



SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE URBANISATION IN NORTHERN HUNGARY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: Urbanization and its consequences became a new research direction in Central-Europe. There were 40 towns in 2016 in Northern Hungary, which means that this is the second most urbanised region in Hungary. The region has 12% of all the towns of Hungary, nevertheless it must be emphasized that urbanisation in the region cannot be considered homogeneous either from a regional or from a functional point of view. Considering the regional distribution of new towns by counties it can be said that urbanisation in North Hungary has been significant in the last decade at the national level but a large number of settlements has been ranked as towns in the eastern and north-eastern parts of Hungary. Looking at North Hungary from a regional point of view we can state that some regions are strongly urbanised while there are large rural areas especially along the borders. Especially in the rural areas of the regions significant urbanisation can be observed in the 21st century. The aims of the research were to analyze the changing of the legal aspects of the declaration of towns in Hungary; to reveal the speciality of the process in North Hungary and to analyze the socio-economic aspects of the urbanization in the research area through the analysis of the actor's point of view. This study reveals the characteristics of this process with using the methodology of comparative data analysis, questionnaire survey and conducting of deep interviews.

Key words: reclassification, urban function, Northern Hungary, socio-economic aspects

INTRODUCTION

The declaration of a town is a reappearing topic of settlement geography in the literature. Obtaining the rights and privileges of a town status is different in each country and the conditions both in Hungary and Central Europe are continuously changing (Kopczyński- Sobechowicz, 2017; Šimon, 2014; Matlovic, 2014; Matlovicova, 2014; Ursic – Matjaz, 2012; Bagat et al., 2008; Szymanska-Matczak, 2002; Basovsky- Divinsky, 1991). Factors could be measurable, like number of inhabitants or percent of sewage system, etc. However some subjective factors also could be take

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into consideration, like the identity, traditions, etc. The processes of classification of towns in Europe are different (Table 1.)

Tab. 1: *The processes of classification of towns in some European countries*

Level of classification	Central: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, France, Ireland, Poland, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden, Hungary	Local, regional: Austria, Great-Britain, Germany, Norway
Method of classification	according to law: Austria, Denmark, France, Norway, Ireland, Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden	according to a decision: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Great Britain, Italy, Hungary

Source: Kocsis, 2008, p. 722

However, the perception on the town status and the role of cities is not uniform in the domestic academic life. Of the disciplines relevant from the point of view of this paper the settlement geographers emphasize the functions of municipalities and the role of intermediate institutions which enable settlements to rise into town status. The experts of “space sciences” believe that a town is the product of the division of labour that developed among the surrounding settlements, and also that a town is a settlement with central roles in which the appropriate quantity and diversity of the urban core functions are concentrated.

To analyze the urbanization and its consequences is a complex task, as not only the necessary factors are various but the awarding of city status and its connection with city functions changed several times throughout history.

Thanks to its complexity, firstly we targeted to analyze the changing of the legal aspects of the declaration of towns in Hungary in order to clarify the background of the urbanization in the research area.

As North Hungary is one of the most urbanized part of Hungary, following the general analysis we aimed to reveal the speciality of the urbanization process in the region.

During our data analysis and field research we experiences that local government, local entrepreneurs and inhabitants have different opinion about the effects of upgrading into a town. Starting from this observation we also analyzed the socio-economic aspects of the urbanization in the research area through the analysis of the actor's point of view.

Legal aspects of urbanisation in Hungary

The awarding of city status and its connection with city functions changed several times throughout history. The first important law in the post-transition period, the Local Government Act 1990 repealed the earlier regulation, and regulated the process during the next nine years (Szabó 1994; Balázs 1994).



§59 of the Act on Local Government states: “A large village/incorporated municipality may suggest that it be declared a town, if the use of that title is justified by its advanced state, and its role played in the region.” However, the system does not contain any mandatory elements; there were only suggested guidelines for the assessors (Tóth 2000, 2000b). There is no reference to any population limit or infrastructure indicators that a city should definitely fulfil. The only rigorous limit is that only a large village/incorporated municipality may become a town and §108 makes it obvious that it may be more difficult to become a large village/incorporated municipality than to proceed to a town status from that position (Pirisi-Trócsányi 2007).

The next milestone of the regulation process is represented by the Act XLI of 1999 on procedures on regional organisation, which provide more detailed guidelines. §15 (1) of the Act states that the members of the local government present the current state of development as well as the regional functions and roles of the large village in a detailed assessment at the beginning of the procedure, then section (2) provides details for this. The appendixes of the application includes a table with all the compulsory data that must be provided by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) and the local government albeit no target numbers are included thus the procedure relies on case law, influenced by common practice (Pirisi -Trócsányi 2007, László 2007). Act CLXXXIX of 2011 on the Local governments of Hungary. §104 states that (1) a large village can be given a town status which has regional roles and fulfils average development that can be expected of a town. (2) Should the minister decline support for the application of a town status, the local government of will receive a notice with the development requirements. If the local government maintains its proposal, it can submit the application again by 31 January following the year when the indicated de-



Fig. 1: Towns in Hungary in 2016



velopment suggestions have been completed. On this basis 18 settlements were given town status by Head of State in 2013.

The above mentioned facts demonstrate that the regulation is still not rigorous enough. Despite the decreasing or even terminated economic activity the number of towns has increased and is still increasing intensely. Consequently, the vast majority of the towns in Hungary lack functionality and are scarcely populated (every eighth town has a population under 5000, a number of towns have no town-function whatsoever) but there are no regions severely lacking of towns⁴ (Figure 1, Faragó 2006, 2009).

As a result of the above mentioned facts the number of towns has risen (Table 1).

Towns in North Hungary

There were 46 towns in North Hungary in 2016, which makes it the second most urbanised region in Hungary. 12% of the towns of Hungary can be found in this region but it must be emphasized that the urbanisation of the area cannot be considered homogeneous either from a regional or from a functional point of view. (Bujdosó-Szűcs 2008).

In the examined area the case of Nógrád County has to be highlighted because no settlement has been given a town rank since 1989 and owing to the current regulations it is highly unlikely that there will be for a long while since there are no villages in the county. Because of this Nógrád is the least urbanised county in Hungary but Heves County in North Hungary belongs to the less urbanised counties with its 11 towns and low level of urbanised population (Table 2).



Fig. 2: *Towns in North Hungary with the date of declaration*
Source: own edition

4 Scarcely-urbanised zones: area where the distance between towns exceed 25 kilometres (Szabó G., 1997)



Tab. 2: *The development of the number of towns in Hungary between 1945 and 2016*

Year	Number of towns (db)	Rate of urban population (%)
1945	52	35
1960	63	40
1970	76	45
1982	96	53
1984	109	55
1989	164	58
1990	177	62
1993	184	63
1995	194	63
1996	206	64
1997	218	64
2000	237	65
2004	274	66
2006	289	67
2007	298	67
2008	306	68
2010	328	68
2013	346	69
2014	346	69
2015	346	69
2016	346	69

Source: Magyarország közigazgatási helynévkönyve, 2015., on the website of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, The President's 325/2013. (VII. 10.) KE decree on the declaration of towns (Magyar Közlöny, 2013. évi 118. szám, 64033. oldal)

Examining the North Hungary from a regional point of view we can state that some areas (Sajó-valley, the Miskolc area, Borsodi-Mezőség) are heavily urbanised while other places mainly along the national border lack urbanised zones (Hajdú 1977). The Cserhát and the Cserehát regions are characterised by this fact (Figure 2).

The growing number of towns indicates that there were great potentials in the settlements at the time of the regime change and the turn of the century. This is supported by the fact that during the past two decades the number of towns grew by more than 40%.

We can state with certainty that settlements were given town rank each year other than election years and 2001, 2004 as well as 2013 were exceptionally “fruitful” years as 3 large villages became towns each year (two large villages became towns in 2005 and 2009 while only one in 2003, 2007, and 2008) (Figure 3).



Tab. 3: *Urbanisation of Hungarian counties*

County	Number of towns	Σ settlements	Ratio of settlements with town status (%)	Ratio of urban population (%)
Budapest	1	1	100	100
Pest County	54	187	28,8	66,21
Central Hungary	55	188	29,2	88,1
Fejér County	17	108	15,7	44,12
Komárom-Esztergom County	12	76	15,8	64,73
Veszprém County	15	217	6,9	32,23
Central Transdanubia	44	401	10,9	54,47
Győr-Moson-Sopron County	12	183	6,5	59,77
Vas County	13	216	6,0	60,48
Zala County	10	258	3,9	56,61
West-Transdanubia	35	657	5,3	59,24
Baranya County	14	301	4,6	66,04
Somogy County	16	245	6,5	52,34
Tolna County	11	109	10,1	56,39
South-Transdanubia	41	655	6,2	59,02
Borsod-Abaúj Zemplén County	29	358	8,1	58,63
Heves County	11	121	9,1	46,93
Nógrád County	6	131	4,6	41,96
North Hungary	46	610	7,5	52,85
Hajdú-Bihar County	21	82	25,6	80,43
Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County	22	78	28,2	72,81
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County	28	229	12,2	54,31
Northern Great Plain	71	389	18,2	68,56
Bács-Kiskun County	22	119	18,5	68,17
Békés County	22	75	29,3	75,85
Csongrád County	10	60	16,6	75,35
South Great Plain	54	254	21,2	72,61
Country total	346	3154	11,03	68,6

Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2015



Naturally there are certain aspects of this process of urbanisation in the region (Lukács - Perger 1975). It can be declared that most of the settlements with a central function had become towns by the time of the regime change. The historic centres and sub-centres with real and full urban roles were towns at the time of the World Wars while after 1945 during the first phase of urbanisation – in harmony with the national processes – it meant the creation of the industrial towns (Hatvan, Ózd, Kazincbarcika, Tiszaújváros – earlier Leninváros).

The second phase of urbanisation included the natural centres of former micro regions/small areas. Mezőkövesd, Encs, Heves, Pásztó, Edelény, Szécsény, Tokaj, Bátonyterenye, Füzesabony, Pétervására, Putnok, Rétság, Sajószentpéter, Szikszó became towns owing to their institutions and intermediary functions (Molnár-Pénzes 2005, Bujdosó Et Al., 2007, Bujdosó 2007, Bujdosó 2010, Bujdosó 2012).

After the regime change the process of the declaration of towns became more polarised. The new types include settlements in the near vicinity of large cities (Alsószolca, Felsőszolca, Nyékládháza, Emőd), smaller industrial towns or former industrial towns (Lőrinci, Borsodnádásd, Bélapátfalva, Rudabánya, Sajóbáony), natural centres of micro regions (Mezőcsát, Szendrő, Pálháza, Abaújszántó, Gönc, Cigánd, Verpelét) or settlements with other functions (or no functions) (Kisköre, Onga, Gyöngyöspata vagy Mezőkeresztes) (Bujdosó 2013).

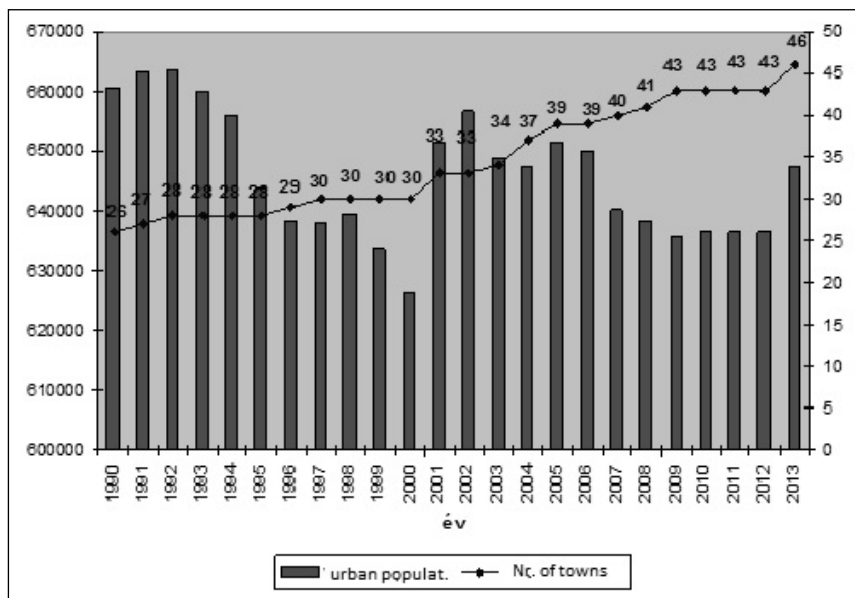


Fig. 3: The development of the number of towns and the urban population between 1990 and 2013



METHODS

The complexity of the topic as well as its spatial and temporal dimensions required a wide range of methodologies to be applied in my work, which are the following:

- literature review: due to the specific nature of the topic primarily the *literature published* in Hungary was processed with a short international overview;
- the project applications of towns to be declared, *development documents and strategies* lying on scientific bases;
- regulations of town declarations as well as national, regional and settlement *normative regulations* of Hungary's regional and settlement development;
- the scientific articles of (conference) publications;

In addition, further empiric and secondary research were carried out:

- *processing* national and settlement *statistical data*: during the research the *statistical databases* available for the examined towns, TSTAR, Statistical Yearbooks were used. In addition, *data about project applications* were gained from EMIR, MÁK (Hungarian State Chamber) and OTMR (Hungarian Territorial Monitoring System) databases. In order to present the status change and the actual public administration status the Settlement Collection of the Hungarian Republic was used. To find out about the most recent information about the settlements their *websites* were used together with www.valasztas.hu;
- *SWOT-analysis of the examined settlement*: primarily analyses taken over from documents of town declarations;
- *questionnaires*: as we only had partial data available for the research, primary research had to be carried out. I chose to use questionnaires directed at three target groups (different questionnaires were applied with both open and close questions). When surveying local governments, I was primarily interested in the factors and motivations of their request for declaration of a town and also the results since the declaration (sources, institutions, gains). The examination covered all the local governments of the settlements included in the analysis. Another target group of the primary research were local enterprises and companies, altogether 50 representative enterprises per settlement (representing the economic profile of the settlement). The questions were about the economic activities, project possibilities and the results after the declaration of a town. The third target group of my questionnaire was the locals: 500 people were interviewed, which was not a representative sample. The objective of the questions decisively about the general assessment of the settlement, the changes in services and standard of living was to have a subjective picture about the 'soft' factors that do not suggest statistical data;
- *in-depth interviews*: interviewing mayors and entrepreneurs, the inhabitants primarily to explore the special local features.



RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review, the primary and secondary data collection and analysis the following scientific results can be stated:

1. The title of a town has a strong prestige in our country. They live it as a rank, and cooperation between the inhabitants results in a higher prestige.

The specialist literature on the topic concludes that the previous economic benefits of becoming a town (in the case of villages with a lot of inhabitants the ratio of the VAT remaining on the spot can be higher if the settlement is a town, it is easier to win national and EU projects for towns due to the higher level of institutions, enterprises also prefer towns) cease to exist, so expressed revenue increase does not come with the title. This hypothesis was proved by my examination.

At the same time, becoming a town was a question of prestige for the settlements examined, all the target groups highlighted it. It is also important to note that the prestige of not all the settlements increased after they were declared towns (Mezőkeresztes, Kisköre). Furthermore, success is not lived in the same way by all the target groups. While the leaders of the settlement take it as a success (as they initiated it) and note a prestige growth, the local enterprises do not feel in the same way (Figure 4).

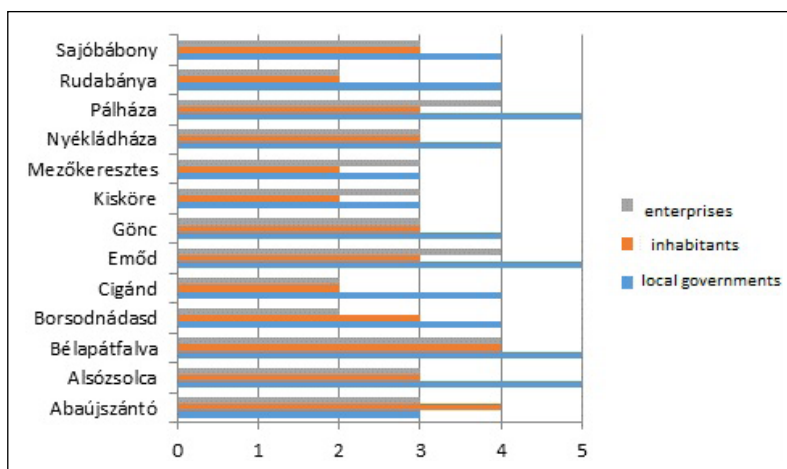


Fig. 4: The assessment of greater prestige in the examined towns after declaration by target groups

Source: own compilation based on the questionnaire

2. Developing infrastructure is essential in the life of all settlements regardless of their rank, so in many cases developed infrastructure was a prerequisite of declaration.

The infrastructure of a settlement generally reflects development. As developing infrastructure plays a significant part in the lives of all settlements, the question is whether developed infrastructure was the prerequisite of declaration or it changed



afterwards? During the examination seven indicators were assessed that mostly represent the present state of infrastructure.

In many settlements indicators formed a growing smooth curve as network development is continuous and growing. Maybe it is worth noting that positive infrastructure development preceded the declaration of a town and it is not the consequence. Of course, some „towns” may differ from the average, but on the whole the increase of the indicators is obvious.

To sum up, we can state that there was no significant relationship detected if the declaration of a town has any role in increasing infrastructure indicators. The development of the infrastructure is essential for all settlements regardless of their rank. What is more, developed infrastructure was a prerequisite of declaration.

3. The title „town” means emotionally more for the locals. The declaration of a town is a significant social, psychological factor that strengthens identification and encourages cooperation.

According to many researchers it is important for the inhabitants to live in towns, which enhances local patriotism and identification with the place (Süli-Zakat Et Al. 2002, Patkós 2002). Sometimes a settlement wants to become a town to free extra energies from the locals and they are willing to contribute more to a would-be town than a village (Kiss 1997). In certain cases after declaration the settlement starts to develop and the inhabitants become active to prove they deserve to be a town (Szigeti 1997, Huszti 2008).

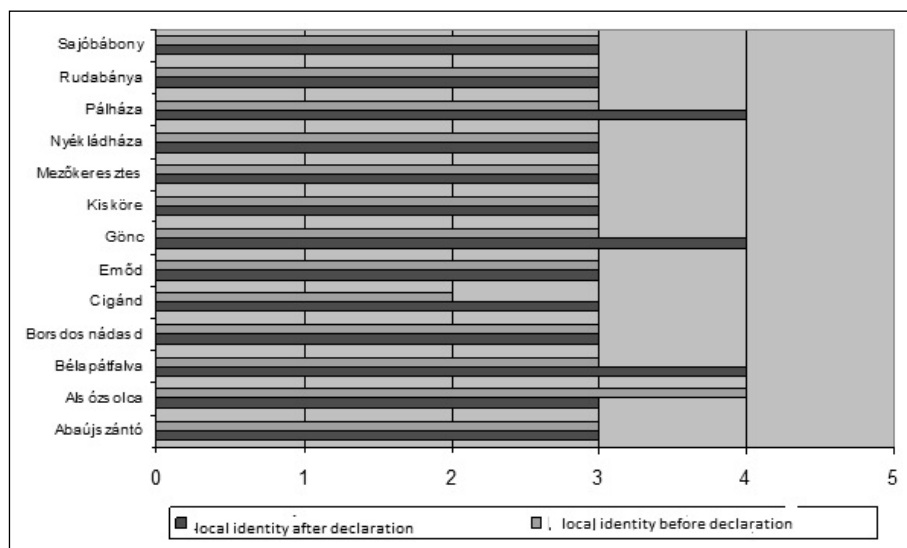


Fig. 5: The assessment of local identity in the examined towns

Source: own compilation based on the questionnaire



The settlements that have already earned that title during the course of history but lost their rank the declaration is a decisive sociological-psychological factor that strengthens identification and encourages cooperation (Csapó 1994, Csapó -Kocsis 1997, Zsótér 2008).

The locals' sense of identity is also changeable at the examined settlements. First, it is interesting that in the case of Alsózsolca the sense of identity decreased. In my opinion this can be due to the loose relations of the people moving out of Miskolc. It is also important to note that in smaller and primarily hillside towns (Bélapátfalva, Pálháza, Gönc) the locals have stronger ties to the settlement, so we can say that the title of a „town” has an emotional charge for the inhabitants (Figure 5).

4. Declaration of a town has positive impacts on the project applications, activity, success and source adsorption capacity of the settlement.

The examination proved that becoming a town has a positive impact on the success of the projects and the amount of funds according to the management. At the same time, however, it is also important to note that in a way the respondents also evaluate their own work, project activity and success so this subjectivity can result in a more positive picture than real (Figure 6). In addition, the opinions of the target groups differed significantly. While town management unanimously declared that the declaration opened up project opportunities and more funds, local inhabitants and enterprises shared this view only in some settlements. It is also supported by the analysis of the amount of funds.

Project applications brought along positive changes in nearly half of the declared towns although most settlements assessed the available project opportunities satisfactory. Almost without any exceptions local enterprises thought their project prospects had improved.

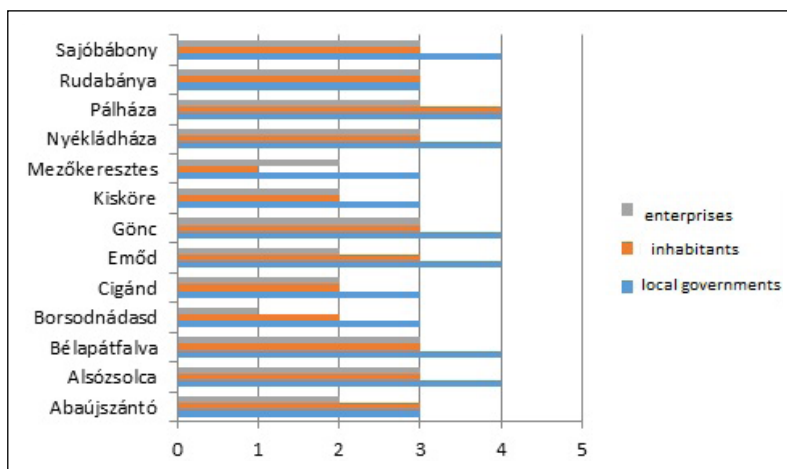


Fig. 6: The assessment of project opportunities in the examined towns after declaration by target groups

Source: own compilation based on the questionnaire



However, we have to see that people sometimes have the misbelief that towns can apply for more projects than villages and they are more successful. The results of the examination did not prove the opposite. It is also obvious that it can be influenced by several external impacts that were outlined previously.

5. The declaration does not automatically mean institutional network extension, more jobs or improved services.

One of the objectives of the examination was to find out whether the declaration of a town can induce improving employment and better chances of getting a job. According to the locals as one of the target groups nearly half of the examined settlements have better employment prospective since the declaration. Mezőkeresztes and Abaújszántó can be the exceptions where the locals are and were pessimistic. It is not surprising, too, that the most favourable indicators are presented by two towns near Miskolc (Alsózsolca, Nyékládháza). However, it must be considered that opportunities may not be improved in the settlement concerned as the inhabitants can find a job easier in the nearby town so we cannot state with certainty that employment opportunities have been improved due to the declaration.

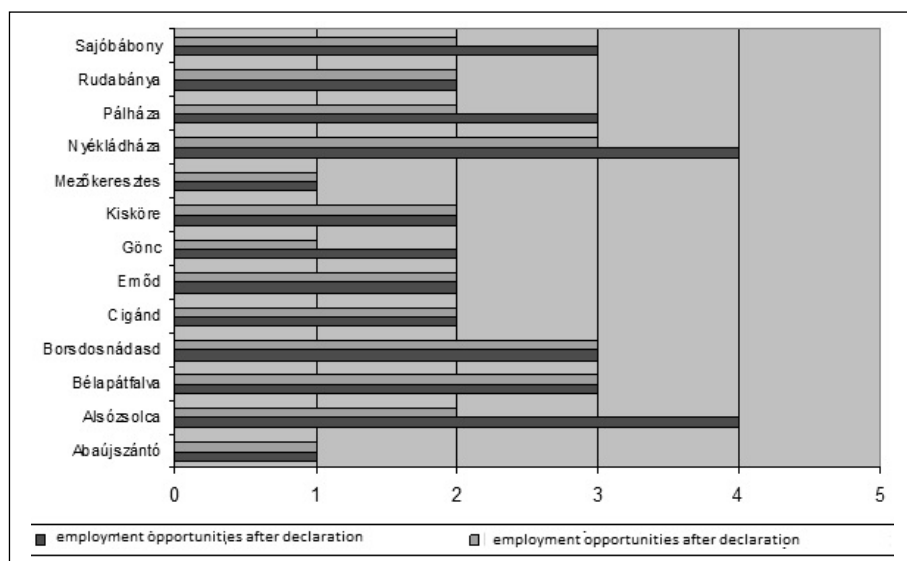


Fig. 7: The assessment of changes in employment opportunities
in the examined towns

Source: own compilation based on the questionnaire

Of the secondary examination when analysing the documents of application for the town status it was pointed out several times that in case of declaration, or as its impact, new institutions may arise and the ones playing a central function can be extended. This expectation, or desire, was not proved unequivocally as the regional



institutions had been set up even before the declaration of a town (they were the pre-requisites of the declaration).

The institutionalisation level of the examined towns is very varied although it can be stated that most of them lack some functions or their function is weak. Regarding administration only Cigánd and Gönc have district offices and apart from them Bélapátfalva, Borsodnádasd and Emőd has the office of government issuing documents.

The basic services are available in all the towns but apart from them only an institution (usually a secondary school or the fire brigade) plays the central function for the towns.

Kisköre and Mezőkeresztes does not have any of the functions mentioned before as almost all the services must be required in the nearby towns (Füzesabony, Heves, Mezőcsát, and Mezőkövesd).

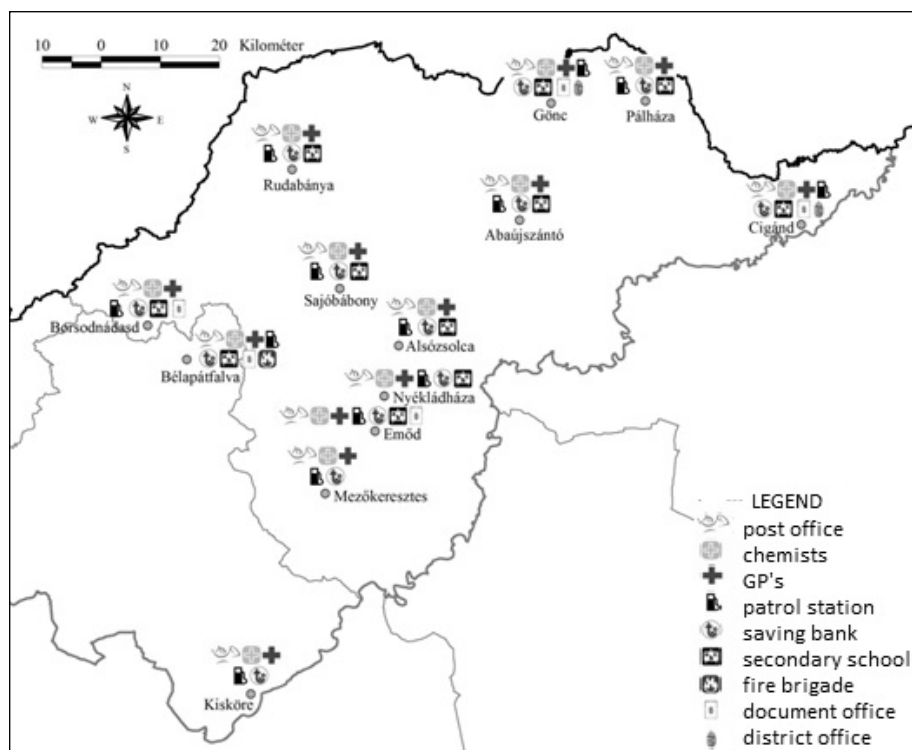


Fig. 8: The institutionalisation level of the examined towns

Source: own compilation based on TEIR data and the local websites

The situation is similar in assessing the correlation between town declaration and the change in the number of services. Although the town management sees the increase of services as an obviously positive fact, according to the local people the



number of services only increased after the declaration in the case of half of the towns, and there was no change in the case of most towns. However, it must be noted that the positive trend is useless if the population assesses the number and the standard of the services available as maximum average.

6. Town declaration is not by all means a conscious instrument for town development and development policy, rather it is the self-assessment of the town management so the opinion of the leaders is significantly more positive than the real picture.

Due to the liberalisation of settlement development and settlement organisation policy during the years after the change of the regime more than 80 settlements became towns in Hungary and some of them lack functions. The devaluation of the town rank resulted in the symbolic meaning of town inauguration. According to Csapó and Kocsis (2008) the main function of acknowledging a settlement was self-reward (Csapó-Kocsis 2008). The issue of whether town declaration is an instrument for town development and development policy or just self-reward mentioned by Csapó-Kocsis requires further examinations.

Knowing the results of the primary research it is worth noting that town management is mostly overrepresented so it obviously means the evaluation of their own success and giving higher subjective values to the criteria applicable to the settlement (Figure 9).

It became obvious from the local inhabitants' answers that their opinion is nearly one unit lower than the town management's so we proved that the subjective opinion of the leaders is not necessarily real and their opinion is rather a self-justification.

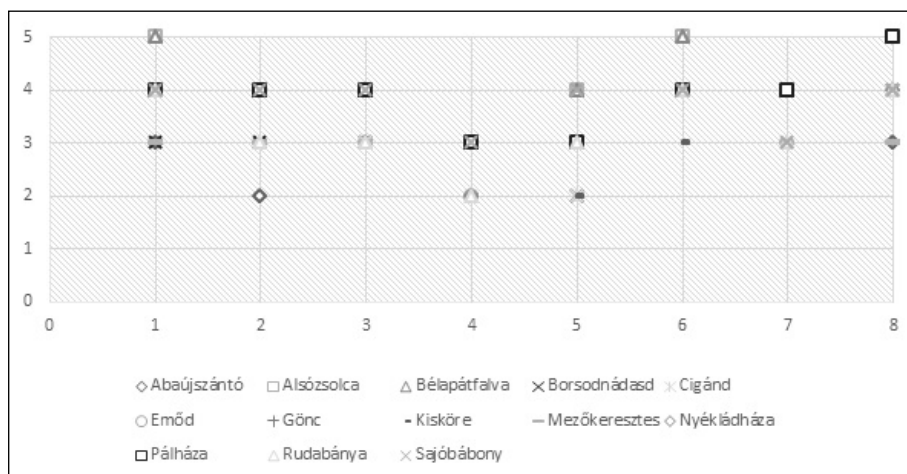


Fig. 9: The correlations of town leaders' opinion in the examined settlement
Legend: 1. improved standards of living; 2. stronger enterprises; 3. new sources of funding for local governments; 4. new institutions and services; 5. economically measurable changes; 6. improved image of the town; 7. the population has stronger ties; 8. greater prestige.



7. During the process of town declaration political influence in decision making was relevant in some cases, there is no significant correlation between the settlements and the political parties declaring them towns.

In the process an advantage is that the settlement as a town is more apparent both on the real and mental map but there are some cases when mayors regard their personal and primarily political objective to gain the title so motivation for the declaration is often political (Trócsányi – Pirisi – Malatyinszki 2007, Kiss -Michalkó- Tiner 2012).

The issue of how local and national politics influence town declaration was also examined. According to Gábor Szepesi a correlation between settlements and the political status of parties declaring them towns can sometimes be detected (Szepesi 2008b). It is supported by the example of the North Hungarian Region where in only three cases had the settlements a mayor from the governing (ruling) political party at the time of the declaration (Nyékládháza, Sajóbábony, Verpelét) (Table 3).

Tab. 4: Political affiliation of mayors in the year of declaration of the town

	Ruling party	Mayor
1998-2002		
Borsodnádásd	FIDESZ	MSZP-VSZSZ-SZDSZ
Emőd	FIDESZ	MDF
Gönc	FIDESZ	Independent
2002-2006		
Nyékládháza	MSZP-SZDSZ	MSZP
Abaújszántó	MSZP-SZDSZ	Independent
Bélapátfalva	MSZP-SZDSZ	Independent
Cigánd	MSZP-SZDSZ	Centrum
Kisköre	MSZP-SZDSZ	Independent
Pálháza	MSZP-SZDSZ	Zemplén Settlement Association
2006-2010		
Alsószolca	MSZP-SZDSZ	Independent
Rudabánya	MSZP-SZDSZ	Independent
Mezőkeresztes	MSZP-SZDSZ	Independent
Sajóbábony	MSZP-SZDSZ	MSZP
2010-2014		
Gyöngyöspata	FIDESZ-KDNP	Jobbik
Onga	FIDESZ-KDNP	Independent
Verpelét	FIDESZ-KDNP	FIDESZ-KDNP

Source: own compilation based on www.valasztas.hu



CONCLUSIONS

At the end, it is worth to make conclusions about the benefits of the research. In concordance with our research aim the paper presented and proved that the current legal regulation of town declaration and its practice has anomalies and causes disharmony in the system of settlement-rank-function.

We have proved that gaining the rank of a town is rather a question of prestige than an economic-social-development political question. However, it stretches beyond the everyday political issue, it is in a more complex system of relationships that has a significant spatial effect on micro level. Declaration of a town is a significant social, psychological factor that strengthens identification and encourages cooperation.

We also righted that developing infrastructure is essential in the operation of urban functions, so high level infrastructure is a prerequisite of declaration.

We attested, as well, that declaration of a town has positive impacts on the project applications, activity, success and source adsorption capacity of the settlement, however town declaration is not by all means a conscious instrument for town development and development policy, rather it is the self-assessment of the town management so the opinion of the leaders is significantly more positive than the real picture.

We think, a further added value of our paper, that we proved, the methodology of traditional geographical researches was applied in the research so one of the important objectives in addition to enriching theory was to serve the social-economic practice directly.

Additionally, the collected research material and the scientific results can serve as the basis for related sciences (historical geography, law and public administration, socio-geography, development policy, public administration and statistics).

Finally, in our opinion the statements of the research can serve as the scientific basis for the partial theoretical reassessment of the Hungarian town declaration and settlement development policy and the empirical analyses can be a good starting point to evaluate the town declaration process and its impacts.

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