



Journal of Business and Social Science Review  
Issue: Vol. 2; No.2; February 2021 pp.30-32  
ISSN 2690-0866(Print) 2690-0874 (Online)  
Website: www.jbssrnet.com  
E-mail: editor@jbssrnet.com  
Doi: 10.48150/jbssr.v2no2.2021.a5

## **Tiszabura—a Hungarian Roma village without a future?**

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### **Abstract**

This study describes the success of the settlements and their socio-social retention in its catch-up program in the current Hungarian countryside. What are the necessary steps to launch small settlements in socio-economically disadvantaged regions on the path to development.

Technical advances and changes in the geographical sciences have made it possible to use special data and methods which until recently were not used in Hungary. This has allowed us to get nearer to answering questions in social geography such as poverty research, talent geography, Romology and criminal geography. These methods allow us to better research the changes in society in Hungary.

The results of poverty research in Hungary could first be published and applied after the fall of Communism in 1990.

My current research is closely linked to research on social geography done at the Institute of Geography at Pécs University.

Dr. JózsefTóth, one of the most well-known representatives of Hungarian social geography has highlighted that societal phenomena and geographical areas are closely linked, and that ignoring this may lead to undesired and irreversible changes in local society.

Years ago already, unbiased and politically neutral scientific research on social geography has shown that unfavourable changes are underway in society, and the results of this can already be felt. The reason it is so important to analyse the current situation from many different directions (sociology, economic and criminal geography) is that we are faced with a societal phenomenon that spans borders. In our case, it is not only Tiszabura that is touched unfavourably and irreversibly by this process, but surrounding hamlets and villages, such as Tiszaroff, Kisköre, Tiszagyenda, Tizsanána, Tiszabó, Tizaszőlős and Tomajmonostora are also faced with the same problem. Certain areas in the Borsod region andBaranya and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties proven that this is not an isolated geographical and societal problem, rather that more commonly the face of entire parts of the country are changing irreversibly.

In 2020, Tiszabura is estimated to have around 2800 inhabitants, 90% of whom are Roma. Unemployment is at the same level. In 1970, merely 10% of the village's population was Roma. In the time since 1970 a complete exchange of population has happened. The younger generation fled, the older generation who stayed is aging and dying out. The number of people moving in from other areas is high. Tiszabura has undergone irreversible urban decay. There are no jobs in the village, there is no agricultural production and there is no longer a tourism industry. A large proportion of the population lives off social benefits or steals out of necessity to feed their families. The only people with regular income are pensioners or those employed by the local government. Theft out of necessity is commonplace. Social benefits are the only means of survival for the marginalized local population.

If we analyse the situation Tiszabura is currently in we can come to the conclusion that political and economical decisions between 1970 and 2010 have changed its properties, its population composition and its role in the labour market so much, that this has resulted in a seemingly irreversible and irresolvable situation.

This area has never been particularly developed compared to a town or a western Hungarian village, but despite its resources, Tiszabura always had the potential for development. A working collective, husbandry and fruit production of industrial proportions, cereal production and fishing all helped provide for the inhabitants of the village as well as of the surrounding region.

Those who could not find themselves a job in the village found jobs in more distant industrial areas or on large government projects. If the existing resources and potential of this underdeveloped region had been put to better use, and the region had been developed further, the village might have kept its attractiveness for the local population and the younger generation might not have left in search of better education and employment prospects.

It is not only the ethnic and social composition of the village that has changed, but also the age composition. The proportion of people aged 0-14 has multiplied, changing from an ethnic perspective the composition of pupils at the local nursery and school. Therefore it is not only a process of ghettoisation that has affected Tiszabura, Tiszaroff, Tiszagyenda and Kisköre villages; the structure of local society has also changed.

The cheaper cost of living in the area is encouraging an influx of poorer classes. The result is that the shanties of neighbouring villages join up creating a continuous ghettoised area, the population of which lives completely isolated from social mobility and quality education which would allow advancement.

From a social geographical point of view, a combination of social and regional disadvantages is making an exit from the given environment and situation impossible.<sup>1</sup>This is not only conserving the state that the given village or villages are in, but will also have an effect on larger settlements in the area with better resources, transport and infrastructure, therefore it can be foreseen that this tendency of ghettoisation will continue towards Tiszafüred and Kunhegyes.

In 2004 Joseph Tóth highlighted the following:

“If we use financial aid as a way of conserving the structures in these underdeveloped regions, we will conserve the problem itself as well. However, if we interfere in a competent manner, the given settlement will have a chance of emerging.”<sup>2</sup>

Iván Szelényi and JánosLadányi used the term “underclassisation” (*sic*) to describe the phenomenon where not only Roma, but also those losing their income and becoming marginalized have slipped down to the level of extreme poverty, creating a class of “nouveau-pauvre”. This phenomenon does not occur exclusively in Hungary. They have little or no chance of re-emerging from this condition. This tendency can be observed in Bulgaria and Romania, where the marginalization of Roma is even more severe than in Hungary.<sup>3</sup>

In Hungary the fine line between Roma and poor Hungarians is becoming less clear, because the poorer, non-Roma living in rural areas live in the same social conditions as Roma. This is why the concepts of poverty and the Roma ethnicity must be distinguished, because they do not cover the same category.

In my opinion, the process of urban decay in Tiszabura and the surrounding settlements is irreversible.

It can be remedied only with a profound and broad convergence programme, which includes the social safety net, education, job creation and assumes the regularity of income from regular employment. Public work schemes provide a temporary relief, but in the long run these do not provide the means for recovery.

The illustrated situation divides society into those who are progressing and those who are falling behind. Where do those get a place in a money-oriented society, who are marginalized and have had no opportunity for amassing savings, or those who from birth have been marginalized and later become highly disadvantaged? How can generations grow up without a basic education, without middle or higher education prospects? These both mean that their chances of social advancement are very slim.

The unemployed, those with little qualification, the illiterate, the inactive, those with many children, the sick and the Roma all belong to this category. In villages and in areas far from cities inactivity is higher, thus

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<sup>1</sup> Virág Tünde: Kirekesztve, A falusi gettók az ország peremén, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2010. 129.o.

<sup>2</sup> Tóth József: Tanulmányok a településföldrajz témaköréből, Pécs, 2004. Tanulmánykötet, 57.o.

<sup>3</sup>Ladányi János- Szelényi Iván: Cigányok és szegények Magyarországon, Romániában és Bulgáriában. Szociológiai Szemle, 2002/4. 72- 94.o.

the chance of falling behind is also higher.<sup>4</sup> Those belonging to one of these inactive groups are at the most danger of falling into irreversible poverty, and have been excluded from the labour market and have a very small chance of re-entering.

The level of advancement of a society is marked, among other things by the way it treats the downtrodden, children, and the marginalized. Why is the Roma question so taboo in Hungary? Can we assume that it will fix itself? That hundreds of thousands will reintegrate into society without an integration and convergence programme? These questions still need to be answered without delay. There is no time left.

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<sup>4</sup> Monostori Judit 2003. Statisztikai Szemle, 84. Évfolyam, 4. szám