

CHANGES IN THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THE VILLAGE CORUND

Key words: modernization, entrepreneur culture, culture of interiors, folk art, the Corund phenomenon, change of social structure, economic strategy

The aim of my paper is to reveal and to model the mechanisms which assure the functioning of Corund's economy. I shall follow the production branches, which mean the income resource of individuals and families, from historical sources up to present day narratives. Although I have deepened my research in a historical perspective, I shall focus pretty much on present day situations. In this context I have identified two dominant economic attitudes, divided clearly from each other. On the one hand I focus on the (self-sustaining) farmers of the agrarian sector, and on the other hand on the strategies of such persons or families, who expose a market-related or market-oriented attitude. My theses are based on the following issues: *sources of income, reactions to challenges, the "dynamic motives" of economy, a change in lifestyle, a change in the social structure.*

Following the systematization of the collected data I was able to get an overview on the functional mechanisms of the rural community, which are specific, furthermore unique in the region. Corund's society hides a very structured social network, which has been successfully adapting to the changing relations of the ages. It was able to produce suitable reactions even in situations when the surrounding settlements were held back or have seen recession.

(1.) *Sources of income.* The historical research shows how the village of Corund followed a natural evolutionary process up to the point where the demographic increase reached a critical level, where the agrarian sector could no longer satisfy the needs of the inhabitants. Up to the end of the 19th century the agrarian sector was the one to assure the sources of income for most of the families, as well as certain social prestige for the members of the local community. In Corund – as well as in any other Sekler village – possessing land, and cultivating it properly, was not only an existential issue, but also the norm of the community.

Pottery has gradually become a mass phenomenon, due to the fact that the members of the community were convinced by the economic benefits of craftsmanship. Wagon merchant, rooted in the tradition of salt trading, gained a new meaning with the booming of craftsmanship. The quantitative increase of pottery, due to the increase of producers, activated the wagon merchants, who showed their mobility. The tradition of pottery in Corund seems to be fulfilled by the close cooperation of these two occupations.

Already in the years of socialism, one could see in Corund those economic endeavours, which naturalized some sort of entrepreneur culture, in formal contrast with the central power, but serving the interests of the local society. Trade started to become a mass phenomenon once with the evolution of tourism. After the system change, the possibilities given by the free market led to the registration of numerous small businesses, among which the rising group of local re-sellers were in majority.

The agrarian sector still plays an important role in the whole production of the village, but it grabs our attention not really in means of profit quantity, but in the number of people involved. The farms situated on the higher part of the mountains were not driven under the command of the central power, not even in the period of communism, therefore in their case we can talk about production continuity. But in the last two decades a higher income was given by the secondary and third branches, so the aspiration towards these domains is perfectly understandable.

(2.) *Reactions to challenges.* In the history of Corund there were dynamic and less „vigorous” periods, to which the members of the community tried to give a response according to their individual abilities or driven by the rules of their society. One of these factors can be considered the constraint to search for new strategies due to demographic increase. In lack of land the families were forced to try to succeed in entirely new occupations, respectively to naturalize these within the village.

Regarding the producing society of the village, in the first half of the 20th century the most relevant constraint was given by the changing buying demand. The enforcement of the form, model and technological innovations, dealing with the challenges of the market, was the credit of the local small industry units. These appeared in the form of individual enterprises, bringing determining patterns to the economic life of Corund. The families which were not so open to the new ideas, were quickly convinced by the efficiency of the pottery workshops, afterwards the road was clear to pattern-following.

With the liquidation of private property the farmers were not only deprived of the possibility of agricultural production, but also the workshop process was brought under the

command of the state. With the tacit approval of the local administrative and political elite, the local families gradually placed their resources into craftsmanship and home industry. The “qualified” craftsmen were very good at serving their own interests, as characters of the second economy being able to fulfill life strategies which were opposite to the ideology of those days. Under the social regime, which was against capitalism, the strategy of the merchants of Corund was sustained because the “entrepreneurs” did not aspire to symbolic functions, but remained the “invisible” characters of second industry to the end. The pliable economic milieu following the system change in 1989 proved to be more like a field of endless possibilities than a labyrinth for the local families.

The local community was able at all times to give quick answers to the appearing challenges. Thanks to the dynamic changes and rational decisions, neither the crisis of pottery use, nor the liquidation of private property or the privatization after the system change could bring economic recession to this village.

(3.) *The “dynamic motives” of economy.* The change in the economic life of the village – in terms of quantity as well as quality – was brought by the merchants. I identify them as the chain-loops of micro-economy, who assures the movement of the community from an anterior level of production. As a conclusion we can state that wagon merchants were a very important “dynamic” motive in the economic life of Corund.

Regarding the continuity of pottery production, we have to emphasize the role of those small industrial units, workshops, which stepped beyond the tradition of family units, and functioned as real industrial units. Micro-industrialization resulted in a period of modernization within the community of Corund. The measurable components of this process can be observed at the families who were set up for craftsmanship production, and it has become a part of their production strategy as pattern-following, as the influence of external innovators. In the age of modernization, that is in the 20th century I can identify two major factors. In the first phase I have to outline the role of innovators, while in the socialist period I shall emphasize the economic influences of the characters of second economy.

I conclude the uniqueness of the village in question following the so-called *Corund phenomenon*. My more limited research, oriented to the region, shows how differently from the other settlements, in the case of Corund we can talk about a historical product, which combines the knowledge and attitude patterns inherited from generation to generation, the economic strategies and the opportunistic exploitation of any given possibility. In spite of similar social-geographic relations, no other village of the region can show such a graphic of evolution. Further more, in the case of the villages of Seklerland, we cannot see such a

spreading of the phenomenon on the communal level. As wider the field of research might be, as more we can convince ourselves of the uniqueness of the Corund phenomenon. I do not know any other rural settlement in the country, where the tradition of craftsmanship evolved to the community level of modern entrepreneurship. In Hungary or in other parts of Europe the occasional craft trade might offer the possibility for producers to sell their products, while Corund is a non stop trade in each part of the year.

(4.) *A change in lifestyle.* Regarding the architectural practice and the living space of the families, the village has encountered lots of change. Even the socialist type of building practice seems to be out of date, so the new buildings and interiors are organized following the patterns of western magazines. The modern and quasi-modern interiors are the ones dominating the contemporary family homes, and because of the accentuated urge of representation the furniture still remains a measuring tool of social aspirations.

In the case of the local re-sellers, the non rational overbidding of each others interiors can be recorded very well in the accumulation of goods. Those people, who saw the quality evolution of their lives in the continuous increase of consumption, will always relate to the social strata situated “above” them, trying to reach their level. This could be also a motif for mass production. My experience is that material aspirations dissolve the prejudices, and a great part of the inhabitants will not deny the endeavour to get maximal income, a feature so characteristic to Corund.

(5.) *A change in the social structure.* After the system change, using the possibilities of the free market, the individual had endless options for choosing his/her model of life conduct. Some individuals possessed a consolidated material basis even in times of socialism, and as a part of the informal economy, they were able to gather enough capital to have the opportunity to “jump out” after the system change. Not everyone succeeded in saving and consolidating the earlier positions, nevertheless in the 1990s all members of the younger generation wanted to become a merchant. The society of Corund, being stratified according to wealth and occupation, was continuously modeled by the internal economic and social relations. Although I take into a serious consideration the innovators, as an external element, I can state that through quick and creative pattern-following, the traditional life strategies lost their importance, and a capitalist spirit took over, became general. Taking all these facts in consideration I outline that the change in the social structure of Corund took place before the system change. Many innovators were formed from the formal pattern-followers, and they were the one who really benefited from the system change in 1989.

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