

# Social acceptance of rural dwellings. Results of a sociological research related to rural dwellings

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## Abstract

The paper shows the results of a sociological research, which is related to the protection of rural dwellings. The empiric data were collected in seven villages in Hungary and Slovakia from 2005 to 2008.<sup>1</sup> The text is based on the questionnaire produced in 2005 in Szendrő (north-east Hungary, Borsod County). The interviewed respondents could choose from eight buildings, four of which they had to evaluate in detail using a semantic differential scale. The photos of the buildings represent three in today's settlements existing architectural periods: the traditional vernacular epoch, the socialist period and the current trends. The evaluation of dwellings varies mostly by size. Today's buildings obtained high ratings in every parameter. The typical multi-storeyed family house of the 1970s and 1980s is less suited to create an impression. The traditional vernacular dwelling achieved a medium average rating, but not performing as well as the two larger buildings. The ranking of the older socialist building with a nearly square ground plan and pyramid hip roof was in every respect the worst. There is also the analysis of a similar questionnaire, which collected attitudes in an urban environment. In Budapest the oldest buildings had the highest acceptance; however the socialist era and today's architecture became the critic. After comparing the results of both researches a working hypothesis was formulated which suggests that the vernacular monuments in Szendrő are in a transitional period: they are not yet able to reassure the social claims of the inhabitants and they do not yet have a value as cultural heritage.

## Keywords

Cultural heritage · Monument protection · Vernacular architecture

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## 1 The aim and course of the survey

It is no secret to professionals or the lay person, that the protection of the architectural environment and the modernisation in conformity to current values can not just be an official matter. The success of the protection of monuments depends mainly on the attitude towards this heritage of the communities that inhabit these buildings and live in these cities and villages.<sup>2</sup> The importance of the question has captured considerable scientific attention up to now, but it has not yet resulted in an inclusive sociological research project concentrating on the subject.<sup>3</sup> It may have seemed to be too much of a social interest to the architectural sphere, and social science does not seem to have been attracted by the possibilities of such an inquiry.

The main interest of Hungarian vernacular architectural research concentrated on the forms of dwellings and settlements. Many studies have been published by ethnographers focusing on the social background but we do not have any knowledge about today's processes. According to common knowledge in Hungary the history of traditional vernacular architecture ended after the Second World War when the changing situation was not a prosperous period for peasant culture. The 1970s started a new upswing in Hungary, characteristic was the integration of village populations due to the rise to middle-class and the use of factory mass-production for house building.

Many sociological surveys are based on the questions of the

<sup>1</sup>The research was published in Hungarian: Tamáska Máté: Hagyományos és modern falusi lakóházak örökségszociológiai vizsgálata (Heritage sociology of traditional and modern rural dwellings). In: Szociológiai Szemle 2006/4, 36-62. and Tamáska Máté: Generációs különbségek a falusi lakóházak megítélésében (Differences of the generations in the acceptance of rural dwellings). Generációk a történelemben. Hajnal István Kör évkönyve. Szerk.: Gyáni Gábor Nyíregyháza 2008, 253-261.

<sup>2</sup>The Bibliography of the subject is too large to include here. However I would draw attention to the conference – Tusnád 2000 which handled the subject as a central question [10]

<sup>3</sup> I would mention two texts at this point. The first is edited by Erdősi-Szonkoly. It contains texts written by authors from different counties [6] including some very interesting papers but no international research project resulted from it. The other book was written by Hungarian authors. The papers to find in it are more theoretical than empirical. Empiric surveys were made in Budapest but they are not yet published (SZONDA 2004, STUDIO 2005).

real estate market and the sociology of dwellings is an acknowledged field, however we have no reliable information on the relation of people to the values of the built environment and its aesthetic opinions on this question. The survey programme started in 2005 could serve as a good basis for the development of the subject.

This paper is based on the results of the survey organised in June and August 2005. The Department for History of Architecture and of Monuments of the Budapest University of Technology in July of 2005 organised a research initiative on the monuments and valuable townscape-related buildings of the inner town of Szendrő.<sup>4</sup>

The settlement with more than four thousand inhabitants, although having a city status, is more of a rural character except for its centre. In the centre there are multi-levelled buildings situated next to one other, but the rest are free standing houses on separate sites. The inner part of the town looks mixed, there are many family houses built mainly during the socialist period, some with storeys added. The 'suburbs' have a more uniform style, mainly with the visible tendencies of the 1970s and 1980s, but the overall view of the town is somewhat incoherent. The remains of the Citadel, the 'kékfestőház', the steeple of the reformed church indicate that with the proper care Szendrő has the potential to develop into a 'town of monuments'. The centre and the rural-looking area beneath the citadel could be historically protected.

Related to the protection of the architectural environment, research based on a questionnaire was developed that asked the opinion of those who live or work in the surveyed building, their opinion related to statements and photos of the town's conditions, its monuments and architectural environment. Parallel to the preliminary survey unstructured interviews were taken that were very important to the interpretation of the data collected later. Taking into consideration the results of the preliminary survey the final data-collection was organised by the local government. One hundred inhabitants of Szendrő were selected randomly according to the rules of the representative sampling.<sup>5</sup> The chosen individuals were visited by interviewers.

<sup>4</sup> The architectural research of the Technical University was not the first in Szendrő. The monograph of the City edited in 2002 has a paper from Balassa M. Iván focusing on 350 years of developing of structures and today's heritage of folk architecture [1].

<sup>5</sup> The sample taking was processed accordingly: The sample frame was from the registry of the local government (in alphabetic form). The whole population totals 4300 people and 100 were questioned following a computer randomisation of numbers between 1 and 43. It was the first person who was asked and after that all of the 42nd addresses as well. In case of wrong addresses or refusal, the sample was completed according to quota sampling. The interviewers selected persons of similar age (+/-5 years) and gender, living in the same street omitting the persons identifying data and covering 22 addresses. The final sample was 102 people (N=102).

A problem with this survey is that a part of the questionnaires were incompletely filled in. A section of the answers are contingent and cannot be interpreted. The size of the sample suggests that we should be prudent with the final conclusions.

## The results of the questionnaires

This analysis is mainly descriptive instead of being explanatory; the purpose of the paper has been to formulate a thesis based on the experience gained in Szendrő. As part of the questionnaire the questioned individuals had to evaluate houses shown on photographs according to certain guidelines. The structure of these guidelines was meant to represent the main dwellings types in today's village. In the first round the interviewed respondents could choose from eight buildings, four of which they had to evaluate in detail with a simplified semantic differential scale.<sup>6</sup> The main point for the selection of the buildings has been to represent three architectural periods and to make possible the comparison of these according to a social evaluation (Fig. 1).<sup>7</sup>

The first group consists of the representatives of traditional rustic dwellings.<sup>8</sup> Building number one represents a dwelling in good condition, renovated according to the underlying principles of monument protection of legitimised rural architecture. On the second image can be seen a traditional dwelling but in bad repair. The third building shows the characteristics of the Kádár era modernisation of dwellings: simple hip roof instead of Dutch gable (hip) roof, urban window divided into three parts instead of old windows, strong colouring instead of the former white facade. The fourth picture reflects a state of urbanisation when two dwellings located on two sides of a plot are connected by a gate, resulting in a closed view of the building from the street. The second period is represented by two basic dwelling types from the socialist era: the typical single-storey house with a near square ground plan and pyramid hip roof, characteristic of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>9</sup> The second is characteristic of the 1970s and 1980s. It is not only more horizontal developed but also vertically with a mansard and a balcony. The flat is definitely bigger as in the former the roof is a gable type. The third period tries to seize the dwelling demand of the differentiated society after the change of regime. We were not able to represent the multiplicity of this period, so we somewhat arbitrarily chose two buildings.<sup>10</sup>

The evaluation of both the contemporary buildings is positive, but facade number eight that is covered by vegetation gives a

<sup>6</sup> Respondents choose from 8 building, which dwelling is the most beautiful, the poorest and the richest etc. After that they had to decide in which one they would like to live in, and which is similar to their own. They veiwed at least 4 buildings and they had to evaluate them (like school notes) according the deadlines: It is good to live in, Beautiful, Traditional, an Ornament of the street, Practical, Large, Rich, Homely, and Old.

<sup>7</sup> The questionnaire contained the dwellings in a random order.

<sup>8</sup> For selection of traditional types the monograph of vernacular architecture by Barabás-Gilyén and the typology of Meggyesi Tamás [2, 12] were used.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding this dwelling type see also: Tamáska Máté: Kockaházat a skanzenbe? Az utóparaszti háztípus helye a vidéki házfejlesztésben. (Cube house in the Open Air Museum? The post-peasant house type and the developing process of rural dwellings. In: Múltunk 2008/3. 98-108.

<sup>10</sup> The survey showed a striking difference between the latter, indicating that it may be a big difference among the tendencies of recent times.



1

- ❑ in good repair
- ❑ renovated according to the underlying principles of monument protection



2

- ❑ in bad repair
- ❑ original materials



3

- ❑ urban window
- ❑ simple hip roof



4

- ❑ a state of urbanization
- ❑ a closed vision of the building



5

- ❑ near square ground plan
- ❑ pyramid hip roof
- ❑ 1950s and 1960s



6

- ❑ mansard
- ❑ balcony
- ❑ a bigger ground plan



7

- ❑ mansard
- ❑ planed garden
- ❑ new materials
- ❑ contemporary



8

- ❑ near multi storey
- ❑ colored
- ❑ contemporary
- ❑ new materials

Fig. 1. Dwellings Types

more affluent impression. Seventy percent of the respondents thought that this building seems to be the most affluent, while thirty percent chose picture number seven. The poor condition of building number three could have contributed to the majority of the sample considering it the least affluent.

Interesting consequences can be drawn from the comparison of how satisfied the inhabitants of Szendrő are with their actual homes (Fig. 2). Interesting in itself is that while more than a half of the respondents would be glad to live in the houses considered to exhibit affluence, only three percent of them answered that they actually live in houses like that. Thirty percent of the respondents ranked their own dwellings as among the “long” houses renovated in the sixties, another thirty percent among the standard houses of the sixties and lastly forty percent ranked themselves among the dwellings of the seventies and eighties. In comparison with the answers as to where

the respondents wanted to live, these types of houses represent only total of forty percent of the most preferred categories. The cube house especially seems not to be a home of choice and this can be stated to a lesser extent in connection with the two other types.

The next table explores the further relationships between the most preferred dwelling type and the actual home (Fig. 3). Half of the respondents living in the single-storey “Kádár cube” would move to a modern building. Half of the respondents aspiring to the latest trends chose building number seven, the other half building number eight. The family house of the 1970s and 1980s is also popular; forty percent of the respondents would choose this. Nobody living in a cube house with pyramid hip roof is satisfied with the actual home: ten percent of them would prefer even a renovated rural dwelling.

The owners of the sixties renovated rural houses gave similar

								
Nr.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Similarity	1%	0%	28%	0%	28%	40%	3%	0%
Preferred	4%	0%	10%	0%	2%	28%	16%	40%

Fig. 2. Differences between actual and most preferred dwellings

answers. They would also prefer to live in the newest houses, but choose the more ostentatious building. However, there is a significant difference: 17% of the residents of the renovated rural houses did not want another home and preferred the home coinciding with their type of the house. They seem to be almost as equally satisfied as the residents of the family houses of 1970s and 1980s, 19% of whom considers their actual home as the most preferable. An absolute majority of those living in family houses chose picture number eight considered the most affluent, suggesting that they have the highest aspirations.

It seems that there are significant differences in the degree of satisfaction among the residents of the three characteristic house types. The least satisfied are the possessors of the cube houses, who besides the appreciation of the modern houses that is characteristic of all groups of people, as a larger proportion look more positively towards the next architectural period, the multi-storeyed family houses of the 1980s. The dwellers of the renovated rural houses and the multi-storeyed family houses are approximately to the same degree satisfied with their present homes. However, if they could choose, the former would decide in the same way as the dwellers of the single-storey cube houses, while the latter would orientate themselves towards to the affluent looking building.

		The preferred dwelling ↓			
Today dwelling		7	3	6	8
5		26%	11%	41%	22%
6		21%	17%	35%	27%
6		8%	8%	19%	65%
<b>Sum:</b>		<b>17%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>42%</b>

Fig. 3. Wish to move from today dwelling to other one

In the case of four buildings out of the eight, semantic differential scales have also been applied (Fig. 4). The respondents had to decide what grades from the grading system used

in schools can be applied to the building in question, according to certain guidelines. The evaluation of dwellings varies mostly by size. Building number eight obtained high ratings in every guideline. That is not surprising because the respondents mostly favoured this building in the previous question.

The typical family house of the 1970s and 1980s is less fitting for ostentation: fewer than in case of the previous building consider it beautiful, rich and the ornament of the street. However it serves well the purposes of living and it is homely, spacious and practical according to the respondents.

The ranking of the two smaller buildings was in every respect worse. This was especially true in case of the cube house, which could not compensate the poor housing conditions with the aesthetic appearance. With reference to the statements of beauty and ornament of the street the renovated rural house achieved a medium average, although not performing as well as the two larger buildings, while the cube house was definitely relegated by the people of Szendrő. Neither of the buildings has a potential for ostentation, and the housing conditions achieved a lower ranking than in the two previous cases.

### A comparison of Budapest

The research published in 2005 by the Studio Metropolitana had also mapped the attitudes of the population in relation to the architectural environment, although with different methods. The comparison of this study with the results of Szendrő is very edifying.

Inhabitants of Budapest perceive the presence of three dominant architectural periods: that of the architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of the realism of socialism after the Second World War and the modern construction. This alignment does not correspond with the stylistic periods set up by the history of architecture. The survey points to an incomplete knowledge of people in architecture periods. According answers given by people in Budapest, it can be said that the category of “architecture of the 19th century” in the mind of the lay person is often mixed with the baroque. The category “realism of socialism” does not cover the post war period but – according to the respondents - the full length of the socialist period, especially the quarters of blocks of flats. The use of the word “modern architecture” in everyday language does not mean a style period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but contemporary efforts. (People use modern architecture as a synonym for contemporary architecture.) The evaluation of the

	It is good to live in	Beautiful	Traditional	Ornament of the street	Practical	Big	Rich	Homely	Old
	2,3	3,4	3,2	2,7	2	1,2	1,1	2,5	2,4
	2,1	1,3	3	1,1	2,4	1,5	1	2,5	3
	5	4,6	3,5	3,7	4,6	4,8	4,4	4,6	1,1
	5	4,9	3,1	4,8	4,4	4,9	5,0	4,8	1,1

Fig. 4. The detailed evaluation of the four highlighted types

three periods – not actual periods but those given by respondents – is very different: the benchmark is the 19<sup>th</sup> century especially its representative official buildings like the Parliament, the National Museum, and Andrásy Street and the Fisherman’s Bastion. The socialist realist construction is characterised by strong rejection, although – not to forget – in fact the architecture of the 1970s is considered as social realist by the respondents. It is important to underline that the external evaluation of the quarters of blocks of flats is definitely worse than the evaluation of the inhabitants of it. The judgement of the 1980s is a little better, and the evaluation of the period after 1990 is good as a whole, but it doesn’t approach the acceptance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The contemporary architecture – regarded by people as the “modern era” – is considered up-to-date, practical, and “western”, but its aesthetic value and lasting nature is questioned.

In case of Szendrő, that is characterised by rural conditions the architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is represented by the folk architecture active until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in our case the first four buildings.<sup>11</sup> The first period of the socialist area is represented by the cube house, the 1980s by the family house with mansard and the contemporary architecture by buildings number seven and eight. When we compare the acceptance of the periods we can state that the inhabitants of both Budapest and Szendrő reject the socialist era. Parallels can also be drawn in the more positive evaluation of the 1980s. In contrast to this, a little simplified we can state that in what concerns the evaluation of the local examples of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary architecture, the inhabitants of the two settlements have quite an opposite opinion. In Szendrő the prestige of the folk dwellings can not be compared to the benchmark character of the 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture in Budapest. On the other hand, the dwelling

<sup>11</sup> The heyday of folk architecture is the 19th Century, so it is right to compare it with the architecture of Budapest in the same period. Especially, if we consider, that on the façades of peasant houses appears the decoration of the bourgeois buildings [2] 146.

houses built after 1990 were rated high both on aesthetic aspect and functionality, while in Budapest the technical advantages were highlighted.

The manifest differences are partly due to the nature of the methods. While in Budapest attitudes on the constructed environment, as a whole were mapped, without highlighting the dwellings, in Szendrő the task was specifically the evaluation of the rural dwellings. We have to suppose that there must be a considerable difference in the judgement of a public building compared to the reality of a building serving a housing purpose. Functional considerations can count more in the case of the latter; while in the case of the former aesthetic aspects would be more significant. This is suggested that in Budapest the technical advantages of the newly built dwellings were highlighted and even those living in blocks of flats do not consider them unsupportable. Namely the technical state of the flats balances and in some cases may even overwrite the aesthetic appearance.

These methodological differences would probably not indicate such significant distinctions by themselves. Consequently it is worth investigating the differences between the object, i.e. the architectural aspects and the differences that manifest themselves through the sociological aspects of the two towns, so that based on these distinctions we can formulate the initial hypotheses for further work.

#### Hypotheses drawn from the experiences

The history of the protection of monuments shows that at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the only aim had been the preservation of the bigger, monumental buildings [3]. The protection of dwellings and with them the heritage of rural architecture is characteristic only after the Second World War [4]. The dwellings rarely represent values by themselves, but the substantial number of them makes them as decisive as the representative buildings that concern the townscape [13]. However, while the protection of the latter has had a tradition older than a century,

the former have been among the values protected by the authorities for only fifty years.

One of the most important tasks of the protection of heritage is to ensure the preservation of the technical heritage of the separating period when these are no longer up-to-date and have not yet gained the hoped for social acceptance (the change between tradition and heritage) [9]. It seems that the representative buildings of Budapest are through this period, while our rural buildings are present in this presumably transitional phase.

There is a less mentioned social aspect of the protection of the monuments that is manifested most openly in the case of folk heritage but may be also true in some way of the appreciation of civil architecture. Folk art is a historical category.<sup>12</sup> This is indirectly true to every historical style, that was born between the social circumstances of a given period (is productive) and after having passed through the other stages later, is being kept alive only artificially, in our case by the protection of monuments.<sup>13</sup> There is a basic social condition to artificial maintenance that is most obvious in the case of folk culture, that we could call “*departure*”.

The essence of this process is that the society that has produced the folk culture has to depart from its former self; more simply said it has to become a modern civilised society, so that the inherited objects, departing from their initial symbolism and developing new functions can be integrated into the new social system. As a result of this process the “documentary function” of the building is enforced and they become the part of modern life thanks to their folklore aspects.<sup>14</sup> In those societies where the memory is still alive, meaning that the value system of the peasant society has not entirely given way to the civilised modern, bourgeois one, the artificial preservation meets several social difficulties. In the traditional rural world the taste of the community is strongly influential; what concerns for example the size of the house, and the tracks of this influence can also be discovered in the memory of society. These circumstances given the bourgeois individualism that would make possible the individual take-over of the folklore is not grounded.

We assume that the society of Szendrő presently lives in a value period like this. The intellectual strata of the village, the small town tries to mediate the most modern fashion of the cities. This can explain that the group of people presently living in the relatively newest building (multi-storeyed family house) would most like to modernise its housing conditions (building number eight), in this way trying to align with the presumed or real urban values. The society represents a unitary world of

<sup>12</sup>There are very felicities the words of Dobszay: “Productive age is first followed by the reproductive age, this surrenders its place to the period that remembers but does not practice any more, than follow (...) the instruments of the artificial preservation” [5].

<sup>13</sup> Without monument protection architecture can also be preserved, but in these cases the social development is mostly slowed or stopped [11].

<sup>14</sup> The houses can fill out the next functions: technical, sociological, economical, psychological, and documentarian [8].

taste; there are no differences according to parameters of education, gender, age in the judgement of the four buildings evaluated in detail. The mentality that measures the representational value of the house, its size, as well as the aspiration to the newest and the rejection of the old, that is out of use or is simply considered anachronistic, can all be considered as peasant features.

These kinds of after-effects of the peasant values do not allow for the plurality characteristic of the modern civilised society, the judgement of taste that prefers the heritage of the aged folk architecture is labelled as extravagance.

Taking all this into consideration, we can formulate the following theses:

- 1 The appreciation of the folk dwellings in the villages is low. If we accept that the buildings that are relevant from the point of the townscape or other considerations, buildings that have lost their up-to date value, will after a while become socially accepted, then we can assume that the evaluation of dwellings belonging to rural folk architecture is in a transitional period.
- 2 A cause of this is that the protection of monuments and the professionals in general, as well as the opinion-forming groups have not been focusing on the rural dwellings for a long enough period.
- 3 Another important cause is that the rural society has not yet departed enough from these building, so they cannot utilise their documented value in the marketplace that is due to their age.

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