

URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN HUNGARY IN THE LAST 25 YEARS

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On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of our polytechnical undergraduate training, let me mention that in these years we are also celebrating the centenary of planned urban development. This landmark is highlighted by events like the establishment of the Board of Public Works (1870), international planning competition for the development of the capital (1871), the simultaneously launched large-scale development projects (Radial and Ring roads), administrative union of Buda—Óbuda—Pest (1872) etc. The coincidence of the upheaval of urbanization concomitant to early industrial development and the starts of higher technical education was by no means accidental.

During the relatively short period which elapsed since that time, urban development has had increasing impact on our life and views. In a book published one hundred years ago "Novel of the Next Century", Jókai the popular writer of romantic fiction described his vision of today's Budapest with smoking chimney-stacks on the peripheries casting "picturesque fog" over the city. He did not think that this proper symbol of urbanization would hardly be regarded as "picturesque" by the people of our time all over the world.

Nowadays, urbanization is a widely debated issue. Both its advantages — economic growth, evolution of human environment — and disadvantages — urbanization problems — are viewed as worldwide phenomena allowing an international exchange of experience. Models of urbanization evolved in countries at an advanced stage of urban growth — though greatly differing from Hungary in many respects — are instructive for us, too.

In this short lecture, I should like to point out some specific features of Hungarian urbanization, which qualify the impact of general tendencies. These features will be analyzed from three aspects:

- economic development of the country in the international context;
- effects of the social-political system;
- influence of natural and historical characteristics.

The development of modern industrial production took place in several subsequent phases, and urbanization process of individual countries was fundamentally influenced by the phase where they joined the international tendency

of industrial growth. This time only two types of urbanization process will be distinguished. Their difference results from the primary motives of rapid urban growth. I shall call these two types the active and passive ways of urbanization.

Active urbanization is generated by the structural changes of economy and production. Owing to the mechanization and chemization of farming resulting in a growing output, a considerable part of agricultural labour is released. At the same time industry, undergoing large-scale growth, can offer employment and accommodation in urban areas, that can gradually assimilate immigrants from rural areas. As a consequence of this double process, a new social, economic and spatial balance is evolved.

Passive urbanization is due to demographic explosion under the impact of civilization unaccompanied by adequate economic and social development. Agriculture, with its conventional means and techniques, is incapable of supporting the increased rural population. To escape famine, people rush into cities, which are, however, unprepared to offer adequate accommodation and employment. In the former case, migration is a process parallel to economic and technical advancement as well as to physical development of cities, prepared to accommodate the newcomers. In the latter case, there is no such balance, neither in time, nor in the rate of development. The masses of immigrants remain in the peripheries of growth both in economic and sociological terms, even if they settle down in the central, rapidly declining areas of cities. These two opposite ways of urbanization process bring about the sharp contrast between the urban growth of advanced and developing countries (former colonies), producing in the latter case metropolises which consist of a modern urban core and the surrounding belt of squatter settlements occupied by the unemployed.

In its early period, Hungarian urbanization followed the passive type of urban growth (the surplus of agricultural labour either settled down in urban slums, or left the country to seek fortune in America), but in the last 25 years it has been bearing the obvious marks of the active process. Consequently, in this respect, our urbanization problems are similar to those of the advanced countries, and to a certain extent they emerge at a faster rhythm, partly because in order to overcome our former backwardness, we *must* undergo the same process within a shorter period, and partly because the actual level of science and technology makes it *possible* to accelerate development. Thus for instance, the flow of former agricultural labour to other sectors of economy started half a century later than in the United States, but at a three times more rapid cadence than in the corresponding period in the US.

Within the period of the last 20 years, the number of agricultural workers decreased by 30% (700,000 people), meanwhile the number of those employed in industry increased by one million. Although this structural change was due

to the economic development of the country, thus, the resulting urban growth can rightly be considered as an active way of urbanization, economic-technical, and social-behavioral advancement, however, could not keep pace with this large-scale process limited to a short time span, in other words, *urban development* in its true sense (the evolution of urbainness from both physical and cultural aspects) has been lagging behind *urban growth*. The difficulties of sociological-psychological adjustment to urban living are well illustrated by the prevalence of semi-urban living patterns (where men work in cities, and their families live in rural areas and possibly work in agriculture), a feature typical for the transitory phase of urbanization.

When Hungary is compared to other nations, besides referring to the specific features stemming from historical development, it should be taken into account that this country is rather poor in mineral, power and water resources, the territory is fairly small, thus, short distances within the country facilitate close contact between regions, all these features fundamentally affect the urbanization process.

It is due partly to the traditions of Hungarian urban development, and partly to its planned control, as well as to the transportation system that in the evolution of the national settlement structure decentralization on the regional scale and concentration on the urban scale have been the typical tendencies. In contrast with the suburban growth in most western countries, Hungarian cities have tended to accommodate their growing population in housing districts adjacent to their built up areas.

Active urbanization of the last 25 years was greatly affected by the country's socialist system as well as by national economic planning. The advantageous impact of these latter is particularly obvious in long-term development control: in regional planning and in the development of national settlement structure. Our achievements in these areas have international reputation, indicating the advantage of national planning and control in the interests of the whole society over spontaneous urban sprawl and conflict of interests stemming from private ownership. Our experience could be usefully adopted in countries which have but modest development resources and are lagging behind the international trends of economic growth, and thus can eliminate their backwardness only by an intense, planned concentration of available resources.

Regional development of the last 25 years, however, has not been a smooth process. It is thus necessary to pay attention to the dangers of our regional policies, especially to that of voluntarism. In this connection, let me point out a few examples.

The desire to rapidly make up for backwardness may (and did) lead to the overemphasis of certain projects, and to maximalism in certain fields of production, which result in a deviation from the optimum. The forced, large-

scale investments of the 1950's on the one hand, and the neglect of the existing build-up of our settlements causing their gradual deterioration on the other hand, hindered the optimal development of national settlement structure and of the accumulated national wealth.

Another deviation from the optimum is the opposite extreme, the principle of "uniform development" lacking any fundamental concept, conserving the national spatial, demographic and settlement structure as evolved under the influence of social, economic and political forces of bygone history and thus incapable to respond to the potentials and demands of our time.

In the last 25 years it has also become clear that social-economic advancement and urban development have to be kept in harmony, thus certain preconceived ideas, benevolent illusions are untenable. The growth of economy and evolution of consciousness impose limits on urban development, which must be observed, otherwise they become detrimental to development itself. This statement can be demonstrated by recalling several events of our recent urban development.

The implementation of socialist aims in rural development was attempted first in 1950, by the organization of co-operative farms. In want of adequate economic and technical bases, it did not lead to the success that had been expected, and after 1953, many co-operative farms were dissolved. After 1959, when these conditions were already provided, the change over to large-scale agricultural production was a fairly smooth process, and by 1967, 98% of agricultural land belonged to co-operative or state farms, and rural areas began to transform under the impact of the new pattern of production. The earlier machine stations, transformed into repair shops of the mechanical equipment of the co-operatives, developed into small industrial centers, thus generating a structural change, the industrialization of rural areas.

The endeavour to concentrate rural settlement system (featured by the prevalence of solitary farmsteads dispersed on vast areas around villages and rural towns) was also ineffective. To this end, a system of so-called farmstead centers (which were to attract the population of solitary farmsteads, and thus, to contribute to the elimination of dispersed pattern) was established. The site selection, — in the regional context — however, was rather voluntary, so most of these centers proved to be unfit for survival, let alone generating growth. In areas of intensive farming production (vine and fruit culture), dispersed farms prosper, and new ones are formed. In areas of large-scale farming, especially in corn-growing regions, concentration is going on rapidly, and is only restricted by the housing conditions in receiving settlements. This tendency of concentration, however, raises serious structural problems in communities which receive the migration from the farmsteads. Because of their accustomed living pattern and economic position, the newcomers are likely to settle down on large plots in the outlying parts of towns, thus causing a

further expansion of the wide rural-type belt around the central core, the growth of which is restricted, therefore the development of an urban build-up is counteracted.

The great extent of nationalization (expropriation) of housing stock, and the predominant role of the public sector in residential construction in the postwar years were also mistakes of development policy, stemming from groundless expectations. It involved that the government renounced of the contribution of the population to the increase of national property, and undertook tasks beyond its capacities. This policy has led to the neglect of repair of existing housing stock, to the inefficiency of residential construction as to both volume and quality, still devouring funds allocated for building roads and facilities. The nationalization of urban land has undoubtedly been an achievement, greatly facilitating the implementation of comprehensive development concepts, but some experiences indicate that public ownership of land, by itself, does not guarantee optimum land use and layout, on the contrary, it may lead to unjustified underrating of the value of land.

Natural-physical features of the country and those of its historical development have had their undoubtedly strong effect on urbanization of Hungary in the last decades, the latter (although being the elements of superstructure, thus doomed to change following social transformation) continued to act either through the earlier evolved man-made environment or through popular views and desires (like the great desire among the peasants to own a strip of land), even when earlier policies and ideologies had ceased to be in action.

Such century-long historical antecedents have brought about the overall national infrastructure and settlement structure owing its disproportionate state to the rural-based economy and semi-feudal social system of Hungary at the time of early industrial development. This unbalanced state was aggravated by the territorial changes after World War I, breaking the historically evolved relations in the urbanization structure, and giving a halt to development in areas along the borders. The potentials for inevitable co-operation and integrated urban development in these geographical areas have been provided to the extent how political reconciliation with neighbouring countries has been achieved. Economic and political integration of socialist countries, through the development of regions along the borders and through its overall effect on national economy, is likely to exert great influence on urbanization of Hungary.

Besides the planned growth of counterpoles to Budapest, the decentralization of the country's industrialization pattern is a definite process, which can be attributed to two principal motives:

1. Manpower resources in large industrial regions are likely to run out by 1975. The output of housing construction is inadequate to fulfil prevailing

demands let alone those brought about by immigration. This is why many industries tend to expand in a deconcentrated way.

2. Agricultural co-operatives are ever more engaged in industry. From 1966 to 1968 their income from industrial activities increased by 80%, and this rate is likely to have grown even more since then. These activities may be in direct relationship with agricultural production, or may supplement it, but often independent factories are settled in rural areas, attracted by available manpower and housing. These small, dynamic industrial plants offering well-paying jobs attract the employees of large plants, aggravating the labour shortage in the latter.

A few words should also be said about the effects of industrialized construction on urban development. Industrialized construction is inevitable, if building industry, with its declining manpower-base wants to cope with the increasing demands on housing. The currently prevailing form of industrialized construction — plant prefabrication — significantly affects urbanization. First of all, this technology requires the regional concentration of housing development. The scope of action of a housing factory is limited by the economical delivery of units, by the quality of roads, and by the safety problems of delivery of fragile elements. The prefabrication plant, while it is in operation, imposes building constraint on the area within its scope of action, because its products must be built in immediately, with the cadence of completion. Economical operation of prefabrication plants requires the continuous and rapid assembly of a large number of dwellings on a contiguous area, therefore in the overall urban pattern well integrated and well prepared sites must be continuously provided within their scope of action. This method of housing construction offers and is conditioned by a high level of amenities. Finally, in case of the lack of foresight and complex preparation of the project, the technology of prefabrication, with its high level of management techniques, provides an over-advantageous position to the developer and building contractor to the detriment of non-technical aspects of urban development.

In this short survey I attempted to point to a few typical features, achievements, problems and motives of urbanization in Hungary during the last 25 years. Our achievements in planned urban development should neither be underestimated nor overvalued. In order to be successful in this field in the future, it is needed to avoid one-sided, voluntarist approaches in planning, and to deepen the theoretical-scientific bases of planned development.

Summary

Urbanization process in different countries can be either active or passive. The basis of this distinction is whether the masses immigrating from rural areas can find adequate living conditions in cities, or are forced to settle down in urban slums. Urbanization in Hungary during the last 25 years was obviously active.

Besides the achievements of this period in urban development, several shortcomings — stemming mostly from the lack of experience in planning — such as mistakes of voluntarism, benevolent illusions, underestimation of objective tendencies were typical of this process.

Well controlled urban growth of the future requires the deepening of theoretical-scientific base of planned development.

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