

# Reforms of Administrative Division in Hungary

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## Summary

Hungary has a historically formed special development and spatial order of state border.

Central administration and the direction of the central administration was often determined by foreign powers thus putting the territorial units of administration —the counties, principally— into the role of “national resistance” throughout the centuries.

Since 1867 central, territorial and local administration operated as one, hierarchically articulated system. Changing any element of the system causes modification of the whole system.

This study gives a picture about theoretical and practical problems of administrative spatial organization and components of the reform endeavours since the 1870s. Even this relatively short period was full of changes in the state structure and the functions and the operation of different administrative levels. Most of the administrative reforms were subsequent to structural shifts in economy, society, and policy or to a modification of state borders.

The study gives a detailed description of processes and changes after 1945. Special attention is paid to geographic and practical questions of the 1984 town-surrounding reform.

## I. Introduction

The history of development of Hungarian state also confirms that administrative division of territory was always raised as mainly a supreme governmental and political question. The meaning, the aim and way of functioning of territorial system were formed in subordination to the given relations of power and political aspirations.

The administrative division of Hungarian territory is also bearing national peculiarities, formed during the history. The county-system, nearly simultaneous with the establishment of Hungarian state had a significant stability in the course of the historical development, it obtained a relative independence and later, it had reactions on shaping new forms and solutions, determining them to a significant extent.

The natural, economic, transport structure, and that of the network of settlements of the state territory, the number of population, the composition of nationalities, the development of forces of production, the established order of social and territorial division of labour exercised an influence on formation of the administrative structures of territory - in periodically changing ways.

The territorial division of country is not only an administrative question, since the division of territory governs the frameworks of activity of political, jurisdictional etc organs, too, functioning by reason of *territorial principle*.

The spatiality of the administrative organization of territory and the questions of division of functions are raised on two levels from geographical point of view: 1/*settlement administration*/ village, town/; 2/*territorial administration*/ district, town-surrounding, county/. The indispensable condition of efficient and successful functioning of administration is the determination and regulation of links among diverse levels. Every project on administrative reforms or reforms of administration must respond to the questions of every level of territorial division.

I will only in brief refer to the historical changes of administrative division of territory, development of principled and theoretical foundations of organising the territory, their interdependences of theory of geography. I will analyse more minutely only the processes after 1950, especially having regard to the reform of townsurroundings of 1984.

## **II. Main lines of recent historical development of territorial division of administration**

The county system, having formed during the history, is the most important unit of territorial organization of Hungarian administration and, simultaneously, one of the national peculiarities. In administrative respect, everything existing within the county, and everything beyond it in the majority of cases, was built upon the county.

The emergence of counties can be traced back to the XI.th century. At the beginning, the county is a territorial unit of administration and management of royal estates, later in the XIII.th century it becomes the organization of autonomy of nobility. In spite of changes of smaller territorial kind, the county-system preserved its historical territorial roots; essential changes take place only under outer influence. Such an influence, forming the structures and ranging over a relatively long period, was given rise in the central areas of the country by the 150 year long Turkish occupation/1526-1686/.

In the course of our recent history, significant changes in the administrative system of the country occurred the years 1870, 1923, 1949 and after 1984. The changes have been caused on one hand by the transformation of social, economic, political relations, on the other hand by modifications of state boundaries and structure of the state, respectively.

The Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867 created the general political conditions and the governmental frameworks of evolution of capitalism in Hungary. The relations of political law of historical Hungary took place in Hungary, having a relative inner independence within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Transylvania was united with what is called "Motherland"; Croatia-Slavonia arrived at legal relations of "co-dominion" of it. Town Fiune /Rijeka/ and its surroundings were annexed to the country as a "Separate Body".

After solution of relations of political law, it started the development of the modern civil administration. In the framework of this, it succeeded also the reform of the administrative division of territory. It referred to the administration both of settlements and

territorial. The legal status of towns, formerly having feudal privileges, was arranged. One part of royal free towns was transformed into municipal boroughs, their competence was corresponding to those of counties. The adjustment of legal status and that of administrative order of the villages followed in 1871. The law on villages regularized the administration of the settlements in a uniform framework and created three categories for the villages, being valid until 1949 with smaller modifications. The districts within the county united the villages into an administrative framework, but they were not territorial self-governing units.

The territorial reform of 1876 caused the elimination of territorial self-governments of feudal origin and character. The privileged territories integrated into the county-system. When looking at the details of the reform, we can underline that the territorial order of the counties was not entirely transformed at the formation of the civil administration; the civil administration was functioning mainly among the historical boundaries of counties.

After the First World War the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy fell to pieces; historical Hungary became disintegrated. After the Peace Treaty of Trianon of 1920, the modifications of the boundaries of counties aggravated the disproportions and contradictions of the territorial divisions of their administrations. From 72 counties of historical Hungary only 10 remained entirely undamaged, 25 of them, however, got divided to a smaller or larger extent among new boundaries of countries.

In this new situation, the reform of division of counties became indispensable. /The smallest county consisted only of two villages and its area was 16 square kilometres, and the area of the largest one was 11.817 square kilometres. /The measure and direction of the reform were fundamentally determined by political intentions, thus in 1923, the broken counties along the border of the country were united, in terms of provisionality, in this manner the number of the counties decreased to 25. The reform left untouched the inner territories of the country.

The representatives of the geography desired an essential reform. GYULA PRINZ wanted the new territorial division of administration of the country to be built upon the zones of attraction of transport, and PÁL TELEKI upon the system of natural regions.

After the democratic transformation, started in 1945, and later after the socialist volte-face, the problems of organization of territorial administration were raised again. The constitution of 1949 fixed the socialist economic, social, political relations and determined the fundamental questions of the new administrative division of territory of the country.

As for the system of territorial units of the administration, no essential changes took place; the structure, having formed during the history, continued existing, notwithstanding, the counties, districts, the towns and the villages received new functions and new contents; and the administration new tasks.

The most essential modification was the successive transformation of the previous executing - controlling administration into a planning, developing, supplying one, preserving its standard functions, too.

*First of all, the territories of the counties have been arranged.* Instead of the previous 25, 19 counties were formed. From political consideration, there was an effort for the territorial stability, so the reform brought only corrections, but by means of elimination of broken counties and division into two parts of county Pest, the great part of territorial and populational was liquidated /Figure N° 1./ When transforming the territorial order, the natural potentialities, the economic, transport relations and those of network of settlements and the endeavour of long-range development were considered alike. /The division of counties in our country up to now has preserved the territorial order, formed at that time, only a few villages and one district were reannexed./

*The new division of district was formed after the territorial arrangement of counties.* In comparison with the former division, it was a significant change when the district received an independent council organization. The number of the districts decreased from 150 to 140 and districts were considered to have been formed, capable of living perspectively, uniform economically and geographically, consolidated from point of view of transport and zone of attraction, too.

*The administration of settlements was laid upon new fundaments, too.* In this respect, the territorial rearrangement of administration of Budapest has an out-standing importance, 7 suburbs and 16 villages were annexed to Budapest.

*The town administration was developed in a contradictory manner.* Three town-categories were created: 1/ town, subordinated to the Council of Ministers /Budapest/; 2/ town, subordinated to the county council /24/, 3/ town, subordinated to the district council /29/. The design of the town administration failed in its effect, thus as early as in 1954 the situation of town changes. The towns come out of the jurisdiction of district councils and towns of district rank are created. Debrecen, Miskolc, Pécs, Szeged become towns of county rank, being equal to the counties.

*The village administration is one of the fundamental questions of the governmental division of territory.* In case of villages we can talk about the vigorous transformation of the territorial order. Before the introduction of the council system 3169 villages were coordinated by 1190 large villages and 662 offices of district-notaries. In 1950 2.978 village councils were formed, among which 2.808 were independent village councils and from 371 villages were formed 170 common village ones. The network of village councils, developed nearly all over the country, furthered the direct realization of the aims and activity of the central power in transforming the society, as local organs of the governmental power.

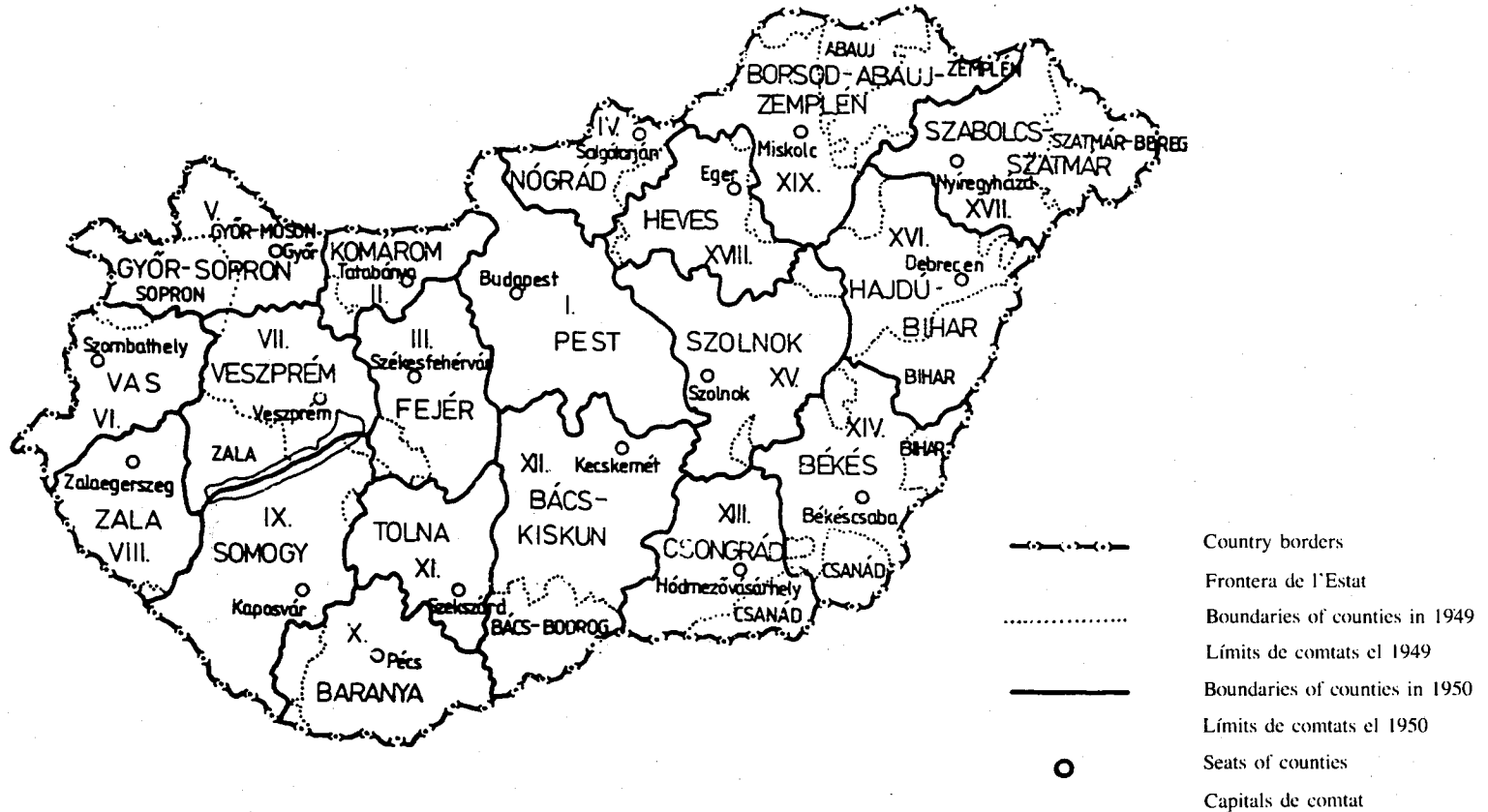
From the beginning of the 1950's within the geography, the reform of administrative division of territory was raised in connection with forming economic regions. Several conceptions were born in order to establish a regional administration/a territorial level, replacing the counties, or the one, situated over the counties/, but the "official" planning - economic regions, established in 1971, have not received administrative structures. These 6 planning-economic regions covered whole counties and served as a mean of planning. By the middle of 1980's even their formal existence ceased to go on, in the new economic situation the place and role of the counties strengthened again.

When casting a glance at the process of changes of administrative division of the Hungarian territory between 1950 and 1980, /Table N° 1./, we can see that the number of the counties remained unchanged, the number and importance of the districts vigorously decreased, and by 1980 the system of town-surrounding took shape already instead of the districts. The number of towns was dynamically growing, the number of villages diminished in consequence of declaring them towns on one hand, and because of unifying the villages on the other hand.

The number of independent councils vigorously lessened, that of villages with common councils skyrocketed, so the number of administrative units of villages deviated from the number of villages.

All in all, we can say that the establishment of towns and the urbanization transformed the territorial order of Hungarian administration to a significant extent in the last three decades. In spite of this, it cannot be said that the administrative organizational order and the territorial division were completely established, being adequate to processes of urbanization.

Figure 1  
Territorial Reform of 1950 in Hungary (Reforma territorial de 1950 a Hongria)



### III. Geographical questions of administrative Reform of 1984

On 1st of January, 1984 essential changes took place in the administrative division of territory of country. The districts were put an end to, their places were taken over by the town-surrounding, and surroundings of large villages, respectively. The spheres of activity of the eliminated district offices were decentralized to the villages in the majority of cases, a small part of them got to the towns. As a matter of fact, this reform was the first step towards the formation of an administration on two levels.

*The administration by town-surroundings is a transitional form that remains until the creation of conditions of village administrations directly by the counties.*

In the course of the territorial reform 139 town-surroundings or surroundings of large villages, respectively.

Table N° 1.

Administrative division of territory of Hungary between 1950-1980 (Divisió administrativa del territori d'Hongria entre 1950-1980)

Year	Number of			Number of villages			
	counties	dictriets	town-surroundings	towns	villages	with independent councils among the villages	with common councils among the villages
1950	19	140	—	54	3169	2808	361
1960	19	128	—	63	3210	2857	353
1970	19	107	—	73	3151	1711	1440
1980	19	83	49	96	3026	715	2311

Among the seats 105 are towns and 34 are large of town rank, recently established. Apart from 4 exceptions /Budapest, Hajdúböszörmény, Száhalombatta, Túrkeve/, the towns take part in solving the new administrative tasks. In 34 large villages of town rank the conditions of becoming towns have gradually been produced.

When determining the territories of town-surrounding two factors come to the front: 1/ circumstances of zones of attraction having formed in consequence of economic-natural potentialities and those of geography of settlements of the given village; 2/ point of views of administrative policy of the middle level administration.

In the structure of new territorial administration it is the number of the units of medium extension that a decisive role, however, several zones of smaller or larger area comprising a considerable amount of settlements, respectively, came into existence, too /Figure N°.2/. The system of zones of attraction of the network of settlements, the established order of the relations among the settlements came to the front not in an absolute manner when determining the system of territories or centres of the town-surrounding administration.

As a preparation of the administration on two levels, 32 village councils got directly under county administration. These villages are not integrated with the system of administration of town-surroundings. The limits of the experiment are characterised by the fact that in 11 counties no villages of direct subordination to the counties have been organised.

The reform of 1984 is a result of compromises of several kind; the measure of changes of areas, the sphere of activity of the reform were determined by the political-economic surroundings; and the steadiness of the county boundaries played the role of the fundamental limit. In some counties, aspirations of various characters can be found, too, when looking at the spatial structure of the recent administrative division /Table N°.2/.

#### IV Summary

It is obvious even from this brief and roughly outlined survey that the administrative reform was at all times linked up with much broader social, political changes and endeavours. The transformation of administrative division of territory was several times subordinated to aims of "every days" politics.

Among the administrative levels the settlement administration /town-village/ changes a lot also from the historical respect; and the district, regarding the medium level administration. As opposed to these changes, the counties have been and go on being stationary in high degrees. The functions of counties changed several times, but their spatial order modified only to an insignificant extent.

The possibilities of changes of administrative division of territories are greatly determined by the processes taken place up to now. At the reform of 1984 it was decided for a long period: The administrative division of Hungarian territory proceeds towards the two levels system in which the local councils /villages, towns/ are directly linked up to the county council.

This principled decision does not exclude the possibility of further changes both in the village structure, and in the one of town territory, and, carrying out a territorial correction of county system, even if it were not a comprehensive reform.

The administrative organization of territory all the time touched the population, too, in a vigorous manner. The consideration of interests of the population is particularly important today, when the administration is strongly becoming that of supplying character. On both sides of the administrative boundaries, in our country those of settlements and counties, the population has a vigorous view of territorial identity, and thus it is impossible to disregard its opinion when pondering the importance of administrative reforms.

In the future, in case of administrative changes of every kind, no matter how well-founded and reasonable they are from administrative, economic, geographical etc point of view, the opinion of the population will have to be asked, moreover, in some cases, its approval must be asked for, or else the administrative division of territory will lose one of its component, regarded very essential today, its social recepticon.

Figure 2.  
Administrative division of territory of Hungary in 1984  
(Divisió administrativa del territori d'Hongria el 1984)

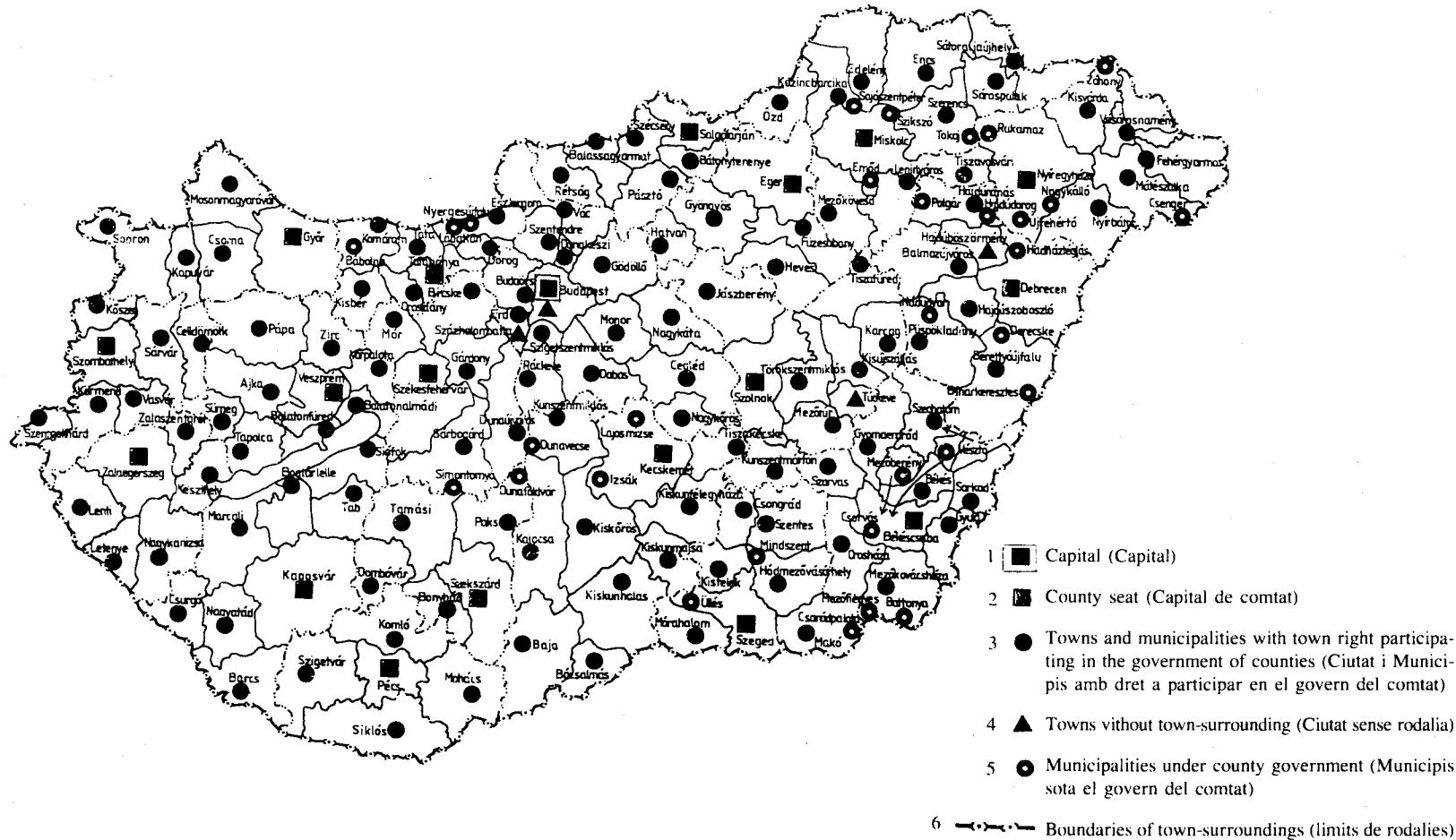




Table N° 2.  
 Administrative division of territory of Hungary on 1. January, 1984  
 Divisió administrativa del territori d'Hongria (1 de gener del 1984)

Capital Counties	Àrea /hectare/	Population	Number of				villages councils of various rank totally	Number of		Number of villages without local councils
			town- surroundings	surround- ings of mu- nicipalities with town right	towns	villages		independent councils among the village councils	common councils among the village councils	
Budapest	52 507	2 064 307	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	
Baranya	448 701	433 788	5	—	5	291	77	11	66	214
Bács-Kiskun	836 170	566 066	6	4	6	105	98	91	7	70
Békés	563 193	431 291	6	3	6	68	58	50	8	10
Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	724 784	803 956	9	1	9	339	151	62	89	188
Csongrád	426 268	454 633	5	2	5	54	41	31	10	13
Fejér	437 367	423 377	3	3	3	103	69	45	24	34
Győr-Sopron	401 222	429 987	5	—	5	160	75	35	40	85
Hajdú-Bihar	621 161	553 036	4	2	5	74	42	21	21	32
Heves	363 755	347 763	4	1	4	114	83	63	20	31
Komárom	225 052	323 256	6	1	6	68	45	30	15	23
Nógrád	254 438	238 319	3	3	3	117	52	18	34	65
Pest	639 414	983 200	7	6	8	171	122	89	33	49
Somogy	603 630	358 283	5	3	5	233	63	4	59	170
Szabolcs-Szatmár	593 809	587 784	6	1	6	219	108	48	60	111
Szolnok	560 756	443 375	7	1	8	67	45	28	17	22
Tolna	370 391	268 237	5	—	5	103	56	33	23	47
Vas	333 682	284 504	6	1	6	209	65	8	57	144
Veszprém	468 888	388 625	8	1	8	212	66	12	54	146
Zala	378 440	316 368	5	1	5	250	65	2	63	185
Magyarország	9 303 628	10 700 155	105	34	109	2957	1381	681	700	1576

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