

**ELTE EARTH SCIENCES
DOCTORAL SCHOOL**
Head of Doctoral School:
Dr. Gyula Gábris
Professor

**GEOGRAPHY-METEOROLOGY
DOCTORAL PROGRAMME**
Head of Doctoral programme:
Dr. József Nemes-Nagy
Professor

GERGELY LÁSZLÓ KISS-CSAPÓ

**TRADITION AND MODERNISATION:
SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CHANGES
IN LADAKH**

DOCTORAL THESES

SUPERVISOR:
Dr. Nemes-Nagy József DSc
Professor
Head of Department
Department of Regional Science, ELTE

BUDAPEST, 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

Rationale

What prompted me to carry out research in Ladakh was Ervin Baktay's famous book *On the top of the World*. Upon reading this book, I decided to visit the northernmost region of the Indian Himalayas Ladakh and Zaskar as Baktay suggested that Ladakh was perhaps one of the world's most remote and most mysterious regions.

Ladakh has a population of 117,000 people; 80-85% of whom are Buddhist. The region has partial internal self-government system in Jammu and Kashmir State in India, and its territory is slightly larger than Hungary. Why is it important to examine this remote region with such a small population? The whole territory was completely isolated until 1974, but then India opened its border for tourism. Due to these changes, economic processes inevitably set off, which the local inhabitants of Ladakh had not heard of before. It is believed that in numerous aspects, Ladakh is an example of the process that we have lived through in Europe over the past two centuries: the modernization of social and economic environment. Ladakhis experienced the same modernization process more rapidly, as it all happened in only two decades.

What happens to a mainly agricultural, sparsely populated traditional rural community if they are facing 20th century civilization, with all the blessings and curses? How does modernisation destroy village communities, families, and operating irrigation systems? How is local economy changing from being agricultural into a tourism-based one? How does the traditional way of life go into oblivion? How did a thousand-year old Buddhist gumpa become such a spectacular tourist attraction? How can traditional civilization fight against non-sustainable consumption? Is there a type of globalisation which respects local traditions?

My doctoral research was steered by the questions above, and in my dissertation I attempt to answer them by looking at various data sources. I have visited Ladakh five times, so beside the synthesis of recent research literature on Ladakh and interpreting spatial statistical data, I carried out field research and an interview study in the region.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The first time I met the issue of modernization of Ladakh was in 1998, when I went to the screening of “*Ancient Futures*” by Helena Norberg-Hodge arranged by a Ladakhi NGO. No matter how schematic the film was, it was evident that cultural degradation, rapid social changes and environmental degradation cause problems in Ladakh. That was the moment I realised that it would be worthwhile to investigate these issues from another viewpoint, and by using alternative methods.

In-depth analysis requires a thorough knowledge of existing scientific sources. Apart from the literature review, I could have relied on the *spatial statistical data in Ladakh*. Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir State do not normally make them available to the public, and such purchases can not be done through official channels.

In a third world country, the scientist has “to become accustomed to the vibe” and be accepted by the local population. Therefore, during my trips I tried to get closer to local conditions and Ladakhi way of life. During my trips I visited almost all districts of Ladakh which were open to tourists. There is constant military presence in the region, so for security reasons, some areas are hermetically sealed along the Chinese and Pakistani border, consequently it is impossible for a foreigner to obtain an entry permit.

2.1 Review of Literature

Ladakh is a real peculiarity from the aspect of Religion-Geography and Political-Geography. This fast-changing and fragile region of India has been investigated by cultural anthropologists, sociologists and political science researchers. Hungarian literature on Ladakh’s regional research has not yet been written. The Hungarian authors used to study the oeuvre of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös. Mostly, they followed his footsteps; they tried to reconstruct his life in Ladakh and Zaskar. Among others *Lajos Lóczy*, *Tivadar Duka*, *Ervin Baktay*, *Géza Bethlenfalvy*, *Péter Marczell* did research on Csoma’s life and work.

Prem Singh Jina is the most recognised expert, and he is of Indian origin. He has written more than ten books and fifty publications on Ladakh. *Shridhar Kaul*, teacher and researcher in Kashmir, devoted almost his entire life to studying Ladakh. *Janet Rizvi* wrote her doctoral thesis entitled *Ladakh – Crossroads of High Asia* in 1998. *Helena Norberg-Hodge* wrote her famous book *Ancient Futures* in 1991, and then a film was made with the same

title. *Recent research on Ladakh* is published in every three-four years; for a long time it was edited by *Henry Osmaston, Philip Denwood* and *Nawang Tsering*. From the eighth volume onwards, this monograph has been edited by *Martijn van Beek, Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen* and *Poul Pedersen* of the University of Aarhus, Denmark.

The *Ladags Melong (Ladakhi Mirror)* a bilingual (English and Ladakhi) quarterly magazine addressed local social affairs and it was published between 1994 and 2006.

2.2 Interviews

It is a recurring theme in the European research literature that Ladakhis have to be saved from the negative effects of modernisation and empirical research studies of local people's opinion are relatively scarce. Although there are quite a few negative side effects of fast and forced modernisation it is important to find out how Ladakhis *perceive* modernisation and how they relate to this phenomenon.

In 2007, using all financial means of mine, I tried to find out how personal lives have changed over the past three decades as a result of the modernization policy. I was interested in what impressions, what attitudes people have towards modernization and globalization. I attempted to find out what constitutes the essence of these changes in the eyes of Ladakhis.

Seventeen interviews were conducted with locals by using convenience sampling. In addition to their thoughts on *modernization* I was curious about how they imagine *the future of Ladakh, and their own lives*. Carrying out a representative study was not my aim due to financial and time constraints. Based on 17 qualitative interviews generalisable results cannot be presented, but my modest findings show how Ladakhis see themselves, their own region and the era of modernization.

The following table summarises the research questions, the data sources, the research tools and the data analysis methods.

| | Research Questions | Data sources, research tools | Data analysis |
|----------|---|--|--|
| 1 | What is your view of modernization in Ladakh? | Qualitative interviews (convenience sampling) Local newspapers, Field research, My photos, field notes | Constant Comparative method Phenomenology analysis |
| 2 | What is evident in the effects of modernization? 2.1.) How does modernization affect schooling? 2.2.) How does modernization influence people's career choices? 2.3.) How does it influence tourism-related businesses? 2.4.) What is the impact of modernization on the road network? 2.5.) How does it affect the infrastructure of Ladakhi settlements? 2.6.) What effects does it have on people's health? | Qualitative interviews Literature on Ladakh Statistical data Field research Own and archive photos | Constant Comparative method Phenomenology analysis Document analysis, statistical interpretation of data Qualitative analysis of research notes Qualitative analysis of text and visual material. Analysis of visual data on the basis of the following questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the apparent signs of the culture under investigation? • How can we describe the photos? • How can we group these socio-cultural visual experiences? |
| 3 | What scenarios can be outlined for Ladakhi aspirations for autonomy? | Qualitative interviews Newspapers, documents, Election results | Document analysis, qualitative analysis |

1. Table: Structure of the research: issues, data sources, tools and methods.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Separate chapters in the thesis show the Geography of Ladakh, its endangered fauna and flora, History and traditional everyday life. Later, a detailed analysis of the *fight for autonomy is presented*, which is very similar to the struggle of Kashmir 60 years ago. Over the past three decades, Ladakhi politicians wish to enforce the *subsidiary principle* within Kashmir, similar to how Kashmir emphasises its independence within the Indian state.

Finally the modernization of the last thirty years and the social changes related to these changes are discussed.

3.1 The engine of change

One of the main research question was, what connections lie behind Ladakhi modernization. Because of the strategically important nature of Ladakh – bordering China and Pakistan – it was closed for tourism. Nowadays it is still apparent, as no tourists are allowed to enter the borderland. Despite the closed and guarded borders, Ladakh has never been completely isolated.

It was found that *the modernization of the region started not in 1974*, marked by the beginning of tourism, *but long ago, at the very beginning of the sixties*. As a result of the infrastructure development projects of the Indian government, the traditional way of life has completely changed. The *construction of roads* - which are still in progress throughout the region – *building the electric network*, as well as the *development of agriculture meant that the entire region has transformed radically*.

Although it was the result of modernisation, public schooling had several shortcomings in the first decades. Until 1990 the educational policy of the region was directed from Srinagar, the centre of Jammu & Kashmir, consequently the syllabus did not concentrate on teaching the mother tongue and did not place high value on the maintenance of traditional Ladakhi culture and values.

3.2 Changes in the political aspects of life and autonomy

My interview-research, as well as a thorough study of the local press have found that even local politicians, who have launched a union territory status movement, are dubious about the future of Ladakhi autonomy. Even Thupstan Chhewang MP, who is a founding member of the LUTF movement, remains uncertain in saying when the Ladakhi autonomous area will come

true. The local political opinion-leaders are aware of the importance of Kashmir as the regional power and they also know that the sensitive border areas of three countries would be disturbed if their wish came true. Furthermore, the support of the federal Indian government has to be won, so it is not hoped that the winner of the 2009 elections, the Congress Party, can continue its autonomy movement and reach substantial results.

3.3 Local voices of modernization

The interview participants usually *have a generally positive attitude towards modernization*; most of them are aware of what constitutes such a process. There are no illusions about the benefits of the modernised world, they are fully aware of the drawbacks. The majority of them showed the *feeling of subjection*, which could be the result of the status Ladakh has in Jammu and Kashmir State.

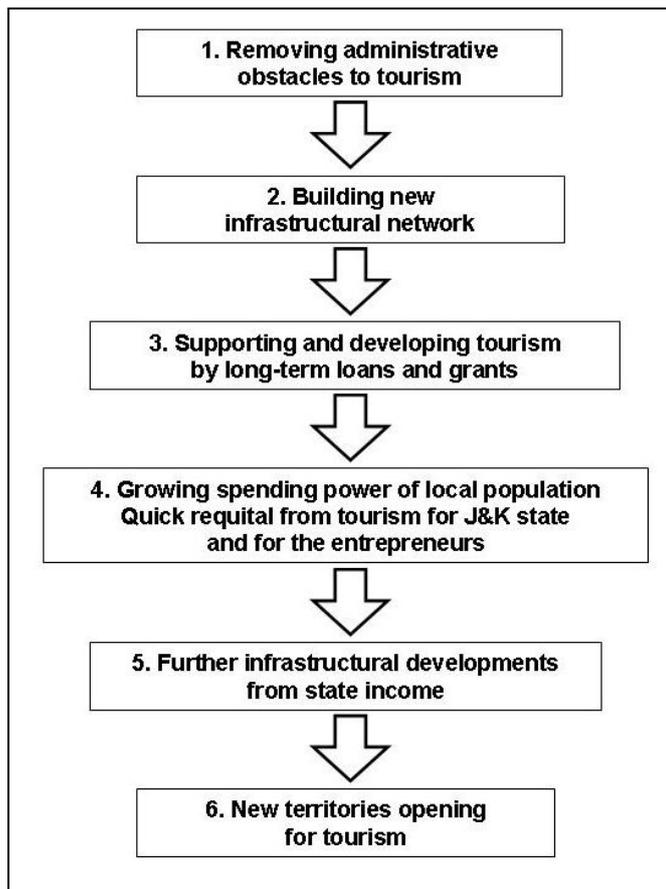
It is impressive that the interviewees mentioned *the impact of education to promote social mobility, and* many people see it as the only way to success for their *children*. It was interesting in the interview data that the participants do not imagine their future life outside India, although they all have very good command of the English language.

In the reviewed publications on Ladakh I have not seen it written down that military careers are so attractive to the local youth. The arguments for a military career include *job security and high salaries, early retirement age, and that these benefits are granted by the State*. It turned out that young Ladakhis trust *in and would like to depend on the state*, and therefore they are willing to wait several years for a secure public sector job, rather than starting their own business.

Most interviewees consider themselves successful, and they are confident about the future. The issue of cultural degradation, which is the central topic of Helena Norberg-Hodge's famous book and nearly all of her publications, was mentioned only once. It is believed the *"culture shock"* has already faded, and the local community no longer feels *"exploited and humiliated"*, as Norberg-Hodge perceived decades ago. On the other hand, Ladakhi *self-government* in the last thirty years, *basically changed, and the cases are handled* by the Autonomous Council of Leh. Within the State of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh has already *achieved broad autonomy*, making the issue of *education* and the *Ladakhi culture* settled.

The transcribed interviews were subject to content analysis and the following themes emerged from the data:

1. My interviewees are generally in favour of modernization, they clearly see the advantages of it in their personal lives.
2. Modernization came to the region not only through the urging of the Indian Government, but also for a number of other reasons including: increasing number of tourists, the more developed education system, and migration of the local students to other Indian states.
3. Ladakhis are aware of the advantages of modern education and its connection with social mobility.
4. It is noteworthy in the findings that many unemployed people choose the Indian Army hoping for a high salary and a promising career.
5. Respondents emphasized the capital importance of autonomy, and some of them unambiguously argued for Ladakhi independence.
6. The majority of respondents are aware of The Ecological Risks and Hazards of the rapidity of Modernization and political pressures such as, melting glaciers, water shortages, and waste treatment.
7. The entire modernization process can be demonstrated through the following clear model.



1. Image: Economic models in different regions of Ladakh. (Own edit)

My interview study, of course, cannot give a comprehensive picture of the attitudes of the whole Ladakhi society, but the results showed that the interviewees considered modernization inevitable, and they have generally positive impressions of it.

They believe that the obvious positive effects of the spectacular economic growth and increasing standard of living outweigh the disadvantages. It is important to state that while Ladakhis benefit from free-market economy, they are reluctant to start their own businesses; they prefer the more secure and better-paid government jobs and army careers. When it comes to the transformation and modernization of Ladakh I do not feel that the most important issue is whether Ladakhis retain their traditional way of life. Their dwellings, daily food, style of dress are necessarily becoming similar to houses, foods, garments known anywhere else in the world. While providing opportunities for locals to benefit from and be part of the modernization processes, it is beyond question, that the unique natural beauty and the cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity of Ladakh must be preserved. One of the most powerful sentences of the transcribed interviews was: *"They cannot keep us in a cage anymore; we want to open up to the world!"*

3.4 Further research directions

Since the research area is situated in the rapidly developing India, it is clear that the changes I presented and described in my research will take place much faster in the future. Although scientific discourse on India generally mentions this country as an emerging economy with advanced high-tech sector and its economy increasingly embedded in 21st century globalized world. Surprisingly, Ladakhi modernization does not follow the usual Indian pattern. It is presumed that the rapid development of tourism will be a catalyst for further changes. Moreover, there might be positive changes in the cold Chinese-Indian relations and in the near future, the Ladakh Railway will be built.

Territorial autonomy, which is still only a hope to remote Ladakh, in a few decades, can become true. Because of the changes described before more studies are needed to monitor this remote region of the Himalayas.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MY PUBLICATIONS

4.1 Articles

Az autonómia és a modernizálódás kérdései Ladakhban
Autonomy, and modernization issues of Ladakh.

Kül-Világ 2009./1.

<http://www.freeweb.hu/kul-vilag/2009/01/kiss-csapo.html>

Mit gondolnak Ladakhban a modernizációról
Ladakhis' beliefs about wealth and development.

Modern Geográfia 2009. 3. sz.

http://www.moderngeografia.hu/tanulmanyok/azsia/kiss_csapo_gergely_2009_3.pdf

4.2 Conference presentations

Geographer PhD VII. National Conference Budapest,
Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Science - 2002. October 25-26.

Társadalmi változások Ladakhban

Social change in Ladakh

<http://geogr.elte.hu/old/Konferencia/Sarfalvy.html>

Landscape, space design - Geographer PhD VIII. National Conference Szeged,
2004. September 4-5.

Regionális egyenlőtlenség Indiában

Regional inequality in India

http://geography.hu/mfk2004/mfk2004/phd_cikkek/kiss_csapo_gergely.pdf

A Celebration of Hungarian Science Conference Budapest,
2007. November 16-17. ELTE

A tradicionalitást elsöprő modernizáció

Modernisation sweeping away traditionality

http://www.mrtt.hu/konferenciak/Tortenelem_nyomai/18_kisscsapo.pdf