

József TÓTH

TRANSFORMATION OF THE SETTLEMENT SYSTEM OF THE
GREAT HUNGARIAN PLAIN

1. The historical legacy

The characteristic features of the settlement system of the Great Hungarian Plain and of the urbanization manifested within its framework are a product of history. Among them, the relative backwardness - compared to other Hungarian regions - should be emphasized /Enyedi 1970; Beluszky 1973; Gyimesi 1975/. As early as the period of feudal urban development in Hungary, in contrast to the civic towns of regions with population engaged in mining, handicraft, and trade, only agrarian towns of incomplete social structure and simpler functions came about in the Great Plain. These towns partially had lost their population during the Ottoman Occupation and subsequently became repopulated /adjusting to the requirements of land occupation and agricultural production/ in a settlement system different from other regions.

Although river regulations, railway constructions, and capitalistic industrialization accelerated the transformation of the socio-economic structure of this settlement system, the inherent relative backwardness has persisted. The development around the millenium, which was far from being exempt from contradictions, was broken by the First World War and the Treaty of Trianon, which changed the national borders drastically.

The situation of the settlement system in the Great Hungarian Plain before the Second World War - also described by several researchers abroad /den Hollander 1980/ - can be summarized as below /Tóth 1985/:

- the agrarian towns with large hinterlands consisting of extended systems of "tanyas" /scattered farmsteads/ - with some exceptions - did not function as foci of urbanization concentrating population regionally;

- the process of urbanization was at a backward stage even compared to the internationally low level in Hungary;

- large industry hardly existed and tertiary functions were also underdeveloped;

- slow social restratification was coupled with a low degree of spatial mobility;

- a rigid, conservative social structure existed in villages, including giant villages of ten thousand people;

- the extended system of tanyas practically was unaffected by urbanization;

- this settlement system of sparse and populous elements was only slightly differentiated, the zones of attraction were indefinite and, in their formation, only few functions /administrative and market/ played a significant role.

As a whole, the settlement system at the time in the Great Plain reflected the position of the region in the national regional division of labour. This is characterized by relative backwardness and the ratio of agricultural activities

above the national average.

2. Main factors in the post-war transformation

The rapid and large-scale socio-economic changes that occurred after the Second World War found the Great Plain in a backward condition resulting from the historical development of the national regional division of labour. For each stage of this development, the situation was unfavourable in the Great Plain. Reconstruction was possible and, in the interest of the country, needed in places where something had existed previously and been destroyed and where the reintroduction of capacities promised the rapid expansion of production. Similarly, in the stage of accelerated industrialization, the areas with existing larger plants and heightened prospects for cooperation were favoured. In Hungary, as in general in the socialist countries, industrialization took place through the sectoral and regional redistribution of the national income produced by agriculture, by far the most important economic branch in the Great Plain. As the progress in infrastructure was mostly bound to industry, the backwardness of the Great Plain was maintained in this field and, in some cases, even increased. The total effect of all these circumstances was unfavourable for the living conditions of the population and, along with the uncertain situation following the collectivization of agriculture, resulted in large-scale outmigration. The consequences for the demographic structure of the Great Plain are hardly remedied.

The main feature of this first period /to the mid-1960s/ was the preservation of the back-

wardness of the Great Plain in an interregional comparison. In the second period, since the mid-1960s when the planned industrialization of the Great Plain commenced, this first affected the major focal points of the region /such as Szeged, Debrecen, Szolnok, Kecskemét, and others/ and later spread to the other towns. Intraregional inequalities started to grow in accordance to differences in the date of beginning and extent of industrialization and in the physical conditions for large scale farming. The resulting picture is that, in spite of the undoubted progress compared to its own past, the Great Plain remained a periphery of the centre comprising Hungary and the so-called industrial axis of the country. Since development concentrated on towns, several portions became peripheries to periphery.

The transformation of the social and occupational structure of a settlement's population are important factors in urbanization. The settlements of the Great Plain used to be dominated by the predominance of agriculture and, in spite of the large-scale changes, the ratio of agricultural workers is still characteristically higher than the national average today. This feature is primarily manifest at the lower levels of the hierarchy of settlement, but it is observed in the higher categories, too. As all over the country, urbanization and occupational restratification were driven by industry. Since most of the Great Plain settlements were overlooked in the first stage of extensive industrialization, the majority of people who gave up farming and found employment in industry moved from the region. Thus, the ratio of resident non-agri-

cultural workers increased within the declining total population. The level of urbanization in the Great Plain measured by occupational structure also increased in this way /Tóth 1977/, through so-called passive urbanization.

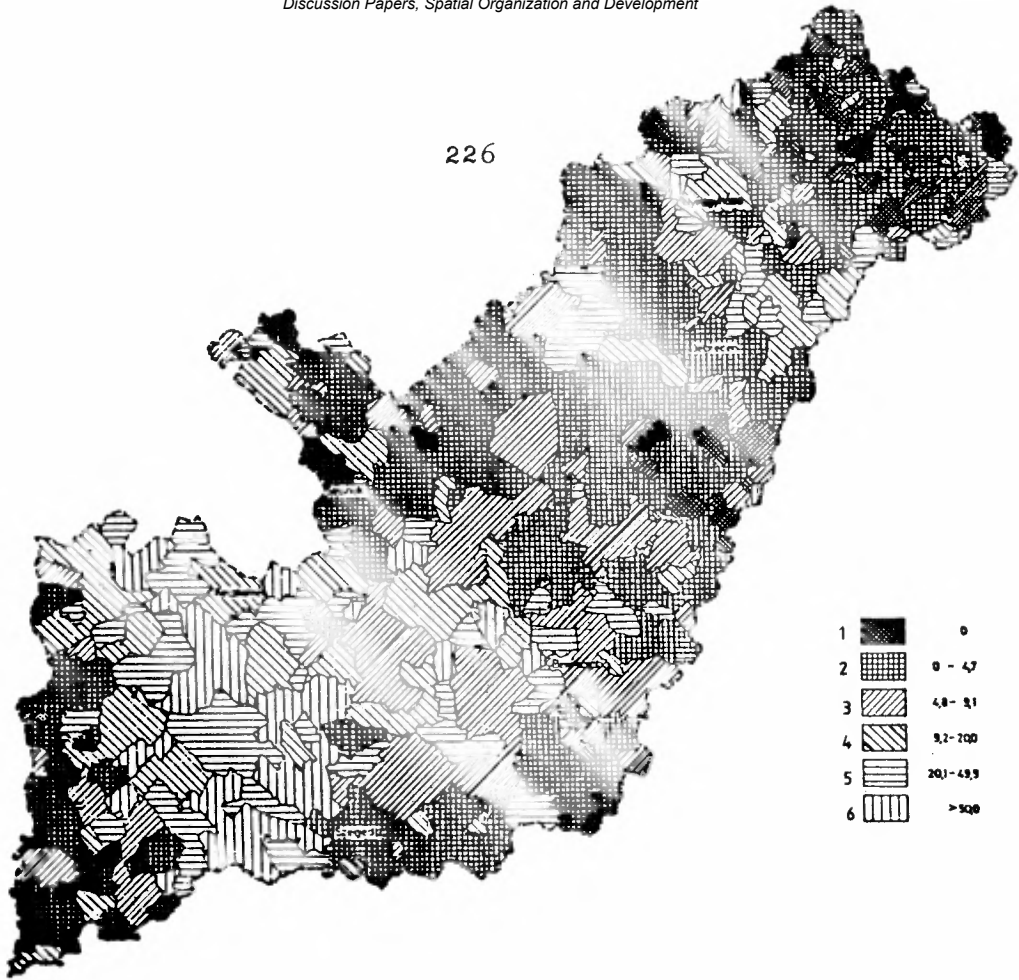
Because of the delayed development of the Great Hungarian Plain, only in the second stage of intensive industrialization, which also reached the Great Plain, and in the expansion of non-agricultural activities on large farms /from the second half of the 1960s/, industry started to function as the actual driving force of urbanization in the Great Plain. As a natural consequence of delay, with the exception of the most urbanized towns and some settlements of special functions, the settlements of the Great Plain remain at this stage, while the leading role of industry has been taken over by the tertiary sector in Hungary. Modern agriculture also intensifies urbanization and, in addition to the smallest settlements, is decisive in some small towns as well /such as in Nádudvar and Mezőhegyes/. It is a new phenomenon that, through the building of housing estates around the centres of large farms, agriculture contributes to the birth of new settlements /Csatári - Enyedi 1985/.

The major socio-economic changes and the rise of living standards have also transformed the outward appearance of settlements. With the organization of large farms, the introduction of industry, and the development of services and utilities, new functions and related morphological elements appeared in the traditional market towns and villages /Becsei 1973/.

The settlement system, which acts as the framework of urbanization in the Great Plain, is different from that in other parts of Hungary, since it has larger elements /16th 1984/. /The average population of a village in the Great Plain is 2773 people, double the figure of other parts of the country where villages number 1365 people on average./ This is a favourable condition in itself, but it has not been exploitable as a consequence of the nature of the economy, delay, the higher-than-average figure for outlying population /Fig. 1/and, last but not least, the settlement policy leading to an exaggerated degree of concentration /embodied in the National Plan for Settlement Network Development of 1971/.

In the wake of the accelerated development of the past decades, the previously mostly homogeneous agrarian region has ~~been~~ differentiated territorially and a more remarkable spatial organization has come about. There is not only a hierarchy of settlement formed but a differentiation according to spatial location observed. The settlements previously functioning as more or less closed autonomous systems became rather open and inter-settlement relationships intensified and became multilateral. The centre-periphery relations also intensified and intercentral connections and highly urbanized belts have come about. Although in all these processes a delay is observed in the Great Plain, their occurrence and influence are unambiguously indicative of the modernization of the region.

The two highest developed settlements of the Great Plain are the two regional centres, Debrecen and Szeged. Their size, functions, system of in-



1=no outlying population

2=ratio below the national average /4.7 per cent/

3=ratio between the national and the Great Plain average /9.1 per cent/

4=ratio between the Great Plain average and 20.0 per cent

5=ratio between 20.1 and 50. per cent/

6=ratio above 50.1 per cent/

FIGURE 1 Ratio of outlying population in the Great Plain in 1980

stitutions, economic role, as well as the social structure and level of supply of their population, all indicate their outstanding place among the other settlements of the region; they can only be compared to other regional centres in Hungary /such as Pécs, Miskolc, and Győr/. Their influence has accelerated the transformation of the agrarian settlements in their vicinity; in the environs of Szeged, with a denser network of settlements, it resulted in an agglomeration ring, which is now also acknowledged by administrative boundaries /Krajko - Péntes - Tóth 1969/.

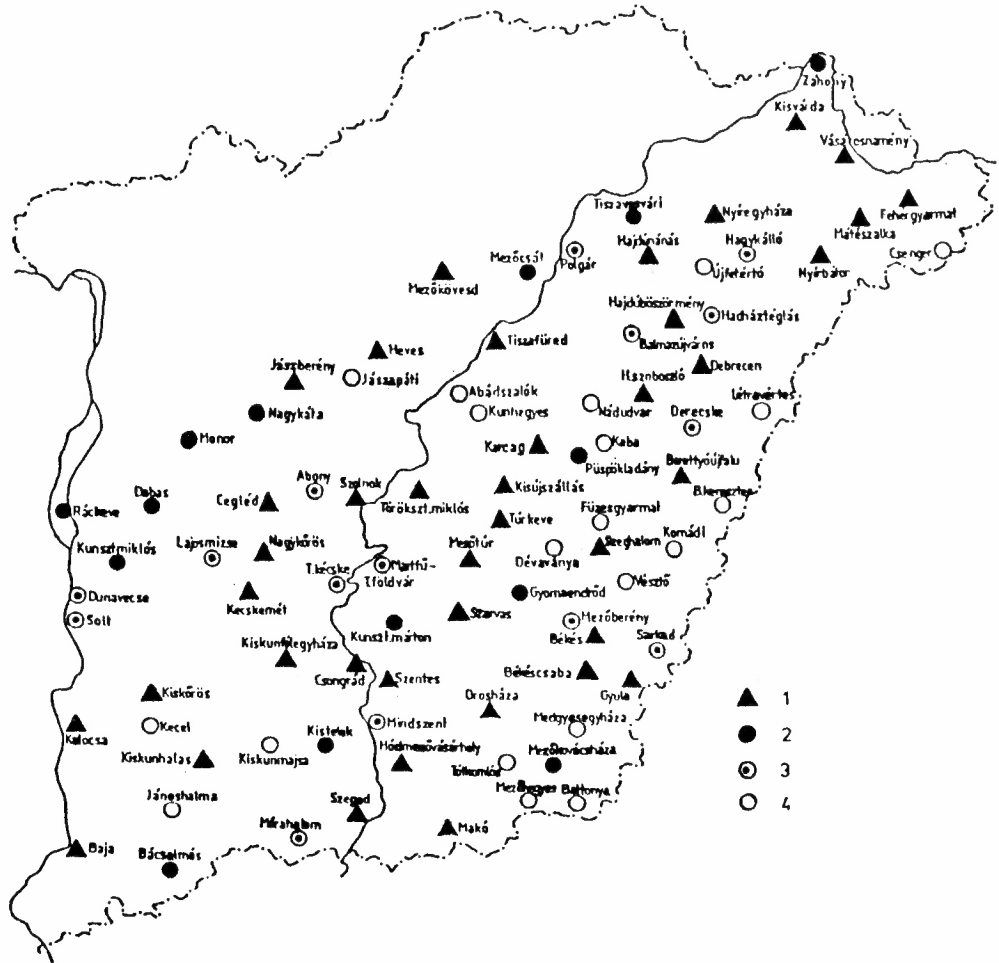
The other four county seats of the Great Plain also belong to the earliest urbanized settlements. Their position is related to the development objectives of the settlements themselves and also to the decisive role played by counties in the Hungarian system of redistribution, which even today remains considerable.

The other towns have also advanced in urbanization, but the levels reached vary widely. Baja, Hódmezővásárhely, and Hajduszoboszló are prominent as examples of the fundamental types of relatively rapid urbanization /multifunctional, agrarian-industrial, and recreational/. There have been essential and beneficial functional and morphological changes in the formerly typical market towns /such as Karcag, Jászberény, Kiskunfélegyháza, Cegléd, Makó, and others/ too.

Among the Great Plain settlements, the giant villages, with 6,000 to 15,000 people, are characteristic /they were small towns in some periods of their history/; some forty giant villages provide dwellings for about one-seventh of the population

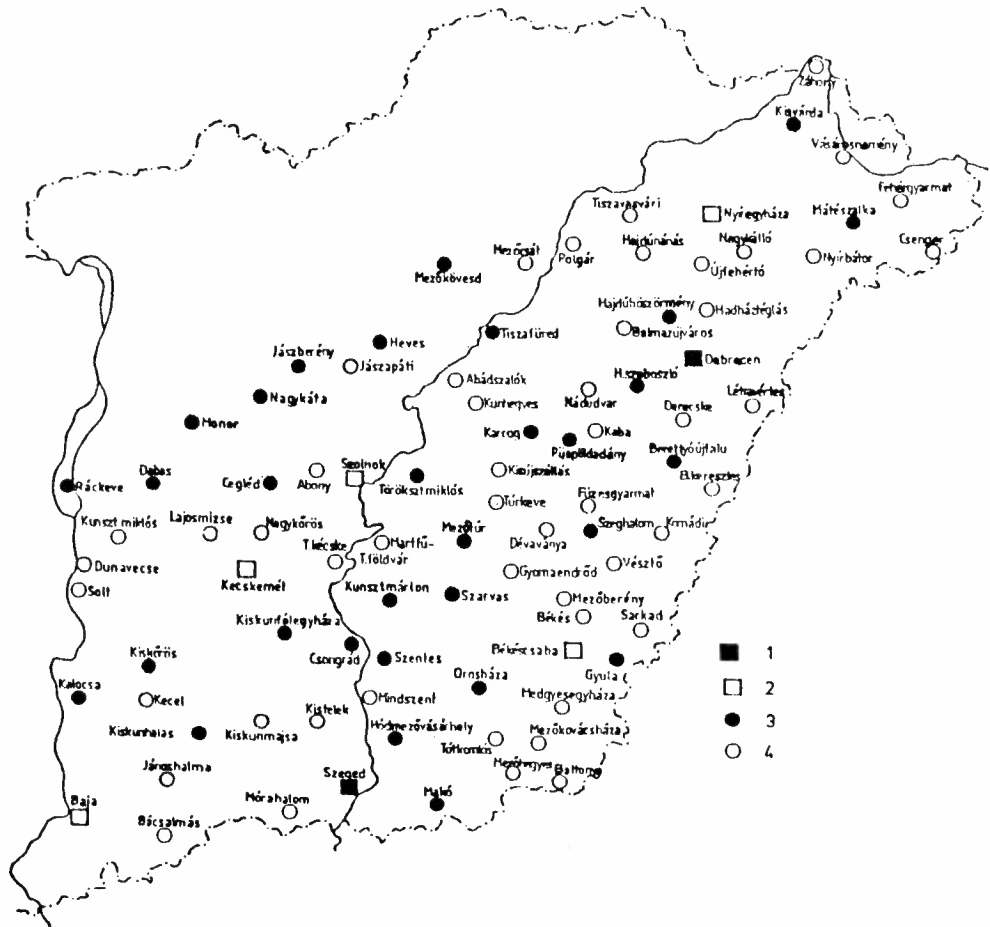
of the Great Hungarian Plain. With minimum central support, they abandoned the giant village quality characterized by agricultural occupation to various extents during the process of urbanization of the last few decades /Fig. 2/. One-third of them have practically reached the level of small town and become independent foci of urbanization; another one-third of them are still bound to a more dynamic centre for their development, but follow a promising trend; while the last third are blocked at a low level of urbanization /Tóth - Dövényi 1983/. Taken as a whole, the hierarchy situation of settlements with any central functions has not changed essentially /Pap 1984/; the differences, however, have increased as a result of more dynamic development and the related structural alterations /Fig. 3 and 4/.

Although their progress was slow, the Great Plain villages have differentiated to a large degree. The factors that have a part to play in the differentiation are rural industry /Barta 1979/; some prosperous agricultural large farms /Mészáros 1982/; favourable location related to traffic, proximity of towns, and recreation facilities; or some combination of these. The development of settlements along the national border stopped at an especially low level of urbanization because of their unfavourable location in the traffic shadow /Tóth - Csatári 1983/. Thus, significant variation has come about in the living conditions of rural areas, too. The process is worth notice that, as a consequence of the lose of population in larger villages and of the appearance of settlements on new /agricultural/ bases, there is a



1=towns
 2=type "Szeghalom"
 3=type "Mezőberény"
 4=type "Véscsanak"

FIGURE 2 Development types of the giant villages and small towns of the Great Plain



1=regional centre

3=mesocentre

2=paracentre

4=subcentre

FIGURE 3 Hierarchic levels of the Great Plain centres

growth in the categories of small villages and hamlets during the last decades.

Urbanization has also affected the system of tanyas in the Great Plain. The decisive impact on this typically Great Plain type of settlement was the rapid and spatially differentiated elimination of tanyas and the movement of the population into the more urbanized towns and villages. At the same time, the living conditions of residents in the preserved tanyas of favourable location in the vicinity of towns in the Danube-Tisza Interfluve have improved remarkably. Today the tanya is the dwelling place of families with hardly any contact with traditional agricultural production. Second homes rebuilt from tanyas are more and more numerous /Király 1984/.

3. Future perspectives

In the strategy for regional and settlement development approved in the first half of the 1980s, an increased role is attributed to the local sources and energies of settlement development. This circumstance will help promote the settlement system of the Great Plain to enter into its third stage of post-war progress. Compared to the previous stage, the settlement system may develop in a more balanced way in this third period since the development of towns and their attraction zones is more coordinated and their interactions are stronger.

The more proportional distribution of development funds between regions and categories of settlements and the growth of the relative importance of local sources provides more favourable opportunities for the settlement system of the Great Plain.

However, as a result of the considerable deterioration of the position of Hungary in the world economy and increasing economic problems, this favourable position is only relative to other regions of Hungary and is not manifest in an absolute sense. In spite of that, the interpretation is justified that the lasting dispreference will cease or reduce and the new strategy will contribute to the exploitation of the favourable features of the settlement system of the Great Plain. These features can be summarized as the more populous elements of the network, the relative balance of social structure, the more considerable traditions of relying on one's own resources /compelled by former circumstances/, and closer relationships with agriculture.

All the above suggest that in the further progress of the settlement system of the Great Plain, backwardness and delay can be eliminated gradually over a longer time span and, thus, the difference will be observed in the future rather in the development path of the settlement system in the Great Plain, which will be of a different nature than that of other regions in Hungary.

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