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Nineteenth-century urbanization in the south-east of the Kingdom of Hungary: demographic dynamics, ethnic and religious composition of urban population

***Abstract:** The paper deals with the problem of urbanization and demographic growth during the 19th Century in the south of the former Kingdom of Hungary. Data for towns in two Counties, Bacs-Bodrogh and Torontal were analysed, focusing on the change of the ethnic and religious composition of the population. Orthodox Christian Serbs made the vast majority of the town's population in the first half of the Century. The Revolution of 1848/49 caused negative tendencies in population growth but in the last decades of the Century urban settlements increased in size significantly. The Serbian Orthodox population, despite moderate growth in absolute numbers, lost majority in almost all towns in the south of the Kingdom of Hungary due to intense immigration of other ethnic and religious groups. The key part of the newcomers was made up by ethnic Hungarians which resettled as a result of government policies and accelerating industrialisation.*

***Key Words:** Urbanization, Kingdom of Hungary, Demographics, Serbs, Orthodox Christians, Bacs-Bodrogh County, Torontal County.*

There is no universally accepted definition of urban settlements that could be applied to all regions and periods in history. It is therefore important to clearly define the meaning of the term in specific research studies. In the case of the Kingdom of Hungary, legal status appears to be the only suitable criteria for identifying urban areas of similar character. In the 19th century, prior to the Revolution of 1848/49 and further reforms, most settlements were incorporated into counties (basic political and administrative units of the kingdom) and had no self-governing privileges. On the other hand, the so-called royal free cities were separate political entities, not integrated in the counties at all, enjoying considerable autonomy and communicating with the central government directly. As a matter of fact, they had the same status in the Hungarian constitutional system as the counties. A number of large settlements within the counties had the status of privileged marketplaces, which included some self-governing rights relating to local, typically communal matters, but these rights

were defined separately for each town. In the second half of the 19th century, several reforms completely changed the basic legal framework. One of the changes was the establishment of a two-tier system for urban settlements. Cities with municipal rights, as first-class towns, maintained most of the self-governing privileges of former royal free cities in communal matters, but lost judicial rights and the status of political entities. Consequently, they became clearly subordinated to the central government in Budapest, acting more as administrative units than autonomous components of the realm. Cities with established Magistrate, as second-class towns, were subordinated to the counties, with only limited privileges to act autonomously when dealing with typical urban issues. They essentially replaced the former privileged marketplaces, but now their status across Hungary was unified, according to the Constitution and special laws [2, p. 174–176; 3, p. 33–35].

This paper focuses on the towns that had the status of cities with municipal rights and cities with established Magistrate in 1910, regardless of their previous classification. In the 19th century, the territory of the counties changed to some extent, without affecting the number of urban settlements, except in the case of Pančevo, which was incorporated into Torontal County after the Banat Military Frontier was abolished in 1872.

The Serbian population of the Kingdom of Hungary was concentrated in the southeast, near the Military Frontier and the border with the Ottoman Empire and Serbia proper. Two counties had a significant Serbian Orthodox Christian population – Bacs-Bodrog and Torontal Counties. In Bacs-Bodrog County, almost all Orthodox believers were Serbs; meanwhile in Torontal County, a mixed Serbian-Romanian Orthodox Christian population lived in most parts of the territory, except in the cities, where Serbs made up the majority [2, p. 182; 4, p. 163–177].

In the first half of the 19th century, no real population censuses were conducted in Hungary. Still, occasional surveys of non-noble population, property and its owners, workforce, special religious counts etc., may be used as alternative sources of demographic data. During the second half of the 19th century, empire-wide professional censuses were conducted regularly, on a 10-year basis. Despite the fact

that an exact comparison of data from all mentioned sources with respect to the same population groups is not possible, the margin of error remains rather low. The results of the analysis certainly offer a reliable overview of the basic demographic trends, which suits the goal of the research.

The data for Bacs-Bodrog County are quite comprehensive, providing a good overview for the entire 19th century (Tables 1 and 2). In most cases, the total population of the cities increased significantly from 1805 until the Revolution of 1848/49. War conditions affected the development of towns further south, leading to stagnation in Sombor and a significant decrease in Novi Sad after 1849. However, the cities soon recovered and pre-war population levels were reached in 1857 already. Population growth remained robust until 1910.

Table 1. Population of cities in Bacs-Bodrog County 1805–1851

Year	1805			1840			1851		
City	Total population	Orthodox population		Total population	Orthodox population		Total population	Orthodox population	
		Total	Share in %		Total	Share in %		Total	Share in %
Kanjiža				9139	1297	14.19	9407		
Senta				13653	2380	17.43	14797		
Baja				13834	1900	13.73	15410		
Subotica	21544	1829	8.49	32984	1251	3.79	48126	2615	5.43
Novi Sad	13312	8274	62.16	17332	9675	55.82	10007	6163	61.59
Sombor	14976	9003	60.12	21086	11897	56.42	21601	11283	52.23

Source: [11, annex; 7, p. 235–237, 294–296, 320–321, 331–334, 8, p. 869–871; 1, Президијални списи, бр. 1725]

Table 2. Population of cities in Bacs-Bodrog County 1857–1910

Year	1857			1910		
City	Total population	Orthodox population		Total population	Orthodox population	
		Total	Share in %		Total	Share in %
Kanjiža	11084	751	6.78	17018	378	2.22
Senta	16326	2170	13.29	29666	2076	7.00
Baja	17651	745	4.22	21032	332	1.58
Subotica	53366	2778	5.21	94610	3486	3.68
Novi Sad	14055	7024	49.98	33590	11553	34.39
Sombor	22601	11410	50.48	30593	11880	38.83

Source: [2, p. 183]

The situation in Torontal County was similar (Tables 3 and 4). City population grew quickly until the Revolution of 1848/49. While war conditions caused an overall population decline, pre-war levels were reached by 1857. Population growth until 1910 was significant, but not as fast as in Bacs-Bodrog County.

Table 3. Population of cities in Torontal County 1830–1851

Year	1830			1840			1851		
	Total population	Orthodox population		Total population	Orthodox population		Total population	Orthodox population	
		Total	Share in %		Total	Share in %		Total	Share in %
Bečkerek	9780			15544	10398	66.89	14350	8407	58.59
Kikinda	10450			15000	11800	78.67	13866		
Pančevo	10244	7535	73.56	10644	7643	71.81	10956		

Source: [9, p. 448; 7, p. 287–289; 8, p. 790–792, 802–803; 1, Президијални списи, бр. 1725; 12, tafel 37]

Table 4. Population of cities in Torontal County 1857–1910

Year	1857			1910		
	Total population	Orthodox population		Total population	Orthodox population	
		Total	Share in %		Total	Share in %
Bečkerek	16328	9071	55.55	26006	9341	35.92
Kikinda	17350	12492	72.00	26795	14721	54.94
Pančevo	12045	8318	69.06	20808	9361	44.99

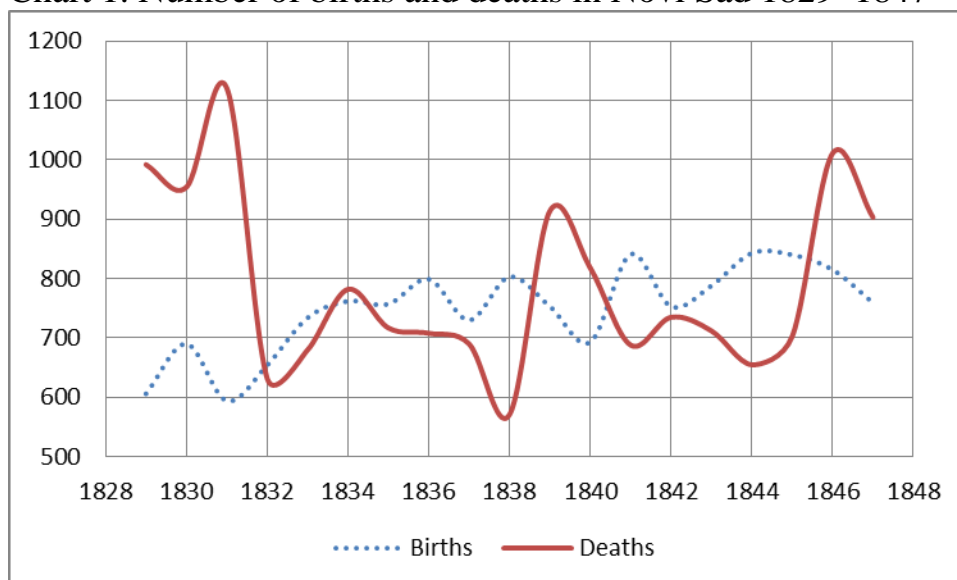
Source: [2, p. 183]

In both counties, the majority of the population was Orthodox Christian and predominantly Serbian by ethnicity. The non-Orthodox population consisted mainly of Catholics, mostly of German origin, along with a significant share of other nationalities: Slovaks, Hungarians and others. Based on the presented data, we may conclude that cities in both counties had a predominantly Orthodox Christian and Serbian character in the first half of the century. Urban areas were centres of culture, education, economic and political life, and south Hungary was no exception. The Serbian national political elite was concentrated in cities, not in rural areas. All institutions that may be categorized as “national”, such as associations, schools, guilds and political parties, were active in urban areas, from where they spread their

influence further to the countryside. The unofficial hub of the Serbian political movement was in the towns of Novi Sad and Bečkerek. As a relative majority, Serbs were more or less in control of official city government bodies, and therefore indirectly influenced policy-making procedures of the entire Kingdom. For example, in the city of Novi Sad, Serbs took control of the city assembly and the Magistrate in 1848, and played a key role in local politics during the following two decades [2, p. 182; 11, p. 97].

The overall rise in city population during the first half of the century resulted mostly from immigration. The case of Novi Sad shows that natural population increase was rather low; in fact, natural population change was negative in the 1829–1847 period (Chart 1). The cholera epidemic of 1831 and food crisis of 1845–1847 caused high mortality rates and a natural population decrease of around 800 people between 1829 and 1847. At the same time, the total population expanded by around 1,300 inhabitants, from some 16,600 in 1830 to 17,875 in 1848. Natural population decline together with total population growth points to significant immigration (around 2,100 people), which meant that in 1848 some 15% of the city’s inhabitants were actually immigrants, though in reality the share must have been even higher, since vital statistical data prior to 1828 are lacking [11, p. 35–39; 6, p 98; 9, p. 252].

Chart 1. Number of births and deaths in Novi Sad 1829–1847



Source: [10, p. 35–37]

The situation changed dramatically in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The total population in the cities basically doubled between 1851 and 1910. But, more importantly, the religious and ethnic composition was significantly altered. Until the Revolution of 1848/49, most cities could be described as “Serbian urban strongholds” in Hungary. The majority of the population was Serbian, and therefore the impact of Serbian national politics, parties, leaders and other communities on the urban administration and policies was huge. After 1848/49 things changed, as the population became more diverse. The share of Orthodox believers, indirectly signifying ethnic Serbs, declined in all cities. In 1910, Orthodox Christians made up over a half of the population only in Kikinda, whereas in other towns the share was below 50%. In Novi Sad, the once unofficial capital of the Serbian movement in Hungary, Serbs accounted for a mere third of the total population in 1910. In most cases, even the absolute number of Orthodox inhabitants declined between 1851 and 1910, while the position of other religious groups improved.

It is clear that natural population increase was not the main reason behind the above changes. Rather, immigration was responsible for the fast growth of the cities. Natural demographic processes combined with government policies, which favoured the immigration of Hungarians in particular, contributed to the “ethnic restructuring” in southern Hungary. The number and share of individuals who listed “Hungarian as their mother tongue” during census-taking, which is considered a reliable identification of Hungarian ethnicity, was growing quickly until 1910 (Table 5). Before the outbreak of the First World War, Hungarians outnumbered Serbs in Novi Sad, the traditional “Serbian political centre in Hungary”. Even in Pančevo, at the very south, where almost no Hungarians had lived in the first half of the 19th century, every seventh citizen was a Magyar (Hungarian) in 1910.

Table 5. Share of Hungarians in cities 1840–1910

Share of Hungarians by mother tongue in the population – in %			
Year	1840	1880	1910
City			

Bacs-Bodrogh County			
Kanjiža	70	91.59	97.87
Senta	82	84.33	91.76
Baja	36	70.54	79.86
Subotica	33	49.01	58.75
Novi Sad	11	25.87	39.72
Sombor	17	20.56	32.94
Torontal County			
Bečkerek	23	18.63	35.18
Kikinda	18	14.92	22.27
Pančevo	/	6.61	16.17

Source: [7, p. 235–237, p. 287–289, 294–296, 320–321, 331–334, 8, p. 790–792, 802–803, 869–871]

This development, facilitated by government administration employment policies, was related to industrialization, bureaucratization and the expansion of transportation networks. The predominantly agricultural regions in the south of Hungary reached quite respectable levels of industrialization by 1910 (Table 6).

Table 6. Level of industrialization in cities 1880–1910

Population employed in Industry and Handcraft – in %		
Year	1880	1910
City		
Bacs-Bodrogh County		
Kanjiža	/	6.21
Senta	5.72	6.72
Baja	15.75	16.96
Subotica	5.49	7.3
Novi Sad	12.9	15.36
Sombor	8.67	9.5
Torontal County		
Bečkerek	11.32	14.11
Kikinda	/	11.75
Pančevo	12.79	14.88

Source: [7, p. 235–237, p. 287–289, 294–296, 320–321, 331–334, 8, p. 790–792, 802–803, 869–871]

The administration, under full control of the central government in Budapest, was packed with newcomers from inner Hungary. The expansion of railroads was used for settlement purposes as well. Railroad workers were a privileged class of semi-state employees, very suitable for planned relocation. The government did not hesitate to misuse its impact on workforce engagement. For example, in the 1880–

1910 period, in towns and stations along the Subotica-Novi Sad section of the main railroad from Vienna to Belgrade, built in 1882, the number of Serbs increased by 14.6%, and of Hungarians by 75.5% [11, p. 110–112]. The Hungarian government and political elites identified cities as centres for spreading political ideas, as well as national identity. Changing the ethnic composition of south Hungarian cities was actually considered a national interest and part of a semi-official political programme, or, in other words, an act of “demographic warfare” [5, p. 163–177]. The results were quite impressive. The ethnic character of the cities in Bacs-Bodrog and Torontal Counties changed drastically. The Serbian movement in Hungary lost, step by step, its main urban strongholds, necessary for maintaining the national identity of the population as a whole.

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HISTORY OF URBANIZATION IN EUROPE

**Collection of Articles of the III International Scientific
Conference**



Nizhny Novgorod State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering
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The collection includes articles by Russian and Serbian historians devoted to various aspects of urbanization. The works are distinguished by their diversity and have a multifaceted character. The collection is intended for teachers of universities and schools, graduate students, students and all interested in history.

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