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REFORMS OF ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION IN
HUNGARY 1950-1984

1. Introduction

The history of the development of the Hungarian state confirms that the administrative division of territory was always raised as mainly a supreme governmental and political question. The meaning, aim, and way of functioning of the territorial system were formed in subordination to the given relations of power and political aspirations.

The administrative division of Hungarian territory also bears national peculiarities, formed during history. The county -system, which was established nearly simultaneously with the Hungarian state, maintained significant stability throughout the course of historical development, obtaining relative independence and, later, participating to a significant extent in the shaping of new forms and solutions.

The natural, economic, and transport structure, along with the network of settlements of the state territory, the number of population, the composition of nationalities, the development of forces of production, and the established order of social and territorial division of labour exercised an influence on the formation of the administrative structures of territory in periodically changing ways. /E.g., in earliest stages, physical

geographical objects /i.e., rivers, mountains/ were priorities in the formulation of public administration boundaries because they can fix public administration boundaries most definitely./

The territorial division of the country is not only an administrative question, since the division of territory governs the frameworks of activity of political, jurisdictional, etc., organs, too, functioning by reason of the territorial principle. The spatiality of the administrative organization of territory and the questions of division of functions are raised on two levels from a geographical point of view:

1/ settlement administration /village, town/;

2/ territorial administration /district, town-surrounding /administrative hinterland/, county/.

The indispensable condition of efficient and successful functioning of administration is the determination and regulation of links among diverse levels. Every attempt at administrative reform or reform of administration must respond to the concerns at every level of the territorial division.

2. Main lines of historical development of territorial division of administration

The county-system, having formed during history, is the most important unit in the territorial organization of Hungarian administration and, simultaneously, one of the national peculiarities. All sub-national administrative functions are based on county divisions.

The emergence of counties can be traced back to the XIth century. In the beginning, the county

was a territorial unit for the administration and management of royal estates, later, in the XIIIth century, becoming the organization of autonomy of the nobility. In spite of changes to smaller units, the county-system preserved its historical territorial roots; essential changes take place only under outside influence. For example, such influence was the 150 year Turkish occupation, which was sufficiently long to have an impact on the structures of the central areas of the country.

In the course of our recent history, significant changes in the administrative system of the country occurred in the years 1870, 1923, 1949, and after 1984. The changes have been caused on the one hand by the transformation of social, economic, and political relations; on the other hand by modifications of state boundaries and the structure of the state.

The Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867 created the general political conditions and the governmental framework for the evolution of capitalism in Hungary. The relations of political law of historical Hungary took place in Hungary, having a relative inner independence within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Transylvania was united with what is called "Motherland"; Croatia-Slavonia arrived at legal relations of "co-dominion" of it. Town Fiume /Rijeka/ and its surroundings were annexed to the country as a "Separate Body".

After the relations of political law were solved, development of the modern civil administration began. Reform of the administrative division of the territory was also undertaken within this framework, covering both settlements and territory.

The legal status of towns, formerly having feudal privileges, was arranged. Some of the royal free towns were transformed into municipal boroughs and given status corresponding to counties.

The legal status and administrative order of villages was adjusted in 1871. The law on villages regularized the administration of the settlements in a uniform framework and created three categories for villages, which remained valid until 1949 with small modifications. The districts within the county united villages into an administrative framework, but they were not territorial self-governing units.

The territorial reform of 1876 eliminated territorial self-governments of feudal origin and character, with privileged territories being integrated into the county-system. When looking at the details of the reform, we can underline that the territorial order of the counties was not entirely transformed at the formation of the civil administration; the civil administration was functioning mainly among the historical boundaries of counties.

After the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy fell to pieces; historical Hungary disintegrated. Out of its previous 325 411 km², the Trianon peace treaty left Hungary with only 93 073 km². The number of population also fell to 7 606 971 as compared to 20 886 487 in 1910. After the Peace Treaty of Trianon of 1920, the modifications of the boundaries of counties aggravated the disproportions and contradictions of the territorial divisions of their administrations. The territories of only 10 of its former 72 counties remained intact,

while parts of 25 others were removed; the rest were left outside the new boundaries.

In this new situation, the reform of division of counties became indispensable. For example, the smallest county consisted only of two villages and its area was 16 square kilometres; while the area of the largest one was 11,817 square kilometres. The measure and direction of the reform were fundamentally determined by political intentions. Thus, in 1923, the broken counties along the border of the country were united, thereby decreasing the number of counties to 25. The reform left untouched the inner territories of the country.

3. Reforms of administrative division after the liberation

After the democratic transformation, started in 1945 and later after the socialist volte-face, the problems of the organization of territorial administration were raised again. The constitution of 1949 fixed the socialist economic, social, and political relations and determined the fundamental questions of the new administrative division of territory within the country.

As for the system of territorial units of the administration, no essential changes took place; the structure, having formed during the course of history, continued to exist, notwithstanding the new administrative tasks for the counties, districts, and towns. The most essential modification was the successive transformation of the previous executing controlling administration into a planning, developing, supplying one, preserving its standard functions, too.

First of all, the territories of the counties have been arranged. Instead of the previous 25, 19 counties were formed. From political considerations, an effort was made to stabilize the territories, so the reform brought only corrections; but through the elimination of broken counties and the division into two parts of county Pest, a majority of the territorial and population imbalances were removed /Figure 1/. When transforming the territorial order, the natural potentials, the relations of economic, transport, and the network of settlements, plus the goals of long-range development, were considered equally. The division of counties in our country up to now has preserved the territorial order, formed at that time, with only a few villages and one district being reannexed.

The new division of district was formed after the territorial arrangement of counties. In comparison with the former division, a significant change occurred when districts received independent council organization. The number of districts decreased from 150 to 140. Districts were formed on the basis of transport sheds and zones of attraction to act as economically and geographically uniform entities.

The administration of settlements was laid upon new foundations, too. In this respect, the territorial rearrangement of administration of Budapest is of outstanding importance; 7 suburbs and 16 villages were annexed to Budapest.

The town administration was developed in a contradictory manner. Three town-categories were created: 1/ town, subordinate to the Council of Ministers /Budapest/; 2/ town, subordinate to the

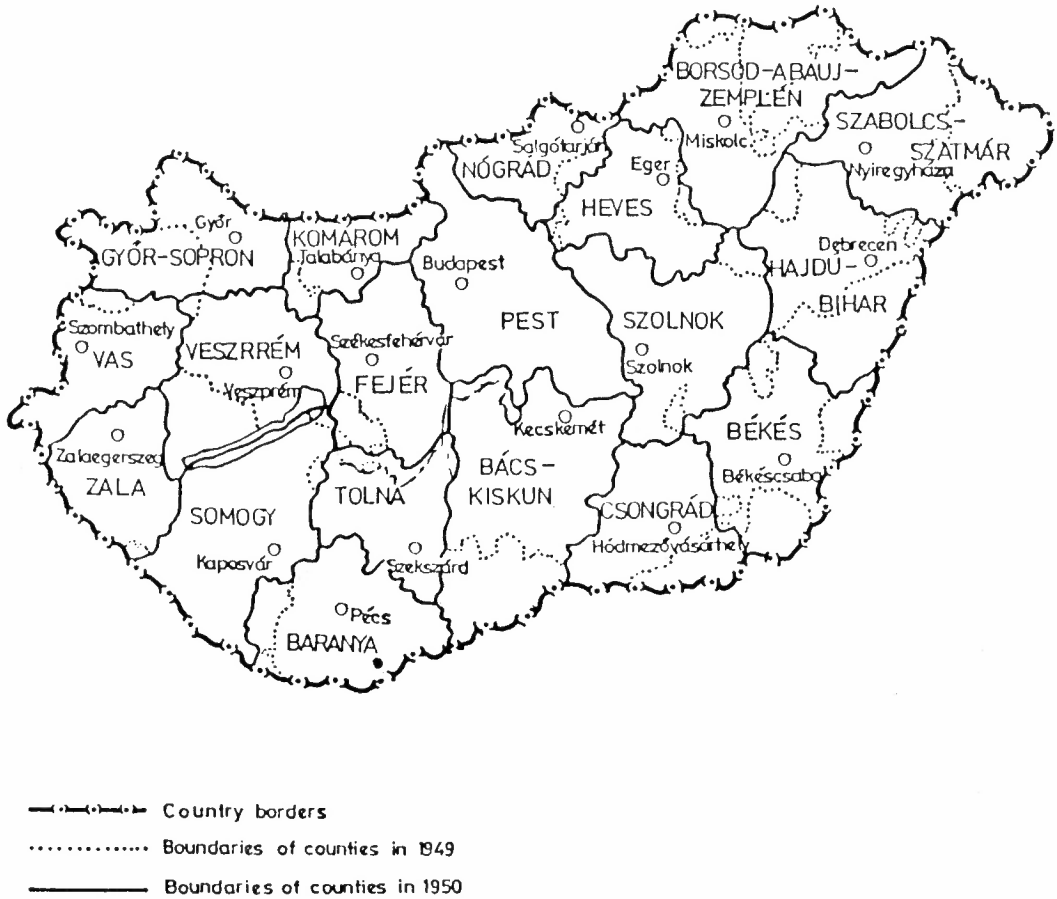


FIGURE 1 Territorial reform of 1950 in Hungary

county council /24/; 3/ town, subordinate to the district council /29/. The design of town administration failed in its effect /districts did not possess urban management experience; it was within a short time that the relationships between towns and districts led to sharp contradictions/. Thus as early as 1954 the situation of town changed. The towns were removed from the jurisdiction of district councils and towns of district rank were created; namely, Debrecen, Miskolc, Pécs, and Szeged.

Village administration is one of the fundamental questions in the governmental division of territory. In the case of villages, we can talk about the vigorous transformation of the territorial order. Before the introduction of the council system, 3169 villages were coordinated by 1190 large villages and 662 offices of district-notaries. In 1950, 2.978 village councils were formed, among which 2.808 were independent village councils and from 371 villages were formed 170 common village ones. The network of village councils, developed nearly all over the country, furthered the direct realization of the aims and activity of the central power in transforming society as local organs of governmental authority.

Beginning in the 1950's, territorial administrative reform was carried out in connection with forming economic regions. Several conceptions were born in order to establish a regional administration, i.e., a territorial level, replacing the counties or one situated over the counties; but the "official" planning economic regions, established in 1971, have not received administrative structures. These 6 planning economic regions covered

whole counties and served as a means of planning. By the middle 1980's, even their formal existence ceased to continue, and in the new economic situation the place and role of the counties again strengthened.

When casting a glance at the process of changes of administrative division of the Hungarian territory between 1950 and 1980 /Table 1/, we can see that the number of counties remained unchanged, the number and importance of the districts decreased vigorously, and, by 1980, the system of town-surroundings already took shape replacing the districts. The number of towns was growing dynamically, while the number of villages diminished as a consequence of declaring them towns on the one hand, and through the unification of villages on the other hand. The number of independent councils lessened dramatically and that of villages with common councils sky-rocketed, so that the number of administrative units of villages deviated from the number of villages.

All in all, we can say that the establishment of towns and urbanization transformed the territorial order of Hungarian administration to a significant extent in the last three decades. In spite of this, it cannot be said that the administrative organizational order and the territorial division were completely established, being adequate to processes of urbanization.

4. Geographical questions of the administrative reform of 1984

On the 1st of January, 1984, essential changes took place in the administrative division of the

territory of the country. The districts were put to an end, their places being taken over by the town-surroundings and surroundings of large villages, respectively. The spheres of activity of the eliminated district offices were decentralized to the villages in the majority of cases, a small number of them becoming towns. As a matter of fact, this reform was the first step towards the formation of a two-level administration.

The administration by town-surrounding is a transitional form that remains in effect until the creation of conditions of village administrations directly by the counties. In the course of the territorial reform, 139 town-surroundings or surroundings of large villages were formed. Among the seats, 105 are towns and 34 are large villages of town rank, recently established. Apart from 4 exceptions /Budapest, Hajdútöszörmény, Százhalombatta, Túrkeve/, the towns take part in solving the new administrative tasks. In 34 large villages of town rank, the conditions of becoming towns have gradually been produced.

When determining the territories of town-surroundings, two factors come to the front:

- 1/ circumstances of zones of attraction having formed in consequence of economic- natural potentialities and those of the geography of settlements of the given village;
- 2/ point of views of administrative policy of the middle level administration.

In the structure of the new territorial administration, the medium extension units are given a decisive role; however, several zones of smaller or larger area comprising a considerable number of settlements also came into existence /Figure 2/. The system of zones of attraction of the network

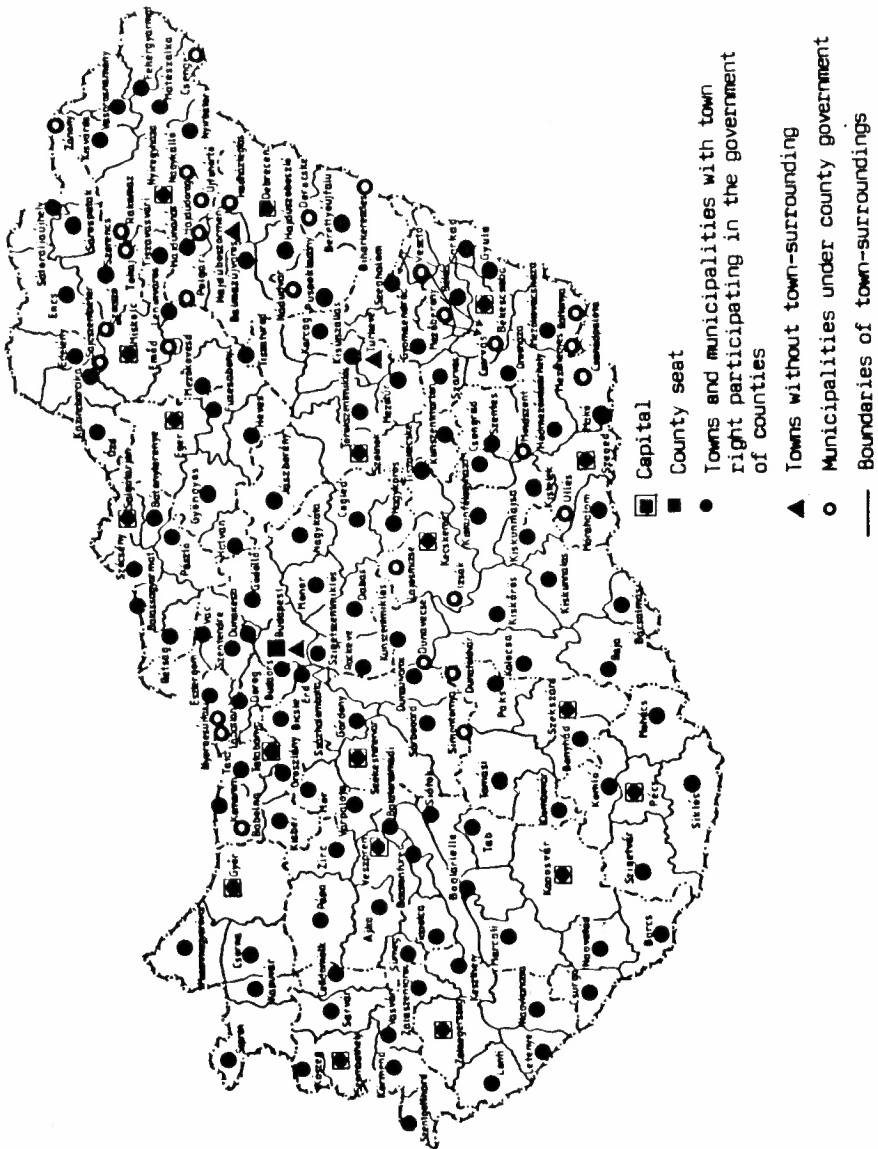


FIGURE 2 Administrative division of territory of Hungary in 1984

of settlements and the established order of the relations among the settlements came to the front in a relative manner when determining the system of territories or centres of the town-surrounding administration.

As a preparation for administration on two levels, 32 village councils were placed directly under county administration. These villages are not integrated with the system of administration of town-surrounding. The limits of the experiment are characterised by the fact that in 11 counties, no villages of direct subordination to the counties have been organised.

The reform of 1984 is a result of compromises of several kinds. The measure of changes of areas and the sphere of activity of the reform were determined by the political-economic surroundings; while the steadiness of the county boundaries played the role of the fundamental limit. In some counties, aspirations of various characters can be found, too, when looking at the spatial structure of the recent administrative division /Table 2/. In comparison to earlier circumstances, a few counties /e.g., Pest, Bács-Kiskun/ could evolve regional subdivision due to the category of rural communities with urban administrative status which contributed to the easing of tensions in the environs of towns. In County Baranya, there are no rural communities with urban administrative status although areas lacking towns /e.g., Sellye, Sásd/ could have been managed more rationally.

5. Summary

It is obvious even from this brief survey that the administrative reform was at all times

linked to much broader social and political changes and concerns. The transformation of administrative division of territory was several times subordinated to aims of everyday politics.

Among the administrative levels, the settlement administration /town-village/ changed considerably from the historical ease along with the district as the medium level of administration. As opposed to these changes, the counties have been and continue to be highly stationary; the functions of counties have changed several times, but their spatial order has been modified only to an insignificant extent.

The possibility for change in the administrative division of territories is determined largely by the processes that had taken place up to now. At the time of the reform of 1984, a long-term decision was made to proceed towards the two level system in which the local councils /villages, towns/ are directly linked to the county council. This decision does not exclude the possibility of further changes in either the village or town structure or even of carrying out a territorial correction of the county system, even if it were not a comprehensive reform.

The administrative organization of territory also touched the population in a vigorous manner. The consideration of interests of the population is particularly important today, when the administration is adopting strongly a supplying character. On both sides of the administrative boundaries, in our country those of settlements and counties, the population has a vigorous view of territorial identity, and thus it is impossible to disregard its opinion

when pondering the importance of administrative reforms.

In the future, in case of administrative changes of every kind, no matter how well-founded and reasonable they are from administrative, economic, geographical, etc. points of view, the opinion of the population will have to be asked; moreover, in some cases, its approval must be asked for, or else the administrative division of territory will lose one of its components, regarded very essential today, its social reception.

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Table 1

Administrative division of territory in Hungary between 1950-1980

Year	Number of					Number of villages	
	counties	districts	town-surrounding	towns	villages	with independent councils among the villages	with common councils among the villages
1950	19	140	-	54	3169	2808	361
1960	19	128	-	63	3210	2857	353
1970	19	107	-	73	3151	1711	1440
1980	19	83	49	96	3026	715	2311

Table 2

Administrative division of territory of Hungary on 1. January, 1984

Capital, Counties	Area /hectare/	Population	Number of		Village councils of various rank totally	Number of		Number of villages without local councils	
			town- surroundings	number of surround- ings of mu- nicipalities with town right		towns	villages		
Budapest	52 507	2 084 307	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Baranya	448 701	433 788	5	-	1	291	77	11	
Bács-Kiskun	836 170	566 066	6	4	6	105	98	91	
Békés	563 193	431 291	6	3	6	68	58	50	
Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	724 784	803 956	9	1	9	339	151	62	
Csongrád	426 268	454 633	5	2	5	54	41	31	
Fejér	437 367	423 377	3	3	3	103	69	45	
Győr-Sopron	401 222	429 987	5	-	5	160	75	35	
Hajdú-Bihar	621 161	553 036	4	2	5	74	42	21	
Heves	363 755	347 763	4	1	4	114	83	63	
Komárom	225 052	323 256	6	1	6	68	45	30	
Nógrád	254 438	238 319	3	3	3	117	52	18	
Pest	639 414	983 200	7	6	8	171	122	89	
Somogy	603 630	358 283	5	3	5	233	63	4	
Szabolcs-Szatmár	593 809	567 784	6	1	6	219	108	48	
Szolnok	560 756	443 375	7	1	8	67	45	28	
Tolna	370 391	268 237	5	-	5	103	65	33	
Vas	333 682	284 504	6	1	6	209	65	8	
Veszprém	468 888	368 625	8	1	8	212	66	12	
Zala	378 440	316 368	5	1	5	250	65	2	
Hungary	9 303 628	10 700 155	105	34	109	2957	1381	681	
								700	1576