

# SPECIAL URBANIZATION: THE EFFECTS OF INDUSTRY ON RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN HUNGARY: A CASE STUDY

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Until the middle of the nineteenth century Ózd was only a small settlement the residents of which were engaged primarily in farming. The center of the area was not Ózd, but rather the neighboring town of Sajóvárkony, which was also home to the registry office. The society and image of the village underwent major changes with the decision to establish an ironworks. As Ózd was slowly affected by urbanization, its population grew substantially. At the turn of the century, it was already seen as a small town. However, Ózd only became legally town in 1949. In this article, I present the evolution of the settlement from a small community with an economy founded essentially on agriculture to a medium-sized city with an economy based on industry.

**Keywords:** Ózd, Hungary, urbanization, urban history, industrialization, economic history

I would began my examination of the transformation of Ózd with an outline of the problems that arose with the urbanization of the settlement. The landowners and craftsmen living at that time in Gömör county in the north of Hungary were interested in smelting. In the early nineteenth century most of them merged to extend their influence and they formed smaller organizations. The main reasons were: merging was essential to make production more efficient and to increase the quantity, they needed to use their combined power to counteract any unfavorable outside impact, and it was easier for them to launch their products on export markets together. In 1845 the organizations planned to construct an ironworks. They chose Ózd, which was located in the northernmost of Borsod county, to

be the site for the works since it had brown coal deposits which were necessary for smelting. The iron ore was transported from the neighboring yards in Gömör county.

The production in the works started in 1847 and it generated significant changes in the region. In 1881 the works of Ózd merged with those of Borsodnádásd and Salgótarján creating the Rimamurány-Salgótarján Ironworks Plc. This brought about an even greater development, and as a result, the image and society of Ózd was very much like that of a town in the last decades of the nineteenth century. (Berend 1980) Earlier the inhabitants of Ózd were only engaged in farming on lands of poor quality, we could only find a few craftspeople there. They could, therefore, get employment at the ironworks only as hands. It was at least something better than the way they had lived as poor peasants since the payment they got at the works was secure and predictable. The management recruited clerks and skilled workers from abroad and the north of Hungary where there had previously been industrial plants and smelting. Formerly the population of Ózd had been exclusively Catholic and they had only spoken Hungarian there, but the migrant workers were Slovaks, Germans and Moravians who were Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists. They had a great impact on the image of the society in Ózd. These migrants came from citified surroundings, so they influenced the mentality of the natives in this direction. (Dobosy 1992)

Table 1: The changes in the population of Ózd in the given periods

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population (capital)</i>
1850	346
1857	821
1869	1,216
1880	1,430
1890	2,304
1900	3,640
1910	5,981
1920	6,022
1930	7,322
1941	21,277

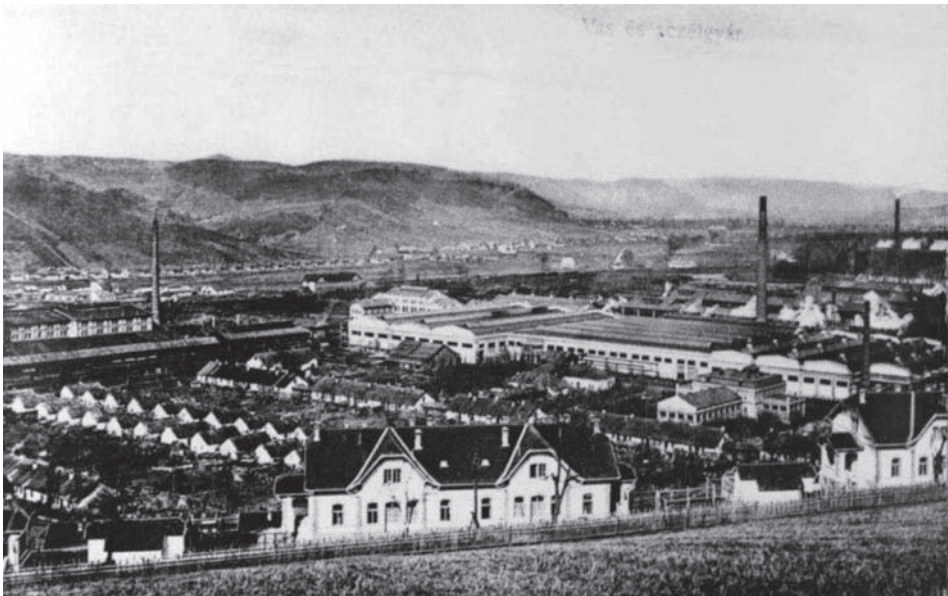
Source: Statistical data from censuses

According to the table it is obvious that the population of Ózd multiplied during a century. The fastest increase happened in the early period (in the middle of the nineteenth century) and at the turn of the century. The population grew signifi-

cantly as a result of the location of the works and the attracting effect of smelting. The number of inhabitants increased from a couple of hundred to several thousand, at turn of the century the population was ten times bigger than before. Urbanization can clearly be seen from the increase of population. It shows us that by the early 1900s there was a population in Ózd as big as that of a smaller town. The population here did not include the inhabitants of those smaller settlements which had been built by the management of the works, but administratively belonged to the neighboring Bolyok or Sajóvárkony villages whose dwellers also experienced observable changes thanks to the ironworks. These neighboring settlements and Ózd merged into a larger town in 1940, and that gives the visibly larger number of population in the statistics of the year 1941.

It is definitely worth taking a closer look at how the structure of employment changed at that time, as it can also be one of the characteristics of urbanization. The locals, the majority of which had previously been in poor financial situations, were more than willing to take a job at the ironworks. The local society was soon stratified from agricultural workers to industrial workers. The settlement of people was continuous, and it accelerated from the 1880s.

I have looked through the sources of the time and I conclude the three-quarter part of the population, at the turn of the century, earned their living from iron industry. The rest is as follows: 7–10% is made up of business people, craftspeople, administrative clerks who moved to Ózd because of the increased demand



Picture 1: The ironworks, surrounded by housing estates in the early twentieth century  
Source: Collection of the Museum of Ózd

created by the development of the works and the growth of the population. Agricultural workers had a similar proportion to the above. They were the natives who still had not chosen to be employed at the works. The proportion of the stratum of agricultural workers slowly decreased in this period. Through the analysis of the employment structure it is obvious that the settlement had the characteristics of a town rather than a village by the turn of the century. (Registers of Ózd 1895–1949, The census of the Countries of the Hungarian Crown in 1900)

The appearance of the ironworks caused a considerable change to the housing conditions which had previously been poor and rustic. The Rimamurány-Salgótarján Ironworks Plc attached great importance to improving the living conditions of its workers and employees after its foundation in 1881. Apart from the high wages and generous payments in kind the company built several housing estates for their workers. It was a way to localize people and to enhance loyalty towards the company. Another reason for the importance of building these houses was that formerly if one had been offered a better payment somewhere else they had not had any trouble moving away. These buildings were considered to be modern at that time and they surrounded the factory. The main consideration was to make it faster for the workers to get to their place of work. Besides, there was free use of the gardens.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the housing estates were provided with modern road network and public services. Peace was kept by the guardians of the housing estate. Those areas which were outside the boundaries of the housing estate – the „old Ózd” – were not so developed and remained rural. (Csontos–Vass 2001)

It is essential to analyze the level of the provision of public institutes in Ózd at that time as it can also mark the urbanization of a settlement. The Rimamurány-Salgótarján Ironworks Plc also laid special emphasis on improving the living standard and education of its workers. A hospital for factory workers was also established to improve medical attention. A swimming pool was also built near the factory in 1904, and it was available not only for clerks but also for workers. It was the first indoor swimming pool in Central Europe. Apart from swimming possibilities it also provided smaller rooms where one could enjoy the favorable effects of hot and cold steam. In 1896 the company set up an own elementary school in which there was a high level of education and the school itself employed teachers recognized nationwide. The eight-class education system was first established at this school in the country instead of the previous six-class system.

The company gave special attention to culture. The clerks could take part in cultural programs in the Tiszti Kaszinó (Casino for Officers) and the workers in the Olvasó Egylet (Society of Readers). The auditorium of the latter was the sixth biggest in the country. Many charities and other organizations as well as choirs operated and there was a wide variety of sporting possibilities. The buildings



Picture 2: The building of the indoor swimming pool and bath in Ózd  
Source: Collection of the Museum of Ózd

were of great architectural value. These are unambiguously the signs of urbanization since Ózd was adequately provided with public institutes already in the late nineteenth century. (Nagy 2012)

Table 2: The changes in the numbers of craftsmen and businesspeople (per person) between 1898 and 1908 in Ózd

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>1898</i>	<i>1908</i>
Shoemaker	5	11
Tailor	2	4
Watchmaker	2	3
Joiner	1	2
Tinner	1	3
Butcher	1	2
Slaughterer	3	3
Ale-draper	4	6
Trader	7	17
Barber	2	5
Baker	1	3
Brush-maker	1	1
Coffee seller	2	3
Confectioner	-	1
Architect	-	2
<b>Altogether</b>	32	66

Source: A.B.: Az ózdi hetivásár ügye. (The matter of weekly fair in Ózd) In: Ózdi Hírlap, 6 Dec. 1908. pp 2 –3.

The table above shows us that at the end of the nineteenth century Ózd already had a wide range of possibilities as regards business. In 1898 there were 32 craftsmen and businesspeople living in the settlement, this number doubled within 10 years. More than 222 self-employed craftsmen and 140 businesspeople lived in Ózd in 1940 after the merging of settlements. (Berend 1980: 263.) The appearance and expansion of trades was due to the demand created by the local residents, and this demand also reflects urbanization, in other words the urban mentality of the locals. Although the number of traders increased remarkably in this period, it was considered to be too low compared to those settlements that had similar number of residents.

The migrating skilled workers made a remarkable impact on the mentality of the local villagers. Their previous scale of values changed significantly. It was not agricultural work, but the factory that was in the center of their lives, they made their schedules according to the work at the factory. The people in Ózd, similarly to those in other towns, regularly went out to attend cultural programs and entertaining shows in their free time. The way they dressed also changed rapidly as



a result of the migrants and the work at the factory, and it was supported by the management as well. (Vass 1977: 168–175.)

Even the contents of newspapers reflected the town-like features of Ózd at the turn of the century. In the January of 1910 a local paper called “Ózdi Hírlap” described Ózd this way: *‘For only a few years our little village has been undergoing a drastic change. Certain things happen day by day and they further the formation of a small country town from a muddy settlement. Delightful palaces are being built (...), and the society is slowly beginning to be a town...’* (Alig néhány. Ózdi Hírlap, 9. jan. 1910. 9. p. 2) Not only the journalists had these thoughts but also the local intellectuals whose real aim was also the change from village to town already in this period. Göbl Márton local parish priest had also expressed his thoughts in the paper called “Ózd és Vidéke” in 1907, more than 40 years before Ózd was pronounced town. He suggested that by joining the neighboring settlements to Ózd *‘... it will found a large town. These settlements are so closely located to the developing industry of Ózd which provides them, that their joining involuntarily offers itself and it can lead to the formation of a town with a regular council.’* (Dr. Göbl Márton: Ózd jövője (*The future of Ózd*). In: Ózd és Vidéke, Dec. 5. 1907. pp 2–3). These words unequivocally refer to the fact that contemporary intellectuals all believed that both the aesthetic and social image of Ózd showed that the settlement would soon have to be given the status of a town.



Picture 3: View of the high street of Ózd  
Source: Collection of the Museum of Ózd

All in all, we can see that Ózd was more like an urbanised settlement than a village at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The number of population increased as well, the structure of employment of those living there did not reflect rural conditions. The image of Ózd was also town-like if we take a closer look at the view of the streets of that time and also at the architectural features of the buildings which have been built since then. The town was adequately provided with social and cultural institutes and it started to act as the center of the region from the last third of the nineteenth century. The contemporary sources supported this as well. By the beginning of the twentieth century the mentality considerably changed as a direct result of the migrating clerks and skilled workers, and the local residents looked and behaved like urban people rather than rural ones. The way people dressed also changed rapidly, local clothes were fast replaced by factory clothes. Nevertheless, thanks to the political circumstances the people of Ózd had to wait a long time before their settlement was given the status of a town. It only happened in the first years of socialism, in 1949, so Ózd had spent half a century on the waiting list to earn its well-deserved place among the towns of Hungary.

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