RÉKA VÁRKONYI-NICKEL
THE “RIMAIAK” IN SALGÓTARJÁN

The Workers’ Lifestyle on the Colonies of the Rima Steel Corporation (Rimamurány-Salgótarján Iron Works Company Ltd.) in Salgótarján during the Time between the two World Wars

PHD DISSERTATION

History PhD School
Dr. Gábor Erdődy DSc the director of the PhD school
Atelier Europian Historiography and Social Sciences PhD Program
Dr. Habil. Gábor Sonkoly PhD the director of the PhD Program
The members of the board
Chair: Dr. György Granasztói DSc.
Referee Dr. János Bali PhD
Referee Dr. Eszter Zsófia Tóth PhD
Secretary of the board Dr. Ádám Takács PhD
Members Dr. Zsombor Bódi PhD
Dr. Gábor Czoch PhD
Dr. Judit Toronyi PhD

Supervisor Dr. Judit Klement PhD

Budapest, 2014.
I. The Aims of the Study

I have focused my research studies on the lifestyle of the workers who were living in the colonies of the Rima Steel Corporation in Salgótarján. The factory started to run up in Salgótarján under the name of 'Iron Factory' from 1871. In 1881 the two rival factories, the 'Union of Rima' in Ózd and the 'Iron Factory' in Salgótarján have fused creating the new and powerfull Rima Steel Corporation.

The choosen period is the time between the two World Wars, just before the socialist way of reorganization of the factory after the 2nd World War. Inside in this period I have given special attention to the researches of my subject in the time between 1935 and 1945. The reason of this consideration rooted to that fact of the ages of those workers who were interwied by me, their memories don't go back further in time from that point. My personel ties with the town, and through my family with the life of the steel workes all together has given many inspirations to my work.

While I was carrying my researches I have examined the following questions: What were the conditions and terms of living in the colony of Rima Steel Corporation in Salgótarján? What kind of links were established between the workers and the factory, and amongst the workers, who had settled down in the town from different part of the country? Have the workers of the Rima Steel Corporation had a completly different community in the society of the town? Was the lifestyle of the workers living in the Rima's colony an unique one, or it was tipical all around the worker's colonies?

II. The structure of the dissertation

I. Context
1. The methodes, historiographical background and sources of the dissertation
2. The general history of the period
II. The factory which ruled the time and place
1. The valley of factorys: Salgőtarján
2. The history of the steel factory of Salgótbarján from the beginning until the II. World War

III. The Society of the Rima’s colony
1. The built environment of the colony
2. Labours and the Corporation
3. Education
4. Spare time, sport and cultural life

IV. The frames of the everyday life
1. The rules of the family and social life
2. Childhood in the colony

V. Achievements and more questions

III. On the Methodes

During the first part of my research study I had developed the questionnaire for the interviews, and I had started the interviews with the pensioners of the Rima Steel Corporation. In this part of the researches I also managed to take photographs on the built heritage of the Rima Steel Corporation, i.e. I have taken photos of factory buildings and of the buildings of the colony.

The second part of the research I have continued the personal interviews. On the basis of the interviews I have completed the cognitive map of the interviewees, touching their childhood living in the colony. Meanwhile I was busy with cognitive mapping I was gathering the archival sources in the Hungarian National Archive and the Nógrád County Archive of the Hungarian National Archive. I have researched the photo documentation of the Rima Steel Company which is kept in the Dornay Béla Museum of Salgótbarján. At the final stage of my research study I have already had several type of sources from interviews, plans and maps to numerous documentations of the structure of the colony and the every day life of the workers.

Analyzing the lifestyle of the workers community I have used the methodes of antropology and the oral history. Besides these I have paid attention to the very useful outcomes of the urban anthropology. In my analyses I used side by side the approaches
of the makro and the mikro history as well. The numerical datas of the sources were analyzed according to the quantitative methodology. The personal interviews, as the anthropology considers, have given a good opportunity to analyse the personal narrative of past. The memoires of my interviewees, the former workers of the Rima Steel Corporation, keep the elements of their lifestyle. The personal narratives of the past help to reconstruct the collective memory of the workers community.

IV. Achievements

The first mansions of the colony were built in the same time when the factory buildings were constructed from 1865 to 1871. The newly established factory had recruited workers from the regions of North Hungary, and the vast mass of workers had required fair accomodations in the closest area or surroundings of the factory. Compareing to the other districts of the village (from 1922 town) the accomodations facilities of the worker's colony were highly the best. The differences were even more bigger if we compare the accomodation facilities (houses) of the „palóc“ villages and the flats of mansions in the colony of Rima Steel Corporation in Salgótarján. The life in the colony was organized by the terms and rules of the management of the Corporation. The aspects of every day life were effected by these rules in many ways. The usage of the flats and gardens or their refurbishment, the order of the public places, all of them were specified in the terms of the colony.

The colony of the Corporation were separeted from the other parts or districts of the town. This separation was symbolicly and realisticly appared with the three gates posted on the borders of the colony and guarded with gatemen. The factory and its workers were linked together with complex ties. On the first, and the most important level was the employee and employer relation, but besides this the factory acted as a landlord as well, and the workers were the tenats living in the colony of the Corporation. From the second generation the community of the colony had already had a very strong idenity on the basis of their urbanized lifestyle and not negligibly their far better salary in the town. In the same time as the shared elements of their lifestyle had
became more intensive and stronger the members of the community started to call themselves „Rimaik“.

This selfdefinition consist of mainly three important parts: 1. The local surroundings with its built enviroment and infrastructre. 2. The factory as it had organized the working time according to the production. 3. The inner ties or links amongs the members of the community.

The hierarchy was as far as important in the colony community like in a society of a village, but this did not appear sharply in the structure of the planed housing estate, (the colony), i.e. there were no separated streets for the managemants of the Corporation, like it was built in Ózd, the other member of the Rima Steel Corporation. Analyzing the graveyard it was cleared that the employees of the Corporation mainly used the IV. section of it and there were not separated the workers from the members of the management.

The settled inhabitants of the colony of the Rima, and of the whole settlement, were mainly catholics in Salgótarján. Only a relativly small minority belonged to the other three churches as lutherans, calvinist and jewish. The catholic parish church stood in the center of the village from 1397. The lutheran church was built in to the closest neighbourhood of the Rima colony on the top of the Kuczor Hill in 1882. In the management of the Corporation the majority was lutherans i.e. the engineers. The synagogue, located to the south end of the settlement, was finished in 1902. Finally the calvinist church was erected on the opposite side of the Tarján stream, not so far from the Kuczor Hill. The old parish church after several reconstruction works remain still small and unefficient to serve the catholics of the fast growing town. The new catholic church and with it the new catholic parish was established right to the symbolic border of the Rima colony. The land for the new church was given by the Corporation as a donation, and the service of the church was appointed the Franciscan Order. The Franciscan church situated on the beginning of the Acélgári road was finished in 1936.

The Rima Steel Corporation as it was in Ózd and Borsodnádasd, had run a very good organized welfare and healthcare system for workers and their families. The employees of the Corporation had enjoyed the benefits of the Corporation’s insurance policy. Each workers could joined to the health insurance or to the pension fund of the Corporation. The Corporation established and financed holiday resorts, hospitals,
orphanage and pensioner mansions. The employees of the Corporation could used their flats until they kept their work abilities, after pensioned them they should have moved to their own accommodation or to the pensioner mansions. Above their salary they had got the electricity, the coal for heating for free from the Corporation and they could buy food and clothes in the Corporation’s magazine in a cheaper rate than anywhere else around the town.

If somebody had got a flat from the Corporation first time it could be on Ózdi, Járdánházi or Bikási Street and after some years he could move to Salgó Street, Acélgári Street or Liptay Street. The Corporation gave financial aid (usually it was a loan without interest) to their employees to build their own houses on the upper part of the colony like Szent Ferenc or Jónásch housing estate. The abilities of the flats, like floorspace, comfort level, proprietary rights and distance from the factory meant the professional recognition, social status and of course how long had he worked to the factory.

The furnishing of the flats showed a mixed picture: sometime they used rural, folk elements but mainly they were urban interiors. In case of the death of an employee the factory let the widow to stay in the flat but only in one room. This kind of accommodation was called widow flat.

Like the cultural establishments, the sport was organised in the same way, initiation of the factory but in consort of the labour’s requires. The Club for the Workers and an other one for the Management or Officers of the Corporation was established in the colony. Under the Officers Club they organised the sportlife of the colony and in the Workers Club they organized a library, orchestra, choir and the amateur theatre group. After the first World War a big and wonderful recreation park and playground was made with pine trees and locust trees on the hill-side. The inspection of this park, called Dolinka, was in the hand of the factory gardener.

The Rima Steel Corporation made so much for the elementary schools also at the national level and also at the town level. The first school was opened in the 19th century and the new school was built in 1929. The school-inspectors in their yearly relations every time had declared that the new, modern school is excellent and exemplary for any other elementary school in the country.
I have made my colonial childhood researches by the researching method of the ethnography. Mainly I brought into focus the process of upbringing into work, the mental maps, and to collect different types of children’s games. Children could learn, in most cases, from their observations and practices, so they learnt the life of adults and the method of housework unbewares. The work of boys and the work of girls became more and more separated with age.

I collected and typed the games by the help of the ethnography. I found nursery rhymes (I. group), singing-dancing games (IV. group), moving - training games (V. group), and intelligence developer games (VI. group). I have examined the associations of the colonial boys scout and the militarized version of boys association, called: Levente.

The boys started to work in the factory in the age of 14. Their first working place was the department of nail packaging. This time brought so many changes into the life of young teenager boys. They left their childhood behind them and slowly enter the life of the grown-ups. They were dependent on working or became a grammar school pupil the hierarchy between the children of the colony had changed and it could be seen in the externalities too.

The habitants of the Rima colony in Salgótarján who called himself “Rimai” had common identity and made a well-defined local community. They were mixed descent as in nationality as religiously at the first time. They spoke different languages (German, Slovakien, Hungarian) and the families had different traditions. The only common point was the Corporation and the steel factory, so they became a homogenous community in the town, the steel-workers. The factory had defined their ordinary life also in space and in time. For the habitants of the colony the toll bar meant the limits in local place and the stem horn in time, both defined their rhythm of life.
V. Publications of the author in the subject
