

REGIONAL AND TOWN DEVELOPMENT IN HODMEZOVASARHELY FROM THE ASPECT OF CITTASLOW

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Abstract

While examining the future and development of a settlement it is necessary to consider the roles of both the natural and social factors. They are basic needs for its survival and fate which are in a continuous interaction with each other, changes in one factor are followed by changes in the other, thus complementing and postulating each others. Regarding the future of Hodmezovasarhely the idea of the so-called 'livable city' is getting more and more important role.

In my paper I am aiming to show the concepts of Hodmezovasarhely to become a 'livable city' and to improve the safe transport.

Keywords: development, Cittaslow, Hodmezovasarhely.

INTRODUCTION

Regarding the future of town Hodmezovasarhely it is worth considering its location, in the socio-economic space of the Southern Hungarian Plain, what role a town can fulfill (for a functional analysis of Hodmezovasarhely, see Kis, 2008a) which is referred by the public as the second largest town after Budapest because of its widespread world of farmsteads; it is a town with county rights having a particular position in Csongrad county. Regarding its spatial position, another interesting fact is that it is only 25 kms away from Szeged which is not only a regional centre but also a city with county rights. The two towns have always been competing with each other which can be clearly read in historical descriptions, everyday anecdotes and literary works, too.

Changes in the relationship between Szeged and Hodmezovasarhely can be observed mostly in migration and commuting of the population of the two towns. Their roles in the Southern Plain region and their relationship can be determinant factors not only in their development but also at a regional level. (Gal, Veba, 2009). One of the most significant factors is the improvement of the traffic between the two towns which is supported by the large number of commuters from both directions. As a result, the safe public transport for a reasonable price and reduction of the vehicular traffic are important factors for the population commuting between the two towns.

Regarding the future of Hodmezovasarhely the idea of the so-called 'livable city' is getting more and more important role. According to the older generation of Hodmezovasarhely, these two towns have the strongest

influences in the Southern Plain region: the busy and lively Szeged and the quiet Hodmezovasarhely giving peace for creation. In 2009 the Assembly of Hodmezovasarhely County Town decided to join the 'Cittaslow' movement – first in Hungary.

Hodmezovasarhely is located in the south-east of the Hungarian Plain, between the valley of the river Tisza and Bekes-Csanad-ridge.

According to regions, the meso-region of Lower-Tisza is located in the small region of Marosszög. (Beluszky, 1999; Koszegfalvi, Loydt, 2001) The area can be found in the north-west of the small region. Its average height above the sea level is 78-88 meters, it is an absolute flat land of flood area with a low average relative relief where there are smaller flood-free islands. The majority of landforms is of river-origin, formed from the alluvial deposits of the rivers Tisza and Maros. The mean annual temperature is 11.6 °C, the annual number of sunny hours is 2100.

The advantages and disadvantages coming from the geographical position of a settlement are called positional energy, according to Mendol, Tibor. Each settlement has an absolute and a relative position. (Beluszky, 1999; Koszegfalvi, Loydt, 2001) The above mentioned facts give the absolute position of the town, however, from the point of view of its development its relative position is much more important since conditions of its surroundings determine its future. (Kovacs, 2001.) One of the determinant factors of Hodmezovasarhely was the vicinity to Szeged mentioned in the Introduction, while the other one was the transformation of the geographical environment.

Before the regulations of the river Tisza there were 76 lakes around Hodmezovasarhely the largest of them was the former Hod-lake with its length of 16 kms and width of one km. After the regulation in 1862 the water world disappeared. The lakes in the town area slowly silted, then they were built in, nowadays their memories are kept in the names of town districts and street names. Today there are 10 districts in the town.

The area of certain parts of the town is improving by building new houses, their population is young, whereas in other parts the condition of the houses is worsening in parallel with the aging population there (for a fuller analysis of this topic, see Kis, 2008b).

Hodmezovasarhely was known for its wide-spread world of farmsteads during the last centuries. In the 1950s, due to collectivization parts of the population living on the farmsteads were located to farm-centers liquidating their properties (farmsteads). The number of population of the farm-centers and their future are two as important questions as the ones of the inner city area. How can the town ensure living for the future generation? What can it do to prevent migration from the town because of the narrow range of living conditions?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Plan of town-development of Hodmezovasarhely County Town says that „at the beginning of the 21st century political, socio-economic changes typical to both the wider and narrower regions, culture, natural environment, infrastructure, reorganization of employment and incomes together determine the measure and directions of development outline-able up to 2020. ”In addition, ‘the task of the Plan (i.e. Settlement Structure Plan, the Local Construction Regulations and Lay-out Plan) is to assure spatial-technical-ecological frames in order to realize and accomplish the objectives of the conception. Also, the task of the Plan is to reconcile the public and private interests in connection with the real estates in the area of the town.” (Long-term Town-development Conception of the City Council of Hodmezovasarhely County Town) It can be read there that the conception should be revised in 10-15 years and it should be complied in a flexible way with the changing interests of the population. It considers important to create the conditions for the human environment and for sustainable development. Finally, all of them should be realized in respect to the spiritual and environmental traditions of the settlement.

The „Long-term Town-development Conception” of Hodmezovasarhely also refers to the Leipzig Charter: „The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities recommends – among others - things to do for the harmonic inner development of the cities. For Hodmezovasarhely it is important to contemplate and follow the principles described in ten chapters.” (Long-term Town-development Conception of the City Council of Hodmezovasarhely County Town)

For the last two years the population can read and hear the most about two issues from the local media, regarding town development, one of them is the construction of tram-train between Szeged and Hodmezovasarhely, and the other one is the ‘Cittaslow Movement’ urging on realization of the livable city. It is more and more popular among inhabitants and try to learn more and use and enjoy advantages of it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Movement „Cittaslow” started from Orvieto, Italy, in 1999. Its essence is to offer the population a balanced, healthy way of living and to provide them living conditions of high quality in several spheres of life. It was in 2010 that the General Assembly of Hodmezovasarhely decided to join this movement and then in 2011 they passed the relevant decree

38/2011. (06.07): „Enforcement of the principles of the „livable” town at international level in the frame of the „Cittaslow” Movement”. (sz.n. 2011)

One of the basic principles is to create the conditions of a „livable town” which minimize uniformity in town life, which consider the interest of the population in each decision and finally, which provide appealing living conditions. It is important to add that the word „local” is referred to the outskirts of the town, as well, so it includes the farmsteads and farm-centers, too.

The decree touches land protection, application of environmentally-friendly technologies supported by the town council, and also it assumes to be important to give more information about the intentions of the Movement to the younger generation.

If these intentions raised the youth’s interest, the town development of this direction could be realized with a potential success.

The decree came into force on 7 June, 2011 and it summarizes the „Cittaslow” Movement of the town in 4 fields, in 10 points. If they could be completed, within one or two decades a pleasant, safe town could welcome the visitors.

Intentions to protect the environment are, for example, the use of thermal water as a source of energy, cultivation of lands being aware to the environment which could make the support of local farmers possible. It could be improved by the enlargement of catering, farm and country tourism. Also, the selective waste collection, which has been operating fairly well for the last 10 years, would be brought to date even more. Environmental protection would appear even more in education. It is important to mention that the „Green Link Team” was established in 2003 which holds the local teachers together and excellently coordinates the environmental education at each level of education in the town. In the future a closer cooperation with the „Cittaslow” Movement is expected since the basic principles of Green Link correspond to the ones of the „Cittaslow” Movement in several fields.

Another important question is the development of the town infrastructure. To ensure safe traffic, the decree aims to decrease the measure of transit traffic the realization of which started a year ago by building a roundabout road towards Mako and Totkomlos. The roads towards Szentes and Oroshaza still cross parts of the town where there are mainly residential buildings, and 5-10-storey panel houses. On the other hand, bicycle roads, roundabouts decorated with statues have been built. The project about the potential tram-train-line may be connected there, too. The decree mentions the necessity to improve the potable water quality.

The decree underlines the importance to preserve the traditional, local handicraft industry of great cultural value and also to protect and

support the farming activities necessary for the traditional way of living on the farmsteads. The Town would support the new farmsteads where the traditional forms of animal husbandry are accomplished. A lot of people working in agriculture think their agricultural work does not let them to enjoy sport facilities, but they are sure it is important for all other people. Farmers try to produce environment-friendly or bio vegetable and fruit which can be a global support for inhabitants for their good health. (Gal, 2005).

The Program for the Healthy Hodmezovasarhely (EVP) has been operating with fairly good results in Hodmezovasarhely since 2008 which popularizes the healthy way of living, participation at screening tests, physical exercises and preservation of the residents' health. The Cittaslow Movement would join this program, too. People living here can take part in events which are organized with this purpose. They organize trips in performance for bikers, screening tests, events for adults, while students' conferences and health-days for pupils.

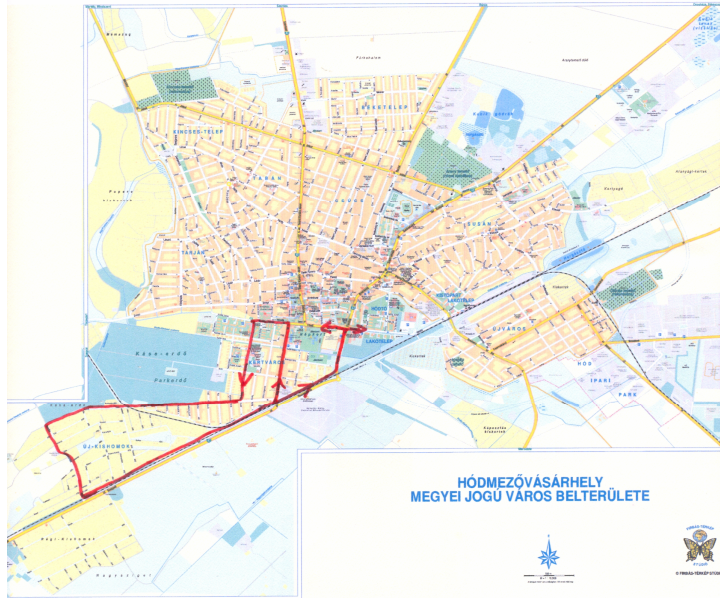
In the streets and bicycle roads of Hodmezovasarhely it is absolutely ordinary to see people running, jogging, walking or cycling either early in the morning, or late in the afternoon – even after dusk. Regarding their age, the picture is varied: most of them are between 15 and 60, but they have a thing in common, namely, neither of them is a professional, all of them do these activities as a hobby since sport is important for all of them.

I made a counting among runners in June and July, 2011. It was not of a full-range survey, I asked only runners and bikers moving on the most popular, safest, quiet part of Hodmezovasarhely. They do one of these sports generally early in the morning before work, or late in the afternoon, in the evening. Lots of them use the line Nagy Andras Janos street – Nyikos str. – Bordas str. – the bicycle road along the Main Road 47- signed with red colour in Map 1. Most of them ran in the above-mentioned period between 6 and 9 pm. Since this line is covered with asphalt, the protection of the runners' joints is not ensured. This area has been used for running for years, if a stamped strip of land had been realized along the bicycle road, more hobby or active sportsmen would use it.

We can find other active and less active sportsmen in other parts of Hodmezovasarhely, too, who prefer moving near their homes. For those who live not so far from the stadium the place is given. However, there are not so many people who would drive 5-10 kms for a nice jogging, which would be, anyway, a bit strange, or people would not like to cycle to a place where they can run.

2012 autumn a runway was built for joggers, which is 1 km long in green area of downtown. The runway is carefully designed for running and jogging reflects to all needs (picture no 1). On the one hand leads to a high

traffic area demarcated. On the other hand - structurally - protects the joints. It is easily accessible location; car and bicycle parking are close by.



Map 1. One of the line used by „hobby runners” (signed with red)
(Source: Map of Hodmezovasarhely, Fírbás-Térkép Stúdió,2006.)



Picture 1. Runway for running and jogging
(Source: author's picture, 2013)

In our town more and more people take up Nordic walking, a relatively new way of physical exercises in Hungary, as a hobby one of the important conditions of which is an earth path or grassy area. Nowadays,

the club organizes trainings in the grassy area called Europe Park, however, formation of an earth path along the bicycle roads would give a wider range of sporting areas in this case, too.

The actual realization of healthy life-style (physical exercises, healthy diet, etc.) and screening tests carried out in the interest of the residents' healthy would be real examples, if there were the material conditions within easy reach which now are still missing in the town.

I think if the demands of the population were sized up in a wider scope during town development, not only in the field of sports but also in activities of different types, the satisfaction level of the population would be much higher towards these anyway appealing and useful plans and ideas of town development.

CONCLUSIONS

All in all, it can be seen that there are numerous opportunities in the Southern Plain Region, in Hodmezovasarhely to shape a pleasant, safe settlement. There is no need to establish a new town from nothing since our ancestors formed an excellent basis for us, our task is to preserve and continue traditions. We should fill them with a content which could provide living for those who live here. Also, it should be done so that the ancient charm of the settlement could remain together with developed technologies.

The task is not so simple, since slowing, declining development can be experienced in smaller towns around the busy, lively city, Szeged. However, this process seems to avoid the town, so the settlement structure could keep its basic, typical features.

In my opinion, there should be a change in attitude, besides lessening everyday living problems, so that Hodmezovasarhely could retain its population by means of both traditions and modern technology. It would be important to make it clear for the residents why it is advantageous if globalization affects the town less, why it is important to protect traditions, to produce high quality goods locally and to buy them locally at the local trader instead of purchasing the cheap, mass-products of hypermarkets and Chinese traders.

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