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The New Challenges and Situation of an Ethnic Minority within a Local Community in the Light of Social Changes

Abstract

Our memory is largely shaped by the way we look at the peoples currently living within the Carpathian Basin. Once a well-known tobacco-growing village in Historic Hungary, Torda (also known as Torontáltorda in Hungarian) is now a dispersed settlement with a Hungarian ethnic majority located in the Banat region of Vojvodina, Serbia.

The shifting of national borders, the two World Wars, the events of the Yugoslav Wars and migratory movements have collectively changed and decimated the lives of Hungarians who had found themselves outside their motherland's borders after the 1920s.

In spite of the decline in population, the emigration of young people, and the everyday struggles resulting from hard living conditions, this village in the Central Banat district could attract further socio-ethnographic interest. In the micro-communities of rural settlements, education and religion play a key role in creating social value, maintaining Hungarian culture in the area and forming a national, local sense of identity within the community. Commemorative rituals, local traditions and national holidays often cross each others' paths and blend together through education and religion, highlighting the reality and cultural values of the community, as well as the array of connections between community life and ethnic culture. This study discusses Torda's present in the light of social change and the process of cultural mapping, touching on the importance of the local cultural association in the community's life. This study also explores the events of the past few decades that have left a deep imprint on the micro-community's life in a cultural, social and ethnic sense.

Keywords: migration, population, preservation of traditions, cultural mapping, local holiday, local identity, cultural nation



Introduction

*Vojvodina*¹ is an autonomous province located in the northern part of Serbia, bordered to the north by Hungary. There are currently more than twenty registered ethnic groups and more than thirty religious communities in its territory, the Serbs being the dominating nation in terms of population, followed by ethnic Hungarians. *Vojvodina* is a multiethnic, multicultural province with six official languages and a rich cultural tradition, divided by three rivers into three separate regions, *Bačka*, *Banat* and *Syrmia*. The most significant Hungarian ethnic group lives in the northern part of *Bačka* and *Banat*. *Banat* is a geographic and cultural region located between the *Bačka* region of *Vojvodina* and historic Transylvania, predominantly populated by Romanians, Serbs and Hungarians, and to a lesser extent, Germans, Romani, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Croats, Czechs, and *Banat* Bulgarians.

Despite the continuous social changes and difficulties, the Hungarian community living in *Vojvodina* as an ethnic group has cultural autonomy, its borders can be easily determined and its members can be enumerated.

The site of the research, the village of *Torda* (also known as *Torontáltorda*) was located in the territory of historical Hungary until the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays it is a small settlement in Serbia, in the Central *Banat* region of *Vojvodina*, mostly inhabited by Hungarians. In 1920, following the signing of the Trianon peace treaty, it was annexed to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later Yugoslavia.

The purpose of the study

Using the local village *Torda* as an example, the purpose of this study is to highlight (1) the way the 1920 shifting of national borders, the two World Wars, the events of the Yugoslav Wars and the migratory movements transformed

¹ Its precursor, the Voivodeship of Serbia and *Banat* of Temeschwar existed between 1849 and 1860. The Serbs kept the name *Vojvodina*, but it only became a widespread term in the Hungarian language after 1920, first used in Yugoslavia. As evidenced: Kósa 1982: 460–461. *Vojvodina* as an autonomous province was annexed to Serbia on July 31, 1945 following a vote by the House of Representatives of *Vojvodina*. Mészáros 2018. Some Hungarians refer to the current territory of *Vojvodina* as “*Délvidék*” (Southern Land), however, from a historical-political point of view, that name also refers to a geographical unit wider than today’s *Vojvodina*, as it includes certain territories of the former Kingdom of Hungary, such as some areas of today’s Croatia.

the everyday life of the settlement; (2) to discuss, from a social ethnographic perspective, the new challenges the ethnic group faces in terms of farming and the community role of cultural associations and non-governmental organizations; (3) and to explore the cultural traits, symbols that connect the ethnic group as a cultural nation to the national culture and traditions of the motherland.

In the spirit of ethnic diversity, this study explores *Torda* based on the results of an ongoing research, presenting the small settlement in the light of social change and in the community space. In the short summary of the history of the village, the study touches on the demographic data, the geographical and historical-political circumstances, which have also influenced the preservation of the identity of the Hungarian community of *Torda* in the past few decades. The second part of the study discusses Zsolt Szijártó's anthropological research methodology in the Hungarian community in Berlin, the process of cultural mapping based on observation and community activity, based on which the conceptual framework of cultural mapping, community-related digitization, archiving, participation in society and mobility will be explored. This study also sheds light on the events of the past few decades that have left a deep imprint on the micro-community's life in a cultural, social and ethnic sense.

Gathering the source material

To provide a summary on the village's history, I primarily relied on archival sources, the church history book *Historia Domus*, and birth and death records from the village's registry. I have also received guidance from local resident József Dobai's community history-themed publications. More recent events are summarized on the basis of the local newspaper, the articles published in the daily newspaper *Magyar Szó*, the accounts of the data providers, and the database of the Vojvodina-based *Prosperitati Alapítvány* foundation. I have also overviewed the descriptions of the recommended and accepted local values at the village's repository of values.

For secondary sources, I have relied on the contribution of data providers. I conducted an in-depth interview with the chair of the local community council, the artistic director of the cultural association and the local parish priest. Furthermore, I collected information using the method of observation at community events.

The reality and challenges of an ethnic minority

In the 21st century, finding the values on which a thriving community can be built in a multicultural environment through self-organization is one of the main objectives of the ethnic Hungarian communities living outside their motherland's borders. Apart from the demographic decline, one of the greatest challenges the ethnic Hungarian community of Serbia faces is the preservation of its cultural and ethnic identity. According to Richárd Gyémánt, several factors could be listed among the causes of the Hungarian population decline in the period between 1991 and 2002. These include the extremely low birth rate, continuous assimilation, mass emigration from the region, significant aging, suicides, and divorces.²

Taking all of this into consideration, numerous local cultural and educational institutions, cultural associations as well as non-governmental organizations voluntarily assume the responsibility of community building, keeping traditions alive and bequeathing them from generation to generation, preserving interest in the national culture, nurturing the culture of the ethnic minorities' motherland and also providing education in their mother tongues.³ The role of these associations and social organizations became particularly relevant during the period of the Yugoslav Wars, from the 1990s and after the regime change in the 2000s. Most of the cultural associations operating today, dealing with Hungarian culture and traditions in order to strengthen and maintain identity, were established in the 1990s in the shadow of nationalism and the war, and the majority of them are functioning to this day. Public cultural institutions are located in the larger cities, while in smaller villages and settlements, where there are no professional institutions or there is no way to maintain them, the cultural associations assume the role of representing culture in the Hungarian communities, therefore their tasks and role are extremely important.

Community culture is decisive in associations as each community has its own traditions, values and norms. As a result of the numerous interactions among diverse socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural characteristics that take place throughout time, communities possess a significant amount of organized and deeply embedded information. This information becomes a part of the community in question and is crucial to the formation of the identity structures of its members.⁴

² Gyémánt 2009: 110.

³ Kormányos Katona 2021: 93; Lovas (ed.) 2011.

⁴ Waseem 2008: 1.

Gábor Gyáni states that the thing that sets tradition apart from modern endeavours is that people following traditions typically tend to “recycle inherited patterns, which may easily seem as if traditions remain within the confines of the world they had been passed down from, while they undergo continuous changes at the same time”⁵.

In the decades following the signing of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, during the interwar period, the proliferation of the middle-class began in the *Banat* region of *Vojvodina*,⁶ too, causing the rural communities to face changes as well. The Hungarian community of the region was forced into minority status and had to redefine its social, economical and cultural roles. The embourgeoisement process initially restructured the macro-environment of families and individuals, and later, modernization also transformed the local, familial micro-environment.⁷

The ethnic Hungarian community of *Vojvodina* is a cultural nation, whose future can be significantly changed and shaped by cultural identity. Cultural identity and personal identity are strongly connected, and as a result, it makes one take pride in their local heritage. Memory has a significant impact on cultural identity, since culture has been deeply ingrained in people’s memories throughout history.⁸

Heckmann explains that in the region of Southern and Southeastern Europe, the members of an ethnic group sharing the same culture and traditions are bound by their common sense of origin within the framework of a cultural nation. The members of the same ethnic group all share common cultural and historical experiences.⁹ Taking Heckmann’s view further, Keményfi describes his idea of a cultural nation as an ethnic group¹⁰ which is stable and independ-

⁵ Gyáni 2000: 31.

⁶ In the territory of *Vojvodina*, the proliferation process had already begun before in the 19th century in the *Bačka* region, with the establishment of the *Nemzeti Kaszinó* (National Casino) and other associations in *Szabadka* (*Subotica*) in 1840, when it was still part of the Kingdom of Hungary. The oldest, still operating cultural organization, the *Népkör Művelődési Központ* (*Népkör Culture Center*) in *Subotica* was opened in October of 1871 as a liberal reading circle. The *Banat* region did not undergo proliferation until the beginning of the 20th century. Following the signing of the Treaty of Trianon and the shifting of national borders, the first approved cultural institution in *Banat* was founded in 1921 in *Zrenjanin* (*Nagybecskerek*). This was the *Torontárhármegyei Magyar Közmművelődési Egyesület* (The Hungarian Cultural Association of Torontál County). Németh–Várady 2022: 5.

⁷ Pozsony 2021: 212.

⁸ Shao–Lange–Thwaites–Liu 2017: 31–32.

⁹ Heckmann 1992: 30–39.

¹⁰ Keményfi highlights that the concept of ethnic group is a concept based on cultural characteristics and is not the same as ethnic identity (ethnicity). Keményfi 2001: 205.

ent of continuously evolving social situations. According to Keményfi, the borders of these ethnic groups can be determined through certain cultural criteria, and their members may even be enumerated.¹¹ Kövér states that the concept of cultural nation is based around the unity of linguistic culture, which is what he considers to be the determiner of a nation.¹² Identity is built in relation to belonging to a particular community, and at its core are the traditions and customs of said community.¹³

Yuhan Shao and his co-authors define the different types of identities appearing in landscape research at a theoretical level, with a thorough literature review. This study will highlight some of the definitions from the authors with Yuhan Shao and his co-authors.¹⁴ The authors report on four major groups of identities: national, regional, urban and local. The research is related to all types of identity with the exception of urban. Because national identity is based on a shared past and is especially strong in terms of group social identity, it arouses powerful emotional responses.¹⁵ Additionally, national identity can take many different forms, including objects, occasions, monuments, and ceremonies, all of which provide important symbols to it.¹⁶

Taking the views of Heckmann, Kövér, Shao and the latter's co-authors into consideration, it can be argued that from a cultural perspective, the ethnic Hungarian community of *Vojvodina* identifies with the cultural traits, myths, symbols of a nation living in a different country, while simultaneously trying to preserve the heritage and traditions pertaining to the Hungarian culture within the region.

According to researchers, regional identity is a unique type of phenomenon that develops via historical and territorial socialization.¹⁷ The term "regionis" is well recognized as a term that describes a certain geographic location used by a particular group of people.¹⁸ Local identity, which has a number of sub-types, is an identity that pertains to a specific locality, such as a street or neighborhood, and offers a sense of peace, security, and pride to its residents. These are the elements that set the place and its inhabitants apart from other lo-

¹¹ Keményfi 2001: 205.

¹² Kövér 2006: 90.

¹³ Újvári 2009.

¹⁴ Defining and exploring the different types of identities is not the main purpose of this study. Hidalgo–Hernández 2001: 273–281; Raagmaa 2002: 55–76; Lewicka 2011: 207–230.

¹⁵ Shao–Lange–Thwaites–Liu 2017: 26.

¹⁶ Shao–Lange–Thwaites–Liu 2017: 26.

¹⁷ Shao–Lange–Thwaites–Liu 2017: 27.

¹⁸ Shao–Lange–Thwaites–Liu 2017: 27.

cations and provide a strong autonomous image to which people can form strong identification and attachment.¹⁹ Ethnic Hungarians in *Vojvodina* have a strong regional and local identity, which has also been proven by several studies²⁰ from the past 10–15 years. They define themselves as *Hungarians from Vojvodina*, attached to their region through their language, past, traditions and self-organization, and their shared history along with the socio-economical opportunity of the present is a core element of their cultural identity.²¹

The location of the research from the perspective of ethnic diversity

Torda's first resettlement dates back to 1776 when the treasury moved tobacco-grower families from *Szeged* and its vicinity to the area. It is also the year *Torda* started to appear on maps, even though it can also be found on a map of *Torontál* County from 1700 published on the 433rd page of Samu Borovszky's monograph *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai – Torontál vármegye* (The Counties and Cities of Hungary – Torontál County) when *Torda* only existed as a steppe.

Following the 1920s, the life of the village was drastically changed and shaped by the shifting of national borders, the two World Wars, and later the events of the Yugoslav Wars and migratory movements in that period. Until 1960, *Torda* was an independent municipality in the *Törökbecse* (*Novi Bečej*) district, after which it became a part of the municipality of *Žitište* as a result of a reorganization of public administration. In the 21st century, in accordance with the most recent administrative classification, *Torda* is located in the municipality of *Žitište* (*Begaszentgyörgy* in Hungarian), 14.5 kilometers north of the same-named town, and 39 kilometers from the city of *Zrenjanin*.

The village belonged to the Diocese of *Csanád* until the end of World War I, after which it fell under the authority of the Apostolic Administration of Banat between 1923 and 1987. Currently, *Torda* belongs to the Central Deanery of the Roman Catholic Diocese of *Zrenjanin*, and it is located in the vicinity of the Romanian border to the east.

Regarding the village's population trends, cultural historian Ferenc Németh has provided data from two periods, citing the findings of demographers. The first period, spanning from the beginning of the 19th century to 1948, was

¹⁹ Shao–Lange–Thwaites–Liu 2017: 29.

²⁰ Gábrity Molnár–Mírnics 2003; Gábrity Molnár 2008, 2011; Badis 2008.

²¹ Gábrity Molnár 2011: 127.

mostly characterized by an upward trend. The second period, dating back to 1948 and still ongoing, shows a continuous decline as a result of depopulation, emigration and low birth rates.²² Nowadays, the estimated population of *Torda* is below 1000, as many residents live and work abroad, while still having their permanent residence registered in the village.²³

Table Nr. 1: The demographic decline of Torda (1880–2011)²⁴

Settlement	Population		Decline in population		
	Year	1880	2011	No. of people	Percentage
Torda		3643	1458	2185	59,97%

Table Nr. 2: The demographic decline of Torda (1991–2011)²⁵

Settlement	Population		Decline in population		
	Year	1991	2011	No. of people	Percentage
Torda		2183	1458	725	33,21%

Despite being surrounded by several towns and villages of mixed ethnicity, most of which have a predominantly Serb population, *Torda* has managed to preserve its Hungarian ethnic majority even after the Yugoslav Wars.

Many small settlements of *Banat* are experiencing an ageing population, which has led to the start of the process of dispersion²⁶: young people are migrating to big cities or abroad in hopes of an improved livelihood, the birth rates are low and death rates are high. Small settlements with a Hungarian ethnic majority are also struggling to sustain their institutions, elementary schools, cultural associations and non-governmental organizations. The events of the

²² Németh 2020: 216.

²³ The last census in Serbia was held in 2011. Due to emigration, it is very difficult to accurately determine the real number of people registered as residents of *Torda* living in the village. Many of them work and live abroad, but they do not wish to be separated from their native village, so they are still listed as registered residents of *Torda*.

²⁴ Gyémánt 2004: 274–276. The table was modeled after Richárd Gyémánt's table from the source material.

²⁵ The 2022 census data is still being processed. The period of 1991 began in the same year as the Yugoslav Wars

²⁶ Defining the concept of dispersion is not the subject of this study. Several researchers have elaborated on the description and definition of the concept of dispersion: Biczó 2000; Mirnics 2003; Ilyés 2005; Keményfi 2005; Tátrai 2017.

Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s had particularly strong negative effects on the local residents' lives.

Table Nr. 3: Torda's population distribution by nationalities per the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia in Belgrade

Year	Total population	Hungarian	Serbian	Croatian	Romani	Yugoslav	Slovakian	Monte-negrin	Romanian	Other (or undisclosed)
1953	4085	4013	7	–	–	–	1	–	2	62
1961	3803	3768	21	–	–	4	1	2	–	7
1971	3345	3177	40	1	90	8	1	2	–	26
1981	2697	2555	33	4	71	24	1	–	–	9
1991	2183	1989	31	1	118	30	–	–	–	14

(Source: own creation)

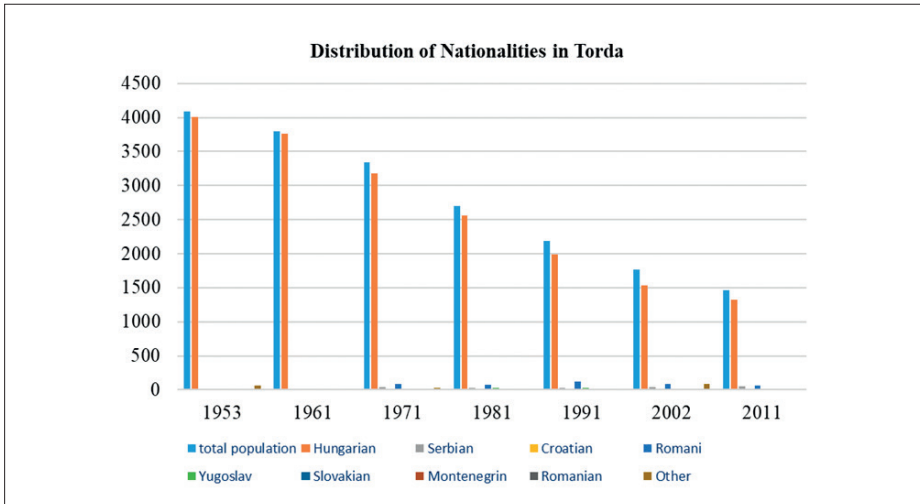


Fig. Nr. 1: Distribution of Nationalities in Torda.
(Source: own construction)

Torda in the community space in the light of social changes

It was established in the Introduction that the Hungarian ethnic group living in *Vojvodina* is considered a cultural nation, whose life has been trans-

formed in the wake of social changes, and as a consequence, its members have changed the way they relate to society and have determined their cultural ideas regarding their situation.

In the second half of 2016, Zsolt Szijártó conducted an experimental anthropological research among the Hungarian community living in Berlin. He attempted a new method to approach a small community living abroad. His research focused on the newest technological and methodological observations of scientific knowledge and understanding, such as community-led cultural mapping initiatives.²⁷ He explored the relations between cities and migration, or in a broader sense, the relationship between place and mobility, and place and community, while also discussing the visibility of the cultural heritage of Hungarians in Berlin on a theoretical level.

His research addressed two major issues in detail: how can one respond to the “new situation resulting from digitalization and participation revolution”²⁸. His project examined “the common points between the everyday life of ethnic group(s) and the history of the city”²⁹ in order to explore and archive past heritages, and to bring his findings to light, which could play a key role in shaping the present and even more so, the future. Cultural mapping could also provide an appropriate framework for “demonstrating an ethnic group’s heritage and array of connections”³⁰, while simultaneously trying to discover “the flows in which” the spatial mobility of a particular group “can fit into”³¹. Participation is prominently present in the research phase of the project so that as many people as possible could contribute to the development of a base of heritage creation. Digital technology could establish the set of criteria for creating archives that aim to include as many marginalized groups as possible in the process of archiving cultural heritage creation. It targets a community of ethnic groups that

“are not really visible in the majority city space, and are also segmented from a generational aspect, as there are significant differences in the value systems and ways of life of certain groups. On the other hand, one of their important attributes is that these groups create spaces and venues – either in the city’s real space, the digital space of the Internet or both – that play a fundamental role in develop-

²⁷ Szijártó 2018: 199.

²⁸ Szijártó 2018: 206.

²⁹ Szijártó 2018: 206.

³⁰ Szijártó 2018: 205.

³¹ Szijártó 2018: 205.

ing their identity and making it visible. They serve as the starting point for cultural exercises that facilitate organizing their everyday lives, create opportunities for building a social network and even allow these groups to formulate ideas about themselves or their identity and bring them to light".³²

As an experiment, I tried to replicate the methodology of Zsolt Szijártó's research and the project model mentioned in his study for my research, applying them to the situation of the small community and ethnic group I was studying, from a cultural anthropological and ethnographic approach. I attempted to find similarities and parallels between them as my study also focused on an ethnic group that was forced into a minority status, and whose members encounter individuals from the predominant and other ethnic groups on a daily basis, but as a result of their situation they do not appear prominently in their broader environment (in the municipality or the region) compared to the country's dominant nation.³³ Differences and gaps between the value systems and the ways of life of the groups can stem from not being particularly familiar with the state language (Serbian in this case), their level of education (school and professional qualifications) and the differing national culture. *Torda* is considered to be a language pocket; education in the village is only available in Hungarian, while at school, students learn Serbian as the language of the region two or three times a week. After completing the 8th grade of elementary school, many students continue their studies in their mother tongue in secondary schools located in the Northern *Bačka* district. Those students who choose to study in Serbian in the neighboring city of *Zrenjanin* out of convenience, tend to master the Serbian language eventually. According to my data providers, these Hungarian students have initial struggles with the language barrier as they have to study twice as hard in Serbian classrooms, but tend to perform well after a while. Sociologist Zsombor Csata explains in a study he conducted among Hungarians in Romania that these comparative disadvantages can be overcome if the students learn each others' language, or at least one group masters the language of the other group. Therefore, not only do these diverse, multiethnic societies become functional, but they can also serve as a valuable resource for society since they can be the breeding ground for developing significant intercultural relationships.³⁴

³² Szijártó 2018: 203.

³³ In *Vojvodina*, municipalities are smaller than counties in area and population, but are bigger than districts.

³⁴ Csata 2019: 34.

These days, the community of *Torda* is creating spaces for cultivating their identity both in their town's setting and on the Internet. Through their national holidays, symbols, cultural heritage and folklore they establish the criteria for their own archive, as well as formulate their ideas regarding their ethnicity. On a social level, participation appears in the form of an active individual becoming a part of an active community through several cultural associations and non-governmental organizations. "The individual and the community have to experience the concept of collectivity together in order to become an active community that is able to assume social responsibility."³⁵

The issue of the relationships between place and mobility can also be explored through the project model, as there are clear evidences of population movements within the ethnic group both in the past and the present, since a good portion of *Torda's* population have migrated from the village due to educational or professional reasons.

In view of all this, it can be established that the following concepts constitute the main elements of the project model: *digitalization* through technology, temporal *archiving*, which is closely related to the former, the *participation* of the ethnic group in society and the *mobility flows* associated to them. A detailed exploration of these four key issues is impossible within the framework of the study; therefore, through a few examples, I will instead outline how the new challenges and social changes affecting an ethnic group and a small community that is on the verge of dispersion can be theoretically presented in the process of cultural mapping, relying on my primary sources and the method of observation inside the community.

Cultural mapping in the settlement

Through the process of cultural mapping, we can shed light on the array of relationships between the individual and the community, while building communicational bridges between the individual and society actors, which include the National Council of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority, the local community office³⁶, the local society and non-governmental organizations. Such practices that can also reveal the personal perceptions of a local community are referred

³⁵ Kormányos Katona 2020: 79.

³⁶ In *Vojvodina*, the administrative body managing a small settlement is called a local community. The administrative body that includes several neighboring settlements is supervised and managed by the municipality.

to as ethnographic tools.³⁷ With the help of these tools, we can map out the cultural resources, networks, relations and patterns of use of a particular community or group.³⁸

This process can also highlight the differences between tradition and modernization in a local rural community. These include the types of socio-economic changes that occurred in the past 30 years, the re-evaluation of local folk traditions, the relationship between the place and the community and the way cultural heritage and its system of relations is present. Folklorists may use methods of social ethnography and social anthropology to conduct micro-level explorations of social changes on both the level of the small community and the individual, and by analyzing and interpreting their findings, they can provide a clearer description of macro-level processes as well.³⁹

Digitalization and archiving

Digital technology, temporal archiving and cultural heritage creation may all play a role in shaping the identity of an ethnic group, as well as their self-representation. As opposed to bigger cities, small settlements offer completely different opportunities for their residents who all have to respond to the challenges of the modern era and the advancements of the past few decades, while wishing to preserve their traditional rites at the same time.

As a response to the challenges of globalization, the leaders of *Torda* contribute to the self-representation of the village with the help of Facebook, the website of the local community office, the media and the local newspaper. Promotional posters of local cultural events are published digitally on the Facebook pages of the local community office and the cultural association, while 3-4 paper-based copies are also posted on the bulletin board in the centre of the village for the older generation. In order to improve the quality of life of the community, public roads are asphalted, and despite the continuously declining population, the administration is doing everything to keep the local pharmacy, doctor's office and post office open. Products have also been made from the area's natural resources, such as a bottled version of *Torda's* medicinal mineral water which was being sold for years, making the village present on the community market. Innovation and village development is realized through

³⁷ Szijártó 2018: 200.

³⁸ Szijártó 2018: 200.

³⁹ Balogh–Borsos 2006: 806.

tenders, which are mostly organized by the National Council of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority, and are usually aimed at educational institutions, the civil society sector and cultural associations.

Archiving is not only important because it preserves the past, but it can also extend the amount of information available about the village. Digital technology is expected to open the possibility for the creation of archives.⁴⁰ Establishing the village's repository of values that preserves the intellectual, material and built heritage of national values, which is a crucial element of the cultural heritage and the community archive. With the help of collective memory, the goal is to create venues that aim to preserve and strengthen the identity of ethnic groups. The Romanesque church ruin of *Arača* (*Aracs*), located 34 kilometers from *Torda*, is one of the most important built heritages and symbolic monuments of the self-identity and self-determination of Hungarians in *Vojvodina*. It is the epitome of national rebirth that connects the past and the present and has promoted the presence of Hungarians in the Banat region along with their Christian faith. A monument preservation association was formed in *Torda* in 1998 with the aim to organize an annual commemorative ceremony at the ruins of the church in order to promote the importance of the community's built heritage.

Ethnography contributes a lot to determining a nation's cultural heritage and, as a consequence, to forming national identity and appropriate national self-assessment as well.⁴¹ Archiving may happen via cultural associations, memory houses, country houses, or in a religious space. During the years of the Yugoslav Wars (1991–1999), the memory of the ethnic group's sacral heritage also represented their survival, attachment to the Hungarian language and belonging to the Hungarian nation and culture, which strengthened their identity. It is no accident that during these extremely trying times, in 1992, the local Roman Catholic church community, led by Msgr. András Bú, prepared the renovation plans of *Torda*'s St. John of Nepomuk church for its 150th anniversary. The renovation of the church and its cemetery chapel was completed in 1998. The church bell and the tower clock were electrified, the belfry was replaced with ball-bearings, and the bell room was given a new floor, while the stairway, the sacristy and the drainpipes were all renovated or changed. The church's lighting was updated, a concrete road and car park was built around it, and a new Heart of Jesus statue was erected in front of the chapel.⁴² The Stations

⁴⁰ Szijártó 2018: 203.

⁴¹ Balogh–Borsos 2006: 806.

⁴² Dobai 1998: 72–73.

of the Cross in the cemetery were also restored during this period. The renovations served as a way to strengthen the community's religious identity as well as to preserve their mother tongue, providing them with a vision for the future.

Inside the village's repository of values, a memory house was established in 2016 in honor of plant breeder and plant geneticist professor Dr. János Berényi (1954–2015), operated by the *Tordaiak Klubja* community club. The memory house is open to the public and is home to an exhibit of the professor's works. Visitors can find a rich collection of pumpkins and seeds, an old village home parlor, classic pieces of furniture and items from the professor's childhood home. The memory house also has a multimedia room where small conferences can be organized. The memory house⁴³ is one of the village's points of interest, and is the only such facility in the area.⁴⁴

In 2022, the village's country house was opened, which functions as a community building and has a design that is reminiscent of the 1900s. The Intermunicipal Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments from Subotica and The Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of *Zrenjanin* have both commented on the items exhibited in the house, which have been donated by the residents of *Torda*.

“Despite the fact that the dispersed Hungarian community has faced many disadvantages, this is an opportunity to turn all of that to our advantage. After all, it is the minority Hungarian community that is now able to kickstart rural tourism in the area, and these country homes will no doubt have a major role in it”⁴⁵,

the director of The Center for Diaspora of Northern and Central Banat expressed.

“Even dispersed communities feel a need to preserve anything that is of value. Our village is full of local values, and this is a great opportunity for us to showcase them not just for the local residents, but also for people who have moved away or any visitors,”⁴⁶

the town mayor commented.

⁴³ The memory house was owned by the family. At the beginning of 2023, the family could no longer afford the costs of operating the building, so they opted for selling it. Their attempts at finding external sources of financial support were unsuccessful.

⁴⁴ *Vajdasági Magyar Értéktár* (Hungarian Repository of Values in Vojvodina).

⁴⁵ Kecskés 2022: 5.

⁴⁶ Kónya-Kovács 2022: 28–29.

Reinterpreting the traditions is another function of archiving. For instance, at the corn festival of *Torda*, the traditional hand corn husking contest aims to revive old traditions, while also incorporating elements that meet the expectations of the modern era.

The importance of archiving is integral in preserving, developing and promoting cultural heritage and cultural services.

Participation and mobility

In the process of cultural mapping, participation can manifest itself in social and economical changes, the representation of community-cultural relations, cultural arenas, the forms of community organization and the development of intercultural and social networks. Out of these options, this study will discuss social and economical changes and the forms of community-cultural relations, i.e. cultural activities, in more detail, while also touching briefly on mobility.

Social, economical change

The local infrastructural transformation, farming, the changes in the use of mechanical devices, as well as social and power changes all have an impact on the development of the rural way of life, the income generation thereof and on job creation opportunities. One might wonder to what extent and how can traditional peasant culture be compatible with modernization efforts and the challenges caused by globalization. András Vajda mentions that within the microcosm of a settlement, individual economies and social groups appear in different phases of modernization and socio-economic transformation, and cultural diversity is a result of these differences. There are groups that undergo rapid transformation, while others are characterized by immobility.⁴⁷ The latter groups recognize the achievements of modernization, but refuse to utilize and incorporate them into their economic strategies.

Ethnologist Árpád Töhötöm Szabó explains in his summary of his fieldwork that some senior citizens find it difficult or impossible to adapt to the technologically rapidly changing world, which results in them being pushed out of traditional workspaces over time.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Vajda 2019: 27.

⁴⁸ Szabó 2009: 50.

Tobacco cultivation in the region of *Banat* had its golden age in the 19th century, but became less relevant in the following years. The residents of *Torda* were still engaged in traditional tobacco cultivation at the end of the 20th century, despite the fact that it had a gradually decreasing importance in their livelihood, and by now it has become completely obsolete from traditional workspaces.

The village has experienced social changes in the 21st century as well. In the once renowned tobacco-growing village, tobacco cultivation ceased approximately 15-20 years ago due to the low purchase prices of tobacco, and partially as a result of the transition to the use of modern machinery. Traditional tobacco cultivation is less rewarding and challenging for the young population, while older generations struggle with the operation of newer, modern machines. Cultural historian Zoltán Kalapis⁴⁹ predicted 35 years ago that tobacco cultivation would be preserved for posterity through its material and spiritual memories, and the form of livelihood that had once laid the foundations for the future of the village in the form of the tobacco growers who had settled in the area would cease to exist in the 21st century, along with the cultivation of sugar beet, which also used to be a reliable source of income for the residents for decades in the late 20th century. Those who had earned their daily bread through these two profitable forms had to transition and adapt to the changes rapidly.

Nowadays, people from the village try to generate their income from agriculture by cultivating alfalfa, wheat and corn, animal husbandry, or by working in companies and factories in the cities of *Zrenjanin* and *Kikinda*, such as the cable factory in the latter, or the sewing factory in *Žitište*. Some of them also work in public administration, healthcare, education or commerce. In the case of commuting workers, being away from the village's community can also accelerate the breakdown of traditional customs.⁵⁰ Many women and mothers opt to work as caregivers abroad in the hope of a better living, resulting in them only being able to come home to their families every two or four weeks. *Torda* mostly offers manual work opportunities in the field of agriculture, and the population is aging at a dangerous pace due to the lack of job opportunities. For decades, the daughters and wives of large farmers would take care of household chores in the traditional peasant society. In the 21st century, however, women have become the breadwinners in many families by working as caregivers abroad and commuting between their home and workplace. These

⁴⁹ Kalapis 1998: 30.

⁵⁰ Verebélyi 2005: 45.

women often do not even have the necessary qualifications or foreign language skills, or they obtain them via short courses that last a mere couple of weeks.

With the support of the government of Hungary, the *Prosperitati Alapítvány* foundation began operating in *Vojvodina* in 2016 with the aim to provide financial assistance to those working in small businesses and agriculture for the purchase of crops, land, agricultural machinery and village houses⁵¹ through tenders, thus encouraging Hungarians of *Vojvodina* to try to make a living in their homeland. The Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture and the Ministry of Agriculture also supports registered agricultural producers by organizing tenders for the purchase of equipment, while the Provincial Gender Equality Institute offers help to young families.

Despite all these options, the number of people moving away from the village for professional or educational reasons is still significant. Many of them only return for brief visits, family celebrations or some of the events organized in the village.

“For a dispersed community like ours, it is very important to have events that preserve tradition, and all kinds of other programs that can bring the community together. The Hungarian community of Torda is close-knit, because no matter what type of event we organize, there are always a lot of volunteers. This and the village’s more than ten non-governmental organizations is where our strength lies. We can only get by and survive by sticking together. We try to fill the void left by the youngsters who move away in hopes of a better life by uniting together. And we do our best to make the people who choose to stay here feel comfortable at home.”⁵²

said János Dobai, the mayor of Torda.

Here are the trends of winning tenders organized by the *Prosperitati Alapítvány* foundation between 2016 and 2020 based on their categories. Each tender requires the applicant to pay an own contribution.⁵³

The tender category announcements of *Prosperitati* changed every year between 2016 and 2020. Looking at the data of the announced categories and the grants awarded, it can be seen that over the five-year period, the greatest in-

⁵¹ The purpose of the tender is to provide a non-refundable (partial) grant for the purchase of village houses and their plots of land, as well as farmyards in the Autonomous Province of *Vojvodina* for married couples, cohabitants, and single parents with minor children.

⁵² Kecskés 2022: 21.

⁵³ Based on the data provided by the *Vajdasági Prosperitati Alapítvány* foundation. (Own editing)

terest was shown in grain-integration⁵⁴ tenders (67 successful applicants), followed by the procurement of agricultural machines (64 successful applicants) and purchase of land (26 successful applicants). The least interest was shown in honey-integration, start-up business and vegetable integration. The period between 2016 and 2020 reflects which agricultural sectors showed increased interest today, how the economic production demand changed at the turn of the 20th century and the 21st century, and what kind of income ensured the livelihood of families.

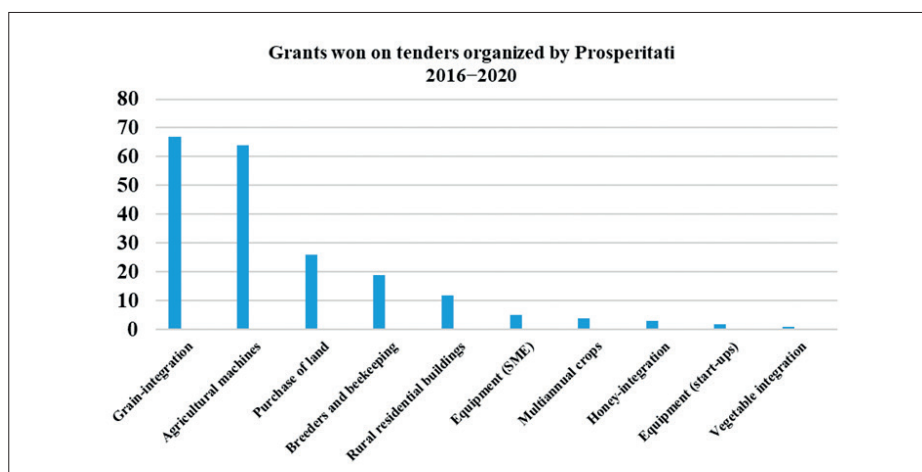


Fig. Nr. 2: *Grants won on tenders organized by Prosperitati, 2016–2020.*
(Source: own construction)

Regarding social and economical changes, it can be established that on the one hand, the efforts of the members of the community are aimed at keeping and increasing their properties and lands according to their possibilities, while on the other hand, there are those who leave the peasant life and become industrialists, state employees, and factory workers.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Payment of non-refundable support to individual, registered agricultural producers and legal entities (agricultural cooperatives) for the purchase of tools, agricultural machines and mechanical attachments to vehicles used in agricultural production, necessary to fulfill the obligations contained in their integration contract. Integrator: legal person (agricultural cooperative) with whom the registered agricultural producer enters into a contract, e.g. for the cultivation and harvesting of crops (sugar beet, sorghum, corn, sunflower with high oleic acid content, milling wheat, sunflower seeds, rapeseed, malting barley, soybeans, fodder barley, fodder wheat) and delivery to the integrator.

⁵⁵ Verebelyi 2005: 47.

Community-cultural relations and cultural arenas

In addition to the economic transformation, the intellectual and cultural life and arena also underwent changes from the 1990s. In the already productive local cultural life, not only did community building become the primary priority, but so did the preservation of national culture and national identity. The close-knit nature of the Hungarian community of *Torda*, the preservation of Hungarian culture, the nurturing of the association culture tradition, the role and activity of the young people who remained in the village in the cultural association, and community life are exemplary today, despite the population decline. The self-organized cultural association and numerous non-governmental organizations of the settlement play a prominent role in the process of creating and preserving traditions. The cultural bridge between the cultural association, the non-governmental organizations and cultural consumers is provided by the National Council of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority and the local community office in the form of the support framework awarded through tenders. The creative identity markers serve to highlight the particularities of the settlement. Among these identity markers are intangible and non-material goods, such as the very important *Durindó* and *Gyöngyösbokréta* folk music festivals, the Day of the Hungarian Culture, and other local traditional holidays and tradition-preserving events like the corn festival, the Cultural Days of *Torda*, or the Meeting of the People of *Torda* in the Carpathian Basin.

In addition to the Petőfi Sándor Cultural Association, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary, a number of NGOs operate in the village as well, serving the local community. Most students of the local elementary school are members of one of the professional groups of the local cultural association, such as the folk music choir, the folk dance club or the folk instrumental club. Teachers play an active role in shaping the local cultural life. The Petőfi Sándor Cultural Association, located on a public square at the main road intersection in the center of the village is an important part of the local cultural life. Apart from rehearsals, it hosts many community events: balls, assemblies, professional group activities and crafts lessons. In the 2000s, it became possible again to commemorate national holidays by singing the Hungarian national anthem freely, within the framework of institutions and associations. *Torda* traditionally celebrates the Hungarian national holidays occurring on March 15 and August 20. Two monument can be found in the public square in front of the association: a carved burial column in honor of the Hungarian Civic Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849, which was erected in 2010, and the bronze bust of Saint Stephen, which was the first such statue in the region of

Banat at the time of its inauguration in 2014. National history is an important part of the community's memory, the cult rooted in the people is conveyed to the present through the veneration of church saints. The church has a special significance as a sacred community space as "tolerance has increased in relation to religious holidays"⁵⁶. The state founder Saint Stephen and the Feast of New Bread are also commemorated in the religious space, and there is a living tradition of setting up tents and processions on the Feast of Corpus Christi. In the 2000s, several symbolic memorial sites, crosses, small sacred monuments were erected or renovated in the settlement, and through them, the narrative and message of the community's memory and the historical past became important.

"Nowadays, everything that wants to be remembered and everything that remembers something is part of heritage in some way. One of the drivers of heritage creation is the revitalization of dealing with the past: the local community, while creating the past, recognizes itself in its remains."⁵⁷

At major cultural events, the small settlement breathes together as a community and participates in them either in the form of organizing these cultural programs or performing at them. Local intellectuals play a significant role in shaping and keeping local culture alive. In a local society, the network of human relationships operates from the bottom up and displays the most important cultural events, scenes, and defining moments of the everyday life of an (ethnic) group.

Mobility

Torda shared the same fate as other villages in *Banat* or *Vojvodina*. The everyday life of this smaller settlement was and still is determined by emigration and the lack of job opportunities. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, America was the most favorite destination among the people of *Torda*, while after the Second World War, in the 1950s, a larger wave of emigration began again, which was further accelerated by socialism in the 1960s. In the 1950s and 1960s, the state of the domestic manufacturing industry had a significant impact on the workforce, and Western Europe became the preferred destina-

⁵⁶ Verebélyi 2005: 98.

⁵⁷ Vajda 2016: 34–35.

tion: families started to move to Austria, Germany, but also to Hungary and Australia.⁵⁸ From the 1970s onwards, the population of the village decreased rapidly, and the period from 1991 to 2000 presented yet another challenge to the small village, which was dwindling in population. The events of the Yugoslav Wars also affected *Torda*, as many single young people and families left the village and moved abroad in the hope of a better life and security, mainly to Hungary, Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom. Internal and external migration has not stopped to this day and is continuous. Since the 2000s, residents have been moving out of the settlement for the purpose of making a living, earning a better income, and furthering their education.

Conclusion

A few years ago, Zsolt Szijártó conducted an anthropological research in the Hungarian community in Berlin, during which he assessed a smaller community of 6,000 living abroad using a new technological approach and methodological observation. In his research, he devoted special attention to cultural mapping based on the community's activities, and to an archive that collects cultural heritage and can be displayed on a digital platform. The spatial and social structures of the examined community can also be displayed on the platform, thereby shaping the future vision of a city and a community. As part of an ongoing research, relying primarily on written sources and observation, I attempted to experimentally recreate the aforementioned model and methodology for an ethnic group that lives in a multicultural environment in a village in the Central Banat region of *Vojvodina*, and considers itself a cultural nation. In my study, I have presented a small slice of their daily life, the social and economic changes they experience, and the new challenges they are facing, also focusing on the events of the present, in four conceptual frameworks: digitalization and archiving displaying temporality, the visible participation of the ethnic group in society and the associated mobility flows. As Zsolt Szijártó explains, the project requires the participation and co-operation of both the researcher and the participants of the research, "so it needs to lead to co-operation between different groups (online and offline), their members and representatives at every stage of the research"⁵⁹.

⁵⁸ *Torontáltorda* n.d.

⁵⁹ Szijártó 2018: 206.

In light of these, the following conclusions along can be drawn along the proposed research objectives:

1. As a result of historical events, the examined ethnic group was separated from the motherland and suffered a significant population loss in the span of 140 years. As a result of internal and external migration, many residents of *Torda* currently live in big cities or abroad for the purpose of employment and furthering their education, which has changed their attitude towards their home village and the local world. Their sense of local identity still ties them to the small settlement, and although they do not live there anymore, they are still registered at a local address, and they often baptize their newborn children at the local church. Despite the difficulties, the leaders of the small settlement are trying to find opportunities, resources, and support at the local level with a network of contacts that will allow them to preserve their national institutions and non-governmental organizations, to represent themselves and become visible on the cultural map.
2. Nowadays, the ethnic group must adapt to the life situations and circumstances shaped by social changes. Looking at the culture of farming and the community role, activities, and participation of the local cultural association and non-governmental organizations, it can be established that the historical events and changes, and the globalization process of the 21st century also initiated the economic and cultural change of the local peasant society. The changes in the economic structure (e.g. work equipment, machines, production methods, the abandonment of peasant life and employment in factories, small businesses and the social sphere) happened more dynamically in some cases, adapting to the needs of the present, but at the same time, cultural changes were related to traditions (country house), adhering to popular, national culture, but following modern festive rites (corn festival, new community programs linked to the village day and the church fair), they occurred at a slower pace. These events are preserved in the community's collective memory through archiving.
3. The system change of the 2000s also resulted in changes in cultural and religious symbols. The creation of a cult of locally born artists and historical figures who achieved outstanding results, the marking of national historical events by erecting monuments played a role in shaping the local and national sense of identity. In the recent period, the attention shifted to the monuments erected in the village square, thus strengthening the collectivity of the community.

The basic principles outlined in the study have been presented as a possibility for the project model of an initial, ongoing research, and it is advisable to expand the project model in accordance with the results of said research.

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