

MÁRIA KIS^{*}

Trust, Culture, and Territorial Development

Abstract

Some researchers think that economic life is inseparable from culture, i.e., the “irrational” values associated with moral, public spirit, family, and religion, thus the latter manifests itself in neo-liberal economics that predominantly relies on interests and making rational choices only to a limited extent. Therefore, modern societies see preservation or creation of high-level social trust and social capital as their major task, since its lack is capable of hindering economic growth in a way similar to that of a deficit in physical capital.

The above considerations provide a ground for explaining the success of certain settlements, and the failure of others to succeed.

Összefoglalás

Egyes nézetek szerint a gazdasági élet elválaszthatatlan a kultúrától, azoktól az „irraciónális”, értékektől, amelyektől, amelyek az erkölcshez, a közösségi szellemhez, a családhoz a valláshoz kötődnek, s ezért a túlnyomórészt érdekekkel és racionális választásokkal operáló neoliberais közgazdaságtan csak korlátozott mértékben érvényes. A modern társadalmak legfőbb feladata ennél fogva a társadalmi bizalom, a társadalmi tőke magas szintjének megőrzése vagy megteremtése, mert ennek hiánya legalább olyan mértékben akadályozza a gazdasági fejlődést, mint a fizikai tőke szűkössége.

Ezen gondolatok alapján próbáltuk megmagyarázni néhány település sikerét, illetve sikertelenségét.

The major area of modern life where culture has direct impact on the well-being of individuals, communities, and international trends, is economy. According to a false view, economy represents a totally separate segment of life controlled by its own rules. However, those with a living standard above the subsistence level would, as a rule, start some business activity not solely for the sake of satisfying their own selfish financial needs. Thus, business activity forms a considerable part of social life and is embraced in diverse standards, rules, and moral values. In his book, Fukuyama evidences the above proposition by taking four examples from 20th century economic life:

- During the oil crisis of the early 1970s, Mazda and Daimler-Benz were both hit with the prospect of bankruptcy as a result of declining sales. Both auto-makers were bailed out by their business partners, led by 2 large banks. It was the Sumitomo Trust in Japan and the Deutsche Bank in Germany that appeared their life-savers. Their aim was to sacrifice immediate profitability for the sake of saving their traditional partners.
- The recession of 1983–1984 that ravaged America’s industry also hit the Nucor Corporation hard. Nucor was in the steel-making business, where it was active building

^{*} Associate college professor – University of Szeged, Faculty of Engineering, 6724 Szeged, Mars tér 7.; tmark@mk.u-szeged.hu

mini-plants. Its plants operated as „green-field” investments, with non-union workers, and many of them were former farmers. Due to the drop in revenues, rather than firing workers, the company put its employees on a three-day workweek, including the management. Of course, the action entailed a corresponding cut in pay. Following the recovery of the economy, Nucor became one of the best companies in the American steel industry, thanks to a large extent to the esprit de corps it enjoyed in the plants.

- In the Toyota Motor Company’s assembly plant, any of the thousands of assembly line workers who work there can bring the entire plant to a halt by pulling on a cord at their workstation. (Later on, Ford auto-making plants also adopted the technique). In this way, the management trusted the workers with considerable powers in the hope they will not misuse the control thus granted.
- In German factories, shop foremen know how to do the jobs of those who work under them and frequently take their place if the need arises. Foremen can move workers from one job to another and evaluate their performance. There is great flexibility in promotion: workers can obtain credentials as an engineer by attending in-company training programs, rather than going to a university.

One thing that is common to each of the above 4 examples is related to the fact that business actors supported each other because they felt they were members of one and the same community, based on mutual trust. Such trust may be a key to the success of a settlement, as exemplified by the case of Mórahalom.

Mórahalom – a town built on tradition-based solidarity and togetherness

The capital of Homokország

Mórahalom is one of the youngest settlements and dynamically developing towns of Csongrád county. To cite Ferenc Móra, it is the capital and also treasury of Homokország [lit. „Land of the Sand”]. Mórahalom is a small agricultural town located at a distance of 21 km from the county seat Szeged, centre of the Homokhát Micro-Region, named after the pre-dominating type of soil of the area stretching between the Danube and Tisza rivers, that is, sand. Most of the settlements of this micro-region have a common root: they developed into farm centres and, later on, into villages, from the once wide-spread world of farms established around nearby cities. These settlements have preserved their peculiar world, which is the characteristic feature of this region. Typical features of the area include predominance of sandy soil, a dry climate, wide-spread sets of farms, and agricultural production, in particular, horticulture. The Homokhát Micro-Region incorporates 15 settlements, with just one town among them, viz., Mórahalom. The history of the town goes back to 1892, when the city of Szeged established Szeged Lower Centre, the administrative centre of the lower farms of the city, thus creating the central point for the densely inhabited system of farms. In 1950, the settlement was assigned village rank, then, in 1970, it became a major village. Those were the years when the first period of intensive development took place. Mórahalom was assigned town rank on March 1, 1989. When it came to a shift in political regime, the settlement survived the troubled times already as a town. That was when the period of becoming a real town, characterized by struggles, successes and failures, began. The settlement occupies a global area of 8,314 hectares, with just 3% being a section built up within town limits, while 97% of the town represents a built-up

area situated outside town limits. The town has a population of 5,417 inhabitants, with 1577 citizens living outside town limits (on farms). The main activity of the town is related to agricultural production, predominantly private farming.

Establishing roots in the sand...

The settlement became a town in the troubled period of the change of the political regime, a time that happened to coincide with the decline in agricultural production. The former system of cooperatives broke up, the economy experienced a vast gap, and the agriculture of the country was in ruins. Basically, the problem stemmed from the fact that the system ceased to provide further support, leaving the people to themselves, so everyone tried to become a master of himself, and produce and sell individually. However, many failed to succeed, which forced large numbers of farmers living in these areas amidst the atmosphere of the change of the political regime to escape, give up their former lifestyles, traditions, and move from outer farming areas to city centres. For a couple of years, the intentions of the ancestors to establish roots in the sand through hard fight with the circumstances and sacrifice, and sustain the small town appeared to bear no fruit. In the opinion of the town management maintained even today, „A settlement having town rank does not in itself mean it in fact is a town, the functions and sustaining institutions making it a town proper need to be provided”. In the first place, the direction of development efforts had to be identified. This entailed two things: returning to the origin of the settlement and specifying its „spirit”, then, in the light thereof, identifying the break-out points that could boost development of the economy and the settlement. The settlement structure of Mórahalom, an 18-year old small town, has a history of a hundred years. The „spirit” of the settlement is represented by the roots which go back to Szeged Lower Town, the lifestyle of farms based on agriculture. Hence, development started off according to the following ethos: „We are here not in order to tell people what to do, rather we should help them do what they want to do”. Everyone envisaged the following three objectives:

- do not let the young leave here,
- should they leave, they should return as educated persons,
- those staying here should feel it is nice to live in Mórahalom and it is good to be a citizen of Mórahalom.

Mórákert Cooperative Association, the economic engine driving Homokország

The solution did not arrive at no cost. Nevertheless, dedication to hard work and firm commitment to carrying on with farming on the sandy soil allowed the people here to overcome problems. In times of trouble, solidarity and togetherness rooted deeply in their genes came to the rescue. Following a period of 5 years of making efforts, in the spring of 1995, the Mórákert Procurement and Services Cooperative Association of Mórahalom was established with as few as 52 members. The organization set up in accordance with advanced Danish and German models diverges sharply from the tradition of Hungarian cooperatives, even in terms of operation. Nevertheless, it is built upon the traditions of the settlement related to agriculture and sand. Its primary objective is to promote private farming on a self-management basis, without any responsibility for production being assumed. On the other hand, the Cooperative Association provides professional advice in all phases of the value driving process, concentrates resources, and sells produce. An important aspect of its operation is that it supplies its services to members on a not-for-profit basis, in other words, it exclusively aims at recovery of the costs it incurs. This is a form of cooperation

where sales activities, rather than production activities, are coordinated and, as a result, goods are delivered to market in uniform packaging. The system has started off, evidencing the victory of the approach that relies on team work. The solution at hand has produced a number of benefits: on the one hand, transactions with major actors have become considerably easier to perform, on the other hand, the association provides an opportunity to keep up producers' security so that people can sustain themselves on the basis of what they produce. The enterprise that started off with 52 members as of today has 600 producers and a scope of suppliers involving, and, indirectly providing work for, more than 1600 families. Furthermore, nearly 100 persons are employed at the packaging lines, not to mention the young educated specialists with a thorough background in engineering or economics, who are needed to fill positions in the management. A further achievement is the 100-fold increase in sales revenues, from 38 million HUF attained in 1996 to 3,800 million HUF realized in the previous year. As appreciation of the above and thanks to the experience obtained in the area of the management of production, processing, logistics, and sales, as well as owing to its economic situation, the Cooperative Association has operated since 2000 as a recognized vegetable and fruit producer and seller cooperative (called a „TÉSZ” [Producer and Seller Cooperative]). This recognition meant an enormous leap forward in the life of this small town, with the commitment and the hard work now bearing fruit. As a result of conscious and continued preparation for accession to the EU, the Mórakert Cooperative Association was the first TÉSZ in Hungary to be declared a TÉSZ conforming to the EU.

However, development efforts did not end at that. The experience accumulated, the culture of intensive growing, as well as the effect of the local climate have helped producers to successfully grow vegetables and fruits that have characteristic flavours and represent a Hungarian specialty, making them selling well not only country-wide but also abroad. Agriculture and the related processing industry have become the driving sector of the region. Based on available economic and geographical conditions, the local government of the town decided on establishing an industrial park. The aim was to create a fundamental infrastructure utilizing the Szeged-centred scientific culture and human resources, thus providing both entrepreneurs and investors with optimal conditions. The settlement was awarded the state-recognized „Industrial Park” title in 1997. By the year 2000, the infrastructure had been created; since 2002, the Incubation Centre has invited investors to occupy an area of slightly less than 2,000 square metres. The largest Agricultural Logistics Centre of the region was established on the premises of the Industrial Park by Mórakert Cooperative Association as investor. Thanks to the Industrial Park title, several hundreds of jobs have been created in Mórahalom, and this process will continue into the future. An increasing number of employees from the surrounding settlements undertake work in the park, often times relocating together with their families that are unwilling to undertake commuting. In response, the town tries to compensate them for the time lost and the expenses incurred by supporting them in obtaining a flat and also by building new flats. Furthermore, the town assists young people in remaining in the town through providing help in getting established in the town.

Team spirit in Homokország- the man of Homokhát

In parallel with streamlining the economy, citizens of Mórahalom had to face another difficulty representing a threat to the integrity of the settlement, involving the specific dispersion of the farms surrounding the town of Mórahalom. The farms situated outside town limits provide home for a large number of mostly elderly people who are in need of care.

The elderly would not move into the town for two reasons: on the one hand, „an old tree is hard to transplant”, as they would put it, and, they do not have the financial means for relocation, on the other hand. As money was an obstacle, these people had to be assisted in a humane way. In other words, a specific solution had to be identified. This involved setting up a form of provision that is unique in Hungary and is in line with the requirements specific to the region: the system of village custodians. Building the system commenced in the spirit of „Attention to the neighbour with the social sensitivity of farm people, because that is how it used to be”. The farm services programme began in the mid-90’s from Phare support, involving a battery of farm custodians and responsible farm representatives. The elderly living on farms are in need of a wide spectrum of assistance, starting from all kinds of administrative duties to everyday tasks, like chopping wood or doing shopping. Accomplishing such tasks requires dedication and a *Mórahalom* spirit, as such jobs cannot be performed for money. The provider and the beneficiary of the services need to set up a kind of mutual trust. Responsible farm representatives receive as remuneration a mobile phone and an amount of 4 thousand Hungarian forints. Each of them supervise 15 to 20 farm dwellers and send a report to the care centre on a daily basis. Whenever a problem arises, the centre can take measures and provide for appropriate care immediately. Another type of service is related to elderly care supported by a signalling system, established in the town a couple of years ago by the Maltese Charity Service. The system is based on a signal transmitter, an emergency device similar to a key-holder, which the elderly can use in case of feeling unwell. When the device is pressed, the signal is transmitted to the care centre, where the computer identifies the person looked after, along with the related symptoms, diseases, and medication on record. The service is on duty round the clock, and the result is measured by the occasions whenever quick help results in saving a life. Mention should also be made here of the unique system of farm representatives, incorporating two elected responsible farm representatives. Their duty is to communicate all sorts of problems to the mayor’s office, where immediate assistance is available. Citizens of *Mórahalom* find it very important to consider those living outside town limits not as „secondary citizens”. Those within and those outside town limits should live in a symbiosis.

The treasure of Homokország: the wine of Homokhát

The grapes in the coat of arms of the town refer to the fact that the area used to be a predominantly grape and other fruits growing place. In the 18th century, Maria Theresa passed an order to control the plantation of grapes on the Alföld in order to bind quicksand. Since that time, loess soil and favourable climatic conditions have enabled wine producers through conscientious cultivation to produce flavours that are more pleasant compared to the other regions of the Alföld, owing to the high number of sunny hours, which allow for the production of light, fresh-tasting high quality wines. In addition to former traditional brands (*kövidinka*, *kadarka*), new types of grapes producing quality wines have appeared in the vineyards over the past 25 years. The tradition related to grape growing and wine production represents a sensitive indicator of the economic and cultural situation of the given era and region, as it forms an integral part of human culture and civilization, strongly bound to a belief in permanence and continuity, human and even cross-country relations.

Riding a horse on Homokhát... – tourists from abroad, rural tourism

Tourism is a series of successes of the town steadily taking shape. The tradition is based on the therapeutic spa located within *Mórahalom* town limits. The spa that was opened in 1962 has been totally refurbished over recent years. The bath and the adjacent *Thermál*

Panzió represent a uniform complex of buildings in the heart of the town, rich in modern spectacular features. With its several open-air and covered pools, the bath complex offers both recreation and recovery for all generations. In 1999, the water of the bath was qualified as having a therapeutic effect. Later on, the establishment was declared a therapeutic bath. The bath is unique in the sense that it is the only therapeutic spa of the area where thermal and therapeutic services offer a framework for the three main elements of physiotherapy: prevention, treatment, and after-care.

Building on present-day farming life style, rural tourism is gradually developing. The settlement that emerged from the one-time Szeged Lower Centre world of farms has created several tourist routes as a result of renovation and reutilization of the old farm school buildings that were erected in part at the time when Count Kuno Klebersberg served his office as a minister. The tourist routes present the architectural features of the once famous farm schools, along with the sights of interest in the surrounding settlements, to be visited on foot, on horse-back, or on a bicycle tour.

The opportunities of Homokhát for future growth

Until now, this small town has made considerable progress in strengthening its economy and keeping its population together. Nevertheless, the settlement is full of new plans and sets ever new objectives to achieve. While preserving values of its past, the town is determined to exploit upcoming opportunities as well. By and by, citizens of Mórahalom realize that in addition to agriculture, rural tourism and tourism in general may and must offer a new opportunity to generate income. The cultural heritage of Mórahalom is deeply rooted in the traditions of the world of farms. Gastronomy, traditional costumes, religious life, folk cosmogony, and natural wisdom offer an opportunity to identify local peculiarities that may serve as a foundation for tourism. The novelty of the approach lies exactly in the preservation of traditions. This a town which maintains its traditions. A future may only be built upon a clear picture of our past.

As local people put it: „We want to be a part of Europe while at the same time we want to remain Hungarians from the lower farms.”

Bibliography:

- Fejes Zsuzsanna* (2004): „A siker titka” [*The Key to Success*] kézirat, Szeged.
- Fukuyama F.* (2007): „Bizalom.” [*Trust*] Európa könyvkiadó, Budapest p.7–21.
- Kis M.* (2005): „Image vizsgálatok szerepe a területi marketingben egy adott település példáján keresztül” [*The Role of Image Analyses in Territorial Marketing, Viewed from the Example of a Specific Settlement*] SZTE SZÉF Tudományos Közlemények, 25. sz. p. 35–41.
- Kis M.* (2006): „Térségfejlesztés marketing aspektusból” [*Territorial Development from a Marketing Aspect*] SZTE SZÉF Ökonómiai és Vidékfejlesztési Intézet 2006. évi tudományos évkönyve p. 65–78.