

# A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HUNGARIAN AND ROMANIAN SETTLEMENT DEVELOPMENT POLICIES DURING THE STATE SOCIALISM\*

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## 1. Introduction

Settlement and settlement network policy seems to be alien to direct high politics but upon examining their essential relations we can say that in fact these „politics” signing the basic outcomes and spatial consequences, i.e. the synthesis of the economic, social processes and political changes.

At the beginning of the state socialism (in Romania 1948, in Hungary 1949) the endeavour to imitate the Soviet practice (or rather the pressure to do so) the indiscriminating adoption of the Soviet scientific accomplishments is obvious but „the representatives of the bourgeois science” are still present and elements of earlier views also emerge. From the early 1960s in the interest of promoting modernisation, the western scientific achievements were more powerfully integrated (often with a content and in a form strongly trans-ideologised). Such elements of the western practice gained ground which seemed to serve the efforts and plans of „catching up and overtaking.”

The theoretical, historical, political and practical problems of state socialism (state capitalism) had essentially been the personal matter of the Soviet Union up to the end of World War II. After the Central European communist changes, the issue of the state socialist system turned up as essential and common characteristics of each small socialist country. Besides general and common features (which, considering the essential elements of the era, were similar to each other), each structure’s national characters could appear and develop.

The evolution of the settlement development policies of state socialism in Hungary and Romania was greatly influenced by the

conception of socialist society in the new system, the historically developed socio-economic spatial structure of the country, the sectoral-structural objectives of economic development and structure policy in a wider sense. Settlement development had to be integrated with the centralised structure of management, public administration and planning. In the practical activity a reply had to be given to the peculiar regional and settlement problems of the country (capital cities – the provinces, capital cities – the large cities, large cities – small towns, towns – villages, the system of small detached farms) and priorities had to be assigned under the circumstances of limited resources.

In the formulation of the goals, the direction and the instruments of regional policy science participated periodically and to an altering extent. In the 1950s science had a ceremonial role, than it took part in the establishment of the regional and settlement development policy depending on the political interests and objectives with a changing content and varying successfulness. From first to last the scope of movement of science was restricted, since the determining characteristic feature of the period was that the judgement of every professional issue obtained an ideological and political content

The regional and settlement development policy of the period was determined to a great extent by the long-term, planned, ideal notion of society as well as by the direct conception of the society and the actual practice of the organisation of society. Perhaps the most often used phrase in the writings of the period was *the socialist society*. Several levels and groups of interpretations of this category developed changing with time, but there

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remained some permanent elements, too. In the everyday practice and the political activity philosophical, ideological and propagandistic elements got mixed.

In addition to the system of values of the socialist transformation of the society, the directly formulated economic development strategy (the two were related in a lot of cases) determined the objectives and possibilities of the prevailing settlement and settlement network development. In the period of the extensive development of the economy, in the case of developments of sectoral (industrial) character regional and settlement development was a partial result, a kind of consequence related to the major investment projects.

In connection with settlement and settlement network development once again arises the issue of periodisation as well as that of the attitude to be taken in relation to the international processes and scientific tendencies. We regard the whole of state socialism as a homogeneous but not undifferentiated whole. The typical phases of settlement and settlement network development policy coincide with the structural changes of the economy, politics and public administration but the coincidence is not of a mechanical nature.

There were similar and very different elements of settlement development policies in Hungary and Romania. Until the early 60s the Hungarian political aims were much more harder, and in the 80s the Romanian rural settlement policy turned to be brutal.

In Hungary the minority questions there were no important elements of settlement policy, in Romania problems of Transylvania, and questions of Hungarian minorities were permanent and serious part of settlement development policy.

## 2. Common ideological points

The ideology of building a socialist society was given partly by the „classics’ works” (Marx, Engels, Lenin) and especially Stalin at the beginning of the era. The Soviet practice was formally available for the actual implementation.

According to *Stalin's* approach the socialist revolution was to conquer first in the towns, the

socialist ownership would be created there, the socialist transformation of the economy and the society was bound to occur first in the towns. The socialist towns were to reform the villages as well. The villages would not follow the socialist towns mechanically, therefore the socialist ownership and later the social relations of socialism were to be formed in the villages by means of external intervention. On the long term the whole settlement system was to be transformed in accordance with the construction of socialism.

Without being immersed in the general conceptual analysis Hungarian or Romanian aspects of so-called socialist settlements (communist model city, socialist model capital, socialist town and socialist village), I just would like to briefly refer to a summary and quote an article published in a Transylvanian Hungarian Journal titled ‘Korunk’ (‘Our Age’) in January 1931. In this article ‘N’ describes the socialist urban construction in Soviet Union. It is important to present this article since the thoughts written down here ‘have come back’ almost like a ghost in the state socialist Hungary and Romania:

- ‘We must ask ourselves: Which kind of new needs are demanded by the changed life in connection with the residence? And in which aspect is it different to live in a socialist town? If we can find answers to these questions then the question of ‘How should a socialist town look like?’ will be answered as well.’
- ‘The basic element of current social life is the family – the basic element of today’s town is the family flat.’
- ‘The task of the socialist city architect is to design suitable buildings for socialist life.’
- ‘The socialist town is created in parallel with the planned development of the whole country. Its growth is controlled by plans and goes up to the point where the growth of the city does not turn into negative way.’
- ‘The layout of the socialist city will also be different than the current city’s....’
- ‘The collectivisation of agriculture... created the basis for dissolving this conflict (between the town and village) and opened new opportunities for the building of towns.’
- ‘The first agricultural town Novokhopyorsk is already under construction.’

- ‘The socialist city is no longer socialist theory and fantasy. The first ones are already under construction.’
- ‘And what will happen with today’s cities? They will remain temporary but their time is limited since the wealthy socialist society will certainly not remain in holes without light and air which were inherited from capitalism. Where it is possible the existing town will be reconstructed socialistically and enormous centres will be dissolved. Cities with more than a million inhabitants are not ideals of socialism. The historically important buildings have to be kept but the others will be destroyed or rebuilt or implanted with trees.’

I believe that the concepts should be thought over again and understood from the aspect of whole Hungarian and Romanian urban developmental process. The reason for that particularly is that this article was published in Transylvania in a Hungarian journal and between the two world wars.

From 1950 *Khrushchev* formulated his theory, which had a political impact, on the “socialist agrarian towns”. One of its significant components was that the antagonistic contradictions of town and village as well as the long-term economic, social, cultural, architectural and supply-related etc. differences would cease to exist under socialism but also modern settlements uniting all the advantages of both town and village would come into being without the disadvantages involved.

For the Hungarian and Romanian political leaders settlement policy was one of the instruments of economic development and of the radical transformation of the society, partly an objective and a consequence.

### **3. The basic structure of settlement network on the basis of national censuses (in Romania 1948, in Hungary 1949)**

The Romanian People’s Republic was proclaimed on December 30, 1947. The change of the regime accelerated the establishment of subsystems of state socialist system and a party-state structure was created. The structures were developed according to Stalin’s state-building

principles and practices. National characteristics have gradually been involved in Romanian foreign and domestic policy including regional policy and development.

According to the census of 1948 – when the forced movements of large populations had already almost finished (deportation, resettlement, carrying off into captivity etc.) – we can characterise the Romanian settlement network:

- the number of inhabitants in the country was about 15.9 million,
- of which 3.7 million (23.4%) lived in 152 towns and 12.2 million (76.6%) in villages,
- Bucharest as the capital was also the most populous city (with its one million people including outskirts also),
- in the country there were only two towns (Cluj, Timișoara) whose population exceeded 100 thousand,
- the other towns belonged rather to the medium-sized category,
- considering urbanisation, there were significant differences between the traditional macro-regions of the country,
- apart from Bucharest, the most developed region in the country was Transylvania.

At the beginning of state socialism Romania was nearly a classical agrarian country, with a relatively big capital and some industrialised cities.

The Communist takeover was constitutionalised by the Constitution of People’s Republic of Hungary on 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1949. This constitution in fact was a clear Stalinist one in aims. On the basis of the constitution a party-state was established in Hungary.

According to the census of 1949 the population of Hungary was 9.2 million, out of which:

- 1.6 million (17.3%) lived in Budapest, the capital of the country;
- 1.1 million (12%) lived in towns subordinated to the county councils (their number was 24) and these were the more important towns in the country,
- 644 thousand inhabitants (7%) in towns subordinated to the district councils (29),
- while 5.8 million people (63.7%) lived in the 3,143 villages of the country.

After Budapest just population of three cities was higher than 100 thousand. These cities were

traditional regional centres. Population of four towns was higher than 50 thousand. They were the most developed county's seats. Among the villages we could find 2364 with less than 2000 inhabitants, 72,4% of all settlements in Hungary. In these settlements was living 22.7% of all population of Hungary.

At the beginning of state socialism Hungary was an agro-industrial country with a relatively big and developed capital.

#### 4. Stages of settlement policy and results (consequences) of development

At the beginning of state socialist era, Romania inherited highly different settlement networks from region to region. The characteristics of networks in Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia had been formed in historically different social, economical and cultural processes. The political leadership announced an economic developmental and 'homogenisation' social restructuring programme based on a kind of class struggle (started at the beginning of building socialism).

The socialist system was itself based on centralisation processes. 'Democratic centralism' had further increased the already heavy burden of restructuring. Collectivisation, implemented forcefully in several waves, and the building of a repressive apparatus of councils gained a particularly important role from the villages' point of view.

Cities have enjoyed a kind of benefit from the 'class struggle' since the beginning. At the same time, the industrial workers who had found jobs due to nationalisation lived in rather poor living conditions. Industrialisation and urban construction had already been used as ethno-political tools in the hands of political leadership in Transylvania since the earliest period.

At the beginning of the state socialist era, the majority of Romanian population lived in villages, and in fact most of these were backward ones. The average size of villages was small and most of them were poorly supplied by infrastructure.

The political turn of 1948, then its acknowledgement in the Constitution of 1949, in Hungary the switch of the economic, social and political system, the changes in the place, role

and character of public administration logically brought about the shaping of a settlement policy expressing, representing and projecting the economic, social and political objectives and endeavours of the socialist society.

The decision making processes of settlement development were very similar in the two countries:

- Main political, economic and administration aims were decided, and declared by the parties (programmes, congress decisions etc.),
- Governments "translated" these decisions into acts, directives etc.,
- Ministries were every day active players in the processes,
- Different and changing background institutes (in Romania I.C.S.O.R., I.S.P.R.O.R., I.S.A.R.T. and between 1974-1990 I.S.L.G.C., in Hungary TERINT, BUVÁTI, VÁTI) were the planners.

Key points of settlement policy in Hungary were:

- The classification of the villages and towns in December of 1951

*The Institute of Regional Planning elaborated the conception of classification in several versions and in the process of co-ordination with the county party committees the classification of the individual settlements was modified even further until the political approval and announcement of the range of a „special class" or of 1st class settlements occurred. According to this conception only Budapest and Miskolc belonged to the class of special settlements, ensuring there by the possibilities of their especially centralised direction". 73 towns (2.2%) were planning for strong industrialisation, 81 (2.5%) for industrialisation. In the final version 1530 (47% of the settlements) was classified into the category "not to be developed".*

- Settlement Network Development Study Project in 1963

The classification of the settlements according to the regional function would often be justified by peculiar but approved principles and normatives. The 9 regional

centres and regional co-centres carried the possibility of an decentralised development. An the other side 66.5% of the settlements became “subordinated villages” According the conception most of the villages unable to develop and detached groups of houses in the outskirts would cease gradually.

- Nation-wide Settlement Network Development Framework Plan in 1969

The planned regional functions of settlements and structural classification of the stock of settlements do not significantly differ from those contained by “Study Project” of 1963.

- National Settlement Network Development Conception, 1971

The conception determined the range and directions of the development of national, special high-grade, high-grade, partially high-grade, intermediate-grade, partially-intermediate-grade centres. The conception classified 64% of the settlements “other settlements”, but in this case there is no question of the perspective elimination of villages any more.

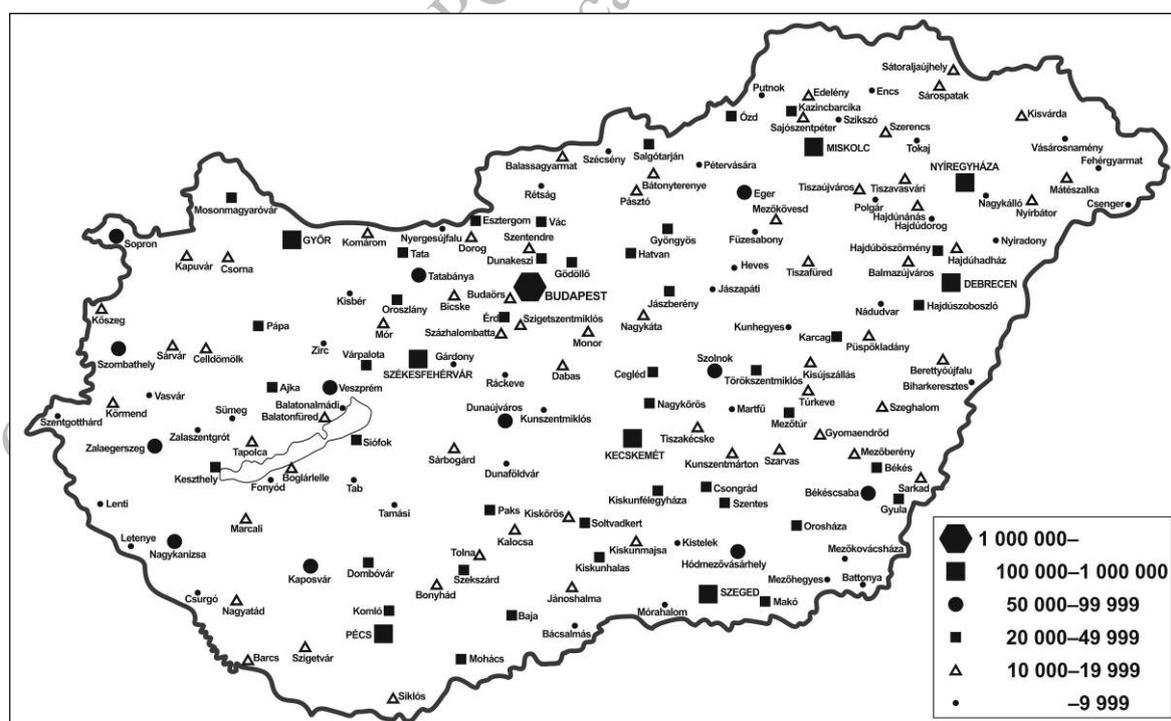
- Modified National Settlement Network Development Conception, 1982

The most important change in the modification was: instead of “other settlements” introducing the category “basic settlements”.

The legal declaration of town status was followed partly the settlement network development conceptions: between: 1950-1965 9 villages turned to be town, mainly industrial (socialist) cities, between 1966-1975 19 villages turned to be towns, between 1976-1985 26, and in 1989 41 villages were declared to be “town” (Figure 1).

Results or consequences of Hungarian settlement network policy until the end of state socialism can be summarized:

- Budapest turned to be a big city on Central European level,
- Five cities (Debrecen, Győr, Miskolc, Pécs, Szeged) started become functional regional centres,
- Most of the county seats were modernised,
- Micro-regional centres were strengthened,
- Most of the villages were losers of socialist settlement policy.



*Fig. 1. Population categories of Hungarian towns in 1990*

Key party's decisions on settlement and settlement network development in Romania:

- A new state committee was formulated in 1965, which received very little attention at the beginning, although it played a prominent role in the implementation of tasks.
- In December 1967 the national party conference adopted a kind of reform package that effected the direction of economy and comprehensive public administrative reform. The party conference made important decisions also from the settlement policy respect. It started spatial planning processes as well, conceptualising that 120 new towns needed to be established, 558 agro-industrial centres should be created and about 6300 villages should be eliminated for the aims of modernisation. (The ratio of elimination of villages was less than it was planned at that time in Hungary)
- During the period when city planning and regional development became a mass phenomenon, the county system executed by the administrative reform in 1968 turned into the primary frame. The strong party-state executive apparatus was built in the counties. In the framework of administrative reform 13,149 villages were organised into 2706 communes.
- In July of 1972 a party decision was taken about systematisation, reform of rural structures, and about ethnic homogenisation.
- Act of 58/1974 dealt with spatial, urban and rural settlement planning. According to the act, the building of 300-350 new towns had to be started.
- In 1974 a new 25 year party programme was accepted, a new vision of multilaterally developed socialist society. Modernisation of settlement network was an integral part of the programme.

- In November of 1984 a party decision was taken on the formulation of small agro-industrial towns.
- In 1986 was updated the party policy concerning the "new settlement order".
- In March of 1988 was declared that the settlement systematisation plan should be accomplished in three phases, during which 7-8 thousand villages should be eliminated, and the inhabitants should be resettled to central urban settlements.

Consequences of socialist settlement policy in Romania:

- New town system was established (Figure 2)
- Rapid growth of ratio of urban population (1948 – 23.4%, 1956 – 31.3, 1966 – 38.2, 1977 – 43.6, 1983 – 49.0, 1990 – 54.3%)
- Bucharest turned to be a big city, but with many new structural and social problems,
- Relatively big and modern functional centers were developed (with more than 300 thousand inhabitants),
- New county's seat network was developed
- Micro-regional centers were formed,
- Tragical losers of Romanian settlement policy were the villages,
- The brutal settlement policy generated political, social, economical instability and crises.

An open conflict started between Romanian settlement policy and Hungarian society at the beginning of system change. In Hungary mainly the growing opposition groups that had organised the demonstrations, but the official policy also raised its voice against the planned demolition of villages, especially on the territory of Transylvania. The largest demonstration was held in Budapest on Heroes' Square on June 1988. Number of demonstrators were estimated about 100 thousand.



**Fig. 2.** *The process of acquiring city status in Romania between 1945 and 1989 within the framework of the system of counties in 1968*

## 5. Summary

In evaluating the settlement and settlement network development policy from the aspect of the realisation of the objectives we may come to the conclusion that luckily the declared objectives were not always realised (e.g. planned thinking of the communities in the early 1950s) and even the proclaimed „proportionately planned development" was not adequately enforced according to the objectives. On the one hand, the regional and settlement differences decreased, on the other hand, new disproportionateness came into being. In the allocation of the development resources lasting (nearly continuous) preferences can be observed for the good of the industrial regions (the point of the matter being that for these areas this did not result in a stable economic structure capable of growth).

In Hungary the position of Budapest and the large cities (Győr, Debrecen, Miskolc, Pécs and Szeged) strengthened in the settlement network, even if they were functioning insufficiently. In contrast with the plans, however they did not become real counter-poles in comparison with Budapest. The development

of the county seats accelerated, their development levels often approached each other. The real losers of the settlement development policy and practice are the majority of the communities. Their traditional economic, social, institutional system had been smashed in the last four decades and they were left without the new conditions of survival or new paths of development being planned.

Regional and settlement (urban and rural) policy was an integral part of Romanian state socialism as well. The party and the state intervened into the regional and local processes according to the changing political considerations. Privileged towns, especially Bucharest and county seats, were dominant in the era but the developmental focuses changed from time to time.

Considering rural policy, significant changes can be observed, but regarding the whole period a kind of anti-farmer and anti-rural behaviour can be noticed. The real political challenge from the system's point of view was not against farmers, as they could cultivate land happily in the structures (state farms and

cooperatives) determining the agriculture since the early 1960s. The enemy was the peasant, in fact the “autonomous man” who was able to produce his livelihood bases on his own work, on his own land, and thus acquired a relative autonomy.

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