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**“We Came to a Village...”**  
*Value Systems in a Changing World*

**Abstract**

Although we experience an increasing level of cultural foreign experience in our time intensified by the pressure of migration and the development of information technologies, the conventional view of value systems still prevails in modern nations. Change in culture is a never-ending process, though. The persuasive power of stability and uniformity seems to decline in postmodernity transforming the role of nation states, as well. Peripheries and “partial truth” come into view. Value systems are also affected by these changes. Value systems are no longer cast from a single mold, but rather derive from a dynamically changing framework that is shaped by the dialogistic connection of the elements of the sociocultural realm, the central role of the subject’s interpretation and the positioned meaning of values. This paper attempts to describe the changes brought about by postmodernity through the everyday life of four families settled down in Hosszúhetény. After having embraced traditional values at a certain point in their life as a result of a conscious decision, families are compelled to reevaluate their former worldview. This process results in the revision of their identity, as well. In the end, they are trying to establish themselves through various representational practices in a village that has already been modernized. While trying to analyze the components of their value system, I define so-called *correlations* in the hope of realizing a more relevant understanding of the postmodern age.

**Keywords:** value systems, identity, correlations, postmodernity, metanarratives



We imagine values as solid frameworks that keep our everyday life within limits. They guide us on the pursuit of our goals and behaviors we deem right. The word “value system” gives special emphasis to this view. Change in culture is a never-ending process, though. The persuasive power of stability and uniformity seems to decline in postmodernity. Peripheries and „partial truth” come into view. “Postmodernity rehabilitates the marginal, integrates the exotic, and channels many values into the social mainstream which has no relevance for the historical and cultural traditions of the given area”<sup>1</sup>. As a result, perception of values and value systems is also modified. They are no longer cast from a single mold, but regarded as a dynamically changing framework shaped by the diversity of the sociocultural milieu.

In my paper I will examine the integrating power of values through the everyday life of four families settled down in *Hosszúbetény* whose main purpose is to realize a self-sufficient lifestyle based on traditional values. While trying to analyze the component parts of their value system, I define so-called *correlations* in the hope of providing a deeper understanding of the post-modern age. Knowledge drawn from the outer world as a result of interpretation is a universal human trait. However, this experience shows a high degree of diversity due to the socio-cultural embeddedness of the individual. What constant is the relationship between the external environment and the human cognition. This systemic relationship is manifested as a collection of *correlations*. Correlations are therefore the hermeneutic relationship between the individual and the external variables of the sociocultural milieu. Values, on the other hand, are a combination of correlations, their process of pattern-formation during which the resulting constellations become saturated with normative content.

In my view, changes in value systems follow a four-step process and evolve in close relationship with identity politics. At some point in their lives, people are exposed to new values. This turn can be a result of a conscious decision, a commitment to new ideas, or even a sudden change in living conditions. After having identified with new values, the individual is encouraged to reevaluate his or her former worldview, which leads to the transformation of their value system, as well. Changes in value systems do not leave personal identity untouched either, leading to its revision and sometimes a formation of a completely new identity. In the end, the individual seeks to establish his or her new identity through various representational practices.

I regard traditional values as attributes of peasant societies before the advent of modernity. The most important feature of traditional societies is

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<sup>1</sup> Gyökér 2020: 122.

the central role of community based on mutual support and shared activities. In this context, villages are viewed as locality-based units bound to a particular geographic location.<sup>2</sup> Since proximity and reciprocity play an important role in the life of traditional communities, self-expression and personal initiatives are kept between boundaries, and only a limited form of individualism can be realized.<sup>3</sup>

As a first step, I try to identify the main changes brought about by post-modernity regarding knowledge production along with the tension between subjectivity and objectivity, the role of metanarratives and texts in power distribution and the crisis of representation adding a fourth aspect which I find especially decisive: the birth of small, local communities. As a next step, I discuss some value theories that influenced me the most. In the end, in order to support my ideas, I present some empirical data drawn from my fieldwork that was conducted in Hosszúhetény.

## **Introduction**

### *Postmodernity and its basic tenets*

One of the most important recognitions of postmodernity is that the world is not organized around a general framework of explanatory principles, but is home to a diversity of interpretations – often mutually exclusive interpretations, in which beliefs, conjectures and expectations play at least as important a role as the attributes observed during empirical investigation of a given phenomenon. In postmodernity, the hegemony and the unifying power of metanarratives are broken. Diversity, heterogeneity are the key words of the era, which is characterized by the peaceful coexistence of pop art and photo-realism; John Cage’s music philosophy and punk music; TV series and B-category films. As Jameson notes: “the postmodernisms have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole ‘degraded’ landscape of schlock and kitsch”, and those postmodernisms admire a world of imagination filled with science fiction, fantasy novel and horror.<sup>4</sup>

Postmodernity is a kind of counterculture that draws its power from the crisis and criticism of modernity. Though the mindset of modernity is pervaded by an unbroken optimism and faith in progress, since World War II

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<sup>2</sup> Nádasi 1987: 68.

<sup>3</sup> Erdei 1934: 93.

<sup>4</sup> Jameson 1991: 1.

the shadow side of the era has come ever more starkly to the surface. Due to growing internal contradictions, modernity's notion of progress is slowly turning against itself, giving rise to postmodernity. The crisis is based on the misconception that the balanced operation of the system should be pursued along general principles, which ignore the specific features of the sub-processes. Since minor processes show a markedly higher degree of diversity, conflict between the center and the peripheries arises. All these coercive forces transform the nature of cognitive processes as well, shifting its focus from general explanations into a diversity of individual interpretations.

*Discourse and metanarratives*

Although transition from modernity to postmodernity is very diverse, the essence of the change is confined to a single characteristic as Jean-François Lyotard points out: postmodernity is based on the recognition that "scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse"<sup>5</sup>. Postmodernity questions the status of discourse and calls for re-reading. The central role of texts in power formation is recognized. Foucault approaches the oppressive forms of power through the concept of discourse, discerning that discourse is a limited collection of assertions, which gain leadership in a given historical period and in a particular linguistic area, suppressing alternative strategies of interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Postmodern authors emphasize the constructed nature of scientific descriptions, drawing attention to the historical and institutional determinants of text production. Prevailing texts are not incidental, scattered products of a historical period, but are testimonies of power formation, which formulate statements about reality. Repressive forms of power are clearly illustrated by the phenomenon of orientalism. According to Said, orientalism is not only a means of knowledge production, but also a means of oppression applied by the West against the Middle Eastern societies concerned. The pictures and allegations propagated in this way are nothing but mere representations of a reality deprived of its locality, and committed predominantly towards the West, not the East.<sup>7</sup>

Texts emerging as a result of scientific research come under scrutiny, too. According to Clifford, anthropological writing has always been a determining factor during research. That it has only recently become the focus of atten-

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<sup>5</sup> Lyotard 1984: 3.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault 1972: 117.

<sup>7</sup> Said 1994.

tion "reflects the persistence of an ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience"<sup>8</sup>. This kind of perspective, in many cases, attributed only a formal character to research reports, reducing their role to the status of well-kept "field notes". In postmodernity, meaning is thus *positioned*. The same life situation observed from different epistemological perspectives often lead to different interpretations. And at the same time, even staying within the framework of a particular sociocultural perspective, we may come to different conclusions. Therefore, interpretation plays the primary role in the process of knowledge production.

*Subjectivity vs. objectivity*

Subjective experience overrides faith in the existence of objective reality. While metaphysical realism emphasizes the existence of reality independent of human experience, postmodernity is distrustful of the postulates of objectivity and the applicability of scientific methodology. The driving power of the postmodern turn is a deep skepticism about whether the researcher is able to integrate the results of his or her observation into an explanation of the phenomena examined, and thus be able to produce credible socioscientific knowledge. According to Reed, this is questionable. Ethnographic fieldwork involves an epistemic paradox. Since the researcher is a social being who brings his or her own knowledge and preliminary experiences – as a kind of inheritance – into the sociocultural situation, the evaluation process becomes subordinated to the researcher's subjectivity, which raises doubts about the credibility of the account.<sup>9</sup>

Rosaldo emphasizes the power of emotions while analyzing the cultural phenomenon of "rage, born of grief"<sup>10</sup>. After realizing the organic unity of grief, rage, and behind *Ilongot* headhunting, Rosaldo is forced to reconsider the classic principles of anthropological research. In order to understand the specific cultural phenomenon, he introduces the concept of *positioned subject*. In analyzing the phenomenon of mourning, he criticizes earlier anthropological methods that only dealt with the description of the given rite rather than analyzing the feeling of mourning. He believes that the functional description of rites as a set of actions deprives the event from its historical depth and the momentary tensions of human drama. Ethnographers who

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<sup>8</sup> Clifford 1986: 2.

<sup>9</sup> Reed 2010: 22–23.

<sup>10</sup> Rosaldo 1993: 1.

exclude strong emotions therefore distort their accounts and “remove potentially key variables from their explanations”<sup>11</sup>.

### *Crisis of representation*

Awareness of the discursive character has many implications; in particular, a sense of theoretical uncertainty, a doubt about the origin of knowledge. Rorty traces back the history of crisis to philosophy’s central concern of becoming the foundation of knowledge. According to the overall attitude consolidated by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, knowledge is nothing other than the authentic representation of reality existing independently from the cognitive processes of the mind. Understanding the nature of knowledge is, therefore, the clarification of mental processes through which consciousness creates its representations of external reality. A contradiction inherent in the initial situation is apparent to Rorty: philosophy’s quest to become a “tribunal of pure reason” is problematic since it was established during a specific historical period (the 17<sup>th</sup> century), and within a geographically specific region (Europe)<sup>12</sup>. Postmodernity questions belief in the clarity of representation which led to the naive idea that the world is fully perceptible and perfectly describable. It holds the view that even the simplest cultural encounter is situational in nature and due to the subjective aspects of the cognitive process, ethnographic truth remains only partial.<sup>13</sup>

It is recognized, that reality transmitted by representation, is not a credible source of cognition, but rather a network of meanings created in an arbitrary fashion. In the postmodern era, the “natural bond between the signifier and the signified” is loosening.<sup>14</sup> New contents penetrate the scope of interpretation. As a result, the image of the signified becomes enriched, transforming conventional meanings as well. *Epoch blending*, the simultaneous presence of incompatible historic periods of time only amplifies the crisis. In the maze of constant allusions and arbitrary references often lacking normative basis, meaning becomes uncertain.

For Tyler, the crisis of science is in fact the crisis of representation, resulting from the disabilities of language as a tool for describing the world. While glorifying its triumph over knowledge, science has tried to place discourse under its control. However, since the verification process science

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<sup>11</sup> Rosaldo 1993: 12.

<sup>12</sup> Rorty 1979: 4.

<sup>13</sup> Clifford 1986: 7.

<sup>14</sup> Saussure 1959: 68.

has established is within its own discourse, its ambitions have led to controversy, which makes it impossible for science to justify its claims.

The crisis of representation probably reaches its ultimate form in Baudrillard's *simulacra* and *simulation* theory. According to Baudrillard, reality by now became completely transformed. The phenomena were finally torn away from their archetypes and in the interpretation simulation took over. Simulation is "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal". Reality is no longer based on the process of representation, but rather on generated patterns, command models. "The age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials – worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs". As a result, separating the simulation from actual ideals becomes impossible.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Local communities*

To counterbalance the negative forces of globalization, the power of the local scene is recognized. One of the most important developments of post-modernity is the growing demand for the recreation of local communities. Only a self-organized community can provide an adequate space for self-expression and personality development, counterbalancing the unifying effects of the market economy. Individuals in identity crisis or seeking refuge from social control turn again towards the community, looking for a way out. Within a community they find home, will be able to re-establish their identity, and paradoxically preserve their independence.

Though nostalgia for local communities seems to be a peculiarly postmodern phenomenon, its foundations can be traced back to the commitment to the countryside destroyed by modernity. According to Araghi, the collapse of rural communities can be divided into two periods. From 1945 to 1973, it is characterized by the emergence of the world market and the establishment of the institutional system of the new global political-economic order, while from 1973 to the present day it is marked by the collapse and the reorganization of the institutional system. During the first phase, development policies launched by the United Nations focused mainly on industrialization and internal growth as opposed to export-oriented agricultural production. The aim of the programs was to create family farms, thus preventing the spread of communism. However, in those countries where access to credit was limited, only a few family farms emerged and gained

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<sup>15</sup> Baudrillard 1988: 166–167.

leadership. Reforms thus led to the formation of a large number of unviable smallholdings that became vulnerable to market forces. The years after 1973, on the other hand, have been marked by a relative decline in US hegemony. The root cause of this process was the collapse of the Bretton Woods System. As a result, the state took on a transnational character, giving free path to the spread of international capital independent from national regulations through the operation of supranational institutions. This process continues even today.<sup>16</sup>

The postmodern debate surrounding development theory is a dilemma of choice between global market and human communities: the question is whether we support infinite growth of industrial production, or rather, we focus on communities so that they may find their spiritual-environmental unity, and develop a sustainable way of life once again. This latter objective seems to be more justifiable. Since the beneficiaries of globalization are only one-fifth of the world's population, globalization can be considered more as a project designated by political considerations, rather than a necessary process of credible representation of the individual's interests.<sup>17</sup>

## Values and value systems

### *A historical overview*

Considering value system theories in general, we can observe different approaches to the topic. Many authors emphasize the integrative aspect of values. In these theories values are regarded as guiding principles, deep-rooted assumptions or postulates, which ensure the unity and harmonious functioning of culture. This type of integrative character is accentuated by Hoebel who was among the first to carry out systematic research on the topic. Hoebel was actually investigating the nature of law among primitive tribes like Cheyenne, Kiowa or Comanche. After having taken into consideration the conception *imperative of selection*<sup>18</sup> laid down by Ruth Benedict he found that

“once a culture gets under way [...] there are always some criteria of choice that govern or influence selection. These criteria are the broadly generalized propo-

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<sup>16</sup> Araghi 1995: 355.

<sup>17</sup> McMichael 2004: XXXVIII–IX.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict 1961: 171.



sitions held by the members of a society as to the nature of things and as to what is qualitatively desirable and undesirable. We prefer to call these basic propositions 'postulates'. Philosophers and sociologists commonly call them 'values'.<sup>19</sup>

Hoebel's views on values were echoed by many anthropologists like Francis Hsu who studied the system of Chinese clans. Hsu emphasizes the integrative power of values. In his theory, values show the focal points of the culture's integration. They are a limited set of behaviors that have gained exclusive validity over other behaviors within a particular culture. Postulates are generally accepted by all members of society and considered to be the natural order of things. Hsu, however, points out the fact that fundamental values are not always consistent with each other. Consistency is the indicator of cultural integrity.<sup>20</sup>

For Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, the normative aspect of culture is determined by certain value orientations. In their view, value orientations are "complex but definitely patterned (rank-ordered) principles, resulting from the transactional interplay of three analytically distinguishable elements of the evaluative process", defined as cognitive, emotional and guiding aspects. Although principles change from culture to culture, variability only appears in the pattern of the elements (principles), which are themselves cultural universals. The authors in their theory identify five orientations, and three degrees within each orientation whose combination defines the general "profile" of a given culture. In the theory of value orientations, transitions completely disappear, though. Patterns representing cultures seem to create a particular type of human being (good or evil, being subject to nature, living in harmony with it or dominating its forces), whose scope of validity applies to all members of society. Culture is constantly changing, though, and our values are continually being re-evaluated. In the postmodern era we find polyphonic life paths containing values that are often incompatible with the past or the socio-cultural traditions of a given region. Someone can be an IT person, make a movie, and even cultivate an organic garden at the same time: his value system will be made up of preferences set by the horizon of his life cycle. Following the theory of Kluckhohn, a self-sufficient individual questioning the achievements of modernity, may appear in negative light, even if he lives in postmodernity.

Another group of authors concentrates on the transition between modernity and postmodernity and tries to understand the persistence of tra-

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<sup>19</sup> Hoebel 1954: 13.

<sup>20</sup> Hsu 1969: 61.

ditional values and the characteristics of the (post)modern personality. This conception was originally outlined by Roland Inglehart who tried to visualize cultures in a co-ordinate system by examining the relationship between *survival* versus *self-expression* and *traditional* versus *secular-rational* values. In Inglehart's interpretation difference between modernity and postmodernity is, however, an evolutionary one: the traditional value system appears as a lower level of social development, the world of social backwardness and exploitation.<sup>21</sup>

Inkeles and Smith examine the causes of the emergence of the modern man and reach the conclusion that "men become modern through the particular life experience they undergo", specifically through work experience gained in factories and industrial plants. The authors regard the individual as the basic unit of modernity. They are convinced that personality traits are not necessarily formed in childhood only: changes in values may take place in adulthood as well. The individual, after having come into contact with an institution, incorporates its characteristics into his or her own personality. Culture is therefore in continuous motion, its component parts are constantly being changed and updated.<sup>22</sup>

Bilsky and Schwartz examine the relationship between values and personality traits. In their theory, values are described as "cognitive representations of the important human goals or motivations" coordinating people's behavior. Motivation plays an important part in this model highlighting the difference between the various types of values. According to the authors, values and personality traits constitute an integrated structure and can hardly be distinguished from each other. Despite all the similarities, though, values are conceived as a distinctive type of disposition: "as guiding principles in the individual's life, values are conscious goals evaluated in terms of importance"<sup>23</sup>.

## Values and value systems in the postmodern age

"Reading" of culture is transformed in postmodernity. Interpretations carried by traditional cultural definitions are hardly capable of describing sociocultural changes in their entirety. For Geertz, culture is still a

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<sup>21</sup> Inglehart 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Inkeles-Smith 1974.

<sup>23</sup> Bilsky-Schwartz 1994.

"historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life"<sup>24</sup>.

In Geertz's definition cultural transmission plays a decisive role. Almost everything is overshadowed by the past, and it seems that innovation, temporality resulting from the diversity of communication, or randomness of sociocultural life situations, do not play any role in forging knowledge or shaping a personal life philosophy. However, in an age like postmodernity, the source of content (traditions) and the flow of knowledge (information) can hardly be controlled. Because of weakened family ties, symbols of the past may mean nothing to the next generation. *Pastiche*, the empty form of a referential system hiding behind the mask of historicity, is one of the creative techniques of the era, as Jameson recognizes.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, meaning production is situational, and interpretation thickens in the moment of the encounter.

Among the cultural terms defined within the sociological tradition, Inglehart's definition provides a subtle meaning of culture. According to him, culture is created in the cross-section of two extreme dimensions: the constraints of external reality, and the inner world of the subject. On the one hand, culture is the "system of attitudes, values and knowledge that is widely shared within a society and is transmitted from generation to generation". On the other hand, it is "the subjective aspect of a society's institutions: the beliefs, values, knowledge and skills that have been internalized by the people of a given society"<sup>26</sup>.

When examining value system theories, we find that definitions are basically essentialist. Interpretations assume a general meaning whose relevance extends to society as a whole. Reality has degrees in postmodernity, though. Knowledge production is more procedural and always adapted to the expectations and conditions of the given sociocultural situation. In my view, culture is a dialogic relationship between inherited forms and acquired knowledge, which gains meaning through the interpretative act of the individual based on his or her value system. The meaning created in this way is a "momentary" meaning, since the individual's value system also changes dynamically.

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<sup>24</sup> Geertz 1973: 89.

<sup>25</sup> Jameson 1991: 16–18.

<sup>26</sup> Inglehart 1997: 15.

Just as the definition of culture, concepts of values become also transformed in postmodernity. In my view, values are the conclusion of an organic *correlation* between the individual and an external variable of the socio-cultural milieu based on practical considerations, as it becomes manifested at a certain point of the individual's life path. "There is a never-ending dialogue between the individual and his or her own sociocultural environment. A correlation is in fact this *dialogicity* in its reflective entirety."<sup>27</sup> Individuals define their values on the basis of their own life, then compile their value system out of those that gain special significance in the given life situation. Values are therefore the individual condensation of preferences related to the sociocultural environment: either value variations emerging from the reconsideration of already existing values, or newly created ones reflecting the needs of the given sociocultural milieu.

An additional feature of values is their interpretative nature reflecting one's own personal relation to his or her sociocultural environment, and the resulting dynamism, that is, their positioned meaning: a lifelong unrelenting re-evaluation of the content of values one professes. Because individual life situations show a high degree of diversity depending whether a situation is related to the workplace, family, or other group membership, a different "reading" of the same value is possible in different sociocultural environments. This fractured system is also described by Arjun Appadurai who coined the term *disjuncture*<sup>28</sup> when addressing changes of our time can be observed in its full dimension in the life of families living in *Hosszúbetény*.

## Case study

*Hosszúbetény* is a small village situated in the southern part of Hungary. It was traditionally an agricultural settlement whose inhabitants were engaged in cultivation and viticulture. Nowadays, however, these activities have gone into decline. Villagers commonly commute to work outside the village, in larger towns like *Pécs* or *Komló*. Among traditional activities, viticulture and the associated winery have survived. In addition to the peasant population of the village, miners should also be mentioned who settled in *Hosszúbetény* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of coal mining. After the transition, a boom in rural tourism occurred. This boom perhaps helped attract attention to the village, leading many new residents to move there. This newly emerging core

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<sup>27</sup> Gyökér 2020: 128

<sup>28</sup> Appadurai 1996: 33.

is a narrow group of intellectuals whose value system is markedly different to that of the village-dwellers’ worldview. Their guiding principles are organized around ecological considerations based on self-sufficiency, organic farming and community life. Instead of emphasizing growth and self-expression, rather sustainability and self-restraint are recognized. Local solutions are emerging as an alternative to the globalist perspective of the service sector. In place of the usage of information technologies immersion in joint activities becomes appreciated putting an emphases on *face-to-face* communication.

Since families seek answers to practical questions, my research relied on semi-structured interviews recorded with community members in order to explore the interconnectedness of personal motivations and local needs. During the selection process of my interviewees, I have applied a non-probability sampling technique, the snowball method. Since families form a closed group, a community whose members are trying to establish a traditional way of life based on self-sufficiency, this approach has proved to be particularly useful because after having met my first contact point I have easily reached out to other families as well.

The fieldwork was completed during the summer of 2011. Interviews were carried out in the village, and its peripheries, with the exception of one family, which lived in the forest. During my research, members of four families were questioned out of those 7 to 8 families who also took an active part in community development and the organization of different projects beside cultivating their own farm. Interviews were documented with a video camera, the recordings of which later served as a basis for an independent documentary film.<sup>29</sup> Recordings were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed using the method of thematic analysis.<sup>30</sup> Accounts were then coded to identify recurring themes and topics of the personal interviews. Based on the themes obtained during my analysis, correlations were refined and further developed applying the inductive reasoning during which I was continuously striving to diminish the distance between the empirical material of the texts and my theoretical framework.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to questions about values and values systems, life histories were also analyzed. According to Thomas and Znaniecki, social facts exist only through the subjective filter of the individual. During various historical periods, and even in different geographical locations, different narratives come to the forefront emphasizing different aspects of social reality. There-

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<sup>29</sup> Gyökér 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Braun–Clarke 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Kovács 2007: 234–242.

fore, social life must be interpreted as the result of an uninterrupted interaction between the individual and his or her sociocultural milieu.<sup>32</sup>

Beside semi-structured interviews, participant observation also formed an essential part of my fieldwork. One of the indisputable advantages of the participatory method is that it dissolves the “scientific self” of the researcher, who thus appears more authentic to community members, as Katz points out. Even if the location of the research is influenced by the presence of the researcher, members of the community explore their daily lives not from the perspective of a social science but from their own.<sup>33</sup> During my research, I visited community events and recorded different kinds of interactions between community members. These were occasions like harvesting, garden works, mutual visits between families and food sharing events.

### **Everyday life as interplay between correlations and values**

Relationship between individuals and variables of external reality is determined by mutual reciprocity. Constants of sociocultural reality influence individuals in their decision making who – in return – make social reality an object of their interpretation. Correlations are the conclusion of this interpretive act. Values, on the other hand, are a conclusion of certain correlations and their development into unique patterns, a process that is determined by the hermeneutical aspirations of the individual. Since values always acquire their meaning through a specific life situation, the existence of a universally valid value system is a paradox. This would assume that different lifeworlds could be matched with each other disregarding their spatial and temporal embeddedness. Concentrating on the aspects of a self-sufficient lifestyle based on traditional values, I have distinguished the following correlations as decisive elements of the families’ value system:

#### *1. Correlation between humankind and nature*

Instead of evading nature and artificially manipulating it, the notion of guardianship becomes accentuated in postmodernity. According to this approach, living communities are considered to be equal to humankind. The idea is also emphasized by Thiele (1995), who argued for such a personal

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<sup>32</sup> Znaniecki–Thomas 1958: 1–8.

<sup>33</sup> Katz 2015.

relationship towards nature, free of desire for possession and domination. As is so strikingly illustrated by one of my interviewees:

*“I try to approach nature in a way that I only make some adjustments. I do not want to transform it at any price. All I want is to adjust it in a way that suits everyone: nature, animals, beetles, and plants as well.” (ZsG)*

Guardianship also builds community and strengthens social cohesion. As a result, a feeling of connectedness is being created among community members. They emphasize common goals and cooperation. In their effort to create such a milieu, families are trying to counterbalance the negative effects of modern life, which often lead to “the predominance of individual strategies of survival over the principles of intragroup and intergroup identity and cohesion”, as Uzzell *et al.* describe it.<sup>34</sup>

## *2. Attitude towards spirituality*

Although in the postmodern era everything is pervaded by a sense of instantaneousness and immediacy, there is still an unbroken desire in people for permanence and continuity. “The greater the ephemerality, the more pressing the need to discover or manufacture some kind of eternal truth that might lie therein”, as Harvey points out.<sup>35</sup> Increases in spiritual susceptibility in postmodernity underline this basic human need, which is also reflected in peoples’ value system living in *Hosszúbetény*. One of its central categories is religiousness that encompasses many forms of religious convictions including Christianity, Pantheism or Buddhism. A personal commitment towards transcendence is accentuated here without which a balanced relationship between man and landscape is inconceivable. As is revealed by my interviewees:

*“For me, land is not only the land, but everything, the earth itself. The whole earth in its unity. And I like to personify this as life itself, and to become one with Mother Earth, with her maternal quality.” (KNJ)*

*“I think you can surely discover God in nature. It is also possible in the city but we have probably been more open to this kind of experience within the framework of nature since our childhood than to the other.” (JL)*

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<sup>34</sup> Uzzell et al. 2002: 27.

<sup>35</sup> Harvey 1990: 292.

### 3. The role of tradition

Families living in *Hosszúhetény* are trying to revitalize a way of life that was once typical of the traditional peasant society. This process is heavily loaded with conflicts, though. The tension between the capitalized village and the farmers' specific way of life together with the negative experience of loss of knowledge as a result of modernization are being further deepened by the search for a compromise with consumer society. As is also explained by my interviewees:

*"The peasant lifestyle was embedded into a community, into a system. This system has completely disappeared by now. So, in practice the classic peasant lifestyle and our way of life are as different as chalk and cheese." (KNZs)*

*"Even on a theoretical level, we are not able to operate the system, this once coherent, unified worldview that they were able to operate once because they knew the details. And because we don't know all the details, we're just struggling to rebuild this unified vision again." (JL)*

Tradition takes on a distinct feature in postmodernity. It is not simple *traditionalism* or *nostalgia* lacking self-reflection but a special course of action having transformative power, which helps create a dynamic future through the resurrection of a forgotten past.<sup>36</sup> Through conscious adaptation of traditional values, families try to meet the challenges of our time while employing elements of modernity that prove to be beneficial for them. They strongly believe that our civilization is running into a global catastrophe unless we return to the ancient knowledge of our ancestors. In this context, the past is a pledge for the future, a possible way out of the apparent chaos of the present. Returning to a rudimentary form of production is therefore regarded as a commitment to the future:

*"I think that's the real value: to live from the work of my own hand and have a direct feedback on my own work. I can see more and more people who would like to follow the same path. And on the other hand, conditions of our present time point to the same direction. If consumer society collapses, humanity will be forced to return to the past and cultivate the earth with its own hands." (ZsG)*

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<sup>36</sup> Clifford 2000: 100.



#### 4. Correlation between individual and community

Community is regarded by many authors as a central unit of the traditional peasant society. It is a kind of social, economic and legal unity determined by cooperation, reciprocity and joint activities, which are bound by the geographic location of the village.<sup>37</sup> Faith in the power of community plays also a central role in the value system of families living in *Hosszúbetény*. Family members are strongly convinced that personal goals can only be realized within the framework of a well-functioning community. In order to achieve this purpose, ideals of community building and cooperation come to the forefront. As described by one of my interviewees:

*“We have also tried out how our community can work together in agriculture. Therefore, we sowed spelt, an ancient strain of wheat. All the families took part in this project financially and then, as a result of our common work, we also bought a mill that is now moving from family to family, and everyone is grinding his own grain with it. Our experience was very positive. People in our community were brought together by this common activity.” (KNJ)*

The traditional concept of community is complemented by the idea of mutual relationship between man and landscape whose foundations were laid down by Leopold’s land ethics.<sup>38</sup> My interviewee’s worldview is based on the unbreakable link between man and nature. In their accounts, prominence is given to attitudes like personal commitment and deepening of ethical behavior towards natural communities. The spirit of community is manifested through their respect for the natural environment. As is set out by one of the interviewees:

*“The traditional peasant culture was aware of the simple fact that different phenomena of life are interrelated with each other. That various forms of life manifestations, life of the Earth, plants and animals, natural events, how people act and think, different aspects of material life, peoples’ houses and plots are all interrelated things in life. And to recognize and live this unity is the wisdom that was actually present in traditional cultures, but became in our time forgotten as were many other ancient values.” (KNZs)*

However, the possibility of the creation of a community is continually overshadowed by the feeling of alienation inherent in consumer society. In the age of modernity, as my interviewees point out, individual actions are

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<sup>37</sup> Szabó 1969.

<sup>38</sup> Leopold 1949.

mainly determined by the pursuit of self-expression and individualism, which makes it more difficult to maintain commitment and devotion:

*“Basically, there is a Christian community in the village consisting of extended families that we are building for some time now. And there is another community consisting of farmers and intellectuals whose members overlap with that of the Christian community. The best would be of course to form a real village community because people became really separated from each other. And this is very bad.” (JL)*

*“We had to realize that joint activities also raise difficulties. We produced potato together that entailed a lot of hard work, like planting, hoeing etc... And during this work, differences arising from different life styles came also into light. Not everybody could afford to take part in these activities. So finally, it didn't work.” (KNJ)*

## Values embraced by the families living in Hosszúhetény

As a result of correlations' pattern formation, the following values have gained prominence in the life of the families:

### 1. Self-sufficiency

Self-sufficiency is regarded by many authors as a basic tenet of traditional peasant societies. In their view, traditional communities were once closed localities whose relationship with other settlements were limited. These conditions then served as a basis for self-sufficiency, according to Erdei.<sup>39</sup> Although the idea of self-sufficiency has been revitalized by the families, members of their community also admit that its pure form cannot be achieved. As is revealed by my interviewees:

*“The original idea, I think, was that we didn't need civilization because it would lead us to a dead end. And we let it all go. We go into exile. But years have taught me that this is impossible. We cannot create everything for ourselves.” (ZsG)*

*“What we can fully cover in our way of farming is vegetables: carrots, potatoes. And meat: rabbit, pork, poultry. But if we take a look at the current fruit consumption for example we have to realize that it's a bit abnormal. When one eats grapes during wintertime or apples whose storage life is much shorter. So, self-sufficiency can only be realized if we limit our needs as well.” (NB)*

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<sup>39</sup> Erdei 1934: 91.

## 2. *Self-restraint*

Realization of a balanced relationship between man and nature plays a prominent role in the lives of the families I studied. Restoration of a previously broken relationship is an ethical duty, which focuses on ecological self-restraint, rather than growth based on economic self-interest. In order to realize their goal, families are trying not to interfere with natural processes. They also avoid using chemicals and agricultural machinery. Whenever surpluses are being produced they are not for economic self-interest or maximizing profit, but for conducting a kind of barter trade. Increasing biodiversity and favoring indigenous plants are also strategies that work towards sustainability, thereby reducing vulnerability to commodities produced by multinational companies. As is revealed in the accounts:

*"We are trying to produce as much as we could under the environmental conditions of our land in order to exchange these things later. So, if there is something we can produce more than we need, we exchange it." (ZsG)*

*"We collect local grafts and replant those species that have worked. And the same with vegetables. So, we test as many cultivation methods as possible and apply the best ones." (KNJ)*

## 3. *Organic farming*

An important milestone on the road to reconciliation with nature is the commitment to organic farming. This strategy is regarded as a conscious revolt against the practices of intensive agriculture, mechanization and the use of chemicals. Instead of artificially manipulating nature, organic farming relies on the self-sustaining power of living communities, thereby reinforcing the notion of guardianship. The idea is also emphasized by Thiele who was arguing for such a personal relationship towards nature free of desire for possession and domination.<sup>40</sup> Realization of organic farming is not that simple, though. The village has by now become modernized and absorbed by the surrounding consumer society. Cultivation is determined by methods of chemicalization, mechanization and monoculture. Apart from the newcomers, no one in the village follows a traditional way of life any more. Changes in sociocultural conditions as a result of globalization often place families at crossroads. As we see in the following account:

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<sup>40</sup> Thiele 1995.

*“It’s not like I don’t use chemicals or fertilizers – as one of my interviewees said. Because of the type of farming we are doing, a particular garden with a relatively small number of plants and fruit trees, this type of farming doesn’t allow us to just simply ignore the usage of chemicals. Not to mention that my neighbor sprayed his garden with pesticides last year covering my garden too. So, I have been living in a dream world for years, believing that what I ate was fully organic. But in fact it wasn’t.” (JL)*

#### 4. Anti-globalization

Placing values in a broader context, strategies used by families meet in the field of anti-globalization. Revolts against consumer society are based on the belief that the growth paradigm – as the engine of technical civilization – is starting to fade away. Since continuous growth is unsustainable, conflict between centralized economic policies and heterogeneous sub-processes is inevitable. Therefore, the achievements of technical civilization, the compulsion towards growth encoded in consumer society, reality as filtered by the media, these are all seen as forces to be conquered by the families. Possible answers to this question given by them are contradictory, though:

*“I do not think that consumer society is about making everyone feel good, having everything they need. Rather, it is a story of the manipulated collective. People are led astray about what they really need. The concept of well-being is actually an illusion.” (ZsG)*

#### 5. Local strategies

A logical consequence of anti-globalization is breaking away from the urban lifestyle. Local strategies become appreciated instead and, as a result, attention turns to the village. The possibility of establishing a village as an independent, self-contained unit is increasingly defined. One of the key features of local communities is their ability to respond more quickly and flexibly to changes and to develop more effective action plans based on local knowledge – compared to those solutions developed by a central power. The main purpose is to return to the human scale and to use one’s own local resources. This approach, of course, also entails the circumvention of central power and control characterizing classic distribution systems. The principle of independence, which refers to the self-sustaining capacity of a system in general, plays a decisive role in this scenario. Each system is capable of reproducing itself from its own resources, as Max-Neef states in his writing.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Max-Neef 1991.

Therefore, what can be produced locally must be produced locally, thereby reducing economic dependence. As is emphasized by my interviewees:

*“I think the idea of acting locally is already a commonplace. It aimed at strengthening local communities and building relationships. As far as I remember, climate change was the starting point. [...] And then obviously the solution is not to import food from Italy using huge trucks, but to produce them locally.” (ZsG)*

*“As we individually strive to achieve self-sufficiency in our life, the village could be a self-sufficient unit as well. In fact, from a country's point of view, these so-called small local communities, which are larger than the family, might be able to operate an economy based on self-sufficiency.” (KNZs)*

## **Changes of identity by newly emerging values**

The individual is exposed to an incessant flow of external impressions. The influencing power of social reality and sociocultural environment that surrounds us is inevitable. *Thrownness*, being immersed, being delivered into this world gives rise to a kind of vulnerability as we enter societal reality.<sup>42</sup> During interactions with their sociocultural environment, individuals continuously develop their identity that takes on different characteristics at different stages of life.<sup>43</sup> In this sense, identity is the conclusion of different values, which are formed at the intersection of various correlations. Thus, identity is neither closed, nor final, but instead is a constantly evolving phenomenon.<sup>44</sup> The individual is not only a passive bystander of the impacts of external reality but also a conscious creator of his or her own world. In the postmodern era, tendencies to versatility are more rapidly gaining ground due to the growing pace of globalization and information technologies. Not only new ideas, ideologies, but even a news report, a television broadcast, or a reading experience on the World Wide Web can have a transformative power, not to mention the power of virtual communities formed in the cyberspace. As a consequence, the individual is constantly forced to re-read his or her own worldview and the underlying value system in the light of new experiences. During the evaluation process, identity is also transformed and new dimensions are added to it, modifying each individual's conceptions about the sociocultural realm.

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<sup>42</sup> Heidegger 1967: 135.

<sup>43</sup> Erikson 1991: 437–439.

<sup>44</sup> Hall 1990: 222.

Embracing a traditional way of life has a significant transformative effect not only on values and value systems but also on identity. Due to changes in lifestyle, values undergo a sort of selection. This process results in the revision of identity. As a consequence, alternative identities come to birth. In the end, these newly-constructed identities are trying to establish themselves through various representational practices. A defining aspect of identity politics is the discursive nature of various representational practices (that is, the self-articulation of a newly-born identity through various modes of action). Identification is, in fact, a never-ending process that unfolds from a wide range of possibilities. During its practical realization it delineates the symbolic boundaries of identity. The birth of a new identity is a kind of differentiation that can only be understood through the individual's relationship with the *other*.<sup>45</sup>

In the life of the families I have studied, representational practices may take various forms depending on concrete life situations. Among them we can mention the organization of a dance house, the revival of the local market, organic farming and barter trade. Identity politics represented by my interviewees illustrates all the difficulties brought about by the social changes of postmodernity, though. While modernity consolidated individual and categorical identities and reinforced self-sameness, social changes made at the same time render the recognition of identities problematic. "Recognition is at the heart of the matter", though, as Craig Calhoun recognized. "No matter when and where one looks, subjectivity is perhaps best understood as a project, as something always under construction, never perfect"<sup>46</sup>. This also explains the failure of the attempts that my interviewees underwent. In their view, the previous situation has reversed. Those intellectuals who come to the village often represent traditional values to a greater extent than the indigenous people of the village themselves. As one interviewee points out:

*"We came to a village in Hungary, settled down in a community that we thought would work roughly the way we dreamed of how villages could live in Hungary. And it actually turned out to be no longer the case. The idea we were thinking about did not really match reality."*  
(KNZs)

All these circumstances call attention to the volatility and incompleteness of postmodern identities and show us "how complex is the relationship

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<sup>45</sup> Hall 1996: 1–5.

<sup>46</sup> Calhoun 1994: 20.

among projects of identity, social demands and personal possibilities"<sup>47</sup>. As is strongly articulated in the following accounts:

*"Co-operation is not so typical between the indigenous people of the village and the newcomers. Both groups of people try to hold their lines and communicate only among each other."*  
(KNJ)

*"It has become clear to me over time that it is not working for me to live this way of life as we imagine it now in the traditional sense. To toil from morning till night in order to satisfy our basic needs and to give up all kinds of entertainment at the same time because of lack of time or money."* (KNJ)

Representational practices carried out by the families are also overshadowed by uncertainty, which is illustrated through the fate of the local market. The main motivation for creating a local market – which only survived one year – was to enhance local production and trade within the village. Although there was no marked opposition to it, it slowly died away after a while. Indifference seemed to play a decisive factor in its decline:

*"The local market was an initiative that, unfortunately, collapsed more quickly than expected. Unfortunately, the market itself as a platform is not really viable in the country. Virtually everyone goes to supermarkets where he or she can get everything faster and cheaper, having more choices. The local market failed because it couldn't fulfil these requirements. It was poorly organized, held in the wrong place, and no one gave their solid support to promote it."*  
(JL)

## Conclusion

In my paper, I seek to explore the value system of a small, rural community as revealed through the structural relationship between its members and their environment. My starting point was the assumption that value systems in the postmodern age are no longer cast from a single mold, but are much more of a dynamically changing framework. This framework is characterized by the dialogue between the various constituent elements of a given sociocultural situation, the distinctive role of the individuals' interpretation, and the dynamism of values resulting from their positioned meaning. I am convinced that culture is meaning that arises as a result of individual interpretations, which is created in the overlap between tradition, knowledge and

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<sup>47</sup> Calhoun 1994: 14.

values. In examining values, therefore, I did not set out from the list of abstract ideas of freedom, happiness, or equality as laid down by Rokeach.<sup>48</sup> Instead, I defined so-called *correlations* in which individual relationships are revealed with regard to particular sociocultural situations through personal, practical considerations. During my research, it became apparent that neither the correlations – nor the values deduced from them – can be regarded as pure forms of absolute concepts. In a single value, the influencing power of numerous correlations can be identified, and at the same time, one distinct correlation can be present in the component parts of many other values as well. The dialogue between them is always determined by the sociocultural medium in which they surface.

The value system of the families living in *Hosszúbetény* is based on the revitalization and reinvention of traditional values. In a contradictory way, this interpretive act takes place in the sociocultural environment of a village that has already been modernized. As a result, postmodern identities are formed through various representational practices (organic farming, dance house, barter trade, the revival of the local market) in order to be recognized in a space dominated by modernity. Although values professed by the newcomers form a coherent system, their identity is deeply fragmented by conflicts with the traditional population of the village. Their room for manoeuvre is limited, just as are their interpersonal relationships with the village-dwellers. Similarly, their network extends mainly to the members of their own community. Although there were some occasions during which their practices encountered each other, these opportunities became very soon exhausted and were not able to dissolve the boundaries between the two groups. In a contradictory way, neither did the incoming families seek to learn the traditions of the village. However, in many cases, they themselves tried to show exemplary behavior towards the majority of the village. A similar *fragmentation* can also be found when examining identities within their own group. Although values associated with the traditional way of life play a crucial role in their identity formation, individual interpretations show a markedly high degree of diversity on a personal level.

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<sup>48</sup> Rokeach 1973.



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