

Tamás Fleischer:

## ***Position and Prospects of the Young in Small Villages***

In recent years conferences and press coverage have dealt at great length with small villages and their living conditions prospects of their populations and their future. Yet there have been few articles published about the position of the young who live in small villages, although this was the main theme of a conference held in 1984. In this study I wish to explore this grey area by using published articles, statistics and data.

Areas containing small clusters of villages have survived largely in those parts of the country which were remote from (military) road networks, particularly in the south and southwestern hill of Transdanubia and in the hills in the north of Borsod county. They did not develop into large centres or market towns, nor become significant for communications. This was because of their poor agricultural potential, their location in the hills or in marshland and their distance from the main lines of communication. Nor did war, also because of their isolation and inaccessibility, destroy this pattern of settlement. Such factors consolidate archaic conditions in certain areas (Ormánság, Göcsej, Órség). These villages, often in deforested regions with their labour intensive horticulture, fruit growing, animal husbandry and forestry, were not suitable for estate management and consequently became dominated by the small-holding peasant. Even 100 years ago the surplus population were forced to seek work in other regions of the country. In order to prevent the fragmentation of the land, single child families and birth control became widespread.

During the last forty years, three significant factors have changed the lifestyle of these villages and had a particular effect on the settlements.

The first was land distribution; because of the lack of suitable large estates for division the effect was less significant in these areas than it was on average. Secondly, extensive industrialisation only effected these regions by attracting the labour force away; finally, the collectivisation of agriculture in regions unsuitable for large scale farming caused more tensions and harm than in other areas.

At the time of the Settlement Development concept of the 70s, when towns and large cities were given development priority, not even the few remaining opportunities for development were successfully exploited. Although more settlements were given electricity and subsidiary roads during this period, the inhabitants of small villages experienced backwardness and disadvantages in every possible way. A new pattern of life has not yet replaced the old disintegrated one; those who had the opportunity to leave their home villages more or less did so. The majority in these villages grew old. Because of the resulting distorted age structure, the birth rate in these areas is generally low.

With all these factors in mind, the questions which we must first address regarding small villages and the young are: Are there in fact young people in small villages, and if so, in what numbers? What are their prospects? Are children born?

### Premises

The category of 'small villages' is well defined in administrative and statistical terms. Small villages are accepted as being those municipalities where the population is not over 1,000. We can further differentiate "dwarf villages" (hamlets) which have a population of less than 500 people.

At the time of the 1980 population census, there were 96 towns and 3,025 municipalities in Hungary. Within this latter category there were 754 municipalities with a population of between 500 and 1,000; 640 had a population between 200 and 500, 193 had a population of less than 200. Looking at these 1,587 municipalities we are able to carry out more detailed comparisons and analysis with the assistance of published statistics.

Table 1.

The number and population figures for small villages 1960–1970–1980

	Total number of muni- cipalities in 1980	Popula- tion between 500–999	Popula- tion between 200–499	Popula- tion between 0–199	Total number of small villages
Number of municipalities in 1960		770	481	64	1,315
Inhabitants of municipalities in 1960		563,018	176,569	10,141	749,728
Number of municipalities in 1970		795	551	119	1,465
Inhabitants of municipalities in 1970		581,957	198,275	18,307	798,539
Number of municipalities in 1980	3,025	754	640	193	1,587
Inhabitants of municipalities in 1980	8,007,898	554,281	226,207	27,451	807,939
Inhabitants of municipalities in 1970	5,211,635	624,660	271,420	37,329	933,409
Change between 1970–80	– 3.9%	– 11.3%	– 16.7%	– 26.5%	– 13.4%
Inhabitants of municipalities in 1960	5,545,076	710,133	321,873	47,246	1,079,252
Change between 1960–70	– 6.0%	– 12.0%	– 15.7%	– 21.0%	– 13.5%

It is immediately obvious that in spite of, or rather as a result of, the decline in the population of municipalities, more and more settlements are becoming small villages to the extent that the number of those living in small villages has not declined but grown. Consequently, the study of living conditions in small villages, far from being untimely, has become increasingly important.

At the same time it is also true, of course, that those small villages observed at any given time will rapidly lose their population.

*Table 1* illustrates that the population of settlements which fell into the 'small village' category in 1980, compared to that of 1970 or 1960, has considerably declined, by 13.5% during the 60s for example. This constitutes more than twice the average across the board. The rate was similar during the 70s, but in that period it was more than 3 times the average fall of population for all municipalities. In municipalities with a population of less than 1,000 in the 1960s, and in those with a population of less than 5,000 in the 70s, the population also declined. The rate of decline in percentage terms is in inverse proportion to the size of the settlement, and as *Table 1* demonstrates; it has already reached -11%, -17% and -26% in the 3 categories of small villages. This decline is dictated by the difference between outward migration and natural reproduction. Outward migration has affected every category with a population not exceeding 15,000 (ranging from 0.1% to -23.7%). At the same time, the difference between the birth and death rates has dropped from +5.5% to -2.7%, which means that in spite of outward migration, there is an actual increase in the population in municipalities with a population of more than 5,000); in those with a population between 500 and 5,000, the birth rate can only moderate the decline brought about by outward migration. In the "dwarf" villages (hamlets) with a population of less than 500 the birth rate has aggravated the fall in population caused by outward migration.

It can be seen that small villages are only one factor in a process with consequences for the entire settlement network, with a negative impact on almost the entire range of municipalities. In most cases there is no clear line distinguishing or grouping small villages from the Hungarian municipality network as a whole. The figures show that the total population of the 1,587 small villages in 1980 was 808,000. Let us now turn to the number of young people living in these small villages and the kind of problems they face.

By putting the question in this way, we are led from the statistical categorisation of small villages to the small village as an environment for particular lifestyles. However, we would be mistaken to restrict ourselves to the categories defined by the administration, according to which 7.5% of the Hungarian population live in small villages.

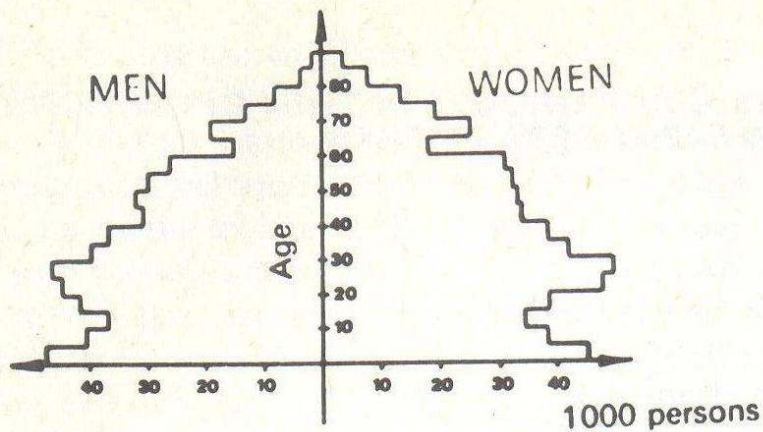
In reality, settlements can be divided into centres and suburbs. If we count the population of the suburbs separately, the previous number given for municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants will be further increased by 100, therefore adding another 32,000 people to those included as living in settlements with a population less than 1,000. An additional 145,000 people will be counted as living in villages with a population not exceeding 1,000 if we take into account the fact that almost 700 settlements registered as other centres by statistics, were previously independent and have now lost their names and identities as municipalities. Finally, the entire population of the suburbs among the 10,000 or more settlements which have a population of between 50–1,000 is 350,000.

This is to say that 1,420,000 people live in settlements with a population of less than 1,000; this is 13.3% of the entire population, of which 12.4% (1,334,000 people) live in villages with a population of more than 50 but not exceeding 1,000. The impression we gained from the official figures with regard to the 808,000 people categorised as living in small villages and the 368,000 people under 35 years within that figure, can be applied to a further 60% of the population and are characteristic of the position of almost 600,000 young people.

### **Youth: A definition?**

Whilst the statistical definitions were unambiguous for small villages and problems only incurred in connection with the definition of the unit of analysis, the opposite is the case for the definition of "youth". We could avoid the problem by simply referring to the youth statistics of the Central Statistical Office which sets the age of 30 as the upper limit but the situation is actually more complicated. Furthermore, the word "young" is commonly used, thus its meaning changes constantly. It is rather a contentious concept and not wholly statistical. What is more, the "official" limit has more often appeared as 35 instead of 30 within the last decade, following the aging of that generation which could not be given any other attribute other than young. However, we do not wish to go into unresolved issues in research, so we will circumvent this problem from the statistical angle. The main statistical age groups (0–14, 15–39, 40–59 and above 60) have been further divided into 5-year sub-groupings, which has made all comparisons between those aged below 40 possible.

We will now examine the question of demographic reproduction within the context of the small village network, as defined by statistical and state administrative terms, using the demographic division of the population as a starting point.



**Chart 1**  
**TWO TYPICAL AGE**  
**PYRAMIDS**

Chart 1/a

Age of population in county towns with more than 100,100 inhabitants.

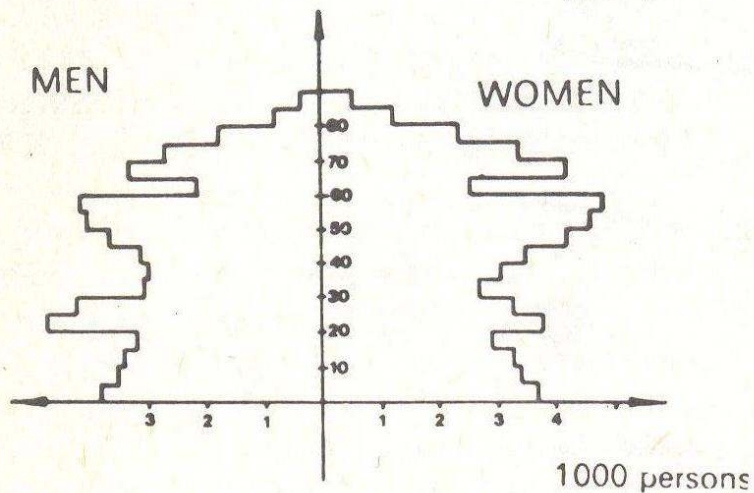


Chart 1/b

Age of population in small villages with population between 200-500

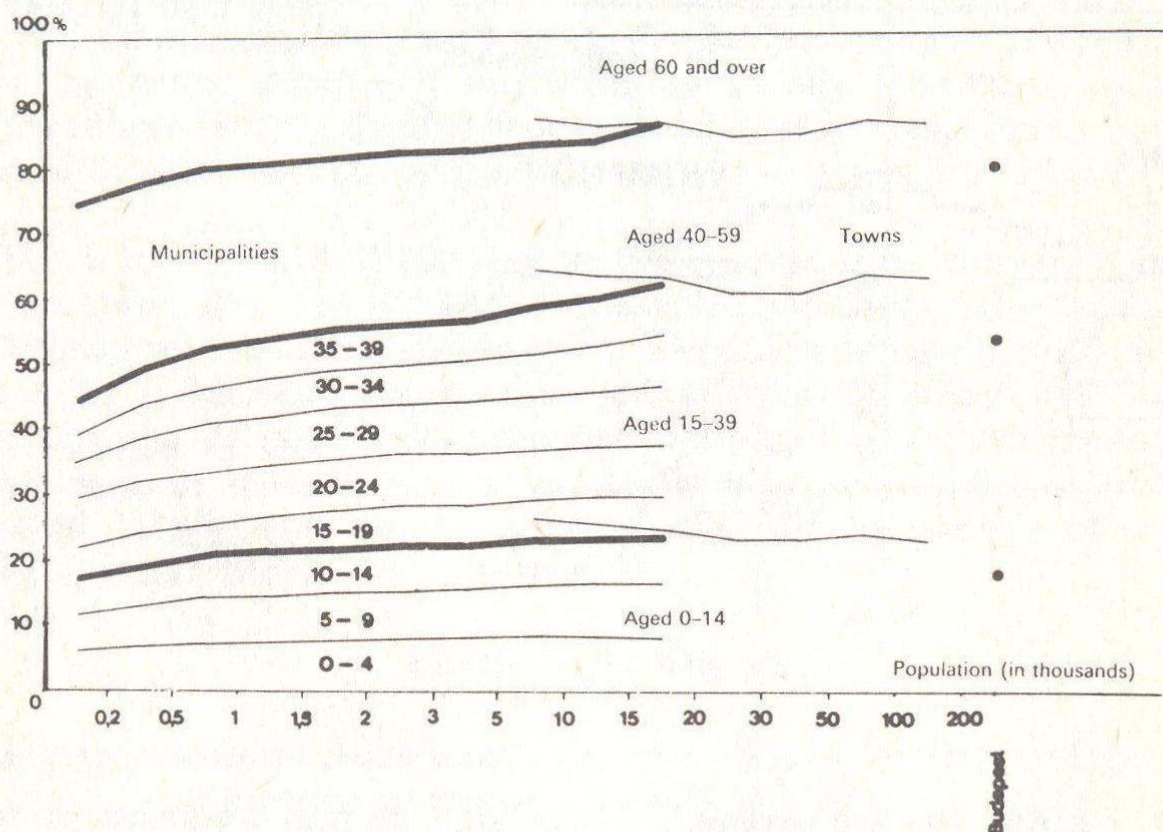
*Chart 1* shows two age pyramids. Chart 1/a, split into 5-year age groups, shows the male and female population in towns of over 100,000 inhabitants. Chart 1/b deals with villages with a population of between 200 and 500 (with a different horizontal scale). (Direct comparison bears out the generalisation already made: the top heavy age structure of the small village, the predominance of women within the older age groups and the lack of working age groups and young people.)

Imagine the age pyramids for every category of settlements drawn up in an imaginary line one behind the other, using the same scale. At the beginning of the line there are the small villages with a population of 0-199, 200-499 and 500-999, followed by small, medium and large villages, then small, medium and large towns.

Vertical cross-sections of this formation as we see the age pyramids in the chart, would show the population of different age groups within the same category of settlements. Cutting the formation horizontally would show where people belonging to the same age group tend to live, whether in towns or in municipalities. I shall attempt to make comparisons in these two cross-sections.

Chart 2

PROPORTION OF THE MAIN AGE GROUPS IN THE POPULATIONS OF DIFFERENT SETTLEMENTS



In 1980, 21.8% of the total population of Hungary were aged less than 14. Looking at the different settlement categories we discover above average numbers for this ageband in county towns. As the size of the town decreases, so the proportion of the population increases from 23% to 26%. Conversely, in villages the proportion of 0-14 year olds declines as the size of the village declines from 24% to 17%. (If we were to look at Budapest in this way, the pattern would be comparable to that of the percentage of children in a small village of 200 people.)

35.8% of the Hungarian population is aged between 15-39. The figure for county towns is higher (38%-40%); in large villages it is about 38%; small villages the proportion of this age group falls by approximately 10%. There is only one apparent exception; in the 20-24 male age group, in contrast with the above pattern, there is an increase in this proportion of the population as the size of the village becomes smaller.

Regarding the 40–59 age group, 25.3% of the total population comes into this category. County towns are near to this average (23–24%). But there is a different pattern in the villages where the proportion of the male population between 40–45 years of age declines in conjunction with the fall in size of the village, whilst that of the female population in the same age group shows an increase. In the small villages we also will find that over 45 years of age, the proportion of both the male and female population increases – from 24% up to 30%. (In Budapest, the proportion of the population between 40–59 years of age corresponds to that of a village of 3,000.)

17.1% of the Hungarian population is over 60 years of age. This number is lower than in county towns (13–15%), but in the villages the number apparently increases in inverse proportion to the size of the village, from 14% to 26%. (Budapest would correspond to a village of population approximately 800.)

We will now take the total national population of a given age group as being 100% and attempt to establish what proportion of which age group lives in the different types of settlements. We will look at the following categories: Budapest, other large towns, municipalities and within the latter category, small villages with populations between 0–199, 200–499, 500–1,000. For those people below 40 years of age, we will divide the population into 5-year sub-groupings; we will then look at those 40–59 years of age and those over 60.

*Table 2* contains basic population statistics. *Table 3* offers the opportunity to compare in percentage terms the different age groups (by columns). To facilitate this comparison, *Table 4* contains the deviation in percentage from the average, as can also be gleaned from *Table 3*.

In county towns, there are above average numbers of population under 45 years of age and necessarily there are below average numbers of people over 45 years. The considerable surplus in the 15–19 age group modifies this trend (at the expenses of the municipalities: note that this includes those in secondary education). It is also worth mentioning the high figures for the 25–35 year olds, which also originates from the municipalities.

The average for municipalities is just the opposite of this trend: the below average proportion for the working age groups is worth mentioning as the main tendency.

Budapest is a different matter. For dependent and older age groups the pattern is similar to that found in smaller villages; as regards those between 25–50 years of age it has all the characteristics of a town. It is also apparent that Budapest was a main attraction for those in their 30s (in the 1960s). However, for those in their 20s the main attraction seems to be the other towns. The trend peculiar to the 20–24 age group also deserves attention in

Table 2.

## THE POPULATION OF DIFFERENT SETTLEMENT TYPES BY AGE GROUPS

Table 2.  
THE POPULATION OF DIFFERENT SETTLEMENT TYPES BY AGE GROUPS

Number	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-59	60-x	Total
Budapest	142 722	121 452	106 008	103 779	140 160	179 216	159 632	151 381	538 857	416 140	2 059 347
County towns	323 000	281 094	254 042	257 053	290 054	325 890	279 722	258 157	1 395 816	932 387	3 642 218
Region	399 982	370 134	342 739	289 660	383 703	386 445	316 663	311 031	1 309 826	897 754	5 007 898
500-999	40 850	37 686	35 370	30 207	43 184	39 913	30 800	31 326	152 761	112 184	554 281
200-499	15 089	13 945	13 549	12 294	17 163	15 136	11 555	12 235	64 766	50 475	226 207
0-199	1 663	1 526	1 512	1 400	2 054	1 565	1 197	1 338	8 137	7 059	27 451
Small villages	57 602	53 157	50 431	43 901	62 401	56 614	43 552	44 899	225 664	169 718	807 939
Total	865 704	772 680	702 789	650 492	813 917	891 551	755 987	720 569	3 244 499	2 246 272	10 709 463

Table 3.

### THE PROPORTION OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF SETTLEMENTS WITHIN THE POPULATION OF DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

(%)	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-59	60-x	Total
Budapest	16,49	15,72	15,08	15,95	17,22	20,10	21,12	21,01	19,92	22,74	19,23
County towns	37,31	36,38	36,15	39,52	35,64	36,55	37,00	35,83	31,67	28,21	34,01
Region	46,20	47,90	48,77	44,53	47,14	43,34	41,88	43,16	48,41	49,05	46,76
500-999	4,72	4,88	5,03	4,64	5,30	4,48	4,07	4,35	5,65	6,13	5,18
200-499	1,74	1,80	1,93	1,89	2,11	1,70	1,53	1,70	2,39	2,76	2,11
0-199	0,192	0,197	0,215	0,215	0,252	0,176	0,158	0,186	0,300	0,391	0,256
Small villages total	6,65	6,68	7,18	6,75	7,67	6,35	5,76	6,23	8,34	9,28	7,55
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 4

### DEVIATION IN PERCENTAGE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF SETTLEMENT AND AGE GROUPS IN RELATION TO THE AVERAGE (LINEAR) DISPERSION (SEE ALSO CHART 3)

(%)	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-59	60-x	Total
Budapest	-14,2	-18,2	-21,6	-17,0	-10,4	4,5	9,8	9,2	3,6	18,2	0
County towns	9,7	7,0	6,3	16,2	4,8	7,5	8,8	5,4	-6,9	-17,0	0
Region	-1,2	2,4	4,3	-4,8	0,8	-7,3	-10,4	-7,7	3,5	4,9	0
500-999	-8,9	-5,8	-2,9	-10,4	2,3	-13,5	-21,4	-16,0	9,1	18,3	0
200-499	-17,5	-14,7	-8,5	-10,4	0,0	-19,4	-27,5	-19,4	13,3	30,8	0
0-199	-25,0	-23,0	-16,0	-16,0	-1,6	-31,2	-38,3	-27,3	15,4	50,0	0
Small villages total	-11,9	-8,9	-4,9	-10,6	1,6	-15,9	-23,7	-17,5	10,5	22,9	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

\*The indicator was worked out by comparing the figures in Table 3 with every column of Table 3 (specific dispersion)



this respect. As we have already mentioned, the proportion of the male population in the 20–24 age group shows an increase towards the small villages, and this is similar to the trend observed within the over 45 age group. Small villages apparently illustrate the tendencies for municipalities in an exaggerated form. The lack of the 25–45 working age group, and the over-abundance of those over 45 is also considerably higher in the average of small villages than in that of municipalities (and it is furthermore marked in “dwarf” villages or hamlets).

The lack of children is particularly apparent in the small villages, whilst the average for the whole range of the municipalities is close to the national average in this respect.

**Chart 3**

**DEVIATION OF THE POPULATION RATIO OF DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS FROM THE NATIONAL AVERAGE, BY SETTLEMENT CATEGORIES**

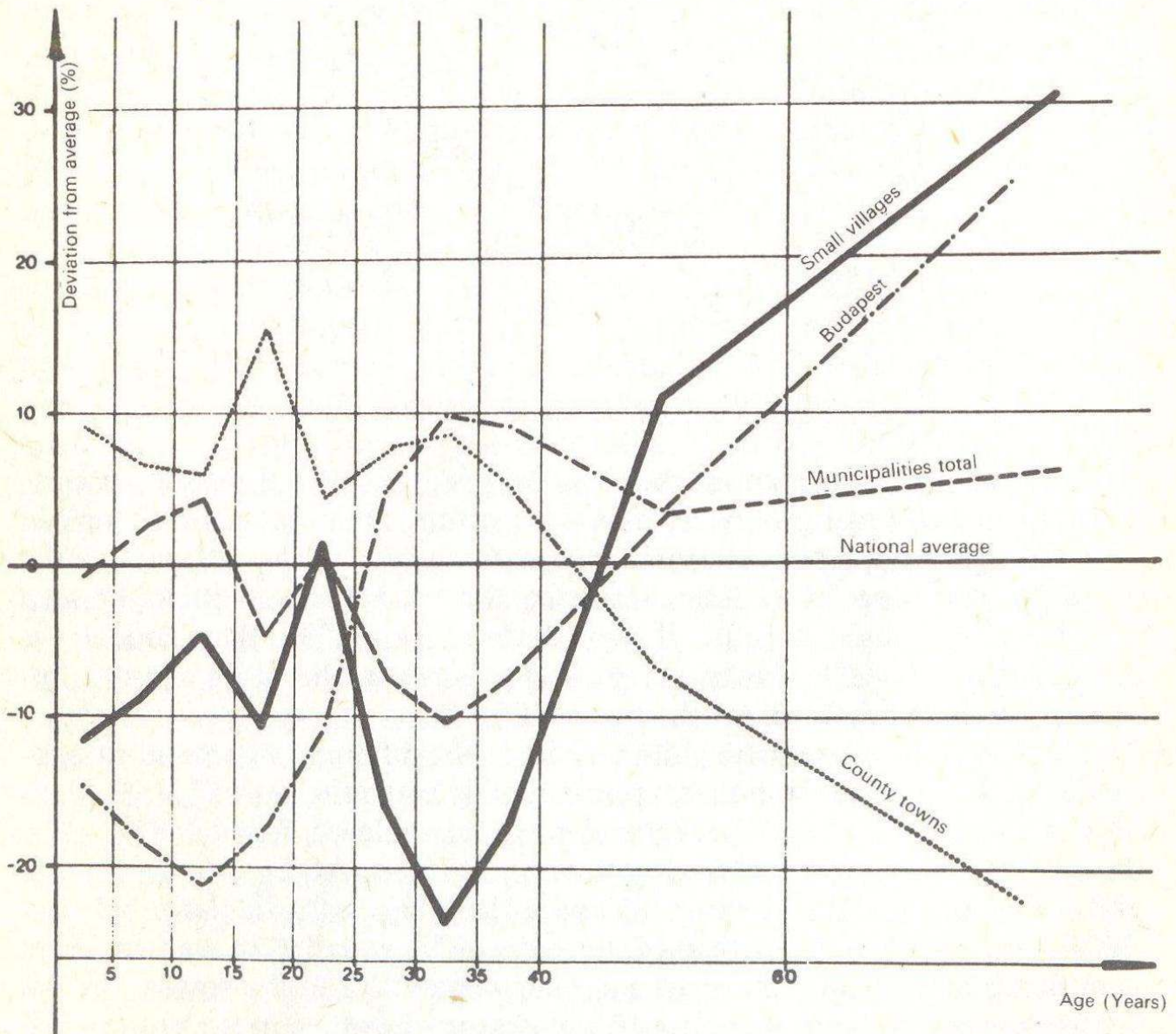
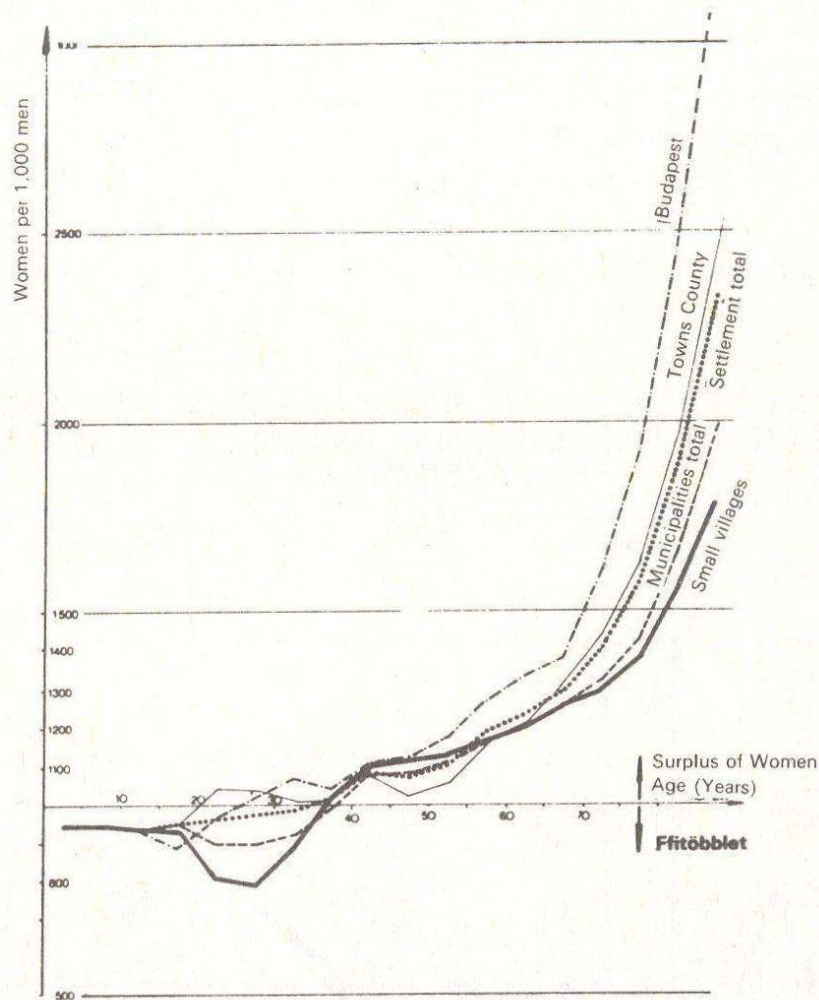


Chart 4

NUMBER OF WOMEN PER THOUSAND MEN BY AGE GROUPS AND SETTLEMENT CATEGORIES



The difference in behaviour patterns between males and females is conspicuous in some age groups. (Chart 4 illustrates the number of women in different age groups per thousand men nationally and also shows this for those different types of settlement as used above). Nationally it can be seen that there is a slight surplus of men under 35 and that this tendency is replaced by a rapidly growing surplus of women in the older age groups. (The ratio becomes 2:1 over the age of 80).

A look at these phenomena with respect to the different settlement categories leads to the conclusion that, approximately up to the age of 15, the place of birth does not affect the natural ratio of male to female. The main destinations for migration (county towns and Budapest) tend to involve an above average number of women leaving the villages, particularly between the ages of 20-40; thus, instead of the average 5% shortfall in women, there is in fact a surplus of women to a similar percentage in the towns. As Pál Juhász has pointed out, there is a 10% shortage of women in the municipali-

ties, which is a particularly difficult problem in small villages. In these settlements with a population between 200 and 500, the shortage of women between 20–30 years of age can reach as much as 20%, whilst in those with a population below 200 it can reach as much as 25%.

In the 35–40 age group, where nationally there is a surplus of women, the male-female ratio in small villages shows abrupt changes. The ratio is again imbalanced, but it shows a surplus of women. (To put it another way, up to the 55–60 age cohort, county towns are able to diminish their surplus of women mainly at the expense of the small villages). Over 65 years of age, the ratio is a more balanced one: the surplus of women in towns is above average, whilst in municipalities it remains below average. Furthermore, if we look at small villages, the surplus of women is more moderate than the average for municipalities.

Returning to the 20–40 age group, on the basis of statistical indicators, the question is valid as to whether the considerable shortage of women in small villages is caused by a “drain” or an “influx”; in other words, whether it is towns that attract the different age groups of women, or on the contrary, whether it is the villages that can only provide male employment to an extent that forces the female population of these age groups into outward migration. If we look at the main ratios for the educational and occupational structures and the proportion of 15–29 year olds going into secondary or tertiary education, the influence of the place of residence is crucial. (In towns 20%, in municipalities 10%, and in the different categories of small villages 8.5%, 7.7% or 7.1% of the young people go on to further education.) Of those who go into tertiary education, the proportion of women is 4–5% higher than that of men when the figures are broken down by sex. The deviation is especially apparent among secondary school students: in villages and in small villages, the ratio of girls to boys is 2:1. (40–50% as compared with 20–25%, whilst the national average is 65% and 41% respectively.)

In the villages, as compared to the number of boys with secondary vocational education, overtraining is characteristic of girls with a general secondary certificate of education. They will obtain their secondary education in towns and tertiary job opportunities attract them into large municipalities and towns. (In small villages, approximately half the active income earners work in agriculture, against the municipality average of 33%, and the national average of 18.5%).

The diminished level of education of those living in small villages calls attention to a lag in mental reproduction and the reproduction of disadvantageous living conditions. That is, an uneducated man may often find it more difficult to adjust to structural changes and will be more rigid in his acquired knowledge. He will thus feel it necessary to preserve the status quo, no matter how disadvantageous his situation might be. By so doing he

makes it much easier for dependence on large centres, commuting and a disadvantageous divisions of labour to prevail. ("Monoculture", even in the educational sense, leads to inflexibility and lack of adjustability and thus curbs the impacts of outside change.)

If we look at the total figure of active wage earners, 15.7% of those living in municipalities live in small villages. However, they provide 20% of the migrant working force and, furthermore, if we only look at the balance of the migration figures for municipalities (meaning those that leave but do not return), 26.4% of this imbalance is provided by small villages.

If we want to define the prospects of smaller villages through the views of those living in them in terms of the number of flats constructed between 1970-79, we note that in this period 30% of urban flats were renovated. Accompanied with a decline in the population within the municipalities, this ratio decreases from 30% to 14% for a population between 500 and 999, 9.8% for a population between 200 and 499 and 5.3% for a population below 200. One may conclude that whereas small settlements are not disadvantaged in terms of the number of rooms per head, they are considerably backward with respect to their material comforts; the ratio of homes with bathroom, toilet, water supply and drainage in small villages is generally approximately half that of homes in municipalities (which in turn is one quarter of that in towns).

### **The prospects for small villages**

In the above analysis we looked at small villages as homogenous in order to compare them with the other types of settlements, this does not mean that the problems of small villages are uniform. Based upon studies of settlements from different view points, conclusions may be drawn for future prospects. From the second half of the 1980s, two major shifts emerge with respect to the development of small villages, both of which are closely connected to the settlement development programme of the 1970s.

Those small villages which were situated in the vicinity of areas where intensive development took place developed entirely differently. They had the dubious choice of becoming industrial residential areas, their role constricted to providing supplementary functions for the neighbouring town (notably labour and homes). During the period when priority was given to the development of towns, these settlements on the peripheries managed indirectly to gain benefits for themselves. However, there is a fear that this peripheral development is rather limited in scope. It can only be regarded as development in the specific relationship and given role. It is true though that while these circumstances remain the same, growth will be measurable and verifiable. The half-educated, monocultural man very much fits into this development pattern. Those who are dissatisfied will still wish to escape. As

a result, a contra-selection takes place, leaving the village with an imbalanced range of population, without an intelligentsia or leadership.

Development took place in those small settlements which were designed to fulfill central-like functions within the small village regions. Their gain in terms of additional functions in fact took place at the expense of their environment. This meant that the process ultimately did not accomplish its aim, but the settlement which acquired more artificial functions temporarily benefitted from this.

Real progress based on existing development potentials (production for the market, leisure, etc.) has been relatively rare and it can be due much more to a fortunate coincidence of potentials than to a well-considered development policy.

In summary it can be stated that, although the small village syndrome is by no means new, its roots going back to previous centuries, the disadvantageous situation of these settlements was not changed by the settlement development policy of the 1970s which has been operative since. Indeed, some of these disadvantages even grew.

Long-term opportunities for the young to be successful locally are, in a peculiar way, improved by the fact that chances for dependant relationships, as outlined above, are also becoming more limited. The fact that they will be squeezed out of these opportunities will urge them to explore the possibilities for local success. A consequence of this compulsion to act may be the opening up of new development opportunities at a local level, in keeping with the village environment, which would be impossible to assist directly (as the main source of such a development is the actual lack of support and the need to rely on self-generated means). Indirectly, however, this process can be stimulated by recognition and broadening of the room for manoeuvre of local initiative.

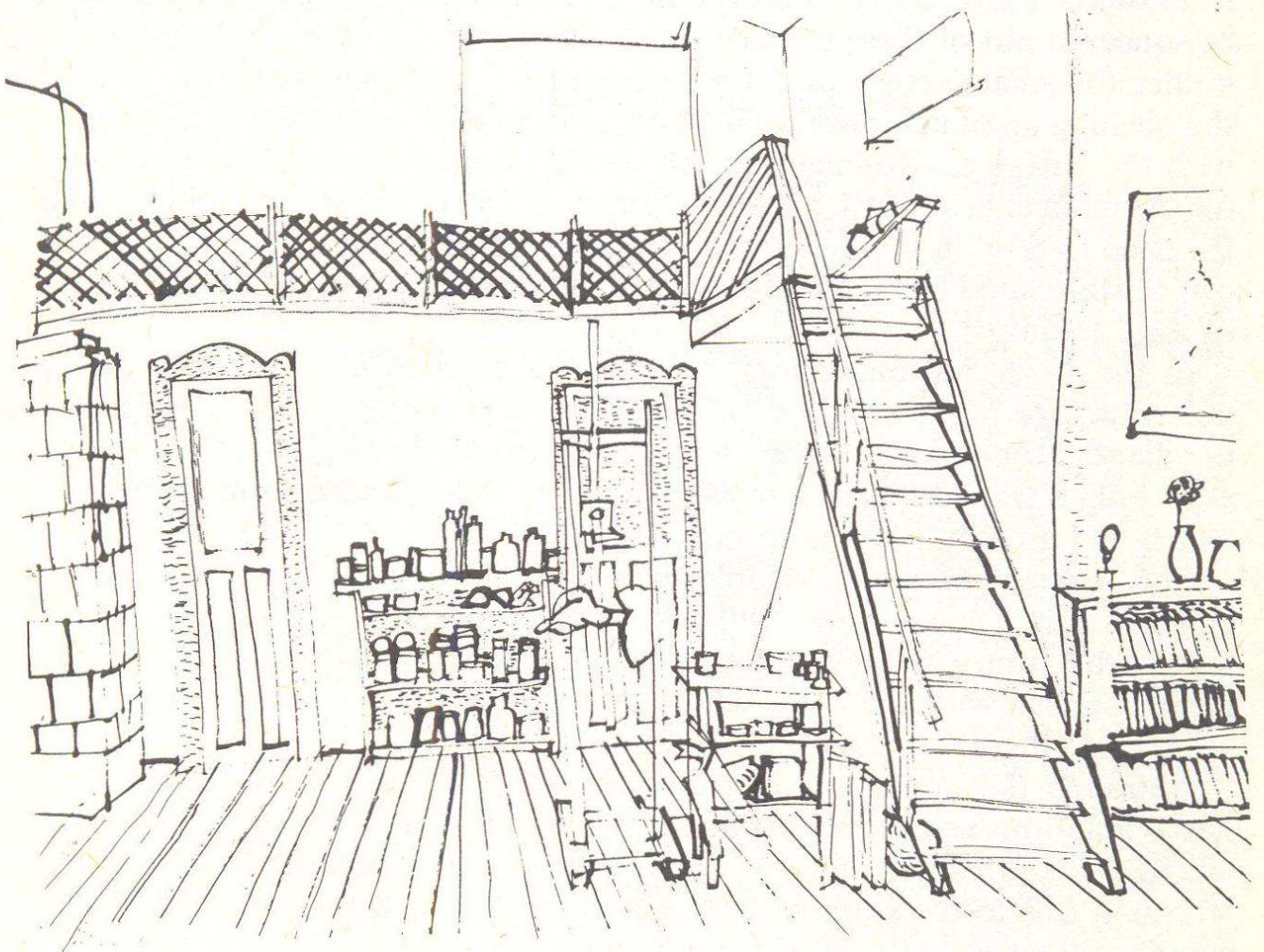
In the 1980s certain factors, such as the changes in the conditions of mortgages for home building, modified the migrational patterns, primarily in villages around large towns, and a re-emigration has also started. However, only a tiny proportion of small villages were effected, primarily those which had already become special residential villages.

The segment of young people who live in small villages with several children and a low income will not receive homes from the state in the foreseeable future, as the building of state-owned homes does not geographically coincide with the areas where the (admittedly) needy family groups are found: the two are as such unrelated.

Although the opportunities for local decisions have broadened, under new regulations and the per capita ratio, only 15–20% of urban development efforts will effect small villages. These small villages are also affected by the fact that, due to the scarcity of central resources, it will not be possible to complete the construction of a comprehensive supply of drinking water by

1990, as was originally planned. There is no doubt that it would be impossible to find a solution to problems stemming from the existence of small villages other than by supplementing the special priorities. Such a position has been declared in original new principles for the allocation of resources.

Finally, I would like to remark that the position the situation of young people living in small villages, apart from their stratification in different types of settlement, could be outlined in more detail through the introduction of a stratum analysis which would consider individuals as separate units. Concrete results in this form were not available and so our present study could not cover this. However, it has become obvious that such research should show where there are real examples and opportunities for changing one's circumstances in a way other than by escaping unfavourable conditions through migration. As to the background in small villages for people to create an active strategy for life, the above summaries show that the overall picture does not seem to be positive.



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