

University of Szeged  
Faculty of Science and Informatics  
Department of Economic and Social Geography

Doctoral School of Earth Sciences

GÁBOR MIKLÓS SZEPESI

**The city-proclamations in Hungary after the system-change**

Theses of PhD Dissertation

Supervisor:  
Dr. József Becsei  
university professor

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## 1. CHOICE OF TOPIC, SCIENTIFIC PREMISES

The years following the political system change (especially the 1990 elections) were responsible for principal changes in town proclamations, i.e. the number of towns has almost doubled for the past two decades. As a consequence – unlike the situation before the political changes – the rate of proclaimed towns and the ones regarded as towns because of the quality and quantity of urban functions provided has changed significantly in favour of the first type.

In this connection, I set the goal of my research to examine which factors contribute the most to proclamations. My study is based on the 1990 Territory Organisation Act, whose sections about proclamations regulate the (not compulsory) criteria, such as geographical location, demographical factors, economic and infrastructural development, institutional endowment. Apart from the factors mentioned in the act, I also took other relevant aspects (first of all the political will) into consideration. In addition, I created a complex indicator which was aimed to serve as an aid to state and correlate the level of development of the newly proclaimed towns. This complex development indicator was applied on the potential towns in order to determine the group of those large villages which are predicted to become towns in the future.

Urbanization, its periodicity and processes are widely dealt in the Hungarian specialist literature (ENYEDI, 1988, LACKÓ, 1988; TÍMÁR, 1999, BAJMÓCY, 2002, DÖVÉNYI-KOVÁCS, 2002 etc.). The place of towns in in the settlement network and the changes in the number of towns are investigated in several general studies (BELUSZKY, 2003; MENDÖL, 1963; BECSEI, 2001). Small towns, however, which category covers all freshly proclaimed settlements, have been under examination in Hungarian specialist literature only since the number of proclamations started to increase significantly. (RUDL, 1998, 2002; CSAPÓ,

1998; TÓTH, 1996; KŐSZEGFALVI, 2001; ZOLTÁN 2002, 2003). Other researches have also become characteristic which examine proclaimed small towns having no or just marginal town functions (BELUSZKY-GYŐRI, 2006, DÖVÉNYI, 2006, PIRISI-TRÓCSÁNYI, 2006).

The question of proclamations is also dealt with in the Hungarian specialist literature from socio-geographic and administrative point of view (HAJDÚ Z., 2005; HENCZ A., 1973; KISS É., 1997; SZIGETI, 1997). The most complete and significant survey about proclamation after the political system change was carried out by the Janus Pannonius University in Pécs (TÓTH-TRÓCSÁNYI, 1996), where further researches were made concentrating on settlement-geographical, legal or self-govermental aspects of proclamations. Authors dealing with the issue more or less agree that proclamations must not be brought to a stop, although a more reasonable code of regulations would be indispensable.

The concept of town is determined differently by various branches of science. The expansion of the feeling of inhabitable space and the spatial loose of settlements make it difficult to define towns properly. The settlement geographical, the urban statistic, the sociological approach all agree that a town is form of settlement specialized in central activity in the regional division of labour. The central functions make it possible for the town to play its regional role. On the other hand, this central role must be regarded differently in different territories of the country since, for example in the area of small villages in Dunántúl the elementary authorities may play central role. The Hungarian law doesn't make difference between cities, counties and villages.

The concept of "small town" is not necessarily determined by size by the Hungarian specialist literature considering the differently featured central roles of the same sized settlements located in different parts of the country. The upper limit of population in small towns is determined with different figures by specialists (between 5,000 and 30,000).

The level of development of our small towns is somewhat determined by history as the majority had little local or positional energy regarding their distant location from infrastructural and industrial centres of development with consequences valid even today.

Some of the new towns lack in complete central functions which served as the basis of newborn terminology in the taxonomy of towns, such as "village-town", "dwarf-town", "barely-town", etc. referring mostly to freshly proclaimed small towns.

## **2. THE DATABASE AND METHODS OF MY RESEARCH**

My research was principally based on the following sources and methods:

1. Comparison and analysis of related specialist literature.
2. Quantitative data collection from secondary source of data. These include, first of all, the publications of the Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (Central Statistics Office: „Helységnévtárak”, „Megyei Statisztikai Évkönyvek”, „Helyzetkép a régiókról”, „Népszámlálási adatok”) and electronic database ([www.ksh.hu](http://www.ksh.hu), T-STAR).
3. Quantitative data collection from primary source of data. Considering that not all the data collected by the KSH were published, I completed the database with the help of the notaries of the related settlements. It was truly important in the case of the settlements and large villages proclaimed in the past few years.
4. Creation of one normalized, extrapolated to maximum – minimum intervals, 20 grade scale for measuring and correlating the development of new and potential towns.

### **3. SCIENTIFIC RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

#### **3.1. The influence of principle-legal background of proclamations on urbanization**

(1) Urbanization started with the establishment of bourgeois large-scale industry in Hungary after the Conciliation in 1867. In the period of dualism the town network went through slow modernization, the concept of town was not even defined. Due to the lack of legal regulations in proclamation during this period, there were a number of settlements in Hungary providing urban functions on the one hand, but lacking the city rank on the other. Substantive legal regulations of proclamations were not even introduced after World War II (quasi regulations included council laws), proclamations were given by political and economic interests. A significant change in the process was caused by the introduction of the 1971 OTK, more aspects were highlighted such as developing the rural regions of big cities and townless regions. Town proclamations – up to this time – were connected to the size of population (8,000 inhabitants). In the 1980's the conditions of proclamations were eased, which meant that applying the principles above was not obligatory.

After the political system change two acts also dealt with proclamations: the 1990 LXV act about self-governments and the 1999 XLI act about territory regulation. Although both acts control the process of proclamation in details (*figure No. 1*) giving proposal rights to the prime minister (minister of self-governments currently) and decisional rights to the head of state, the exorbitant liberalism in proclamation has not eased significantly. It is also shown by the fact that the aspects in the tenders of the candidating settlements – and which serve as the grounds of my thesis – are not taken into consideration seriously enough, so the subjective factors are still in the foreground.

(2) Therefore it is not surprising that almost the same number of settlements gained proclamation between 1945 and 1990 as in the following 17 years. The difference seems even more significant in annual division: in the preceding decades of the political system change 2-3 settlements gained proclamation annually on average, unlike the 7-8 proclamations since 1990 (*figure No. 2*). This inequality deepened the regional differences in terms of level of urbanisation even further in Hungary: whereas the Budapest region, the north of Alföld (The Great Hungarian Plains) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county – though because of different reasons – is urbanised well above average, the regions of small villages have lost in the battle of urbanisation.

(3) In the East-Middle-European region, Hungary has the most liberal system and practice of city-proclamation. The process is getting more and more liberal in Romania, where the townless regions are aimed to be eliminated. Nevertheless, the practice of proclamation is rather moderate in the other countries of the region. It is especially typical of Slovakia, where only two new settlements have gained town rank since 1990.

### **3.2. The motivating factors for urbanisation**

(4) On the course of my examinations I found that the motivating factors for urbanisation have changed significantly, compared to the last decades: nowadays there is very little direct financial benefit of city rank, but the inhabitants may calculate with several indirect ones, such as an increase in estate values. Becoming a town is also a question of prestige in the rivalisation between neighbouring settlements.

### **3.3. Aspects subserving becoming a town**

#### **3.3.1. Geographical location**

(5) Taking the examined criteria into consideration the geographical location as an influential aspect of urbanisation does seem to play an important role according to the legal regulation introducing the concept "the place of big villages in the settlement network of the region". In the case of several settlements it was the geographical location which helped in the process of urbanisation. I divided the settlements in 8 groups. Settlements divided in the first structure group gained proclamation only because of their location in the small village region where there were few towns. The towns located in the agglomeration of big cities and large-village regions of the Alföld were divided into the second structure group sharing the feature of being located in regions where the settlement network is built up by highly populated elements. This location generated certain functions helping with the process of urbanisation. Settlements located in the critical areas have become towns in the process of compensating regional differences. Having good natural resources (e.g. coastline location) and booming tourism may also be an urbanising factor. A part of the settlement categories listed here – as it is proven in the later sections – may be seen as functional groups at the same time.

#### **3.3.2. Population, demographic parameters**

(6) In several European countries (for instance among the European Union countries) population is considered as the only condition of proclamation (the lowest number is 200 inhabitants), however, I came to the conclusion in my thesis that merely the number of inhabitants in the settlement does not reflect whether the settlement deserves the rank of town. In addition, the Hungarian

towns are so far behind the ones in the developed countries in terms of infrastructure, authorities and level of development that other conditions should be set before proclamation. Thanks to this, more and more loosely populated large villages have gained proclamation regarding their favorable geographical location in the last few years (mainly in the area of Dunántúl). On the other hand, low population provides very few urban functions remunerative, thus densely populated towns are much closer to the concept of a functional town.

(7) Most new towns of ours have been increasing population constantly since their proclamation (mostly in the Budapest agglomeration) due to the special features of suburbanisation: while cities and bigger town are constantly losing population, small towns are enforced with those people. The situation, however, is different with the peripheral new towns located either on the border of counties or the border of state. Towns proclaimed after the political system change have increased their population due to the congenial migration figures (and not the natural reproduction), which shows that becoming town and the related better life circumstances do not necessarily result in higher reproduction rates. Suburbanisation, however, has a truly positive effect on new towns by improving the way people feel, increases shopping potential and thanks to this the amount of sum coming from local taxation. But there is some region, where towns decrease their population (for example in the area of Alföld), sometimes due to the suburbanisation (for instance in Szentlőrinc), where people moved to the villages.

### **3.3.3. Historical past**

Historical past may also influence the process of urbanisation in a way that several settlements try to compensate for losing a previous rank (e.g. agricultural centre) by gaining proclamation. The chances of candidate settlements are increased by having a past rank as this factor is included in the criteria of proclamation according to the legal regulations.

(8) Settlements proclaimed after the political system change can be divided into several groups according to the significance of historical, and above all, administrative past. Agricultural towns originating in the Middle Ages and the Modern Age, other medieval settlements of e.g. ecclesiastical importance, local centres, and settlements with defending functions had significant historical past. Notwithstanding, historical past should not be considered as a necessary condition of proclamation since a part of our new towns (e.g. some modern settlements around Budapest or in the Alföld (The Great Hungarian Plains)) would not have had the chance to gain town rank.

### **3.3.4. Economic and infrastructural development**

The 1999 XLI act considers the economic and infrastructural development and the role of institutions of the candidating settlement as necessary factor for proclamation.

(9) The number or existence of certain institutes is not necessarily indispensable for proclamation. It may happen that although the institutes providing basic services are available in most new towns some central "real urbanic" functions might be missing. On the course of my investigations I drew the conclusion that the more special, the more exclusive the service we talk

about the less probable the new towns provide it, which reflects that most of the freshly proclaimed towns are only inhabited by a few thousands of people. These towns cannot certainly be compared to others accomodating 10-20,000 people demanding the same network of services.

**(10)** The infrastructural and economic development of new towns was examined through 24 highlighted aspects concentrating on their figures, rates or partly on their existence. According to the examination it can be stated that all the towns provide institutes for basic services, however, their number is inadequate (e.g. the number of nursery and primary schools in the towns with 10,000 inhabitants). Taking medium level institutes into consideration, the result is rather various: only 10 percent of the new towns have hospitals, 20 percent have hotels and one third have secondary schools. In none of the settlements can one find theatres or court of law.

Economic and infrastructural development is rather on a different scale in new towns, lacking the neccesary institutes in some cases, thus there are only few newly proclaimed settlements which meet the requirements of a real town in terms of functionality (located rather in the Budapest agglomeration or in the touristical regions in addition.) This leads to the fact that in the case of a lot of towns (e.g. gaining proclamation in the past few years in the townless regions or critical areas) the city rank is at least disputable.

Those settlements whose town rank is questionable have the common feature of lacking infrastructure. They are only capable of providing basic services with their own inhabitants, their medium level service network is only partial, having thus limited central functions.

The analysis of economic and infrastructural development also confirmed that an increasing number of settlements have gained proclamation, where the

quantitative and qualitative features of central functions do not support it, contributing to the depreciation of town rank.

It is also worth mentioning that several of our new towns have such big industry to satisfy not just local but regional – in some of the cases national or even international needs, establishing the economic wealth of the certain town and also its surroundings, which worked in favour of gaining proclamation (e.g. Balatonfüzfő, Lábatlan, Répcelak, Jászfényszaru).

### **3.3.5. Political will**

In Hungary, requirements and conditions of different kind and importance, objective and subjective, strict and easy have always been set for settlements in the process of proclamation.

**(11)** The requirements and conditions have been built up upon the actual political interests reflecting the economic and social circumstances of the given era.

On the other hand, the correlation between proclamation and politics is not always obvious or cannot be supported by facts in each case.

In my study, I investigated only those cases where the influence of politics can easily be shown, for instance when – on the basis of the current law – the proclamation is initiated by the Prime Minister and decided by the Head of State. It is also typical that the number of proclamations increases in the preceding year of the elections (e.g. 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005).

The fact is that the campaign-like proclamations cannot be connected to one political side, both the left-wing and the right-wing governments have initiated the processes.

(12) As far as the political orientation of the proclaimed settlements is concerned, more than twice as many settlements have been proclaimed whose member of parliament belonged to the ruling political party, and the same refers to the political orientation of the mayors (*figure No. 3*).

It is clear that the proclamations are not at all independent from the actual political circumstances and thus other – mostly professional – reasons have been pushed in the background.

### **3.4 Measurement and comparison of the complex development of our new towns**

In addition to examining the influential factors of town proclamations one by one, I also attempt to make the level of development of the new towns comparable and measurable by creating a complex indicator. In the course of my investigation I made a 10-figured minimum-maximum scale graded by 20 to be able to show the economic, touristic, demographic and infrastructural facilities of the settlements.

(13) The analysis confirmed that according to the development index based on the calculations, the most developed new towns are mainly located in the agglomeration of Budapest, which is not surprising at all considering the results after analysing the measured figures one by one, the same towns finished on the top of the list. Obviously, it is due to the near location of the capital city: 13 out of 20 settlements are located in this area. It is interesting to note that these settlements gained promotion mostly in the 2000's (e.g. Törökbálint, Dunaharaszti, Visegrád, Budakeszi). Beside these there are some significant touristic centres among the highest valued towns such as Hévíz, Zalakaros. Nevertheless, the urbanizing factors are different in both groups: settlements in

the agglomeration gained proclamation for dense population, low unemployment rate and better than average institutional services, whereas settlements in the tourist regions benefited from the number of nights spent by tourists and the number of registered enterprises and small businesses were the cause of the good results in the analysis.

On the bottom of the list settlements in the north of Hungary and in the Alföld region can be found, without exception. Their common features are: decreasing population, high unemployment rate, low (well below the average) rate of salaries and wages, low small-enterprise morale, limited tourism, lacking institutional services with very few exceptions (*figure No.4*).

(14) Nevertheless, this investigation also revealed that becoming a town in Hungary cannot be connected to merely objective factors, the social and economic circumstances have to be taken into consideration as well. Thus settlements located in the eastern regions of the country have a bigger chance to gain city rank even with worse features than the ones located in the highly developed areas around Budapest or in Dunántúl.

### **3.5 Chances of proclamation for our large villages**

Gaining large village rank in Hungary is regulated by the 1990 LXV act in the number of inhabitants (5,000), however, those villages whose population stays under the limit may keep their rank if it was given before the introduction of the law. On the other hand, nowadays, this settlement category has become rather formal, far from being regarded as an administrative rank. The number of large villages is generally bigger in the counties with more freshly proclaimed settlements after the political system change, and as a consequence, further proclamations may deepen the urbanizational difference between certain counties.

(15) Basically, my examinations with large villages revealed that the majority fall behind the average of new towns, and some unfavorable tendencies can also be witnessed considering the loss of population and higher rate of unemployment or, for example, lacking institutions. It is really hard to find large villages which would meet the requirements set – though not necessarily – to other towns, although tendencies in the past few years have ended up in setting less demanding conditions. Accordingly, the tendency of promoting settlements in an unjustified way seems to continue, especially around Lake Balaton and in critical areas or in some large villages with special features. A part of these (e.g. Zamárdi, Halásztelek, Isaszeg, which have the biggest chance to be promoted) finished in considerable position on my complex development indicator scale ((*figure No.5*)).

My investigation has shown that due to the descending strictness of conditions of proclamation, more and more settlements – which are not prepared for the role of a city – gain proclamation. It certainly leads to the reconsideration of proclamations and the necessary changes in taxonomy of urbanisation.

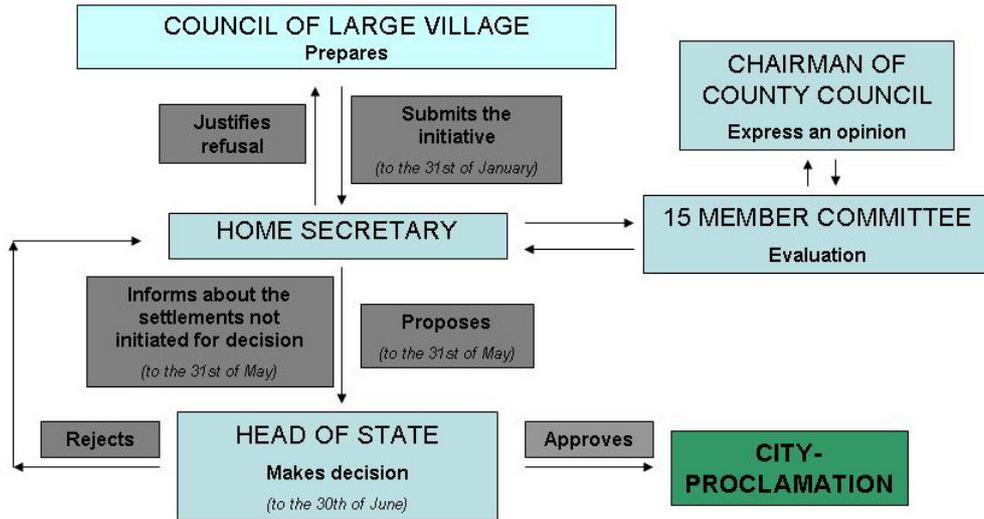


Figure No.1: The order of city-proclamations (Source: 1999 XLI act, own design)

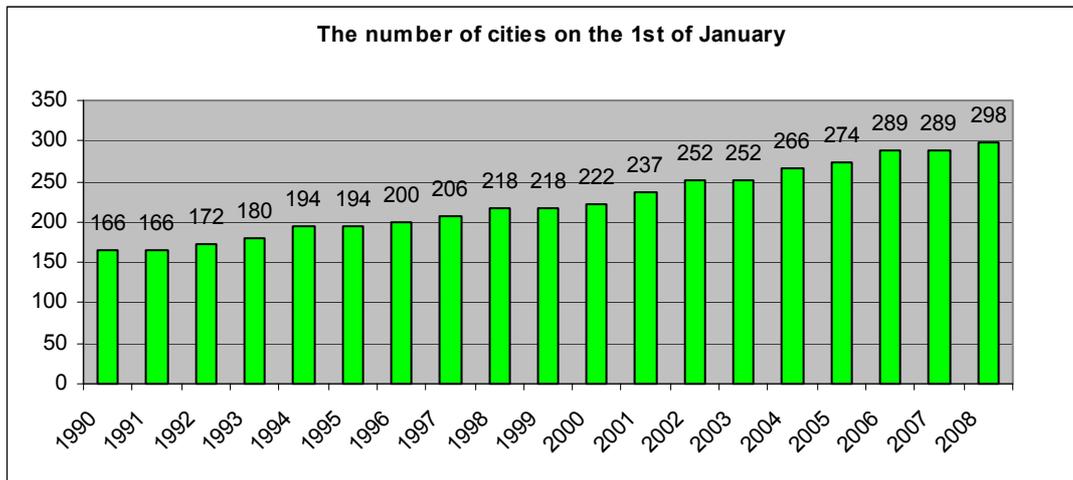


Figure No.2: The year by year change of the number of cities after 1990 (Source: KSH, own design)

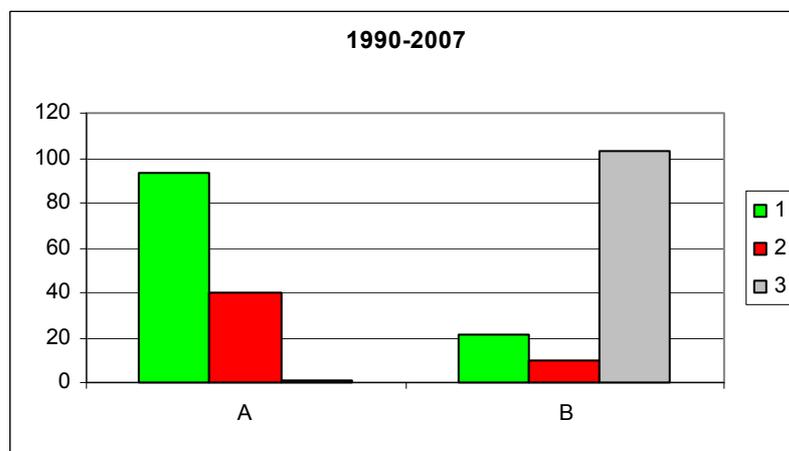
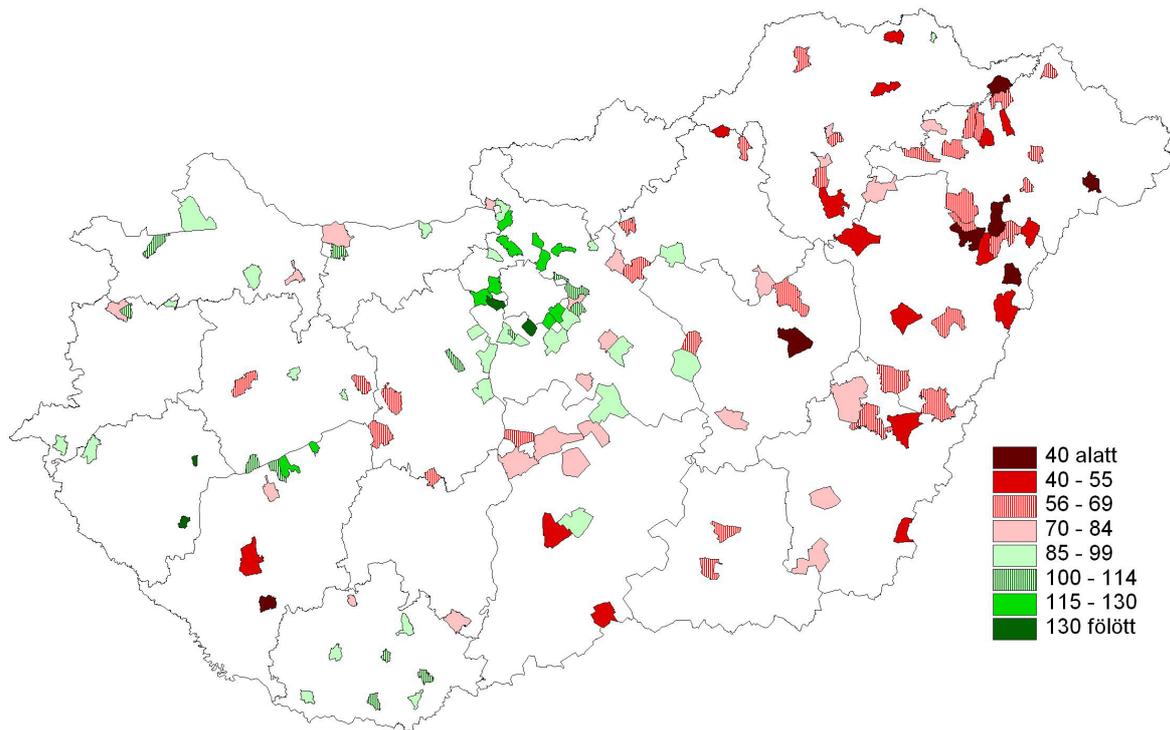
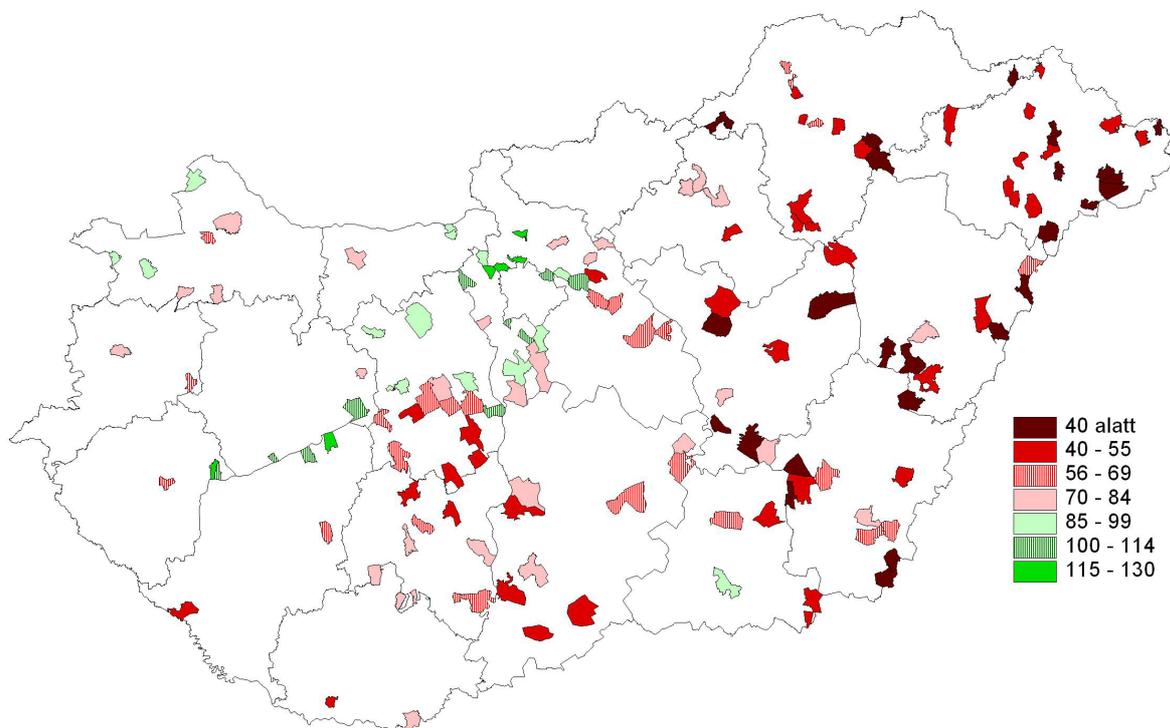


Figure No. 3: The summary of the political orientation of the proclaimed settlements after the political system change A: The member of the Parliament, B: Mayor, 1:Cabinet, 2: Maverick .3: Independent (Source: own research)



**Figure No. 4: The complex development of our new cities**  
(Source: KSH, notaries; own design)



**Figure No. 5: The complex development of large villages**  
(Analysed factors: 1.: current population, 2.: annual change of population, 3.: rate of unemployment, 4.: SZJA(personal annual income-tax) - based annual income per capita, 5.: registered small enterprises per 1,000 capita, 6.: cars per 1,000 capita, 7.: rate of flats provided with public water-conduit, 8.:existence of medium level institutes, 9.: existence of cultural institutes, 10.: number of nights spent by tourists. Possible figures: 0-200.) Source: KSH, notaries; own design

#### 4. UTILIZATION OF THE RESEARCH

In my thesis I introduced the principle-legal background of town proclamation, its history and the related current legal regulations.

On the grounds of the aspects above, I determined the factors which were the most conducive to gaining proclamation. I grouped the new towns according to their geographical location and history, and highlighted their economic and infrastructural features. By means of a complex development indicator I made it possible to measure the development of new towns and compared the data with the potential towns and large villages.

The process of proclamation will continue in the following period as well. My thesis aims to serve as a tool to compare and correlate the candidating settlements to the ones already proclaimed after the political system change in terms of urbanizing factors and the development of towns and also gives a guideline to decide whether objective or subjective factors were principally taken into consideration in the process of proclamation.

The dissertation contains 120 pages with literature and figure index, 38 figures, 15 charts, 7 appendices, Hungarian and English summaries.

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##### Publications in the study area:

1. SZEPESI GÁBOR (1998): The catchment area of the József Attila University (1997-98). In: Becsei József (szerk.): *Research for the Board of Education*, pp. 1-33.
2. SZEPESI GÁBOR (2005): The Economic and Social Geography of Balassagyarmat in 2000. In: *Local Annual of Balassagyarmat (2005)*. Balassagyarmat, 2005, pp. 81-101.
3. SZEPESI GÁBOR (2007): City-proclamations in Hungary. In: Becsei József: *Altering towns of Alföld*. Szeged, pp. 151-176.
4. SZEPESI GÁBOR (2008): City-proclamations in Hungary after the system-change. In: *Space and Society*, Year 22, No. 2, pp. 53-70.
5. SZEPESI GÁBOR (2008): The political will as the influential factor of the Hungarian urbanisation. In: *Geographical Bulletin*, 2008, No. 3-4. (accepted for publication), size: 11 p.
6. SZEPESI GÁBOR (2008): The urbanisation in Hungary after the system-change. In: *Geographical Panorama (Geographische Rundschau)*; accepted for publication), 2008, size: 16 p.