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Thesis of the Doctorate Dissertation

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Traffic and space.
Economic and social effects of some local railways of GYSEV and MÁV in the northwest-Transdanubian region until 1920

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Determining the subject of research

In my doctorate dissertation I am observing the economic and social effects of three local railways in the northwest-Transdanubian region until 1920. This area – in such a perspective – has not been subject of historical scientific research. The guidelines of the work is the history of construction of the local railway of the Fertő region, that of between Sopron and Pozsony (Bratislava) and that of between Sopron and Kőszeg.

The reason for choosing the year 1920 the upper time limit of the dissertation is that the age of railway construction closed down by 1920. The fixed-track network increased in this country until that time unambiguously. Trianon forms a sharp caesura, since moving away the borders results in an incomplete railway network, and with this a new chapter began in Hungarian railway history. This also affected the local railways examined by me, as a certain track – short or long – of all three got into the neighbouring countries. As a consequence, the local railway Sopron–Pozsony ceased by right. A research embracing a larger time scale would have exceeded the time needed for writing the present work, that is why this restriction is necessary also because of this.

My research focuses on Hungary, within that on the northwest-Transdanubian region. I am writing about the construction history of the railway, and about presenting their functions from a universal and nationwide aspect, as it would not provide a perfect and clear picture concerning the starting- and the final point if I only dealt with the local railways. The north-Transdanubian – flexibly-handled – region examined by me means the territory of Moson, Sopron, Vas County, furthermore, the city and surroundings of Pozsony. I am introducing their regional, economic and commercial relations, as far as the sources allow me to do so. When I am exploring the effects causing the change of regional factors induced by the local railways, I emphasize certain settlements. Among them Sopron, Pozsony, Kőszeg, Pándorfalu and Kiscell were the final stations of these local railways, and new lines were added. The two significant free royal towns, Kismarton and Ruszt was given a railway then, and this determined the development of the two settlements. Nezsider, Pándorfalu, Fertőszentmiklós, Eszterháza and Répcelak were functioning as stations forming a junction, and the construction of the local railways (HÉVs) meant a new development strategy in their lives.

The starting point of the introduction of the northwest-Transdanubian region is a monography by Vera Bácskai and Lajos Nagy, sketching out the Hungarian market districts, market centres and cities on the basis of the census of the year 1828. Although railway did not
exist at that time yet, this work of unique value can still build an excellent base, since it reveals the conditions before the railway construction in an exact way, even though not all the settlements chosen by me took part in the census.

When introducing the area, I am not only focussing on the settlements concerned by the three lines, but also on the centres that can be found in the different sources, and that are important from the viewpoint of the development of the region (for example Szombathely, since there has been a railway track from már Kőszeg to the city since 1883), because there had already been a railway line towards these, so also these settlements had an effect on the construction of the local railways examined.

The choice of the lines can be reasoned with the fact that Sopron as a traffic junction had an outstanding importance in the area. With the local railways to Pozsony and Kőszeg, the city got into a contact with new regions and centres towards north and south. The HÉV of the Fertő region had the end stations Kiscell and Pándorfalu, and it was built out in a fertile and contiguous territory that rightly required the "cheap railway", and not lastly, also Sopron initiated its creation. The development history of the three HÉVs is distinct originating from their senses of line, and also the territories touched by them. From a railway-construction history point of view, as well as their effect changing the economic and regional factors, the HÉVs can be regarded as excellent examples with their distinct functions.

My objective was to thoroughly explore the construction of the local railways in the territories examined, the decision-making mechanism in connection with them, their financing, the fights of interest surrounding them, and their economic and social effects, and that the conclusions coming from them should be well-established. In my dissertation I would like to introduce the development of the parts and settlements of the northwest-Transdanubian region, based on the establishment and modernisation of the three local railways.

I am looking for the answer to the questions below:

- What effect did the railway actually have in the given area?
- What changes did railway construction and railway development result in the period examined with regard to the region?
- Who and what interest groups constructed the local railways?
- What interests lie behind these?
- What was the most important factor in the field of the sense of line?
- Who determined the direction of the track?
- What conceptions were formulated, and how far they were followed later?
- What kind of help did the settlements provide with the construction of the
railway?
- Who were the main stakeholders of the individual HÉVs, and how did they finance the construction?
- What large estates and large-scale works did the railway touch in the given area?
- What was the original function of the railways, and how did it change later?
- How did the construction of HÉVs influence the change of the number of population of the chosen settlements?
- What infrastructure developments did railway development result in in a settlement?
- What social effects did local railways have?

The dissertation is an interdisciplinary work, having a wide source base (qualitative and quantitative), it examines the topic with a universal and a nationwide perspective, in addition, it has space-, traffic-, technology-, lifestyle-historical, area-developing and settlement-geographical traits. The work gives an insight into the construction history of the railway, the appearance of HÉVs, and into their importance in the northwest-Transdanubian region.

**Raising the problem**

The history of the railway already started to be discussed within wide bounds during the 19th century, however, time had to pass to examine the effects of the new vehicle. On a historian level, the railway had not been subject of scientific research, so mostly people working in the particular branch and those drawing inspiration from there were writing about it. Through this, a great part of the works that can be read in Hungary far more concentrates on technical parameters than on the economic, social and mentality-related effects of the railway. We have to note that nowadays, both in a nationwide and in a universal aspect, several people started to deal with the railway in a way that they examine it together with the landscape surrounding it, transforming the picture created of it before, and they explore the complex effects as well. It is clear from the facts written above, that – unfortunately – there are very few works of railway history that have been made according to the methodology and demands of history science. The objective of the present dissertation is to place the HÉVs in the landscape surrounding them, emphasising their importance in every field of life.
The source basis of the doctorate dissertation

Both traffic- and history science need a railway history written with scientific methods, as well as the examination results of the device in connection with economy, society and mentality. While writing the dissertation and examining the effect, I was relying on a number of primary sources.

The dissertation relies on a wide source base that can be traced in national and local public The Sopron Archives of the Archives of Győr-Moson-Sopron County of the Hungarian National Archives, the Mosonmagyaróvár Branch Archives of the Győr Archives of Győr- Moson-Sopron County and also the Vas County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives preserves sources in connection with the licensing process, financing, execution and operation in the deputy-lieutenant scripts. From the Tribunal material of Budapest Royal Court of Law of Budapest Capital Archives we can create a picture – mainly – of the forming general assembly of Sopron–Pozsony HÉV, about its management members and its regular shareholders. Based on these – since the sources are of relatively good condition, and they remained abundantly – the construction history of the individual HÉVs can be easily reconstructed, however, they have still been used only by few people up till now. In the case of the Sopron–Pozsony HÉV we can receive an exact picture of the forming general assembly and of the list of names of the regular stakeholders, whereas these data have not come to light at the other two railways.

Considering quantitative sources the situation is quite good, as several censuses and annual reports remained, that enable to make up data lines. At the examination of the number of population the volumes containing the census data of the countries of the Hungarian crown have provided a great help. Alongside with this here can be found the statistics almanac of Gusztáv Thirring, one of the greatest statisticians of the era, and the corresponding parts of the Hungarian Statistics Almanac series in which there are data lines related to infrastructure and school supply. Moreover, in the Hungarian Technical and Transport Museum there can be found a unique source material, that enables the reconstruction of the state of the examined local railways, their annual business results and performance. The quantitative sources make the examination of the effects of the railway significantly easier.

The press of the age proves to be an inevitable source in railway history. The local papers reported about any events related to the individual lines many times and accurately, from the uidea bursting out right to the realisation, then about the timetable, the accidents, the annual reports, etc. A great deal of them can be traced in local archives and libraries, while national –
specialist newspapers about traffic – can be accessed in Hungarian Technical and Transport Museum or in National Széchenyi Library in their original or microfilm forms. All these can be used as excellent guidelines in reconstructing a story, which is perfectly completed by the multitude of objective archive sources.

Among the printed sources we can find several further categories. To the first belong the people writing about the railway, the HÉVs the first time and their works. Another circle is formed by the descriptions and monographies of the age of the counties of the area examined in the dissertation. Practically to the same place can be classed the annual reports of the industrial chamber, the counties, the deputy-lieutenants and the calendars of the time, Károly Baross' census-taking work about the landowners of the 19th century and the agricultural statistics of the countries of the Hungarian Crown. Into the next group belong the fundamental rules published of the given local railways. With the help of these the list of names of regular stakeholders can be reconstructed in case if the inaugural meeting and the detailed share-underwriting is not at disposal, like in the case of the Fertő region- and the Sopron–Kőszeg HÉV. The financial compass of the age documenting the management members of railway companies and financing banks can give a great help to make the interest groups belonging to the railway clearer.

Finally, there are laws of the age, maps, timetables, diaries, personal memories and tiny printed matters (tickets, photos, postcards) at the researchers' disposal. These can make the individual details more exact, visualize the railway constructions of the age, and the economic and social relations coming to existence through this.
The results of the doctorate dissertation

My doctorate dissertation is the introduction of three local railways (Sopron–Pozsony, that of the Fertő region, Sopron–Kőszeg) of the northwest-Transdanubian region (Moson, Vas, Sopron Counties and the city of Pozsony) and their economic and social impacts on the widest source base until the present day. My research is based on archive sources, the press of the age, fundamental rules, pictures, censuses, travel books, statistics, manuscripts, industrial chamber reports, monographies and specialist literature written in the examined period. Based on all this it can be concluded that it is not only the construction history of the three local railways, but also the introduction of the northwest-Transdanubian region on the basis of railway developments and the impact examination of the chosen HÉVs that proves to be a new result.

In my dissertation I tried to give an insight into what conditions were existing in the region immediately before the appearance of the railway, i.e. at the beginning of the 19th century, and also into how the new vehicle influenced the development of the region. First of all I wrote about the historiography of the railway, which can also be considered a novelty, since neither the history of the Hungarian railway nor – above all – that of the region can be found in any concise work. Following this, I outlined the history of the Hungarian railway from the beginnings until 1920 intending to concentrate on the essential points only. After all this, I presented the northwest-Transdanubian region and its centres from a demographic, settlement-geographic, economic, area- and railway-network-developing point of view in the examined time period. In the region it was already early, in 1847 when a railway line was opened between Pozsony and Marchegg. The main motive of its construction was that the big landowners of the territory wanted to boost the trade directed towards the west. This also indicated that the northwest-Transdanubian region did not at all prove to be peripheral within the domestic railway network that was built out centred in Budapest, and it could thank this for its proximity to the more developed West and above all its flourishing agriculture. In the area examined by me a highly-developed agricultural culture was established, and Austria meant a safe market for it already in the period before the railway. The appearance of the bound-track vehicle opened a gate to the capitalist development, and the area that had had mainly an agricultural character, stepped on the way of industrialisation and modernisation, however, until 1920 it was still the agriculture that had priority. The important role of the area in economy and transportation was reflected by the fact that it was one of the territories that was supplied with railway lines the most densely in domestic terms by 1920. This and later
researches unambiguously prove that one of the most developed regions of Hungary was Northwest-Transdanubia. Thanks to its favourable location, close to Western-Europe and Vienna, the capital of the Monarchy, and its transit role, the region, that is peripheric compared with Budapest, can be considered extraordinarily important also from a railway-developing point of view.

In the examined region and in Hungary the network of the main lines – also of GYSEV – was built up by 1880, and practically at the same time with this a new category emerged that meant a new perspective in the development, the local – or how it was called at that time – the ”cheap” railway. The local railways came into existence in order to satisfy the transportation and economic demands of the particular region, and became vertical supplements to the main lines of the Budapest-centred Hungarian railway network. Deriving from their names used at that time, their execution required less financial expenditure, however, it did not mean that those who had them constructed could easily provide their financial background. So that an area could keep up with the development it was inevitable to construct the railway there as well. It could not call at all the settlements, but with an optimal sense of line many people could benefit from it. It is not by chance, that the construction of the local railways was preceded by serious disputes and interest battles in connection with the sense of line. This can also be traced in the case of the three lines chosen by me. It had an extremely huge stake where the railway track should go, because later on it could have a huge influence on the local economy and society as well. This can explain the fact that in many cases the agreement lasted for a long time concerning the designation of the final direction. In some cases this was also not made easier by a person who had the permission of preparatory work that could not provide the necessary financial background of the construction, so the thing failed. All these are certainly connected, since in case the line to be made in the given region was widely supported by the particular settlements, counties, big landowners, plant owners, private individuals and the people living there, then that direction clearly had legitimacy, and also the money was collected earlier for that. The deciding factor was usually the number of people behing the settlements, the counties and the capitalists, whose interest was clearly that the railway should cross their territories. The lines that are quite winding regarding HÉVs were created this way.

The construction of the three local railways of the northwest-Transdanubian region did not differ from the domestic relations of the time. All of them were realised with private initiatives, where one or two influential people (in the case of the Sopron–Pozsony line József Haller and Mátyás Laschober, in the case of that of the Fertő region Kálmán Radó, in the case
of the Sopron–Kőszeg Miklós Stein) carried out his plan through long bargainings and efforts. This does not mean that the construction of the lines was only their interest. At all the three local railways supporters ”arrived from several levels”. At the underwriting of regular shares we can find – with a distinct amount according to their financial potential or interests – the settlements concerned, counties, a few interested big landowners and factory owners, and we must not forget the support given by the state, either. The 35% caution necessary for the issue of the construction licence comprised of these. The remaining 65% consisted of the loans given by the banks, and from this point of view it was not all the same what capitalist group was standing behind whom. The three local railways chosen by me as well give a good example for the phenomenon, since their construction was only managed to realise when people having real capital joined to the matter. József Haller and Mátyás Laschober got the money of 65% of the actual construction capital through the executors from Pesti Hazai Első Takarékpénztár, Radó Kálmán from the ”own” Budapesti Bankegyesület, while Miklós Stein from Bank für Transportwerke in Basel.

Although the local railways by their names refer to the satisfaction of local demands, if we examine the apparatus responsible for their execution and operation, we already get a different picture. Railway construction was guided by several experienced entrepreneurs from Budapest, who executed several domestic lines, like Miklós Gfrerer, Frigyes Schoch, Vilmos Grossman, Mihály Pollacsek and Miklós Stein. The construction promised a huge profit for the entrepreneurs, however, local society benefited very little from this, since the inhabitants took part in the construction only in a small number, mainly as helping hands, for lower wages. From this wage tension there was even a fight at the construction of Fertő region HÉV. The executors have the work done by their well-tried navvies, but there was also an example at the construction of the Kőszeg HÉV that they made foreign technicians work.

The composition of the managements responsible for the operation of the local railways shows a heterogeneous picture. The president was either the person having the construction licence (at the Pozsony HÉV Kálmán Radó) or the main big landowner of the area (at the Fertő region HÉV and at the Kőszeg HÉV Miklós Esterházy). Apart from them there can be found the representatives of the concerned municipal authorities, the solicitors conducting the administration – local or from Budapest –, the executors, the local factory owners, plant owners, or politicians working in several managements, railway experts and entrepreneurs from the capital. From this it can be considered probable that as well as local interests also national ones moved the threads in the case of all the three HÉVs.
When examining the functions of local railways it turned out as well how seriously influential factors the nature-geographical landscape and the sense of line are. Basically in the construction of all the three railways the main role was played by the later industrial and commercial functions. Mainly in the case of the Fertő region line but also at the Sopron–Pozsony HÉV this will be determining, while the touristic significance of the Kőszeg line also rose greatly thanks to the crossed cultural landscape. This region was a strategically important area already during the first world war, so it is not surprising that also the Fertő region- and the Kőszeg railways joined the military transportation.

The HÉVs had an effect on the changes of regional and demographic factors as well. The big landowners, factory owners and entrepreneurs of the region did a lot so that the railway line should not divert their territories of interest, since through this new markets could open for them. The most mixed is the picture at the Pozsony railway from this respect, as among the share-underwriters we find a lot of factory owners, entrepreneurs of Pozsony, but even people living from agriculture. At the Fertő-region- and Kőszeg HÉV the priority was that the production units belonging under the local main big landowner, Miklós Esterházy, which can usually be connected with agriculture. They all saw new economic opportunities in the railway being constructed.

At the examination of the demographic relations of the 11 emphasized settlements it also turns out that the appearance of the railway does not always have a beneficial effect, or just how "harmful" it is for a city or a village if the railway track diverts it. In Kőszeg, Kiscell (Celldömölk), Fertőszentmiklós, Pándorfalu, Kismarton the connection between the appearance of the railway and the increase of population can be demonstrated. In Sopron, Pozsony and Eszterháza, although the number of inhabitants increased, it cannot be directly explained by the construction of local railways. In Répcelak, Ruszt and Nezsider there was just an opposite process going on, the number of people living there showed a falling tendency after the opening of the lines, which can be reasoned by the extracting effect. Although all the settlements chosen by me were functioning as a railway junction, not all of them could make a profit out of it. Celldömölk for example was moved out of its original position, and it was made a seat of a district. Eszterháza and Pándorfalu rose from their surroundings, and even came up the removal of the district centres to here. At Sopron and Pozsony these local railways – because of the importance of their main lines – did not result in a significant change. Kőszeg lost from its earlier position, and not even the recent railway could stop this tendency. Kismarton and Ruszt went through an economic and functional loss of ground. They lost their former, gathering role at the borderline just because of the rise of
the railway and of the long-distance trade. In the case of Nezsider its position of a junction did not prove to be a determining factor, it remained a small town with a partial function.

In the settlements concerned also the infrastructure got modernised by the construction of the track. The appearance of the new local railways had a beneficial influence in this field, as the former stations got either enlarged, modernised, or new ones were built. In the towns it even occurred that the two infrastructures got connected. The railway station of the towns was functioning as one of the (final) stations of the tram network and of the omnibus- and rented-car traffic, from where passengers were transported to the city centre, since they were situated at the peripheral area of the settlement. With this it can be stated that the railway changed the former picture of the landscape and the settlements. The buildings and the services available through them gave a civilisation pattern towards the settlements, not incidentally, they also made easier to keep in touch in society.

From all these it can be seen that these HÉVs promoted the dynamisation of the northwest-Transdanubian region even more, by bringing formerly isolated areas into the railway circulation, and by this they created new markets for the producers here. Not incidentally, they contributed to the territorial rearrangement of the examined region, its space-structural changes and also to the development of the infrastructure of the particular settlements.

In the dissertation my objective was to introduce the impacts of the examined HÉVs on the economic, social and mentality changes. About the latter two we can state that the change will be the most striking in the territories of Northwest-Transdanubia that have not been touched by the railway before. This initiative has moved nearly the whole society, since it is everybody's interest that the railway track should get closer to them. It is the construction of the railway that is the first capital-rich enterprise that concerns local society indirectly or directly as well. The engineers, executors, politicians and workers coming to the settlement changed the everyday life of people living there. An administrative inspection – where the final sense of line was decided – or the solemn inauguration of the local railway itself counted as a great social event with the participation of the inhabitants of the settlements concerned. After opening the railway the station becomes an important community- and distributing place where people who are willing to travel could encounter a number of new things. Travelling habits changed anyway, as passengers started to change from carriaged vehicles to the railway, offering a completely new travelling experience. The new vehicle made the length of the route that can be covered in a day shorter, by this also the passengers' sense of comfort increased. As a consequence of Gábor Baross' zone tariff plenty of people got on the train. It can be thanked also to this that all the HÉVs examined by me had a special function
of passenger transportation, for example a touristic function and that of going to work, going to the fair or going to theatre. Also the everyday life and the life quality of the people concerned changed through this, as they started to adapt to the timetables if they travelled to an event or to work by rail. From this follows that people's sense of time was transformed as well, and this proves the influence of HÉVs generating changes in mentality.

To sum up all, it can be concluded that the construction of the – local – railways had a very big stake in the northwest-Transdanubian region as well. The appearance of this vehicle not only had a technology-historical significance, but it also resulted in economic, social and mentality changes. Those researching railway history earlier – except for a few historians – handled the history of the vehicle as an isolated phenomenon, thus its effects are less-known even today. Hopefully, my dissertation helps to those who wish to see railway history in another perspective as well. Furthermore, methodologically and regarding its findings, it can be utilized by historians of transportation and those researching the examined region as well.
The author's publications in this topic that have been published so far

Studies:


Reviews:


