Changes in the Town Network in Slovakia[1]

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Abstract: *The fundamental features of the town network of Slovakia developed during the two World Wars. It was at that time when the town network which still serves as the basis of the present town network of Slovakia was marked out. Naturally, the role and importance of the individual towns has changed since then. At the beginning, achieving national goals, i.e. creating Slovak majority towns and then, during the decades of the communist era, industrialization had priority. Organizing, planning, developing and service providing functions are typical of the post-modern towns of the new bourgeois era. An important element of the competition among towns is also the organization of international relations.*

Key words: *settlement network, town, functions of towns, twin-cities*

The main characteristic features of the network of settlements in Slovakia

The most important characteristic feature of the network of settlements in Slovakia is that there are a lot of settlements. Consequently, there is a high number of tiny villages in its territory. However, during the decades of communism, the number of communities with fewer than 1000 inhabitants decreased at a quick rate, which was the result mainly of the fusion of communities and the attachment of small communities to neighbouring bigger ones. When the political ambitions to carry out centralization and unify settlements lost ground, a high number of formerly independent communities broke away from the central settlement. This was promoted by the first administrative measure of the new bourgeois era, i.e. the restoration of the independence of settlements.

Tab.1: *The number of settlements in Slovakia, according to groups of settlements, (pieces)*

	1950	**1961**	**1970**	**1980**	**2001**
-199	304	220	200	236	367
200-499	1200	938	863	727	805
500-999	1002	1019	968	796	786
under 1000	2506	2177	2031	1759	1958
%	*74,9*	*67,3*	*65,7*	*64,6*	*67,9*
1000-1999	562	651	644	568	547
2000-4999	209	321	316	280	253
5000-9999	42	56	57	55	53
10000-19999	17	21	24	36	32
20000-49000	6	9	17	19	29
50000-99999	1	1	0	6	9
100000-	1	1	2	2	2
Σ	*3344*	*3237*	*3091*	*2725*	*2883*

Source: KSH Budapest, Štatistický úrad SR Praha - Bratislava

In spite of the fact that there were so many tiny villages, the majority of the population of Slovakia used to live in settlements with more than 1000 inhabitants. Both the number and the proportion of the inhabitants of the gradually decreasing number of tiny villages became lower but the changes that took place after 1990 affected them, too. Although the number of the inhabitants of tiny villages increased, compared to former years, their proportion within the total population continued to decrease (Slavík, V., 1997).

	1950	1961	1970	1980	2001
-199	44722	32205	27892	31393	45 808
200-499	413118	331450	303003	251267	276 280
500-999	697182	727463	697357	570284	556 289
1000 alatt	*1155022*	*1091118*	*1028252*	*852944*	*878377*
%	*33,6*	*26,1*	*22,7*	*17,1*	*16,3*
1000-1999	768663	910762	904961	804291	767 561
2000-4999	615768	930887	926372	830734	743 307
5000-9999	283104	382836	391705	374260	368 623
10000-19999	222827	290098	317722	545659	460 574
20000-49000	141572	247201	517896	589822	850 194
50000-99999	62465	79352	0	417831	646 054
100000-	192896	241796	450377	582627	664 765
Σ	*3442317*	*4174050*	*4537285*	*4998168*	*5379455*

Source: KSH Budapest, Štatistický úrad SR Praha - Bratislava

Changes in the town network of Slovakia

The town network of today's Slovakia took shape mostly during the two World Wars. The number of towns almost doubled in 1930 compared to 1910. In fact, this increase did not take up 20 years since it was the result of the establishment of the new state. Although the number of the towns originating from these years kept on rising, its pace was slower. The number of the 77 towns in 1930 had not doubled by 2001, either.

Tab.3: Changes in the number and population of towns between 1910 and 2001

	1910	1930	1950[2]	1980	2001
Number of towns, (pieces)	39	77	91	84	136
Population of towns, (people)	481184	902953	1048219	2205711	3010162
Rate of increase in population,%	-	187,6	116,1	210,4	136,5
Average population of towns, (people)	12713	13506	13464	25671	21987

Source: KSH Budapest, Štatistický úrad SR Praha - Bratislava

This radical reform of towns reflected the state–creating purposes of the new political power. They intended to organize the new state on the basis of their own ideas disregarding traditions.

Tab.4: Changes in the proportion of nationalities in Slovakia between 1910 and 2001

		Population		Slovak		Hungarian		German	
		people	%	people	%	people	%	people	%
1910	urban	403 778	12,8	125 449	31,1	200 189	49,6	69 312	17,17
	rural	2 762 396	87,2	1 546 779	56,0	935 249	33,9	134 672	4,88
	Σ	*3 166 174*	*100,0*	*1 672 228*	*52,8*	*1 135 438*	*35,9*	*203 984*	*6,44*
2001	urban	3 022 106	56,2	2 674 072	88,5	200 611	6,6	3 674	0,12
	rural	2 357 349	43,8	1 940 782	82,3	319 917	13,6	1 731	0,07
	Σ	*5 379 455*	*100,0*	*4 614 854*	*85,8*	*520 528*	*9,7*	*5 405*	*0,10*

Source: KSH Budapest, Štatistický úrad SR Bratislava

The most important task between the two World Wars was the slovakization of towns. The social composition of towns in the historic Hungary mostly meant the majority of inhabitants with Hungarian nationality. The new state regarded it as its priority task to replace Hungarian by Slovak majority. Establishment of cities served this purpose. Both in existing and in newly-established towns the main ambition was to achieve the dominance and exclusive majority of Slovak employees in administration, in the system of state institutions and in public institutions as soon as possible. The proportion of Slovak inhabitants increased to 88,5% in 2001 compared to 31,1% in 1910.

After the communists had come to power in 1948, the town network began to be formed in the new political system. At that time, however, there was a town network which the new power could use for

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[2] *The source of the figure from 1950: Statistický lexikon obcí ČSSR 1982. The legal definition of the concept of the town has only been existing since 1991 (Slavík, V., 2000).*
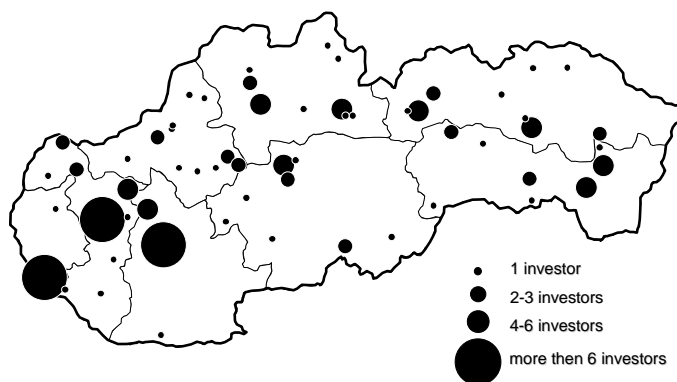
its purposes. According to communist ideology the power of the working class had to be implemented. A way to achieve this goal was to involve new people in the power and remove the old ruling class. Besides, they created new jobs for working-class people by developing industry and they also increased their number. The scene of such political and social changes was also towns. By that time the number of towns in Slovakia had been so high that it increased only to 91 in 1950 compared to 77 in 1930.

The communist social policy was aimed to achieve the concentration of powers, so they reduced the number of towns, as a result of which their number decreased to 84 in 1980. This process was going on simultaneously with the reduction of the number of settlements. The unification of settlements was so typical that by 1980 the number of settlements had fallen by 105. Meanwhile they wished to increase the number of inhabitants in existing towns. They achieved this goal by industrial development. Whereas the number of city–dwellers rose from 900,000 in 1930 to only one million in 1950, it doubled according to the 1980 census. It was in these years that housing estates, so typical of Slovak towns even today, were built (Dická, J., 2007). Instead of the worldwide victory of communism, the 1990s saw its worldwide collapse. Just like in 1818, when the social revolution was accompanied by a national revolution, in the 1990s social changes, the collapse of communism, was accompanied by national movements. New nation states emerged, one of them being Slovakia.

With the bourgeois democracies emerging, settlements also had more opportunities to change their position. Villages that had been attached to other settlements could become independent again, and others could now become towns. The increase in the number of towns was considerable. According to the 1980 census there were 84 towns in Slovakia, and after 1990 this number rose to 136 at a quick pace. The number of towns did not exactly double as it had during the two World Wars, but it did increase by 60%. A similarly important change was that the number of inhabitants kept growing by more than one third, i.e. 36%, and exceeded 3 million. In this way it can be stated that the majority of the Slovak society (56,2%) became city–dwellers, in spite of the fact that after 1996 their number began to fall in Slovakia, too.

New functions of towns

With industries having lost importance, administrative, planning and developing, commercial, financial, cultural, educational (university, research), sanitary and other service providing functions play an increasingly important role (Slavík, V., Kožuch, M., Bačík, V., 2005). The investments resulting in economic development are also attracted by towns. Instead of central planning, the competition of towns contributes to their own development. Their competition has resulted in a new town network, which is the result of their performing individual functions.

Fig.1: The main multinational investors in Slovakia. Source: Commercial Office, Bratislava, 2004. Edited by István Mezei, drawn by Máté Mády.

The map shows the attraction of capital as one of the above mentioned functions. The geographical location of the settlements that have been preferred by investors shows a semi–circle drawn from Bratislava to the north. The most popular places have been towns, and the most investments have been carried out in the three districts in the west (Mezei, I., 2007).

Developing new, independent international relations can also be regarded as a new function of towns. In the new conditions when they can be open to the world, as members of the European Union, Slovak towns have grasped the opportunity to develop official relations with a lot of other towns.

Tab.5: *International relations of Slovak towns*

Neighbouring country	188
Member state of the European Union	84
Third country	30
All European countries	*302*
Other continents	22
All the relations	*324*
information	68

Source: homepages of the individual Slovak towns

68 out of 136 Slovak towns provide information about their twin–towns on their homepages. The most relations have been developed among the towns of neighbouring countries, most typically with Czech towns. Among non–neighbouring countries, Germany is in the first place, and among third countries they have developed the most relations with Serbia and Montenegro. Regarding continents outside Europe the USA is in the first place. Motivations of relations are manifold. It is important to represent Slovak national interest, since in each case some kind of Slovak concern gave opportunity for cooperation. Besides, more practical reasons are also present, e.g. acquiring town development experience.

To sum up, we may state that the towns in Slovakia have given up the character of last century industrial towns and have taken up that of organizing and service providing towns of the post-modern age and they all show individual characteristic features.

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Redakčná poznámka: *Nie slovakizácia miest v medzivojnovom období bola najdôležitejšou úlohou, ale odmaďarčenie ťažkých následkov násilnej maďarizácie vo všetkých oblastiach života na Slovensku na zásadách parlamentnej demokracie a revolučných premien a vymožeností.*

Zmeny v sieti miest na Slovensku

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Obsah: *Základné črty siete miest na Slovensku sa vytvorili počas dvoch svetových vojen. Práve v tomto období sa začína rysovať súčasná sieť miest. Postavenie a význam jednotlivých miest sa prirodzene odvtedy zmenili. Vytvárali sa veľké mestá, v ktorých počas komunistického režimu mala prioritu industrializácia. Funkcie organizácie, plánovania, rozvíjania a poskytovania služieb sú typické pre postmoderné mestá novej buržoáznej éry. Dôležitým elementom konkurencie medzi mestami je taktiež budovanie medzinárodných vzťahov.*

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