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'RURAL POVERTY' IN URBAN SPACES OF BUDAPEST
RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR EXAMINING SPATIAL INEQUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

In this paper an attempt is made to find new perspectives on the investigation of spatial inequalities in contemporary Hungary. The research focuses on urban and suburban spaces that belong to Budapest, yet are also intensively linked to rural spaces through the migration processes from *resource-poor rural regions to the resourceful areas of the capital city*. The paper first attempts to define the concepts of 'urban' and 'rural', to better understand the uneven relation between them, and to avoid those simplifying approaches that are wide-spread in these kinds of investigations. Having understood and defined the concept of 'rural' and 'urban' from an Eastern European perspective, I have reconstructed. In order to demonstrate how important it is to consider the institutional mezzo level (as the housing policy and labour market), which influence the cycles of this process the most important steps of the rural-urban migration process in the case of Budapest are reconstructed.. Finally through a local example it is shown how to find these abstract concepts in a concrete space and what kinds of patterns can be observed through a local example.

Key words: spatial inequality, rural-urban relation, linking micro and macro perspective

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to find new perspectives on investigating spatial inequalities in contemporary Hungary. In this study people of rural-origins living around Budapest are followed. In the following sections some new results about the process of urban spatial exclusion in Budapest will be presented and a new approach will be introduced in order to better understand the structural reason for Hungarian spatial inequalities.

Speaking about rural poverty in urban spaces may seem paradoxical. The distinction between rural and urban space have already been disregarded by social sciences. This essential opposition connected to the modernisation paradigm of the social sciences wherein the village revealed the pre-modern society while the city instantiated modernisation (Pahl 1966). Later theories have underlined the essentialism of this urban-rural distinction and urged for new ideas and interpretations within rural and urban sociology (Pahl 1966, Csire 1999, Csurgó 2013, Megyesi 2007). Many authors emphasised that the spatial diffusion of capitalism destroyed those spatial distinctions that had been caused by distinct divisions of labour (Pahl 1966, Harvey 2013). David Harvey emphasised that capitalism could not distinguish rural and urban modes of productions. He argued that the different kinds of labour divisions had a spatial consequence: some of the regions could specialise in labour with a more advantageous position while others had less favourable positions, which could lead to spatial inequalities (Harvey 2013).

From the rural-urban distinction researchers have turned to investigate spatial differences in order to understand how spatial inequalities have formed and what kinds of mechanisms determine these inequalities (Nemes-Nagy 2009). In my study 'rural' is not an essential but a spatial category. It has a methodological and spatial meaning, which expresses the spatial hierarchy of the social inequalities from the Central and Eastern European perspective (Éber et al. 2014). In my study the rural and urban categories express (1) a relationship between spaces from the point of view of the division of labour (Massey 1995) (2) the historical consequence of the uneven spatial development from a social historical perspective (Braudel 1996, Smith 1984), and finally (3) a social-political category through which social inequalities are expressed (e.g. the sociography movement which is an important tradition in Hungarian social sciences) (Rézler 1943, Némedi 1985, Papp 2012).

In my study I suggest new methodological perspectives and approaches on how to research spatial inequalities. (1) I will emphasise the importance of the socio-historical approach to researching spatial inequalities, claiming that these phenomena have to be examined in a longer term, thus addressing the question of researching the forces and cycles, which form structural inequalities (Braudel 2006). Further, (2) I

will suggest a new epistemological perspective on how to undertake the research question of spatial inequality at a micro level in order to consider the institutions of the mezzo level and the structural forces of the macro level. In my paper I argue that rural poverty can be examined in Budapest through considering the migration process of poor villagers from the countryside to the capital. Despite the fact that in Hungary spatial exclusion is usually linked to the poor peripheral rural regions (Virág 2010), we can find neighbourhoods where, due to migration processes, rural poverty is concentrated in the urban space as well.

In the following sections of my paper I am going to define those macro structural processes that shape the movements and dynamics of spatial inequalities in Hungary. Afterwards, I will reconstruct at the mezzo level those spatial relations, which have characterised the movement of rural poverty from the resource-poor regions to the capital city. Subsequently, through the local example of the Hős Street estate of Budapest I will present my research following these points through micro-scale processes.

THEORETICAL PROPOSAL FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF SPATIAL INEQUALITIES

Spatial inequality is one of the greatest challenges in Hungary today, and has been researched by many scholars across different disciplines (Enyedi 1993, Beluszky 1999, Ladányi–Szelényi 2005, Kovách 2012, Kovács K.–Váradí 2013, Kovács É. et al. 2013, Virág 2015). The process of spatial polarisation can be understood from different perspectives and on distinctive scales. Some scholars emphasised that spatial diversity can be understood through the examination of the vertical differences of the settlements. These approaches claim that inequalities are mainly dependent on the size of the settlements. In the Hungarian context vertical spatial inequalities usually mean the hierarchy between big cities and small villages: the smaller a settlement is, the bigger the chance to live in a poor neighbourhood. This effect is also called the 'city-village fall' (Bihari–Kovács K. 2006) a concept, which refers to the social consequence of living in different sized settlements. This can be linked to the under-developed urban network (Kövér 2006, Konrád–Szelényi 1971) and the dominance of the rural areas, which is the spatial outcome of Eastern Europe's semi-peripheral position. Others emphasise the importance of horizontal differences when investigating spatial inequalities (Gyuris 2014). These approaches suggest that spatial inequalities can best be understood in a comparative regional study with respect to the different degrees of modernisation. The significance of the spatial polarisation was recently demonstrated by the most important socio-structural studies (Huszár et al. 2015) and overviews (Valuch 2015). These studies emphasise that regional inequality is one of the sources of social tensions in Hungary today. Adding to this, many scholars have emphasised that regional differences can be understood only in a historical context (Beluszky 2000, Győri 2011). Róbert Győri, who has investigated the historical dimension of regional inequalities in Hungary by comparing the census of 1910, 1970 and 2001, found that the origin of the recent trends of spatial inequalities is based on long-term uneven developments and their controversial modernisation tendencies. Győri claims that the 'modernisation tracks' of most of the regions in Hungary did not significantly change in the last 100 years. Investigating and aggregating the most important indices of living standards he found that the majority of those region that were backward in 2001 had already been at the bottom of the regional hierarchy back in the 1970s and 1910s (Győri 2011).

By investigating rural poverty in urban spaces I attempt to integrate these approaches. On the one hand, rural poverty in Budapest can be considered as a consequence of vertical spatial exclusions from the labour opportunities, which are provided by the country's capital for those poor people who come from resource-poor regions. On the other hand, there is a strong correlation between the number of people migrating and the regions where they come from. Several regions are under-represented and there are some that are over-represented in the migration process toward Budapest (Thirring L. 1935, Benda 2004). Considering social historical trends in the regional differences I claim that there are certain regions that cannot maintain the number of their idle inhabitants and therefore the 'useless population', is pushed out of these spaces to more resourceful regions, such as bigger cities. It is argued in this paper that regional differences are the spatial consequences of uneven development (Smith 1984), which is a repercussion of the Eastern European capitalist integration. I suggest considering spatial inequalities as a relationship between the resourceful and resource-poor regions (in this case between Budapest and its rural hinterland), which shows the distribution of the different kinds of modes of production in a spatial dimension. Furthermore, I propose an investigation of the spatial inequalities in a social historical perspective, which highlights that the social and economical differences between regions are not coincidental. Moreover, it has a structural background, which can be investigated in the long term (Braudel 2006).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE INVESTIGATION OF SPATIAL INEQUALITIES

As mentioned in the introduction, the structural inequality between the capital and the countryside is a secular characteristic of spatial structures in Hungary (Győri 2011, Beluszky 2000). While my study focuses on the peripheral zones of post-socialist Budapest, the processes are embedded in the historical continuity of the spatial structure created by unequal spatial development since the modernising decades of the 19th century (Timár-Váradi 2001). In the focus of my paper these spaces are the 'containers' of the above mentioned macro structural social processes

The investigated spaces can be described as physical units with social functions that are embedded in 'path dependent' historical processes (Braudel 1996, Braudel 2006, Aguirre-Rojas 2013). Consequently, using classic sociological methods designed to grasp contemporary processes, my research will focus on historical spaces, which have the capacity to reveal past forms of social organisations. I define the above-mentioned peripheral zones as spaces that can be grasped by micro-level descriptions from the present. Yet, those peripheral zones, through their present day characteristics, represent macro-level structural tensions in the spatial structures that stem from successive eras of Hungarian history (Dualism, the Horthy era, state socialism, post-socialism) (Smith 1984, Harvey, Lepetit 2002).

Nevertheless, these spaces are important from a methodological point of view as well. In this sense, spaces are physically surrounded units through which one can research the question likewise from a micro point of view. (Hammersley-Atkinson 2007, Sárkány 2005, Kovács É. 2007) Although spaces are not proportionally representative samples in a statistical sense (Small 2009) they help to gain a close access to local phenomena and to understand the macro phenomena embedded in a mezzo perspective in a comprehensive way.

In the following I will define the characteristic of these spaces. My research question is concerned with the definition of those spaces that are situated in urban areas but where residents have a rural background. The areas I chose are heavily populated by people coming from different rural settlements. Their connection to this particular place is managed and shaped by their kinship networks that help them find jobs and have better opportunities than they had at their home places. Personal networks and contacts are practical, and provide the chance of mobility from rural areas to these urban places. I argue, therefore, that the urban-rural distinction can be misleading in this case. My hypothesis is that these urban places, due to rural migration, cannot be interpreted as a rural or urban space in a simple geographical sense. In the following part of this section I am going to add some social aspects to this question in order to gain a better understanding of rural development in urban spaces.

The geographical answer: rural-urban fringes

The tendency of the western suburbanisation process of the 1960s brought new concepts in regional studies. Many scholars have argued against the traditional separation of urban and rural spaces and claimed that, through urban expansion, new spaces came into being on the verge of rapidly developing urban centres, which were at once carrying both rural and urban characteristics. One of the theorists of the topic, Robin J. Pryor (1968), through investigating western regional development came to the conclusion, that these so-called 'urban-rural fringes' are transitional zones showing both urban and rural use of space. According to Pryor, these fringe-zones can only come into being between urban centres and 'rural hinterlands', assuming a developmental process, which points towards the urbanisation of rural areas, that is, agricultural economies being converted into industrial and service sectors. Although Pryor (1968) aligns his model mainly to western urban developmental history and social context, he highlights that the nature, the function, and the spatial and temporal extent of the urban-rural fringes can differ largely depending on their surrounding political, social, and economic context. Judit Timár (1993, 1998) investigated the aspects of the urban-rural fringes in Central and Eastern Europe on the example of the Hungarian Plain. Timár (1998) describes the Hungarian fringe-zones as dynamic and conflict-filled spaces, which are characterised by the rapid changes of owners, functions, and use of space. The author thus investigated towns on the Hungarian Plain, which in their territorial expansion adversely affected the living conditions of those living in the periphery. She claims that the particularity of the Eastern European urban-rural fringes lies in the privatisation process of the post-socialist transition, which carries within itself the spontaneous transformation of the peripheral zones and the lack of state intervention (Timár 1993).

Through own research and hypothesis, an attempt is made to find another possible adaptation of the urban-rural fringe theory in Central and Eastern Europe. In my view, the particular transformation of the Central and Eastern European urban-rural fringes was not only influenced by the post-socialist transition, but also by a longer socio-historical process which is better understandable in a *longue durée perspective*. (Braudel 2006, Gyóri 2011) The uneven regional development in Central and Eastern Europe has created a spatial and social process, through which we can speak not only about the continuous suburban expansion of the major cities, but also about the continuous migration process from cities to the rural areas and vice versa, depending on the

economic cycles (Ladányi–Szelényi 2005, Timár–Váradi 2001). I argue, therefore, that the urban-rural fringes in Budapest and Hungary do not only mean the annexation of rural areas by the big city, but it also includes the flow of rural practices generated by spatial exclusion, back into the city.

The anthropological answer: the critique of the rural-urban distinction

Anthropologists have started to turn their attention towards urban spaces in the beginning of the 1960s when urbanisation has become a global process. Beforehand, anthropological research focused mainly on rural societies preferring to investigate 'archaic cultures' (Southall 1973). From the end of the 19th century social scientists have strongly distinguished the so-called 'urban' and 'rural' spaces. The former was connected to modernisation, while the latter was linked to 'archaic cultures'. The spatial consequence of this approach was to strictly distinguish urban cultures from the rural ones, not considering those connecting points and networks that demonstrated the relations and passages between these two categories. The concepts of 'community' and 'society' used by Tönnies (2004) or the theory of folk-urban continuum of Redfield (1962) has clearly signalled that these descriptions of the urban-rural spaces were strongly connected to the ideal-typical definitions preferred by the modernisation theories.

Urban anthropology, which shifted its attention to the urban space through anthropological lenses, recognised these false dichotomies and began to destroy them. Anthropologists who began to investigate the cities, were focusing on those global phenomena that saw rural populations leaving their villages and moving to global cities (Southall 1973, Fejős–Niedermüller 1983, Al-Zubadi 2007). Dealing with these problems, scholars realised that dichotomies between rural and urban cultures cannot be applied to the societies they investigated. Many researchers claimed that institutions linked to the rural world by anthropologists were still present in the urban spaces and vice versa, while many issues connected to the urban culture had their origin in the surrounding rural life (Lewis 1970a).

Therefore, one of the most widespread research fields of urban anthropological investigations was the role of the kinship networks in the rural-urban migration process. Researchers broke with the old scholarly traditions and tended to investigate the relations between the rural and urban spaces, asking questions about ways to detect the functions of these networks and ways these networks helped integrate the people into urban life (Gans 1966, Lewis 1968, Young–Willmott 1999). Anthropologists link those patterns to the families and kinship networks which form the cultural and economic balances of a community or a household and help to establish those institutions that are able to maintain the urban integration of people with a rural background.

The urban anthropological approach was an important step to destroy the urban-rural dichotomy in the social sciences. It paid attention to those problems which have been invisible earlier. On the one hand, urban anthropologists documented cases and did thousands of fieldworks which inspired new fields and opened up new research questions. On the other hand, they worked out new methods which help us develop better research questions and methodology to conceptualise rural poverty in urban spaces in the Eastern European and Hungarian context.

THE MEZZO LEVEL OF THE INVESTIGATION: THE RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION PROCESS IN HUNGARY

The migration process from the Hungarian countryside to the Hungarian capital city of Budapest has always been a significant phenomenon within the social history of Hungary. The unequal division of labour between the Capital city and the countryside has continuously triggered a movement between these locations throughout history. Whether the movement has been a success or a failure from the perspective of migrants has always been influenced by economic cycles and by the labour market. In the following section an attempt is made to reconstruct the most important points and periods of this movement and summarise its tendencies and characteristics through my research questions.

Rural migration to Budapest during the Dualism era

The city of Budapest was born administratively in 1873 when the three smaller towns of Buda, Pest and Óbuda were unified. The unification project was strongly connected to the growth of urbanisation. The population of Budapest grew from 355,000 to 929,000 inhabitants within 40 years between 1880 and 1920 (Thirring G. 1893, Thirring L. 1935). During this era Hungary engaged in the forming capitalist world system, the power of which was concentrated in Budapest. The accumulation of the population and growth of the city was outstanding in comparison to other European cities (Thirring L. 1935).

Population growth in Budapest and its hinterland between 1869 and 1930 (persons) (Thirring L. 1935: 11–13)

| | 1869 | 1930 | the measure of the growth |
|--|-----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| The population growth of Hungary | 5,014,203 | 8,688,319 | 1.75 |
| The population growth of Budapest | 270,685 | 1,006,184 | 3.75 |
| The population growth of Budapest and its hinterland | 297,167 | 1,421,397 | 4.75 |

Initially the city began to expand vertically: investors built huge blocks of flats and rented them out to newcomers. The source of the population growth was clearly the migration from the rural regions to the capital city. This tendency has been typical since the beginning of the 20th century. According to the statistics 65% of the population growth of Budapest was sourced by the internal migration process of Hungary (Thirring L. 1935). While the modernisation processes were strongly concentrated on Budapest, in some regions (especially in the North-Eastern and some Transdanubian counties) had not been touched by these processes. Those regions that became the 'losing spaces' of the modernisation processes sent out their population into the capital cities or into the international migration channels. Usually those regions that are the source of the incoming population were characterised by a lack of industry and transport connections, and the obstacle of the expansion of the agricultural production (Thirring L. 1935).

Rural migration to Budapest in the Horthy era (1920–1945)

The migration process from the countryside to Budapest did not slow down in the first part of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the private housing structure could not follow the growth processes, which resulted in a housing crisis in the city (Gyáni 1992, Umbrai 2008, Udvarhelyi 2014). There were two consequences of this process. Firstly, it formed slums, where the homeless and evicted renters lived in huts and barracks on the

outskirts of the cities. This was a completely new consequence of the urban poverty, which signaled that spatial conflicts could not be solved within the borders of the city (Umbrai 2008). Secondly, the city began to extend horizontally to its suburbs and its hinterlands (Thirring L. 1935). More and more newcomers decided to move to the suburbs around Budapest (settlements that would officially become parts of the city in 1950), since it was impossible to find housing possibilities in the inner city.¹ The importance of the suburban settlements was still crucial in the Socialist Era, which shows that in the 20th century the city could not absorb the excess population of the rural regions. In the 1930s the rural migration had become even more significantly linked to the economic crisis. The recession in agricultural products resulted in more and more people coming, even from the regions of the Great Hungarian Plain. The presence of rural poverty was one of the biggest challenges to local governance (Gyáni 1992), which was strongly connected to the lack of social housing programmes (Udvarhelyi 2014).

Rural migration to Budapest in the Socialist Era (1945–1990)

The migration process from the countryside to Budapest took new directions during the Socialist Era. Although the general political intention was to reduce the importance of Budapest, the role of the capital city was still important. Gyula Benda (2004), who investigated the migration process of Budapest between 1938 and 1970, pointed out that the industrial dominance of Budapest was continuously decreasing². While the growth of the population of Budapest had been continuously declining, the migration processes from the countryside to the capital city had been still present. Gyula Benda pointed out that even though the number of newcomers in Budapest declined, the number of temporary inhabitants was still very high. He claimed that the population of the agglomeration had been continuously increasing during the Socialist Era.

Population growth in Budapest and its hinterland between 1901 and 1969 (%) (Benda 2004: 219)

| The growth of the population (in %) | at the territory of the capital city Budapest | at the territory of the agglomeration |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1901–1941 | 1.75% | 16.8% |
| 1949–1959 | 1.16% | 1.95% |
| 1960–1969 | 0.75% | 2.23% |

According to Benda these phenomena have two important consequences. Firstly, although the number of the newcomers declined, the number of people who wanted to move to the capital city did not reduce as significantly as the data showed. Because of the lack of housing possibilities, the newcomers did not get permanent, but only temporary staying possibilities. They usually lived in workers' hostels (Horváth 2012) or had activated their kinship network or other kind of social capital to find housing possibilities in Budapest. Secondly, people who had come from the countryside to Budapest must have moved to the suburban settlements of Budapest (Berkovits 1978). The sociological profile of the incomers did not change too much. They were usually young and men from those agricultural regions where there were no significant industrial investments, with a huge amount of excess population (Benda 2004). Consequently, although the state tried to

1 Between 1900 and 1920 Budapest had 468,000 newcomers (while its natural increase was 100,000 inhabitants) and its agglomeration towns had 235,000 newcomers (while its natural increase was 60,000 inhabitants).

2 The percentage of the labourers employed in the industry of Budapest in 1938 was 51.3%, in 1955 it was 44.1% and in 1969 it was 35.67% (Benda 2004).

influence the processes of movement and migration, some of the trends had continued since the Horthy era and the rural incomers had always been present in the life of Budapest.

The investigation of post socialist rural migration to Budapest is much more challenging than that of earlier periods. On the one hand, there are no overviews of the kind that have already been written by scholars for the earlier eras (Thirring G. 1891, Thirring L. 1935, Benda 2004). On the other hand, urbanisation processes were getting more complex and confusing. Because of the different kinds of urbanisation and suburbanisation processes it was very hard to statistically distinguish completely contradictory phenomena. Firstly, we can talk about the continuous suburban expansion of the major cities that follow the western suburban trends, where urban middle class families leave cities and move to the surrounding areas seeking better housing conditions (Timár–Váradi 2001, Csanádi–Csizmady 2002, Csurgó 2013). A second phenomenon sees people leaving cities because they cannot afford to live there causing a continuous migration process from cities to rural areas (Ladányi–Szelényi 2005, Timár–Váradi 2001). To better understand these contradictory tendencies Ladányi and Szelényi came up with the concept of post-socialist suburbanisation, claiming that the suburbanisation of the middle classes and the exclusion of the poor from urban places are taking place simultaneously in the post-socialist Hungarian urban spaces (especially in the case of Budapest) (Ladányi–Szelényi 2005). It is important to emphasise that the exclusion of poor people from urban spaces into rural ones is a cyclical movement. According to the latest research, temporary inhabitants are still present in the spaces of Budapest although those housing institutions (e.g. social housing, workers' hostels) that would have served their housing needs have disappeared after the transition. Because of the lack of formal housing possibilities newcomers from the countryside attempt to find housing through informal ways, activating their kinship networks.

It is therefore claimed that the spaces where rural incomers are concentrated have some characteristics, which are worthy of investigation through the point of view of spatial inequalities. In the following section of my paper I attempt to present a neighbourhood of Budapest where these phenomena are still present at the moment.

THE MICRO LEVEL: RURAL POVERTY IN BUDAPEST IN THE CASE OF THE 'HŐS UTCA' NEIGHBOURHOOD

The final section of this paper is based on the first steps of an ethnographic study³ of the small housing estate between the numbers 15/a and 15/b on Hős Street in Kőbánya (the 10th district in Budapest). This section aims to present through a local and empirical example⁴ the function and concentration of rural poverty in a large city and inspire new approaches and perspectives on how to search spatial inequality from the rural point of view in the case of Budapest.

3 My study is strongly connected to the research of the NGO 'Kontúr' and the College for Advanced Studies 'Angelusz Róbert' of ELTE University. The main goal of the College and the Association was the sociodemographic survey of the building blocks at 15/a and 15/b on Hős Street in Kőbánya, with a special emphasis on the study of family relations and the use of space among the residents. One of the goals of the study was to investigate the situation of those who live in the residential estate, and help in the long-term and effective intervention of the NGO's community development project. Our research group followed up the survey with more in-depth interviews conducted in the neighborhood (Szeitl–Vigvári 2016).

4 The empirical data that my paper relies on is based on interviews and participatory observation. The data collection was conducted between July 2015 and May 2016. Additionally, I have gained experiences through voluntary works as well, mainly by organising events and activities for the children of the residential estate.

About the 'Hős utca' neighbourhood

The 'Hős utca' neighbourhood is situated on the outskirts of Budapest, yet close to main transport nodes. The biggest railway and bus stations of Budapest are easy to reach, and the city centre is no more than half an hour away. The blocks are hidden among non-residential areas between railway lines, storages and barracks – they are practically invisible to people. According to the latest Census the neighbourhood officially has 635 inhabitants living in 280 households. The age structure of the area is young⁵ compared with the Hungarian average.

The housing estate of 'Hős utca' consists of two blocks with a total of 317 flats. The size of a flat is 27 square meters, consisting of one room and one kitchen. Every two flats share a toilet, while the residents have installed showering possibilities in every flat. The ownership structure of the blocks is varied: 150 flats out of 317 are owned by private individuals, and 167 are owned by the municipality. Nevertheless, only 101 out of 167 are let out as social housing, the others are boarded up and not let out. The pattern of flat use is diverse. Some of the private flats are let out to those families who could not get social housing from the municipality. Private flats are often rented as usury or for a higher price than their value. Since the medium term intention of the local municipality was to demolish the blocks they have let out fewer and fewer apartments, leaving those who do not have any housing possibilities to break into and occupy some of these flats illegally.

The 'Hős utca' neighbourhood is one of the most stigmatised spaces of Budapest. The blocks and their inhabitants have always been part of media reports representing it as a dangerous and 'no-go area' (Wacquant 2013). The stigmatisation of this area can be easily experienced through the hardships of using services (for example service engineers do not come here if they notice the address of the client), going to a job interview (people do not get jobs when employers realise that the prospective employee lives in the Hős street), or trying to arrange official matters at the city council.

The neighbourhood can be characterised through the duality of being closed in as opposed to openness. On the one hand, people are isolated and are excluded from the many aspects of life: they live segregated far from the formal institutions and other residential areas. On the other hand, the area is well integrated into the city space having lots of social connections to 'outside areas'. The neighbourhood attracts several informal activities (drug distribution and informal businesses), which are operated through the extended networks of the residents. Beyond the criminal aspects, the 'openness' of the neighbourhood is caused by helpers and activists whose presence has influenced the life of the neighbourhood.⁶

In order to be able to accurately investigate the notion of space, it is important to emphasise the social and historical boundedness of the neighbourhood. Using the social and local history to investigate space, we can understand the function this place has in the rural-urban migration process.

5 The distribution of the age categories in the case of the 'Hős utca' neighbourhood: 0–17: 183 persons 18–39: 223 persons 40–59: 162 persons 60+: 67 persons. Source: Hungarian Statistical Office (KSH): Census of 2011

6 The Baptist and Calvinist Church engage in various activities (for example, collecting used syringe needles or organising camps for children). The NGO 'Kontúr' has been carrying out community development work since 2013 while the 'A város mindenkié' (The City is for All) organisation started to help people with housing advocacy in 2016.

The (historical) role of the space: the 'Hős utca' neighbourhood in rural-urban inequalities

The blocks of Hős utca were built at the same time, through the same programme as the well-known and already demolished blocks of Illatos út 5. called 'Dzsumbuj' (Juhász 1976, Ambrus 1985, Kecskés 2005). These four storey, highly crowded blocks were built in 1936 at the fringe of Budapest under the social housing policy of the Horthy era (Gyáni 1992, Umbrai 2008). My hypothesis is that due to their location and social characteristics, these blocks were erected with the aim to mitigate the housing crisis of 1936, and have functioned as a fringe where the migrating, mainly rural poor, found temporary or permanent housing solutions. The primary reason behind the choice of the building area was the low land price of the site, itself guaranteeing its peripheral location.

Characteristically, these buildings were not associated with any factories, such as in a traditional working class district, but they stood alone on no-man's land. This fact underlined that the inhabitants were predominantly employed on short-term contracts or lived on benefits, and were not part of the organised proletariat. The majority of the inhabitants were employed in unskilled jobs and did not belong to the caste of skilled workers: they were generally born to families with an agrarian background and were first generation urban proletariats for whom these housing estates meant the first stop towards an urban life (Gyáni 1992). My hypothesis is that the social composition and function of the estates did not change considerably since then. It can be asked, nevertheless, what was the function of these blocks under subsequent political regimes and economic cycles (state socialism, post-socialism) in terms of the labour division, and housing between the capital city and the rural areas. How did the social composition of the estates change? To what extent did it increase the opportunities for spatial mobility of the migrant rural workers in the different eras? What was the function of these spaces within the life of the capital? The historical and sociological research of these spaces can contribute to the understanding of the structural tensions between urban and rural spaces, and provide us with qualitative interpretations of macro-social processes.

However, it must be asked, what kinds of urban spaces can be spoken about in these neighbourhoods? In order for us to better understand the social status of the Hős Street residential estate, we need to define several characteristics of the estate's spatiality. Although the Hős Street estate in geographical terms can be clearly considered an urban, moreover, a metropolitan, spatial structure, I argue that we are facing a non-traditional urban space. Ladányi János (2004) in his research points out that the Hős Street as an encased estate functions as a basis for those poor rural people who have aspirations for a life in Budapest. Ladányi (2004) argues that similar spaces to Hős Street are becoming the arenas of the rural poor, who are in a competition for post-industrial social-goods, while being continuously displaced from post-socialist cities. According to him the economic and social spaces in these fringe-zones provide the essential role of mediators between rural and metropolitan migration. Therefore, the small housing estate on Hős Street is an important resource in terms of housing for those rural dwellers, who, as a result of spatial inequalities, see their opportunities in moving to the capital there (Ladányi 2004).

My own field experience largely supports the hypothesis of Ladányi János. The spatial position of Hős Street, although relatively good from the point of view of transportation, in terms of the peripheral positioning

of the residential buildings, which do not belong to a residential area, the street does not fit into the structure of the capital city and the district. The residential buildings are abandoned industrial buildings and military installations, lined with rail tracks, far from urban institutions. The residents are generally arriving from one of the city's segregated neighbourhoods or from rural areas and their composition as a group is rapidly fluctuating. *'I feel lucky just because there are many girls with rural origins who would like to come to Budapest, try a better life without any educational or financial background. I didn't come to a totally alien space because I have kinships here. If I have some problem I just run down the stairs and I can solve it. I am lucky from this point of view; if I have any kind of problem I just shout and then my brother comes and he acts and helps me.'*

Listening to the life stories of the residents the themes of the rural past and attachments appear almost without exception, held together by threads of kinship. It is questionable, whether this 'urban terra incognita', which ensures rather inhumane housing conditions for those drifting between the resource-poor rural and the resourceful urban spaces, can be seen as an urban space in its traditional sense.

The characteristics of the rural-urban transitory space in the case of 'Hős utca'

As I have noted, the 'Hős utca' neighbourhood has always served a special purpose in helping migration from the countryside to Budapest. 'Hős utca' neighbourhood as a transitory space has its own spatial character and institutions, which represent the rural-urban spatial relations and expose the macro structural pressures existent at the local level. Through my empirical results I present those social phenomena which characterise these moving processes and present (1) the hierarchical relationship between rural and urban spaces from the housing point of view (2) the kinship institutions which mediate between 'rural' and 'urban' spaces and (3) the political and ethnical consequence of this moving process.

1. There is a large fluctuation between the dwellers of the two residential buildings. The ownership structure of the flats lends itself to people easily changing their apartments according to their situation on the labour market. Because of the transitional situation of the blocks' [il]legality, flat letting (flat-usury, illegal flat-occupation or cheap flat buying possibilities) can provide a temporary solution for those who come from the countryside to the capital city to get jobs and find better living conditions than in their home region. Therefore, this neighbourhood practically serves as a transitory housing possibility for those people who attempt to join the labour market of Budapest from the resource-poor areas. This space can function as a 'springboard' for those who are able to integrate deeper into the labour market, however, it can easily push those people, who become useless for the same market, back to the rural areas. In this latter case the area functions as a 'sluice', which can easily dispose of the drift of the population.

2. These kinds of neighbourhoods are based on transitions and changes. Since there is a big fluctuation of the inhabitants,⁷ people cannot form community roles for themselves, which prevents any sort of community empowerment or intervention. Migration and moving processes are strongly connected to kinship networks, which determine the relationships in the community. Because of the transitional state of the people, they

⁷ According to research by the Angelusz Róbert College for Advanced Studies 50% of the inhabitants moved here in the last 5 years (Szeitl-Vigvári 2016).

are only weakly integrated into the formal institutions. Since people often live temporarily or informally in a flat they do not have documents to access local services (healthcare, welfare systems or education for their children).

Dwellers are usually not categorised according to their ethnicity, rather they are differentiated according to the length of time they have spent living in the neighbourhood. People, therefore, are divided into such categories as 'natives', which is strongly connected to an urban identity (people, who have been living there for 10–20 years) and 'immigrants', which are usually strongly connected to a rural identity (people, who have been living there for less than 10 years). Natives can be Roma as well, while immigrants can be Hungarian of course, but ethnicity does not matter a lot in this case. On the other hand, the community is fragmented by the kinship networks, which often present the geographical origins of a family because of the chain migration processes (e.g. the category of 'Dombrád' people in the neighbourhood which means dwellers and families who came from Dombrád (a village of Szabolcs-Szatmár Region) to the Hős utca in the last few years through their kinship networks).

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a new aspect of investigating spatial inequalities and rural poverty in today's Hungary. The aim of this study was to suggest a new methodological approach, which based on the relational concept of rural-urban division can provide a better understanding of the Eastern European character of spatial inequalities. Through the conceptualisation of 'rural poverty' it was desired to capture the nature of the spatial processes in Hungary. The historical investigation of my paper demonstrated the importance of long-term trends in spatial inequalities showing those structural effects that influence it. The analysis of the lives of poor Budapest dwellers of rural origins can contribute to the better understanding of the urban spatial exclusion and help to organise our knowledge about the Hungarian and Eastern European spatial process as well.

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