

# 1. Introduction

The settlement structure of Slovakia is the result of long historical development. The present-day settlement network and the emergence of the most important towns can be traced back to the Hungarian Middle Ages, especially to the 13th and 14th centuries. The development of the settlement network has been influenced by geographical location, the configurations of the terrain (the mountain range of the Carpathians), the raw materials deep in the earth (minerals, metals), the military and political situation (since this was an area sheltered from the conquering Tartans and Turks) and the changes in the administrative system (settlements gaining town status). The privileges granted by monarchs had a strong effect on the town network. The great migrations (the conquering Hungarians, Polish/Goral shepherds), organized settlements (Germans/Saxons), voluntary or less voluntary settlements (the Hussite Czechs and Habans fleeing from the Catholic monarchs and the Hungarians fleeing from the Turks) and the development and changes in the economy (the significance of mining changing with time) all determined the changes.

The development of the contemporary Slovak town network can be divided into two large eras and several small periods. The first main period took place in the age of historical Hungary. During this time several peoples with different languages, religions and attitudes to work (Hungarians, Germans, Ruthenians, Poles, Jews, Serbs, Croats, Czechs, Bulgarians, Romanians, Italians, French, English, etc.) coexisted there with an increasing number of Slavic peoples, who spoke a mixture of languages and dialects which were very different from each other. From the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries on, these peoples gradually started to become Slovaks. However, it was only after the foundation of Czechoslovakia that Slovak identity started to strengthen. Subsequent analyses underline the fact that, in the course of history, differences in language have

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caused fewer conflicts, and less destructive ones, than differences in religion. The peoples living in Hungary did not wage war against each other because of linguistic or ethnic differences; rather, religious conflicts were the main reasons for wars, e.g. the Hussite wars or the battles fought between reformation and counter-reformation. It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that ethnic and language differences lead to conflicts. It is an important fact that in the 1848-49 Hungarian war of independence, the most difficult Hungarian national struggle, there were more Slovak people fighting on the revolutionist Kossuth's side than in the imperial army. This indicates that the ethnic conflict between Hungarians and Slovaks was much less bitter than, for instance, in the case of the Hungarian and the Serb or Romanian people. One of the main reasons why Hungarians and Slovaks (and all the other peoples living in that area) could coexist peacefully was the division of labour, which had developed over centuries. The order of labour division was reflected by the society of the towns in Felvidék (earlier, Upper Hungary; since 1920, Slovakia) and also by the relations these towns had with the settlements in their environs, in other parts of the country and in other countries. The coexistence of Hungarians, Slovaks, Germans, and others was replaced by isolation, exclusion and expulsion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but this was not because of the ethnic composition of the towns.

The area of contemporary Slovakia was not a regional, social, economic, administrative or linguistic unit; and therefore the different characters and separation of the areas populated by Slovaks were not reflected in the names of the age, either. In the old Hungarian language the northern mountainous area of Hungary was called Felföld, which stretched as far as contemporary Partium (the area between Transylvania and the Great Hungarian Plain), but did not include the northern part of the Small Hungarian Plain or the left bank of the Danube. In geography, the name Felföld (highlands) appeared as the opposite of Alföld (plain). At present, in Hungary since the Trianon Peace Treaty, the southern part of Felföld is called the Northern Mountain Range.

The name Felső-Magyarország (Upper Hungary) is used in history, but the counties near Bratislava do not belong there. The Upper Hungarian mining directorate involved Gömör, Borsod, Szepes, Abaúj and Torna Counties (their towns are *Gölnicbánya* [today: Gelnica], *Szomolnok* [today: Smolník], *Igló* [today: Spišská Nová Ves], *Rozsnyó* [today: Rožňava], *Jászó* [today: Jasov], *Rudabánya* and *Telkibánya*), and that of Lower Hungary (Alsó-Magyarország) included Nyitra, Bars, Hont and

Zólyom Counties (their towns: *Körmöcbánya* [today: Kremnica], *Besztercebánya* [today: Banská Bystrica], *Selmecbánya* [today: Banská Štiavnica], *Bélabánya* [today: Banská Belá], *Újbánya* [today: Nová Baňa], *Bakabánya* [today: Pukanec] and *Libetbánya* [today: Ľubietová]).

The name Felvidék (Upper Hungary) appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, denoting the high mountains mostly inhabited by ethnic minorities close to the Polish border. After that part of the country had been torn off from Hungary in 1920, the name Felvidék took on a political and administrative meaning. Since then it has been used to mean the whole area of Slovakia, also including the part of the Small Hungarian Plain to the north of the Danube (*Paládi-Kovács* 2003).

In their analyses, the representatives of Hungarian academic life, especially those of historical geography, regard the watershed area on the left bank of the Danube and that on the right bank of the River Tisza as Felvidék (*Pinczés* 1998).

Henceforth I will mainly use the term Felvidék (Upper Hungary) regarding the historical past. Neither the standpoint of present-day Slovak public opinion nor (unfortunately) that of Slovak researchers is acceptable. In contradiction with the historical facts they refer to present-day Slovakia (together with its borders and geographical and administrative names) as a thousand-year-old province (country).