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ANTHROPOLOGY**

The lifestyle and material culture of the shepherds from Csík

**Study regarding the occurred changes in the lifestyle and material culture of the
shepherds from Csíkmadaras (Mădăraş) in the 20th - 21st centuries**

PhD Thesis. Summary

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Keywords

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Summary

In my PhD thesis I examined the occurred changes in the lifestyle and material culture of the shepherders from Csíkmadaras. I could conduct this research by studying the social stratification of the shepherds, their habits, the material supplies of the sheep farmland, and also by focusing on such factors with major impact on lifestyle as the possession and the use of sheep-runs, the sanitary regulations, the education and the flux of information; I studied all the aforementioned factors within the confines of the significant historical events of the 20th-21st centuries.

The research was based on contemporary collection; during the process I applied the participating observer's method. The latest exhibits from the variation analysis literature and those of the informants' statements date back to the 30s-40s of the 20th century, while my most current items are from 2012.

I completed my research focusing on a shepherd's - Vánca Imre – and his family's activity. I chose him because he is the only sheep husbandman and cheesemonger born and still living in Csíkmadaras, and who, year after year, takes responsibility for the sheep stock of the local farmers. As a member of the community, Vánca Imre's work is relevant in the point of keeping the other farmers committed to sheep husbandry henceforward. The cheesemonger is currently the only notable local maintainer and organizer of communal shepherding in Csíkmadaras.

He is the main promoter of the contemporary shepherding practices. Since 2003, each year at spring he collects the farmers' sheep, he organizes the spring sprout, he takes care of the feeding and the grazing grounds at the verge of the village, respectively, as the leader of the event, he participates at the autumn return of the stock. As the head of the family he successfully operates a well structured working team: his wife and his mother mainly help in housekeeping and in selling the goods they've produced, while his two brothers-in-law respond for the keeping (guarding, pasturage, milking) of the stock – partly their own sheep, partly the other farmers' stock. Their daily work is mainly defined by the necessity to produce for the market, thus they've started using such technologies, which are different from the previous shepherd and cheesemonger roles. Part of the profit of their family business is spent

on consume: for the welfare and comfort of the family, while the other part is invested in the procurement of such agricultural machines that increase the efficiency of their work. Building a customer network that covers the whole settlement represented a precondition for the successful running of their enterprise.

In my dissertation I drew the following conclusions:

My fieldwork at Csíkmadaras shows that in Csík the domestic sheep husbandry hereditary from generation to generation is in decline, and as against this new, farm-like enterprises appeared that specialized for intense breeding (merino, East Friesian, etc.). These businesses don't focus on communal shepherding, but put forward rather the private, for profit sheep breeding for export. The studied individual, Vánca Imre learnt shepherding from his grandparents and his uncle. Acquiring this craftsmanship he has continued the profession of his ancestors as a businessman. His example presents that type of shepherd and cheesemonger who operates such an enterprise rooted in family tradition, which puts great emphasis on production for the market.

Reviewing the structure of the shepherding occupation one can observe that the traditional shepherding roles have mainly subsisted. The staff compound of the sheep farms remained mostly the same. The determination of the staff's number working on the farm lies on objective principles, as the number of shepherds is correlated to the dimension of the stock. The share of the tasks is flexible: even though the shepherders have their specific area of activity, there are still passages among the roles. At Csíkmadaras the partial cessation of the traditional field judge occupation has been the major change in the professional structure, as during the past decades this role merged with the crofter's role. Vánca Imre tends not only just the traditional role of a crofter, his range of activities is much more wider than that. His activity is that of a shepherding businessman's, the crofter has mainly administrative tasks, thus this role is more similar with the former role of the field judge; however his duty has such numerous characteristics which support the tasks of the crofter. His attributes show that Vánca has a complex competence, which alloys the status of the field judge and that of the crofter. Due to his entrepreneurial behaviour and to the complexity of his duties, his social estimation among the other sheep husbandmen is not always positive. The general tendency prevails, according to which those farmers who have been continuously connected with him for years will adhere to giving their stock henceforward to him, while those farmers who ususally give their animals for a long while to crofters living in one of the neighbour settlements, will do so also in the forthcoming years; there are other farmers, who once in one

or two years, according to the fees, turn to several crofters. The presence or absence of these farmers generates the shrinking or increase of Vánca's economic network.

In my Ph.D. thesis, along the study of the social questions related to the shepherders' activity, I also wanted to examine – as my other main goal – their material culture. I paid increased attention primarily to the existing means of the sheep ranch and of the alpine, summer accommodation of the shepherds and sheep. On one hand I examined the objects found at the ranch - as the material elements of the shepherding way of life - from viewpoints of consumption, while on the other hand I systematically arranged the objects, I placed them in context and I studied them taking into account the possibility of life cycle approach. I had to disaffirm my assumption according to which the shepherds, reported to the society, represent such an antagonistic way of life that can just hardly take in innovations; while examining the assets of the ranch I experienced exactly the opposite of my initial hypothesis. Regarding the existing means, the shepherds are open to innovations due to the propagation of the industrial commodities, and according to the conditions of the 21st century the household utensils and those for the milk processing - that were previously made by craftsmen using manual techniques – have been replaced with modern articles for personal use, mostly made of plastic and which are also replaced now and then. These days the isolation of the ranches from the outside world also gets a new revaluation, as the telecommunication tools permit for the parties within the settlement and for those staying at the alpine accommodation to continuously keep in touch.

Next to the material assets of the ranch I also researched the objective supplies of the shepherds' housing conditions within the settlement. The object centered study of Vánca Imre's home has been relevant from the angle of the objects' life cycle found at the ranch: the material supplies of the alpine accommodation is often augmented with tools formerly used in the household and which became redundant. The study of the interior furnishing also shows the way in which the material surroundings of a shepherd are transformed in the 21st century – according to the necessities of the modern man. The transformation of the lodging conditions of a family that lives mainly from shepherding and the acquisition of prestige objects shows the capacity of closing up the ranks with the members of the community. The shepherds establish such living patterns in their home and at the alpine accommodation which are characteristics of the consuming behaviour of the 21st century man.

In my opinion the research of the objects in a life cycle approach made possible for me to create the complete inventory of the shepherding utensils, and taking-off from this I could present the occurred changes of the tools. The definition of the deeper meanings of the objects

was possible due to repeated inquiry. The research results show that the life stories of the objects provide minimal information compared to people's life stories. The users of the objects remember mainly the acquisition circumstances of the utensils. The defined interval of use is not precise every time, as the owners of the objects give different declarations regarding the procurement date and interval of use of some utensils. The picture of the alpine accommodation and sheep ranch in the 21st century is a contradictory one compared to those that one can find in the ethnographic specialty literature of the Transylvanian shepherding; due to the drastic social and economic changes occurred during the latter several decades the type of the shepherding utensils has spectacularly changed.

My hypothesis according to which in our days, in Csíkmadaras the shepherds' creativity regarding the manufacturing of objects shows a special feature has also become refined, as the changes of the living circumstances resulted in the decline of those utensils and their use, that were made by shepherds, that represented the peculiar shepherding culture and that were made locally, using manual techniques. The results of utensils related research clearly shows the propagation of the globalization also in the case of sheep ranch. The traditional utensils have been replaced by such objects of standardized production, that were initially used in the households and which were subserviently bought in order to amplify the set of utensils of the sheep ranch.

The mapping of the crofter's economic network has shown a complex relational system, covering the entire settlement; thus I could carry out a more elaborate study of Vánca Imre's shepherding activity. The function of certain types of relation can be conceived not just through the angle of economic activities, for these connections, along work, help to develop common leisure activities. The relationship network developed during the last eight years has fostered the continuous sale of the family's products, and due to this the family could also get periodic works, assuring the other members of the community an opportunity to earn money.