

THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE EXAMPLE OF KÖRÖSFŐ (ROMANIA)

Krisztián Ritter¹, Tímea Halmosi², László Péli³

associate professor^{1,3}, lecturer²

Szent István University, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences^{1,2,3}
ritter.krisztian@szie.hu¹, halmosi.timea@szie.hu², peli.laszlo@szie.hu³

Abstract

The role of the endogenous resources has been emphasized since a long time by the literature of territorial and rural development. In parallel the role of agriculture in local employment has decreased significantly for the last few decades. The Institute for Regional Economics and Rural Development (IRERD) of the Szent István University Gödöllő regularly makes researches in traditionally farming rural villages to analyze the possible role of agriculture besides such tendencies in local development strategies. The primer sector has had a big importance for centuries in the life of Körösfő (Izvoru Crişului) village located near to Bánffyhunyard (Huedin). At the same time, the general tendencies, growing importance of local handwork industry and the decreasing farming opportunities have affected the settlement's local economy as well. During a summer research camp in 2017 the role of agriculture as an endogenous competitive factor in long time local development was analyzed in this settlement by a primary research organized by the IRERD. According to the results, the agriculture has lost its previous significant role in the life of Körösfő caused by the changing economy of the village (trade and handwork), the disadvantaged conditions, the unfavourable natural capabilities. Summing up the research, the sector could be the basis of creating local development strategy in Körösfő just in a very limited way.

Keywords: *agriculture, local development, rural development*

JEL classification: *Q19, R19*

LCC: *HB, HM, HQ*

Introduction

The increasing globalization of the economy, the intensifying territorial competition, and the importance of a more complex business environment creation are emphasizing the need to develop and implement local (economic) development strategy that builds on local, endogenous resources (see e.g. Áldorfai and Czabada, 2014; Áldorfai et al., 2015; Moseley, 2003; Tóth and Káposzta, 2014 among others). This can be interpreted particularly from a rural development point of view in accordance with regional and local development philosophy (see Káposzta, 2020 or Nagyné and Lendvay, 2018).

According to rural development experts these developments can be effective and successful if - while linking to regional and global networks (see Lowe et al., 1995), they give space to local participation and local initiatives (Cernea, 1992) - they are clearly based on the local (natural, economic, human, cultural) resources of the given area (see Kulcsár 2017, Nagyné, 2013 or Ploeg and Dijk 1995). Meanwhile, self-sustaining development will break away from the dependence of external aid in the long run and serve sustainable development (Murdoch, 1995). According to Kulcsár (2017) the importance of local activities and local actors as well as the integrated approach are decisive in addition to local resources.

An important element of the changing global economy and society the new role of “rural” - the strengthening, transformation, and the fulfilment of a new role, as the concept of the countryside has developed for a long time in developed countries to a completely new social and economic dimension. Through the objectives and actions of the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the EU attributes to the agriculture and the rurality a multifunctional role. According to the basic idea of multifunctionality, the income of the rural population is not only derived from primary function, food and industrial raw material production, but from fulfilling cultural and environmental tasks as well (Kopasz 2005).

In the European model, multifunctional agriculture and rural areas - besides food production - also perform ecological, environmental, societal, economic, social and cultural functions. These include the creation of the basic conditions of recreation and tourism; support for small and medium-sized enterprises; nurturing rural communities; the maintenance of landscape and cultural heritage; cultivating traditions, agri-environment protection, etc. (Madarász, 2004). Naturally it is still about a competitive agriculture that adapts to the world market and globalization to provide farmers with a decent standard of living and stable income. Among the features are highlighted food products, their gastronomic events and a close relationship with tourism (see e.g. Bakos and Topa, 2016; Nagy et al., 2012). The role of tourism is also accentuated by the literature in rural areas (see e.g. Urbánné et al., 2017 or Némedi et al., 2016).

At the same time the trends that derives from the changing agriculture as the former backbone of rural economy cannot be ignored. After the change of regime in the Eastern European countries the land use and ownership in agriculture changed radically, and the organizational structure and operating structure of the farms also changed. Parallel to changes the sector's role in the national economy (GDP) and particular in employment significantly decreased. The latter is particularly problematic for small rural villages (see Oláh and Urbánné, 2016 or Tóth and Oláh, 2019).

These changes are, to a large extent, a general tendency appearing in the EU and in the developed countries, but because of the change in spatial structure and the spatial nature of the economy they affect different areas in different ways. Based on the above mentioned, the question arises that in an originally agricultural community after a shift to craftsmanship and trade what kind of role agriculture has and what position does it fulfil in local development strategies.

Material and method

The Institute of Regional Economics and Rural Development of Szent István University (SZIU) annually organizes village research camps targeting settlements characterized by special situation from rural development point of view. In the summer of 2017 the camp was placed at the municipality of Körösfő (Körösfő, Kalotánádas, Sárvasár, Nyárszó - see Figure 1) in Transylvania, located in Kalotaszeg region, near Bánffyhunyard. The research was attended by lecturers, students and PhD students of SZIU, Török Ignác High School of Gödöllő and the University of Kolozsvár.



Figure 1. Location of Körösfő municipality

Notes: Körösfő village itself Kalotaszék, Sárvasár and Nyárszó villages, as the part of Körösfő municipality

Source: www.varak.hu

During the village camp a questionnaire-based primary research based on supplementary, structured in-depth interviews was conducted aimed specifically at the role of agriculture. The population's general "agricultural exposure" was tried to map with thematic questions of the questionnaire, while the opinion and view of major agricultural entrepreneurs, primary producers, farmers and the settlement leaders and other key personnel - which were taken into focus during the preliminary examinations and the questionnaire research - were collected through deep interviews. During the questionnaire nearly half of households were interviewed with directed sampling, while the selecting of the interviewees were targeted.

For a long time, agriculture has played an important role in the lives of the inhabitants of Körösfő and its connected settlements. However the changes noted above - the transformation and typical agricultural tendencies did not leave the village untouched. The original goal of the research and this article is to explore the role of farming in the life of the village, the opportunities that can be attached to the longer-term developments and the differences in the agricultural economy with regard to the four villages forming the municipality. The most important results of primary research (questionnaires and interviews) are presented below.

Research Results

The agricultural characteristics of Körösfő village are not ideal. This applies in particular to the quality of soils, the situation in the other villages of the municipality is somewhat more favourable. Nevertheless in the previous centuries the farming was the determinant of the local economy. According to Sebestyén (1998) farming was almost unchanged for centuries, and the community was completely self-sufficient. In the XVIII-XIXth century, the size of the cultivated lands and grasslands were increased steadily, while in the second half of the XIXth century peasant farming was modernized. At the beginning of the XVIIIth century locals also

cultivated vineyards, but fruit production was moderate in Kalotaszeg region. In addition, the people from Körösfő were also famous for their livestock breeding. The cattle were the most valuable animal of the serf farm (also because of its tensile force), pig - the favorite livestock of the Kalotaszeg villages - was important for nutrition, sheep farming was popular because of the wool's attractiveness in markets. The number of horses was also relatively high in Körösfő (Sebestyén, 2007). Buffalo was appeared in the second half of the XIXth century, which was a good workforce and brought prosperity to milk production. The area soon became a buffalo filled countryside. Animals were also taken regularly by the people of Körösfő to fairs: Kolozsvár, Nagyvárad, Bánffyhunad and even the national cattle markets (Péntek, 2014). In the traditional society, forest was an important factor in peasant farming. In the XVII-XVIIIth century, the border Körösfő was also surrounded by large forests, but these were denuded in the XIX-XXth century, their memories are preserved only by place names (Sebestyén, 2007).

Significant change in agricultural employment was caused by the making of tailored goods and the start of craftsmanship and wood carving in the end of the XIXth century. Thanks to poor conditions, the hard, but unprofitable farming, many people turned to the more profitable handicrafts and the related trade, which was specifically attributed to Körösfő village. The role of agriculture in other villages has been changed much more gradually and to a lesser extent, which is still noticeable in current conditions. In the change of agricultural employment, the construction and the characteristics of the socialist economy also set made affects. Due to the technical development, the productivity gains brought by the cooperatives, in Kalotaszeg region the proportion of people employed in agriculture in total employment significantly reduced. The labour force left out of agriculture did not always leave the villages of Kalotaszeg because industrial production had been planted or the existing units were developed, thus the role of commuting increased (Keszi, 1977).

According to the interviews, besides the changes affecting Kalotaszeg, the brake up of the socialist cooperatives further reduced the agricultural community of the examined village. After the brake up of the local cooperatives, in Körösfő locals insisted to maintain plant production for couple of years, but they gradually abandoned it because of the harsh conditions and the "large-scale shepherding" that became characteristic of the time. By the second decade of the 2000s, the livestock farm in Körösfő also fell considerably, and it is estimated that around 20-25 households still keep livestock. Cows and buffalo can be realized only in 4-5 households (only 20-30 animals compared to the earlier 800 number), and pigs have almost disappeared. Shepherding - which although significant in number (about 5-6000 animals, without lambs) - means livelihood only for a handful of local farmers. The workforce employed in sheep production is predominantly not locals but is typically from Moldavia or Romania.

In case of the other three settlements, agriculture is more present in the lives of households, serving commercial production and also self-sufficiency. Domestic or horticultural production can be identified almost everywhere, and while livestock farming is still declining, pigs, rabbits and mainly poultry are still in many places. Cattle breeding and sheep breeding are quite notable in these villages, the number of cattle is the largest in Nádas. In addition, there are about 500 goats in Nyárszó, which are not typical of the area. Bigger orchards (e.g apples) have been in Nyárszó too, but since it was owned by the council and it did not deal maintained it, nature reoccupied the area, the production ceased.

There is also a difference in terms of cooperation between Körösfő and the other three settlements. While there is no co-operation in Körösfő, and there is always "something to quarrel", in the other three community landowners, association (Sárvársar, Nyárszó) or the church community (Nyárszó) helps to work on common interests, common cultivation, very

typical leasing for local livestock farmers. It is also characteristic of local land (this is typical in Romania generally) that ownership rights are not settled or completely clarified by documentation due to the nature of privatization, the everyday administration and the deficiencies of the administration (that is why it is possible to be private, council and ecclesiastical property in the settlement at the same time). In the questionnaire households were asked about the available land (own and rented), the land cultivation method, the agricultural products they produce, the number of animals they kept, how and where they were sold / used, and how many family members are involved in farming. Based on the survey of about 230 households who answered the questionnaire and the results of the interviews, the following findings can be made.

The first important fact to be mentioned based on the experience of the primary research, is that there can be significant differences in the case of the four settlements forming the municipality when examining the role of agriculture. While in Körösfő agriculture has lost much of its former significance and not only as a main source of living, but also by complementary activities due to the weaker conditions and the related handicraft industry and commerce, in the other three villages agriculture is much more pronounced. According to the interviews, in the order of agricultural exposure, Nádas leads, followed by Nyárszó and Sárvásár, till Körösfő characterized by “demolished peasantry” closes the line. Nevertheless, in the latter, many traces of traditional village life can be discovered in various places, as stables and barns are still in a number of courtyards. When exploring the state of agriculture, we first inquired about its base, that is, the existence of land during the questionnaire. As a basic approach we asked about the size of the land owned. According to the results (Figure 2), one-fifth of the respondents do not have any cultivable land (hence no kitchen garden).

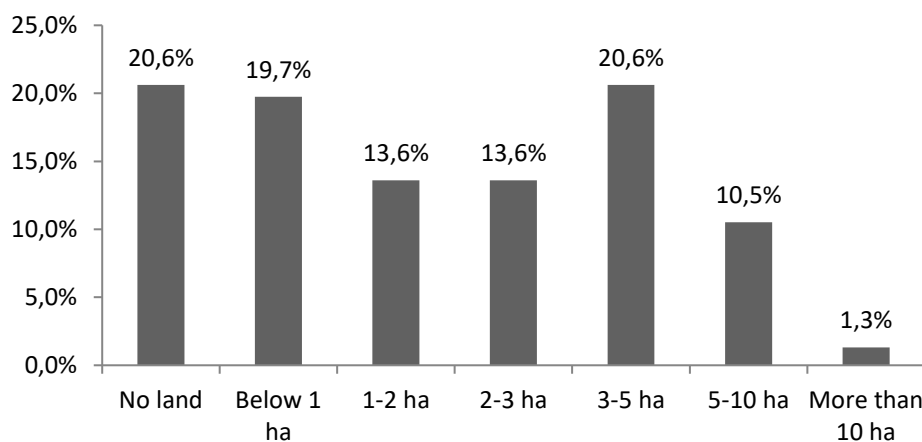


Figure 1. Share (%) of the asked households by the size (ha) of the owned land

Source: Own research and edition, 2020

Nearly one fifth of respondents have an area below 1 hectare, while one quarter have land between 1 and 3 hectares. Ownership over 10 hectares is very rare, and this category was rated by slightly more than 1% of households surveyed. In the case of the four villages, the proportion of those who lacked in land (36%) was the highest in the case of the four villages, while the same ratio was the smallest in Nádas, where only 5% indicated that it had no land (14 and 15% was the value in Nyárszó and Sárvásár). In the case of Nádas, the proportion of those with more than 5 hectares (almost 21%) was the highest.

The investigation also considered the additional areas to be leased to the households for cultivating. Based on the results only 4% of the respondents' households are renting, 70% of them occupy 1 and 5 hectares, while 30% rent more land than 5 hectares. In particular, larger

land leases are linked to livestock farmers and grazing (shepherding). Within the declining agriculture, the weight of animal husbandry in Körösfő is shown that most of the people who have rented areas are living there, while the renter of the largest land is located in Nádas.

The property is also characterized because on the one hand in less valuable land only grazing is a reasonable use, and on the other for grazing it is difficult to maintain another type of cultivation - because of the damage caused by animals (more people reported that it was easier to lease the land for the livestock holders than “litigating” with them).

In the following, we tried to find out who has their own land or rent area, how they cultivate it by themselves or by others (Figure 3). Based on the results, only slightly more than half of the households owning land have their own land, most of which (44.8%) are carried out as an ancillary activity within the household and are not reported as core activities.

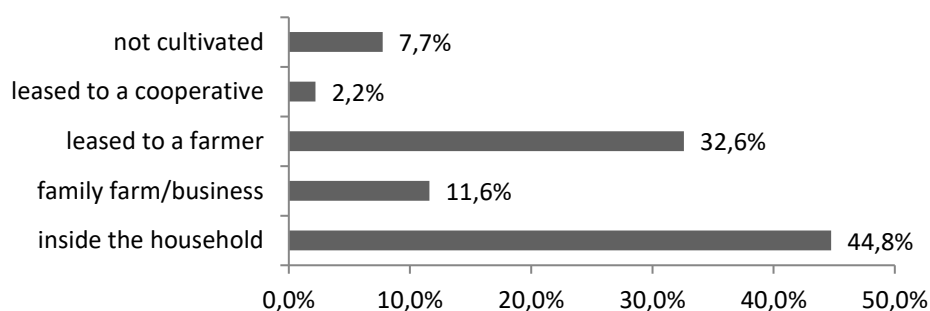


Figure 2. Share of the owned land by the way of cultivation (%)

Source: Own research and edition, 2020

The proportion of those responding households who are farming in the family economy or in the form of a business as a primary activity is a bit more than 11%. More than one third of households lease their land, and nearly 8% of their land is not used either for their own purpose or for rent.

In the following we asked about the products (including plant and animal products) that are typically produced in settlements. This question has been asked for every household, because for example, to keep animals it is not necessary to own land. Almost 40% of the households surveyed do not produce any plant products (Figure 4).

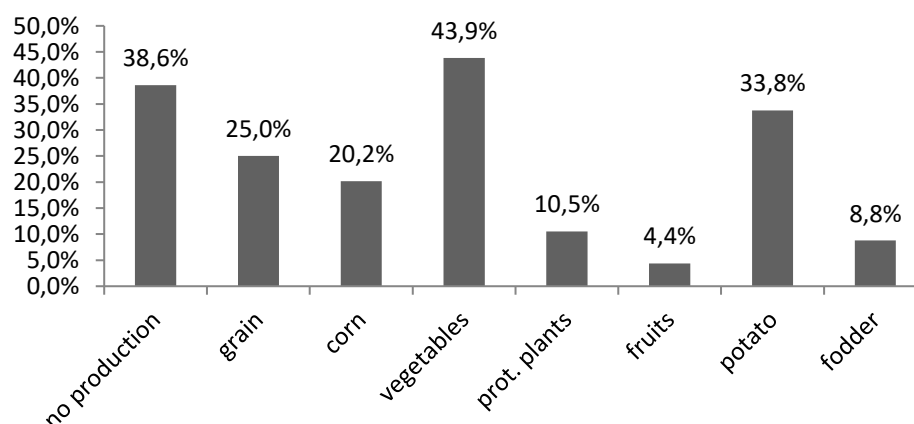


Figure 3. The share (%) of the most typical products produced by the asked households

Note: The three most important products could be indicated

Source: Own research and edition, 2020

Results also shows how much traditional self-sufficiency has diminished. In this case however, the differences between the four surveyed settlements can be shown, as 72.7% of households those who did not produce crops were from Körösfő. This ratio for Sárvásár was 12.5%, for Nádas 9.1% (the main reason for abandoning farming was aging), and 5.7% for Nyárszó. Among the respondents, the most important crops were the different vegetables, with which potato could be also highlighted.

On the one hand these crops are playing an important role in self-sufficiency and on the other they are important from trading aspects. In the case of those with a larger area, grain and corn are already present (one quarter or one fifth of households), and often due to animal husbandry, protein and feed species are also present in nearly 10-10%. Cultivation of fruits was indicated by slightly more than 4% of the respondents.

In relation to animal husbandry, it can be stated that most of the households surveyed (almost 37%) are not doing this activity today (Figure 5). Where animals are still kept, the most commonly occurring is poultry (which is found in almost every second household) or pig (almost every third houses). The formerly famous cattle and buffalo holdings have declined considerably (the latter is seen only at a single owner in Körösfő), and horses and sheep are less typical at the households than before.

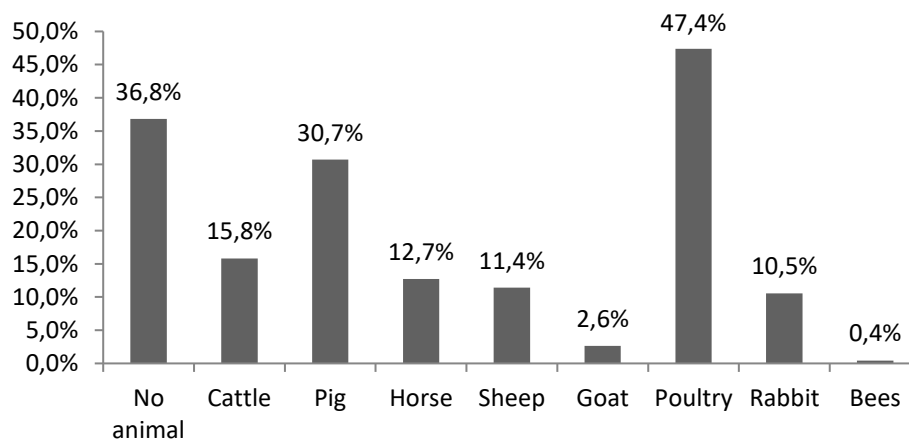


Figure 4. The share of the asked households by kept animals (%)

Source: Own research and edition, 2020

The number of animals kept in the case of cattle but especially in the case of sheep may not necessarily be reduced (indeed even occasionally increased), but there is a concentration on their keeping. This means that people are generally abandoned maintaining livestock, but there is concentration in some stockpiles and areas owned by some entrepreneurs and businesses.

As regards livestock farming, it is also possible to detect a significant decrease in the agricultural exposure of Körösfő as in crop production. Of the households that do not hold animals 66.7% are from there. The ratio is 11.7% in the case of Nádas, 10.7% in Sárvásár, 9.5% in the case of Nyárszó.

During the research, we also examined how the produced products are utilized. Are they fully producing for self-sufficiency or for selling, and if they are sold, what proportion of production is affected? Based on the responses of the households producing the product, there are no families that would fully produce for sale (Figure 6).

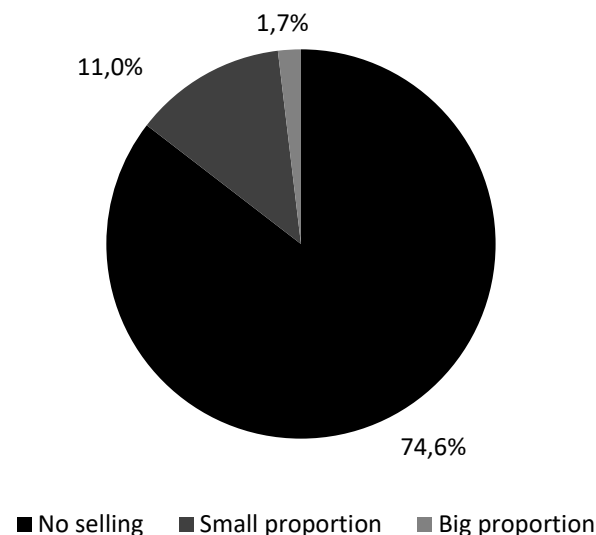


Figure 5. The share of the asked households by the quantity of sold products (%)

Source: Own research and edition, 2020

According to the responses, self-sufficiency is the most important motivation to continue farming, as more than three quarter of producing households do not sell. Of the 11% of the households, which was mainly from Nyárszó and Nádás, sell the smaller proportion of their produced goods, while only 1,7% of the farmers who sell most of their products.

We were also curious that those who deal with sales who are they typically selling to and where. In the largest proportion the market of Bánffyhunyard was highlighted (Figure 7) where 40% of the farmers takes their products.

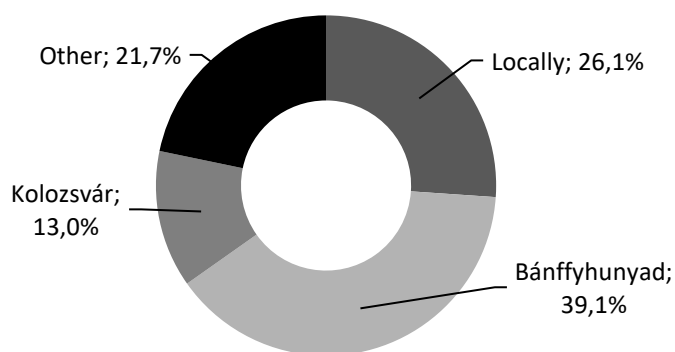


Figure 6. The share of the asked and trading households by the place of selling (%)

Source: Own research and edition, 2020

The role of direct sales from the house is also significant, which was reported by a quarter of respondents. The role of Kolozsvár can be also mentioned, but this is less significant due to its distance, and 13% of the sellers attend there regularly. In previous cases sales are specifically for local retail purposes. In the case of one fifth of producers (21.7%), however, other forms of sales are selling to wholesalers, purchasers and larger companies. This is particularly true for those who grow cereal and arable crops as well as for larger livestock holders.

Traditional rural farms have produced a significant, sometimes full amount of their food needs. This traditional self-sufficiency has however transformed due to the socio-economic changes

affecting the countryside. For this reason, in our research we have also examined the households who produce agricultural products that what amount of their own food consumption can they provide.

Based on the answers (Figure 8) we can conclude that traditional self-sufficiency is not typical of the examined village either. Only 11% of production-related families indicated that their own products completely cover their own consumption. These families are typically found in Nádás and can be characterized both by plant production and animal husbandry.

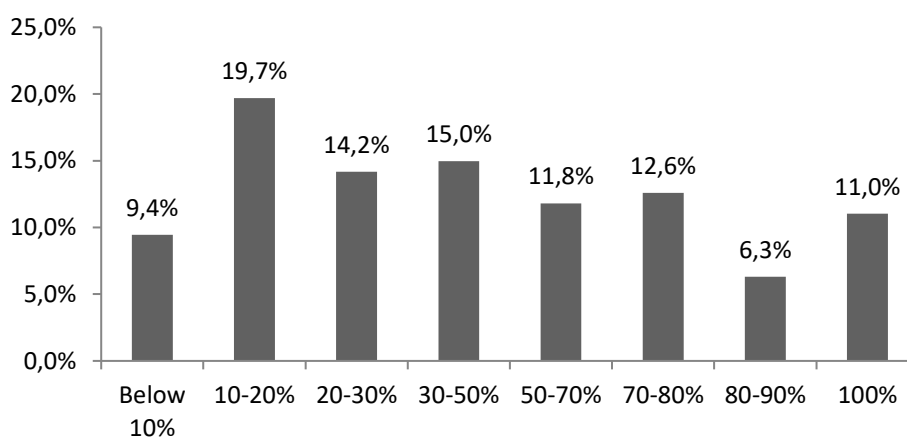


Figure 7. Share of the asked and farming households by the rate of self-sufficiency (%)
 Source: Own research and edition, 2020

Nearly one-tenth of the producers can cover less than 10% of their own food needs. The 10-50% of the consumption can be covered in case of around the half of the respondents, while one-third of them can satisfy the 50-90% of their needs. The weight of agriculture is also represented by the number of family and household members involved in agricultural activities. The number of family members involved can be related to many factors, such as the nature, size, mechanization of the activity, etc. At the same time, the number of involved people shows the extent to which agriculture affects the life of a settlement, region, and household. For this reason, we investigated how many members are involved in farming in households (Figure 9).

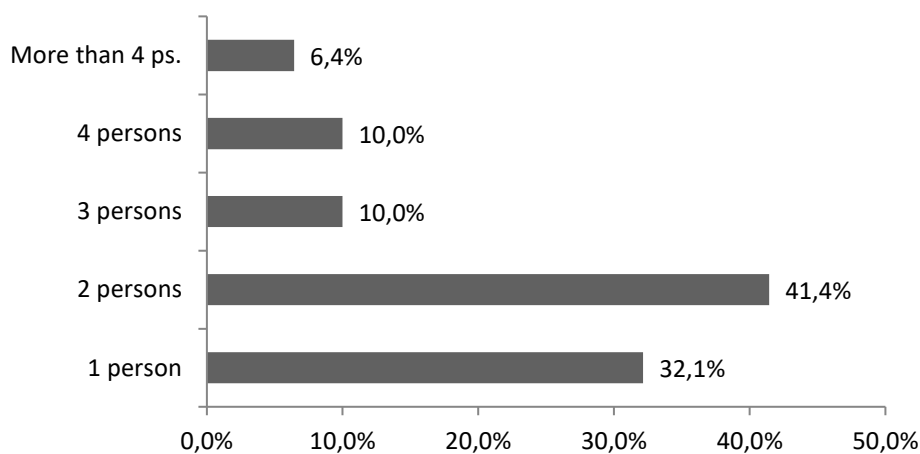


Figure 8. Share of the asked and farming households by the number of family-members involved in farming (%)
 Source: Own research and edition, 2020

The largest proportion (41.4%) is the regular occupation of the two members of the affected households. In one third of the cases, one person in the family carries out agricultural activities, while 10 to 10% three or four people are engaged in agricultural work. With more than 4 family members engaged were selected by just over 6% of the respondents.

Summary

This summary is based on the results of the questionnaires, the interviews conducted with the main actors, the opinion of the population and the observations made during the research. Summing up the research, the decline of agriculture is outlined in recent decades, but this does not equally affect the local community which was surveyed.

A general tendency is shown in rural and village researches that the decreasing agricultural production is basically typical for the older generation, while the young people are already turning away from agriculture and are not pursuing farming because of other opportunities and further education. This has been a characteristic in Körösfő for decades, with the exception that not only agriculture but also further education have been abandoned as a result of craftsmanship. Based on the interviews - due to the narrowing of the possibilities of the local craft industry - further education has become the main feature of young people in recent years. Nevertheless it can finally be stated that in Körösfő agriculture is extremely decreased and its role in self-sufficiency and full-time function is limited.

However it should be pointed out that farming is even more pronounced in the other three settlements, with almost every household carrying out some kind of backyard activity and some degree of self-sufficiency. In addition, commercial production and sales are also better identified. According to the interviews, the “attitudes” of the younger generation are also more positive, on the one hand, they are involved in farming, on the other some of them expressly plan to continue this activity later, even in full-time.

Regarding the role of agriculture in the local strategy, in Körösfő it can only be mentioned - in present circumstances - as a minor role. This means that in this settlement only a few households or families can have a long-term strategy or livelihood, and this also covers practically animal husbandry. Linking with tourism - as explained below - is also possible there, but this is relatively limited building only on the circumstances of Körösfő, compared to the other settlements.

In the other three villages farming can provide an alternative or produce direct incomes in the long run for a much broader population and for the overall the community. Farming means an alternative regarding self-sufficiency or for side business, direct income can be obtained with full-time farming. The environmental conditions and circumstances are more favorable, the limitations of other possibilities (notably the handicraft industry) have caused agricultural traditions to survive, and agriculture is also a “common surface” for the community. There are a number of potential in agriculture which could create opportunity (and jobs) for the whole community like the combination with tourism, diversification and food processing. Rural accommodation, local - good quality and special - foods (e.g. milk, sheep and goat cheese, meat products, organic vegetables and fruits etc.), the quality of environment, the cultural heritage and the local crafts industry are all the basis for this. In Nyárszó such an initiative has already been found.

To sum up there is a clear separation between the four settlements on the basis of the weight, current and future role of agriculture. The reasons for this can be clearly traced back to the

environmental conditions, the formation and flourishing of the crafts industry in Körösfő, and the question of the transmission of the agricultural traditions. At the same time by developing an appropriate level of cooperation, exploiting the local industry, agriculture and tourism opportunities, it would be possible to develop a complex development strategy that would bring prosperity for the whole municipality.

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