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Town, canal, and region. The impact of drainage processes on the urban centrality
of Sombor in the first half of the Nineteenth century

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Hereby I declare that I worked out this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature, and I did not present it to obtain another academic degree.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of the drainage processes that were conducted in the first half of the Nineteenth century on the notion of urban centrality of the free royal town of Sombor. The existing approach in the literature regarding the overall urbanization in Kingdom of Hungary mostly focused on the economic role of a settlement, which put aside the importance of its legal status within the feudal system. This theory, even though it validly changed the definition of what being urban for a specific settlement means, also passed over the importance of the administrative aspect of centrality. In the case of Sombor, there were two leading central political authorities that interacted and conflicted with each other, thus impeding the overall progress of a settlement as a whole. On the one hand, the town's administration represented the interests that did not usually go beyond the territory under their control. On the other, the administration of Bács–Bodrog County represented the interests of the feudal dominions and inhabitants living there.

The main hypotheses of this thesis is that the land drainage process, which was conducted in order to reduce the level of redundant waters and ameliorate the conditions for the agricultural activity, showed the contested centrality of Sombor as a settlement, and showed the juxtaposed positions of the Town and the County. The entire building process of the drainage canals was possible only after the construction of Emperor Francis Canal in the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. Furthermore, the route that connected them to the aforementioned waterway went through the territories which were under the administrative control of both contested parties. This resulted with the negotiations and interplay that prolonged the entire process for decades, as it was conducted from 1827–1848. Therefore, this proves the importance of the administrative aspect in determining the level of urban centrality of Sombor and its relation to surrounding region.

Keywords: urban centrality, Sombor, canal, drainage

Abstrakt

Předkládaná diplomová práce se zabývá dopadem, který měly odvodňovací procesy prováděné v první polovině 19. století na ústřední roli svobodného královského města Sombor. Dosavadní výzkum týkající se urbanizace v Maďarském království se zaměřoval na hospodářskou roli osídlení, přičemž byla ponechána stranou důležitost jeho právního postavení v rámci feudálního systému. Tato teorie, ač platně pozměnila definici toho, co znamená městský charakter pro určité osídlení, tak zároveň přešla bez povšimnutí důležitou otázku administrativního aspektu centrální role města. V případě města Sombor zde existovaly dva hlavní politické orgány, které se navzájem ovlivňovaly a střetávaly, a tím bránily vývoji osídlení jako celku. Na jedné straně stála městská správa, která zastupovala zájmy, jež zřídka kdy překročily jimi ovládané území. Na straně druhé zde byla správa kraje Bács–Bodrog, jež zastávala zájmy feudálního panství a jeho obyvatel.

Hlavní hypotézou této práce je, že proces odvodnění půdy, který byl prováděn za účelem snížení hladiny vody a zlepšení podmínek pro zemědělskou činnost, zároveň zpochybnil ústřední roli Somboru jako osídlení, a také ukázal opačné pozice města a kraje. Samotné vybudování odvodňovacích kanálů bylo možné až po výstavbě Kanálu císaře Františka na počátku 19. století. Navíc jejich trasa, která je spojovala s výše uvedenou vodní cestou, procházela přes území, která byla pod správní kontrolou obou proti sobě stojících stran. To vedlo k vyjednávání a mezihře, které prodloužily celý proces odvodňování na dobu desítky let, mezi lety 1827 a 1848. To dokazuje důležitost vlivu administrativního aspektu na určení ústřední role města Sombor a na jeho vztah s okolním regionem.

Klíčová slova: ústřední role města, Sombor, kanál, odvodňování

INTRODUCTION

The question of how we can measure the urbanization level of a certain settlement in the early modern period remains a problem for many researchers of urban history. The majority of the scholars who dealt with the subject developed numerous definitions of urbanization and of the ways we can apply those parameters in our researches. However, those theories were mostly based on cases from the Western Europe, or more specifically, the most developed part of it, leaving the territories in the east without a satisfactory approach. The differences in the economic and social developments between the two parts of the continent made researchers in the east revise and further develop the existing theories, which basically sought for the answer of what makes a settlement urban or not. In the case of the Kingdom of Hungary, the scholars such as Vera Bácskai used the market centre theory for this purpose. According to this approach, the economic role and pulling power projected on the surrounding population, described a settlement as urban or not, regardless of its legal status. Following this theory, Sombor as a free royal town located in the middle of the Bács–Bodrog County, had a visible market centre role, in relation to its surroundings, being the main place of commerce for around 70.000 people in 1828 when the census of the Kingdom of Hungary was conducted. This categorization did not just show the level of centrality of Sombor, and thus its urban character, but it also placed the town high among the other urban settlements in the Kingdom of Hungary.

At the same time, putting aside the market centre theory, the place of Sombor in the region, i.e. Bács–Bodrog County, and the nature of its relation with its hinterland was overlooked. This thesis tries to show the complexity of the relation of a free royal town with its surroundings, which belonged to the existing feudal system. The other aspects of centrality, such as the administrative one, played a significant role in the relation between the town and its surroundings, especially in the endeavours in which the interests of both sides overlapped. One of the best examples of these shared interests was the question of the drainage of the territory, a necessary prerequisite for the development of the region plagued by seasonal floods. Even though both sides suffered because of constant floods, the town's administration was not only less concerned about that, but it also impeded the efforts of the feudal lords and the State, in their quest to ameliorate the conditions for their subordinates. By placing this juxtaposed positions in the context of the specific period of the

time in which the events took place, in the first half of the Nineteenth century, it is evident that overall efforts of the higher authorities, except the town itself, were designed to increase the productivity of the inhabitants, and consequently, the taxes collected from them.

What makes the position of Sombor more peculiar was that it was a seat for several different administrative bodies that operated simultaneously in the same urban surroundings. Each of these different ruling authorities had its own area of control and interests to protect there. First, the town was governed by the Magistracy which oversaw the area that was given to Sombor in 1749, when it was granted a free royal charter. Second, the County had its seat in Sombor also, since the late 1780s, and it governed large territory consisted of feudal properties between the rivers Danube and Tisa. Lastly, the third major administering body was that of Hungarian Treasury (i.e. the State), which had one of its seats in Sombor, from which it governed the feudal properties that were under its direct control. Therefore, when we speak about the central position of Sombor and its relation to the region, we must pose the question to which Sombor we are referring.

The complexity of juxtaposed positions of different governing bodies was the most evident during the drainage endeavours in the first half of the Nineteenth century, especially from 1827-1848. The construction of the Emperor Francis Canal in 1802, which connected the rivers Danube and Tisa, not only influenced the trade in the region, but it also made the drainage of the territory possible. In the first place, the stream of the river Mostonga was connected to the Canal, which lessen the damages during seasonal floods in the territory under the town's control. Furthermore, the territories in the vicinity of the town, which were under private or State control, were also provided with a chance to drain their land that in certain sections was impossible to cultivate. The two-decade long interplay between the town and County administration, regarding these drainage plans, could be summed up by disinterest of the Magistracy to build and preserve the canal system which would connect the endangered territories to Mostonga and subsequently, to the Emperor Francis Canal. The main problem was that this canal system's only possibly route was through the territory under the legal control of the town's administration, which forced the County to negotiate and persuade them to find common ground. The reluctance of the Magistracy forced the regional administration to seek for the help of the common higher authority, the Hungarian Royal Regency Council with its seat in Buda, but the persuasion lasted until 1848 when the entire drainage system was finished.

The question of the centrality of Sombor was analysed by Antal Hegedüs, in his work regarding the history of the town, where he touched upon the complexity of the position of Sombor, explaining the different authorities residing there. Also, he briefly mentioned the drainage process of the first half of the Nineteenth century, without delving into the further explanations. However, the connection between the two problems, those of the centrality and drainage, was not noticed. When it comes to the other authors that researched the region in this period of time, there were only a few who focused on either the urbanization processes or the drainage issues. For the latter, it is worth mentioning that they were analysed briefly and only in the connection with the building of the Emperor Francis Canal. This gap in the research literature could only be surpassed by referring to the primary data. The existing sources that are explaining the drainage issues in the region were mainly preserved in the Archive of Sombor, which also holds the photocopies of the documents made by the County officials, when this settlement was its seat. This valuable data was not thoroughly analysed, especially the one that was connected with the processes from 1827-1848. These sources could be separated into the plans, pleas and reports, created by the involved parties. Also, in this work I used the maps from the Hungarian National Archives, connected with the problem of the drainage. Furthermore, a source worth singling out was *Repertorium* of Anton Bauer, published in 1826, which was not analysed thoroughly in the historiography connected with Sombor and the broader region. The part of it was published by Antal Hegedüs in his article about the sources for agrarian statistics of Vojvodina, but only in its abbreviated form. Even Hegedüs himself admitted that he was unaware of such important source that lied hidden in the local archive of Sombor, but he nevertheless did not make any further analysis.

This research studies the problem of urbanization, or more specifically, the urban centrality of a certain settlement and its relation to the surrounding region. In the same time, it is a work that sheds more light on the drainage processes and its connection to policies imposed by higher authorities. The connection between the two problems also represented the focus of the research, with the efforts made to provide satisfactory explanations. In order to cover all the problems, this research was divided in several sections. The first one explains the notion of an urban settlement in early modern Europe, with the emphasis on East-Central Europe and the case of Hungary. The case of the free royal town of Sombor was separately analysed, with a brief overview of its history and development during the second half of Eighteenth and the first half of Nineteenth century. Because of the importance of the Emperor Francis Canal, the overview of its construction and the

role of its main creator, engineer József Kiss, were also examined in the aforementioned chapter. The last section focused on the drainage processes in the first half of the Nineteenth century, and the overall development in which they took place, such as the census of the territory and inhabitants made for the entire Kingdom of Hungary in 1828. The drainage process that showed contested centrality of Sombor and contrasted positions of the town and County are also a part of this chapter.

I

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The dichotomy of space in early modern Europe

To get a better understanding of urbanization processes relevant for this research, it is necessary to analyse some of its main aspects in the European continent. The proper analysis would require to define the time and space of the research, because those two notions are deeply intertwined. The time setting in which this processes occurred were usually described by an artificial title of Early modern era that included the period from 1500–1800.¹ Although a certain urbanization patterns appeared several centuries earlier, this time division to before and after the Sixteenth century is important when the other, spatial, aspect is observed. The economic and social changes that occurred in the European societies after the great overseas discoveries, but also after the Ottoman conquests in the east and southeast of Europe, took place largely in the aforementioned time period, or several decades before. Christopher Friedrichs, after he acknowledged this artificial construct made by several historians, suggested that for many of them, including himself, the main emphasis for this period was on the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries.²

Many urban historians focused their researches on urban settlements in Western, and not Eastern Europe, due to the lack of interest from their side and insufficient source data. They mostly focused on the territory going from the British Isles to Low Countries, Germany, France, with comparably less data for the areas east of Saxony and Austria. Therefore, the urban history of Eastern Europe remained, as Jaroslav Miller noted, *terra incognita*.³ Consequently, in order to explain different levels of the urbanization in Europe, a comparison with its most developed part is necessary.

Jan de Vries, in order to analyse source data more systematically, suggested the division of the European continent, which in his opinion was consisted of the Latin Christendom, because of the significant differences that emerged in comparison to the urbanization patterns in the territory

¹ Jan de Vries, *European urbanization 1500–1800*, (Methuen and Co. Ltd – London 1984), 3.

² Christopher Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, (Routledge – New York 2000), xiv

³ Jaroslav Miller, *Urban Societies in East – Central Europe 1500–1700*, (Ashgate Publishing Company – Burlington, VT 2008) 1–2.

under the control of the Russian or Ottoman Empire. Consequently, he divided this area to 16 different sections. Furthermore, he grouped them in four different regions – Mediterranean (Italy and Iberia) Europe, Central Europe (France, Germany, and Switzerland), Northern and Western Europe (Scandinavia, British Isles and Low Countries), and Eastern Europe (Poland, Austria, Czech and Slovakia). His main goal for this division was not to create artificial differences or similarities, but to more easily observe the urban and total population growth. However, de Vries continued to perceive Eastern Europe as a separate region, due to its limited level of urbanization. Evidently, from his research he excluded Hungary that was mostly under the Ottoman rule in the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth century, and Lithuania, due to the insufficient source data.⁴ Cristopher R. Friedrichs had some complementary views to de Vries, as he argued that the notion of urbanization of Europe in his works is confined to British Isles, western and central parts of Europe. From his research he excluded areas that were under the rule of the Ottoman and Russian Empire, which meant that the Balkans and large areas of Eastern Europe were perceived as significantly different from the rest of the continent in terms of the social and economic development.⁵

Therefore, these variations in development brought the different experiences in various parts of the European continent regarding the level of urbanization. Aside from the division between Eastern and Western Europe, one of the most visible divisions for scholars was that between the northern and southern part of the continent. Since the Antiquity the urbanization rate was higher in the Mediterranean region, in comparison to the rest of the continent, because of the higher concentration of trade and political activities. The urban settlements were not just the remnants of the former Roman rule in the region, but they were also a product of Muslim and Byzantine civilizations. The cities in Italian Peninsula also emerged in Early Medieval period, with Genoa and Venice as the examples of influential merchant towns. The urbanization patterns gradually changed over time, and by 1400, according to Hohenberg and Lees, the other parts of Europe, such as Low Countries, emerged as centers of urbanization.⁶

The division of the continent on the western and eastern part was evident even in the works of the scholars who discussed the urbanization of Europe from a historical perspective. The reason

⁴ Jan de Vries, *European urbanization 1500–1800*, 19–21.

⁵ Christopher Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, xiv.

⁶ Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn H. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000–1994*, (Harvard University Press – Cambridge, MA 1995), 10.

for the different urbanization levels lied in the division of the continent in two parts regarding their economic development, or rather, the underdevelopment of Eastern Europe. There were several reasons for the lagged development of these territories and explanations, because of their complexity, would require a separate analysis. In short, they could be summarized with the rise of capitalism in the western and the return of serfdom in the eastern part of the continent. Fernand Braudel explained the return of serfdom in the Sixteenth century with the increased demand of the more developed part of the continent for raw materials and food, which led Eastern Europe to a *colonial destiny*. He depicted a border line between the “new serfdom” and the rest of Europe going from Hamburg in the north, across Vienna to Venice in the south, with the addition of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily. This meant that the eastern part of Europe remained subjugated to landlords longer and to the greater extent in comparison to its western counterpart, which in the end heavily influenced the flow of the capital and people. Consequently, the urbanization processes in the east differed from those present in the “Occident”. Furthermore, the town in the west was perceived as an agent of social and economic change and one of the main reasons for the abolition of the serfdom, while its counterpart in the east remained under control of the feudal lords, which led to their underdevelopment.⁷

In contrast to this traditional view, Balázs Szelényi argued that the entire relation between the feudal lords and urban settlements was misunderstood. The developments of the towns and feudal system were not opposed to each other, and this was true for both Eastern and Western Europe. Relying on different approaches, he argued that a kind of *symbiotic* relation existed between the two, and that the ruling elite in the towns, consisted mainly from merchants and artisans, was not the primary progressive force that consequently led to the liberation of the serfs.⁸ Therefore, if the suggestion that the towns were a part of the feudal system in the west was valid, Szelényi noticed that there was no reason not to assume the same occurred in the east.⁹ Even though an intertwined coexistence was present between the feudal lords and urban settlements, they were often rivals, due to the fact that both competed for a better position in the feudal system. Therefore, the real

⁷ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century, The Wheels of Commerce*, vol. 2, translated by Siân Reynolds, (Harper and Row – New York 1982), 265–272.

⁸ Balázs Szelényi, *The Failure of Central European Bourgeoisie. New Perspectives on Hungarian History*, (Palgrave Macmillan – New York 2006). 8.

⁹ *Ibid*, 11.

reason for this rivalry was not the abolition of the feudal system, but the acquisition of several privileges and monopolies that derived from it.¹⁰

Instead of using the vaguely defined title of Eastern Europe, some scholars chose different terminology to get better understanding of urbanization processes that occurred in their area of research. Therefore, the term of East-Central Europe gained on its popularity and it was used among the scholars who studied the region in which urbanization patterns differed from those present in Western Europe, but also to that evident in the emerging Russian Empire in the east. The East-Central Europe was an object of political desire of two different poles of the European continent in the early modern era, which resulted with its ephemeral role in the interests of researchers.¹¹ Consequently, this region was often labelled as being backward, especially in comparison to the developed Western Europe.

However, in the last couple of decades several scholars tried to observe and explain the main characteristics of an urban development in this region and to potentially show their specificities. There were still differences among scholars about the span of territories that were included in East-Central Europe. Jaroslav Miller wrote about the urbanization characteristics of East-Central Europe, from 1500–1700, and he defined the region, even though it naturally belonged to Eastern Europe, as a distinctive territory that was separated from the Balkans in the south and the most eastern parts of Europe. Therefore, this area stretched from the Baltic Sea in the north, to the Black Sea in the south, and in early modern Europe it was mostly consisted of the lands that belonged to the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Kingdom of Bohemia and Kingdom of Hungary.¹²

¹⁰ Balázs Szelényi, *The Failure of Central European Bourgeoisie*, 12.

¹¹ Jerzy Kłoczowski, *East Central Europe in the Historiography of the Countries of the Region*, translated by Christopher Grabowski, (Institute of East Central Europe, Lublin, 1995), 4.

¹² Jaroslav Miller, *Urban Societies in East–Central Europe 1500–1700*, 2.

Defining an urban settlement in early modern Europe

There are several definitions of an urban settlement in early modern Europe, given by the contemporaries and modern scholars. Max Weber sought for the universal definition or *ideal type* of the city in the west, and for him all different approaches had some unifying characteristics. Therefore, Weber stated that the city was a form of a closed settlement that represented more than just a collection of separate dwellings. Regarding the size, he argued that it was not a decisive factor and that the settlement did not need to be large. To prove this claim, he provided the examples of cities with a certain level of legal autonomy that were smaller in comparison to some villages in different parts of Europe. From the economic perspective, he argued that the majority of the population in the city should live of commerce and artisanship, rather than the agriculture. Nevertheless, this was also not a decisive factor, due to the fact that there were villages with the types of the specialized industry (e.g. villages that made woollen products). The existence of a marketplace was the main prerequisite for Weber's definition of a city, due to the fact it was an area where the regular exchange of goods occurred that satisfied needs of the settlement itself. In the most cases that he analysed the sovereign and the marketplace had intertwined relationship, where the latter could have been created by the former, *princely*, power, or its existence could just be legally acknowledged. In order to clarify his definition of marketplace, Weber argued that the local goods had to satisfy the needs of the majority of the local population and had to be produced either by town population or by its closest hinterland. The division of the labour, an important feature of the market centre, would provide proper exchange of the materials and goods, not just in an urban settlement itself, but also between the city and its dependent area.¹³

Weber gave broad differentiation of the types of urban settlements, based on the origin of their economy. Therefore, he recognized the existence of the *consumer*, *producer*, and *merchant* type of a city. First one was the type of settlement where the economy was based upon the purchasing power of the court or large households that collected their wealth mostly through the rents. The presence of the landed aristocracy was the best example in defining the consumer city, but there were also the cases of the people connected with the Court who generated the wealth from the

¹³ Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, (University of California Press – Berkley and Los Angeles 1978), 1212–1215.

trade monopoly. The producer city derived its name from the presence of developed industry that was its economic basis. Their consumers were consisted of the large entrepreneurs and labour force, with the merchants and landed property also being involved in the whole system. Lastly, the merchant cities based their wealth on the income that came either through retailing of the foreign goods in the local market, or through the sale of domestic products and resale of the foreign goods abroad. Weber argued that actual urban settlements were mixtures of all the aforementioned types and that they could be classified only by a predominant type.¹⁴

Another conception of the notion of a city introduced by Weber was a political one, in which he recognized the existence of the *city-commune* as a form of organization that existed only in the European West. According to him, this type of a city was relatively non-agricultural in his nature, it had a fortification, market, and its own court with the relatively autonomous law that would result with a certain level of the autonomy or autocephaly led by the administration the burghers.¹⁵ Weber saw burghers as a form of association of inhabitants, whose status was institutionalized, and who were all subjects to the special law which was applied only to their group, thus creating a *legally autonomous status group*.¹⁶ Not every settlement with a marketplace that had the resemblance of urbanity possessed this autounomous group of inhabitants, so for Weber the *ideal type* of the Western Medieval city was a combination of the aforementioned economic and political aspects. This type of settlement was present also in early modern Europe and it lasted until the emergence of the modern state and its efforts for centralization.

The problem of defining what was an ideal type of a city was approached from another point of view in the work of Jan de Vries, who wanted to switch the focus of the research from the individual cases to the analysis of the urbanization process and the creation of the urban system in Europe, from 1500-1800. In an effort to define a *post-medieval, pre-industrial city*, de Vries stated that a city in this time period was neither a *non- feudal island in feudal sea*, nor the *centre of technological change, social modernization and proletarianization*, as it was mostly the case in the Nineteenth century. The city of early modern Europe for him was an historical object that should be separately analysed, and not only as a continuation of a medieval town that prepared the setting for the emergence of the industrial type of city.¹⁷ To better measure the urbanization levels

¹⁴ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1215–1217.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 1226.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 1240,

¹⁷ Jan de Vries, *European urbanization 1500–1800*, 8.

of society, de Vries identified demographical, behavioural and structural types of urbanization. First refers to the concentration of population in an urban settlement and its growth in relation to the population in the rural hinterland, from where immigration also arrives. Second type considered the urban way of life and its impact on the society as a whole. In Early modern Europe, cities promoted urban way of life on the rural areas, thus making them appear urbanized to certain extent. On the other hand, in early modern Europe the towns were heavily influenced by rural areas and their way of life, not the other way around, so they were required first to urbanize themselves, and then the others. The structural urbanization, refers to the concentration of activities in the urban area, which was not similar to the concentration of population. In general, it shows a growth in the number of the urban functions that were attracting people to towns, resulting with the gradual change of a rural settlement into an urban one. These *changes in society associated with the development of large-scale, coordinated activities*, as de Vries defined them, were the creation of the centralized state, the conduct of religion with an organized priesthood, the control over the drainage system, the production of goods in the factory system, and the stimulation of exchange through the pervasive market. All the aforementioned were managed by the people holding the social positions created to control these large-scale activities (e.g. bishops, merchants, bankers, governors and others). These representatives also required the communication lines that would allow them to do their tasks, and a type of social relationship that would not be based upon kinship, locality or traditional alliances.¹⁸ Jan de Vries, relying on these three types of urbanization, presented several quantifiable categories of an urban settlement and they were the population size and density of settlement, the share of non-agricultural occupations and the diversity of non-agricultural occupations. The judgment if a settlement fulfils some of these categories, like the threshold of the population size or the percentage of the non-agricultural workers remained arbitrary, but de Vries stated that there was a general view that a settlement must show the presence of all four of them on a certain level, in order for it to be classified as urban.¹⁹

For the contemporaries, one of the most perceivable features of a town was the existence of walls, due to the fact that they made urban area visibly separated from the countryside, and also that it was an evidence of its status and political autonomy, of the township itself. Their importance was emphasized in the definition of a *ville* in *Dictionnaire universel*, written by Antoine Furetière

¹⁸ Jan de Vries, *European urbanization 1500–1800*, 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 10–11, 22.

in 1690. According to him, towns were basically the places of habitation for the great number of people, and it was usually surrounded by walls.²⁰ In *Encyclopédie* published by Diderot and D'Alembert, towns were consisted of the assembly of houses, arranged streets, public squares and other buildings, which were all enclosed with ditches or walls.²¹ Under the term *Villes libres ou Villes Impériales*, it was stated that in Germany (i.e. the Holy Roman Empire) a town was a type of an urban settlement that was not under the direct control of the princely power, and was instead governed, like republics, by their own magistrates.²²

On the other hand, Fernand Braudel stated that this emphasis on the importance of the walls was not entirely valid, because there were many prosperous towns that possessed none of them. In the same time, there were walled settlements that could not be titled as towns even by their contemporaries, due to the fact that they showed very few other urban functions. Many villages in early modern France were walled, as it was shown in the examples of settlements around Narbonne, or villages Ginestas and Rouvray.²³ Braudel suggested that we should look past the walls of a settlement and its total population, and that instead we should look for more obvious characteristic of a town – its ability to concentrate activities of the inhabitants in *as confined area as possible*. The people living together in the crowded area made an impact on the imagery and the spatial planning of their settlement, thus making the streets narrower and the buildings taller, all because of the lack of space that was in the most cases restricted by walls. Even when there was a gradual removal of the walls from the settlements in France in the Eighteenth century, the people continued to concentrate their urban habits in a confined area.²⁴

In spite of this convincing dispute of the relative importance of walls for defining a settlement as urban or not, from the scholarly point of view we cannot deny the fact that contemporaries saw their importance. Gábor Czoch, in the study of city Košice (Hungarian: Kassa), analysed the depiction of city by an engineer Anton Svajcer made around 1780, where it was evident that the dominant features of an urban settlement were the main square, the main street with attached side

²⁰ Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel contenant généralement tous les mots françois, tant vieux que modernes, et les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts* (Chez Arnout et Reinier Leers, Haye et Rotterdam, 1727), s.v. „ville“

²¹ Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Briasson, Paris 1765), tome dix-septième, s.v. „Villes“.

²² *Ibid*, s.v. „Villes libres ou Villes Impériales“.

²³ Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France, vol. 1, History and Environment*, translated by Siân Reynolds, (Harper and Row – New York 1988), 179–180.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 180–181.

streets, the churches, the towers and houses crowded one against another, all enclosed by walls.²⁵ The importance of the walls was such that for a long period of time the part of the city outside of them was not recognized as its integral part.²⁶ The right to build walls was, in fact, visible affirmation of town's legal status and its separation from the rural hinterland, to create urban commune. Regarding the case of an urban settlement which is in the focus of this work, when Sombor became a free royal town in 1749, in the article 10 of the liberation charter the inhabitants were permitted to enclose their settlement with ditches and, if necessary, with walls, if the collective security required such actions. It was emphasized that this right was modelled by other free royal towns in Hungary.²⁷ There are no records preserved that showed intentions for building walls, mostly because of the topographical and safety reasons. Nevertheless, there were trenches that were intertwined with the river Mostonga that later became four streets, called *laurels*, and enclosed the town's centre. It is disputable if these trenches were created after 1749, or they were the remaining structure that was left from the period when Sombor was a military settlement (Latin: *oppidum militare*).²⁸

The existence of the walls, therefore, was a sign of the political autonomy and the legal status of an urban settlement. Still, there is an ambivalence in urban theory among the scholars about whether towns should be regarded as urban due to their legal status, or the function they played. The exclusion of the latter would open the question of defining plethora of settlements that did not possessed legal privileges, yet they manifested several other urban characteristics. In general, throughout the history a group of the inhabitants of various towns shared common rights, which made them distinctive from the inhabitants of the countryside. Their particularity was defined by a certain legal status that was acquired either by the inhabitants themselves through their struggles for autonomy, or were given to a settlement by the sovereign.²⁹

²⁵ Gábor Czoch, *The Transformation of Urban Space in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century in Hungary and in the City of Kassa*, in: *Hungarian Historical Review* 1, no. 1–2 (2012), 111.

²⁶ Gábor Czoch, *The Transformation of Urban Space*, 112.

²⁷ *Povelya slobodnog i kraljevskog grada Sombora [Charter of Free and Royal Town of Sombor]*. Edited by Milan Stepanovity, Sombor, 2008. 62.

²⁸ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor (1749–1848) [Free royal town of Sombor (1749 – 1848)]*, Sombor, 2000, 85–86.

²⁹ Paul Meuriot, *Du concept de ville d'autrefois et aujourd'hui*, in: *Villes et civilisation urbaine XVIIIe – XXe Siecle*, ed. Marcel Roncayolo and Thierry Paquot, (Larousse – Paris 1992), 22.

Christopher Friedrichs made a basic distinction between villages, based on their agricultural production, and cities and towns, based on commerce, trade and non-perishable goods. Among the rights and privileges that defined their status as a free community within the existing feudal system were those that permitted them to hold fairs and markets, build defensive walls, and to administer local finances.³⁰ Towns were, according to Weber, often created around the markets that were approved by the seigneurial or princely power. In some of the cases, this approval came directly from the *oikos* or residence of political power (e.g. household of prince or nobility), usually as a confirmation of the actual state of things, where group of the people, usually the merchants, created a settlement. In other cases, it was the governing power that created a settlement itself, by giving the liberation charters to the settlers, in areas where the necessity for strengthening the trade and economic activity existed. This was the case mainly in Eastern Europe, where towns were intentionally created, by the *reform rulers*, if the terminology of Jenő Szűcs is applied.³¹

Quantity of free royal towns in the Eighteenth century Hungary was intentionally increased by the Habsburgs, resulting with a number of settlements that gained legal status of towns. In the period 1700 – 1787 the total number of free royal towns was raised from 44 to 61.³² Hungarian historian Éva Balázs argued that this increase was a part of policy of Vienna, because of the political and economic reasons. On the one hand, increasing the quantity of the towns that had a right to vote in the Hungarian Diet would potentially undermine political strength of the clergy and the nobility. On the other, through the system of royal towns the State wanted to improve the economy and trade of the selected regions, but this endeavour eventually failed due to the lack of interest coming from the municipal leaders.³³

³⁰ Christopher Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, xiii.

³¹ M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1214; J. Szűcs, *The Three Historical Regions of Europe*, in: *Acta Historica Academia Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29 (2–4), pp. 131–184 (1983).

³² Balázs A. Szelényi, *The Failure of Central European Bourgeoisie*, 84.

³³ Éva H. Balázs, *Hungary and the Habsburgs 1765–1800* (CEU University Press – Budapest 1997), 124–125.

The urbanization rate and patterns in the Kingdom of Hungary

The question of the urbanization rate in the Kingdom of Hungary could be observed differently based on the fact which type of the settlement is regarded as urban. First type that started to appear since the beginning of urbanization in Middle Ages were called *civitates*, and they possessed the rights for the industrial-commercial activities based on the special privileges given to them by their sovereign. Therefore, they were also referred as *free royal cities*, due to the fact that their freedom resided in their autonomous rights, guaranteed by their liberation charter. However, since the Fifteenth century a new type of a settlement emerged called *oppida* (Hungarian: *mezőváros*), and it claimed the dominant role among the settlements in Hungary. This *oppida* as a term referred to a various range of settlements, stretching from those that were large and with distinctive autonomies, to the small villages that possessed rights to hold markets. Finally, all of them were in seigneurial dependency to a certain extent. Therefore, these “market towns” were regarded by some historians as a transitional phase between villages and towns, based on the view that saw their legal status as a defining category. Another group of urban historians regarded these settlements as a unique type of town that relied on the agricultural production, such as viticulture and husbandry, and were oriented towards the markets that were in need of these type of products. Additionally, there was also a certain level of craft industry present, which was a sign of their urban nature. Vera Bácskai represents the group of scholars who saw certain central roles of settlements as predominant factors in defining them as urban, or at least as locations where these types of central functions were exercised.³⁴

In late Middle Ages, just before the Ottoman conquest, the Kingdom of Hungary had between 30 and 35 free royal cities and between 800 and 850 oppidas. Among them, just the population of Buda reached around 10,000 and there were only another six or seven cities with population around 5.000 inhabitants, none of them belonging to the group of settlements classified as *oppida*. Regarding Bácskai’s definition of a town, which would be more thoroughly explained later, of all the aforementioned settlements just between 50 and 60 of them possessed necessary urban

³⁴ Vera Bácskai, *Small Towns in Eastern Central Europe*, in: *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Peter Clark, (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, UK 1996), 78–79.

functions. At the time around 90% of towns in the entire urban system of Hungary were regarded as small, which corresponded with the trends in the other parts of East-Central Europe.³⁵

The urbanization processes were affected by the Ottoman conquests in Sixteenth century and the country was divided in three different political subjects that were royal Hungary under Habsburg control, Transylvania and an area under the Ottoman rule. With this division of territory, the political and economic coherence were lost, and also the largest city, Buda, also fell in the conquerors hands. Still, the most urbanized area in the north and west of Hungary remained formally recognized as the Kingdom under the Habsburg rule, with emerging cities like Kassa, Soprony, Nagyszombat and Pozsony that became new economic and administrative centres.³⁶

When it comes to the question of free royal cities, in the following centuries their number did not change significantly, reaching only 65 in the beginning of Nineteenth century with the number of oppidas that remained unaltered, at 850. The number of liberation charters given during the Eighteenth century was nine, out of which seven were in the territory of Upper Hungary. Majority of these free royal cities came from the former oppida background, and their elevation to new status was often hindered by the feudal lords who did not want to lose them as sources of income. Even though a number of smaller settlements that belonged to the category of oppida vanished during the Ottoman occupation, up to two thirds of them could trace their origin back to Middle Ages. Since Seventeenth century the Hungarian Diet was the one that held the right to approve liberation of a settlement and they often delayed this process for decades.³⁷ Gábor Czoch in his work presented the tables that suggested this incomparable growth in the number of the settlements regarding their legal status, with the application of the threshold of 10,000 inhabitants. Whilst the number of free royal cities rose from sixteen to twenty-one in the period between the censuses of 1784-7 and 1851, the number of the market towns in the same period rose dramatically from five to thirty-one. Regarding the distribution of free royal cities in relation to different population thresholds, and aside from the aforementioned growth of those that had above 10,000 inhabitants, at the same time there was an increase in the number of cities that had between 5-10,000 inhabitants from sixteen to twenty-five settlements. Meanwhile, the number of free royal cities with less than 5.000 inhabitants fell drastically from twenty-nine to fifteen.³⁸ The reasons for these discrepancies

³⁵Vera Bácskai, *Small Towns in Eastern Central Europe*, 80.

³⁶Jaroslav Miller, *Urban Societies in East – Central Europe 1500 – 1700*, 21.

³⁷Vera Bácskai, *Small Towns in Eastern Central Europe*, 80–81.

³⁸Gábor Czoch, *The question of Urban Citizens' National Identity*, 123.

rest in the changes that the Kingdom of Hungary experienced in the early modern period. Due to the political and economic shifts, such as the decline of the long-distance trade with the Holy Roman Empire and the decrease of bullion-mining in the Carpathian Mountains, both characteristic for medieval cities, new factors that defined urban development emerged for the Hungarian cities. The placement of cereals and other agricultural goods to the markets on the Habsburg controlled lands also determined the progress and development of a settlement, regardless of its legal status. The settlements in Hungarian Plain that relied on the large-scale corn production experienced a rapid development, and they were mostly just market towns.³⁹

The appearance of large agrarian towns in the vast Hungarian Plain made the image of urbanization in Hungary specific. These towns emerged from settlements that possessed well-organized system of cattle-breeding and trade, which was later gradually replaced with corn production that allowed these settlements to easier transfer their goods to the distant markets. Bácskai rightfully emphasized the importance of vast space that had its origin in wars fought in Seventeenth and Eighteenth century. The agrarian towns used the space, characterized by low population density, to transform them into pastures and meadows. The social stratification was on a very low level and these towns remained predominantly agricultural, even though they showed certain aspects of urbanity. The level of crafts and trade was such that it was sufficient to supply the needs of the inhabitants of just one settlement. Still, the concentration of population eventually resulted with the progress of trade and development of the administrative and educational institutions that were features of an urban settlement. Even though they possessed some urban qualities, Bácskai argued that they lacked central functions and were difficult to differ by size (i.e. to large, middle or small urban settlement).⁴⁰

The case of Sombor fell mostly in the category of agrarian town, and definition of their type, along the other aforementioned types of settlements were necessary in this work. Paraphrasing Paul Hohenberg and Lynn Lees, in order to better understand the importance of studying history of urban settlements, one must understand that they cannot be excluded from their background. Therefore, there is an unavoidable connection with the political, social and economic systems prevailing in the observed territory and time.⁴¹

³⁹ Vera Bácskai, *Small Towns in Eastern Central Europe*, 126.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 86.

⁴¹ Paul Hohenberg and Lynn H. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000–1994*, 2.

In the beginning of Nineteenth century, about one third of the total urban dwellers in East-Central Europe lived in small towns, which was similar to patterns evident in other parts of Europe, excluding its most industrialized parts. Until the Nineteenth century this ratio did not alter significantly, but since 1800s it started to change in the Kingdom of Hungary, because of the population growth. By the half of the Nineteenth century proportion of the inhabitants living in small towns in the aforementioned territory fell below 10%, in contrast to the total urban population. The agricultural base of production and trade, and not industrialized one, was the crucial precondition which led to the rise of the population in settlements and, consequently, to higher quantity of large towns.⁴²

In a more thorough analysis of the urbanization rate, statistician Gusztáv Thirring estimated that at its height during the reign of Emperor Joseph II (1780-1790), it was around 6,4%, only to rise to 6,6% in the time of census 1850-1. The main flaw of his calculations was that he counted just free royal cities, without market towns.⁴³ On the other hand, historian Zoltán Dávid observed both type of settlements, with the threshold of the population set to 2,000 inhabitants, resulting with the increase of the total number of analysed objects and set the urbanization rate, in the time of Emperor Joseph II, to around 21%. After revising the number of the total settlements and excluding those that did not met his new criteria of urbanity, Dávid arrived to the different conclusion, setting the ratio to around 14,3%.⁴⁴ In conclusion, we can estimate that the total urbanization rate for the Kingdom of Hungary in the 1780s was between 6 and 14%, which meant that, at the time, the progress of the country was predominantly determined by rural factors.

⁴² Vera Bácskai, *Small Towns in Eastern Central Europe*, 85.

⁴³ Gusztáv Thirring, *Magyarország népessége II. József korában* [The population of Hungary in the age of Joseph II]. Budapest, 1938. 82–88.

⁴⁴ Zoltán Dávid: A városi népesség nagysága Magyarországon 1785–ben és 1828–ban. *Történeti Statisztikai Közlemények* 1963–1964. 110–127.

The centre role of an urban settlement

Because of the already emphasized difficulty to define a settlement as urban just by following the legal definitions, several scholars made different definitions of towns, with the emphasis on their urban functions. Consequently, the theory of *central place* emerged, which observed the town as hierarchically highest settlement that supplied its surroundings with special services, administrative, economic and cultural one.⁴⁵ The contemplation about these services and the way they operated in the end produced the theory of central functions, thus titling the entire approach as *functionalist*. In short, *functionalist approach* sees town as the gathering place of series of the central functions.⁴⁶ Brian Berry in his study *Cities as system within system of cities* developed a complex equation where he introduced different variables that through interdependency led to creation of the central place. This variables included populations of the potential central place and that of the area under its influence, their population density, the area and level of trade, and finally a number of the central functions exercised.⁴⁷

Regarding the importance of centrality theory for this research work, it is prudent to present the definitions offered by Hungarian scholars. Based on this aforementioned approach, Hungarian sociologist Ferenc Erdei was the one who recognized the specific urban natures of agrarian towns in Great Hungarian Plain, thus avoiding Western approaches in the construction of a definition of urbanization. He concluded that the dominance of agricultural production did not exclude the urban nature of particular settlement. Historian Sándor Gyimesi used Erdei's theory and tried to define what is the *central role* of settlement. He emphasized the importance of internal characteristics of the settlements, and argued that in order to better understand them, we must observe the size of population, the proportion of artisans, and the presence of administrative and cultural institutions. Further evolution of the Hungarian urban theory required abandoning of the "urban-centric" approach, and instead applying the one developed by Lajos Nagy and Vera Bácskai. Their method was consisted of observing and studying of towns and their areas in the same time. Aforementioned authors also started their work with the functionalist definition, and

⁴⁵ Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn H. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000–1994*, 4.

⁴⁶ Vera Bácskai, *Towns and Urban Society in Early Nineteenth-Century Hungary*, (Akadémiai Kiadó – Budapest 1989), 12.

⁴⁷ Brian J. L. Berry, *Cities as Systems within Systems of Cities*, in: *Papers in Regional Science*, vol. 13, issue 1, 152.

decided to put the emphasis on the importance of the central market function. They concluded that this type of the centre function was present when a market place had regular and intensive economic relation with its area of attraction, and that the requirements and services of the centre influenced the production, the needs and the living conditions of the population in the town's area. The settlements whose market places would fulfil these qualifications were labelled as market centres. Regarding the territory that was under attraction of these settlements, Bácskai defined the *pure areas of attraction*, which were the spaces of attraction that were not affected by any other market centre, and *mixed areas*, where several layers of attraction of different market places could be detected.⁴⁸ Therefore, every settlement that had the pure area of attraction possessed urban characteristics, following the aforementioned constructs.

Vera Bácskai revised the urban roles of each settlement in Hungary, with and without legal status of town that existed in the first decades of the Nineteenth century and concluded that there were just fifty-seven market centres. Out of this sum just twenty-two had the privileges of free royal town.⁴⁹ Therefore, from the total number of forty-eight towns with the royal charter more than half did not fulfil prerequisites for an urban settlement set by Bácskai.⁵⁰ The market centres in Bács–Bodrog County were, according to Zoltán Györe who himself relied on Bácskai's approach, Senta, Novi Sad, Sombor and Kula, and they all shared the common characteristics of a medium sized pure areas of attraction, with almost insignificant mixed areas. The town of Sombor, with a population of 17.534 inhabitants in 1828, had pure area of attraction of almost 70.000 people and less than 1.000 of them living in mixed area. Still, Sombor was behind Novi Sad, which steadily grew to become a regional centre mostly because of its position on the river Danube and the role that played in grain trade in the whole Kingdom of Hungary. The obstacle for the achieving similar or greater status for Sombor was the closeness of Baja, a settlement with the strong attraction pull and also with the good position on the river Danube that provided it with benefits in the long distance trade.⁵¹ However, based on the data from the table shown in the Gábor Czoch's *The Question of Urban Citizens National Identity*, Sombor was ranked high in the seventh place, above Novi Sad, as a primary commercial centre, among twenty-two the most important

⁴⁸ Vera Bácskai, *Towns and Urban Society in Early Nineteenth-Century Hungary*, 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 18.

⁵⁰ Gábor Czoch, *The question of Urban Citizens' National Identity in Mid-Nineteenth Century Hungary*, in: *East Central Europe/L'Europe du Centre-Est: Eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, vol. 33. 2006. (2007) 1–2. 124.

⁵¹ Zoltán Györe, *Gradovi i varoshi Bachke pochetkom XIX veka [Cities and Boroughs of Backa in the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century]*, Novi Sad, 2007, 163–164.

settlements in the Kingdom of Hungary, excluding Transylvania and Croatia. In terms of the ranking done by the population size, Sombor was on the 14th place among all settlements, regardless of their legal status.⁵²

In the early modern Europe, until the French revolution, cities were ideally regarded as the birthplace of the bourgeoisie, a leading force of changes that gradually came into political life. In reality, majority of the towns were inseparable from their rural surroundings. Braudel argued that, in fact, there was a very thin line between small towns and boroughs, a type of settlement usually seen as transitional form between village and town, both being deeply intertwined with their hinterland and its agricultural production. The majority of inhabitants of these settlements, therefore, originated from this type of background, making the total percentage of the population of artisans and merchants relatively small in comparison.⁵³

The urban settlements were, as previously stated, connected with the agricultural production, in some cases even to that extent that the title of *agrarian cities* was coined, where broad stratum of citizens satisfied their own food needs from landed property they possessed within and outside the city walls. Throughout history, obtaining and holding part of the land was often a prerequisite for citizenship. In theory, with the growth of cities and its population, the number of citizens would decrease, because of the lack of the uninhabited and free land.⁵⁴ Whether the town had lower or higher percentage of landowning citizens, the land was often amassed in the hands of the privileged few, who started to create a form of the landowning ruling elite. Paul Bairoch argued that in the preindustrial societies urban settlements heavily relied on the agricultural productivity of the rural hinterland, due to the fact that the population growth and the stability in the town were under heavy influence of potential food surplus. In order to maintain the necessary level of food supply, Bairoch stated that around 70–75% of the entire population had to be included in the production, leaving the rest within the non-agricultural sector. This rule applied even to the most technologically advanced societies, in terms of agricultural production.⁵⁵ When it comes to an urban settlement itself, he estimated the number of people that were predominantly involved in the agriculture to be

⁵² The table shows, as Gábor Czoch stated, that there was a discontinuity between the function of a settlement and its legal classification, and furthermore, the size of a settlement (e.g. Debrecen, the second most densely populated, but 21st ranked settlement by function) did not mean that it would hold significant influence on its surroundings. See Gábor Czoch, *The question of Urban Citizens' National Identity*, 124–125.

⁵³ Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France*, 179.

⁵⁴ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1217 – 1218.

⁵⁵ Paul Bairoch, *Urbanization and the Economy in Preindustrial Societies: the Findings of Two Decades*, in: *Journal of European Economic History*, 18 (1989), 267.

between 5–20%, with the ratio increasing while moving towards the Eastern Europe. This strata of population was not to be mistaken with peasantry and especially with serfs, because they were usually freemen. Therefore, this *agricultural workers*, as they were called, obtained a good general position, because they were near the market and had better chance to sell their own products.⁵⁶ On the other hand, in the rural areas there was also a number of artisans present, and their percentage in the population of the village was several times higher than those of agricultural workers in the towns, with the lower level of wealth and productivity when we compare them to the urban artisans.⁵⁷ Another important aspect of urban–rural interdependency was a demographic one. The mortality rate for the infants was 60% and for adults 20% percent higher in the towns in comparison to villages. With limited food surplus as source of limitation of the urban population growth and stability, mortality rate made significant factor also, leading to the necessary migrations of rural inhabitants to the towns.⁵⁸

Regarding the geographical position of towns, Braudel argued that they needed to be close to roads or crossroads, to be more viable for trade. Furthermore, the ideal image of town would have set of boroughs in his area, under its influence, and also number of villages dependent on boroughs, thus making a complex geometrical construction. Around each town existed a supply zone, necessary for acquisition of perishable food and materials, which led Braudel, who here relied on the model developed over a century earlier by Johann Heinrich von Thünen in his *Der Isolierte Staat* (1826), to define these areas as circles. Ideally, in these zones there would exist markets and even small towns as intermediaries.⁵⁹

Aside from their economic role, towns also served as the centres of political, administrative, religious and cultural actions. Throughout Medieval period in France, for example, towns fought for the autonomy from the seigniorial or royal power, thus gaining the rights to rule over the people living in the borders under their control. The episcopal or university seat, existence of charter – either would make a town likely to exhibit autonomous actions or impose its laws on its inhabitants.⁶⁰ However, with the emergence of modern nation states, towns step by step lost their autonomy due to the existing centralization efforts, but also because the system that justified their

⁵⁶ Living in the vicinity of the market was essential for the perishable goods such as dairy products. See: Paul Bairoch, *Urbanization and the Economy in Preindustrial Societies*, 263–4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 266.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 261–262.

⁵⁹ Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France*, 182–183.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 183.

existence gradually vanished. Consequently, prerogatives of power that towns exercised on its inhabitants were transferred to the national state.⁶¹ The similar processes can be observed in East-Central Europe. Regarding the town's cultural activity as one of the main aspects of central place theory, Paul Hohenberg and Lynn Lees discussed its impact on the rural hinterland. Comparable to the economic and administrative control, towns also functioned as places of cultural transformation.⁶²

The central role of Sombor would be analysed separately in this work, but for now, it is prudent to show how contemporaries viewed towns in Bács–Bodrog County in the second half of Eighteenth century, in order to validate the previous theoretical settings. When referring to Sombor in 1757, the Supreme Count of Bács–Bodrog County stated that there was, in fact, nothing royal or urban in the character of this town, and that he would place it not just behind other free royal towns, but also behind some other smaller settlements.⁶³ While discussing the future centre of the County, Count Ferenc Klobusicky stated in 1765 that this settlement was closer to ruin than to prosperity, and that it was not suitable for the nobility, the county officials and the municipal members to live in.⁶⁴ Vice – count Lipkay argued in 1779 that Sombor would never reach the level of other free royal towns unless it followed their examples, thus alluding to the very low level of the operative capabilities of town's administration.⁶⁵

In order to prove the fact that Sombor was not isolated case when it comes to its lack of urban qualities, we also have to take the example of another town in its region, Subotica. During the work of the Diet of 1790–1, the members of the nobility from Bács–Bodrog County voiced their discontent because of the recent elevation of the legal status of Subotica, which became free royal town in 1779. They stated that there were no ornate houses or other buildings necessary for the settlement to gain an image of urban resemblance. Furthermore, there were no true burghers, which they considered to be a noble-like strata of population, but instead the inhabitants of Subotica were crude and uncivilized.⁶⁶ It is evident that all of this remarks came from the position of Hungarian County nobility and officials, who were opposed to the autonomy of the free royal towns since

⁶¹ Heinz Paetzold, *The Philosophical Notion of the City*, in: *The City Cultures Reader*, ed. by M.Miles, Tomas Hall and I. Borden, (Routledge, London and NY 2000). 212.

⁶² Paul Hohenberg and Lynn H. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000–1994*, 5 – 6.

⁶³ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 85.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 104.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 106–107.

⁶⁶ Gábor Vermes, *Hungarian Culture and Politics in the Habsburg Monarchy 1711–1848*, (CEU University Press – Budapest 2014), 25.

their beginnings. Still, the evidence that these accusations were not that far from the truth was presented in the answer of the Magistrate of Sombor, given to the vice-count Lipkay in 1779, where they found excuses for the poor material state of the town in its lack of income, in comparison to other towns, arguing that there would be no progress without more powerful economy that was at that time heavily hindered by the negative weather conditions.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 107.

II

THE EMPEROR FRANCIS CANAL AND THE FREE ROYAL TOWN OF SOMBOR – AN OVERVIEW OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT

Sombor, the free royal town in the second half of the Eighteenth and the beginning of the Nineteenth century

Even though Sombor existed as a settlement in Fifteenth and Sixteenth century, it gained more significant role during the Great War 1683-1699 between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empire. In that conflict, Serbian and Bunjevac ethnic groups cooperated together with the Habsburg army, taking part in the battles that were held in that region, with the most notable one, Battle of Senta (Hungarian: Zenta), which occurred in 1691. After the war, Sombor, together with the nearby Subotica (Hungarian: Szabadka) became a part of the newly created Tisa (Hungarian: Tisza) Military Border in 1702, with the rank of a *capetanate*, the type of settlement with special rights provided to its inhabitants, who were in return obliged to a military service in the Habsburg army.⁶⁸

The first decades of the Eighteenth century were again characterized by wars with the Ottoman Empire, which took place from 1714-1718 and 1737-1739. During the first of these war campaigns, Sombor was elevated to the status of *Military borough* (Latin: oppidum militare) in 1717, with its own seal and higher autonomy status. In the same time, after the Treaty of Pozarevac (German and Latin: Passarowitz) in 1718, the borderline between the two opposed Empires shifted significantly to the south, which in return relativized the very existence of Tisa Border, and spur up voices for its dissolution. The nobility of the renewed Kingdom of Hungary desired for the abolition of the entire system of borders in the south of the country and for restitution of the system of the counties, where they played a decisive role.⁶⁹ This requests were recognized during the rule of Empress Maria Theresa and Tisa Border, alongside with one on the river Mureş (Hungarian: Maros), was abolished in 1745. The reason for these changes in the Court policies derived from the political situation and position of the monarch, the Empress herself, during the War of the

⁶⁸ Slavko, Gavrilovity, *Sombor – Granicharski shanatz (1687–1745)*, [Sombor – Border Settlement (1687–1745)], Zbornik Matice Srpske za istoriyu, 1992, 14–15, 18–19.

⁶⁹ Slavko, Gavrilovity, *Sombor – Granicharski shanatz*, 27 – 29.

Austrian Succession (1740–1748), when she requested for the help of Hungarian nobility in 1741 and in return promised renewal of the counties in the place of the former Military Border.⁷⁰

From 1745–1749 Sombor was technically a part of Bács–Bodrog County, but in the reality it was under the control of the State or, more precisely, the Hungarian Treasury. The reason for this delayed inclusion in the county system was the discontent of the inhabitants of Sombor with a potential decrease of their rights and their subjugation to the system of serfdom, where they would be under the rule of nobility. In order to avoid this outcome, the inhabitants of former military settlement made a plea to the Empress for the buyout of the status of free royal town, which would exclude them from feudal rule and give them desired autonomous rights. There were several reasons why this status was eventually given to them, regardless of the fact that the process ended four years later, in 1749. First of all, the Court did not want to endanger this strategically important part of the country with the potential emigration of its inhabitants and depopulation of the already scarcely populated land. Although the abolition of Military Border happened in the broader region and the border between two opposing empires was set on the rivers Danube and Sava in the south that did not mean that the Court would simply endanger its fragile parts of recently acquired territory. Furthermore, depopulation meant lower tax income for the Court, which undermined strivings for the creation of modern centralized state. Second, the prevailing mercantilist politic of the Habsburgs, common for that time, saw rising of number of the towns as a measure for economic improvement of the backward regions reconquered in the previous wars. By simply increasing the number of urban settlements that had their own market privileges and potentially the substantial population of artisans and merchants, the economy would be revived and the State would again increase its revenue. Lastly, the sum of 150.000 florins required for the buyout of the royal charter was desperately sought after by the Treasury, which was emptied by numerous war campaigns.⁷¹ All in all, Sombor became free royal town and started new era in its development.

It is important to emphasize some of the key aspects in the development of Sombor in the second half of the Eighteenth century, to get better a understanding of the processes that took place in the first decades of the Nineteenth century. Because of war, the entire southern part of Kingdom of Hungary was characterized by the low level of density of population. In Sombor, in the middle

⁷⁰ Slavko, Gavrilovity, *Sombor – Granicharski shanatz*, 44.

⁷¹ Slavko, Gavrilovity, *Sombor u borbi za elibertatziyu 1745–1749*, [*Sombor in Struggle for the Elibertation 1745–1749*], *Zbornik Matice Srpske za istoriyu*, 37,1988, 44, 77.

of Eighteenth century, less than three inhabitants per square kilometre lived on the town's territory, which is a fact that is hard to comprehend today, and this number increased to around eleven at the time of the Josephine census of 1786.⁷² The population of free royal town in the beginning was around 4.000 inhabitants, and it grew steadily to just over 13.000 in the 1786. The main reason for this rapid population increase was constantly high level of immigration.⁷³

The low density of population, along with several other important factors, influenced the way of production of inhabitants. Before the liberation in 1749 Sombor controlled twenty-six *puszta*s, which was a type of deserted land used mainly for the extensive cattle breeding. In the royal charter this number was cut down to eleven, thus significantly reducing area under direct control of the town to around 1,178 square kilometres. Nevertheless, the old way of production was continued and in general, percentage of the cultivated land was very low, in comparison to the total size of the arable land. The intention of the State was to increase this ratio, because of the fact that inhabitants that were more engaged in the land cultivation were more easily taxed. Over the course of the next five decades, the percentage of the cultivated land increased from around 2% in 1747, to around 8% in 1782.⁷⁴ Another important fact was that just 20% percent of the total town territory was arable, thus suitable for cultivation. Furthermore, due to the backward technology and system of land cultivation, just one third of this percentage of the land was planted with crops, leaving the rest lying fallow.⁷⁵

In order for the inhabitants to fully utilize arable land in the town's area they had to work on the land drainage. A substantial portion of the territory of Sombor was marshland, due to the occasional flooding of the river Mostonga and the high level of underground water. The Mostonga also ran through the town's centre, so when rains fell or snow melted the entire areas of town were flooded.⁷⁶ Even though the drainage of the town's territory was planned for decades, not many things were actually done. It was the excavation of the Emperor Francis Canal in 1802 that spur up draining process and tamed the stream of Mostonga, also reducing the underground water levels and improving the quality of the arable land in certain sections of town's territory.⁷⁷

⁷² Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 40–41, 47; HAS FMS 33/746.

⁷³ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 46–47; HAS FMS 33/746.

⁷⁴ HAS FMS 33/746; HAS AA 178/782; Антал Хегедиш, Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 40.

⁷⁵ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 40.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 85–86.

⁷⁷ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 43.

There were several central roles at display when the position of Sombor was observed in relation to its surroundings, and they were first noted by Antal Hegedüs in his work dedicated to the history of the free royal town in the period 1749-1848. First, Sombor became the seat of Bács–Bodrog County in 1786, during the visit of the Emperor Joseph II, when it was chosen ahead of the other settlements, such as Baja, to be permanent residence for the County officials. Even though the representatives of the County were against this appointment of Sombor, the decision was made mainly because of its central geographical position in the region. The presence of the County officials, and among them a number of educated people, in general positively influenced the overall progress of the town, but it also created conflicts with the town's administration.⁷⁸ Second important institution residing in Sombor was Hungarian Treasury that was in charge of economic and judicial affairs of the inhabitants living under its rule in Bács–Bodrog County, which in the second half of Eighteenth century totalled to around 220.000 people, or about the half of the entire population living there. This administration was also in charge of the colonization in the aforementioned region, when a large number of Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians and Slovaks came there during the second half of Eighteenth century. The presence of the County and State officials meant the higher concentration of educated people and gradual alteration of the ethnic composition of the town itself, as Hegedüs noticed.⁷⁹ Sombor did not become the episcopal centre for either of the Christian confessions, Orthodox or Roman Catholic. First one had its residence in Sombor before the Eighteenth century, but not after 1749, and town was under the rule of the episcopo in Sremski Karlovci. On the other hand, the closeness of archbishop of Kalocsa also hindered the possibility of Sombor to become the centre of Roman Catholic system of episcopacy.⁸⁰ Therefore, this was the main reason why Sombor was not a *city* but a *town*.

⁷⁸ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 103–105.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 108.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 109.

The prelude to building of the Emperor Francis Canal

The drainage system in the region of what was going to become Bács–Bodrog County existed in the Pre-Ottoman period, when the higher density of population and their collective endeavours regulated the level of the redundant water and marshland areas. During the Ottoman rule and after its reconquering by the Habsburgs in the end of the Seventeenth century, this region was left without any care, and unapproachable marshlands found their strategic use. Over 30% of the County suffered from the high level of the underground waters that influenced the level of production and overall living and health condition of the inhabitants.⁸¹

In the case of Sombor, the river Mostonga constantly flooded the territory under the control of the town, including its most urbanized centre. Every year, the level of water in the Mostonga rose due to the melting of the snow or heavy rains that also triggered the rise of the underground water to the surface.⁸² In their plan regarding the construction of the Danube-Tisa canal, brothers Kiss made a couple of remarks made about the river Mostonga, which they considered for non-permanent waterway, as it was often just deep and dry valley in which rainwater and melted snow were collected.⁸³ Although this remark is generally true, it would be exaggeration to state that the river Mostonga was just dried-up valley in its section in the vicinity of Sombor, and entirely dependent on the weather conditions. It was Senator Josip Marković from Sombor who first saw the necessity for the drainage work in the town's area, and he made a plan in 1771 to clean the river Mostonga and connect it to the river Danube. Although his plan was accepted by Hungarian Regency Council, it was ignored by Bács–Bodrog County and the Magistracy of Sombor.⁸⁴ The next project that came two decades later was the plan of brothers Kiss to construct the waterway that would connect the rivers Danube and Tisa, in what was to become the Emperor Francis Canal. This endeavour opened a possibility for further excavation efforts and overall drainage of the affected territory that was under the control of Sombor or in its vicinity.

⁸¹ Mirjana Dyekity, "Bachki kanali – nasledje u funktziyi turizma" [Channels of Backa–heritage in function of tourism] PhD diss., University of Belgrade, 2014, 21.

⁸² Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 42.

⁸³ Friedrich Lötze, *Knyiga o Vrbasu*. Edited and translated by Tomislav Bekity [Book about Vrbas, translated from German original], Vrbas, 2014, 190.

⁸⁴ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 43.

József Kiss – background, education and service

In order to understand the project, construction and impact of what was to become the Emperor Francis Canal, it is necessary to explain who was person behind the entire project. Even though both of brothers Kiss were behind the idea of the Canal, it was the older one that that was leading figure in the entire project. József Kiss was born in Buda in an officer's family, which was ennobled in 1681, and it was his father János that came with his family to Apatin to Bács–Bodrog County in 1754, where he became the supervisor of the military warehouse. The aforementioned settlement, with its position on the river Danube, was a centre for the incoming German settlers, and this entire setting had a significant impact on the future profession of József Kiss.⁸⁵ He was sent by his parents, after he finished his education in engineering in 1766 in Vienna, to travel across Western Europe and gain experience, and he was later accompanied in this journey with his younger brother Gabriel. They reached England in the time after the building of their canal system, which made it possible for them to see the technics used in the construction of the new naval routes.⁸⁶

After returning from his itinerary across Europe, József was admitted into service of the Hungarian Treasury, where he worked for nearly a decade, and the data preserved reveals that he worked in the area around Pozsony, on the regulation of waterway of Danube. It is not clear when he moved back to Bács–Bodrog County, but that definitely occurred in the very end of 1770s.⁸⁷ He was appointed to the position of the Treasury engineer in Bács–Bodrog County and he also became the construction director of the Hungarian Treasury in Sombor. His main task was to create local plans of the new colonial settlements, to measure the land and to distribute ploughlands, pastures, meadows, vineyards and other arable land. Kiss, as an engineer, worked for weeks on the field conducting the aforementioned tasks, and saw that the large sections of land were marshes that significantly influenced the public health and the quality of land. Also, long and heavy seasons of rains, especially in the springtime, made additional damages to the arable land. Therefore, his

⁸⁵ Mirjana Dyekity, "Bachki kanali – nasledye u funktziyi turizma", 29; Nikola Petrovity, *Izgradnya kanala Dunav–Tisa u XVIII veku*, [Construction of the canal Danube–Tisa in XVIII century]. Zbornik za Drushtvene nauke, vol. 43, 1966, 6.

⁸⁶ Friedrich Lötzt, *Knyiga o Vrbasu*, 186.

⁸⁷ Nikola Petrovity, *Izgradnya kanala Dunav–Tisa*, 6–7.

conclusion was that a system of drainage canals was necessary for the region, in order to improve general living conditions of all the inhabitants, but also, more importantly, those of the German colonist that came and were still arriving in Bács–Bodrog County.⁸⁸

József Kiss decided to build a small drainage canal in 1785, with just 1 meter length, between the settlements Kula and Novi (German: Neu) Vrbas, in order to remove the redundant water and to extract it to the marshland area of Crna Bara. For this work he employed paid labourers, men, women and children, mostly coming from the colonizers families. This canal, more resembling to a ditch, was designed to adjust to the natural slope of the region and its water ran from the west to east. The success of this project reassured Kiss that the system of drainage was a necessity for this region, and his agenda was backed by heavy rains in 1786, when the people suffered greatly from the floods.⁸⁹

Kiss used the aforementioned success and the floods followed to build the broad canal from Sivac to Vrbas, both settlements partly inhabited by Germans, and he estimated expenses to be around 14,000 florins. The construction began in the autumn of 1786 in Novi Vrbas, where Kiss moved in order to supervise the work properly. Friedrich Lötzt, in his work about settlement of Vrbas, emphasized the importance of this canal, stating that it made a significant impact on the natural surroundings. The level of the redundant water dropped and the large areas of land were drained and made arable, which was important for the survival of German colonists.⁹⁰ After he successfully finished the Sivac–Vrbas Canal in 1787, Kiss was appointed in the following year to a post of the *Leading Treasury Engineer* (German: Dirigender Hofkammer Ingenieur), where he was in charge of the hydro–technical projects in Bács–Bodrog County.⁹¹ The idea of the canal that would connect rivers Danube and Tisa started to emerge just after completion of his last project in 1787, when he decided to conduct the measuring of the terrain between two rivers. He deduced that the difference between two river levels was around 7 m, with the Danube standing on the higher ground, and that gave him the idea to connect Monostor on the river Danube with Bačko Gradište (Hungarian: Bácsföldvár) on the river Tisa, with inclusion of the waterways of his previous canals and the waters of the marshlands of Crna Bara.⁹²

⁸⁸ Friedrich Lötzt, *Knyiga o Vrbasu*, 187.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 187–188.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 188.

⁹¹ Mirjana Dyekity, “Bachki kanali – nasledye u funktziyi turizma”, 32.

⁹² *Ibid*, 32–33.

The plan for the construction of the Canal

After the end of the war between the Habsburgs and Ottomans (1788–1791), brothers Kiss estimated that the time for their project finally came and they introduced their plan to the Hungarian Treasury, which delayed its decision, and so they went to Vienna to present it to Emperor Leopold II himself, in December of 1791. They intended to start the work as early as in spring of 1792, but it was the change on the throne and the required analysis of their plan by other experts that delayed the implementation of the project until 1793. The plan itself (see Figure 1) suffered insignificant change, with the only addition that the Canal was titled after the name of the new Emperor, Francis II, who supported the plan back in 1791, when he was still heir to the throne.⁹³ In order to validate the claims of brothers Kiss, Hungarian Treasury sent Von Froom, their chief engineer, and Stanislaw Heppel, who was a royal advisor and chief director for the construction activities, in summer of 1792 to observe the terrain that was destined for the future Canal. Both reports made after their observations validated initial plan of brother Kiss, with the notes agreeing that this project would be completed without any significant impediments.⁹⁴

The plan of brothers Kiss was consisted of nine articles, which held in them the information about their goal. The idea for the construction of the canal that would connect the rivers Danube and Tisa had its logic in the fact that the costs of transportation of goods were high at the time, mostly because of the length and the danger parts of the existing naval routes. The main good which trade would benefit from the construction of the Canal was salt, because its transportation from the Mureş County was far too expensive and dangerous. From the aforementioned region, rock salt was mined and transported by the river Tisa, with its major points in Szolnok, Szeged and Titel, and then, after switching to the river Danube, it would continue up to Pozsony, also going through Osijek, Baja and Buda. In the Kingdom of Hungary at that time, an average consumption of the salt was 1.3 million cents.⁹⁵

⁹³ Mirjana Dyekity, “Bachki kanali – nasledye u funktziyi turizma”, 32.

⁹⁴ Friedrich Lötze, *Knyiga o Vrbasu*, 191.

⁹⁵ Single cent, as a unit of measuring for weight, could be transformed to be around 100 kg.



Figure 1. Plan of the Canal made by brothers Kiss and presented to the Emperor Francis II (1792). Source: Hungarian National Archives, Maps Collection S 11 No 0668.

On average, a boat carrying 2,000 cents of salt travelled around 3–4 weeks upstream between Bačko Gradište and Monoštor, the future meeting points of the Francis Canal on the rivers Tisa and Danube, or around 10 to 14 days downstream, in the reverse way. The construction of the canal would reduce the transport time to just two days, and the naval route would be shortened for

227 km.⁹⁶ Kiss argued that on the Canal average boat could carry between 700 and 800 cents of cargo, which was 10 times more than it would be possible on the best roads, with the horsepower. The construction of the Canal would, therefore, improve the trade of goods between different regions and also connect two different areas, those of Bács–Bodrog County and Banat.⁹⁷

The idea of the plan was to build just the section between Monoštor and Novi Vrbas, and from there until the river Tisa it would be only necessary to regulate the waterway of the Crna Bara marshes. The length of the Canal was estimated to 13.5 Austrian miles, or around 102 km, and it would have 5 locks, in Monoštor, Mali Stapar, Novi Vrbas, Bačko Gradište and Bezdan.⁹⁸ The final length of the Canal was 14.5 Austrian miles or around 110 km, which made the initial estimation more or less valid.⁹⁹ In the plan it was also proposed that, after finishing the larger canal, it would be also necessary to dig the side canals, from which waterpower could be used for the work of mills, the industrial and artisan manufactories. Therefore, this project not only included the improvement of the trade in Bács–Bodrog County itself, but it also planned the drainage of the land by creating an ordered waterway system.¹⁰⁰ In the case of Sombor, this meant not only drainage of the town's territory, but also it would order the stream of the river Mostonga

Kiss brothers urged that the work was to be conducted by the newly created private corporation, called *The Company of the Canal*, which was a model they saw in Great Britain during their visit. They also argued that it would be more beneficial for the State to avoid large expenses, due to the bad status of the Treasury that was emptied because of the wars with the Ottoman Empire and France.¹⁰¹ Finally, the work started in May of 1793, and it was conducted throughout the year, including the winter months, and excluding the periods with bad weather conditions. The large amount of workers was hired and they came from different parts of the region, not just from the vicinity of the construction site, because of the possibility of well-paid job. Albeit the work was progressing well in the beginning, during the first years the problems occurred with the first lock in Monoštor, when the Danube flooded and endangered the project. This delayed the work, and by the fourth year of the construction, in 1797, it was evident that it broke its own time limit and far

⁹⁶ Friedrich Lötze, *Knyiga o Vrbasu*, 188.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 190.

⁹⁸ The length of one Austrian mile (German: Postmeile), according to the old system of measurement, was around 7,585 km. *Ibid*, 188–189.

⁹⁹ Nikola Petrovity, *Izgradnja kanala Dunav–Tisa*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 11.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 12.

exceeded expected expenditures. This put pressure on József Kiss, who was at the time the director of the Company, to resign from his post, and even the other members of the Company accused him of incompetency.¹⁰² Because of that he withdrew from the project, and his place was taken by Stanislaw Heppe, who was still at that time chief director for the construction activities. Like Kiss brothers, he graduated from the engineering academy in Vienna, went to Western Europe, including England, to gain experience, and he analysed many modern hydro-technical objects and projects.¹⁰³ However, when he overtook the work from the brothers Kiss, it was evident that they were not to blame for delayed activities and incompetence. The construction was finalized after five years, and the Emperor Francis Canal was officially opened one year after, in 1803.¹⁰⁴ Clearly, the privileged position of the Kiss family in this project, which was after all their idea, and the possibility of high profits, enhanced the struggle for the control over the entire work among members of the Company, which was used by the Hungarian Treasury. The fact that the aforementioned institution subsidized the project with 200.000 florins was also a decisive factor for the State to eventually claim the control over the Canal for itself.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Friedrich LötZ, *Knyiga o Vrbasu*, 193

¹⁰³ Nikola Petrovity, *Izgradnya kanala Dunav-Tisa*, 29.

¹⁰⁴ Friedrich LötZ, *Knyiga o Vrbasu*, 193

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

III

THE PROBLEM OF THE DRAINAGE AND ITS RELATION TO CENTRALITY OF SOMBOR

First drainage attempts in the territory of Sombor and its vicinity

The necessity for the drainage of the underground water and reduction of the number of swamps and marshes was a prevalent problem in Bács–Bodrog County. This influenced quality of the land and its arable potential but also the quality of roads and level of communication and trade deriving from it. Around the free royal town of Sombor and its nearest surroundings, the first attempt to overcome this impediment was already emphasised in the work of Josip Marković, who was a member of local Senate. Antal Hegedüs, in his work about the history of Sombor, gave us a brief description of this endeavour. Marković constructed his plan in 1771, and its main idea was to clean the existing stream of the river Mostonga and then connect it with the river Danube. Interestingly enough, even though the Hungarian Royal Council accepted the plan, the other two deciding parties, County and Magistracy, showed reluctance to do the same, and the whole project fell into oblivion.¹⁰⁶

It is not clear why the plan of Josip Marković never saw its implementation, even though the necessity existed, as we can see from the map of Sombor and its surroundings made sometime between 1787 and 1792. The territory that came under the direct control of Sombor in 1749 is marked with the different colour to show its separation from the surrounding settlements. The author of the map left us a valuable depiction of hydrography on the observed terrain that existed before the building of the Emperor Francis Canal (1793-1801). The river Mostonga ran through the inner territory of town, and its stream irregularly diffused, connecting itself with the surrounding marshland. Outside the town's territory, it is evident that there were many endangered areas with a high level of the redundant water, such as those around settlements of Stanišić, Gakovo, Kruševlje, and Ridica (see Figure 2).

¹⁰⁶ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 43.



Figure 2. Section of the Map of Bács–Bodrog County c. 1787–1792 depicting the territory of Sombor and its surroundings. Source: Hungarian National Archives, Maps Collection S 11 - No. 230.

Even though the purpose of the Emperor Francis Canal, as it was stated by its creators, was to elevate the level of trade in the region, it was also implied that the drainage processes would also be greatly beneficial. József Kiss was a peculiar figure because he was included in two different and yet intertwined endeavours before his work on the Canal. He supervised the colonisation of German settlers in the region where most of the trajectory of his future waterway would run, and he also built short and narrow drainage canals between the settlements Kula and Novi Vrbas in 1785.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Friedrich Lötzer, *Knyiga o Vrbasu*, 187–188.

Therefore, there is no reason not to assume that he saw a future Canal as great potential for the drainage of the territory, which was in this section mostly inhabited by colonists, and their agricultural potential would raise significantly. However, the negotiations with the representatives of the free royal town of Sombor did not go smoothly, regardless of the obvious benefits of the waterway, which were presented to them by Kiss. The Magistracy noted that proposed trajectory of the Canal would go through the southern parts of its territory in the place of swamps near Sivac; the overall gain of the entire project was evident, but they still had their concerns. Because of the uncertain length of the excavations, they thought that the agricultural production in the affected parts of Sombor's territory would be delayed, and their pastures would be flooded as a result.¹⁰⁸ Even though Kiss tried to persuade the Magistracy, they opposed the entire project, which led to the intervention of the Royal Regency Council from Buda in June 1793. The pressure put on the Magistracy by this higher authority was enough to settle the differences between the builders of the Canal and town, which led to the start of the construction in the same year.¹⁰⁹ It is noteworthy that the interest of the Magistracy in the drainage processes was low, to say at least, since the beginning of the construction of the Canal, and this position would remain more or less the same in the similar endeavours in the decades to come.

The existence of Emperor Francis Canal ameliorated the conditions in the southern peripheral parts of Sombor's territory, but also it made possible the connection of existing streams of Mostonga with it. This was a significant change as this waterway represented the constant danger not just for the territory of Sombor but also for the very town's centre due to its flooding potential. The regulation of Mostonga and its inclusion into the new water system was envisioned by József Kiss and his brother, but how it was done can only be concluded from the later sources.¹¹⁰ The existing town's trench, an old defence structure that encircled its inner centre, was used for drainage of Sombor by connecting it via a small canal with the river Mostonga, and subsequently, Emperor Francis Canal. However, this drainage system ended up being fragile because it was heavily damaged in the flooding caused by the combination of underground waters and those derived from rains and melting snow in the springtime. The evidence of this flood was noted by Zoltán Györe, who found it in the statements provided by inhabitants to the conscripts during the

¹⁰⁸ HAS AA 394/791.

¹⁰⁹ HAS AA 201/793.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

1825-1828 census. In those testimonies, it was stated that in the period between “ten or fifteen years ago,” there was a great calamity when during the springtime, the underground waters emerged in large quantities from underneath the earth and ravaged the territory of the free royal town of Sombor for more than six months. In the following years, land cultivation was made almost impossible in certain parts because the retraction of the water left numerous swamps, and where it did not stay, the land was so salinized that it was impossible to grow plants there. Inhabitants estimated that around 14% of the land was permanently destroyed and that this affected both private individuals and the town itself. Since this statement was given in 1827, Györe dated it to the year 1815 because he saw it as a median between 1812 and 1817.¹¹¹

However, this dating was not correct, not just because it was frivolously deduced from the statement that lacked chronological certainty, but also due to the other preserved sources that clarified the problem. The assembly of Bács–Bodrog County was held on 22 July 1811 because of the flooding caused by heavy spring rains. Here, the County acted swiftly and in the general interests of the Sombor as a settlement, which they shared as their seat along with the Magistracy. Anton Bauer, who was main County geometer, devised a plan for cleaning the town’s trench and the canal that led to the river Mostonga and Emperor Francis Canal. According to his measurements, around 0.76 km of town’s trench and 1.91 km of derivation canal were supposed to be cleaned, which amounted to around 2,212.19 cubic meters of mud and around 1,300 of *rabota* days necessary for its excavation.¹¹²

The task of preservation of the trench and derivation canal was left over to the town’s administration, and they had to make reports about their work. Petar Aradski, the town’s main geometer, informed the Magistracy in July 1815 that the canal was again clogged by sediment and excrement, and he did not make any progress in its cleaning.¹¹³ Mostly, he lacked the necessary equipment for conducting measuring on the field, as it was evident from his interaction with the town officials in January 1816. Thus, he urged the Magistracy to borrow everything he needed from the Bács–Bodrog County and to assure them that the gear was going to be returned as soon as he and his associates marked the terrain and made the plans. Another obstacle he faced was the lack of quality workforce, as he stated that for this hard labour, underage boys were not suitable

¹¹¹ Györe Zoltán, *Gradovi i varoshi Bachke pochetkom XIX veka*, 104–105.

¹¹² HAS AA 1059/811.

¹¹³ HAS AA 783/815.

and that grown and capable men were required instead. After the great floods that occurred in 1811, there was several swamps and lakes left on the territory of Sombor, even after first drainage attempts. To drain them, Aradski wanted to connect them with the existing derivation canal, and ultimately, with the Emperor Francis Canal. He also indicated that the winter weather was the most suitable for this endeavours because, in the springtime, the risk of snow melting and rains would be an impediment to any potential work.¹¹⁴ The majority of the work perceived by Petar Aradski was done by 1820, leaving just the swamp formation of Mostonga in the vicinity of the Emperor's Canal.¹¹⁵ Evidently, the cooperation between the Magistracy and County was present when it was the inner territory of Sombor at stake. Furthermore, the former was dependent on the latter in terms of technological supply, which reveals a somewhat peculiar relationship that unravelled, even more, when the drainage of the peripheral territory of town and its vicinity started in 1827.

¹¹⁴ HAS AA 81/816.

¹¹⁵ HAS AA 349/820.

The territory of Sombor and its surroundings

To fully understand the level of the drainage endeavour in this part of the Bács–Bodrog County, it is necessary to explain the territorial aspect, more specifically, whom the agents were that urged for the removal of the redundant water. By the time of the reign of the emperor Joseph II (1780-1790), this region of the Monarchy was divided among the three different landowners who were in control of the number of puszta starting with the three royal towns (i.e., deserted land) in their surroundings. The remaining land was divided between the feudal lords and the State, in this case, the Hungarian Treasury. Regardless of the fact who of these last two actors were in the control of the land, they acted similarly with the State playing the role of the feudal lord of the territories under its control. The Treasury obtained their land in the aftermath of the wars with the Ottomans, in this case after the Treaty of Karlovac in 1699.¹¹⁶

In general, the division of the territory between that which was under the control of the free royal towns and that under rule of the feudal lords, including the State, played a certain role in the development of the land relations and economic stature of the subordinates. When it came to the case of the free royal town of Sombor after its liberation in 1749, the royal deliberation charter guaranteed to it the command of over the 11 puszta, which were at that time mostly remnants of the deserted villages, abandoned during the decades of war with the Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁷

The number of puszta given by the Viennese Court to Sombor was significantly less in comparison to what the town controlled in the decades prior the liberation. During the period 1720-1745, when Sombor was a military settlement inside the Tisa Military Border, its inhabitants controlled 26 puszta in total. By governing this vast territory, in comparison to their settlement size, inhabitants of Sombor gained the opportunity to practice extensive cattle breeding with the level of the land cultivation only high enough to support their families and avoid heavy taxes. It is no wonder then that the process of the liberation in the period 1745-1749 mainly revolved around the question of the aforementioned number of puszta. Due to the high fee required by the State for the buyout of the land under their previous control, inhabitants of Sombor had to settle with much a lower number of 11 puszta, and even that created significant problems for the economic

¹¹⁶ Slavko Gavrilovity, *Sombor – Granicharski shanatz*, 7 – 11.

¹¹⁷ *Povelja slobodnog i kraljevskog grada Sombora*, ed. Milan Stepanovity, 59.

stature of the town in the following decades.¹¹⁸ Consequently, these puszta were Nenadić, Piperoš, Braćević, Rančevo, Stapar, Čičovi, Bilić, Ivanovo Selo, Šaponje, Karakorija, Gradina and Bukovac.¹¹⁹

Because of the lack of land required for the continuation of the previous methods of production, inhabitants of Sombor requested and gained another ten puszta on a one year lease, granted by Count Anton Grašalković, who oversaw the Hungarian Treasury. However, this period of leasing of the additional territories would not last for long because the State had different plans for them. Returning to the question of the control of the land in the Bács–Bodrog County, the State enhanced its position in this region by appropriating all the former land that was not assigned to the free royal town of Sombor.¹²⁰

Acting in the role of the feudal lord through its representatives on the field, the Hungarian Treasury made plans for the colonisation of the land under its control. Colonization endeavours done by the State were mostly induced by the necessity for repopulation of the land for various reasons. The first reason was strategic, and one that demanded strengthening of the Southern part of Habsburg Monarchy since the danger of another war with the Ottoman Empire was always on the horizon. Even though the border was moved further south on the rivers Danube and Sava, the region of Bács–Bodrog County was near the borderline. The second reason for the State to intervene and colonise the land derived from the physiocracy philosophy of the Empress Maria Theresa (1740-1780) and later, her son, Emperor Joseph II (1780-1790). By increasing the number of people, the income gathered through the taxes would also grow, and the general agricultural production would also be elevated. A plethora of uninhabited and unploughed land in this region thus represented the most suitable place for the implementation of the Court's politics. Colonization processes occurred throughout the Eighteenth century in several different waves, and they included various ethnicities, namely Hungarians, Germans, and Slovaks.¹²¹

In 1749, Germans were settled in the Apatin settlement of the river Danube and the nearby vicinity of Sombor. In the next year, under instructions of Baron Redl, who was Steward of the Treasury assets in the region of Bács–Bodrog County, around one hundred families were invited to settle Čonoplja and Dolovi, which were previously scarcely inhabited with Roman Catholic

¹¹⁸ Slavko Gavrilovity, *Sombor u borbi za elibertatziyu*, 56, 66.

¹¹⁹ HAS FMS 32/746; HAS FMS 38/746.

¹²⁰ HAS FMS 57/749

¹²¹ Borislav Jankulov, *Pregled kolonizaciye Voyvodine*, 17–18

families from the area under direct control of town of Sombor. The requirements for this colonisation were that families were also of the same religion, which led to several Hungarians and Slovaks being settled there. Germans were also settled in the same locality in 1772, which made the composition of the settlement even more ethnically diverse. These ethnic groups also settled in Prigrevica, Gakovo, Krnjaja, Stanišić, and Kruševlje in 1763-1767.¹²²

The peculiar case in this colonisation process represented the former settlement of Militits, which was inhabited with Hungarians of lesser nobility status who were somewhat economically deprived regardless of their titles. Consequently, when they were settled in 1752, the name of the settlement was also altered, and *Nemes* (Hungarian: Noble) was added. Because of their privileged status that gave them the right to be exempted from taxes, their community gained autonomy in 1758, and they were regarded as a municipality of nobles within the County.¹²³ To get a better understanding of how fast this entire colonisation process that occurred in Bács–Bodrog County was, we can look at the report of the Magistracy of Novi Sad, a free royal town in the south of the region. According to their statement, by 1774, over 30 pusztae were colonised in the entire County, which reduced the amount of uninhabited land and thus decreased opportunities for extensive animal husbandry, with the total number of cattle reduced from the around 30,000 to just 4,000.¹²⁴ The colonization process did not just impede the potential of the free royal town of Sombor to maintain its previous level of extensive cattle breeding, but it also involved the State and County representatives more closely in the development of the region where their interests intertwined or even collided with those of the Magistracy.

¹²² Borislav Jankulov, *Pregled kolonizacije Vojvodine*, 33–34.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁴ Vasa Stayity, *Privreda Novog Sada 1748–1880: iz arhiva novosadskog Magistrata [Industry of Novi Sad 1748–1880: From Archives of Magistracy of Novi Sad]*, Novi Sad, 1941, 108.

The land conscriptions of Bács–Bodrog County 1826–1828

The importance of Emperor Francis Canal to draining the land of underground and redundant water was recognised by scholars such as Antal Hegedüs. He emphasised its value for the regulation of the stream of the river Mostonga, in addition to its importance for the reduction of the number of marshes and swamps. However, his report about the beginning of this endeavour leaves us without much information. According to Hegedüs, in 1827, a special commission was formed with the plan to remove redundant water from the area of Sombor, Stanišić, Gakovo, Čonoplja, Riđica, and Kruševlje. The man in charge of the entire project was Anton Bauer, the Main County geometer, and his plan included digging smaller canals that would drain the water to the Emperor Francis Canal.¹²⁵

The drainage endeavours that started in 1827 had their place in the larger quest that State officials undertook in the years 1825–1828 when they made a survey of the land that resulted with a census of the Hungarian Kingdom, the first one has ever done since the rule of the Emperor Joseph II. The census of 1828 represents a valuable source of information regarding the number and size of the population, their production and property, and the amount and size of the parcels of the land and its quality.¹²⁶ However, before conducting the census, one large survey of the territory of the Bács–Bodrog County was made by Anton Bauer. This was by itself significant because the same expert was also involved in the later drainage efforts in the region, and he made his own census even though he was certainly aware of the upcoming official one. There is not much information that would shed more light on the role of Bauer besides we know he was the Main County geometer at least from 1805 and involved in the drainage process of Sombor's inner territory, which began in 1811. Antal Hegedüs mentions that the Magistracy of Sombor employed him in 1820 to make cadastral measurings and books of the territory under the town's control. Yet, Bauer resigned from the job just one year later, leaving the work to the town's geometer, Petar Aradski, who started his measuring of the territory and made a map in 1825, but his task was not over by then.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 43.

¹²⁶ Antal Hegedüs and Katarina Chobanovity. *Demographiska i agrarna statistika Vojvodine 1767–1867* [*Demographic and Agrarian Statistic of Vojvodina 1767–1867*], Novi Sad, 1991, 55–56.

¹²⁷ Antonius Bauer, *Corpus Ichnographiarum omnium I[ncllyti] Comitatus de Bacs incorporatorum Terrenorum*, Sombor 1805; Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 45.



Figure 3: Section of the map of Anton Bauer of Bács–Bodrog County (1826) depicting the territory of Sombor, with the Emperor Francis Canal in the South and the endangered areas in the North, with river Mostonga and existing swamps drawn. Source: Hungarian National Archives, Maps Collection S 11 - No. 505:3.

It can be only speculated why Bauer left, but it is evident that in the next few years, he took the task of conducting the conscription of the County, its inhabitants, and the land they controlled. In the title of his work, he wrote that the whole endeavour was dedicated to Ferenc Győri de Radványi, who was administrator of the neighbouring Tolna County.¹²⁸ It is noteworthy to emphasise that said nobleman became Supreme Count of the Bács–Bodrog County in 1829 and

¹²⁸ Antonius Bauer, *Repertorium universarum terrenorum II comitatibus Bacs–Bodrogh*, Sombor 1826, front page.

held that position for the next ten years. Therefore, his request for the census to be made by Bauer made sense because he wanted to know to whom he was supposed to govern.¹²⁹ The main purpose of Bauer's *Repertorium* was to present the size and structure of the urbarial and alodial land in each settlement within the Bács–Bodrog County. In other words, the land given to the peasants for the cultivation from which they generated wealth used to pay their taxes to the owner of the land (under the rules that were negotiated into a contract or *urbarium*) and the land controlled directly by the feudal lords as their private estates. Hegedüs contested that he was not aware of a similar document for any other specific County of the Kingdom of Hungary.¹³⁰

Table 1: A selected data about the landowners, inhabitants and land they controlled, with the amount of unusable area, presented by Anton Bauer (1826):¹³¹

<i>Territory</i>	<i>Landowner</i>	<i>Number of inhabitants</i> ¹³²	<i>Total amount of land (km²)</i>	<i>Pastures</i>		<i>Swamps and rivers</i>		<i>Rushes and reeds (km²)</i>
				<i>Good quality (km²)</i>	<i>Sandy and watery (km²)</i>	<i>(km²)</i>	<i>% of land</i>	
Sombor	Free royal town	20,797	311.47	12.64		5.03	1.61	1.79
Gakovo	Treasury territory	1,795	28.02	2.14		2.21	7.89	
Kruševlje	Treasury territory	878	15.72	0.99	2.75	1.98	12.76	
Ridica	Kovács family	2,629	61.01	10.34		0.91	1.49	
Stanišić	Baron Redl	4,334	97.18	15.18		4.48	4.61	
Nemes Militits	Community of nobles	1,187	65.89			0.28	0.42	

Bauer's *Repertorium* can be divided into two different parts. First, he wrote an introductory section regarding the position of the County and its geographical position and peculiarities, noticing that even though the land itself was a part of a broader plain, it could be separated into two different sections regarding their position in contrast to the dominating loess plateau. By using the classification of the quality of the land common in that period, he concluded that the land above

¹²⁹ Györe Zoltán, *Gradovi i varoshi Bachke*, 37.

¹³⁰ Antal Hegedüs, *Izvori za agrarnu statistiku*, 57.

¹³¹ Antonius Bauer, *Repertorium universarum terrenorum*, 6–19.

¹³² Nobles were not subjected to census (*Populario ignobilium Conscriptio*). See: *Ibid.*

the plateau could fall under the third and fourth categories, whereas the land beneath the plateau was more fertile and, consequently, placed into first and second ones.¹³³

In the second part of his work, Bauer included the census of the whole County, with its three free royal towns, sixteen boroughs, ninety-two villages, and eighteen puszta, where around 432,500 of inhabitants lived. This census is of great value because it shows to whom certain settlements belonged, as well as the ratio between the land given to the peasants and private estates on the specific feudal dominion. By observing just the settlements that were part of the drainage processes, we can see that 1.61% of the territory of the free royal town of Sombor was under swamps and flood water, with that percentage increasing by twofold if we add the territory that was under rushes and reeds and, therefore, unavailable for the cultivation. On the other hand, the amount of territory that was under swamps and flood water on the feudal dominions was significantly higher, where the ratio was around 4.61% in Stanišić and 7.89% in Gakovo, with the highest percentage of 12.76% present in the territory of Kruševlje. However, if we also add the amount of pastures that were under water or sand, the percentage of unusable land in Kruševlje rises to the staggering 30.09%. It is also noteworthy that territories with the highest ratio of land under swamps and flood water were under control of the State, in this case, the Hungarian Treasury. On the other hand, the percentage on the private feudal dominions is comparably lower, excluding possibly Stanišić (See: Table 1). Looking at the data given by Anton Bauer before the drainage plans conducted in 1827, it is evident that the designated area experienced problems with marshlands and redundant water.

Around the same time, when Anton Bauer was finishing his work, the Diet in the period 1825–1827 discussed and decided to conduct a survey of the whole territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. Conscription of the Kingdom was a part of an ongoing debate, and the Diet urged since 1791 for it to become reality; however, wars with Napoleon and a general lack of funds in the following years delayed the work. The interest for the conscription was shared both by Hungarian nobility and the State government. One party was concerned with the deterioration of the economic stature of the subordinated peasantry, while the other was interested in the elevation of the state-imposed taxes that would fill up the empty treasury. Both parties regarded each other as its enemy when it

¹³³ Antonius Bauer, *Repertorium universarum terrenorum*, 2.

came to the wealth being of peasants and blamed the taxation imposed by the other as a sole reason the subordinates could not cope with the number of levies they were obliged to pay.¹³⁴

In his analysis of the census of 1828, which put emphasis on the territory of most of the former Bács–Bodrog County, Györe Zoltán noted that during the conscriptions, the inhabitants were complaining about the quality of the land given to them to cultivate, and that the problem of flooding and redundant waters was ever-present. In the case of Stanišić, around 50% of their land was classified to belong in the lowest category when it came to the quality of the land, with inhabitants stating that in the same year, one-third of the pastures was endangered because of the underground water. This type of water was not listed in the conscription because it could not be easily measurable (See: Table 1).¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Györe Zoltán, *Gradovi i varoshi Bachke*, 21.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 104.

The project for drainage of territory of Sombor and its surrounding villages in 1827

It was not a coincidence that the settlements (see Table 1) and their controlled areas represented the place where the plan of Anton Bauer for the drainage of the remnant water started. Inspection of the maps (see Figure 2, Figure 3) gives us an insight into the state of hydrography and different levels at which the territories were flooded. It is safe to assume that the most water-submerged areas would ask for help from the higher authorities to remove or at least reduce their impediments. The question about why the other areas surrounding the free royal town of Sombor did not make similar requests can be partially answered by, again, referring to the available maps. South and southeastern territories, in contrast to the position of Sombor, were drained to a certain extent when the Emperor Francis Canal was built. Therefore, the territories spanning from Bukovac and Gradina to Sivac and beyond going eastward were regulated mostly by the beginning of 19th century (see Figure 2).

On the other hand, the territories that were adjacent to the territory of the free royal town of Sombor towards the north and east waited twenty-four years until the Canal was built, and the conditions for the draining of their land improved. The inhabitants of Gakovo and Kruševlje were first to request the assistance to solve their drainage problems. They decided to act together, and two municipalities made a joint request to the County regarding their problems, which led, consequently, to the convening of its General Assembly on 26 March 1827, where they discussed their plea.¹³⁶ The Magistrate of the free royal town of Sombor was notified about the pleas, and in return, town officials responded that they were aware of the similar requests since 1818, coming from the inhabitants of Ridica who have been complaining that the water from the territory of Stanišić was overflowing to theirs, and it kept flooding the meadows and pastures.¹³⁷

The complaints from the settlements were, therefore, heard by both the County and Magistrate, which subsequently led to the creation of a commission whose purpose was to test the validity of pleas they received. The composition of the newly found investigative body was such that it represented all the parties that had interest in the matter. The county was represented by nobleman Emerick Kovács, whose family had Ridica as their private property and who was one of the people

¹³⁶ HAS AP 1056/827 Pos. 923

¹³⁷ HAS AP 1995/827 Pos. 923.

who oversaw the judicial tables of the Bács–Bodrog County. Next to him was Martin Pavlović, who oversaw fiscal matters in the territories under Treasury control in the County, and lastly, as a Treasury geometer, was Đorđe Sokolović. The Magistracy of the town of Sombor was represented by two senators, Jakov Lalošević and Jovan Ambrozović. Petar Aradski was also named as a representative of the town of Sombor due to his post of town's geometer, and he possessed experience regarding the problem of drainage since at least 1815. As it was previously noted, the entire commission was led by Main County geometer, Anton Bauer.¹³⁸

The Commission headed to examine the endangered areas on 31 May 1827, and they began their fieldwork not just in the areas of Gakovo, Kruševlje, and Ridica, but also Stanišić and the territory under direct control of the free royal town of Sombor. After thoroughly examining the terrain, on the 16th of June, the Commission concluded that the work necessary for the drainage of the flooded areas could be divided into the two sections regarding the separate canals systems that would be built there.¹³⁹ One of the reasons for this division was the shortage of manual labour, which could be provided by the available agricultural workers from the free royal town of Sombor. Investigation showed that inhabitants of Sombor were more interested in digging out canals in areas that presented greater danger for the territory of the town itself. Therefore, the town was eager to provide labourers and cover the costs for the section that included the areas of Sombor, Kruševlje and Stanišić, and the total amount of *rabota* required would be 3,000. Because of the second section, which included Kruševlje and Sombor but also Gakovo and Ridica, was farther than first one and represented lesser threat to the town's territory, the Commission internally negotiated that the necessary work would amount to around 1,500 *rabota*.¹⁴⁰

The data gathered from the field was made into a preliminary project, which included estimated costs or, in this case, that of required human labour. The project was designed and published by the County geometer, Anton Bauer, on the 25th of June of the same year, and it had some peculiar information that was not mentioned in the previous documents. First, this project referred to the

¹³⁸ HAS AP 1056/827 Pos. 923

¹³⁹ HAS AP 1358/827 Pos. 1545

¹⁴⁰ HAS AP 1995/827 Pos. 923. Hegedüs made a mistake when he stated that during this project on average 3,000 workers were employed because the sources are precise that they require *dies Robotales*, or working days, which were one of the obligations of the inhabitants living on the territories under the feudal lords, but it could also be done by the available labor force that resided in the urban areas, simply because it was a convenient way to provide an extra income. In short, number of working days is not equal to number of workers because single person can work more than a day. See: Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 43. About *rabota* see: Györe Zoltán, *Gradovi i varoshi Bachke*, 70–71.

drainage of the underground water in the territory of Gakovo, Kruševlje, Riđica, Stanišić, and Sombor, which was not earlier emphasised, thus leading us to the conclusion that the priority at that point was to reduce subterranean ponds. Second, the preliminary project specified that they planned to drain endangered areas by utilising the flow of Mostonga, a waterway that was connected to the Emperor Francis Canal since it was built in 1802.¹⁴¹

Table 2: The directions of the canal systems with their estimated length and working days:

<i>Direction</i>	<i>Length (km)</i>		<i>Rabota days required</i>
	<i>Area</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Gakovo, Kruševlje, Riđica and Sombor	Sombor	1.14	1,500
	Gakovo	0.95	
	Kruševlje	0.76	
Stanišić, Kruševlje and Sombor		7.58	3,000

Bauer envisioned that for his project to succeed, it was necessary to build two separate canal systems, which were negotiated during the work of the Commission. The lengths required for excavations were given in measurements used in that time, with 600 fathoms for the territory of Sombor, 500 in Gakovo, and 400 of fathoms in Kruševlje, and the combined one given for the second section, with the amount of 4,000 fathoms. After transforming the measures into the modern ones, it is evident that in the first section 2.85 km and 7.58 km in the other one were planned for excavation, which consequently leads to the conclusion that the total estimated length of the canal systems was over 10 km (see Table 2).¹⁴² Bauer suggested that the width of the canals in the first section ought to be 2.21 m and depth 1.58 m, and in the second section, the width was the same but the depth was shallower, with only 1.26 m, which was possibly due to the greater length of this canal system.¹⁴³

The excavations started in the summertime, and a County official by the name of Albert Antunovics was sent to report on the progress, and on 15 July 1827, he noted that a map regarding

¹⁴¹ HAS AP 1056/827 Pos. 923.

¹⁴² HAS AP 1056/827 Pos. 923. One fathom is equivalent to the approximately 1,896 meters. See: Antal Hegediš, Katarina Čobanović, *Demographiska i agrarna statistika Vojvodine 1767–1867* [*Demographic and Agrarian Statistic of Vojvodina 1767–1867*], Novi Sad, 1991, 16.

¹⁴³ HAS AP 1056/827 Pos. 923. Measures were given in *pedes* or fouts, which translates into approximately 0,316 m. See: Antal Hegediš, Katarina Čobanović, *Demographiska i agrarna statistika Vojvodine*, 16.

the project should be included in a declaration that would be provided to the higher authorities. He was also approached by the representatives of Nemes Militits, a municipality of nobles living in a neighbouring territory of that controlled by Sombor, where they, on the same day, made a plea to the Magistracy of the free royal town of Sombor to help them to drain their land of the redundant water.¹⁴⁴ Their case, however, would be addressed after several years.

From the report made by senators Jakov Lalošević and Jovan Ambrozović, who were the members of the initial Commission, and given to the Magistracy of free royal town of Sombor on 4 December 1827, it can be concluded that two different viewpoints emerged between the months of July and September regarding the level of work necessary in different sections. On the one side, there was a creator of the preliminary project, County geometer Anton Bauer, who represented the interest of the Treasury and private feudal territories, namely Gakovo, Kruševlje, Ridica, and Stanišić. His main goal was to ameliorate the stature of the territories, which was not the case with his colleague, the town's geometer Petar Aradski, whose main area of interest laid within the territory controlled by Sombor. This meant that he, too, only paid attention to those territories that represented the direct flooding threat to town. However, they found common ground in the case of the *Lacum Krushevacsá*, or the swamps created in the territory of Kruševlje by an offshoot of the river Mostonga and the necessity of its drainage (see Figure 3). It was agreed that the area should be drained through two different sections, one that went from Kruševlje to Gakovo and the other that passed through Rančevo, which was in possession of Sombor. This new agreement between the County and town officials was almost identical to the initial plans of Bauer, with one significant change that excluded drainage of Stanišić from the responsibilities of the Magistracy. Furthermore, both geometers were obliged to make separate measurements and to provide their own declarations, with the maps depicting their plans for the drainage. Bauer took the section of Gakovo and Kruševlje, while Petar Aradski took section of Rančevo and Bilić, territories under direct control of the free royal town of Sombor.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ HAS AP 1056/827 Pos. 980.

¹⁴⁵ HAS AP 1358/827 Pos. 1545.



Figure 4. Plan made by Petar Aradski for the drainage of the redundant water from the territories of Gakovo, Kruševlje, Riđica, and Stanišić (1827), through the river Mostonga and consequently to the Emperor Francis Canal (bottom left corner), with the depiction of the flooded areas of Bilić and Rančevo (top right). Source: Historical Archive of Sombor Acta Politica 1358/827.

This agreement was evident when Aradski made a report to the Magistracy of the free royal town of Sombor on 27 September 1827, where he stated the current progress of his drainage work in the area of Rančevo and Nenadić by connecting a derivation canal to the river Mostonga at the Lukin’s bridge, and subsequently, Emperor Francis Canal.¹⁴⁶ The connection point was depicted on the plan that he provided to the Magistracy dated 12 November 1827 (see Figure 4, left of the inscription “Bility”).

¹⁴⁶ HAS AP 1419/827

The renewal of the drainage project from 1833–1848

The canal system, built in accordance with the plans of 1827, did not show any signs of longevity. After the huge efforts that their excavation required, it seems that, in the following years, they suffered considerable damage that made them practically useless. County officials, in this case a member of the judiciary, János Szintula, noted in June 1834 that the main problem that led to the ruin of the canal system was the crumbling of their walls, which had a negative impact on the taxpayers because it represented an impediment to their agricultural production. In addition, the level of revenue collected from them by landowners and the State was in direct correlation with their ability to cultivate the land efficiently.¹⁴⁷

We can only assume what led to the damaging of the canals because the reasons were not mentioned in the sources. Probably the brief operational period of the drainage system was due to their poor construction quality and inability to withstand the first major floods that came after they were built. From the other sources, issued by the Society of the Francis Canal, it is evident that the aforementioned company had problems with the inhabitants of the territory of the free royal town of Sombor because they herded cattle in the vicinity of the waterway and that this damaged, i.e., crumbled the walls of, the riverbed.¹⁴⁸ The nearness of water was essential for the extensive cattle breeding, and it was no wonder that the newly built canal represented a great potential asset for the peasants and their herds. When we take into account the fact that the size of the Francis Canal was incomparable with the small canals built based on the plans of 1827, which were just over two meters in width, it is safe to assume that similar actions of the inhabitants would do significantly more damage.

The first records of these deteriorations can be dated to the spring of 1833, when the Magistracy of Sombor noted that a number of citizens were complaining about excessive damage done to their properties by the overflowing gush of water coming from the areas where a part of original canal systems were built, namely the possessions of Kruševlje, Gakovo, Riđica, and Stanišić. The whole area of the town's outer territory, spanning from the Baja road to that leading to Apatin, where the inhabitants grew gardens and vineyards and stored their haystacks, was ravaged. At the same time,

¹⁴⁷ HAS AP 675/834.

¹⁴⁸ HAS AP 890/1805; HAS AP 239/1826.

the overflowing of water also made the existing stream of Mostonga into a rushing force, which led to the damaging of the territory on the other side of the Francis canal, to which the aforementioned river connected. Because this territory was outside the territory of Sombor, the responsible administrative body for it was the County, whose officials wanted to lessen the impediments to the proper drainage and, above all, clean the existing derivation canals.¹⁴⁹

The problems of the relation between the two different authorities residing in Sombor, the Magistracy and the County, was evident from the beginning of the planning of the system of drainage canals. However, starting in 1833, they intensified to the extent that they included higher authorities, represented by the Hungarian Regency Council of Buda, which tried to intermediate between the juxtaposed interests of town and regional officials. It all began with the request of Nemes Militits, a peculiar community consisting of members of the Hungarian lesser nobility, to the Magistracy of Sombor regarding the drainage issues during the summer of 1833. They wanted to solve the problem of the redundant water by building canals that would connect to the existing system and, eventually, go through Mostonga to the Francis Canal.¹⁵⁰ This was not their first request of that sort, as they made a similar one in July of 1827, but their efforts back then were in vain.¹⁵¹ The Magistracy of Sombor was reluctant regarding the aforementioned requests because they did not want to allow the planned canals to go through their territory, and they tried to avoid bearing the costs of cleaning the existing ones. This futile interaction with the representatives of the free royal town forced the inhabitants of Nemes Militits to complain to their higher authority, Bács–Bodrog County. They were received by the substitute vice-count, who decided to send geometer József Kerekes as an intermediary who would investigate and report about the state of affairs in the field. In July of 1833, he discovered that the town was opposed to any potential negotiation even after his attempts to persuade them by stating that the peripheral areas of Sombor, riddled with reed and cane fields, would also be drained and therefore benefit from the entire project.¹⁵²

The position of the Magistracy of Sombor was perceived as stubborn, and the County concluded that a more formal request was necessary. Therefore, the General Assembly of Bács–Bodrog County was held on 17 February 1834 in Sombor, and it was decided to intervene with the

¹⁴⁹ HAS AP 236/833 Pos. 305.

¹⁵⁰ HAS AP 667/833 Pos. 826.

¹⁵¹ HAS AP 1056/827 Pos. 980.

¹⁵² HAS AP 667/833 Pos. 826.

town's Magistracy and to put pressure on them to comply with their interests. The main judiciary of the County, András Odriy, was selected to be an intermediary between the County and the Magistracy. Odriy requested that the town's officials put effort into cleaning the canal systems in their territory, more specifically in the area facing the feudal territory of Stanišić. The process of negotiation lasted for months, and Odriy thought that the late spring weather of May was the most suitable for the beginning of this work.¹⁵³

Even the decisions of the General Assembly of the County and the actions of Odriy that resulted from them were not sufficient to change the position of the free royal town of Sombor. The indifference of the Magistracy towards the requests of the county invited the Hungarian Regency Council, with its seat in Buda, to intervene. Based on the previous reports from the field, the Council concluded that the deterioration of the canal system in the area of Gakovo, Stanišić, Kruševlje, Bereg, and Riđica was impeding the productivity of the population and general tax income. Therefore, they asked Bács–Bodrog County at the beginning of June 1834 to send József Kerekes, who already had knowledge of the problems acquired during his field investigation in the previous year and was also familiar with the pleas of the inhabitants of Nemes Militits.¹⁵⁴

Kerekes followed the instructions of the County and the Regency Council, and without waiting for the approval of the town itself, he decided to start the work on the repair of the existing canal systems. He employed agricultural workers, who were paid on a daily basis through the existing system of *rabota*. However, on 9 June 1834, almost immediately after the start of his quest, he experienced problems generated by the town's Magistracy and landowners who possessed territory within which the work was supposed to be done. József Kerekes got into a heated argument with landowners Stefan and Marko Radišić, who tried their best to hinder the project. Their obstruction made Kerekes anxious because he believed that the summer time was the most suitable for cleaning of the canals and further excavations, so he begged the judiciary of the County to help him by pressuring both the magistracy and the aforementioned landowners.¹⁵⁵

This plea was addressed swiftly by János Szintula, who reported to József Odriy, who was at the time the vice-count of the County, about the entire inconvenience. Consequently, the Hungarian Royal Regency was again contacted, and Odriy used their support as part of an

¹⁵³ HAS AP 550/834.

¹⁵⁴ HAS AP 236/833 Pos. 305; HAS AP 675/834.

¹⁵⁵ HAS AP 675/834.

argument during his negotiations with the town of Sombor. By the middle of August 1834, every aforementioned agency put pressure on Sombor to pay for the cost of the work that was supposed to be done in their territory and to pressure the landowners who refused to cooperate with the project excavations in their territory.¹⁵⁶

The controversy continued in the following years with almost no progress in the negotiations between the Magistracy and the County. József Odriy in August of 1836 wrote to the Magistracy in the role of intermediary representing the case of Nemes Militits, stating that they still requested to build new canals in cooperation with the town of Sombor and that initial plans were made for that. However, the contesting parties could not reach an agreement about the route of the new drainage system and the general expenses of the project, which were the main obstacles when it came to dealing with town officials.¹⁵⁷

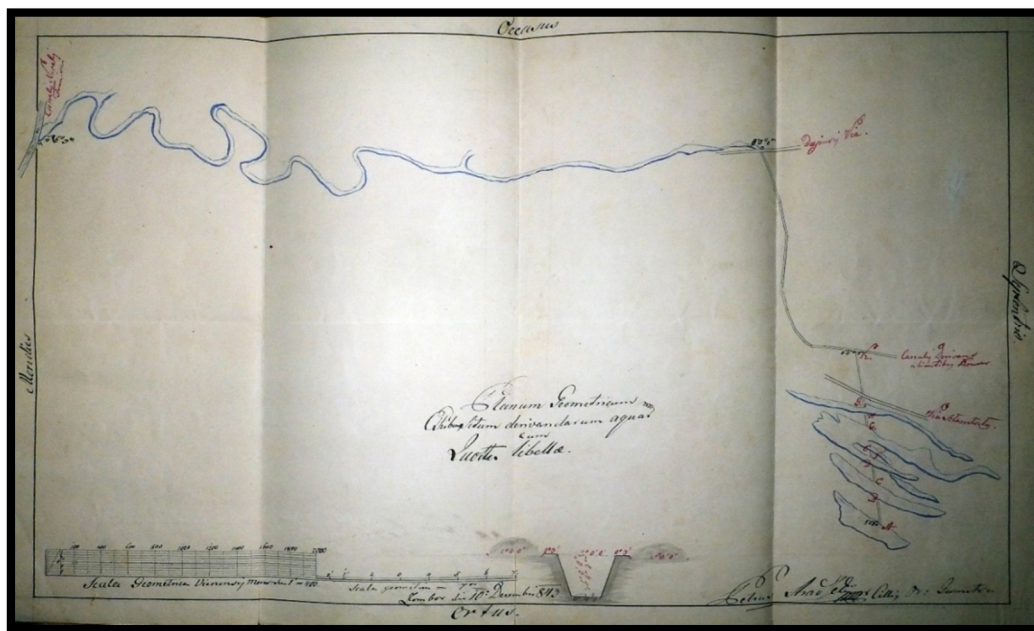


Figure 5. The plan made by Petar Aradski for the construction of the drainage canals going from the swamp areas of Bilić (bottom right) to the river Mostonga, with the depiction of the Emperor Francis Canal (top left) (1843). Source: Historical Archive of Sombor Acta Politica 382/848 Pos. 133/844.

¹⁵⁶ HAS AP 675/834 Pos. 856.

¹⁵⁷ HAS AP 1007/836.

Magistracy officials maintained their resistance until the end of 1843, when they finally decided to send their long-term geometer Petar Aradski to conduct measurements in the field and provide a new plan for cleansing of the derivation canal and excavation of a new one, which he did. His idea was to connect the new canal that would run from the area of Nemes Militits to the existing one that flowed into the Mostonga stream and, subsequently, to the Emperor Francis Canal (see Figure 5). The proposed route would also run through the existing swamps of Trščara, Rančevo, and Široka, and he made a situational plan with precise measurements, including the erection of bridges. Finally, he made an initial estimation of the expenses, which totalled almost 10,000 florins, excluding the additional sum of around 5,000 that would be spent on the 50-year lease of the land through which the canal would run (see Table 3).¹⁵⁸

Table 3: *The estimated costs for the repair, preservation, and building of the new canals and bridges, presented by Petar Aradski (1843):*

<i>Proposed expenditure</i>	<i>Estimated cost</i>	
	<i>fl.</i>	<i>kr.</i>
Excavation of the new canal route	1,339	49.2
Cleaning of the existing draining canal	5,848	36
Preservation of the existing draining canal	1,556	30
Building of bridges and expenses connected with them	956	
Total	9,700	52

In 1844, the town of Sombor sent two experts, Vladimir Kovačić and Stefan Palković, to see how much of the planned project was manageable. They were titled engineers (Hungarian: *mérnök*), and they brought their expertise to test the measurements of Petar Aradski. One practical problem for its implementation, as they witnessed, was the necessity for drainage of the parts of the derivation canal in the periphery of Sombor's territory. In addition, those parts of the canal were dependent on the existing structures in the territory under the control of the County. Therefore, Kovačić and Palković thought that officials from the aforementioned body were

¹⁵⁸ HAS AP 382/848 Pos. 133/844.

supposed to be notified if any works were to be conducted there. The total amount of the canal that was supposed to be excavated was around 143.45 acres or around 1.02 km².¹⁵⁹ They also estimated that these excavations would open the space for new, similar endeavours. It is noteworthy that the estimation of the digging costs made by Vladimir Kovačić in 1846 was just 210 florins, around six times less than the estimation done by Petar Aradski.¹⁶⁰

The reduction of the costs of the project was a product of negotiations with the County officials. The town's interest in the entire project rose because they planned to utilise parts of the drained land to erect schools and potentially other buildings, which reveals the nature of the interest of the Magistracy in contrast to those of the County – whenever the former could avoid the drainage work and its costs, they would, and if there was no way for them to refuse, they sought to benefit as much as they could. The entire project concluded in 1848, five years after the project plan made by Petar Aradski and fifteen since the renewal of the drainage endeavours in the region. The entire process of the drainage took just over twenty years (1827–1848) of interplay between the Magistracy, County, and even the State to conduct and finish the canals.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ HAS AP 382/848 Pos. 416.

¹⁶⁰ HAS AP 382/848.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

The contested centrality of Sombor

The entire process of drainage of the territory of Sombor and its vicinity in the first half of the 19th century, especially from 1827–1848, reveals part of the complexity of the relation between the administrations of the free royal town on one side and of Bács–Bodrog County on the other. For the most part, their interests were opposed to each other, as evident from the preserved accounts of the actors involved. However, this juxtaposition of goals requires more thorough explanation to inquire into the theory of the central place of an urban settlement in early modern Europe, more specifically in the southern part of the Hungarian Kingdom.

The question of centrality was one of the tools used by the historians to classify a specific settlement, regardless of its legal status, as urban or not. Hungarian scholars, such as Vera Bácskai, developed one of the aspects of centrality proposed by historians that dealt with similar issues by focusing on the market central role or the position of the settlement in the region from the economic perspective. This method indicated that the number of settlements in the Kingdom of Hungary at the time of the 1828 census could be described as urban and that whether they had the legal status of a town was irrelevant for such claims. In her work, Bácskai analysed all settlements on the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom and concluded that just 57 of them satisfied the market-central role. Out of this number, just 22 of them were free royal towns, representing less than half of their total number in Hungary.¹⁶²

Using the same methods, in the territory of the Bács–Bodrog County, Bácskai recognised three royal towns (i.e. Sombor, Subotica, and Novi Sad) and the borough of Kula as those fulfilling the set requirements. In the case of Sombor, which at the time of the 1828 census had around 17,500 inhabitants, she concluded that the settlement attracted around 70,000 inhabitants as a market centre and an additional 1,000 coming from the areas shared with other such centres.¹⁶³ The area of attraction was not insignificant because of the total number of inhabitants living in the County, which was at the time around 432,000.¹⁶⁴ The market-centre role of Sombor suggested the area and number of inhabitants for which it represented the main place for trade, and this theory

¹⁶² Vera Bácskai, *Towns and Urban Society in Early Nineteenth-Century Hungary* (Akadémiai Kiadó – Budapest 1989), 18.

¹⁶³ Zoltan Györe, *Gradovi i varoshi Bachke*, 163–164.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 43.

confirms the importance of the aforementioned settlement in contrast to its surroundings and the region in general.

However, by taking this method as granted when it comes to judging the projection of the influence of Sombor in its vicinity, its actual position and the role in which it functioned could be misunderstood. Instead, the application of different but similar methods is necessary. In his discussion about the centrality approach, Robert E. Dickinson emphasises the importance of administrative principle in the centrality theory, where the settlement would ideally be a seat of an administrative body.¹⁶⁵ Paul Hohenberg and Lynn Lees in their discussion of the theory of urban centrality also added an administrative aspect to the economic and cultural ones. The urban centrality meant that the number of functions would be located in a certain settlement and that it could provide special services to its surroundings.¹⁶⁶

In a rather confined area of Sombor, several of central functions were concentrated, whose roles were designed by their administrations. First, there was an administration of the free royal town, which was in charge of the affairs of the town of Sombor and the territory it controlled. Said administration consisted of the Inner and Outer Senate and community representative members. The members of the Senate were appointed for life, and their positions were controlled by a small number of families. The Inner Senate was known as the Magistracy, and it managed the administrative and economic affairs of the town. In contrast, the Outer Senate and community representatives acted as controllers of work of the Magistracy, and they were combined into one body by Emperor Joseph II in 1782. Because of their lifelong appointment to office, members of the Magistracy were hard to control, and they were often accused of corruption.¹⁶⁷

The question of the size of the territory was crucial during the negotiations for the liberation of the town (1745–1749), i.e., granting it the status of a free royal settlement in 1749. The size of the territory under the control of Sombor and its ruling elite decreased by more than half, as the number of mainly deserted villages or puszta fell from 26 to 11.¹⁶⁸ Restricted to that territory, the free royal town tried in vain to expand its jurisdiction to the surrounding villages, which were at the time being colonised by the various settlers. Their colonisation was controlled by the state itself

¹⁶⁵ Robert E. Dickinson, *The City Region in Western Europe*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD – London 2003), 37–38.

¹⁶⁶ Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn H. Lees, *The Making of Urban*, 4.

¹⁶⁷ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 18–22.

¹⁶⁸ HAS FMS 32/746; HAS FMS 38/746.

through its Treasury outpost that had operated in Sombor since the 1760s. The intention of the Viennese Court was to repopulate the region and, in consequence, increase tax income, among other things. It is important to emphasise that the settlements in the Bács–Bodrog County were at one point almost all under Treasury (i.e., State) control, but a number of them were either returned to the noble families that could prove ownership in the years prior to the Ottoman conquest in the Sixteenth century or sold to nobility who possessed enough funds.¹⁶⁹ The State remained the owner of a certain number of settlements it colonised even into the 19th century, and from the valuable description of the aforementioned County made by Anton Bauer in 1826, their number could be taken. From the total of 132 settlements described by Bauer, under control of the Hungarian Treasury, there were 62 or just less than half.¹⁷⁰ This does not mean that the State operated differently as a landowner in comparison to privately controlled ones; in fact, it acted identically by dividing the land in the specific settlement between that owned by the peasantry and that under its control. However, the interests of the State were evidently present in this region, and the economic wellbeing of its inhabitants also meant higher income.

The third agent of centrality that operated in Sombor was the administration of Bács–Bodrog County, which had had its residence there since the visit of Emperor Joseph II in 1786.¹⁷¹ His decision to make Sombor the centre of a region, inside an administrative division of the Hungarian Kingdom of that time, was not at all kindly accepted by its officials. They regarded Sombor as an underdeveloped settlement and even questioned its right to bear the status of a free royal town. All the testimonies left about its urban image and economic stature were left by officials of the County, who regarded the administration of the town as brutish, which sometimes led to heated discussions.¹⁷² From the document connected with the endeavour to conduct the census of the entire Hungarian Kingdom from 1825–1827, where it was stated how many officials were employed in each county along with their daily wages, it is evident that Bács–Bodrog County 27 employed officials. The head of the County was the Supreme Count (Latin: *Supremus Comes*), and followed by the official administrator and vice-count (Latin: *Vice Comes*) and his substitute, who both resided in the County itself, unlike the count himself, who usually chose other places,

¹⁶⁹ Zoltan Győre, *Gradovi i varoshi Bachke*, 107.

¹⁷⁰ Antonius Bauer, *Repertorium universarum terrenorum II comitatibus Bacs–Bodrogh*, Sombor 1826.

¹⁷¹ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 104.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 103–105.

such as Buda, as his residence.¹⁷³ However, the vice-count and his substitute usually chose Baja instead of Sombor for their residence, as evident from the orders they published from that residence.¹⁷⁴ It is unclear why this was the practice, and the possible answer was that it was chosen as the County centre in the second half of the Eighteenth century following all the discontent shown by its officials regarding the choice of Sombor as a residence of the regional administration.

Now that the agents of centrality in the town of Sombor have been introduced, it is evident that its urban central role was more complex when observed from outside the market perspective. The friction in the relation between the County and Magistracy, bodies that both resided in the same settlement, restrains us from making assumptions of how Sombor acted in contrast to its surroundings. The nature of the County was such that it acted as a representative of regional interests, which meant that it was also a higher authority for all the settlements surrounding the territory of the free royal town of Sombor, whilst the Magistracy refrained from acting on behalf of the interests of inhabitants living in the territory it controlled. There is an important question lurking – when the regional role of Sombor is discussed, to which part of this settlement are we referring? Surely, the projection of authority of the County in the vicinity of Sombor led the settlement to act as an administrative centre, but this did not mean that the town of Sombor acted as such. If any regional role of the free royal town could be recognised, it would only be valid for the territory under its control, which consisted of 11 puszta given to it in 1749. In the endeavours concerning the building of derivation canals from 1827–1848, the Magistracy acted in the interest of the aforementioned territory, but only after noticeable and discussed delays. Therefore, the drainage activities of the first half of the Nineteenth century were one of the best examples of these contrasting positions that derived from this evident separation of interest zones between the town and County.

The construction of Emperor Francis Canal was a prerequisite for the drainage of the territory of the County, which in sections suffered heavily from underground water and seasonal flooding. József Kiss, who designed the trajectory of the canal that connected the rivers Danube and Tisa, saw a significant part of it passing through the territory of the free royal town of Sombor. This trajectory delayed the start of its building because of the objections of the Magistracy concerning the impact of this endeavour on its inhabitants. However, the importance of the entire project for

¹⁷³ HAS AP 1269/826.

¹⁷⁴ HAS AP 667/833, 675/834.

the State overcame all the construction obstacles. Placing the part of the trajectory through the territory of the town of Kiss also opened the possibility to restructure the diffused Mostonga stream, which endangered not just the territory under the control of the town but also its inner centre. Additionally, the opportunity for the drainage of territories could connect themselves via new canal systems to the existing Francis canal also emerged.¹⁷⁵ However, the role of the Magistracy in this was not perceived, and it was a mistake, derived from the calculation of the best possible route, to even run the path of the canal through the territory that was exempted from the legal control of the County.

Even though the first drainage endeavours, which followed the floods of 1811, were the product of close cooperation between Sombor's two administrations, it was a different story when the territory of the town was left. Because of the County administration's interest in Sombor's wellbeing, because it was their residence, they made plans for repairs of the existing derivation canal that connected to the Mostonga stream and, since 1802, to Emperor Francis Canal. They assisted the town's administration with the equipment and helped them in their future endeavours. However, in the drainage processes that started in 1827, it was evident that the Magistracy was reluctant to act and that it was only concerned with the territory under its control. They did not even repair the existing structures, which directly endangered the territories that were under County control. Therefore, the role of Sombor in relation to its region was questionable. On the one hand, it did represent the administrative centre for the inhabitants living in the entire County, more specifically, the territory that was privately or state-owned. On the other hand, this regional aspect of Sombor was obstructed by the town itself, to the extent that the building of derivation canals took more than twenty years to complete, as presented in previous chapters.

It was also noteworthy that the County referred to higher authorities when it was necessary, with the example of the intervention of the Hungarian Royal Regency Council in 1834 and their pressure on the Magistracy to comply until at least 1836. The Royal Council was an administrative governing authority that had both the counties and free royal towns under its control. It was re-established in 1723 with its seat in Pozsony and moved to Buda during the reign of Emperor Joseph II. The town was also controlled in economic affairs by the Hungarian Treasury, and Sombor had to send reports to both of the higher authorities.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Nikola Petrovity, *Izgradnja kanala Dunav–Tisa*, 11.

¹⁷⁶ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 24.

After the liberation of Sombor in 1749, there were two different controlling authorities, the Treasury and Royal Council-appointed commissariats that tried to contest the Magistracy on a number of issues. Both were represented by commissars who resided in Sombor for a certain period of time, and their assignment could last a number of years. The Royal Council sent eight commissars in total until 1848, and most of them quarrelled with the Magistracy on mainly economic and administrative issues, usually in vain. The town's administration complained to the Royal Council about the work of the commissars and pointed out their misdeeds and corruption, as in the case of József Almasy, who wrote a lengthy complaint about the deeds of the Magistracy in 1817. In return, the representatives of the town went to Buda and Vienna to refute his claims.¹⁷⁷ These quarrels affected the development of the town and manifested not just in the case of the drainage issues but also in the cadastral measures of Sombor's territory, the task that both Anton Bauer and Petar Aradski had tried to solve in 1820s. This issue was resolved while the royal commissar Emerick Redl was in office (1841–1848). Hegedüs states that his appointment came as a consequence of over one hundred complaints made against the work of the Magistracy, both from County officials and inhabitants of Sombor.¹⁷⁸ It is noteworthy that the overall drainage process that affected the previously discussed territories also came to an end in the same period, during the commissariat of Redl.

¹⁷⁷ Antal Hegedüs, *Slobodan kraljevski grad Sombor*, 24–25

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 26

The role of experts in the drainage processes

The administrative aspect of the centrality of Sombor meant that it was, as a settlement overall, able to provide certain special functions for the inhabitants living in its surroundings. In the case of the drainage endeavours of 1827–1848 done in the adjacent territories of Sombor and similar work done after the floods of 1811 in the territory of the free royal town, it was evident that the role of the expert was of the greatest importance. Several actors played significant roles in these processes, and two of the most prominent were Anton Bauer and Petar Aradski. However, before delving into the analysis of their work, it is important to put them into the broader picture.

The drainage efforts and building of the naval and derivation canals was not a process restricted to Bács–Bodrog County, as it was common for the entire territory of the Kingdom of Hungary in the second half of the Eighteenth and first half of the Nineteenth century. For the southern part of the aforementioned Kingdom, there were even plans in 1816 and 1817 to connect the Drava and Sava rivers by navigational canals and subsequently to the existing system of Francis Canal, which connected the Danube and Tisa rivers.¹⁷⁹ In the case of other free royal towns in Bács–Bodrog County, in the territory of Subotica, canals were built between the lakes existed there, as evident from the plans made by Gavriilo Aradski in 1824.¹⁸⁰

In the case of Sombor, two main experts were capable of devising the plans for the drainage, and they were titled geometers even though there was a certain conflation of the term with that of engineer (Hungarian: *mérnök*). László Kontler states that the first institute for engineering in Europe was established by Emperor Joseph II in 1782 in Pest, and this was probably the place where they got part or the entirety of their education.¹⁸¹ All the counties of the Kingdom of Hungary had two geometers as members of their administration, one main and other acting as support. The main geometer was paid on a daily basis, with the wage of slightly over three forints, which put him into the third of the four wage levels. The vice-count, for example, was paid twice as much as the geometer, who still earned a significant sum on an annual basis. It is not clear exactly when Anton Bauer became the main geometer of Bács–Bodrog County, but it is evident

¹⁷⁹ Hungarian National Archives, Maps Collection S 12 – Div. XIII. – No. 457:1, S 12 – Div. XIII. – No. 470.

¹⁸⁰ Hungarian National Archives, Maps Collection S 12 – Div. XIII. – No. 548.

¹⁸¹ László Kontler, *A History of Hungary*, (Atlantisz Publishing House – Budapest 2009), 221.

that he had done his first measurements as one of the aforementioned territory in 1805, which he used as the basis of his later census made in 1826.¹⁸² He was elected to be head of the commission that was designed to tackle the problem of the drainage of the territory of Sombor and its surroundings in 1827, and he played a prominent role during this process, creating an initial plan, which was later altered after his discussions with his colleague from the town's administration. The other expert who played a prominent role in the entire process of the drainage was Petar Aradski, who appeared as the main geometer of the free royal town of Sombor as early as 1811 and remained in that post for several decades. The last plan devised by him was dated 1843, and he probably retired, whilst as his assistant appeared Lazar Aradski, probably his son, in 1839, and he acted independently, devising reports about the condition of roads in Sombor.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Antonius Bauer, *Corpus Ichnographiarum omnium I[ncllyti] Comitatus de Bacs incorporatorum Terrenorum*, Sombor 1805; Antonius Bauer, *Repertorium universarum terrenorum*, 6–19.

¹⁸³ HAS AA 1059/811, 114/839; HAS AP 382/848 Pos. 133/844.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of difficulties when it comes to the question of how the urbanization level of a certain settlement in early modern Europe could be measured. The majority of scholars who discussed the notion of the urbanization in Europe put their focus mostly on its western, more economically advanced, parts. Their theories that consequently derived from this position set a standard, more or less, of what were necessary requirements for a settlement to be labelled as urban. When it comes to the parts of the continent that were mostly out of the scope of their research, the processes that shaped towns and their characteristics developed differently. However, this does not mean that there were no urban settlements, or those that showed such features, because their existence could be traced back to the Middle Ages.

Because of the fact that the comparison between the towns in eastern parts of Europe with their western counterparts brought mostly conclusions of economical and developmental disparity, the necessity arose for the different approach in defining what was urban. Therefore, the factors such as size or wealth were not the decisive ones, as it was centrality, or more specifically, the role that an urban settlement played in relationship to its surroundings was the key. This approach that focused on the central functions was developed or acknowledged by scholars such as Brian Berry, Robert E. Dickinson, Paul Hohenberg and Lynn Lees, who mainly dealt with urban settlements in the west, and in the case of the latter two, within a specific time period. There were several different approaches in the centrality theory, but the economic, administrative and cultural are the most applied ones.

The economic aspect of a centrality was discussed and developed among the scholars who dealt with the history of urbanization in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. The urbanization of Hungary in the early modern era had its own peculiarities, due to the fact that there were already existing free royal cities, which origin could be dated back to the times before the Ottoman conquest in the Sixteenth century. Also, another type of a settlement emerged, called *oppida*, which did not possess a higher level of legal autonomy in relation to the surrounding feudal system, like free royal cities did. By focusing on certain aspects of centrality, such as economy, it was possible to provide a new perspective on the development of the region and on the important role that the settlements in it played.

This approach, developed by the Hungarian scholars such as Vera Bácskai, regarded the market central role as a determining factor of the urbanization level, and it also elevated the position of Sombor in the hierarchy of settlements in the Kingdom of Hungary. The history of this settlement, since the Eighteenth century and the expulsion of the Ottoman authority, was an example of a gradual transition from the status of oppida (i.e. *military oppida*, a privileged settlement within the Military Border system) to the one of free royal town, acquired in 1749. This exempted Sombor from the feudal authority and the control of Bács–Bodrog County, by granting the specific territory and rights to it. Even though it had the legal status of a town, Sombor lagged in terms of the development behind similar settlements, and that made it susceptible to the criticism that mostly came from the feudal authorities. Their discontent grew even more when the aforementioned town also became the seat of the County administration in 1786.

Returning to the arguments made by the proponents of the economic role of a settlement, labelled as market centre theory, Sombor was ranked high among the other urban settlements in the Kingdom of Hungary. Around the 70.000 people were attracted to the market of Sombor and this showed its overall importance in the County. However, the projection of central functions on the rural hinterland was different if the other aspects of centrality were observed, such as administrative (i.e. political) control. Due to the fact that Sombor was the seat of several different and often conflicting authorities, it is safe to conclude that it is not prudent to overlook what this meant in its overall development. The question that emerges when treating this settlement as the one having significant regional impact was to which part of the settlement we are referring to? Sombor as a free royal town had a control of the predefined territory, without any real possibilities to project its political dominance on the region divided between privately and State-owned feudal territories. However, as the seat of the County it was the centre of the administrative power for all the inhabitants that lived as subordinates on the aforementioned feudal land. This certain duality of Sombor, when it comes to the projection of administrative power, led to conflicting interests that impeded the overall development of the settlement as a whole.

One of the best examples for the aforementioned differences in interests was the question of the drainage of the territory of the County from the redundant water and swamps. The area in the vicinity of Sombor was especially endangered, due to the presence of river the Mostonga that seasonally flooded and even ran through the town centre. The construction of the Emperor Francis Canal (1793-1802), which connected the rivers Danube and Tisa, not only opened the possibilities

for the amelioration of trade in the region, but it also created a waterway through which the redundant water could be extracted. József Kiss, an engineer who initiated the project, negotiated its plan with the State authorities and began the construction of the Canal, also envisioned the possibilities for the drainage of the territory. He had a significant experience in dealing with similar problems, due to his work done in the newly created settlements of German colonizers. However, even though he was supported by the State, interested in the entire project, Kiss encountered certain issues in dealing with the representatives of the town's administration. The Magistracy insisted that, even though they were aware of the benefits of the entire endeavour, they were worried about the disruption of the agricultural production in the affected sections on its territory that this excavation would bring. This position more or less continued in the following decades, leaving the Magistracy only really concerned about their interests that were confined to the territory under their direct control.

However, the drainage process was of essential importance for the amelioration of the agricultural productivity in the territories under the feudal control. The wars with Napoleon's France delayed any significant work of such sort in the region, and the plans for the drainage of the most endangered territories only started to emerge in the late 1820s. It was no coincidence that the first derivation project was promoted by the Main County geometer, Anton Bauer, in 1827. First of all, he was well acquainted with conditions on the terrain, due to the fact that he made a couple of censuses of Bács-Bodrog County. The most significant one, made in 1826, presented the overview of the County, its advantages and impediments. Also, in that document Bauer included a list of all settlements in the aforementioned territory, along with their inhabitants and the land they controlled. By conducting the census in 1826 he was aware of the necessity for the drainage for the further development of the region. Additionally, his work took place at the time of overall census done for the entire territory of the Kingdom of Hungary that was conducted between the years 1825-1827.

In order to drain the most endangered areas (namely, pusztas Stanišić, Riđica, Kruševlje, Gakovo and Nemes Militits) that were adjacent to the territory of the town of Sombor, Bauer envisioned that the derivation canals must connect with the river Mostonga, and subsequently, the Emperor Francis Canal. This meant that the cooperation with the Magistracy was necessary, due to the fact that a part of the excavation was supposed to be done in the territory which was under the control of town. Therefore, a joint commission was created in 1827, consisting of the

representatives of the County, the State (i.e. Hungarian Treasury) and the Town, with Anton Bauer designated as its leading figure of the endeavour. However, when the investigations on the field started, an opposition to Bauer emerged in the figure of town's geometer, Petar Aradski. By protecting the interest of Sombor, he sought for the solution that would limit the involvement of the free royal town when it comes to the excavations outside of their controlled area. This also meant that the Magistracy was only interested in the endeavours in the areas near Sombor that represented a potential threat to the territory of the town. The swamp area of Kruševlje and its flood potential posed a significant risk and here the interest of the County and the Magistracy overlapped, which consequently led to the creation of the first plans for the construction of the drainage canals. Bauer designed the one which ran through the land of the feudal dominions, and Aradski did the same for the one that ran through the territory of Sombor.

The town administration neglected the preservation of these derivation canals in the following years, which led to their deterioration, and subsequently, to new floods that damaged the Town's neighbouring feudal properties. Since 1833, these territories urged the Magistracy to repair the old derivation canal and also to build a new one that would connect to the territory of Nemes Militits and drain their redundant water, but their efforts were ineffective. Because of the reluctance of the town administration to conduct the requested work, the representatives of the affected areas made a complaint to the higher authorities, which in this case was the Hungarian Royal Regency Council with its seat in Buda. However, even the efforts of this authority, which took care of political control over the County and free royal town, were futile. Sombor, or more specifically its town administration, delayed the negotiations and obstructed any potential work on their territory, until 1843. Finally, the Magistracy sent its aged geometer, Petar Aradski, to create a plan for the new derivation canal, which would connect with the existing one that was built around 15 years before, and subsequently, to the river Mostonga and the Emperor Francis Canal in the end. The Magistracy decided to change its position due to the fact that the County was highly involved in the financing of the project. Also, the town administration planned to use the territory that would be drained for the erection of school building. The excavations were finished in the year of 1848, which concluded the entire process that lasted for over two decades, revolving around the construction of the drainage canals designed to extract the redundant water from the most endangered areas in the vicinity of Sombor.

The process of drainage, in my opinion, very clearly shows the complex position of the settlement of Sombor in the region, or at least a section of it. Without the desire to dispute the validity of the market centre theory, I proposed that the centrality of Sombor was contested if the other aspects were taken into account. The administrative duality of Sombor was noted by Antal Hegedüs, but he did not delve into the consequences that derived from this problem. The process of drainage was more important for the County, which led to constant disputes with the Magistracy over the course of decades. Sombor was certainly not the only free royal town that had disputes with the County administration, nor am I making those claims.

It seems that this contested centrality, when it comes to the projection of the administrative (i.e. political) power, was present if there was a certain legal autonomy of an urban settlement, and that was the case with the free royal towns. Having in mind the fact that a specific settlement could be labelled as urban if it possessed certain central functions, the question of which criteria should be applied for a specific settlement arises. I would argue that administrative centrality of Sombor was contested and that this in general impeded the progress of both the town and the region in its vicinity. The process of drainage could not be regarded as insignificant if we are trying to prove the aforementioned claim, because of a several reasons. First, it was an endeavour of great importance for the County and the State, and it was aligned with their physiocracy philosophy. Second, due to the fact that in the specific case of Sombor the canals were built through the territory of the town, the entire process was delayed because of the contested positions of the County and the Magistracy. The Emperor Francis Canal, which was a crucial precondition for the process of the drainage, had the section of it going through the territory under the control of the town's administration, thus turning them into an unavoidable opponent in all the potential negotiations. In conclusion, by observing one of the aspects of centrality closer, more specifically its manifestation exemplified through the process of the drainage, it is evident that a notion of central urban functions had more complexity and that overall position of town in the region requires additional approaches and conclusions.

List of Abbreviations:

- HAS – Historical Archive of Sombor
- FMS – Fortified Military Settlement (1720–1749)
- AA – Acta Anni (1749–1825)
- AP – Acta Politica (1826–1845)

List of Illustrations:

Figure 1: Plan of the Canal made by brothers Kiss and presented to the Emperor Franz II (1792).
Source: Hungarian National Archives, Maps Collection S 11 No 0668.

Figure 2: Section of the Map of Bács–Bodrog County c. 1787-1792 depicting the territory of Sombor and its surroundings.
Source: Hungarian National Archives, Maps Collection S 11 - No. 230.

Figure 3: Section of the map of Anton Bauer of Bács–Bodrog County (1826) depicting the territory of Sombor, with the Emperor Francis Canal in the South and the endangered areas in the North, with river Mostonga and existing swamps drawn.
Source: Hungarian National Archives, Maps Collection S 11 - No. 505:3.

Figure 4: Plan made by Petar Aradski for the drainage of the redundant water from the territories of Gakovo, Kruševlje, Riđica, and Stanišić (1827), through the river Mostonga and consequently to the Emperor Francis Canal (bottom left corner), with the depiction of the flooded areas of Bilić and Rančevo (top right).
Source: Historical Archive of Sombor Acta Politica 1358/827.

Figure 5: The plan made by Petar Aradski for the construction of the drainage canals going from the swamp areas of Bilić (bottom right) to the river Mostonga, with the depiction of the Emperor Francis Canal (top left) (1843).
Source: Historical Archive of Sombor Acta Politica 382/848 Pos. 133/844.

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