, 'the law could flourish, the commandment urging the respect for each other could become respected, and the rule banning the evil, harmful deeds could become powerful' (Imreh 1983: 5). The rules and applying the rules prove the constitutional disposition of the local community, but they can only be interpreted there and then, in those smallest border-protecting, administrative, economy-organizing units.

We must state that the concept of village laws and their order and practice were not created by the Szeklers, but they did not copy or imitate it, either. It was a necessary self-controlling product of the Szekler community life in the villages. In different parts of Europe, there are several written sources which prove the regulations of the rural communities which led a self-sufficient way of life. For example, it appeared in the German, northern French, and Scandinavian regions but also in the case of eastern Slavic peoples and in the Hungarian counties (Csizmadia 1972: 8–27, Garda 2002: 5–32). We can also mention the institution of the communities, the cells organized according to a given territory, in the

Transylvanian Saxon settlements. This was the so-called Vicinity, and it worked on the basis of laws which applied to everybody and which were willingly accepted by everybody. Apart from the ethnic differences, these institutions worked on the basis of similar principles. It is important and relevant to study them because they reflect the inner, organic order of the relations within a community, and they prove that they are the results of an organic development organized from 'below'. As a result, the written, certified data are not the only means to describe or prove the historicity of a compact region or community, interpreted from a natural or social point of view. The cohesive power of a given community, the wisdom which helped it to ripen and build its way of life, its value system, its farming, its ethical norms, and its spiritual and material values can also help us to do that.

Reorganization 2.0

The Enlightenment and Romanticism made society discover the beauty, the healing and refreshing potential of nature, and they established the roots of nature conservation in people's mentality. However, the false illusion of development in the 20th century (bigger, more, brighter) and the approach aiming at growth, quantity, and success on the eve of the 21st century made the ecology-oriented knowledge and practice, which was developed by the communities of the village *tízes* and *szeg* and the communities beyond them during the centuries, sink into oblivion. I call this period in the development of mankind *Reorganization 2.0*.

The original concept of sustainable development was correct, but the official definition was conceived by political institutions and the representatives of economic growth, according to their own interests. They set the goal to be achieved, that is, to ensure clean air, water, and bread to our descendants, but they did not tell or teach people how to do that – not because they did not know how but because the solutions were of material nature. The story began half a century ago, but now the situation is much worse than then. On their way to development, societies urged production to become more and more intense. We talked about sustainability, but did we really know what we wanted to sustain? Politics, projects, decades of strategies and science have only got this far. We can see now that this is not enough because nature and people – who do research rationally, understand 'the real nature of revolutions', and teach that part of the essence of human existence is the responsible use of nature – deserve more respect.

We arrived at the time period when a full and continuous regeneration and 'natural' evolution of nature is not possible any more. It is becoming more and more obvious that this regeneration, this new state of balance has its limits. It seems that we have reached those limits or at least have become aware of those limits. The social, economic, and environmental problems appeared in an extremely complex

system of relations. The need for the protection of the environment – concrete actions instead of words – has come into the focus of attention in our days because, exceeding the local level, it has become not only global but also urgently important.

If we are looking for the relation between cause and effect, the development of the problem and the crisis is due to the fact that we have an inappropriate relationship with nature and do not use the natural and human resources in the right way. In many cases, we have to realize that it is not an ‘accidental’ virus that causes a global crisis. The functioning, mentality, and lifestyle of the modern societies are the sources of the problem. The essence of the current problems is that a significant part of mankind has given up their cooperative strategy with life-sustaining nature and aims at an uncontrolled, speculative, and exponential growth by the unreasonable exploitation of the natural resources.

We seem to have forgotten or do not want to remember the ancient knowledge that our existence and lifestyle depend on nature, a fact also corroborated by our unceasing desire to prove our superiority. We thought that the created world began with us, humans, and it will end with us. Although we were part of the system, we thought that we were superior because we understood it. It seemed that there was nothing that we could not do. We forgot that nature knows better or ‘otherwise’: we are inferior, we need to define ourselves as parts of a subsystem, we need to adapt to nature, the main life support system. Even if we leave this speculative verve behind, nobody can say for certain who ‘the master’ and who ‘the slave’ is in the often life-and-death struggle for survival. It is a fact that we have to reorganize things (Reorganization 3.0) because our arrogance is not justified. We became vulnerable although we thought we were safe. The global world became vulnerable. We cannot stay healthy in a sick world.

The everyday dreams of the consuming society became nightmares within days. These people were the most unprepared when ‘the danger’ reached them, although the scientists and the network science have been making models for several decades and warning them ‘how everything is connected and what this means in science, in business, and in everyday life’ (Barabási 2008: 4–29)². Countries, regions, settlements, and families isolated themselves because of the coronavirus, and they partially got out of the swirl and mobility of the world. I think that no political power could have done this. However, if our space closes, we can open our minds. We have come home to think, to reorganize things, to be afraid. Many people are afraid of thinking, of the changes, but the world cannot be the same as it was before the epidemic. There are more and more people who say that the ‘unsustainable’ world that existed before the crisis should not come back. Many of them understood that there is a combination, a network of problems, and we have to change things, for example, shopping, eating, and dealing with rubbish. We must also say a few words about those who doubt or deny the reality of the world

2 Quotation translated by the author of this paper.

crisis caused by Covid-19. They promise ‘normality’ and its continuation. These points of view are also the results of development as they cannot find their way in the multitude of accumulated lies and ultraliberal thoughts. Hence, maybe it is not appropriate for us to make a valid statement, but we can ask a valid question: What is wrong about closing the space if we open our minds?

Reorganization 3.0

If we treat the issue of Reorganization 3.0 from the perspective of historical ecology development, the diachronic aspect, and the unitary, evolving, and organic system, then the world of the Szekler village *tízes* and the organizing principles beyond it will offer a methodological handhold following the principle that nature ensures all the conditions and necessities of our existence and our civilization and that everything is interconnected and every change has its reasons and consequences. That is the reason why the organizing, working, and developing model of these life-sustaining units can provide the foundation for the development of human systems. The central or ultraliberal mentality and action is not a solution. When we plan our future, we have to adapt to nature. Nature is the perfect source of wisdom, and it dictates its order to us (Hajnal 2012: 7). We need wise organizers who have clear plans for the future, who respect the laws of nature, and who got their chance – in the past months – to map and make an inventory of what is important in our lives on Earth. Wisdom originally lies in people, and ingenuity lies in their genes (Ambrus 2018: 17).

Many times we can get out of the dead-end of the negative events on the global stage only if we turn to the complex, organic, subject-based community models which ripened in the past centuries and which seem to be the best solutions until now. Getting out of the dead-end does not mean a step back, a regression (Ambrus 2012: 181). It can mean a wise search for the right path, hope and confidence in finding the right direction and the treatment of the trauma caused by Covid-19. The communities which already developed the regulations in the Middle Ages have something to turn to. The *tízes* and the *szeg* have the well-developed historical experience and tradition to do that. In fact, they only continue what they successfully realized and operated during the centuries.

Global commerce and monetary systems still work, in a limited way. Furthermore, the free and fast flow of information has made it possible to deal with the epidemic in a relatively uniform way, to share our experience and to acquire knowledge about the behaviour and the nature of the virus. Thus, it is likely that the consequences of Covid-19 will not be as tragic as the negative effects of the plague in the Middle Ages, and it will not ravage like the big epidemics in the past.

We can correctly approach the content of Reorganization 3.0 only as a system, based on natural sciences and natural laws. The reorganization of this period also

has to follow the phases designated by the regenerative capability of nature. It is now and it is here that we have to realize that if we think in a system referring to the whole, to the entire world (holistic), we can offer a new chance to mankind and we will have the opportunity to reorganize, to change a little bit our old lifestyle.

We must realize that the responsibility of the individual is huge. If we are optimistic, we can say that Covid-19 shows where the place of people in the world is, and 'the creativity' of people increases in cases of emergency. Everybody has to practise this type of creativity where they live, in the family, at school, at work, in the street, or in the nature. That is to say, in the period of anthropocentrism, sooner or later we have to extend limited locality to globality and totality. In the isolation and helplessness caused by the coronavirus, we can all experience that our human relationships keep us alive. This is the moment when, using our revelation, our knowledge, and the possibility for a flow of information, we can confute the notorious proposition (ascribed to Albert Einstein, but without any proved source): 'The day when technology will be more important than personal relationships, there will be a generation of idiots in the world.'

Of course, the effects of the reorganization will not be as fast as Covid-19 because the authorities, the multinational companies, the banks, and the media and marketing representing their interest are trying to conserve their power, making way to commercial and political manipulation and speculation. At the same time, different types of consensus, individual habits, the familiar means of physical and mental comfort, and the question of status, which often determines people's behaviour, have a great retentive power. The problem is not *what* we think about the world but *how* we think about it. It is almost impossible to see through the complex, often illogical connections because the main goal of the chaos creators is to create more chaos. Being optimistic, I conclude that it is a natural process that the price of rising is sinking. I am one of those people who have learned from the phenomenon of Covid-19 that we need to diminish our dependence on food and energy. We can live comfortably even if we consume less and save more.

The current environment protection, green economy, and green technology are not sustainable solutions. The 'Blue Economy' model (Pauli 2010) and its practice (Hajnal 2010: 105) represent the real sustainability. However, 'blue economy' cannot be learned and taught at school as the key of development is awareness. Without awareness, there is no chance to do things differently. Modern science cannot cross the threshold of awareness, either. Education in its current form, the church, or the families cannot teach it; they can only suggest the way to awareness. If school, families, and the church inspire us properly, we can learn from what happens with and around us. It seems that the threat and the fact of disease and death, as well as the fear originating from them (Hajnal 2020), make us reconsider our value system, reinterpret our existence, and wish for reorganization (3.0) with the human power and determination needed to achieve it. We want to live in a

family, in a community, in the life-sustaining nature, on Earth: we would like to get back the social frame which provides us security.

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