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SETTING THE BORDERLINE BETWEEN THE URBAN AND THE
RURAL IN THE SLOVENE MARCH BETWEEN 1765 AND 1924

Darja KEREĆ

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education, Kardeljeva ploščad 16, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
e-mail: Darja.Kerec@pef.uni-lj.si

ABSTRACT

This article uses select examples of urban development to present the centuries-long development of Murska Sobota, which was the central spot in the so-called Slovene March (the upper part of the Prekmurje region). From the Middle Ages to the first planned changes to the administration, economy, infrastructure and very structure of the town in the 18th century, Murska Sobota held the status of a borough (oppidum), but in the following decades gained the title of a rural town. A somewhat neglectful attitude of the Hungarian national (and local) authority was also reflected in the subsequent attitude and treatment in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; was Murska Sobota a town in the classic sense of the word or merely a partly urbanised settlement? Media reports on the Slovene March were not always appropriate or were derived from stereotypical notions, which dragged on into the post-independence period.

Ključne besede: Slovene March – Slovenska krajina, Murska Sobota, city, countryside, infrastructure, urban

LA QUESTIONE DEI CONFINI TRA L'URBANO E IL RURALE NELLA
SLOVENSKA KRAJINA TRA GLI ANNI 1765–1924

SINTESI

Prendendo in esame esempi dello sviluppo urbanistico l'articolo presenta lo sviluppo plurisecolare della Murska Sobota, il punto centrale della cosiddetta Slovenska krajina (la parte settentrionale di Prekmurje – l'Oltremura). Dal Medioevo fino ai primi interventi programmati nell'amministrazione, nell'economia, nelle infrastrutture e nell'organizzazione stessa della città, avvenuta nel Settecento, Murska Sobota ebbe lo status di borgo (oppidum), sostituito nei decenni successivi dallo status di città provinciale. Il rapporto alquanto trascurabile dell'amministrazione statale (e locale) ungherese si rifletteva anche in seguito nel rapporto e nel trattamento nell'ambito del Regno dei Serbi, Croati e Sloveni; nel caso della Murska Sobota si trattava di una città dal significato tradizionale della parola oppure soltanto di una città parzialmente

urbanizzata? I riferimenti alla Slovenska krajina nel passato non erano sempre consoni oppure si basavano su immagini stereotipate che si protrassero anche nel periodo dopo l'indipendenza.

Parole chiave: Slovenska krajina, Murska Sobota, città, ambiente rurale, infrastruttura, urbano

MURSKA SOBOTA AS THE CENTRE OF THE SLOVENE MARCH

The Slovene March or Province¹ was a territory with a majority Slovene population, which comprised the present-day upper part of the Prekmurje region, i.e. the Slovene part of the county Železna županija / Vas megye. In the north the March bordered on the territory of the Cistercian monastery in Monošter / Szentgotthárd, in the east on the so-called Stražna krajina / Őrség, and in the south on the county Zalska županija / Zala megye. Slovene March is a literal translation of the Hungarian name² for this part of Prekmurje (Kerec, 2005, 17). The first written mention of the word Tótság as a place name for the area inhabited by Slovenes is dated 1617 (Gyula, 2008a, 129). Two centuries later, the press consistently used the name Slovene March or in Hungarian, Vendvidék.³ The largest settlement within the Slovene March was Murska Sobota (or Sóbota). In written works prior to World War I, authors from Prekmurje wrote down the Slovene March either in the Hungarian or in the Slovene version, sometimes even in both.⁴ Slovene newspapers

1 Surroundings, province: *ino Okrogline Szlovenszke*, 1796; »okroglinški«: adj. district, county, 1848 (Novak, 2006, 391).

2 Tótság, also Tóthság.

3 For instance, in 1897 in the statute of the Hungarian Educational Society of the Slovene March: *Vendvidéki Magyar Közművelődési Egyesületet* (Gyula, 2008b, 158).

4 Thus in an article about the village of Dolenci the writer mentions the border village of Šalovci: »Tü se dokonča slovenski kraj, zvani Tótság / This is where the Slovene town called Tótság ends« (Nájszvetejsega Szreca Jezusovoga veliki kalendár za lüdsztvo, 1914, 37).

and the registrars of the newly-acquired territory continued to use this name for this part of the country until the 1940s, i.e. 20 years after the Treaty of Trianon: »*Murska Sobota is the metropolis of the Slovene March* [emphasis added by D. K.], *its transport, economic and cultural centre*« (Slovenski gospodar, 20 March 1940, 2). Regardless of the subsequent administrative or government measures and the modernisation in the region along the Mura River, Murska Sobota is to this very day considered the only urban centre of the Slovene March. In the revolutionary year (1919) Murska Sobota was the seat of the Directorate for the Slovene March, and later on, for a time, the seat of the civilian commissioner for Prekmurje and of the district governor.

The second largest or most developed town, Lendava or Dolnja Lendava, did not belong under the Slovene March but under the county Zalska županija / Zala megye, and »*because of the new state borders after World War I became a small border town without any political influence, which was passed on to Murska Sobota*« (Brumen, 1991, 45).

MURSKA SOBOTA – TOWN OR VILLAGE?

The national census of 1828 states that there were 40 boroughs in the county Železna županija / Vas megye, and five Slovene boroughs in the Slovene district (Slovene March): at that time Rakičan and Gornja Lendava were the centres of the local authorities, whereas Martjanci and Cankova are mentioned as two villages along the state road. The population did not exceed 500 in any of these settlements, except in the case of Murska Sobota with 793 inhabitants (Gyula, 2008a, 300). The latter did not exceed 2000 inhabitants (Deák, 2012, 63) until 1890 (see Table 1), which Ernő Deák points out as a criterion for determining the level of development or urbanisation of a given place. In 1910, when the last population census was conducted in Austria-Hungary, the number of inhabitants in Murska Sobota showed no significant increase; it was similar after 1919 or until World War II.

Year	1836	1880	1890	1900	1910	1921	1931	1941
Number of inhabitants	793	1.786	2.134	2.304	2.748	2.934	3.571	4.354

Table 1: Number of inhabitants in Murska Sobota between 1830 and 1941⁵

According to Deák's categorisation of settlements, Murska Sobota, as one of the (larger) settlements in the county Železna županija / Vas megye, reached the level of a **partly urbanised** settlement – taking into account the number of inhabitants and the social structure (proportion of rural and non-rural population, education, etc.). He divided

5 I was kindly referred to the work of Deák and his findings by doc. dr. Attila Kovács, for which I am much obliged.

settlements into 5 groups according to the points gained; he gave Murska Sobota 7 out of 9 points, thus placing it in the middle, among the »less urban« ones. By contrast, the more urbanised ones are Szombathely, Körmend, Sárvár and Monošter / Szentgotthárd (Deák, 2012, 70).

So says Deák, but in the past, the scientific works of historians and geographers often included all kinds of names and comparisons for Murska Sobota as a town: a central place, the centre of the region, the most developed centre, a town amidst the countryside, the Sobota⁶ borough, »váraš« (taken from the Hungarian word »város«) (Novak, 2006, 781) or the most typical denomination, derived from Hungarian administration or government: »mezőváros« (Hungarian for borough, small town or country town) ... If we consider the historical circumstances and the annexation of Prekmurje to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SCS) in 1919, it could be said that Murska Sobota, and the entire »image« it showed to the world beyond the Mura River, was closest to a country town. Something in between; neither a village nor a town. Is such a description historically appropriate? Below is a presentation of the features that, regardless of historical circumstances and the political situation, ought to determine the status of a place or settlement as a town. The most basic explanation in *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika* (*Dictionary of Standard Slovenian*) states that a town is a settlement which is the administrative, economic and cultural centre of a broader area (SSKJ). In the past, more precisely in the period in question (19th and 20th century), Murska Sobota was all those things. Borut Brumen, ethnologist and cultural anthropologist, who discussed the identity of the Prekmurje area and of Murska Sobota in his book from 1995 (Brumen, 1995), agrees with the hypothesis of Murska Sobota being a town, which finally became one between 1919 and 1941, when it definitively changed from a »vesnica« (village) to a »varaš« (town), in which different lifestyles took shape (Brumen, 1997, 239).

If today we are wondering whether Murska Sobota is (was) a town surrounded by the countryside or »merely« a town in the countryside, such thoughts were even more present in the past; the notion of whether Murska Sobota was (already) a town was often picturesquely mentioned in popular works, for example:

When the houses in Sobota become higher than the trees, than this large village will become a town, a grandfather once told his grandchildren. The main street in Sobota was at that time, only a few years before World War I, slowly beginning to change its characteristic village look.» (Mataj, Štraus, 2013, 4).

The formation of a new Yugoslav state revealed the many differences among individual places in Slovene lands, not only in the Prekmurje part of the country. In an article in *Slovenski gospodar* from 1924, the author emphasises the importance of unity and cohabitation, mentions the national consciousness of the rural population, and is extremely

6 »Amidst this maize field stands the borough of Sobota [...]« (travel notes of Anton Trstenjak from 1883). I am quoting the manuscript (NUK-rokopisna zbirka, stari fond 193, Slovenci na Ogrskem). The printed work was published in 2006 (Trstenjak, 2006).

critical of the negative influences (liberalism) of foreign rulers (Germans, Italians and Hungarians) on our soil until 1918:

Town – countryside. There should be reciprocity and unity between both, founded on their mutual economic dependence and connection. According to Catholic principles, this reciprocity is based on the fact that all of the classes make up parts of the national organism. [...] In that regard, the peasantry is the leading class, [...]. The peasantry is of special importance to the Slovene nation, for it has preserved Slovene land, and on it Slovene blood and the Slovene language. In the former state, the towns and boroughs scattered across Slovene lands had mostly departed from the Slovene spirit and yielded to the German, Italian and Hungarian way of life. [...] By moving to the towns and boroughs, those born in rural homes forsook their Slovene rural faith and piety, and submitted to liberalism [...] (Slovenski gospodar, 24 August 1938, 1).

Such convictions often appeared in the aforementioned newspaper, which also liked to emphasise the »effeminacy of the townspeople«. The writer A. Kosi from Središče, for example, wrote in 1917 about the relationship between the townsman and the peasant at the town market. He places the peasant in a superior position, because he is the one who »feeds« the townsman. This text reflects the typical »anti-bourgeois« diction, which is still present among Slovenes today (relationship: capital – other places / regions) and which could most easily be summed up in the vulgar language with two pejorative terms: »hohštaplerija« [humbuggery] versus »kmetavzarstvo« [yokelness] and vice versa. The above-mentioned writer does not even try to hide this in the introduction:

One often hears complaints and our local newspapers often write about the fact that there is a certain hatred and hostility between the rural population, particularly between those who are bringing or transporting food to the town market, and the townspeople; in short, that they do not get along. It is especially claimed that when the townsman buys food, he treats the peasants rudely and brutally, thus widening the gap between the urban and rural population. Since complaints are heard from all around, such rumours are surely not trumped up, but must be based on reality. The only question is whether such a relationship has always been present between the rural and urban population, or whether it has appeared only recently – in the present time of war. I claim the following: A peasant selling food and the townsman forced to buy it have never gotten along (Slovenski gospodar, 8 November 1917, 1).

The question automatically arises whether the very existence of an urban centre contributes to the development of the entire province by providing it with the basic economic, social, service and cultural conditions, and by outwardly »informing« about the level of development of the entire (!) region. Precisely in the case of Prekmurje and its largest settlement, i.e. the town of Murska Sobota, the answer to that question is negative. Even in the 21st century, despite poor economic conditions throughout Slovenia, Prekmurje is predominantly believed to be the »least developed region«. If we disregard the cruel

fact that the leading factories in Murska Sobota were shut down or went bankrupt, the locals and the connoisseurs find it hard to shake the opinion that this is merely instilled prejudice. This is corroborated, among other things, by the final report of the Targeted Research Project under the Targeted Research Programme »Konkurenčnost Slovenije 2006–2013 / Competitiveness of Slovenia 2006–2013«, which was created under the auspices of the Institute of Cultural History of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Vovko, 2006/2008). This report focuses on the entire region (not on Murska Sobota alone), on the stereotypical notions about the land and its inhabitants, and highlights the insufficient mention of Prekmurje in primary and secondary school textbooks; however, all of this was already common knowledge prior to the publication of this report.

PERIPHERAL NATURE OF MURSKA SOBOTA

Due to the interesting location of Prekmurje, which is a closed-off region in the east of the country and the one that today borders on three neighbouring countries, the media, public appearances, texts and even technical papers use these almost cliché words and phrases: »border province« (or region), »peripheral province« (or region), »backward province« (or region), »least developed province« (or region), »periphery«, »frontier province« (or region), »peripheral location of Prekmurje« and many more expressions that indicate a lack of imagination or knowledge rather than the actual situation in Prekmurje. For instance, an example from the more recent lexis: »*Peripheral area (with strong emigration; population oriented towards agriculture and the labour-intensive industry.)*« (Slovenski veliki leksikon, 2005, 180). It is an irony of sorts that agriculture and the related industries have died away in recent years to the extent that we cannot speak of a prevailing cultivation of farmland. The most recent obvious example of this was the shutting down of Tovarna sladkorja Ormož / Ormož Sugar Refinery at the end of 2006. In the 21st century, in part due to the above-mentioned words and phrases, Murska Sobota is still most often mentioned in this context and in connection with stories about the bankruptcies of once successful companies. Success stories at the micro-level (including cultural events, the preservation of tradition, and cross-border ecological projects) usually end up in the marginal sections of »local« and »curiosities«.

Putting aside statistics, which is the key tool of geographers when assessing the (economic) development of a (mostly agrarian) region, a cursory review of technical articles leaves the reader with the impression that the paradigm on the »underdevelopment of Prekmurje« was imposed also (!) by the Slovene geographical profession – both in the period up to Slovenia's attainment of independence, and after 1991, when this phenomenon unfortunately became typical of the entire country. I give the introduction in the concluding part of the article by geographer Vladimir Klemenčič from 1991 as an example of imposed pejorative diction:

Prekmurje belongs to the area of the underdeveloped, sub-Pannonian world, which had already presented a peripheral area of Hungary in the period up to World War I,

and remained thus in Yugoslavia and in Slovenia, to the present times. The territory of Prekmurje was in the past and still is today distant from the larger central areas, which became industrialised at the end of the 19th century and acquired important functions of macro-regional significance. With the closing of political borders, Prekmurje was given the character of a peripheral, economically underdeveloped area, especially after World War II. This peripheral nature has been reduced to an extent in the last three decades by the open Austrian-Slovene border and the more intensive industrialisation and urbanisation [...] (Klemenčič, 1991, 119).

Thus, as late as 1991 (!) the »peripheral nature« and »economic underdevelopment« remained the predominant platitudes in certain expert circles, even though Slovene geographers had highlighted the (development) problems and advantages of Prekmurje or Pomurje⁷ (back) in 1959 in *Geografski zbornik* (Geographical Journal), using a much more realistic and less pejorative discourse than some of their contemporaries. In his article in the aforementioned journal, Svetozar Ilešič wrote the following in the introduction:

Today, Murska Sobota is a town and a rather lively town, considering its circumstances. Its function is becoming distinctly urban – administrative, craft-commercial, and cultural-educational. [...] Agriculture now presents the main gainful activity of only 12 percent of the inhabitants of Murska Sobota (Ilešič, 1959, 69).

Thus decades before Slovenia's attainment of independence, when geographers, sociologists and (cultural) anthropologists were starting to discuss the (under)development of specific Slovene sites »anew«, but still based on inherited memory and knowledge, Ilešič completely justified the title of the paper. When reviewing the development of Murska Sobota, he took into account its location, history, ecclesiastical organisation, culture or art, architecture, infrastructure, statistics or population structure, and, last but not least, the development of crafts and the economy. Being aware of the importance of culture, he highlighted the leading role of Murska Sobota in the region: establishment of the printing and publishing house Pomurska tiskarna in založba, of a museum, study library, regional magazines or publications, efforts to establish a theatre, the establishment of a new general secondary school, a college of education and a secondary school of economics (Ilešič, 1959, 77). Just as the geographer Marijam M. Klemenčič did decades later, so had Ilešič highlighted the importance of the functional character and transformation of Murska Sobota into a modern and urban settlement, i.e. a town.

In the opinion of certain authors, »underdevelopment« is not the only identity of Prekmurje, and Marijam M. Klemenčič points out that this underdevelopment went through several development stages, just as elsewhere in Slovenia; these stages can most easily be defined within the context of civilisation levels, which are all con-

7 In 1955, the 9th district Murska Sobota united both banks of the Mura River, i.e. Prekmurje and Prlekija or a part of Štajerska, into the joint administrative unit of Pomurje (see: Stenografski zapiski Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije, 1955, 210).

nected with the long predominance of traditional agriculture, with the rapid and brief industrialisation, and with the entry into the post-industrial era at the beginning of the 21st century. (Klemenčič, 2009, 10–11). He also stresses the difference between the so-called functional area, which may be short-lived, and the region, which is the most comprehensive spatial concept. A specific region takes longer to form and as a rule has a long lifespan (Klemenčič, 2009, 13). Prekmurje is one such region; this premise is also advocated by Ilešič. Yet, two decades ago, when the new state was created and some of the leading companies in Murska Sobota were still in existence or operational, which ensured financial independence and social security of the majority of the population in the region, the hypothesis of a non-urbanised »hinterland« was still predominant. In the past, such a viewpoint could also be found in the papers of certain Slovene geographers, for instance Vladimir Klemenčič:

Prekmurje is a typical example of a frontier region, where more intense forms of industrialisation have appeared only in the last three decades, and with it the forming of stronger centres of non-agrarian employment. For this reason, urbanisation did not encompass the broader countryside (Klemenčič, 1991, 108).

Yet similar was true of certain other regions in Slovenia in that time; nowadays, globalisation has unified the structure, dynamics and, last but not least, the very appearance of larger and smaller localities across Slovenia. Thus, the classic dividing line between the town and countryside, which still existed two decades ago, has disappeared in many places, which is typical of the entire European continent.

DYNAMICS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF MURSKA SOBOTA FROM A RURAL SETTLEMENT INTO A TOWN

In the 20th century, the development of urban centres on the Old Continent also led to the supplementation or modification of the definitions of towns within the profession (urban ethnology and anthropology), which was the result of both World Wars, the pre-war and post-war industrialisation, and migrations.⁸ Strictly historically speaking, the formation, development and definition of a town is also conditioned by administrative acts, which have been connected with religious and secular authorities and with (financial) power – either of (church) institutions or individuals – since the dawn of civilisation. The ruler could also establish a borough / town, »approve« it, rename it, limit or expand its territory, and grant it certain freedoms, legal privileges and obligations (taxes, defensive function, quarantine, etc.). As written by Leonardo Benevolo in his study on European towns, the first characteristic of the Western urban world is that the »idea of a town has lost its general and systemic connotations, and simultaneously, by being precisely adapted to the geographical and landscape features, has been given character.« (Benevolo, 2004, 36). If anywhere, then the geographical and landscape features have special bearing on the

8 More on the topic: Brumen, 1994.

development of Murska Sobota, especially as regards the development of infrastructure since the Middle Ages until the 20th century, which is discussed below.

Putting aside ancient civilisations (and the towns of the ancient world), from which humanity has inherited and adopted mental associations and words, such as *polis*, *urbs* and *civitas* (Benevolo, 2004, 17), in the former Western Empire the reorganisation and transformation of settlements took place in the second half of the Early Middle Ages. Owing to the location, historical circumstances and social dynamics, the transformation processes of European settlements cannot be geographically unified. Moreover: settlements within macro-regions developed from villages and boroughs into towns in such different ways that any unification on the example of the so-called Central Europe (e.g. present-day Slovenia and the neighbouring countries) would be pointless. The development of settlements in Hungary until World War I alone shows certain specifics as a result of its geographical location and geostrategic role. In the Middle Ages one such specific was the (border) location itself: e.g. settlements in the West, which gravitated more toward the Germanic area (in this case Murska Sobota toward Radgona) rather than toward central Hungary. Mediaeval commercial relations were enabled by the so-called Gates of Radgona or Radgona, which was given a railway in 1885; from then on, Murska Sobota remained in its shadow until it received its own railway section (1907). However, after World War II the situation was reversed: Radgona was overshadowed by Murska Sobota!

Another specific is the very status of such peripheral settlements: *oppidum* versus *civitas*. Even in the Middle Ages, there were no royal free towns (*civitas*) in Prekmurje, and one of the most important towns or boroughs (*oppidum*) was Murska Sobota, to which King Matthias Corvinus granted privileges on 6 August 1479, including a weekly market.⁹ Market activity had been present in Železna županija / Vas megye since the House of Árpád, but was rivalled by Szombathely and its nearby localities (e.g. Monošter / Szentgotthárd) or smaller hamlets also on the Austrian side (Kiss, 2004, 399). The 16th and 17th centuries left a mark on Prekmurje and Murska Sobota due to confessional diversity, local conflicts among the aristocracy, Turkish invasions, a plague epidemic (1710), local revolts by subjects, floods caused by the Mura River ... In 1690, Peter Szápáry was appointed the owner of Sobota by consent of the King, and the town was under the aegis of his house until the end of World War I or 1919.

GRADUAL SHIFTS TOWARD URBANISATION IN THE 18th AND 19th CENTURIES

In the middle of the 18th century Murska Sobota almost lost its market freedoms, since the Deed of Privilege changed hands and as a result a hearing was held before the county court in 1765. The inhabitants of the borough fell victim to personal schemes

9 »We, Matthias Corvinus [...] grant permission for organising an annual free fair in this town, on the third day of the Pentecost holidays and for the days following it, if need be. We likewise permit a weekly market with the corresponding privileges. [...] Furthermore, by the power of this Letter of Privilege, we decree that any merchant and other people going to the fair or market, including all of the items and goods from the aforementioned market, shall be under our protection, and shall return to their homes safely and without fear.« (Gyula, 2008a, 78).

and greed; while the Deed of Privilege was being kept (until 1737) in Prosenjakovci, the nobleman Miklós (Nikolaj) Vasdinyei purposely damaged it, because the inhabitants of the Sobota borough had not given him nine buckets of oats as payment for safekeeping. The damage to the deed was discovered at a later date, namely in 1737. Thirty years later, the missing piece of parchment with a watermark was in the possession of the son of a former committee member,¹⁰ Mihály Bertalanics (Mihael Bertalanič), who offered it to his acquaintances at a price of 20 to 30 forints. To prevent the town from taking it back by force, he declared that it was kept by the mayor of Dolnja Lendava. However, one of the witnesses, who had visited his home, recognised the torn-off piece of the deed from Murska Sobota. In 1765, both pieces (the deed itself and the torn-off watermark) finally came before the county court, and the document was hence preserved as an appendix to a legal deed (Gyula, 2008a, 256–257). In the previous century the inhabitants of Murska Sobota were forced to turn to higher authorities several times to defend their privileges and freedoms; in 1631, King Ferdinand II himself intervened by ordering the Hungarian Palatine Esterházy to settle the matter in favour of the inhabitants of the borough or of Murska Sobota (*»oppidi Murayszombat«*); it concerned additional forced labour imposed by Mihael Seči,¹¹ which was used to *»turn a privileged borough into a village and the inhabitants of the borough into subordinate peasants«* (Hozjan, 2007, 93, 95). Such efforts from the inhabitants of Murska Sobota had appeared ever since 1479 and were the minimum assurance for improving their social standing; after all, these processes influenced the continuity of the town or borough status until the end of World War I. Generally speaking, until the abolition of feudal dues it was characteristic that the townspeople complied with the rules, order and contracts much more than their lords or the nobility. Even though the rules were mutually binding, they had to be legally approved and emphasised time and time again, for instance at the turn of the year 1771 in the case of the contract on urbarium obligations between the inhabitants of Murska Sobota and their landlord, Count Peter Szapáry:

We and the townspeople listed below agree with the contract and commit to abide by it with a humble oath and through us others commit to do the same by signing with an X; we would like to add that should the honourable Landlord or we someday wish to withdraw from the contract and only abide by the urbarium, or should we wish to enter into another contract, that we shall be obligated to inform one another of such an intention two months in advance (Gyula, 2008a, 270).

In the national census of 1828, the registrar highlighted the importance of trade and of a market, which did not exist in Murska Sobota: *»There is no market nearby and no cereal fair here; people mostly go to Körmend and Szombathely to buy and sell«* (Gyula, 2008a, 302). Well, a market was established later on; thus in 1885 the local weekly *Muraszombat és vidéke* reported on the prices and surpluses of the market in Murska Sobota, which

10 Member of a county or town council.

11 Also Széchy, Szécsi or in the above-mentioned deed of 1631 *»Zechi«*.

mostly sold field crops (cereals), meat and wine (Gyula, 2008b, 103). In the next three decades, the development of Murska Sobota nevertheless continued and in 1853, when the Hungarian public administration was reorganised, it succeeded in keeping the seat of the district. One proposal suggested that the seat be moved to Gornja Lendava (the present-day Grad na Goričkem), but its location and remoteness resulted in the proposal's rejection. The statement of grounds as to why this proposal was rejected indicates the intent towards the permanent development or progress of Murska Sobota:

It is true that the rent in Murska Sobota is currently high, however, several buildings are being built and when they are finished, there will not only be enough offices available, but they will also be cheap. Besides, there are good roads leading to Murska Sobota from several directions; it has a large population, a developing trade, postal services and transport, and all other circumstances which indicate that Murska Sobota should be proposed as the seat and given priority over Gornja Lendava (Gyula, 2008b, 26).

The mention of **good** (emphasis added by D. K.) roads, trade and transport does not reflect the real state of the infrastructure, but made sense within the context of rejecting Gornja Lendava.

OVERDUE ARRIVAL OF THE RAILWAY

People travelled to the above-mentioned Körmend on foot or by carts until 1907, when a railway line was finally laid. In Hungary a railway system was opened with the first connection in 1846 (Pest-Vác) and by the end of the 19th century the country had already set up a central railway network,¹² whereas the Slovene March remained excluded from it. The town authorities, led by the district governor Pongrác, were aware of this and informed the royal councillor in February 1901 of the following:

The Assembly of the District of Murska Sobota has been doing all it can for decades to provide a railway line to this industrially and economically backward poor region, dependent on the Štajerska region, in order to connect it from all sides with this vital means of transport, particularly with regard to the Hungarian national orientation, thus confirming its connection with the county and the state (Gyula, 2008b, 177).

Perhaps all of the previous lamenting over »a poor and industrially and economically backward province« (by the end of the 19th century Murska Sobota already received its own post office and by 1885 its own telegraph office: Gyula, 2008b, 109–110),¹³ a savings

12 Between 1846 and 1867 around 2285 km of railway lines were built in Hungary; from 1857 to 1913 the railway network amounted to 22,000 km (Romsics, 1999, 18–19).

13 The first telegraph office in Hungary was opened in Bratislava in 1847 (Romsics, 1999, 20).

bank,¹⁴ several societies, a public library, hospital, etc.) did after all contribute to building a railway section, naturally with substantial »local self-imposed contributions« (a decade earlier a public limited company was founded for the building of the railway, not to mention the financial contributions or remittances). The fact that the opening of this line was so important is corroborated by two much overdue modernisations: Murska Sobota was not supplied with electricity until 1926, and before that, the town received gas lighting at the end of the first decade of the 20th century.¹⁵

Thus on 27 June 1907, the railway line was solemnly opened; two days earlier (25 June) *Muraszombat és vidéke* wrote the following about the solemn opening ceremony of the railway line: Two more days and the moment we have been waiting for with such longing for 30 years will finally arrive:

Murska Sobota will get a railway line. On the 25th of this month, the Körmend-Murska Sobota line, which is not yet open to traffic, will undergo an expert and technical inspection, in the presence of representatives of the Ministry of Trade, the county Železna županija / Vas megye and the Hungarian State Railways. It will be a historical moment in the life of Murska Sobota, which the town's inhabitants will be celebrating with the proper earnestness and splendour. [...] At 2 p.m. the train, boarded by members of the committee, will arrive in Murska Sobota. [...] The Assembly has reached a unanimous decision to ceremonially and officially welcome the train. Accompanied by cannon shots and the Rákóczi March, the train will come rushing to an adorned railway station [...] (Gyula, 2008b, 217).

Below is a detailed description of the reception at the station in Murska Sobota:

The volunteer firemen's band, [...] the girls dressed in white will give bouquets to the Minister of Trade and the representatives of the county, after which they will head to the school building. A large triumphal arch will be erected in front of the station and flags will be fluttering in the town. The town administration has been requested to attend the reception (Gyula, 2008b, 218).

The opening of the railway line in 1907 as one of the key factors in the spreading and urban development of Murska Sobota can be found in several headwords of general lexicons and encyclopaedias, for example:

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- 14 More on the first financial institution in Murska Sobota and on the initiator who established the Murska Sobota savings bank in Lendava in 1873, together with the wealthy townspeople (Lendvai Kepe, 2013, 30–39).
- 15 »There are now 110 such gas stations in Hungary. This lighting is suitable for homes and commercial buildings, for all public institutions and barracks [...]. The Benoid gas lighting eliminates the risk of an explosion. The installation is inexpensive, for it costs only 2 fillers (for an intensity equalling 50 candles). All interested townspeople are invited to a demonstration of the aforementioned lighting at the Dobray inn. All questions will be answered by the company's engineer, Sebestyén Jozsef. The demonstration of street lighting will take place on Monday evening.« (Muraszombat és vidéke, 27 September 1908).

Until the 2nd half of the 19th century a mostly rural settlement, which spread quickly after the building of a railway in 1907 and especially after World War II [...] (Slovenski veliki leksikon, 2004, 677).

After this solemn opening ceremony and the launching of passenger (and cargo) transport, things reverted to the old ways in the next few years, at least at the symbolic level, because the inhabitants of Prekmurje were once again forced to wait – literally. Namely, World War I intervened and afterwards, from the year 1919 onward, there were daily pressures and warnings from authorities and those with jurisdiction to establish a connection between Prekmurje and the »Slovene mother country«. The inhabitants of Štajerska and of Kranjska were awaiting this more eagerly than the inhabitants of Prekmurje – thus a travelogue on Prekmurje, written in Ljubljana, had this to say:

Murska Sobota has no railway connection with our towns. A railway line is now being planned and in the spring they will begin building the Ormož – Ljutomer – Murska Sobota railway line, which will be of vital importance to the inhabitants of our Prekmurje. They are currently living cut off from the world. – The town does have a railway station, but the connection between Murska Sobota and the last station in our country, Hodoš, is only operational twice a week (Zvonček, October 1922, 247).

On 22 November 1924, the so-called Wall of China finally fell and the inhabitants of Prekmurje were able to look to the West: »Two festooned locomotives slowly but surely led the crammed saloon and business carriages along the new line from Ljutomer to Murska Sobota. The railway station was teeming with people. Hungarians could not stop wondering at the great number of gentlemen Yugoslavia had, with top hats and all.« The gentlemen were wearing top hats also because a banquet was organised in Ljutomer for select guests from Murska Sobota. Sušnik wrote the following about the reaction from Hungarians: »The Hungarians do not like this new connection. They say it should have been opened through Hodoš and across the Hungarian border! Who cares about Maribor?!« The thirty-eight kilometres long Ormož-Ljutomer-Sobota line was built for 21 months with help from 150 Russian refugees and 150 workers from Bulgaria and Bosnia. The article concludes with a prediction of the consequences of the opening of the railway line: »Now the inhabitants of Ljutomer will be coming to Sobota, so that the connoisseurs will try the wines of Sobota; and the inhabitants of Sobota will be going to Ljutomer for the Ljutomerčan wine. In *Commercium et Connubium!*« (Keric, 2004, 109). The writer's almost exaggerated emphasising of bourgeois attributes is eye-catching: »gentlemen, top hats, banquet, connoisseurs« or villagers »versus« townspeople (Sóbota).

The awareness that the merging of Prekmurje with the mother country in 1919 was important for the entire Slovene territory was constantly present in the central newspapers, weeklies and monthlies, at least in that period. Journalists pointed out transport infrastructure as the key point or advantage (or disadvantage), i.e. roads and the railway

connection, which had until then connected Murska Sobota with the »world« only in the East, that is, towards Hungary (the connection between the town and the neighbouring town of Körmend). The concluding remark on the importance of transport connections for the rural population is also telling. In the bilingual newspaper from Prekmurje, *Mőrzska krajina – Muravidék*, the author wrote in April 1924 (only a good six months before the opening of the Ormož-Ljutomer-Murska Sobota line) in an article about neglected roads and the imminent construction of a railway connection: »Dobre ceszté szo fundament vérsztvenoga¹⁶ napréidénya!« (*Mőrzska krajina – Muravidék*, 20 April 1924, 1) Good road connections are therefore the basis for economic progress.

Slovenes waited for a direct railway connection between Prekmurje (Murska Sobota) and the rest of the new common state (Kingdom of SCS) until 1924. The word »waited for« is appropriate, because the limited transport connections also contributed to the lack of knowledge about Prekmurje among other Slovenes; this situation quite paradoxically continued even after the attainment of independence; namely the new state did not build the so-called motorway or expressway through the Pomurska region until 2008. That the addition to the European transport corridor is of vital importance not only for all of Slovenia, but also and above all for Prekmurje, has already been pointed out as a projection under the headword *Prekmurje* in the above-mentioned lexicon.¹⁷ Unfortunately, predictions and projections are merely that, while the economic and financial (in)competence of the state and of the local communities is a fact which is hard to accept. Let us once more highlight the advantages and urban features of Murska Sobota at the micro-level: cultural and religious diversity, the operation of local cultural institutions, organisations or societies, and, last but not least, of individuals or groups, i.e. the cultural-artistic and alternative scene of the younger generation from Prekmurje in the fields of music, contemporary dance and literary creation. Precisely because of (and despite) the extremely deep-rooted, stereotypical notions of (lack of) progress in the Slovenian space, this generation is in many ways surpassing the framework of the region and of the country. Which, after all, is not that difficult to do in the 21st century, since the digitisation and mobility of the younger generation enable it to erase the borders between urban and rural. And in many ways this is why Prekmurje and Murska Sobota appear more urban than other places in the otherwise more developed central or western part of Slovenia. Therefore, the question is not whether Murska Sobota is urban in the classic sense of the word, because this town has undoubtedly been that for decades. The question whether Prekmurje is truly so underdeveloped as portrayed in the nostalgic film adaptations of the works of writer Miško Kranjec and in the cliché depictions in Slovene media is likewise not pertinent. The question is whether in the 21st century it is even sensible to additionally and deliberately point out the (urban)

16 »Vérsztven«: Prekmurje dialect, economic; »vérsztvo«: economy, property; »vért«: lord (still a commonly used word among the older population). See also: Novak, 2006, 797.

17 »New development opportunities will result from the addition to the European Transport Corridor No. 5 (Venice – Ljubljana – Budapest – Kiev) and the construction of the Maribor-Hungarian border motorway and the Murska Sobota-Zalalövő railway line.« (Slovenski veliki leksikon, 2005, 180).

development of Prekmurje or of the Slovene March, when there are other towns and regions in Slovenia, which unfortunately do not even have half of what has been given to the inhabitants of Prekmurje or of Murska Sobota.

VPRAŠANJE RAZMEJITVE MED URBANIM IN RURALNIM V SLOVENSKI
KRAJINI V OBDOBJU 1765–1924*Darja KERIC*

Univerza v Ljubljani, Pedagoška fakulteta, Kardeljeva ploščad 16, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija

e-mail: Darja.Kerc@pef.uni-lj.si

POVZETEK

Slovenska krajina je drugo ime za današnje gornje Prekmurje, kot se pojavlja v listinskem gradivu, poročilih, časopisnih zapisih ter spominih posameznikov. Njeno največje urbano središče je bila Murska Sobota, ki je vse od konca 15. stoletja imela status trga, v naslednjih stoletjih si je konstantno prizadevala oz. obnavljala privilegije, dane od kraljevih oblasti. V kraj so gravitirali okoliški prebivalci, kljub temu je bilo zaledje s kmečkim prebivalstvom tisto, ki je identiteti kraja navzven odvzemalo status ali videz urbanega središča. Takšne interpretacije so bile značilne tako za uradne spise oz. poročila kot lokalno časopisje v 19. in 20. stoletju. Da je bila Slovenska krajina vedno podeželska, Murska Sobota pa vsaj za odtenek bolj urbana, pričajo različne faze razvoja ali potrjevanja predhodnega stanja (tako je bilo v primeru obravnave zlorabe listine o murskosoboških trških privilegijih leta 1765), vendar v razvejani mreži madžarskih naselij in glede na kategorizacijo madžarskih zgodovinarjev Murska Sobota ni uvrščena visoko na lestvici urbaniziranosti, še posebej zaradi konkurenčnih naselij, ki so gravitirala k Szombathelyju. Na tendenco k urbanosti kaže več desetletno prizadevanje za izgraditev železniške povezave s Körmendom, kar se je zgodilo šele leta 1907 ter ne nazadnje odprtje železniške proge med Mursko Soboto in slovenskim delom Kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev leta 1924. Vmesno obdobje so Mursko Soboto in posledično celotno krajino zaznamovali postopni gospodarski in urbanistični premiki (poštni in telegrafski urad, hranilnica, več društev, javna knjižnica, bolnišnica), a šele dve leti po odprtju železniške proge je mesto dobilo tudi elektriko. Nejasno ali posplošeno mnenje o nerazvitosti Slovenske krajine po letu 1924 se dokaj pogosto pojavlja predvsem pri geografih. Tovrstne stereotipne predstave niso zamrle niti po letu 1991.

Ključne besede: Slovenska krajina, Murska Sobota, mesto, podeželje, infrastruktura, urbano

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