

HUNGARIAN INHABITED VILLAGES FROM BANAT. CULTURAL IDENTITY ELEMENTS

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Abstract: At the beginning of the 20th Century in plains area of Banat region the Hungarian government started a process of ethnic Hungarians colonization. Ethnic from the Northern part of today's Hungary have been selected and colonized in villages such as Babșa, Stanciova, Fibiș, Dumbrava, Dumbrăvița, Iosifalău, Bodo, BalaștorFăget. As in Swabian colonization the settlements chosen to be colonized have been prepared in advance, houses were built and land plots were delimited by authorities before the colonists moved in. So, the houses are similar in size and shape with local ones (because they are built by local craftsmen contracted by the authorities, with local techniques and material) the only difference being the interiors that will be customized to suit Hungarian cultural identity needs.

The following approach studies the architecture of colonist buildings from the village of Otvești (Sacosul Turcesc Township, Timiș County) a village established as a pure colonist one at the beginning of the 20th Century and concludes that even in a purely colonized space we can find solid evidence of interculturality, common for entire Banat region.

Keywords: colonization, cultural identity, architecture, space, interculturality

At the time of the Austrian conquest Banat knew a single village inhabited mostly by Hungarians, namely Szoreg, which will enter into the composition of Hungary. In 1744 are certified only 2.400 Hungarians in Banat; in 1836 – 53.344; in 1840 there were 59.342 Hungarian inhabitants; in 1900 Hungarians accounted 12% of the population, totaling 191.487 inhabitants¹.

Until the first half of the nineteenth century, Hungarian population colonizations in Banat were made only on the initiative of individuals who bought auctioned lands from the erarium areas, where small groups of settlers were brought either as servants or as tobacco growers, especially natives from the plains and near Lake Balaton². An example would be the approximately 100 families of Hungarian settlers who arrived from the Szeged area to SânmartinuMaghiarin 1806, which in return to the benefit of settling in a fertile area were forced to cultivate tobacco on 1-4 acres³.

The Dualist regime, installed in 1867, brought significant changes in Banat regarding the habitat, the main factor that caused these changes being the colonization policy, which intensified especially after 1880. The main political objectives of colonization were: the foundation of Hungarian population settlements, the establishment of Hungarian family groups in areas with a Romanian majority and fertile plots, breaking the national homogeneity⁴. Thus, through a series of laws (20/1873, 5/1894, 15/1908) there were established advantages for Hungarians who wished to settle in the Banat. In 1894 was created

¹Hațegan 2003, p. 178-179.

²Săcară 2005, p. 50.

³Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 406.

⁴Munteanu 2006, p. 134.

the Fund for colonization with a capital of 3 million forints, which reaches 10 millions in 1910, thus Hungarian colonization becoming state policy⁵.

Hungarian colonization⁶ was done in places such as: Bodo (the settlement is first attested in 1880, in 1890 there were 50 Hungarian families sitting, especially originating from the area of Debrecen⁷), Târgoviște, Iosifalău, Țipari (was founded in 1881, with settlers from the county Cenad⁸), Stanciova (between 1905-1907 are brought 150 Hungarian families⁹), Dumbrăvița (first attested in 1891-1892, after the colonization of Szentes' Hungarians¹⁰), Fibiș, Dumbrava (the first Hungarians were settled here in 1893, being brought from the Szeged area¹¹), Făget (in 1900 are colonized in the area the first Hungarian families, forming Colonia Mică); Bunea Mică, still in Făget area, was founded in 1871, when 100 Hungarians from the town Szegszard (Southeast Hungary) were settled¹²; Otvești (Hungarian village created in 1868¹³); Cruceni (in 1868 arrived the first 75 Hungarian families, Hungarian colonization continuing until 1912¹⁴); Gisela (colonized in 1906 with 40 Hungarian families¹⁵); Moșnița Nouă (appears in 1903 by colonization of over 200 Hungarians brought from Szentes and Bekescsaba, which were built 90 houses¹⁶); Mănăștiur¹⁷ (after 1880 over 150 Hungarians were brought here).

Hungarian colonization was done either by the establishment of new municipalities, such as Dumbrăvița or Otvești, either by placing Hungarians in Romanian villages, where we identify a delimitation, both on land and in the mentality of the inhabitants of a "Hungarian side", with streets that descend perpendicularly to the main street, complying with the principles of street systematization introduced by the Austrian-Hungarians, with not burnt brick houses¹⁸.

Researching the issue of Hungarian households in Banat, Nicolae Săcară concludes that for the Hungarian settlers a certain kind of house was mechanically created, whose pattern is to be found in all Hungarian colonies that arose in this period in Banat, Transylvania, northern Vojvodina (at Backi Monostor, in December 1975, N. Săcară identified seven such houses) and Hungary (Veszprém and Tolna counties)¹⁹.

For this type of house no analogies could be identified, either in traditional Romanian villages at the time, or in villages from the place of origin of the settlers in northern Hungary and southern Slovakia, nor in Swabian villages (the construction of the Hungarian colonies, such as those from Lugoj area, was made with Swabian workers from Darova)²⁰.

⁵Săcară 2005, p. 50.

⁶Săcară 2005, p. 51-52.

⁷Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 78.

⁸Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 155.

⁹Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 71.

¹⁰Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 183.

¹¹Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 180.

¹²Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 44.

¹³Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 337.

¹⁴Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 196.

¹⁵Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 206.

¹⁶Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 277.

¹⁷Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 267.

¹⁸Such examples are found at Dumbrava or Mănăștiur (Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 180, 267).

¹⁹Săcară 2005, p. 56, note 31.

²⁰Ibidem, p. 56.

The most representative example of this type of house comes from the village Babșa, Belinț commune, where in 1906 was founded a small colony of Hungarians. According to the census of 1910, there were 249 houses in Babșa, the population consisting of 1171 Romanians, 302 Hungarians, 29 Germans and 21 people of other nationalities²¹. Houses for Hungarian settlers here were raised a year before their arrival, the craftsmen being Germans from Darova²².

The household, which is today in Timișoara Banat Village Museum, includes: the house with barn under the same roof, the barn combined with corn *cotarcă* and sty (the latter seems to be a loan from the Romanian population in the surroundings, being present also in Belinț, Coștei, Paniova)²³.

The house has an in depth development, with veranda on stilts, facing the courtyard; unburnt brick walls are carried out by hand and the base foundation is of stone quarry. The ceiling of rolls is supported by a frame of fir beams, while the roof is made of tiles - scales on pine wood framing. The walls were whitewashed, and the sides of doors and windows painted brown. As structure of the house, the clean room is at the street, then follows the kitchen which served also as living room, the pantry and summer kitchen, the barn towards the garden, the total length of the house being 19,5 m. The entrance to the rooms is through the kitchen, lighted by a window overlooking towards the courtyard, with *șpoiart* for heating and cooking in the back; the clean room, unheated, was the largest room in the house (4.5 x 4.5 m), the brightest (with two windows facing the street and one to the courtyard). Through an entrance door directly from the porch takes place the access to the summer kitchen and barn. For this study we propose an analysis of the specific architecture of the Hungarian population in the village Otvești, Sacoșul Turcesc commune (Timiș county). This village is approx. 25 km from Timișoara. It is a nineteenth century village which developed in 1868 on the estate of Count Kiss, who donated his land to raise a village²⁴.



Timiș County map

²¹Săcară 2005, p. 49.

²²Săcară 2005, p. 53.

²³Săcară 2005, p. 53-58.

²⁴Lotreanu 1935, p. 314.

Along Cruceni (Romanian village colonized with Hungarians in the same year 1868²⁵), Otvești appears as one of the first Hungarian majority population settlements of Banat. The name changed in Itvești during the interwar period, but then returned to Otvești. Each of the colonists received two acres of land and other 14 acres on lease, that they could have bought. The colonists were Hungarians brought from the Szeged area, later on German families being colonized also²⁶. In 1880 the population counted 314 Hungarians and 9 Germans, while in 1910 - 791 Hungarians, 24 Germans and 1 Slovak²⁷. According to census data the population increased from 260 inhabitants in 1869 to 816 in 1910²⁸. The same ethnic composition has kept until today.

Regarding the presence of certain institutions and individuals who carried out specific activities necessary for the community, we know there was a bank called *Institutul de credit Ivești* (Credit Institute Ivești), and also a school with two teachers, a notary with a mayor, a grocer, two blacksmiths, a tailor and a carpenter²⁹.

The cadastral plan of the settlement is quite simple, from the beginning the streets were drawn large, wide, straight and perpendicular, and the houses were arranged on either side of them. Thus the village is divided into six large plots.



Otvești plan (according to Google maps)

Houses arranged on front the street had the land at the back and this is the reason why streets are few. Being a village founded by colonization, the population brought here received plots of land on which the houses stood. Therefore the village is quite airy, with large spaces between streets, something which has been preserved until today. In fact, according to the

²⁵Crețan, Frățilă 2007, p. 196

²⁶Munteanu 2006, p. 135.

²⁷Munteanu 2006, p. 365.

²⁸Munteanu 2006, p. 259.

²⁹Anuarul Socec al României Mari, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=gdc3&fileName=scd0001_20030122001ropage.db&recNum=1847, visited on 24.04.2014.

latest census, population remained mostly Hungarian, although in recent years due to acceptable distance from Timișoara, new owners have begun to build new houses, but these ones are arranged in two marginal areas of the village located along the county road (see Fig. 2).

The architecture of most houses in Otvești still presents specific elements of Hungarian low lands houses from the first quarter of the twentieth century. Typological we meet modest houses with one or two windows located on the narrow side which give to the street, with an open, semi-open or closed porch (*târnaț*) (for economic reasons this space was closed later, not the same time with the house). Generally, the annexes have not been kept by the owners; they can still be seen in some courts. These houses have two living rooms, kitchen, and pantry and tools storage room. In the living room beside the windows from the street, in the back of the house we can still see a window and two chimneys coming out of the roof. Storage facilities are provided only with small windows and no chimney (which would have no sense after all).

Under the wooden pediment there is a belt of tile or masonry protecting the wall. This belt is disposed above the two windows from the street. The belt is emerging as a specific architectural element in Otvești village. The windows are fitted with wooden shutters painted in brown or green. Most houses have a triangular pediment above the windows to the street. It is generally masonry, but still wooden gables can be seen.



Otvești- houses with wooden pediment

On the masonry gable there are practiced two small windows that provide ventilation in the attic.



Otvești- houses with bricked pediment

Very interesting is house no. 194 from Otvești, that seems to be one of the first houses built in the village. The house is large, the same arrangement of windows facing the street, with the specification that it is a house arranged at the intersection of two streets, so that its back side can be seen. The porch has been closed.





House no. 194 from Otvești

What is interesting for the present research is that it has kept the household annex built alongside the residential home. This annex still consists of two rooms of which one appears not having any door. From here one can get to the annex attic where hay was stored. The owners still preserve the wooden staircase providing access to the attic. One of the rooms acts as summer kitchen and entrance from the courtyard is directly into the kitchen. On the narrow side of the annex, disposed at the street, there are two blind windows with a niche on top.



Household annex of the house no. 194 from Otvești

Similar types of houses, from architectural point of view, with those from Otvesti are founded in Alföld plain area from today's Hungary³⁰.

³⁰Márton 2004, fig. 3, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14.

Our research was conducted in the village Otvești because we found that the number of empty houses is growing, some of them leaving the village to join their children in to the city, or the descendants of the former owners have not yet decided the fate of these houses. The fact that fewer households are inhabited and that there is mobility from city to village led us to this research because the same as in other villages in Banat the architecture will change in a few years. Existing houses will be renovated by new owners without having often any connection with the original architecture. Slowly this will disappear under plasterboard, glass and plaster or they would be demolished and new houses would be erected. In addition, Otvești remains one of the first localities where Hungarian colonization occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Along with the benefits granted the Hungarians through political action, in order to accept colonizing the settlements in Banat, the manner in which they were created and the field layout of settlements are as with Hungarian majority population, the existence of a specific house old type, not once offered to Hungarians before, reflect manifest intention of individualizing the ethnic Hungarians. The furniture and decor, through colors and ornamentation, are the true mark of identity of the Hungarian population. Despite the manifest intention of the authorities to these settlers for denationalization, the Hungarian population lived on good relations with the Romanian majority, at least in the settlements of Banat, confirm in once again this is an active intercultural area.

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