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COPING STRATEGIES AND  
MIGRATION IN A DEPRIVED  
RURAL AREA OF HUNGARY

ZSUZSANNA PULSZTER

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Department of European Ethnology and  
Cultural Anthropology, University of Pécs  
Hungary-7624 Pécs, Rókus 2.  
Tel: +36 30 893 5604  
<https://journals.lib.pte.hu/index.php/pnekat>  
Email: [pnekatwp@pte.hu](mailto:pnekatwp@pte.hu)

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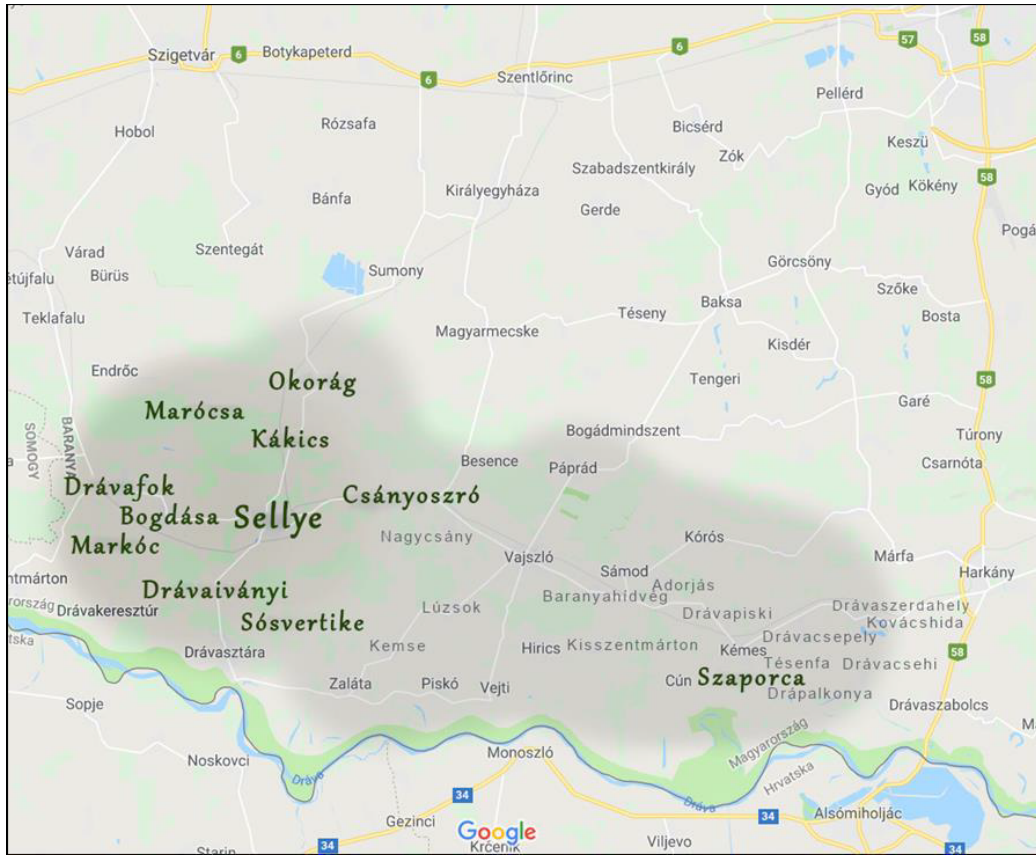
## COPING STRATEGIES AND MIGRATION IN A DEPRIVED RURAL AREA OF HUNGARY

This study covers the results of empirical research in one of the most deprived areas of the country, describes the socio-economic problems of the Selye district, covers the general employment situation in Ormánság, refers to the most important form of employment in the area, that is public employment, and shows the position of businesses and enterprises in the area.

**Keywords:** South Transdanubia, Selye district, public works, unemployment, farming, entrepreneurship, country

This study is about Ormánság, one of the most deprived regions of Hungary, and focuses on its economy, demographics, migration patterns, economy, and coping strategies, as well as about the local businesses, public works, and the problems of the public workers. The results shown here are part of my PhD thesis, in which I studied the present-day socio-economic relationships of one of the best-known ethnographical regions of Hungary. My questions are the following: Who lives here and how is the local society structured? What categories are there in the local society? What are its layers? How is the present-day society built, and what is the history behind it? What has influenced the situation in Ormánság? Why has it become one of the most deprived areas of the country? What causes the changes in demographics and migration? What are the underlying processes and what influences them? What is the socio-economic network like? What are the typical coping strategies?

It was also interesting how the local relations fit the greater framework. Officially the Ormánság, as an area to be developed by a complex programme, should receive state development projects because of weak infrastructure, dominance of small villages, high unemployment rate and the ethnic composition of the population (NVS 2012: 109). This area is described as mainly agricultural in the development documents, so the European Union Common Agricultural Policy directives are valid, as well as the Hungarian State national strategy for rural areas, the Ormánság programme and its operational programme, the Ósdráva programme, all of which offer significant support for the local interest groups, too. The Ormánság programme contains a lot of important strategic plans and targets, for example making a complex system of water and landscape management, reviving a type of agriculture that suits the land, and organizing the local economy, the social economy and employment. It also contains plans to educate the Roma people, with the intention of enabling them to find employment. Also, the Roma people should acquire self-sustaining skills. The programme contains plans to revive both the architecture and the community of the deteriorating settlements as well as to develop tourism (NVS 2012). Besides my own research data, I also relied on the documents of relevant policies in this study.



Settlements involved in the study. Source: Google Maps 2023, own highlighting.

I started my field research in 2009. Between 2009 and 2013 I examined the Social Land Programme that encouraged farming in the area; I wanted to see how it was implemented. In 2013 I started anthropological research in Markóc, a little village that lies on the West edge of the area. For weeks I worked together with the public workers to see the practice of public works from the inside and to get to know the everyday life of the local community. Since 2016 I have been doing fieldwork-based research on unemployment, public works, farming and entrepreneurship in 9 towns belonging to the Sellye Joint Municipality.<sup>1</sup>

## The social and economic landscape of Ormánság and the settlements under study

The population of the settlements with people under 500 has been continually decreasing in Hungary since 1990. Ormánság and the Sellye district have suffered a greater population loss than South-Transdanubia or Baranya County. In the decade between 2001 and 2011 the

<sup>1</sup> I studied the following settlements: Sellye, Bogdása, Drávafok, Markóc, Kákics, Okorág, Sósvertike, Marócsa, Drávaiványi. I did not do any field research in Felsőszentmárton, Drávasztára or Drávakeresztúr, although they have belonged to the Sellye Joint Municipality since 2020.

In the spring and autumn of 2018, Dr Gábor Máté and his students from the Department of Ethnography and Cultural Anthropology, University of Pécs also took part in this research. Citations from interviews conducted by them are marked with an asterisk.

decrease in population was 3% in Hungary, 5% in Baranya County and 11% in Ormánság (Ragadics 2019a: 51). In the next decade, between 2010 and 2019 the population of Ormánság decreased with more than 10 %, which shows significant emigration loss compared to the 0.46 % natural loss (KSH TEIR). The population of those Sellye district settlements that I studied decreased by 26,47%, that is, by 1356 people between 1990 and 2022 (KSH TEIR). As shown in the table below, Sellye town lost more than the quarter of its population by the end of the research period, and some smaller settlements suffered even greater population losses, with Okorág losing the least (17.07%), and Marócsa the most (45.93%) of its inhabitants amongst the settlements of the Sellye municipality.

Population changes in the towns belonging to the Sellye Common Self-Government (1990-2022)				
Name of town	Population (people) 01.01.1990	Population (people) 01.10.2011	Population (people) 01.01.2022	Change in population (%)
Bogdása	329	279	229	-30,39
Drávafok	564	517	464	-17,73
Drávaiványi	222	198	146	-34,23
Kákics	242	227	175	-27,69
Markóc	85	66	56	-34,12
Marócsa	135	102	73	-45,93
Okorág	164	167	136	-17,07
Sellye	3197	2757	2337	-26,90
Sósvertike	184	177	150	-18,48
<b>Total</b>	<b>5122</b>	<b>4490</b>	<b>3766</b>	<b>-26,47</b>

Source: KSH TEIR, own editing.

The negative demographic markers are mainly caused by employment problems in the last decades, however, this tendency is not only specific to this region or to Hungary (see Cartwright 2013). Lack of employment or low-paying jobs make young and agile people leave not only the region, but often the country as well. Doing so, they further deepen existing problems. This phenomenon is not specific to Ormánság; while researching the rural areas of the USA, Brown and Schafft found that it is the younger and better educated people with a better economic status, who leave rural areas (Brown – Schafft 2019: 222). The tendency is the same in Ormánság; as people who remain are in a worse situation, the rate of low-skilled, poor and deprived people is growing. Parallel to this the number of people working in low-prestige jobs are rising: their percentage grew from one-third to almost 50 % between 2008 and 2017 (KSH TEIR). Since low-prestige jobs are usually badly paid, this tendency leads to growing poverty. Due to high unemployment rate, the typical form of employment in the region was public works. There were some state financed employment programmes that provided some periodical jobs, but these were short termed with low salaries. The lack of permanent jobs that provide safe livelihood is the most acute problem. This can be clearly seen in the Local Human Resources Development plan, which states that „[the] Sellye district

*is the only one in Baranya County, where no new, unsubsidized jobs were created by the employers”*(HEEFT 2017: 41).

Although Ormánság was a deprived area even back in the middle of the 1980s due to its poor economy, ethnicity and age of its population, its deprived living standards, bad transportation and media availability, its closeness of County and state borders, and the dominance of small settlements, the problem manifested itself much stronger after 1990 (HI 2005: 120-121). During the interviews, local people often talked about the lack of stable jobs one can live off, as the main reason for the growth of negative tendencies and the marginalization of the whole region. Encouraging agricultural activities is the least effective amongst the most deprived groups because in their value system employment is more valuable than growing their own food. Although there are large numbers of Roma people in the district, according to my studies the everyday lives of locals are determined by their socio-cultural position and existential security or insecurity, rather than by their ethnicity. Other studies came to the same conclusion (see Pulszter 2014; Ragadics 2015: 163). As I saw it, exclusion happens along social, rather than ethnic dimensions. The missing infrastructure and the lack of cultural and social services make improving one’s economic situation rather difficult. According to my experiences, only those families utilize self-care strategies who are in a better position, as local standards go. Families in unstable economic situations usually do not grow their own food or do anything to help themselves. Social programmes promoting farming have minimal effect on helping the really needy. One of the reasons for this may be that the people involved see subsistence farming as a pressure and not as a possibility (Pulszter 2013; Pulszter 2014). Although Ormánság was the target of several development programmes in the past decades, none of them has proved successful (NVS 2012: 61).

## Public works and public workers in Ormánság

According to the National Rural Strategy, 10-15% of the population of Hungary is poor, with most of them living in rural areas. This is why it is crucial to solve the employment problems of rural areas. To prevent growing poverty, the system of public works was created to provide a kind of transit-employment, regular income, and an opportunity to catch up for those people, who were unable to get a job in the primary job market (NVS 2012: 12). In Ormánság there are no primary job market jobs, so public works has an especially significant role in solving employment problems. For a lot of people, public works is the only possible option in the region. This is shown in social surveys: in October 2016 the highest ratio of public workers was in Sellye district, where every third employed person worked as a public worker (KFBesz 2018:5; 10). A lot of people in Ormánság have low education, which makes it difficult for them to be successful in the primary job market. Also, as unskilled jobs available for these people are underpaid, there are a lot of „working poor” (Brown–Schafft 2019: 215). According to data from July 2016 almost 55% of the district’s 962 registered job-seekers only had an elementary school education (BaPa 2017: 68). Since 2011 former public works systems have been replaced by the „single public works system” which brought significant changes in employment relations and payment. Since then, public works does not fall under the Law of Employment and is controlled by a different set of laws. Public works has always been low paid, but the new regulations meant lower than minimal wages (Bördös 2015: 69; KFP é.n.a; KFP é.n.b). As an interviewee told me, the workers in the programme suffered tangible payment losses: *...I was working for the local council about 3 years ago and I made about 60*

*thousand Forints, net. And now I'm making 49.*" (interview, public worker, Markóc, 2013). To put these numbers into context, the poverty threshold in Hungary was 61.889 HUF per month in 2010, and 66.979 HUF/ month in 2013, according to KSH.<sup>2</sup>

Public works is linked to programmes that encourage farming and agricultural production; these are the so-called value-creating programmes, mainly within the framework of the agricultural "Startmunka" pilot programme. Public workers employed in the agricultural programme benefit from the longer-term, often year-round employment. Employers also prefer this scheme, if possible. However, in the opinion of all participants in the field, mayors, employees, public workers and inactive people, public works in agriculture is less productive when one works for daily wages or for themselves, because the payment is so low (Pulszter 2014). Other studies, which studied the effectiveness of the agricultural "Startmunka" programme, had the same results (see Váradi 2016). As a result, the general opinion about public works – and not only about public works in agriculture – is rather negative, namely that public workers do nothing. To make matters worse, in almost all settlements, some public workers have alcohol problems or commit petty theft, thus putting the whole group or all public workers in a bad light. When talking to public workers, they often lamented that other segments of society look down on them and the work they do and make them feel inferior.

In the region, public works programmes often provide the most jobs in a settlement. These programmes are usually coordinated by the local councils, and public works is linked to social help. It was obvious during my fieldwork that the smaller the settlement was, the more remarkable the role public works had. In Markóc, a village of 64 residents, 9 households of the 21 were affected by public works. Almost one-third of active-age people worked in this subsidized employment form in 2013-14. For many of them, it was the only relevant source of income for years (Pulszter 2014). Drávafok, Bogdása and Markóc successfully applied for the public works programmes and got a tractor, and a potato planting machine and with the money won, built wells on their rented farmlands. In settlements where public workers were involved in agricultural production, public works counts as social employment in many respects. On one hand, public works programmes are financed by the state, while on the other hand crops grown are given to poor local families and local social catering services. In some places, as in Markóc, Marócsa, Bogdása, and others, the vegetables grown by the public workers are often given to the residents.

In the case of Markóc, it was an obvious goal to make a strong link between public works and encouraging local farming activity. Developing fruit growing was also an important element of local development plans, which emphasised ecological points and prioritized farming and subsistence. In my experience, most of the locals did not prefer either environmentally friendly technologies or less dependency on big systems, still, they agreed with the development plans, mostly because they thought it would help the village survive. Projects and subsidies helping a sustainable economy provided some solutions to everyday struggles. Public works helped too. Vegetables grown within the framework of the agricultural programme were given to the kitchen of the Drávafok school, where they were either used or distributed among the residents. A briquette-making factory was started, and some horses were kept with the help of the public works programme from the late 2010's. Public workers maintained the public areas of the village, they worked in the garden and the greenhouse of the council where

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<sup>2</sup> KSH é.n. The data is valid for one-person households. For households with two adults and two children, the poverty line was 129.965 HUF/month in 2010 and 140.648 HUF/month in 2013.

they grew plants for all local households. Public workers also sowed and looked after the crops on the fields maintained by the council.

The next village, Bogdása, participated in the agricultural “Startmunka” pilot programme from the beginning. The local council got an appraisal from the Ministry for horsekeeping, which was part of the public works programme. During the time of the research, the village had two horses they used to farm the lands (sowing, harvesting hay collecting). Public workers carted firewood to the local people, if necessary, but they also cut the firewood for themselves: *„Last year it happened so that we have a ditch and a dirt road along which we have softwood trees. I made them cut the wood, everybody could take home 3 cubic meters. We could take it home with the help of the horses. It was free. Nobody had to pay anything.”* (interview, mayor, Bogdása 2018). The purchase of the horses was financed by the programme and public workers looked after the animals. In addition, the public works programme included manufacturing paving stones and growing mushrooms and other vegetables (interview, mayor, Bogdása 2018).

The biggest settlement of the region is Sellye which functions as a regional centre and is the only place where the local council is not the only or biggest employer. Still, the local council plays a major role in employment. During the time of the research, the mayor’s office employed 40 people, another 20 people were employed by the district government office and a further 5 people worked for the communal company owned by the local council. The town had about 140 positions for public workers in 2017–2018. This number is the highest in Ormánság, and as the mayor said *„It’s good to have the possibility.”* (interview, mayor, Sellye, 2018). Still, the programme is not as important in smaller towns as in smaller villages, where the local councils are both the biggest employers and the closest social help providers. The biggest employers of Ormánság operate in Sellye; a construction company, two chemical plants and a light-industrial firm, which employ several hundreds of people altogether.

To have a decent job is one of the most important values in the local system of norms constructing the boundaries between social groups. However, public workers and other marginalised people have no access to this type of employment due to their handicaps. I met a public worker who could not find other employment forms for 20 years (Pulszter 2014). Seven of the public workers I met in Markóc were constantly employed by the village. Two people temporarily left the programme but after a time returned to it. Two people moved out of the villages. One person got ill and died in the autumn of 2018. Since then, all the people who joined the programme came from families whose members had already worked as public workers. *„Being trapped”* is also typical in other settlements, for example in Sellye, the district centre. *„These people always get back, so the numbers are constant [...] They are too old to go elsewhere... Those who could take off were only temporarily employed in the programme, and the ones who got stuck are too slow to perform elsewhere, or they don’t want to.”* (interview, manager of a municipality-owned company, Sellye, 2017).

People, who live in villages with poor public transport services tend to „get trapped” more often, as other studies have also shown (Koltai 2018: 7). Instead of finding jobs in the open job market, they are most likely to find their next employment within the framework of a newly launched public works programme (Bacsik 2012:103). Only about 10% of former public workers can enter the open job market (Bakó et al. 2014: 57-58), so public works programmes fail as transit employment. Despite the high number of trapped participants, I met people who, motivated by better salaries, were constantly trying to find a permanent

mainstream job and succeeded, at least temporarily. In practice, public works foremen are usually flexible when scheduling working hours, and support, or at least don't hinder their subordinates to do side jobs to complement their income. These side jobs are usually odd jobs, seasonal work in the forests or the fields usually within the framework of simplified employment. Some people also rely on income from informal or semi-informal sources (Váradi 2010: 90-91).

People consider public works as a necessary choice... *"There is nothing to choose from..."* (interview, public works foreman, Markóc, 2014). They make the most rational decisions. *"If there are no jobs locally, you still have something..."* (public workers, Sellye, 2018). The big plants that employed a lot of people were closed after 1990, and no new jobs have been created to provide long-term employment for the less educated. It is often mentioned, and not only by public workers, that the loss of previous jobs led to the current situation: *"Look, what would they do without public works? Where would they work? [...] There used to be buses taking the construction workers every morning, especially the unskilled ones."* (interview, retired woman, Markóc, 2014). The Elcoteq factory in Pécs used to employ hundreds from Ormánság. After it was closed down in 2011, many had to find something else, and many left the region. According to the mayor of Sellye closing down Elcoteq had a negative effect not only on employment but on demographics as well. *"Seven hundred people commuted to Elcoteq in Pécs from the Sellye district. Those seven hundred are [...] probably abroad, or in Székesfehérvár, Győr or Kecskemét..."* (interview, mayor of Sellye, 2018). After the factory closed, a lot of the former workers moved to the cities of North-West Hungary or abroad, mainly to Austria or Germany. Those who were less mobile tried to find employment in the nearby factories.

People from Markóc also commuted to work in Pécs. Mainly the ones without young children. Commuting to Pécs to do shift work is not easy for people with young families. My interviewees also mentioned that employers favour workers who live locally or in the nearest villages. They don't choose people from the faraway Ormánság with a poor public transportation system. It's not easy to get to Pécs even from the East part of Ormánság, for example from Szaporca. *"Now, even if I get admitted to a place in Pécs, I can't commute because there's no public transport in time. How could I get there by 6, when my shift starts? How can I get home? Should we rent a room when we own a house? Even if we do, we can't find a job for sure. So, this subregion down here is kaputt. There's nothing but public works"* (interview, female public worker, Szaporca, 2012). Several of my interviewees mentioned their difficulties with poor transportation, and how this situation hinders them in finding a job and commuting. *"Where do you live? Can you commute? [...] These are the first questions they ask."* (interview, male public worker, Szaporca, 2012). Even those people are rejected who live closer because of the lack of commuting possibilities. *"Before I was accepted to do public works here, I was everywhere in Harkány. Every hotel, café, you name it, everywhere. Same in Siklós. I can't commute anywhere else. Had I been accepted in Pécs, I couldn't go there. But I'm never accepted. They ask where I live and that's it. [...] Because of commuting. Even if I don't ask for travel expenses, they choose someone else from the Harkány-Siklós region."* (interview, female public worker, Szaporca, 2012). Bad public transport is a real issue, but unfortunately, Ormánság has a bad reputation in public opinion. Most job seekers of the region have been public workers for some time in their lives and the many negative stereotypes attached to public workers hinder them from finding employment: they are Gypsies, they don't work, they steal – just to mention a few.



Despite all the difficulties mentioned in the study, public work programmes have a lot of clearly visible advantages. Several villages in the district have gardening, animal husbandry or agricultural programmes that provide for local catering establishments as well as the needy or all the residents. For public workers, the most beneficial element is that participating in the programme enables them for social security and the years spent as a public worker are added to their work years when they retire.

Since 2016, the government has reduced the number of places in the programme; as a result, the number of subsidized public works jobs decreased from 24.575 to 9.735 in Baranya County between 2016 and 2021. During the same period on average 57.27% of the Baranya County public workers got back into public employment on the 180th day of leaving. 14.83% of former public workers could find a job in the primary job market (KSH monitoring data of people leaving public works 2014–2016). The data mean that even when the number of public works places is shrinking, most former public workers returned to the programme. The transit effect was not significant. More than half of the public workers got stuck in the system. The year 2016 was the peak for public works, with 2169 people, the 23 % of active-age people in the district working as public workers. By 2021, compared to 2013, the number of public workers decreased from 1576 to 844, to almost half, in the Sellye district (KFA é.n).

## Enterprises in the Sellye district

According to statistical data, the number of enterprises in the Sellye district is the lowest among the districts of Baranya County. In 2010 there were 1821 registered enterprises in the region, only a fragment of which was effectively working: 417 in 2011 (KSH Number of working enterprises 2011) and 418 in 2016 (Ba Pa 2017: 70). Usually there are only one or two enterprises in the small villages of the district, but in the more deprived settlements even the shop or the pub is closed. Agriculture was the determining factor in the economy of the district in the mid-2010s, with 70% of the enterprises being mostly family-owned farms (SITS 2015). In the 1990s self-employed farming was also significant, but this form disappeared by the mid-2000s. In 2012 more than half of the businesses in Sellye worked in agriculture, forestry or fishing. These businesses were usually under-financed, and only a few were well-capitalised (SITS 2015:75). All in all, 99% of the operating Sellye businesses were small, family-run businesses that had no or few employees (SITS 2015:73). As for the dominance of agriculture, it shows the lack of industry in the region, rather than the profitability of farming. Several farmers produced in small quantities, mainly for family use, so agriculture was not a profitable sector for many (Ragadics 2015: 55; Reményi 2009: 147-147, 154). Due to the advances in technology, there are few jobs available in agriculture. That means that while most Ormánság people worked in this field for decades in the past, these days agricultural businesses can't improve the employment situation in the region, even though the businesses are growing (SITS 2015). Farmers and their strategic decisions are significantly influenced by support policies. Area payments, which is independent of production, makes farming safe and profitable. On the other hand, the regulations that come with the payment have a distorting effect on competition and the market. Also, they slow down efficiency (see Lovas-Kiss 2004). This happens in Ormánság, too. While the payments fund the basis of operation and development, the regulations hinder growth and competitiveness. „... *The EU system is based on support, that's why the production costs are so high. [...] If I use the grazing fields extensively, as I should according to the regulations, I*

*can keep only one cow and its calf per hectare. This means I can have 40, a maximum of 50 cows on this field. If I was allowed to use the field intensively, I could keep 150 cows on 40 hectares of grazing fields.*" (interview, agricultural entrepreneur, Sellye, 2018). Smaller farms face the problem that due to the area payments, it is very difficult to buy land, so farmers must rent the land.<sup>3</sup> A Sellye district farmer who has only a few hectares told me that the concentration of the land makes it difficult to live on small farming locally, while the outside owners and big farms enjoy the benefits of the support system. *„...you can't buy land here. [...] If there weren't 50-100 thousand Forints support on a hectare everybody would leave. Because land has no value. [...] It's unreasonable what some people do. They keep themselves up by support. [...] Here you walk around the place and 1-2-3 people own everything. Even locally. (Name of the village) there are 3-4-5 people even here who own 300 hectares. I even know of somebody having 1000 hectares. [...] There are farmers with 100 hectares who really cultivate their land, but without the state funding, they would go bankrupt. And there are those, who only want to make gain..."* (interview, farmer, Sellye district, 2018).

Beyond crop growing and animal husbandry, forestry is the main branch of agriculture in the region. Though Ormánság is a densely forested area and forestry is important, in the last decades there has been a decrease in employment possibilities due to mechanisation.

Jobs in the fields and the forests are seasonal and depend on the weather. *„If we have a rainy period, and one dry day between two rainy ones, then you must go S.O.S. and do a 24-hour shift, as the machines go 24 hours, too. Sometimes even the owners work nonstop and make as much in a week as they would in two months because they can't work when it is raining. Now cold weather is coming from next week. Everybody works 24 hours and transports the wood because they can. Who knows what will be next weekend? That's what we have. Unfortunately."* (interview, forestry worker, Sellye, 2018). Some businesses pay the workers for the standing time, but others employ a minimal number of workers for the long term, and take on extra staff only when necessary.

There aren't too many industrial businesses in the Sellye district, still the big ones employ the most people. According to the data of Baranya Paktum, which coordinates employment development in the area, there are two chemical plants, a construction company, a sewing company and a food processing company in the district that employ hundreds of workers (BaPa 2017). Successful businesses in the industry sector are also embedded in the project economy, they get support from tenders for their operation or development. Some factories around Ormánság also employ some people, but not very many, because of the transportation problems.

Businesses, regardless of the sector or size, often complain that they cannot find competent local people for a position. *„It's difficult to find somebody, and this isn't only my experience. I have a friend who deals with animals, free-range cattle, and agriculture. He has 100 or 150 hectares. He can't find a man to feed the cattle. This happens all the time. Only a few people grow watermelons. Fewer and fewer every year. A person in Vajszló stopped growing strawberries because there were no workers. They brought in some people to pick strawberries from Mohács. Unemployment is so high here, public workers don't want to work or what, I don't know"* (interview, catering entrepreneur, 2018). Demand and supply in the local job market don't meet. That people (seemingly or in reality) *„don't want to work"* is down to several factors. In addition to being unskilled or undermotivated by low wages, having

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<sup>3</sup> A hectare of arable land cost 1.003.400 Fts in the Sellye district in 2016, the average price in Hungary was 1.200.792 Fts. Renting fees of a hectare on average were 49.400 Fts. (KSH 2016)

personal grievances or conflicts, inability to communicate properly or having difficulties in commuting may also add to the picture. Of all these factors, poor payment is the most important, since people do travel for better-paid jobs even when it is difficult, or they leave the region completely to make a better living.

People mention the shortage of skilled workers in the interviews, as something typical in the region. *„There were only two people here who legally worked in skilled jobs [...] the carpenter, but now he is retired, and the other one, who was a gas mechanic... he committed suicide last year. All the others are in bad health. There's no electrician, no bricklayer, nothing in the village. There used to be a hairdresser, too”* (interview, pastor, Drávafok 2017). The reason for this is that the skilled workers got old or died, and the younger generations moved away. *„How to put that, 70% of the younger people who are qualified, and work well left the country, to Austria, Germany, and the UK. Also, a young relative of mine works in England, he's a young guy”* (interview, a former mine worker originally qualified as a locksmith, Sellye 2018). Most skilled workers in the region find employment with the companies rather than starting their own businesses, because of the risks.

There are only a few local entrepreneurs in Ormánság. The successful businesses – like all other successful companies – adapted themselves well to the EU market circumstances and used the opportunities to win tenders and develop their firms and plants. These companies, especially the ones which employ significant numbers of workers can also take part in employment development programmes funded by the European Social Fund. These programmes can provide major support and financing (up to 70-100% wage subsidies or relief from contributions), thus motivating the companies to employ deprived or inactive people or public workers.

The second pillar of the European Common Agricultural Policy is rural development. One of its six priorities is helping economic development to minimise poverty and exclusion (Jámbor 2014a: 56-64). In theory, the Hungarian programmes go this way, but in practice, the deprived workers cannot improve their situation. According to a mayor in the district, it is common practice that underprivileged people are employed mostly for subsidized time and subsidized minimal wages. So, they become job seekers from time to time and can get another chance as public workers or subsidized employees in the next round of development programmes (interview, 2018).

Retail institutions operating in the small villages, shops, tobacco shops, and pubs, seem to be in monopoly, but their position is not good, because the cheaper shops of the bigger towns drain their customers and because the local population decreases. Also, there are several mobile shops, from which you can buy baked goods, meat, vegetables, fruit, mineral water soft drinks, alcoholic beverages, flour, sugar, tea, coffee, chocolate, ice-cream, jam, even stationery and gas cylinders. The mobile shops weaken the demand at the local shops. During my field work the people of Markóc also liked doing their shopping in the mobile shops. However, only those, who didn't need credit. A big part of the population has only a little money to buy things. Some shops try to expand the demand by offering goods on delayed payment. Not all shopkeepers and not to everybody, but delayed payment is an existing thing that influences the day-to-day living of the people. Delayed payment creates a special interrelationship between the shops offering it and the poorest people: their low-income runs out to pay the utility bills and delayed payment of the previous month so the people need to use credit again. The entrepreneurs, who operate the shops and pubs are often representatives of the local self-

government, which creates a different relationship from the simple buyer–seller (and debtor–creditor) one: they are also employees and employers.

Entrepreneurs in the region vary, but they have something in common. They can adapt themselves to the changing environment, try themselves in many fields and take risks, even though they must overcome the obstacles and work really hard. Several of the small businesses have side incomes, for example from farming. The entrepreneurs are quite high on the local social ladder. The ones I met have high status and have (smaller or greater) social capital and economic potential. They have high positions in the local hierarchy because they can adapt themselves to the present economic–politic environment. They have updated information about their field, they can use their knowledge to take the opportunities and flexibly react to the changes in the economy.

## Closing remarks

It is only possible to understand the Hungarian economic system and the situation of Ormánság and the Selye district in it if we take both the local society and the greater picture into consideration. Local conditions are directly influenced by the European Union support framework and the competition for the tenders. Deprived people are usually reference points in calls for funds. Several segments of the local society feel that they cannot claim their interests and local initiatives as they should. In my opinion, such initiatives are hindered not only by outside factors but by the clash of interests in the local communities and by the mentioned socioeconomic environment. Local communities play a crucial role in the success of development (Szilvácsku – Szabó 2012) and community planning holds economic, social, and political advantages for all the participants, for both the „developer” and the „developed” (Bodorkós 2014: 75). The changes of the ownership structure, the system of tenders and the unequal access to information made both social and economic relations more defined, and, as job possibilities decreased in agriculture, contributed to the negative course of demography. To sum up the post-1990 migration tendencies in Ormánság: typically, those people leave/left the area who on the one hand were dissatisfied with the local possibilities and, on the other hand, had the competence, information, and finance necessary for migration. So, the less capable remained. Although, because of their better chances, more highly qualified people leave Ormánság, all social segments are affected by emigration for a better and easier life. Locally the most significant form of employment is public works. The government has been bringing the number of participants down for years. The question is whether the people leaving public works can find employment at the primary job market in an area, where the lack of jobs has been critical for a long time, or the downsizing would make the social differences bigger and play a significant role in the increasing emigration from Ormánság. Businesses present in the area are very different in size, profitability, or profile, but entrepreneurs can deploy profitable economic strategies despite or due to the difficult situation in Ormánság.

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