

Theses of doctoral dissertation

**LOCAL SOCIETY – FACTORY SOCIETY  
LOCAL AND FACTORY SOCIETY OF ÓZD FROM  
LATE DUALISM TO NATIONALISATION**

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## **I. The background of the research**

In my thesis I analyse the peculiarities and characteristics of the community of the forge plant in Ózd, and the structural changes that took place there. My research focuses on the period that starts with the establishment of the corporation in 1881 and lasts until its communisation in 1946. During that time the plant served as the premises of the Rimamurányi-Salgótarjáni Ironworks plc., i.e. the Rimamurányi-Salgótarjáni Vasmű Rt., also known as Rima or RMST. I do not intend to produce a classic report of the history of the corporation, but rather to use the community of the Ózd-plant as an example to present the formation of the Hungarian industrial society and working class, its stratifications, characteristics, distinctive features and everyday life over this six and the half decades, from the 1880s to the communisation that followed II. World War.

The local community and the life of the plant workers during this period had only been tangentially analysed, and the conclusions of such studies – if any – seem to be dubious now in a number of cases. A monograph of the history of the Ózd Forge Plant, edited by Iván Berend T., was issued in 1980, and another book was published by László Réti L. on the history of the Rimamurányi-Salgótarjáni Ironworks plc., but in fact these should be considered historical rather than social historical studies. Among the local historians, there are two researchers, László Dobosy Sr. and Tibor Vass Sr., whose works are to be highlighted, although there have also been others who studied certain fields of the Ózd forge plant and the everyday life of its community. There, however, has never been a systematic and thorough social historical study of the plant's community, so in a sense my research closes this gap. I have been researching this subject since the beginning of my academic studies.

## **II. The objectives**

The appearance of industry in Ózd and the consequent restratification of the local community, as well as the evolving industrial society raise a number of questions and problems that are to be discussed.

1. It is a fundamental aim of this research to analyse how the foundation of the forge plant changed the local community and how the process took place.
2. There are, however, further issues that are addressed in my thesis:
3. What approach, what conceptual framework, what analytic methods are to be applied to interpret the social fabric of the plant community?

4. What was the basis of the stratification of the plant community (qualification, occupation, residence, lifestyle, income, cultural capital, prestige)? What are the characteristic features of the various strata?
5. How homogeneous or heterogeneous was the working class?
6. Was there any mobility among the strata? Was it promoted or hindered by the educational system, the hierarchy of the plant or the existence of cultural associations?
7. What role did the corporation play in the shaping of living conditions, and in the social situation, everyday life and mental attitude of its employees?
8. How did the lifestyle of the local peasants change? What were the differences between the various social clusters as for alimentation, clothing and attitude?
9. Were the employees of the plant organised? Were there any kinds of trade unions to protect and enforce the workers' interests, and if so, how successfully did they work?
10. What impact did industrialisation and the evolvement of new social strata have on the urbanisation of the settlement? Why and how did Ózd outstrip the other settlements? What were the related legal actions, and the spatial and social consequences?

### **III. Resources and the method of analysis**

Besides reviewing the national and international literature on the topic, I studied a wide range of other available resources. I reconstructed the demographic processes and the characteristics of the local community and of the plant community with the help of statistical data collecting/mining based on census registers and process panels. The starting point of the analysis of the size of the community of the Ózd-plant and of its strata was the National Archives of Hungary and the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Archives of Hungary, and their files concerning the Ózd-plant of the Rimamurányi-Salgótarjáni Ironworks plc. For the thorough evaluation of the social changes, a detailed survey of the relevant birth certificates (issued by a governmental agency or by a church) was necessary. In my research I also used the electoral rolls and residential rolls, and other local resources, such as the files of the Reading Club, the most prestigious association in Ózd. I also strived to use the rich pictorial database and sought ways to analyse the available images as social historical resources.

Corporate publications, corporate policies, articles from various newspapers with different affiliations – which allowed me to observe the same topic from different angles –, birth certificates and other corporate files enabled a relatively satisfactory analysis regarding the questions of the social status. For the analysis of the characteristics of alimentation and clothing, however, the archival resources were scarce and fragmented; therefore in the relevant chapters of my thesis I mainly relied on oral history, i.e. interviews with former workers and elder residents of the Ózd neighbourhood. My interviewees were highly valuable resources, thanks to, among other things, the personal papers and documents that they had shared with me. My research regarding clothing also relied on photo analysis, which is a cultural anthropological method not widely used in Hungary yet; as photos accurately document the typical clothing, costumes of the given social groups. Besides archival resources, it was again reminiscences that assisted my research in the chapter about mentality. It was the files of the trade unions and the social democratic party, articles from newspaper with different affiliations and corporate publications, as well as personal papers that I used as resources in the chapter about the protection of the workers' interest. In the section about industrialisation and urbanisation, besides the literature germane to the subject, the administrative files of the relevant settlements and the statistical data of the censuses were of utmost importance, but I also drew information from newspaper articles and reports. I used the rich collection of images for my thesis, partly from the archives of the Ózd Museum Collection, partly from personal archives.

#### **IV. New scientific results**

The start of the metallurgy in Ózd as well as the location of industries in the middle of the 19th century brought a significant change in the settlement and the image of society.

Until this period people had only been involved in agriculture exclusively in the region, and Ózd was only a small village populated by a couple of hundred purely Hungarian people, mostly Catholics. Moreover, the centre of the region was not Ózd, it was the neighbouring village, Várkony. With the establishment of the industrial estate Ózd fast became an important „intersection” of the region. At first there was a need for experts, who were recruited from Felvidék or other foreign areas, the reason for this was that the population of the region previously worked mainly in agriculture and there was not enough skilled workers.

The majority of the immigrants, however, were not Hungarian-speaking. They were partly Protestants. Since most of them had previously had any connection with industry, they represented a different mentality and scale of values, so they changed the local society radically. The inhabitants of not only Ózd but also the neighbouring settlements felt the wind of change: they were beginning to be involved in the developing metallurgy at a higher rate, so the agricultural population continually restructured. These processes speeded up thanks to the development of industry and after the factory of Ózd fused with those of Salgótarján and Nádasd establishing the Rimamurány-Salgótarjáni Vasmű Rt. (1881), one of whose premises, the one in Ózd, gained significance and became an especially important element of one of the most determinant industrial establishments of the country.

As a result of the industrialization new layers of society emerged. The white-collar workers of metallurgy were the officials, the blue-collar workers were the factory workers, who did not form a homogeneous unit at all. The highest-ranked representatives of the officials were the major officials, who ran the factory, apart from them we can talk about - classified by their profession - technological, commercial and human intellectuals, and classified by qualifications, there were officials with a university or a secondary school certificate. These people formed a rather small proportion of the society of the factory, since the majority of that were simple workers. The image of a homogeneous working class, in any sense, must be forgotten: this layer of society was divided manifold, the traversability among its groups were also present.

The classification of the workers on the basis of their professions and their positions within the factory is as follows: there were the so-called „upper workers”, whose responsibilities required skills, and there were the „lower workers” with limited knowledge and skills. Those who were in the top positions within the „uppers” were the minor officials, who led and supervised all the manual workers. These officials were also referred to as masters, - in official statistics foremen, some of them were overlookers or supervisors. The lesser important positions in the upper workers’ hierarchy were those of the overmen, who were responsible for directing smaller groups. Around the end of the 19th century they were in such a financial situation that even provided them with suffrage. Among the upper workers there were two distinguishable groups that did not have any leadership power. One of them were the skilled workers, recognized throughout the country, including electricians or joiners. The other group comprised workers, whose skills could only be utilized within the walls of the factory, they were rollermen, solderers, but at the same time they were more prestigious than the members of the other group thanks to their professional knowledge and importance in

production. That is the reason why there is also no use distinguishing skilled workers and factory hands, since the factory's highest paid employees were not recognized in other parts of the country as skilled workforce.

One of the management's priorities and goals was to ensure the future replacement of the officials and workers. The education system as well as the high-level practice-oriented training promoted this too. As a result, so-called multi-generation official and worker dynasties came into being. It played a prominent role not only in the company's labour policy but also in the families' life strategies that their children and grandchildren should also find employment at the „Rima”. They regarded such a decision as the best in terms of secure income and the transmittal of status. From the youth's point of view, it was not only a way to attain the same standard of living achieved by their parents, but they also attached importance to their possible social advancement based on their qualifications, experiences, knowledge. In connection with the workers we could talk about mobility, the common examples of which, depending on the people's practice and qualifications, were: from lower workers to upper workers – even to the top positions, within the uppers from simple skilled workers to overmen or minor officials. The transition from simple factory hands to officials was, however, only possible in exceptional cases.

The management in its labour policy, from rational considerations, appreciated mainly its workers with professional skills, whom the management insisted on even in critical times in contrast to those formerly poor peasant-turned-lower workers who settled from the neighbouring villages and later from the Great Plain. The analysis of the wage categories also bears out the structure of the factory's society detailed above, so we can easily identify the certain groups. The appreciation of the workers within the uppers who were only accepted in the factory can be seen by their higher wages, these so-called „fire-workers” earned more than all the other simple „classical” workers.

The wages of upper and lower workers increased gradually while the wages of the workers who were seasonally employed did not reach similar levels. The layers of society could also be isolated by domicile. The majority of the officials and the uppers lived in workers' dwellings built by the company and most of the lower workers working in the main factory units dwelled also there. The rent was minimal, electricity was free, and they were provided many perks, such as higher quota of coal than what others got. This also reflected the differences, inequalities within the working class. Most of the lower workers lived in the village-like part of Ózd and in the neighbouring settlements, some of the upper workers with traditional vocational diploma emerged from them. They did not give up their previous

agricultural activities either, continuing them as supplementary jobs. This meant a great help in times of recession when crowds of unskilled workers were dismissed. In these hard times they could still produce the necessary food on their small parcels, which was a great help at the time. In their mentality, however, they were more attached to their land, therefore it is more appropriate to use the agricultural-factory worker name in their case. Seasonal workers lived in Ózd, or in the neighbouring settlements in subtenancy and lodgings.

The groups can also be classified by their cultural organisations. The officials went to the Tiszti Kaszinó (Casino for Officials), the upper workers to the Olvasó Egylet (Society of Readers), while the majority of the lower workers were outside of the entertainment possibilities of the company even in the time of the war-time boom of the economy.

After the analysis of the social stratification, we can clearly state that there was no homogeneous working class, and the classification of skilled-unskilled workers cannot be considered exclusive. We can divide the working class into upper and lower workers rather by their importance in production, prestige, standard of living, extensity and their cultural differences.

The management's welfare policy was of outstanding importance, which reflects the management's patriarchal care. The Rimamurány-Salgótarjáni Vasmű Rt. maintained a welfare and cultural institutional network considered to be of a high level of the time, including an extensive social security network, which was built up in a short time, modern medical attention, institutions for entertainment and education, and favourable possibilities for purchase.

The well-being of the factory's employees was also important for the company itself, the workers could still live in decent circumstances even in times of crisis. There was a significant loyalty to the company, which became part of the mentality of later generations, which they attached to the Rima.

The ensuring of the well-being of employees and workers was supported by the fact that Middle-Europe's first indoor swimming pool was built in Ózd thanks to the management, and the auditorium of the workers' cultural establishment was the sixth biggest in the country. The industrialization also brought considerable changes in the local people's everyday lives, customs. The eating possibilities were affected by the factory as well as the customs of the immigrants. As for people's clothing habits, spectacular changes occurred, as the previous clothes typical of the region were replaced by other styles.

New consumer habits appeared typical of certain social and occupational groups and positions, which was influenced not only by the society's stratification but also by domicile.

In their mentality the factory's officials and workers were attached to their company so much that the job they did at the factory had priority over other things in their lives.

Religion played an important role in their everyday lives, too. It was supported by their employers. As an effect of the high-level corporate welfare policy the protection of the workers' interests was insufficient in Ózd except for the years following the First World War. The upper workers, who had the possibility of forming unions, felt that their standard of living was of an acceptable level, therefore they had no need to claim the improvement of their conditions from the company through strikes and organisations. The majority of the lower workers supplemented their income by agricultural work, while the seasonal workers, who stayed in Ózd temporarily, did not have the necessary power and numbers to form any units. Consequently, there is no use talking about „workers' mentality" or „consciousness of the working class". This way the labour organisations could not fulfil their duties properly.

As a result of the industrialization Ózd soon felt the effects of urbanisation. Although most of the neighbouring settlements developed, Ózd became the centre of the region without any doubt by the turn of the 20th century. In the first half of the century Ózd looked rather like a town, but due to mainly financial reasons and the country's political situation – there were only a few settlements pronounced towns – it was not possible that this settlement, which in the 20th century evolved into a smaller town with its underdeveloped institutions, could be given a higher status. During the period between the two world wars the thought of becoming a town arised again and again, it soon went on when certain parts of the neighbouring settlements were annexed, followed by the fusion of settlements in the year 1940, and at the end of the process – towards the end of our analysed period - thanks to the change in attitude of the politicians, Ózd was given the status of a town in 1949.

In my dissertation I present the formation, stratification, and everyday life of an industrial society through the example of the local and factory society of Ózd. In my research I tried to become familiar with the specialized literature of the topic, both national and international, and to apply a wide range of relevant information so that an even more complex image could be formed of the characteristics of the workers from the settlement and the factory. A new approach of the factory's social structure and the working class became possible through the treatment and comparison of sporadic, hardly accessible sources and methods which have rarely been used in the science of history.



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