

SECOND HOMES IN HUNGARY

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INTRODUCTION

The economic, social, technological development that has taken place in the last third of the 20th century has had significant impacts on the lives of modern communities, touching almost all areas of life. A specific feature of the structural change, connected to urbanisation, is the fact that the so-called basic human existence processes lost their former twofold division and were further divided in time and space. Besides residential and work places, the places for recreation became more and more important. The most important settlements marks of this process are the boom in the number of second homes, including within this category leisure-time homes and the spatial expansion of the holiday-recreation areas.

The process that started from the large cities and mainly from the well-to-do layers – thus characterised as a spatial and social diffusion phenomenon – significantly changed the spatial systems of the affected settlements, their morphologies, functional division, infrastructure, land use etc. Also, it had a considerable impact on the communities and living styles of the areas of origin and destination.

DEFINITION, RESEARCH PRELIMINARIES, CHOICE OF SUBJECT

Definition, characteristics and forms of second homes and leisure-time homes

Holiday houses, summer houses, weekend houses – which I will use as synonyms from now on – belong to the second homes used in leisure time, for leisure purposes. It is very difficult to give an exact definition of the second home or second flat, since the concepts are different from country to country and researcher to researcher. (*Barbier 1965, Baumhackl 1989, Bielckus 1977, Coppock 1977, Csordás 1993, Downing-Dower 1973, Haimayer 1979, Kowalczyk 1994, Robertson 1977, Ruppert 1973, Wolfe 1977*)

In my opinion a second home is a house that is private property of or used for a long period of time as an occasional dwelling by a person (family) that does not consider it as a primary home. In Hungary this category contains the buildings used for leisure time purposes, with an area bigger than 12 m², irrespective of whether they were created by the purchase of a house in a holiday settlement, a garden or an unused village

house; accommodations for students and employees (student hostels and accommodations for the employees or rented accommodations).

The leisure-time homes within the second homes are mainly used in leisure time and temporarily (on weekdays after working hours, on the weekends and during holidays), primarily for leisure purposes.

There is a conceptual difference between the second home and the leisure-time home. The former is a wider category, does not only serve the passing of leisure time but also has functions connected to training and work. In spite of this, these two notions are used as synonyms by the researchers. At the same time, studies up to now have almost exclusively dealt with the holiday and leisure functions of the second homes.

According to the distance between the permanent residence and the leisure time home, the mode and intensity of use two main recreation areas can be differentiated. The leisure-time homes in the proximity of the towns are mainly used on the weekends. These buildings can transform into a permanent residence during the life cycles of the spatial expansion of the town. The leisure-time homes far from the permanent residence are used seasonally, especially in holiday time. A much smaller proportion of these buildings will become permanent residences, because of the greater distance.

One of the consequences of the phenomenon of second homes is the increasing tendency of townspeople to get away for the weekend, eventually followed by the migration of some layers to settlements in the proximity of the towns. The spatial spread of the second homes is thus part of the town development process, and can be linked to suburbanisation. The seasonal suburbanisation can amount to “real” suburbanisation in individual cases: by the transformation of second homes into permanent homes.

The formation and transformation of leisure-time homes as a result of the processes mentioned above may significantly change the landscape. Besides geographical (morphological) signs it can greatly influence the economic structure of the destinations, the infrastructural provision, the state of the environment, in fact, the social and demographic state of the population living there.

Research preliminaries, choice of subject

Scientific analysis of leisure-time homes had already started before World War II. (*Carlson 1938, Greely 1942, Poser 1939, Strzygowski 1942*) Because of the factors leading to their formation, in the developed countries they became a mass phenomenon only in the 1950s and 1960s. Simultaneously, the amount of (mainly geographical) research connected to them increased. (*Graf 1954, Grano 1952, Nordell-Rydberg 1959, Wolfe 1951*)

In Hungary it was mainly planners, architects, and construction experts who drew attention to the above-mentioned problems in the 1970s. In the 1980s a number of geographical studies were carried out by the Geographical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, under the leadership of István Berényi (*Berényi 1979*,

1981, 1983, 1986) and by Kossuth Lajos University of Debrecen, under the leadership of Katalin M. Erdős. (*M. Erdős 1985, 1988*)

In Hungary only a few studies have dealt with research into second homes and thereby leisure-time homes in the framework of a systematic, comprehensive survey. The majority of the surveys done so far was either lacking the geographical approach or was limited to a smaller area or a few settlements.

The last time when summer houses and garden weekend houses were registered in Hungary was 18 years ago, so the information about them is deficient, while their role still increased in satisfying the holiday needs of the population.

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE RESEARCH

During my surveys I used the database available from the TÁKISZ (Regional Information Service of the Ministry of Home Affairs). As I could clearly see from my telephone inquiries and personal introductions, neither the land offices nor the electricity supply companies possess the adequate data, or the data were not available and I did not manage to select them from their information sources.

Another factor which made me choose the databases of the TÁKISZ offices is the fact that 6-7 years ago I carried out a selection for the Great Plain counties. Unfortunately, a number of things have changed since then, which presented considerable obstacles to data collection:

- Change of political system
A complete change of political system has taken place, which made access to the data more difficult.
- Changes in power structure
Changes have taken place in the executive power, local governments have been created, with the right to decide, among other things, whether to introduce local taxes in the given settlement or not. Thus it should have been important to have obtained complete data for at least the year 1991. As the processing system of the TÁKISZ offices of some counties has changed since then, too, a great amount of material was stored on tapes which could only have been read using TPA machines. Several counties informed me about the total lack of their data concerning 1991. A greater problem was in those counties where even the data of 1996 were difficult to trace.
- Lack of co-operation
The leader of the Veszprém county TÁKISZ office, having received my request for information, asked for a theoretical opinion (i.e. permission) from the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry did not con-

tribute to the provision of the data, saying that these were “confidential tax data”. Therefore we do not have any information about a county which has one of the highest number of holiday homes.

- **Incomplete data**

The records from Pest and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén counties did not contain the owner’s place of residence, making the display of spatial connections (both for the resort area and the place of residence) impossible. In the major part (approximately 97%) of the Somogy county records the data relating to the place of residence are missing, too.

- **Changes in registration policy**

Besides these normal deficiencies, there is a serious content failure, as well. This is due to the fact that the system of registration changed after 1991. The settlements could decide, when introducing local taxes, to take out the holiday homes from the “paying circle”. In Tass, for example, where there are almost 1,000 holiday homes, no tax is levied for the buildings, they are not even registered, thus they do not appear in our database, either. It is almost unbelievable that in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county there were only some 1,300 buildings in 1996, and in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg only 340. In this latter county, almost 1,200 holiday homes had been registered 7 years before. Additional content problems were caused by those settlements which were primarily not resort areas, but buildings built in so-called closed gardens were used for recreation purposes. Formerly these buildings had been registered as holiday homes. The change of the legal regulations made it possible for the owner to apply the term “under agricultural use” for such sites and buildings, putting them at once out of the database of the survey. This way we lost sight of more than 2,000 buildings in Debrecen, which had been registered in 1989 and still in 1991.

As we were not able to obtain data for 1991, we had hardly any hope of demonstrating the change in the proportion of the foreign owners during the past five years. A questionnaire survey to be carried out later could resolve this issue.

In spite of all the afore-mentioned difficulties, these were the spatial connections as they appeared in the survey.

A SURVEY OF THE RESORT AREAS OF HUNGARY

Place of residence and origin of the owners

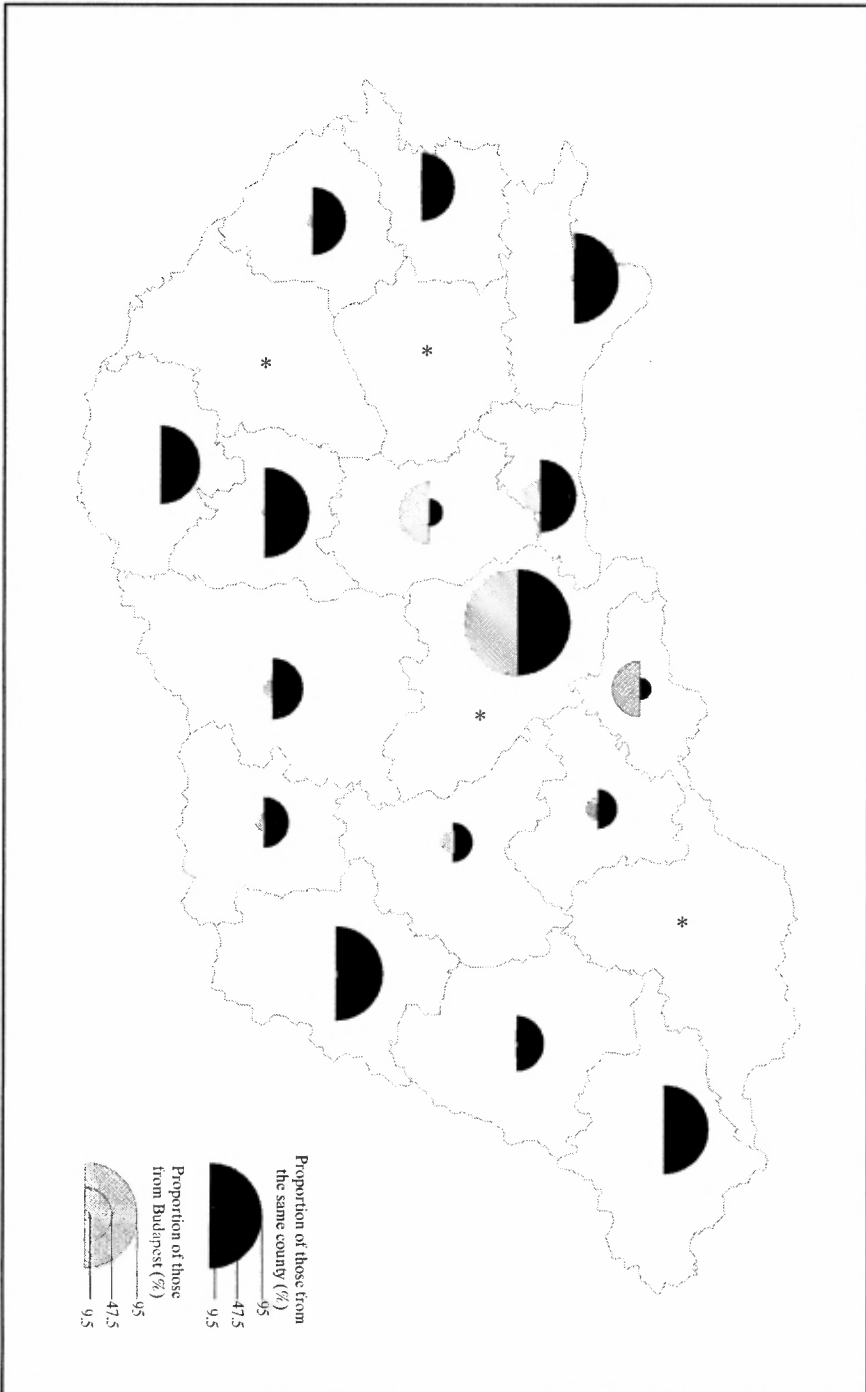
The majority of the owners live in Hungary. (*Csordás 1997*) The number of foreign holiday home owners is negligible, although in the Great Plain counties it is more than it was before the change of political system (only 2 foreigners had holiday properties, while today there are almost 80). Foreign citizens mainly appeared in the well-known places (Hajdúszoboszló, Tiszakécske, Lakitelek, Gyula, Tiszafüred, Kiskunmajsa), mostly in the vicinity of thermal baths. In the course of land office research concerning Tiszakécske and Lakitelek three years ago, after examining the registration sheets of all holiday sites, I found that it was mostly Germans, especially East Germans, who had bought holiday homes in Hungary (owners from Leipzig, Dresden and East Berlin). In the Transdanubian region the proportion of foreigners is significant in selected holiday regions (southern shore of the Lake Balaton and the Danube Bend).

If we look at the proportion of the owners from the same county and from Budapest in each of the counties, we can see that in Nógrád and Fejér counties the number of citizens from the capital city is much higher than that of the residents of the respective counties. In the resort areas of Komárom-Esztergom, Heves and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok counties, the proportion of Budapest citizens is also significant, although here the local owners make up the majority. In the more distant counties, the rate of Budapest owners does not exceed 5%. (*Figure 1*)

Budapest citizens appear among the holiday home owners with different numbers and ratios: they possess holiday homes in almost 80% of the surveyed settlements, namely in 103 places, and their rate can be considered significant (above 10%) within a 120-km radius. We can observe, however, that the smaller the radius, the higher the share of Budapest owners in the resort areas, especially in the northern and north-eastern part of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok and in Fejér, Komárom-Esztergom and Nógrád counties. (It is extremely unfortunate that the data regarding place of residence are missing for Pest, Veszprém, Somogy and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, because – considering the phenomenon of *Naherholung* (recreation close-at-hand) – their share must be high in the proximity of the capital city and around Lake Balaton.)

It is notable that most of the owners are from their own large regions. This means that the share of Great Plain owners exceeds 75% in half of the resort areas of the six Great Plain counties (*Figure 2*), while the ratio of those from Transdanubia and Northern Hungary is only 0.1-10% on average. The share of the holiday home owners from Northern Hungary is higher in their own counties and in the northern parts of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok and Hajdú-Bihar counties as well as in the villages alongside the Tisza. In the case of those living in Transdanubia, the “local”, Transdanubian identity is even stronger with respect to the holiday homes, as in almost two thirds of the resort areas, the proportion of the Transdanubian owners exceeds 75% (*Figure 3*), while their share in the Great Plain resort areas is under 10%. The dividing role of the Danube is worth mentioning, e.g. in the totally different figures for the villages of

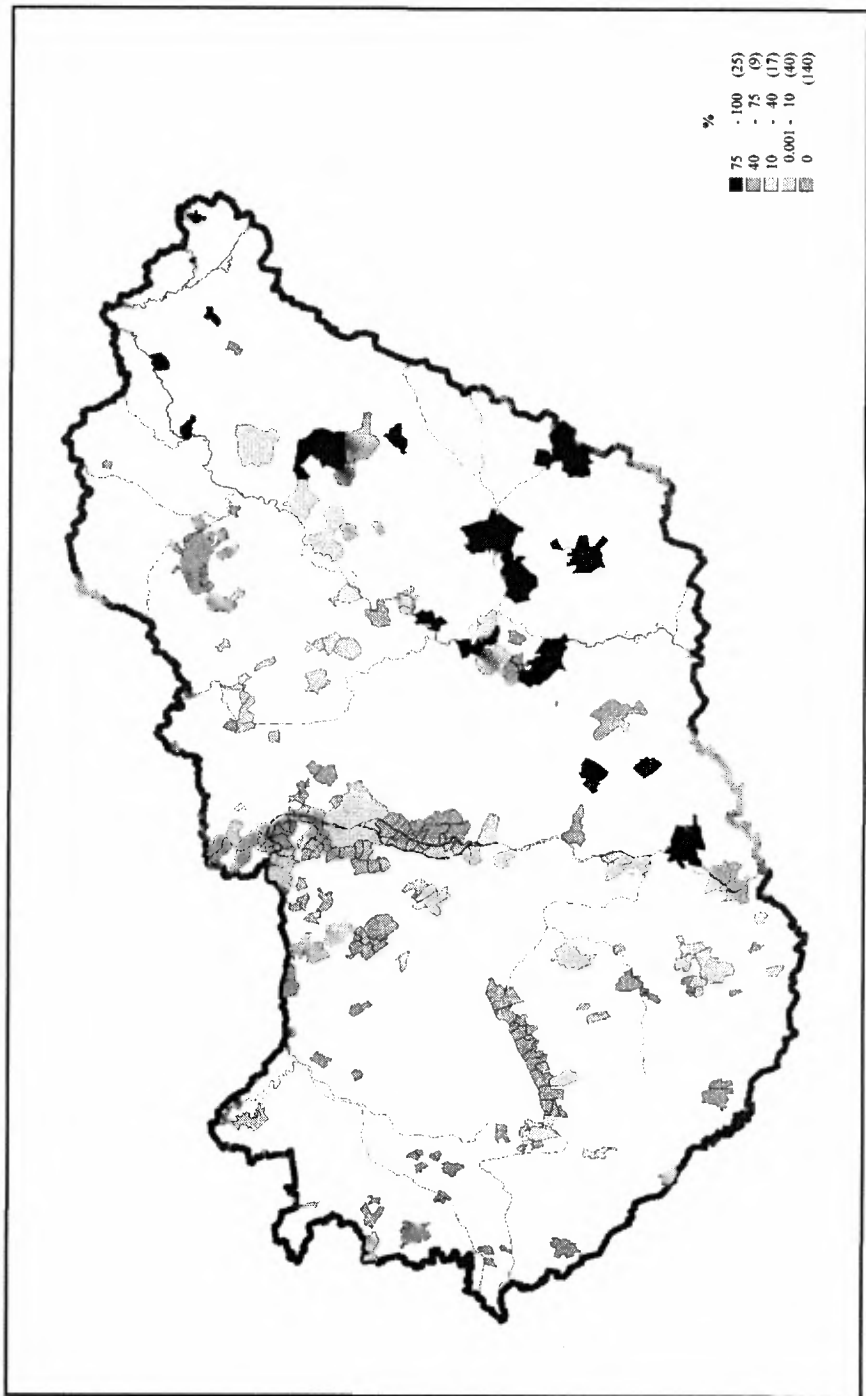
Figure 1
Proportion of holiday home owners in Hungarian counties with a permanent residence in Budapest and the same county, 1997



(*Missing data regarding place of residence in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Pest, Somogy and Veszprém counties)

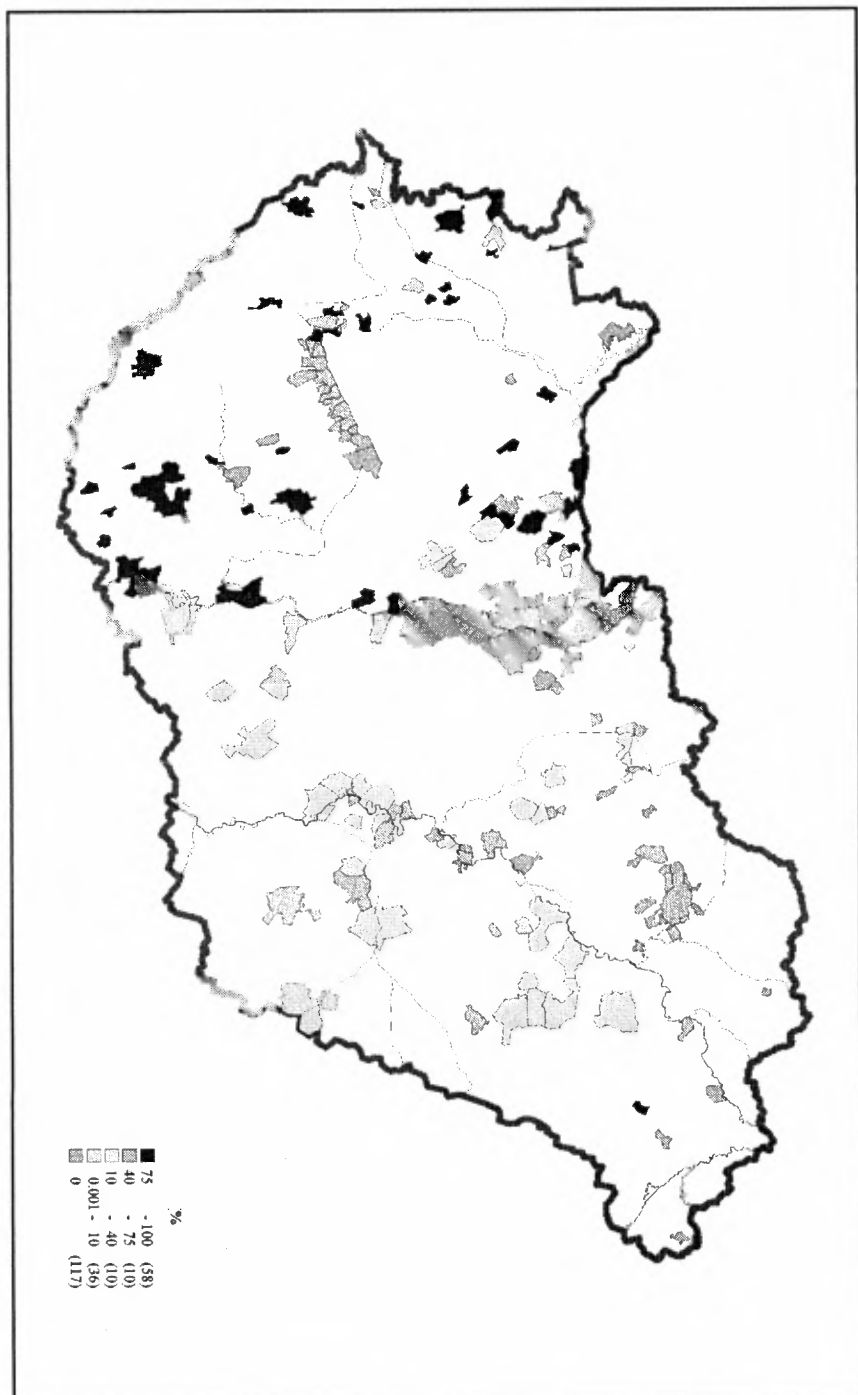
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Figure 2
Proportion of holiday home owners in Hungarian resorts with a permanent residence on the Great Plain, 1997



(Data regarding place of residence are completely missing in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Pest and Veszprém counties, while in Somogy only 3% of them is available)

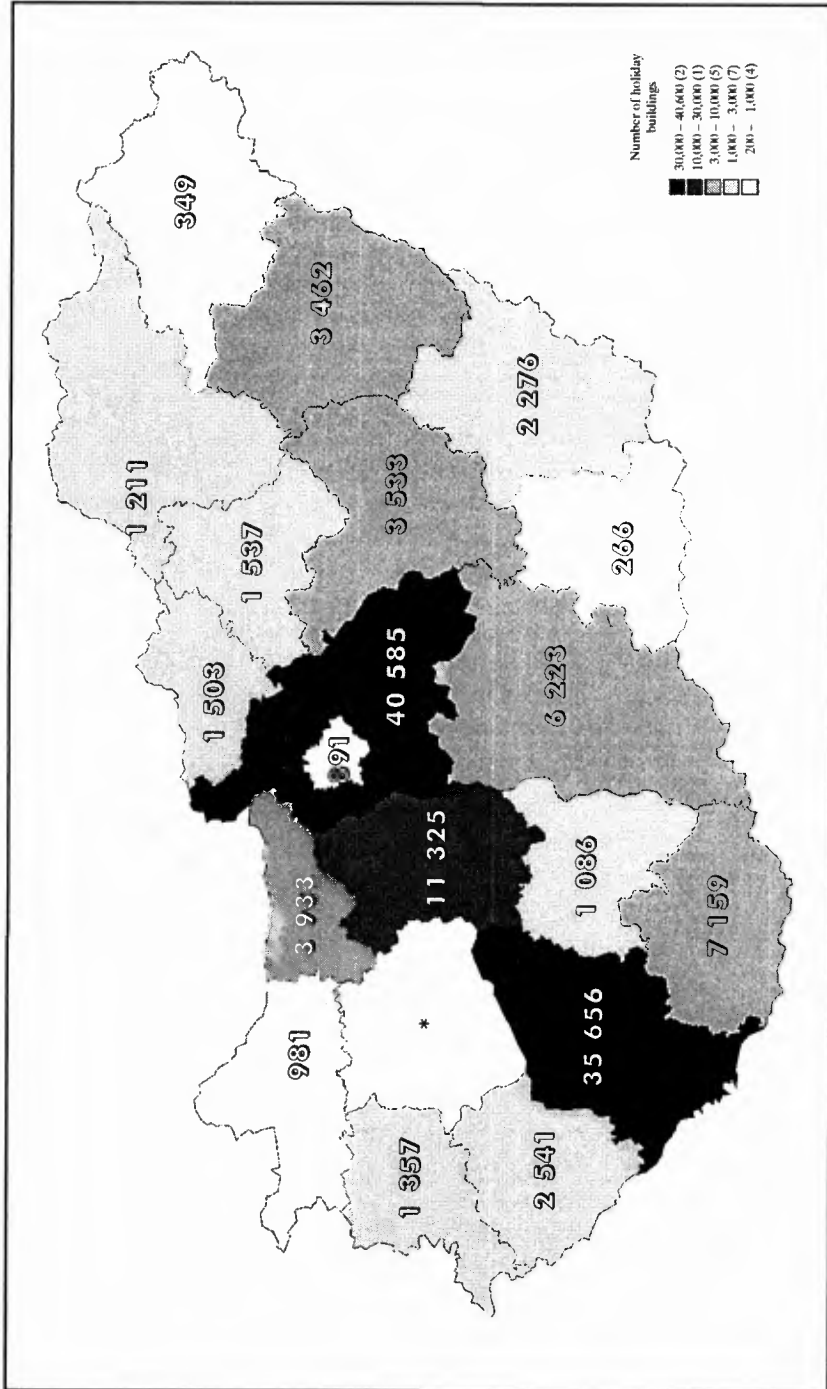
Figure 3
Proportion of holiday home owners in Hungarian resorts with a permanent residence in Transdanubia, 1997



(Data regarding place of residence are completely missing in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Pest and Veszprém counties, while in Somogy only 3% of them is available)

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Figure 4
Number of holiday buildings registered by TAKISZ in Hungarian counties, 1997



(* Missing data)

Rácalmás (Eastern Transdanubia) and Szalkszentmárton (North-West Great Plain). The same can be observed for Great Plain owners, such as in Dávod (South-West Great Plain) and Mohács (South-East Transdanubia).

The number, breakdown and size of holiday buildings

The number of holiday homes in Hungary grew fifteenfold between 1960-1990, to approximately 170,000. In the given period, the number of summer houses per 100 flats grew tenfold, but the figure of 4.4 is far from the leaders in Europe, the Swedish, Norwegians, and French.

The number of holiday buildings, taking the above-mentioned constraints into consideration (without Veszprém county and the non-registered settlements), is almost 130,000. Pest and Somogy counties have the highest number of holiday homes: 40,000 and 35,000, respectively. (*Figure 4*) In the other counties there are much fewer holiday homes: 11,000 in Fejér, 7,000 in Baranya counties and 6,000 in Bács-Kiskun, 3,500 in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, 3,500 in Hajdú-Bihar counties on the Great Plain. In Komárom-Esztergom there are 3,900 holiday homes. In all other counties the number of such buildings is below 3,000.

Looking at the situation by settlements, this means that there are 13 villages and towns in Hungary where the number of registered holiday buildings equals to that of a whole county. They are mainly in the Balaton shore settlements: Siófok (7,200), Zamárdi (5,000), Fonyód (4,000), Balatonfenyves (3,600) and Balatonlelle (2,500 buildings). Others can be found at Lake Velence (Gárdony: 5,600; Velence: 2,500 buildings) or in Pest county (Budaörs: 2,200; Budakeszi: 2,300; Ráckeve: 2,400 buildings) but there are thermal settlements among them as well (Harkány: 4,300 and Hajdúszoboszló: 2,100 buildings).

An important index number of the holiday homes is the so-called average taxable area. We can observe that these figures are higher in the larger resort areas (50-100 m²). The explanation for this is the fact that formerly the only way one was allowed to build larger holiday homes in these areas was also to use the buildings for tourism purposes, i.e. the holiday homes were integrated into the system of tourist accommodation through tourism companies and travel agencies. (*Figure 5*) Thus at Lake Balaton, in the thermal settlements and the newly developing resorts the average taxable area of the holiday homes is relatively high, many times equivalent to the category of dwelling houses. At the same time we can observe, despite Debrecen, Szeged and other towns not having been surveyed, that the area of weekend houses in towns or built and used by town dwellers in closed gardens is much smaller, according to the law, not more than 32 m². Thus it is no surprise that in the resort areas in and around Budapest, Pécs, Szombathely, Debrecen, Baja etc. the average taxable area varies between 20-33 m². If we examine the buildings the taxable area of which is below 32 m², in the above-mentioned settlements and regions their proportion exceeds 75%, in some places reaching 100%.

Looking at the situation by counties, we can see that the share of the holiday homes with 1-32 m² area approaches or exceeds 70% in Baranya and Csongrád counties and in Budapest. In Zala, Tolna and Heves counties this figure remains below 40%, while in Somogy, Fejér, and Győr-Moson-Sopron it is less than 50%.

Breakdown of the owners by sex and age

A breakdown of the owners by sex reveals that in Budapest and in Pest, Baranya, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok and Nógrád counties the share of female owners is relatively high, in fact, in Somogy it almost reaches 50%. This is mainly due to the ageing of these areas, the resort areas having been built a long time ago and forming around the thermal baths.

By the age pyramid of the owners we can see that those between 50-60 years of age (born between 1938-1947) have the largest share. Only Zala (with an average of 60-70 years), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Tolna and Csongrád (40-50 years of age) are exceptions from this. (*Figure 6*)

It was immediately apparent on registration in 1980 that the proportion of the older working population and pensioners was high. As more than 16 years have passed since then, the major part of the older working age groups have become pensioners, so I examined the share of the holiday home owners above 60. The proportion of retired owners exceeds 30-50%, especially around the capital city. It is understandable that in the resort areas around thermal baths and in the neighbourhood of some large cities the share of pensioners reaches the figure mentioned above. We can see, however, that in those settlements on the Tisza and some new thermal baths (e.g. in Kiskunmajsa) where construction has been booming since 1980, the share of owners above 60 does not reach 30%, in fact, in many places not even 15%. The differences may be even better demonstrated by the fact that in some Balaton resorts the owners under 40 are missing, while at Lake Tisza, for example, their proportion reaches 25% in some places.

In general we can say that the age of the owner depends on the level of development of the resort, and also on who is registered (as it is not always the owner who pays the tax on the building). In my essays published in the early 1990s I mentioned a generation shift of the owners, which can either be caused by natural factors (inheritance, transferring the building into the child's name etc.) or a necessity (the change of ownership takes place outside the family, because of a rise in maintenance costs or problems of the primary residence).

As women usually outlive their spouses, I examined the proportion of female owners. In those resorts where the share of owners above the age of 60 is high, the share of female owners rises, too. This is the case along Lake Balaton, around Budapest and in a number of thermal settlements, e.g. Hajdúszoboszló, Berekfürdő, Jászapáti, Cserkeszlő, Harkány, Lenti and Tiszafüred.

The brief analysis introduced above is only a reflection of the visible differences. I

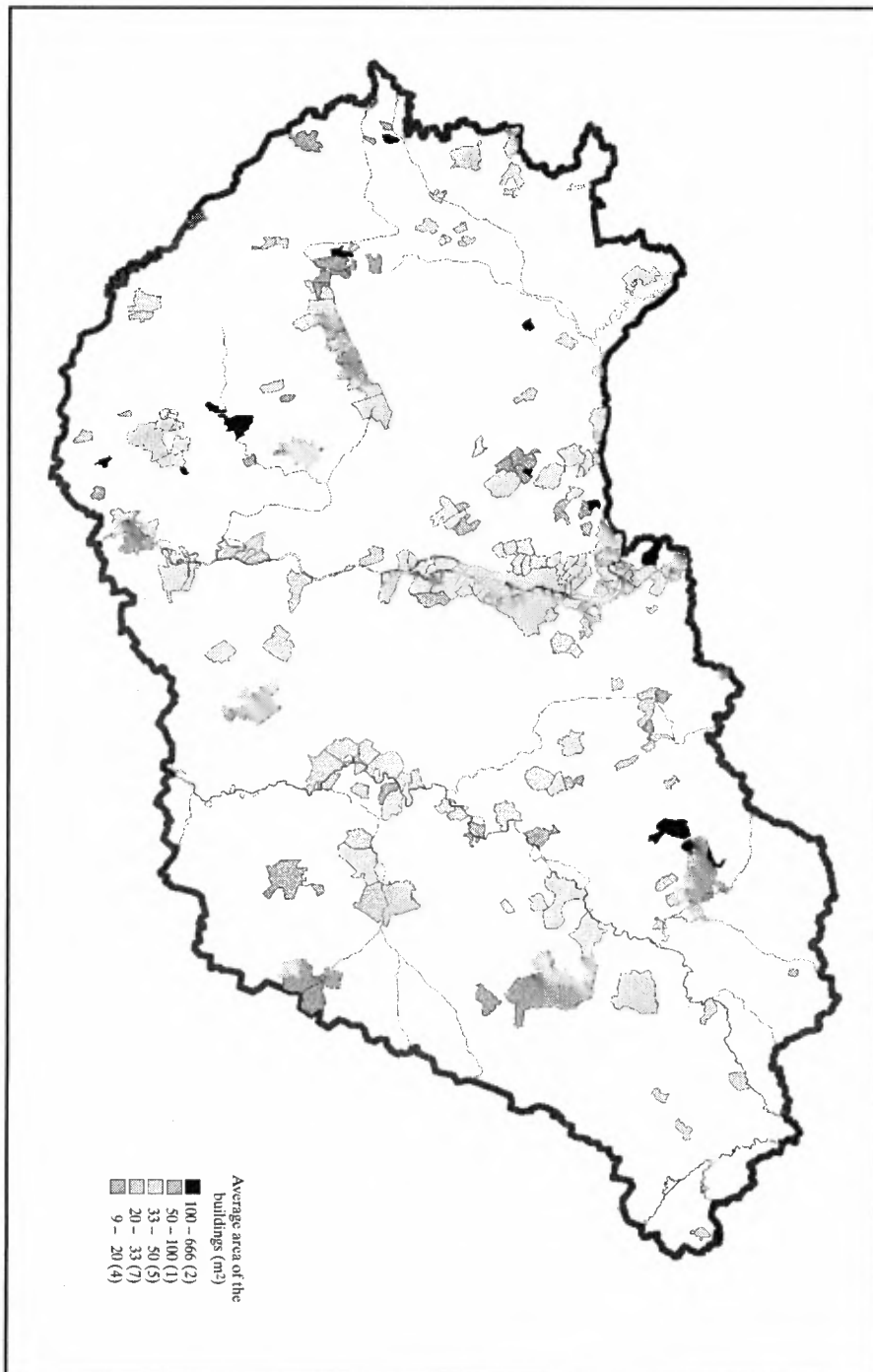
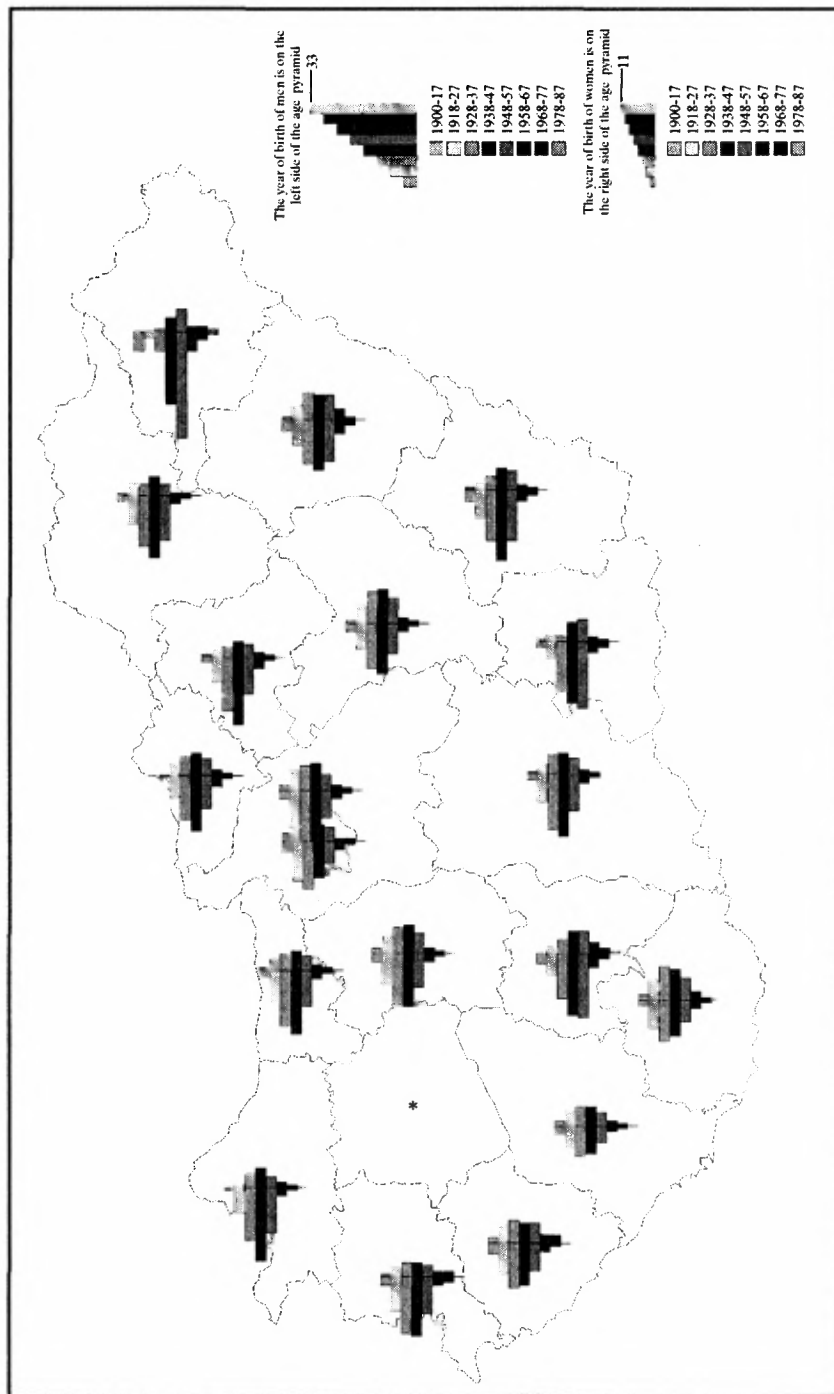


Figure 5
Average taxable area of the holiday buildings registered by TAKISZ in Hungarian resorts, 1997

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Figure 6
Age pyramid of holiday home owners in Hungarian counties, 1900-1987 (%)



(* Missing data)

will provide a more detailed survey consisting of more indices, after obtaining the data for the missing counties.

SUMMARY

Our laws enabled families to have more than one flat in Hungary in the past decades, these were considered “surplus flats”, second flats. In the case of flats and holiday houses many times there were frequent discrepancies between the purpose of their creation and their actual use, which was to a great extent the result of the current decrees and the subsequent mitigating circumstances they contained.

Within the framework of the centrally-planned economy the construction of holiday houses was one of the most liberal areas of individual initiatives. The factors influencing their creation are very versatile and cannot always be explained by the general economic state of the country or by its direct change.

A significant share of those who pay tax on their holiday homes are elderly working people or pensioners, i.e. the generation that is no longer engaged in rearing their children and has reached the so-called consolidation phase in their life cycles.

These days we can witness an interesting natural and forced change of generation among the owners of holiday homes. Many owners who obtained their holiday homes 20-30 years ago, already as elderly working people, have died. An increasing share of those did not have flats of their own but had holiday homes, and were forced to sell their summer houses in order to buy their own permanent residences in the privatisation process of the flats. In the worsening economic situation many wish to sell their former holiday homes because of the maintenance of their flats or the increasing travel, maintenance, tax etc. costs. After all, a considerable share of the families can only support their children, help them to flats by mobilising their holiday homes.

In the developing supply market – as a consequence of the opening of the borders – more and more foreign owners of sites and buildings are appearing. Though a part of the examined settlements are situated far from the western border, in the future – especially because of the free movement of capital that is a result of joining the EU – we have to take it into consideration.

Even before privatisation a part of the most valuable areas or the ones with the most beautiful landscapes – usually river banks – was given to private persons. The “permission” to take the banks, dividing the area into sites was a mistake, since the spontaneously formed settlements of these areas mean the most serious danger. This process continued in the past eight years, since these settlements were in the biggest demand. Because of the condition of infrastructure, first of all sewerage system, there epidemics have already appeared and we cannot ignore them in the future, either. It is not just by chance that the Parliament and Government decree on the Great Plain drew special attention to the improvement of the state of the environment along the lakes and rivers, which, without the order of appropriate moratoriums, will only remain a wish.

Since the state could not provide the whole of the Hungarian population with the conditions of spending leisure time (firms, trade union holiday homes etc.), the forms of the leisure-time homes played an important role in satisfying individual and especially family recreational needs, thus giving those who did not have their own summer houses a greater chance of having a few weeks holiday with a trade union placing. Together with the change to a market economy, and the decline in the trade union holidays the role of private holiday homes will probably grow in importance in satisfying holiday needs. The question is how many per cent of the present owners will be able to keep their holiday homes and how many per cent of the population will be able to pay the increasing costs of recreation and holidays.

NOTE

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