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## NEW FACTORS IN THE DIFFERENTIATION OF THE HUNGARIAN SETTLEMENT NETWORK

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### *INTRODUCTION*

- Special features of the 1989 political transition at municipal and regional level

The change of the economic and political system in Hungary did not consider the whole spectrum of the regional level. It introduced a local governmental system with great – maybe too great – freedom of decision at the municipal level. Although the traditional county level as a regional self-government remained, its competence and regional development role were limited to a minimum. Towns with county rank are not legal (elected) parts of these counties, although party politicians living there can be elected from the party lists into the county bodies. The Regional Development and Physical Planning Act, passed in 1996, tried to change this situation, creating county and regional development councils consisting of delegated members and initiating the organisation of the small regions as well. Real territorial processes and co-operation, however, are hard to achieve, because of the lack of willingness to co-operate at the municipal level, particularly amongst the town governments, which have a high degree of independence.

- Contradictions of the local governmental system at municipal and regional level

This is a great contradiction inherent in the system, especially if we consider that the process of European accession prefers primarily supports for the regional level, i.e. territorial units of higher level than the counties.

- Internal and external conflicts of municipal transformation

The municipalities welcomed their independence and with great enthusiasm started to solve their accumulated and acute internal problems. The weight and volume of these problems were so great that the municipalities could hardly see beyond their own public administrative borders. Also, they were not particularly interested in regional co-operation based on the modern principle of partnership. However, the compulsory elements of regional policy, the new regional application system for the resources of regional development and the partial

decentralisation of their redistribution made some important regional-organisational changes necessary.

- European trends

It is interesting that after the large European political trends of regionalisation in the 1980s and 1990s, from new European spatial development perspectives it is the urban networks, the competition of modern cities, the key role of small towns and the new type of village development which are more and more frequently mentioned. It is uncertain what effect this transition will have on the regional/settlement development of a country which has not gone through that specific developmental phase of large-scale regionalisation.

#### ***THE AIM OF THE STUDY***

During the last Seminar I discussed the differentiation of the Hungarian territorial development at micro-regional level as well as the most important elements and factors of this process. In the past two years regional differentiation of the small regions has increased since then. In this study I attempt to discover to what extent this differentiation is the consequence of the processes taking place at the municipal level.

- A review of the main elements of the transformation of municipalities

The classical fields of settlement geography deal with the fundamental transformation of the economy, infrastructure, the institutional system, the central and local settlement functions, population and society. In the euphoria of the change of the political system everybody doubtless expected rapid and favourable changes. The settlements themselves, however, are objects with many centuries of traditions, and they can only slowly change. The settlements are both stages, frameworks and results of a total socio-economic transition. And since this transformation is as yet far from completed, it shows with great precision the contradictions and deficiencies of the settlements.

- Major features of the transformation of towns and villages

It is the majority of the villages who are definitely the losers in the transformation. Their socialist agriculture collapsed, and after the reductions of the socialist industrial plants in the small and large towns the unemployed flowed back into the villages. The population of the villages has been ageing for decades. Their local economic power is insignificant, their regional integrative and contact-making ability is also moderate.



### **MAIN PROCESSES AND FINDINGS REVEALED BY THE ANALYSIS**

- Transitions defining the character of the villages and the towns

Taking the total Hungarian settlements into consideration, there is very little close correlation within the index system and among the individual indices. This is a favourable fact from the aspect of factorial analysis, but it also implies that among the factors indicating transition there are hardly any “joint movements” and interdependence. There seem to be two outstanding elements, namely the provision with institutions and the primary school education of the population. These usually amount to a positive differentiation. (*Figure 1*)

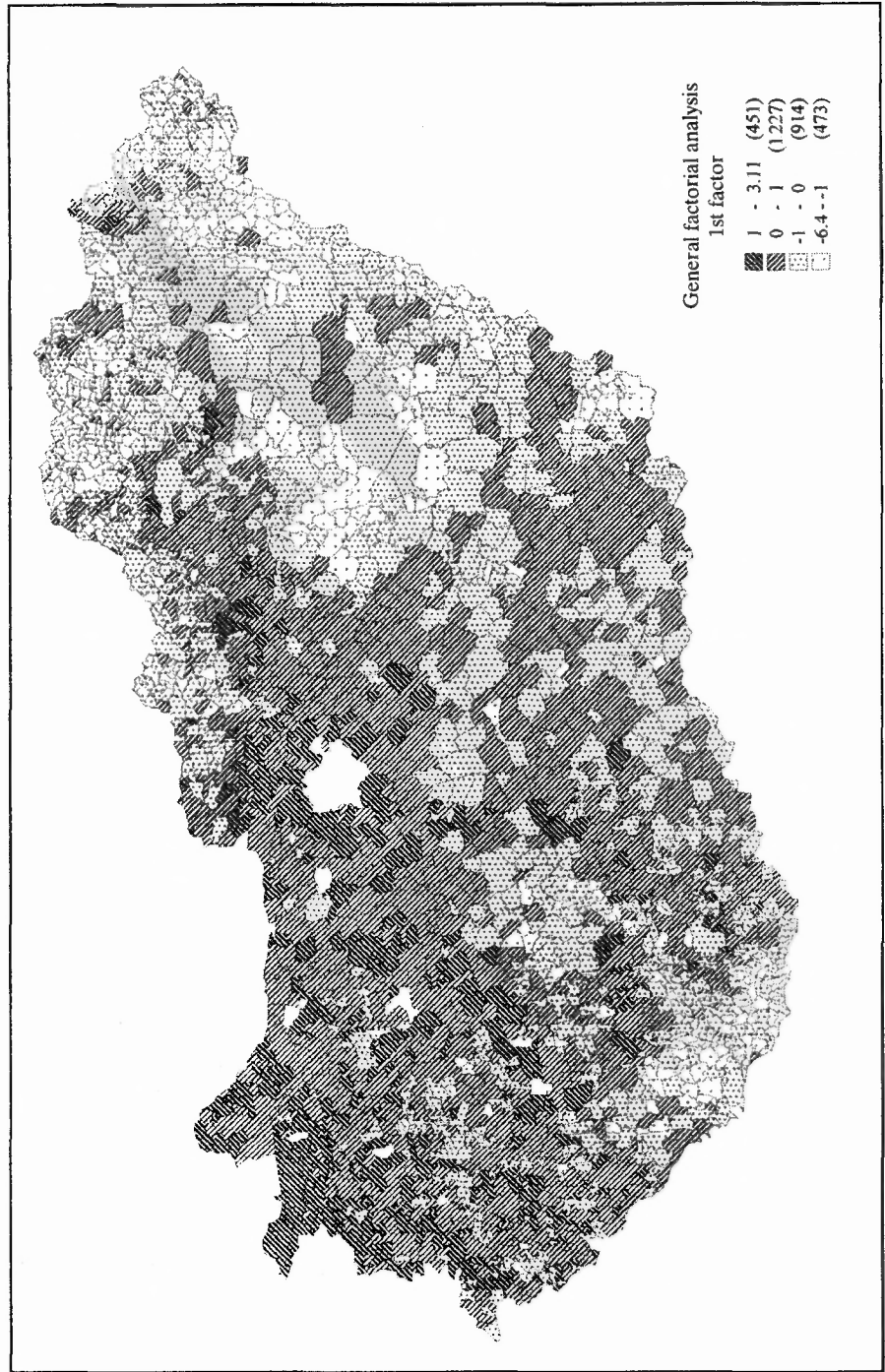
It is also interesting that, despite the main factor method, it was not the progressive elements that stood out in the survey of the settlements, but the very high negative determination of unemployment and social underdevelopment. In other words, differentiation is strong downwards. Naturally, the main factor only explained 23% of the changes described by the indices. The size and the number of population became the main content of the secondary factor. This shows that the changes of the macro-system, i.e. the total of the settlements is only secondarily dependent on the size.

The analysis done for the towns, with a slightly expanded index system, showed a completely different picture. On the one hand, the explanatory power of the main factor is much stronger (61.4%); on the other hand, within the urban network, which otherwise is more homogeneous than the whole of the settlement network, the differentiation is much stronger. The main progressive elements are: number of enterprises, high birth rate, favourable pace of housing constructions, but the size of the towns is also an important element.

The result of the general analysis done for the villages is slightly different. On the one hand, it is not dependent of the size, i.e. the quality of the village transformation strongly depends on what quality urban centre the villages belong to. On the other hand, while the basic infrastructure in the towns is partially balanced, in the villages the effect of the infrastructure, telephone or car supply is still significant. Six factors were detected here, among which, besides the main factor demonstrating the general development, the existence or absence of the signs of new village functions, such as tourism, second homes or even suburbanisation are worth mentioning.

- The role of the size, demographic situation, economy, infrastructure, the human sphere and the typical settlement functions in determining the transition and in differentiation at national level and on the Great Plain

**Figure 1**  
*Spatial dispersity of main factor points of general analysis*



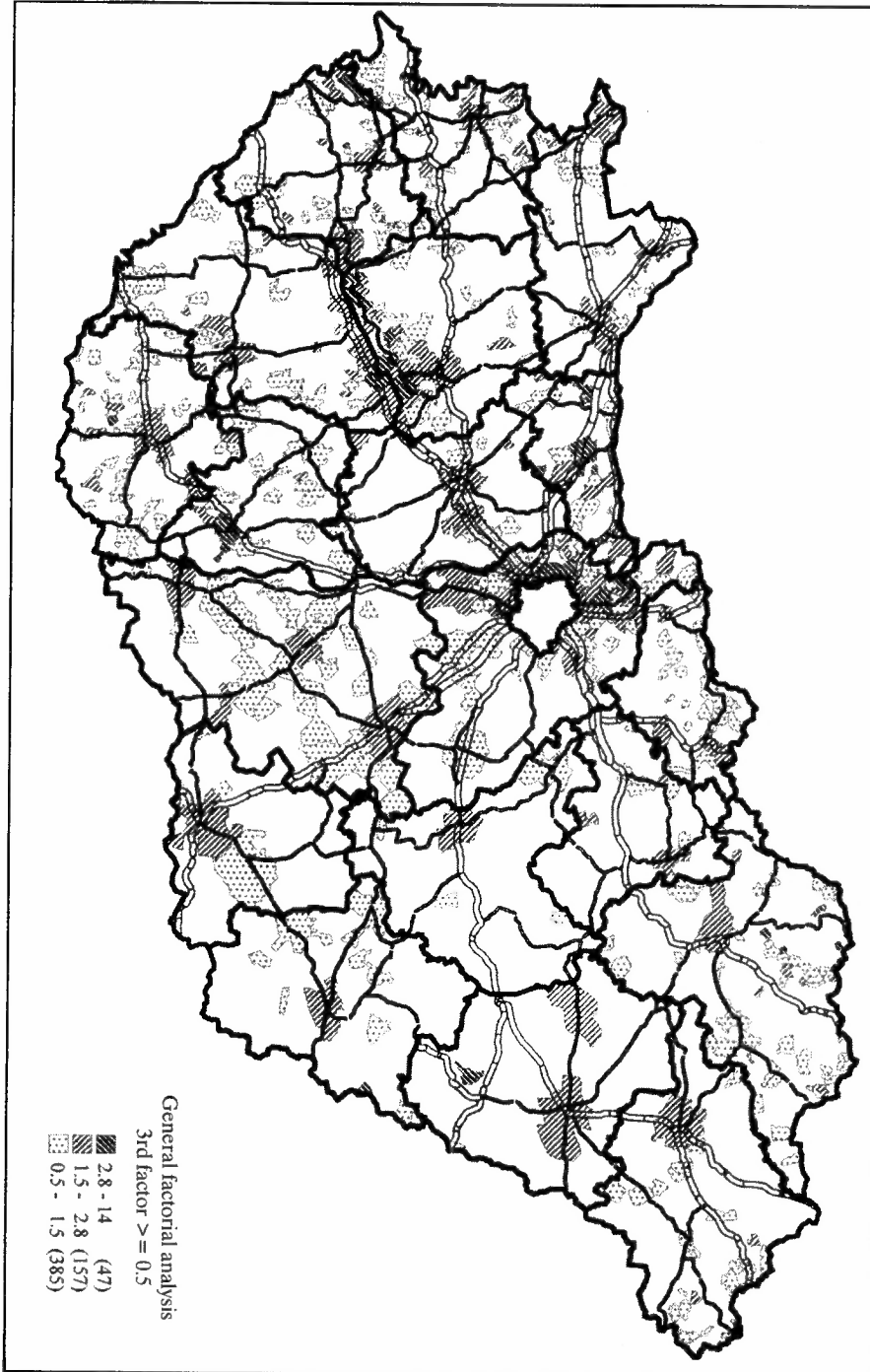


Figure 2  
Diffusion of dynamic (3rd) factor and the Hungarian road network

I have already mentioned in general that a relatively small amount of close correlation were detected in the survey of the changes. In other words, from the favourable demographic conditions – which might be the consequence of a large number of Gypsies in the given settlements – we cannot or can hardly draw conclusions for the economy. Besides the general levelling off of the infrastructure, the concrete economic development effects of the main industrial elements is minimal. One of the most interesting final conclusions can be that the quality of the human resources is more and more differentiating. Its value in the main factor in the general analysis was 0.8. (*Figure 2*)

The settlement network of the Great Plain, however, is different from the national one to a large extent. What differentiates the settlement network of the region to the largest extent here is the existence or absence of the partially inherited, well built-up institutional structure, the individual entrepreneurial willingness and its high proportion. Thus the trends that can be seen at national level exert their effects here in a different way. In the villages of the Great Plain it is the high proportion of car owners and entrepreneurial willingness, while in the towns of the region the size and the indices deriving from the administrative position which differentiate the most. The indices of the traditional agrarian character have a strong effect, too, but in a negative direction.

- Concrete factors contents determining differentiation, change and development in the settlements

The indices demonstrating progress and falling behind exert their effects simultaneously, and these effects have shown so far the signs of strong differentiation in the whole of the settlement network.

For example, size is only an important element in the towns of the Great Plain, but not elsewhere. However, much more important and differentiating are the indices showing the booming of the economy and the existence and adaptive character of the human resources, which – especially in the case of towns – can trigger uplift of investments and expansion of their regional effects.

In the case of villages, it is clear that the most important characteristics of progress are the favourable geographical location, the strong connections with the towns, the existence of some special non-village function or the appearance of the latest village functions (suburbanisation phenomena, tourism, border crossing etc.). Agriculture is only important in progress in very small intensive village islands. (*Figure 3*)

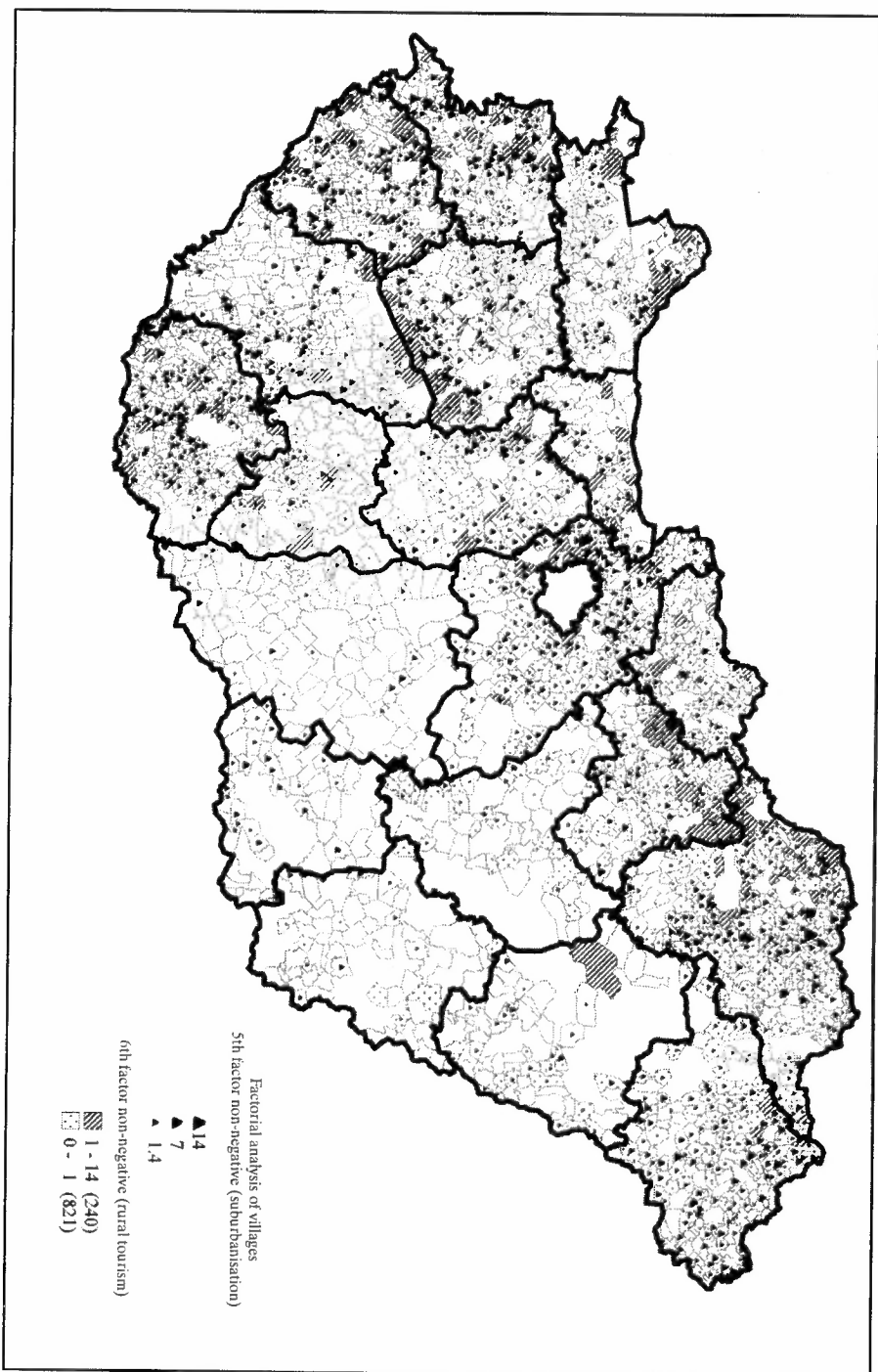
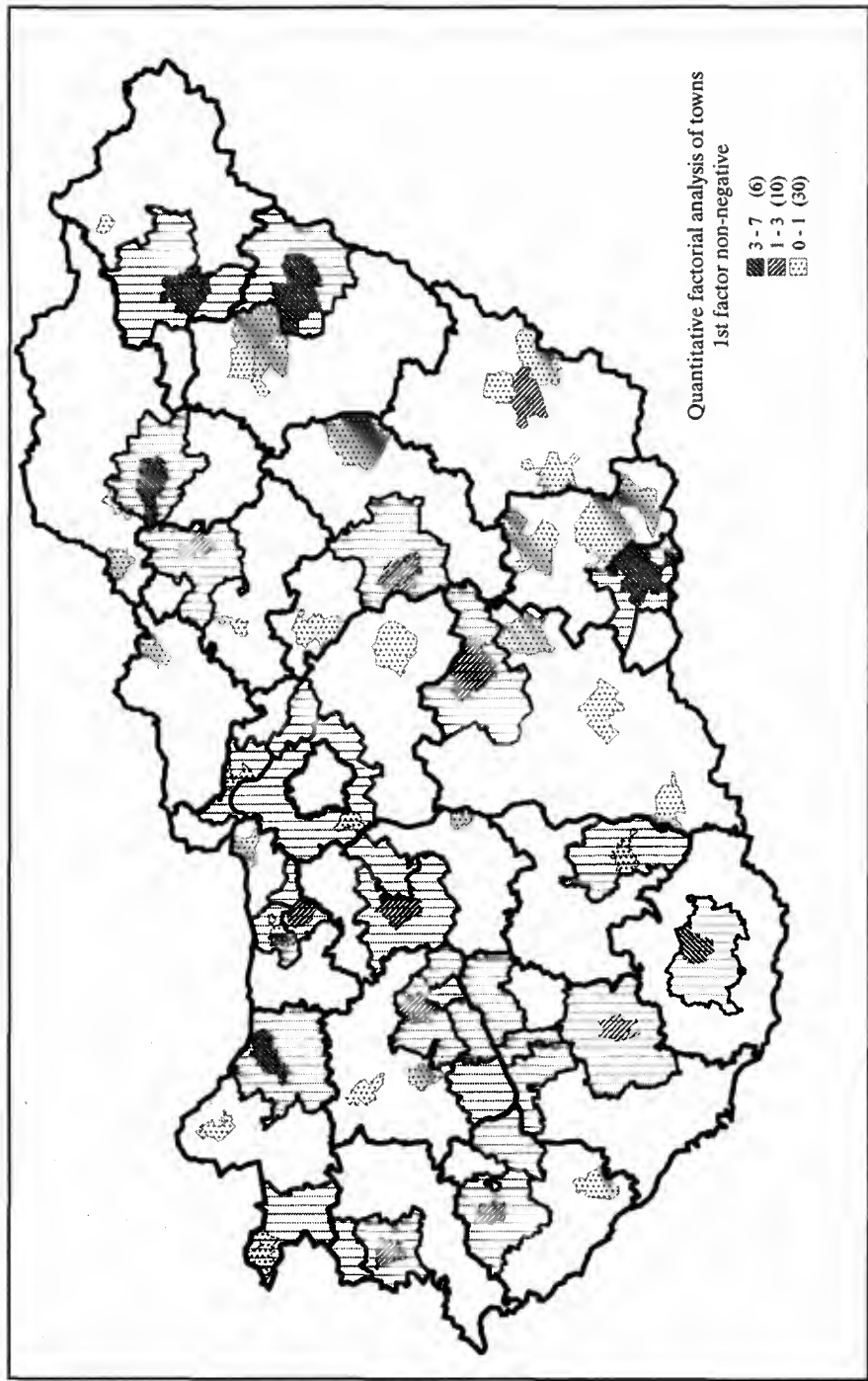


Figure 3  
Special factor of village analysis



**Figure 4**  
*Developed towns and developed small regions*



### SUMMARY

- Contradictions of the processes at municipal and regional level

The processes of the Hungarian political change of 1989 in the settlements are full of contradictions, not only as regards the settlements themselves and their inner system of their spheres of operation, but also their regional system. Their internal contradictions can hardly be solved by the possibilities of regional integration and an organic regional co-operation, thus the towns are more and more often confronted with the villages in their environs. There are and probably there will be poor regions with rich towns, and also regions in a favourable position, with rather poor villages – all of this at the same time. The undeveloped regional policy has been unable so far to enforce its influence. Also, the extent of solidarity at settlement and regional level is rather limited. (*Figure 4*)

- Contradictions in the development of the towns and their environs

As a summary we can state that the development tracks of the towns and the villages have been different so far. The factors are different and so are their effects. Presumably joint development can only be achieved with much more resources and much better co-operation.

- Opportunities to adapt to new European trends

The above-mentioned facts and processes may call smooth European accession into question, both at municipal (mainly urban, of course) and regional level. It is also questionable whether now, when the new regional principles of the European Union prefer settlements and their special groups again, we should carry on with the paths of regional organisation development which may be burdened with a lot of difficulties, or we can go on concentrating more on the settlements, towns and their environs organically connected to them. This is probably a common question for all of us, but one I cannot yet answer.