

## DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF THE BEREG PLAIN BETWEEN 1970 AND 2003

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**Abstract:** *One of the most typical features of settlement development of our ages is urbanisation. This region has one town: Vásárosnamény that has had the rank of town. The smaller villages are losing their population, at places slowly, at others more quickly. There are similar areas in the country, where similar effects are taking place. All these factors might encourage venturesome young people to stay on their homeland or even to move back. Stabilising agriculture, supporting fruit growing, or even processing fruits, local-patriots in agriculture or trade might also contribute to this force of the region. Wealth of natural conserved areas, churches from the Middle Ages, wooden bell towers and the traditions of Beregi people all ensure that this corner of the Hungarian Great Plains will live on.*

**Key words:** *smaller villages, migration, rural tourism.*

### 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE BEREG PLAIN, BEREGI TISZAHAT

The Beregi Plain is situated in the county of Szabolcs-Szatmar-Bereg, in the northeast part of Hungary. It is part of the Upper Tisza Region, lying between the border of the country and the Tisza River. It is the northern part of Szatmar-Beregi Plain. Before all the protection against floods was set up it was the perfect catchment area, it was significantly influenced by the floodings in 1970 and 2001. The centre of the Bereg Micro-Region is Vasarosnameny. The total population is 30,885; the area is 567km<sup>2</sup> (2003) (*Fig. 1.*). Bereg, the Vásárosnamény sub-region is one of the 168 of the country's sub-regions. Not only the settlements of Tiszahát on the right side of Tisza, but also the ones in the town's catchment area on the left hand side belong to this area.

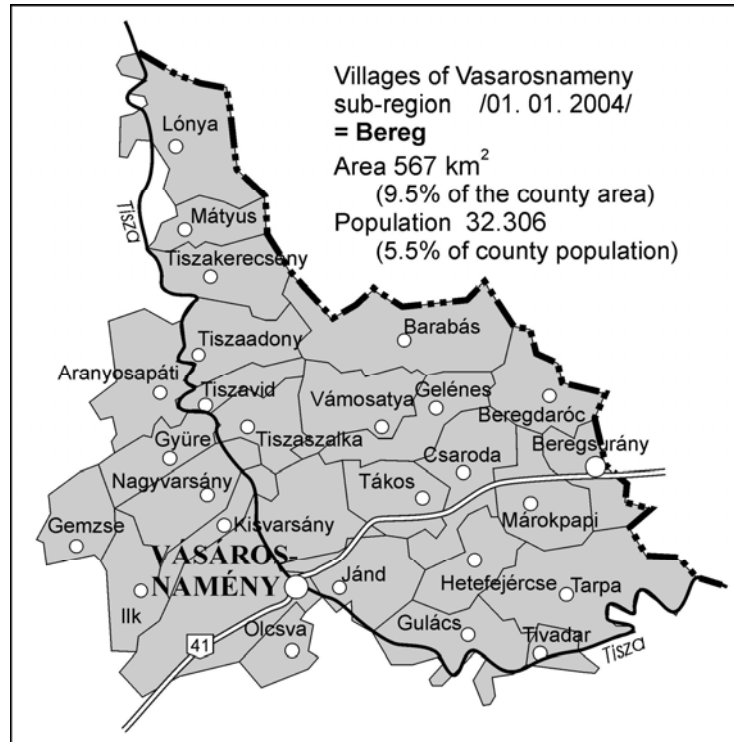
This region has one town: Vásárosnamény that has had the rank of town since 1979. The smaller villages are losing their population, at places slowly, at others more quickly. There are similar areas in the country, where similar effects are taking place; those are regions by the borders in Somogy and Baranya counties. The number of small villages has decreased since 1870, but they do not cease to exist in large numbers. This process started very strongly during the first half of the 50's in the villages of agricultural nature. Considering the various categories

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of villages and also various regions of the country, we can state that the decrease of village population had different degrees and did not happen at the same time.

**Fig. 1.** The Bereg sub-region



## 2. SETTLEMENT STRUCTURE OF BEREGI PLAIN

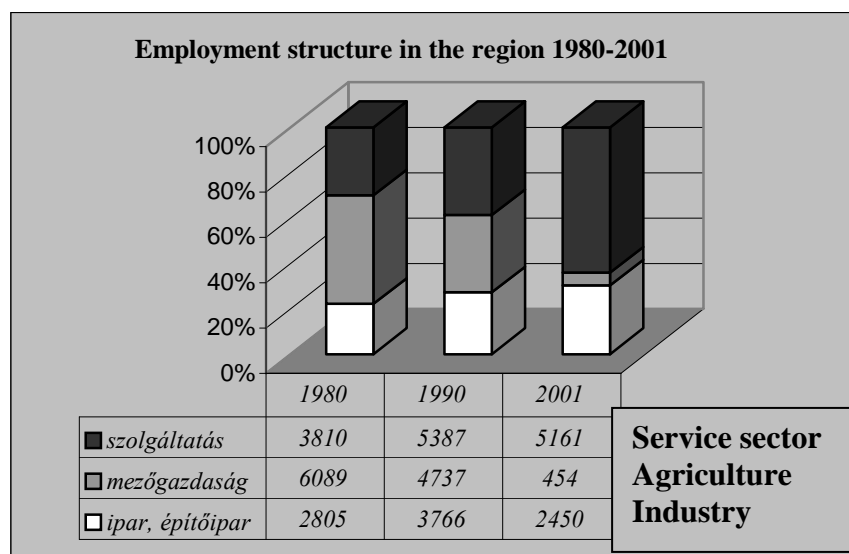
The most typical settlement type on the Beregi Plain is a small village. In the middle areas of our county the small and middle size villages with average 2,000 people are common, while in the western parts villages with more population are dominant. There were several factors contributing to their development. Reconstructed from the settlement structure and on the evidence of papers, most of them originated from the Hungarian conquest times. In this part of the country the Middle Age settlement structure was conserved, the Turkish invasion did not reach this far; there are a lot of villages still existing by natural resources. At the time the opportunity for cultivating land, or settling down was only possible on the plains by rivers, where spring and autumn floods could not reach. These areas were limited (2-3 km long and wide), so that area also limited the size of settlements. Flood cultivation went on until river regulations came into force. These villages are densely populated. On the Great Plains the density of

settlements is 1-2 person/100km<sup>2</sup>, while here it is 5-6 (P-né Eke, 1981.) Categories of settlements in Bereg are based on their sizes: 5 farms (Mátyus, Tiszavid, Hetefejércse, Márokpapi, Tákos), 15 hamlets (500-1,000 people), 4 small villages (Gyüre, Kisvarsány, Ilk, Jánd), 2 big villages (Tarpa, Aranyosapáti), 1 small town (Vásárosnamény).

### 3. CHANGES IN POPULATION IN THE ABOVE REGION

The permanent population of an area is the number of people with a permanent address. Actual growth (fall): sum of natural growth of the population and migration difference. Natural growth is the difference of live births and deaths. Natural fall in Hungary in 2003 -4.8-person/1000 resident, in our county -0,9. Changes in the population of villages are influenced by two demographic phenomena: natural growth and migration.

**Fig. 2.** Employment structure in the region

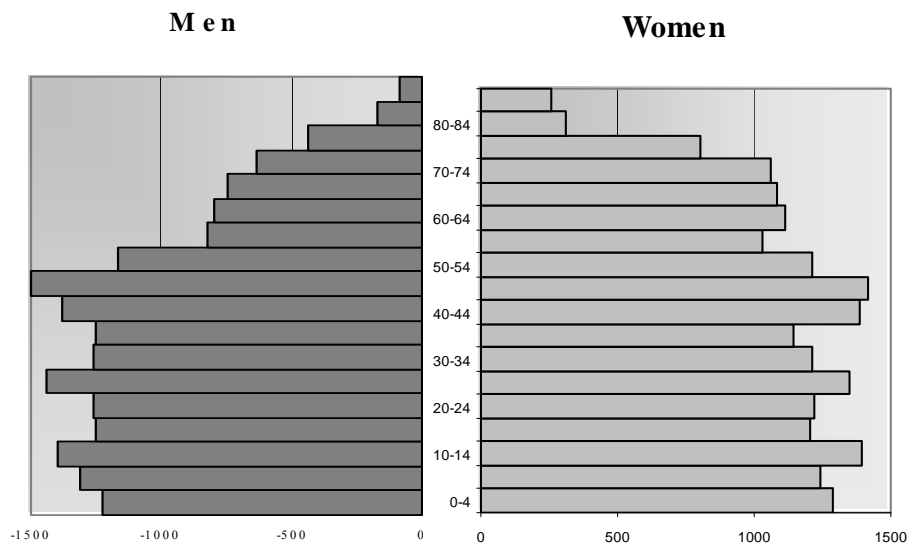


During the last three decades changes in the population of the county show the following tendency: the population between 1970 and 1980 increased by 3.6%, this increase of 20,886 people was followed by a similar size decrease between 1989 and 1990, therefore in 1990 the population was the same as in 1970. In 1970 the number of people living in the Szatmár and Bereg areas was 76,875, 13% of the county's population. In 1980 it was 12 %, in 1990 11%, which shows their proportion decreased even compared to the total population of the county (Fig. 2.)

These days bigger natural growth of travelling people helps the statistics. On settlements by the border of Szatmar-Bereg Plain the ratio of travelling people is 12-15 %. Number of

travelling people: 1980:6, 1990:3,334 and in 2001 3,535. According to statistical data 3-5% of the population is travelling people, but in reality this reaches 15% at certain places. Villages with most travelling people: Aranyosapáti, Nagyvarsány, Olcsva, Tiszakerecseny.

**Fig. 3.** The relation of men and women in population, 2003



On the settlements of the Szatmár-Bereg Plain where migration loss was significant, population has decreased in every age group since 1980. At highest rate the number of young people, at lowest number of old people has fallen. Younger, more skilled, adventurous people have moved away, they looked for better living conditions in other parts of the county or country. Fall in the number of births happened between 1970 and 1979, this is only typical for the whole country later on (1980-1982). This ongoing nature of decrease of births is well represented by an examination of the ratio of young people aged 0-14. Younger age group of able-bodied population (aged 15-39 years) give the volume of migration, therefore their numbers significantly go down. Reasons for decrease of population: fall in number of births, high death rates, new family model, worse living standards, migration from the area. After the flooding in 2001 migration was not significant. Population of towns in the country gradually grow. Natural growth has a role, just like migration to the area. Population of Vásárosnamény increased 15 % (1970: 7,881, 1980:8025, 2000: 8853, 2003: 9,362) (Fig. 3.).

It can be noted when looking at underprivileged settlements in Hungary, that most of them lie by the borders of the country. They are at a disadvantage from the infrastructure point of view as well. Connections are limited by Tisza, they only have 2 road bridges: one at Vásárosnamény leading to Gergelyugornya (part of town), the other one between Tivadar and Kisar.

**Tabl. 1.**The population in the settlements of Bereg Plain

<i>Settlement / year</i>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2003</b>
Aranyosapáti	2218	212	1926	2025	2174
Barabás	1328	1153	911	765	846
Bregdaróc	805	792	609	826	830
Beregsurány	956	850	716	537	636
Csaroda	730	589	544	635	663
Gelénes	1209	1016	851	617	604
Gemzse	726	620	509	866	853
Gulács	804	739	679	1051	869
Gyüre	566	466	351	1279	1284
Hetefejércse	582	573	459	278	309
Ilk	1101	1143	1135	1246	1277
Jánd	810	889	759	1021	853
Kisvarsány	1540	1276	987	978	975
Lónya	522	465	392	812	842
Márokpapi	1391	1179	1017	445	457
Mátyus	200	200	200	334	364
Olcsva	745	578	415	758	747
Olcsvaapáti	3346	3012	2459	358	317
Tákos	339	278	228	421	401
Tarpa	1150	1131	1019	2183	2253
Tiszaadony	837	772	717	734	724
Tiszakerecseny	959	896	986	950	972
Tiszaszalka	1058	1065	1011	845	942
Tiszavid	1108	1036	1023	545	501
Tivadar	496	494	459	224	231
Vámosatya	793	814	727	644	599
Vásárosnamény	7881	8025	9098	8853	9362
<i>Összesen</i>	34.00	30.263	30.187	30.230	30.885

#### 4. CONCLUSION

It is a general characteristic of villages on the Bereg Plain that natural growth is low and they have a very high ratio of people over 60. Fall in the population will continue, though migration will

reduce. We cannot talk about depopulation of villages at a national level, but at a micro-regional level Szatmár-Bereg Plain is an area showing very strong decline. Employment levels are low, which can be explained by lack of job opportunities and ageing population. Ratio of educated population is very unfavourable. Reconstruction has been finished, population mobilisation did not happen at all. The reason for internal migration and urbanisation earlier was a desire to find better living standards. People migrating to towns or villages lying nearby are mainly young, able-bodied. Since this process influences lot of settlements, economic, social-political and other measures are becoming urgent to prevent the situation from getting worse. Social issues related to ageing are very important: making more job opportunities is the most urgent task. Kiss és Bajmócy tried to border the spheres of influence of the towns in the Alföld (Great Hungarian Plain). It was interesting to compare the theoretical spheres of influences and the statistical micro-regions, and compare the theoretical spheres of influence together by area, population and the number of settlements (J. P. Kiss–P. Bajmócy 2001).

Lying by the borders means – from the settlement development point of view – one-way traffic, lack of towns, lack of industry, lack of employment along with migration of young people and an older generation who stay and need support. Industry should be based upon local resources. It could possibly be based upon sectors processing agricultural produce and food. One of the highest priorities is the education levels and skills of people.

The only advantage of being an underprivileged area is the untouched nature, which could be the ‘treasure’ of the area if tourism started to blossom. The tourist opportunities are more and more available for settlement development. Local governments and Bereg Region Development Society try to take advantage of these (Noble Days in Bereg events, Tisza Party, Kuruc Festival, etc.). The best-built recreational area is Gergelyiugornya: they have an open-air bath with thermal water, and a beach by Tisza, there is a new spa being built at the moment. This area provides sport, entertainment and also recreational opportunities.

Rural tourism is significant, too: folk style buildings, old crafts, gastronomic features (plum processing in various forms: jam, palinka, prunes) all attract domestic and foreign tourists. Water and eco-tourism, hunting and church tourism are also present. Shopping tourism brings most to the centre of this micro-region, Vasarosnameny. All these factors might encourage venturesome young people to stay on their homeland or even to move back. Stabilising agriculture, supporting fruit growing, or even processing fruits, local-patriots in agriculture or trade might also contribute to this force of the region. Wealth of natural conserved areas, churches from the Middle Ages, wooden bell towers and the traditions of Beregi people all ensure that this corner of the Hungarian Great Plains will live on.

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