

SETTLEMENT SYSTEM

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Settlements are the geographical framework for socio-economic life. A settlement serves the physical and spiritual needs of its inhabitants, is an imprint of the past and culture of the community, and also reflects the natural conditions of the area. All settlements in a geographical region together form the settlement system, which can be examined on the basis of the statistical data on autonomous administrative units, cities and villages. However, smaller settlements without independent local government (e.g. scattered farmsteads/tanyas, former manor farms, mining settlements) are also part of the settlement system, and some of these may have special significance in certain regions (e.g. tanyas in the Danube–Tisza Midland). The size and density of individual settlements, as well as their aggregate spatial pattern, have a major impact on the functioning of the settlement system, on the relationship between different parts of the system, and on the quality of life of the people living there.

Changes in the settlement system in the Carpathian Basin after World War I

The distribution of the nearly 40 thousand settlements in the wider region of the Carpathian Basin is very uneven. This unevenness reflects historical developments, natural features, farming possibilities and the spatial distribution of the population. Areas in the Alföld are characterised by settlements with greater population size and smaller density, while smaller but denser settlements dominate in the hilly and mountainous regions. The Carpathian Basin, which is mostly surrounded by natural borders, has historically offered favourable conditions for the development of settlements (except in the 16th and 17th centuries). Settlements in the Carpathian Basin, which has a geographical area of 325 thousand km², were founded and developed within the framework of a single state for about 1,000 years prior to World War I. One thousand years of harmony in the settlement system was broken by the Treaty of Trianon (1920), which disrupted economic relations between parts of the formerly united country and resulted in new customs borders and protectionist provisions. Within the spatial structure of the shrunken country, Budapest took on an ‘oversized’ role. Several important counter poles (e.g. Zagreb, Bratislava/Pozsony, Košice/Kassa, Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, Timișoara/Temesvár) lay – after Trianon – in the successor states. Indeed, only Debrecen, Szeged and Pécs remained in Hungary, as regional centres.

After World War II and with the exception of Burgenland in Austria, ‘state socialist’ systems were established in the countries of the Carpathian Basin after the Soviet model. Through the nationalisation of privately owned assets, including production and service companies, the state rapidly became the main determinant of settlement processes. Albeit to varying degrees, each country initiated the collectivisation of agricultural land and the establishment of a state-run agricultural sector. All of this offered additional opportunities for the state power to influence the development of settlements. The extent of central intervention in the development of the settlement system varied from country to country and from era to era. For



1 Rebuilt after the floods of 1879, Szeged is the regional centre of the Southern Alföld

instance, in Yugoslavia private farms continued to operate, as agricultural land was not collectivised. In that country, therefore, villages and homesteads had a better chance of survival and development than in other communist countries in the region. In the former Czechoslovakia, the development of the more underdeveloped eastern part of the country (Slovakia) was stimulated by the establishment of industrial sites, which involved the rapid industrialisation of the existing urban population. In Romania, the development of cities in Transylvania and Crișana/Partium, which were much more advanced than cities in the Old Romanian areas, was not a political priority for some time. Indeed, it was only in the second half of the 1960s that a major realignment in the local settlement system began. This shift was triggered by the construction of mass housing, which served both the Romanisation of Transylvania and the infrastructure development of the cities concerned. The settlement system of Zakarpattia, which was part of the Soviet Union, developed under completely new conditions compared to the previous ones (and most of all its surroundings). As a result, the development of settlements in certain regions of the Carpathian Basin after 1945 differed in many respects. The forced growth of the number and proportion of cities and towns dwellers (urbanization) is a common feature. The main reason for this was that cities, as seedbeds of communist industrialisation and modernisation, enjoyed an advantage over villages in the allocation of development resources (e.g. housing).

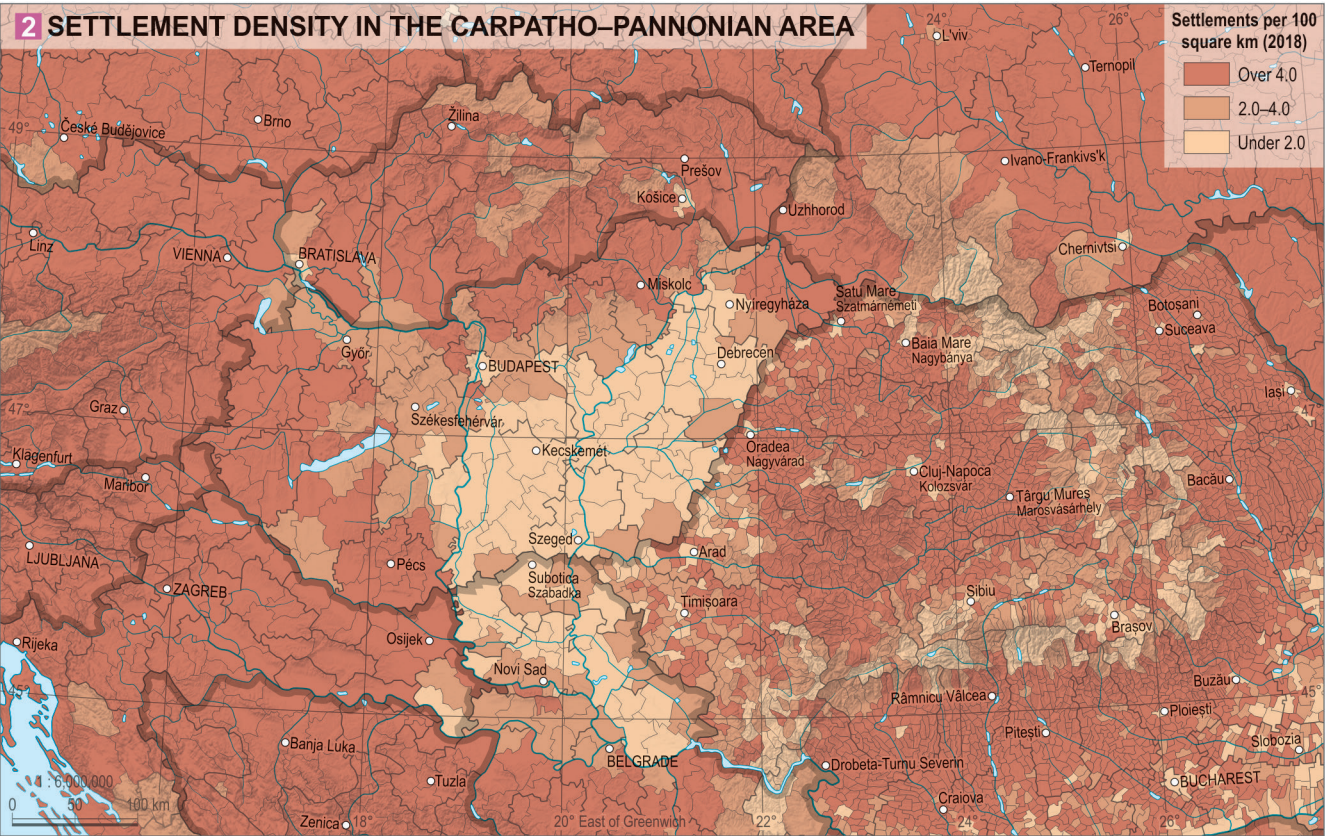
1 DISTRIBUTION OF SETTLEMENTS AND THEIR POPULATION BY SIZE CATEGORIES IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN (2018)					
Settlements by size categories (thousand people)	Settlements	Population	Settlements	Population	
	Number		Proportion (%)		
below 0.5	9,599	1,851,796	55.7	6.6	
0.5–1	3,215	2,291,747	18.7	8.1	
1–2	2,305	3,248,930	13.4	11.5	
2–5	1,421	4,248,743	8.2	15.0	
5–10	352	2,421,647	2.0	8.6	
10–20	183	2,604,500	1.1	9.2	
20–50	107	3,187,316	0.6	11.3	
50–100	33	2,263,113	0.2	8.0	
100–200	12	1,672,288	0.1	5.9	
200–500	7	2,013,434	0.0	7.1	
500–1000	1	692,189	0.0	2.5	
above 1000	1	1,749,734	0.0	6.2	
Settlements of the Carpathian Basin in total	17,236	28,245,438	100.0	100.0	

The collapse of communism in 1989–1990 brought another turn in the development of settlements in the fragmented Carpathian Basin. With the restoration of a non-hierarchical system of municipalities, the privileged situation of the cities ceased and the external and internal conditions of the development of settlements changed significantly. The highly centralised urban development model of communism, which had been based on central distribution, was replaced by a pluralistic market-based environment in which local conditions and the role of local politics were valued. As the settlement system became more differentiated, the geographical location and accessibility of a settlement became more important than its ranking in the settlement hierarchy. The transition to democracy and a market economy set in motion changes in the settlement system throughout the region. From the 2000s on, these changes were augmented by accession to the European Union.

Settlement system of the Carpathian Basin by population size

A total of 28.2 million people lived in the 17,236 settlements of the Carpathian Basin in its narrower sense in 2018. The settlement system is quite fragmented in Central European terms, although there are significant geographical differences behind this. Settlements of less than 500 people make up 55.7% of the settlement system, while they are home to only 6.6% of the population. Considering the present-day area of Hungary, 36% of all settlements belonged in this group, accounting for 2.9% of the population (in 2018). By comparison, in Germany, which underwent industrialisation and modern urbanisation earlier, the proportion of settlements with less than 500 people – which account for just 0.7% of the population – is only 20.1%. Past differences in urban development are also indicated by the fact that in the Carpathian Basin only 21.7% of the population live in cities with more than 100 thousand inhabitants, whereas in Germany this value is 32%.

Budapest, the only city in the Carpathian Basin with a population of more than one million, is at the top of the settlement system (2018: 1.75 million people). It is followed by the Croatian capital, Zagreb, with a population of 692 thousand. Seven further cities have a population of more than 200 thousand, of which only Debrecen (202 thousand) is found in the present-day area of Hungary. This group includes Bratislava (429 thousand) and Košice (239 thousand) in Slovakia, Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár, 329 thousand), Timișoara (318 thousand) and Brașov (249 thousand) in Transylvania and Banat, and Novi Sad (249 thousand) in Vojvodina. Another 12 cities have a population of more than 100 thousand, six of which are located on the present-day territory of Hungary (Győr, Kecskemét, Miskolc, Nyíregyháza, Pécs and Szeged). The share of the population of settlements with more than 100 thousand inhabitants is 28.4% in Hungary (mainly due to Budapest), 25.3% in Pannonian Croatia and 24.1% in Transylvania in the wider sense. In contrast, cities with more than 100 thousand inhabitants account for only 13.3% of the population in Vojvodina, 12.3% in Slovakia and

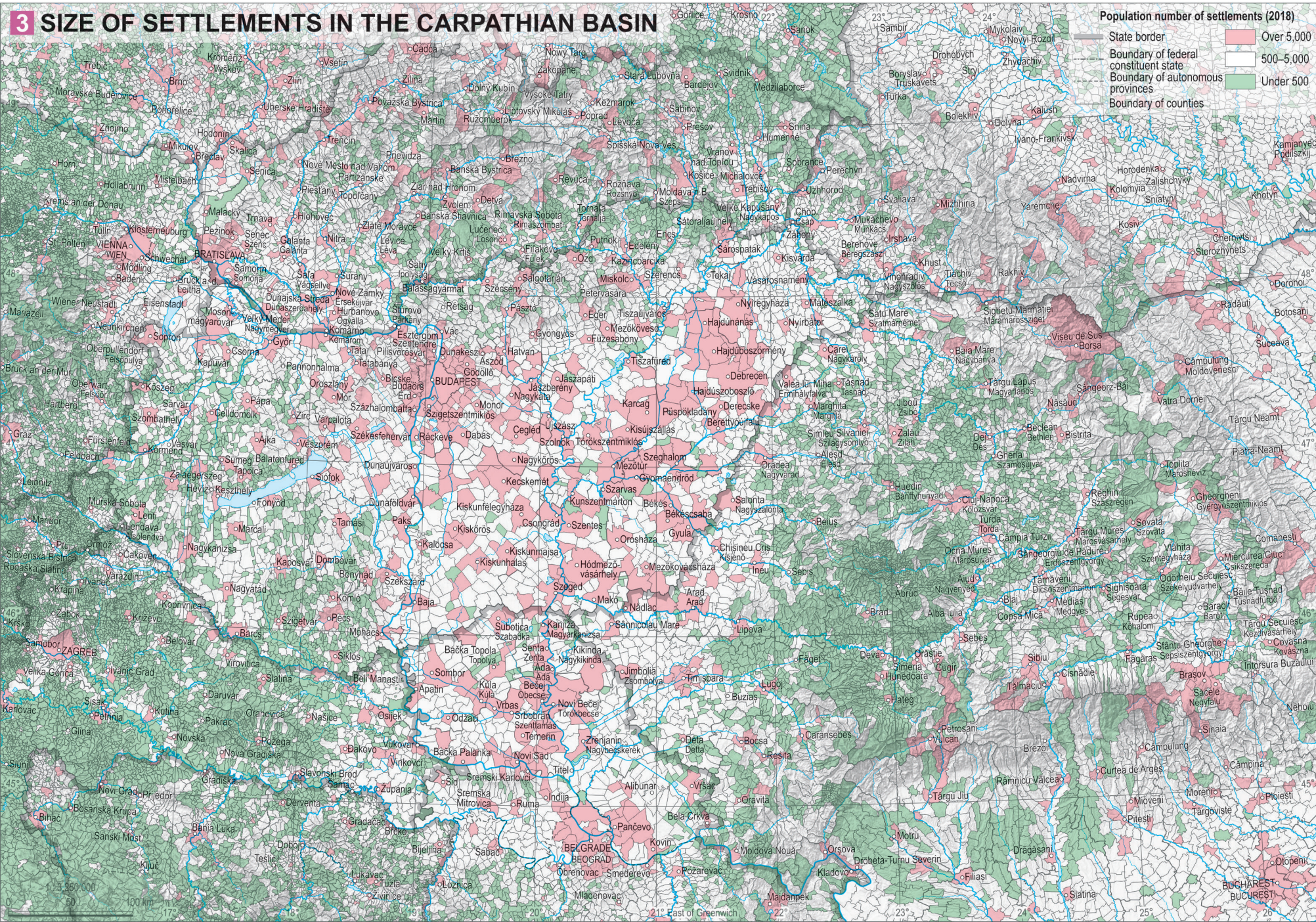


9% in Zakarpattia, while in Prekmurje and Burgenland, such large cities are completely absent. Settlements with fewer than 20 thousand inhabitants dominate within the Carpathian Basin in terms of their number and share. Indeed, 59% of the inhabitants of the region live in such settlements. In particular, settlements between 2 thousand and 5 thousand people are significant in terms of population.

There is a close correlation between population density and the nature of the settlement system discussed in this chapter. Even so, rather than population density shaping the settlement system, the nature and functions of the settlement system determine the development of population density. Settlement density in

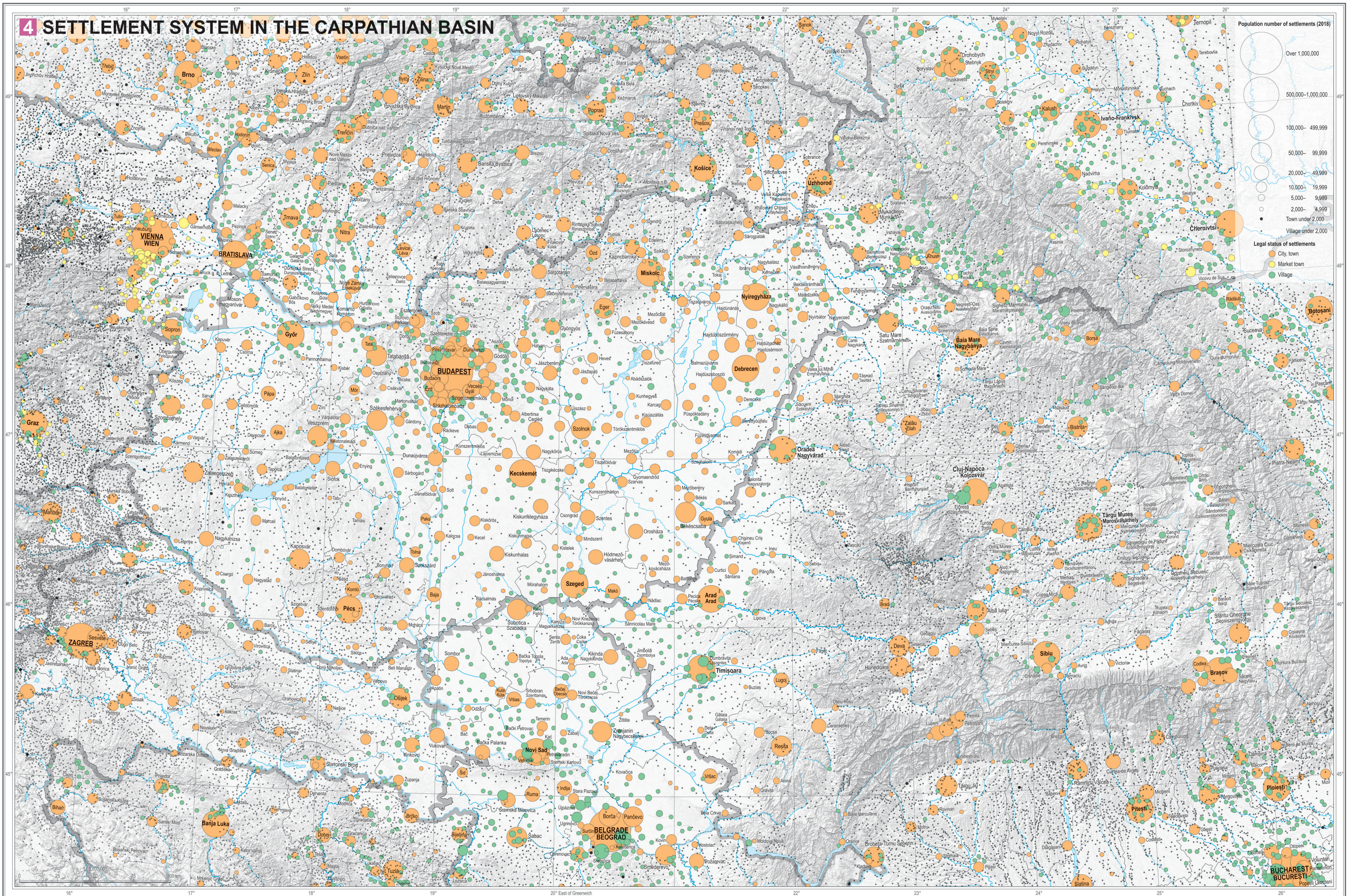
the Carpathian Basin shows marked regional differences. Whereas in parts of the Alföld there are just 1.3–1.4 settlements per 100 km², the corresponding value is greater than 10 in certain hilly and mountainous areas (e.g. Apuseni Mountains, Carpathians). There is a strong correlation between the density of settlements and their average size, the reasons for which include the natural environment and the nature of the economy. In lowland areas, the population settled in sparsely located, but larger settlements, using the land between them for agricultural production. In the Alföld, the destruction of the Ottoman–Turkish occupation also played a role in the rarefaction of the settlement system. The surviving cities, which had

been paying taxes to the Sultan since the mid-16th century (*Hass*), had huge lands, often extending over tens of kilometres from the built-up zone. From the 18th century onwards, in the midst of peaceful conditions, population growth began to accelerate, resulting in the emergence of giant villages, which are still typical to this day. Concurrently, some people began to move to homesteads. However, in the hills and mountains, there was less ‘living space’ for residents of the settlements. Moreover, farming (e.g. grazing, logging and hunting) was able to support only a small number of inhabitants. As a result, smaller, more densely clustered settlements became dominant here, often established in the clearings of once contiguous forests. Consequently, the share of settlements of less than 500 inhabitants in Southern Transdanubia, the North Hungarian Range, Eastern Slovakia and Transylvania is significant. Settlements with a population of more than 5,000 inhabitants, however, form large contiguous areas in the Alföld and Syrmia, around Budapest and in the Kisalföld. There were significant differences between the lowland regions and the hilly and mountainous areas not only in the average size of the settlements, but also in the quality of the building stock and in the appearance of the settlements. In the settlements of the Alföld, buildings tended to have adobe and mud walls, while reeds and straw were used for roofing. In the hills surrounding the Alföld and in the mountains, the building materials of the settlements were the widely available quarry-stone (limestone, volcanic tuff) and fired brick, while in the higher mountain regions timber was used and the roof was mostly covered with shingle and tile. All this still has an impact on regional differences in the quality of the housing stock (chapter XII. 2. 1. on housing conditions).

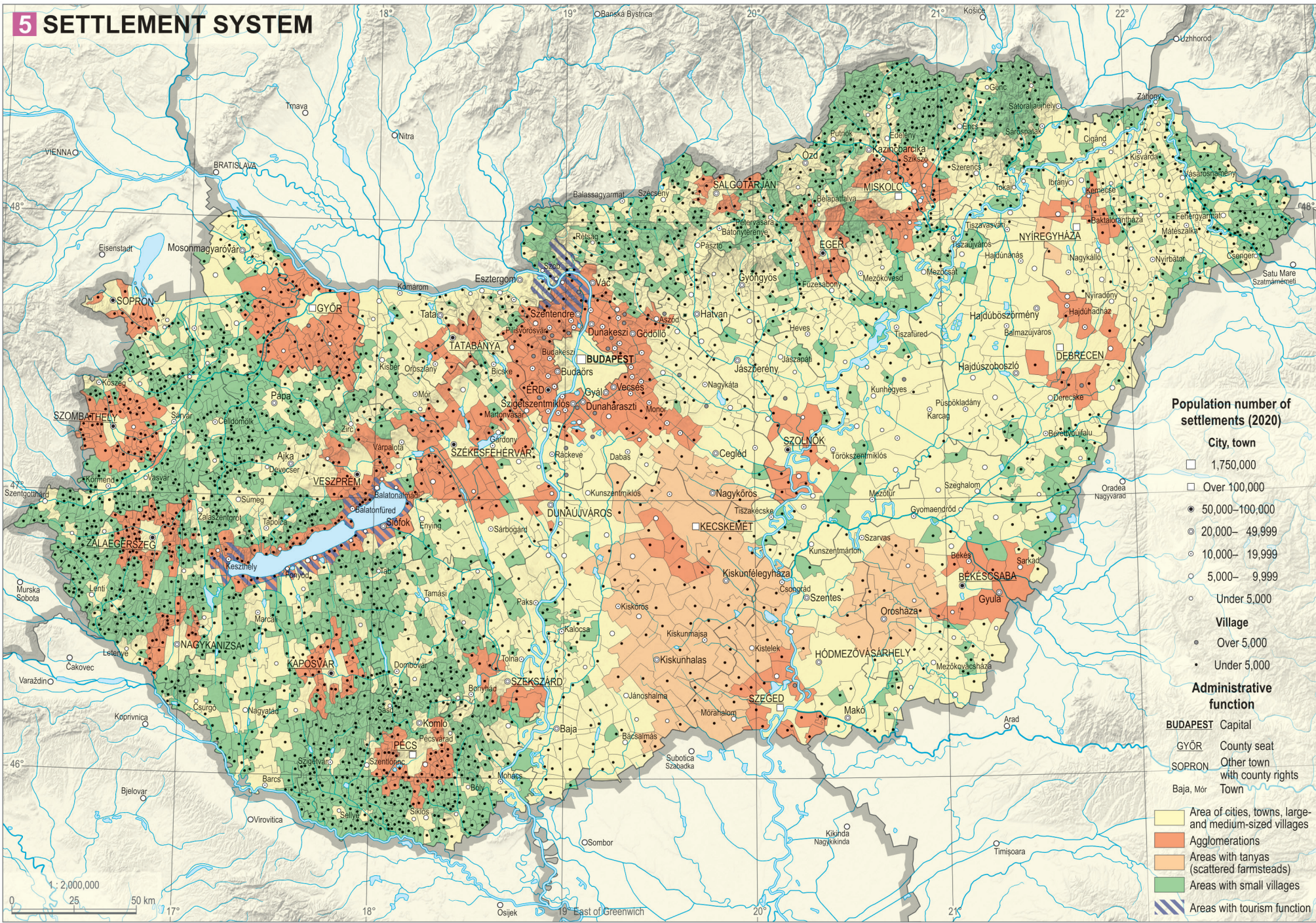




# 4 SETTLEMENT SYSTEM IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN







### Settlement system of Hungary

In the present-day area of Hungary, the average population of settlements is 3,100 people, and only in Vojvodina is there a higher average (4,016). In contrast, only 2,076 people live, on average, in one settlement in Zakarpattia, 1,590 in Slovakia, 1,273 in Transylvania and only 920 in Burgenland. The average size of settlements decreases from the lowland core area of the Carpathian Basin towards the rims. The size of a settlement and its population affect its development opportunities, the quality of services, the labour market situation of inhabitants, and ultimately the capacity of the settlements to maintain their population. Settlements with less than 500 inhabitants were particularly disadvantaged in the aftermath of World War II and under communism. Since the overwhelming majority of their inhabitants were working in agriculture, the nationalisation of land and the politically motivated restructuring of agriculture made their



2 Szalafő-Pityerszer, an example of the fragmented ('szeres') settlements common in the Őrség (Vas County)

labour market situation extremely unfavourable. Many people of working age either out-migrated or began to commute to towns and industrial centres. The settlement policy aimed at diminishing rural settlements (school districts, construction bans, etc.) also contributed to this process. After the collapse of communism, disadvantages due to the size of the settlement were mitigated. Most settlements became administratively independent and acquired their own local government.

When considering the settlement system of Hungary, the data of the administrative units (municipalities) should be taken into account. As the data from municipal and administrative units are generally comparable, this approach is acceptable. However, in certain regions or in certain municipalities or administrative units, this compliance does not apply. (e.g. in the Őrség in Vas County, several groups of houses, fragmented settlements, form a village [2]. In agglomerations, administrative boundaries may not correspond fully to the actual settlements. Some geographers accept each farmstead (tanya) as an independent settlement. In some cases, administratively combined settlements have not been consolidated into single settlements, such as Esztergom and the attached Pilisszentlélek or Szentgotthárd and Farkasfa.)

There are currently 3,155 settlement units in Hungary, of which 346 are designated as towns [5]. The number of settlements has gradually decreased in the long term; Hungary had 3,412 administratively separate settlements in 1933, 3,339 in 1949 and 3,070 in 1990. Since 1990, however, their number has been growing slowly. Still, there are conflicting processes behind the data. Some settlements (administrative units) have vanished, often in the course of settlement mergers. For example, in 1950, 24 previously independent

municipalities were incorporated into (Greater) Budapest; and today's Miskolc is made up of 8 former settlements. Many municipalities have been merged (between 1900 and 2000, 544 municipalities were merged with other municipalities). A small number of municipalities have ceased to exist. This was the case, for example, in Gyűrűfű, which was completely depopulated in 1972. Other examples include Kisújbánya in Baranya County and Vértesszomszka in Fejér County. (These villages have recently been revived as holiday settlements.)

Some new settlements have also been created (428 between 1900 and 2018). In the decade after World War II, a large number of so-called tanya villages were formed in the Alföld. This development was viewed as a solution to the problems of tanyas – such as the difficulty of accessing primary health care. Certain areas with dense tanyas were administratively separated from their parent settlement and organised into separate villages. At the time of their formation, they mostly lacked a classical centre and the associated institutions. Over the decades, however, they have mostly been transformed into 'regular' villages (Mórahalom and Tompa were even designated as towns). A number of industrial and housing estates (Almásfüzitő, Tokodaltáró, Petőfibánya, Martfű, etc.) and lake-side resorts (Balatonföldvár, Balatonrendes, Balatonakaratya, Balatonfenyves, Berekfürdő, etc.) were also organised into villages. After 1990, several villages that had been forcibly attached to cities under communism regained their autonomy (such as Algyő, which was separated from Szeged, Szarvaskő separated from Eger, and Berente separated from Kazincbarcika). Several settlements have been formed out of localities that have become independent municipalities (villages) in

Settlements with specific forms have developed in the Carpathian Basin over time.

The layout of Várság (Székelyvárság), a settlement on the volcanic edge plateau of the Harghita (Hargita) Mountains, with a population of 1,621 people, almost exclusively Hungarians, reflects a lifestyle adapted to the high mountain environment [6a]. From the beginning of the 19th century the extensive lands of Dealu (Oroszhegy), which rose towards the forested hills, were initially cultivated from buildings that were temporarily inhabited at the time of harvests. Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, Székely families from Dealu (Oroszhegy) and Corund (Korond) settled here on a permanent basis, and Várság (Székelyvárság) became an independent village in 1907. Located at an altitude of 900–1000 m and consisting of houses scattered on a hillside, the village has an area of 77 km<sup>2</sup> and its inhabitants mainly live from logging and wood-working (e.g. making shingles).

Adaptation to the natural environment is also reflected in the layout of Kétvölgy, which is a logging settlement and has 83 residents (2020) in the Vasi-Hegyhát Hills in the southwestern part of Vas County [6b]. It was founded through the merger of two former villages, Ritkaháza and Permice (Vashegyfalja), in 1951. As the Hungarian name implies, the buildings of the settlement were established in adjacent valleys and scattered in forest clearings. Most of the houses are surrounded by meadows or wooded areas. The scattered layout of the village is linked not only to farming, but also to the protective function of the area. This is where the western border guard region of Hungary lay.

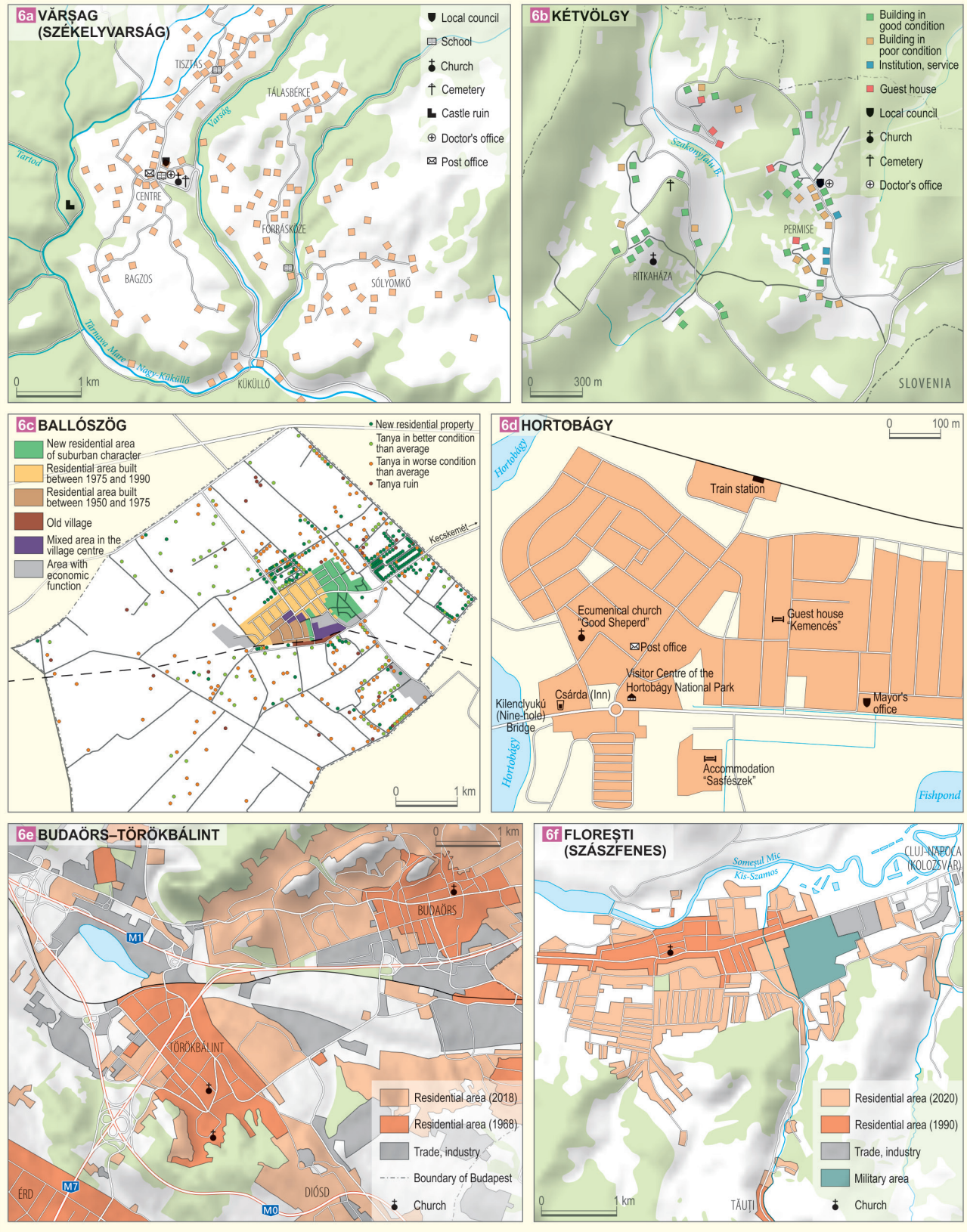
A characteristic settlement in the Danube–Tisza Midland is Ballószög (3,780 residents in 2020), which was already mentioned in the 14th century as a place with a church called Ballószög [6c]. Turkish destruction and the following desertification depopulated the ancient settlement. Its revival in the first half of the 19th century was due to afforestation and vineyard planting programmes, which were launched to stabilise wind-blown sand. At first, land was given only to residents of Kecskemét. Later, however, more and more people set up tanyas and started farming. After World War II, an important communist objective in settlement policy was the organisation of tanyas in municipalities. To this end, a village centre with public functions (e.g. post office, school, shops) was established near the more densely located farms. Finally, the ancient core of Ballószög became an independent settlement in 1954, and in the following decades new streets were opened. Since 1990, Ballószög has been shaped by suburbanisation, as people have moved out of Kecskemét.

Hortobágy with 1,297 residents (2020), which belongs to a rare group of planned villages, also owes its existence to political will [6d]. The village is a rarity because in most cases it is the larger cities that were born or rebuilt (e.g. Szeged after 1879) according to the standards of the engineering drawing table. The settle-



3 Hortobágy, a village with a regular layout designed by engineers

### SOME SPECIAL SETTLEMENTS



ment became populated after World War II, when the communist state announced its programme to cultivate the puszta (bare land). During the large-scale restructuring of agriculture, a state farm was established in 1950–51. Many people were brought against their will to the local forced labour camps. From 1953 on, workers were recruited from other parts of Hungary. The settlement core was formed where the main road crosses the Hortobágy River, and the formally established regular parts of the settlement were adapted to this. Hortobágy became an independent village in 1966, having been separated from Balmazújváros.

The recent development of Budaörs (29,119) and Törökbálint (14,189) to the west of Budapest at the junction of the M1 and M7 motorways has been triggered by market economy factors and lifestyle changes in society [6e]. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, the two settlements belonged to the inner commuter belt of Budapest. Most residents worked in the capital, which was also attracting people from other parts of the country. By 1990, the population of Budaörs was almost 20 thousand, and Törökbálint had reached 10 thousand. After the collapse of communism, the direction of in- and out-migration changed. Many people moved out of Budapest as a result of suburbanisation. As the metropolitan population grew, global capital increasingly invested in the area, establishing office parks, shopping centres, depots and warehouses, largely at the expense of for-

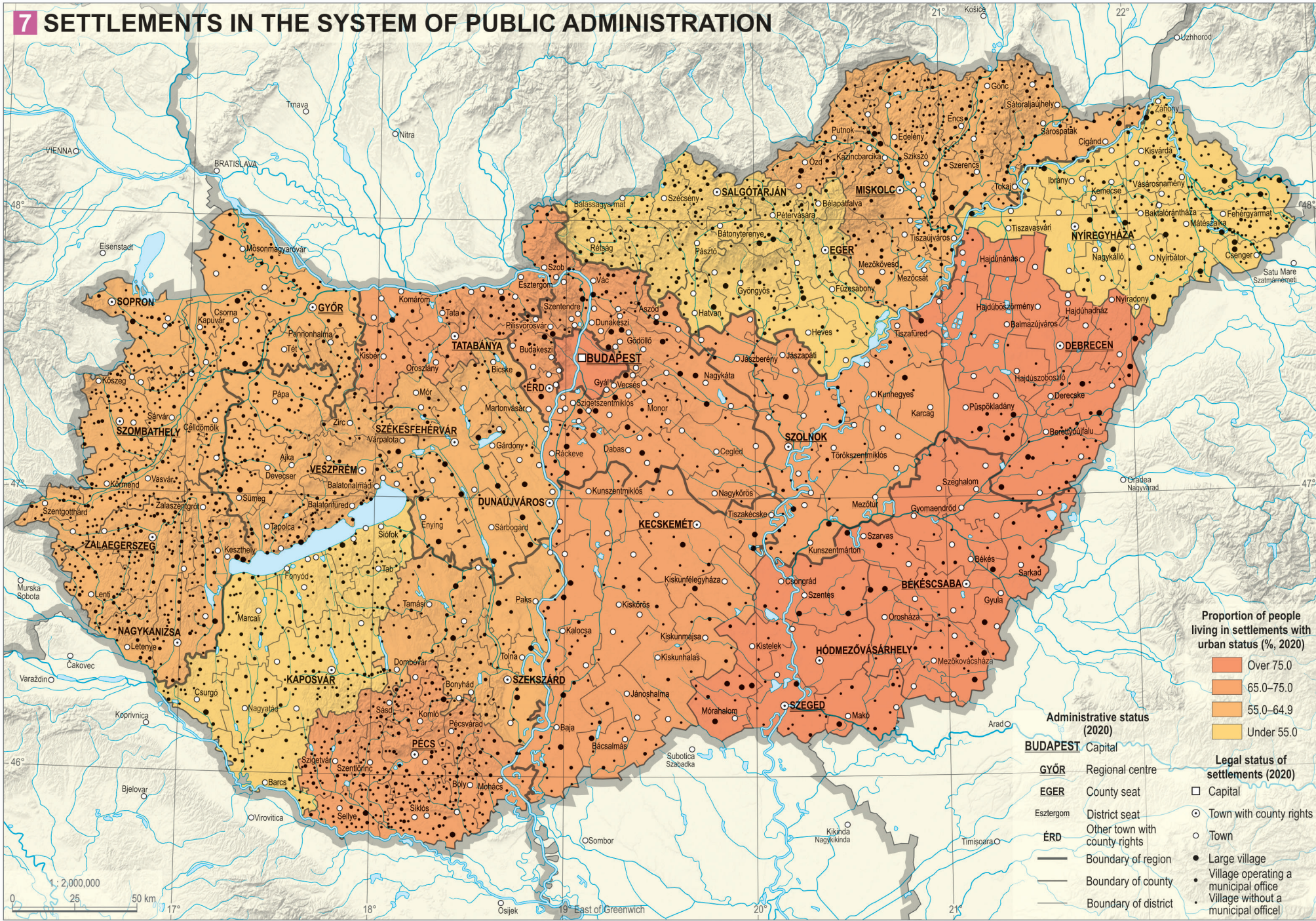
mer agricultural land. Cheaper land prices than those in Budapest, good accessibility and the presence of a large consumer market nearby continue to bring significant benefits to businesses that settle here today.

Similar factors played a role in the development of Florești (Szászfenes) at the western gate of Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár) [6f]. Around one-third of the 6 thousand residents of the settlement were Hungarian when the communist regime fell. Now the settlement has 45 thousand inhabitants, who are mostly ethnic Romanians. The rapid population growth of recent years has been due to a single factor: the influx of people from Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), for whom high-density residential areas have been developed. The basic institutions (e.g. education, health) are largely absent for most services, the inhabitants must travel to Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár).



4 Florești (Szászfenes) near Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár) is an example of unbridled suburban development





the last few decades, such as Bocskai kert (separated from Debrecen), Remeteszőlős (from Nagykövácsi), Monorierdő (from Monor) and Pilisjászfalu (from Piliscsaba).

The Hungarian settlement system is characterised by both fragmentation and concentration. More than a third (36%) of settlements have less than 500 inhabitants, and if cities are excluded and only the villages are taken into account, the proportion of tiny villages rises to more than two-fifths (40.5%). In Hungary, there are currently villages with as few as 8 (Iborfia), 10 (Tornabarakony), 11 (Tornakápolna), 14 (Debréte), 17 (Felsőszenterzsébet), 19 (Csertalagos, Gagyapáti) residents. The proportion of settlements with 500–999 inhabitants and thus regarded as ‘small villages’ is an additional 20.7% (23.2% of all villages). Accordingly, the proportion of settlements with a population of less than 1,000 is 56.8% in Hungary (63.7% of all villages).

The size of municipalities has a far-reaching impact on their development potential and on the demographic and social structure. The unfavourable situation of tiny and small villages is made worse by their uneven distribution in the country; their density is greater in Southern and Western Transdanubia and in the northeast of Hungary. In Baranya and Vas counties, 90.6% of villages have less than a thousand inhabitants, and this figure is 86.3% in Zala County and 80.7% in Veszprém County. Extensive areas with tiny villages can also be found in the northern third of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County (their proportion is 69.9% in the county). In these areas, the tiny villages cannot be connected to larger villages providing basic services. Most of these contiguous areas of tiny villages had become disadvantaged by the 1970s. After the collapse of communism, however, disadvantages arising from

the small size of settlements were reduced, as each settlement became an autonomous municipality with the ability to maintain an administrative office (including a notary) and to establish and maintain institutions. Since 1990, the technical infrastructure in tiny villages has also improved. Nevertheless, many social and sociological indicators still closely reflect the size of a settlement. In recent decades, the demographic and social structure of most tiny and small villages has been greatly distorted by selective out-migration (with the better educated and younger inhabitants moving away). According to the statistical data, there are municipalities in Hungary today where no earners are recorded, where between a half and three-quarters of the inhabitants are aged over 60, where no new houses have been built since 1990 (and most of the existing ones are empty). And there are quite a few municipalities where all these statistical metrics occur together. For example, 73% of the houses in Tornabarakony in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County are uninhabited, 77% of the residents are older than 60, and no new houses have been built in the last 30 years. Similarly, in Debréte, only one in three houses is inhabited, with the proportion of elderly residents exceeding 60%. The properties have no value, luring people living in extreme poverty, mostly Roma, to move in. Notwithstanding the gravity of the problems of tiny and small villages, it is also true that barely one-twelfth of the population of Hungary lives in them.

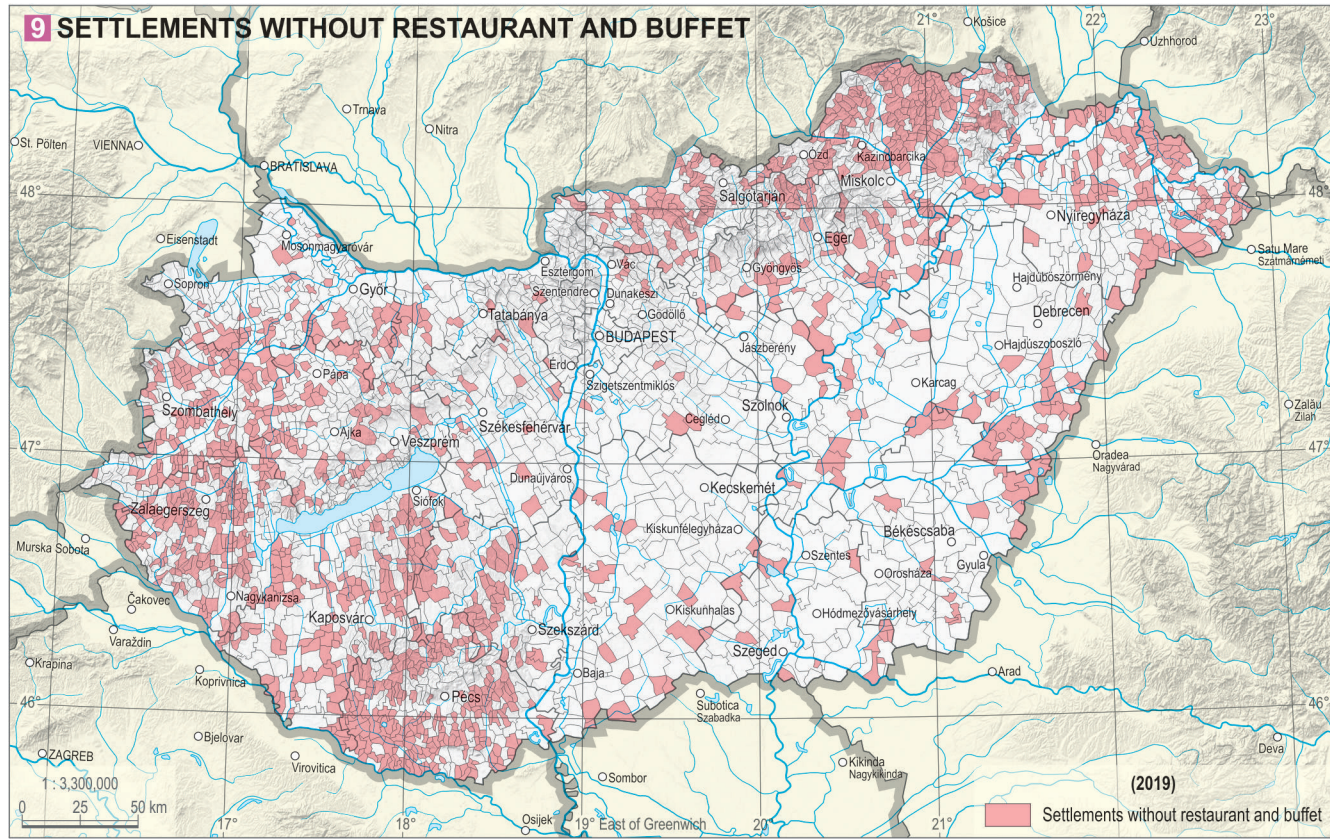
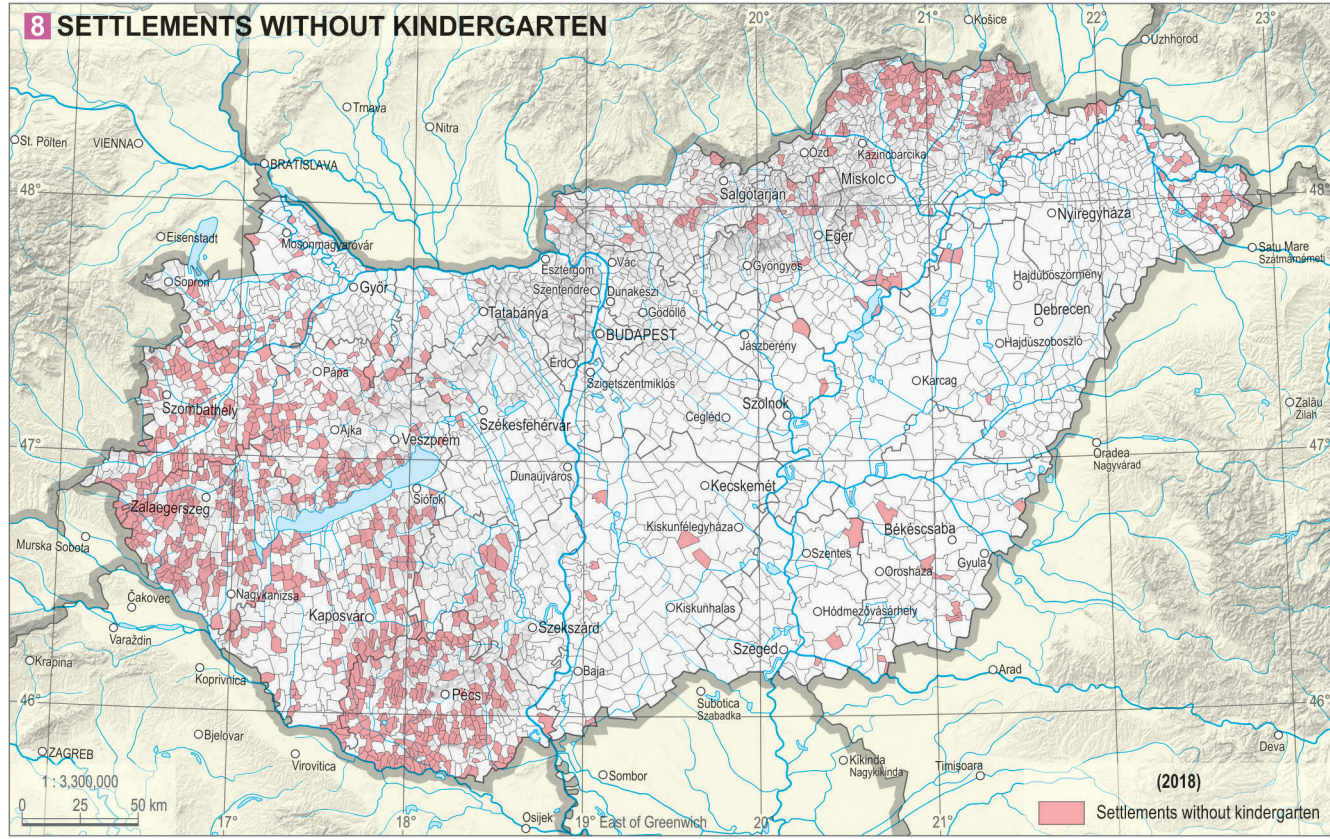
Settlement density varies around the country. In the counties with many tiny villages, 6.8 (Zala, Baranya) and 6.5 (Vas) settlements are ‘squeezed’ into 100 square kilometres, while in the same area less than two settlements are found in the Alföld.

Areas with characteristic settlement structures or

functions can be identified throughout Hungary. Those with tiny villages have already been described. Areas with a tanya settlement structure are noteworthy and have gradually declined since World War II. Lands with still active tanyas can be found in the Danube–Tisza Midland, between Hódmezővásárhely and Békéscsaba, where nearly 200 thousand people live (see chapter 11. Rural areas). In addition, agglomerations (chapter 9. Urban settlements) and resort districts, as well as the ‘remaining’ areas with medium and large villages and urban areas, can be defined clearly.

### Settlements and public administration

The position of settlements in the public administration system of Hungary can be determined on the basis of two factors 7. On the one hand, an important factor is the status (administrative rank) of settlements with local authority rights in public administration. In Hungary, the Local Government Act distinguishes five types of municipality: the capital city, towns with county rights, towns, large villages and villages. There are specific requirements at each level of administrative division (and these requirements have varied over time). On the other hand, cities and settlements include the seats of the regional bodies of general public administration: the county and district seats below the national level and the seats of notary bodies with a similar role in the area of several settlements. Decentralised public bodies are distributed among the above-mentioned public administration units, such as the chief regional architect’s offices, the regional bodies of the NAV, the water directorates, and the certification offices of weights and measures.



In 2018, there were 3,155 administrative units in Hungary (not including the 23 districts in Budapest): Budapest, the 23 towns with county rights, 322 other towns (i.e. in total 346 cities and towns), 127 large villages and 2,682 villages. The number of settlements with town status increased rapidly between the end of World War II and 2013: such settlements numbered just 54 in 1945 and 166 in 1990, but their number increased to 222 in 2000 and 346 in 2013. (Since 2013, no further settlements have been given the rank of town.) Until the collapse of communism, town status brought with it many advantages (e.g. an advantageous position in the state redistribution system). After 1990, however, their privileged situation ceased. Even so, as the requirements for town status were minimal, their number rapidly increased. Despite these developments, a large proportion of the settlements that were declared towns after 1990 are not considered to be such by urban scientists. In 2015, the requirements for town status were tightened (e.g. at least ten thousand inhabitants). Scientific studies suggest that Hungary has 180–190 towns in the functional sense. In other words, our map, which shows settlements of town rank, overestimates to some extent the urbanisation of Hungary. It can be stated that 70.6% of the population of Hungary currently lives in settlements of town status, but the proportion of people living in settlements that are towns in a functional sense is only about 61%.

Twenty-three of the towns have county rights; these settlements are not subject to the county local governments. Apart from the county towns (i.e. the ‘capitals’ of the counties), five cities – Sopron, Nagykánizsa, Dunaújváros, Érd and Hódmezővásárhely – have the rank of town with county rights (when the title was awarded, in each case the number of inhabitants exceeded fifty thousand). The 127 large villages have no more rights than the other villages, so they comprise a rather ‘ineffectual’ administrative category.

In terms of the proportion of the urban population of each county, three counties in the Alföld are at the top of the ranking (in Hajdú-Bihar County, the proportion of town dwellers exceeds 80%). This is partly due to the predominance of large settlements in the Alföld, which led many of them to apply and receive town status (almost one in three settlements is a town in Békés County). On the other hand, the population of settlements serving historically as market towns is well above the average of their hierarchy level. There are no longer town-deficient areas in Hungary; on average, there are 269 sq. km for each town or city in Hungary.

In the system of regional administration, three institutions (types) play a role in shaping the settlement system and influencing the functions of county towns. Under communism, the 19 county centres (together with Budapest) enjoyed a particularly special role in the settlement system. In addition to the public and

state administration bodies, the county seats oversaw the regional management of most institutions and organisations in the country’s ‘nationalised’ economy and society (from county bakery companies to waste collection and financial institutions). This setup greatly increased the number of urban institutions in the county centres. Moreover, they had a favourable place in the redistribution system and became local decision-making power centres. Unsurprisingly, there was a rapid increase in the number of their inhabitants. As institutional and service centres, they remain defining elements of the settlement system.

Districts have taken over the tasks of organising medium-level regional administration since 2013. The tasks of cities designated as district seats (174 out of the 346 officially recognised towns) resemble those of the county centres in their areas of competence.

The district-notary plays a special role in areas with small village structures in Hungary. In these areas, some settlements (e.g. in Zala County, 22 villages have fewer than 50 inhabitants and 23 further villages have 50–90 people inhabitants) cannot maintain even the basic network of institutions (e.g. nursery, primary school, general practitioners, pharmacy and post office) or the institution of administration, the notary. Here, the villages jointly maintain a notary office and a district-notary, which is usually established in the most accessible and largest village in the area. Other basic institutions are also found in such places (tobacco shops, off license shops, convenience stores, etc.), thus creating a village district 8 9. Currently, 1,433 of Hungary’s settlements do not have a notary, and in another 462 a branch of the local government office covers the public administration. (These settlements make up more than two-thirds of the village system.) This administrative solution has naturally become common in small villages; of the 203 villages in Vas County, only 29 (14.4% of the villages) have a notary; in Baranya County, the figure is 18.8%, and in Zala County it is 19.7%. In these counties, nearly a dozen villages form one district-notary.

The tiny and small village structures have a major effect on the institutional facilities of the villages 8 9. Of the 2,809 villages in the country, 1,138 have fewer than five hundred inhabitants, and another 653 have between five hundred and a thousand inhabitants. Villages with small populations cannot support the most basic institutions, as their network of institutions is highly deficient or completely absent. This has a far-reaching impact on the lives of villagers, contributing to the out-migration of residents and to many other disadvantages. For example, 968 of the villages have no nursery, as the small number, or absence, of children in this age group means the state has no incentive to maintain a nursery. It is telling that the average population of such settlements is only 251 people. The situation is even worse in market-based services (i.e. with cost-oriented prices). There are no restaurants or buffets in 1,474 villages in Hungary, that is in more than half of the villages. Their average size is 531 people. Their potential for development (e.g. tourism) is limited by the absence of catering facilities. The map of settlements lacking such facilities clearly reflects the distribution of the settlement structure of tiny and small villages. The affected areas lie mainly in Western and Southern Transdanubia (i.e. in Vas, Zala, Somogy and Tolna counties) and in the northeastern part of Hungary (i.e. in Szatmár and Bereg, the northern third of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, and Nógrád County). Villages lacking such basic facilities form extensive, contiguous zones in these areas.



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