

THE CHANGE OF LANDSCAPE USE –THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY LIVING IN A LANDSCAPE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

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In my childhood, I spent my holidays on my grandfather's mountain hay meadow, on the South mountain (Délhegy) of Gyergyó 10 kilometers away from the village. The image of the mowers in white shirts arising at dawn, their movements while they cut the grass on the steep hillside, the siestas, the collection of hay, haystack making, the stories and the dinners spent under the starlit sky have all pervaded me. It was a hard work but I do not remember people complaining that the work was not worth it, because hay was needed for life. The women brought out the lunch on foot every day and did not complain of the distance. It was their lives. We children were happy to be there and help. Today, on these meadows, forest has grown up, and the places that are appreciated are mostly those which can be mown by machine. Today there is nobody who would walk 10 kilometers to take lunch, and the children desire to go to the sea and remote places on holiday.

The landscape is formed out of the cooperation of nature and human activity. It exists in continuous alteration and change. Man forms nature into a cultural landscape, cultivates the plough-lands, the meadows, the pastures, the forests. There are only a few areas around us that are not pervaded by human activity. So the scenery unfolding before us always reflects the state of consciousness of local people and the community living in landscape; that is, its relation to the natural world and to the community. We can say that landscapes are such living and vivid organisms, whose consciousness is man, so landscapes have destinies. The landscape is an open book from which we can read the story of the place and its community. From the scenery and by following the changes in landscape use, we can read this story. However, we can not only look back to the past but we can also discover those tendencies which display the future.

The ideal image of the European cultural landscape - which is emphasized by both the Charter of Historic Monuments and the European Treaty of Landscape as something valuable, to be protected - is the basis of modern European culture. The European „ancient landscape” was altered by the Christian impulse: by cutting down the forests, regulating waters, bigger and bigger areas became plough-lands, meadows, pastures, vineyards and orchards. In the middle of the village communities stood the church, surrounded by the houses, around which vegetable gardens, plough-lands, meadows, pastures and then forests formed „rings”. This model was of course adapted according to the morphology of each particular landscape but essentially in this order. Man is a part of the landscape and the community, and is not able to exist in himself/herself alone. This picture of the landscape reflects the harmony between man and nature. That is why, as tourists, we seek out and admire these places. We feel them to be harmonious, and we sense the invisible coherence in the scenery which connects people to each other in the local community, and connects the landscape to landscape-cultivating man. And why is the cultural landscape something that we should protect more and more strongly? Because this ideal landscape and its structure has been increasingly altering and disappearing. Since our lifestyle, economic culture, and relationship to Earth and to the natural world has changed, traditional communities have broken up, and the process of individualism is becoming predominant.

Accordingly, those regions in Europe which still preserve this landscape culture demand special attention. Székelyföld/Transylvania is one of the last unified regions containing a „complete landscape” in Europe, and we know that it is one of the most endangered areas as well. Modernization does not occur as a slow transformation process like in Western Europe but it almost shocks the local society. Now there is a vacuum. Traditional lifestyle and landscape use are breaking up, there is no concept of the desired future, no local strategy, and the influences from outside originate from a global economic action which has nothing to do with the local interests and values.

All these are reflected in the landscape of Székelyföld/Transylvania. Here we can see trends which show the change of the relationship between the community, the land-cultivating man and the landscape. We may allude to the three most conspicuous, naturally interconnected landscape elements: the radical reduction of forests by clear-cutting, the process of afforestation of abandoned mountain hay-fields, and problems of water management caused by the radical change of the water systems of certain catchments.

The processes of „erosion” in the landscape coheres with people’s state of consciousness and the state of the community. If we are looking for answers to all these questions, we have to make ourselves aware of and to affirm the value of the landscape heritage and of the community. In my presentation, I will show through some examples of regional development that the process of destruction is very fast, and the work of rebuilding is a long and slow process, whose results in this success-orientated environment are hardly perceptible. But success in rebuilding the landscape and culture will be as important for people’s souls and their personal stories of destiny, as it is for the history of the landscape.