

Százhalombatta among the Industrial Cities

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„What do we mean by urban design and where does the expression originate from? Previously in Hungary we referred to it as urban planning or urban renewal; however none of these adequately described the entirety of the term. On the one hand, increasingly our activities expand beyond towns/cities [...] and on the other, it is not only development and planning, but also, in a wider sense, the correlations in historical, economical, sociological, psychological factors and in other respects [...] we may say it is about social development potentials and requirements, which more or less circumscribe the nature of urban living spaces we and our descendents shall live in – thus, how the future will look in this respect.” (Granasztói, 1976:21)

„To the Százhalom (could be translated as hundred mounds) district or settlement countless folk legends and myths are connected from the time of Jordanes through Anonymus even up until the 20th century. János Arany, a renowned Hungarian author and poet, also mentions Százhalom in his piece titled Keveháza, which is part of the Csaba-trilogy. In 1853 the poet added the note to his piece writing that “Százhalom today is called the village of Bata on the right bank of the Danube.” However, in the area there are signs of human settlements dating to prehistoric times owing to its advantageous geographical position – the vicinity of the Danube providing ample fishing grounds, and the protruding loess hills, which offered both means for protection material prosperity.” (Rumi, 1998:18)

In the second half of the 20th century Százhalombatta was the last among the developing socialist industrial cities to go through its own transformation. This metamorphosis was due to the presence of two major industrial enterprises the MOL Plc. and the Dunai Erőmű Rt (Danube Power Plant Plc.). The town and its living environs enjoyed from the beginning a rather controversial status. From 1960 the newly emerging industrialized city has taken on important tasks, resulting from the industrial activities, and as necessities mandated by the elevated social functions. The local municipal council paid attention to the furthering of cohesion among the residents by the active involvement of public service providers at its disposal, in addition to the pressing issues related to housing shortages and the local industrial plants.

The city in the 21st century intends to continue its development model based primarily on industrial activities, however there is room for novel initiatives such as finding a new industrial character for the town based on innovations, e.g. setting up industrial parks, as well as supporting cultural programs of diverse nature such as the Summerfest Festival or the realization of a municipal conference center. The town therefore functions as a municipality of mainly

industrial character even in the 21st century, increasingly drawing on modern innovative enterprises. Nevertheless there are several contentious issues, which may threaten the city's prosperity in the long-term.

A short history of the city

The name Százhalombatta originates from the iron-age mounds that can be found at the edge of the city. The earliest signs of human habitation can be dated back to around 3000 BC, the Neolithic Period, but more intensive human settlement of the region occurred only during the Bronze Age approximately at 2000 BC.

In the immediate area of Százhalombatta, because its advantageous location was coupled with the proximity of the Danube, which translated to secure fishing grounds and fertile agricultural land, human settlement was observable even in the Paleolithic Period. The human inhabitants of that age probably settled around area of the current Óváros-Téglagyár (historical city center-brick factory), which is attested by the wealth of artifacts found and structures built. The area of the brick factory was transformed into an earthen fortress only towards the late Bronze Age, the remnants of which are visible to this very day. During the Bronze Age four distinct cultures followed one another in the area, the Nagyrév, the Vátya, the tumulus grave, and the urnfield cultures. The tumulus graves found west, south-west of the earthen fortress reaching as far as the town of contemporary Érd can be dated at the early Iron Age, the Hallstatt period. These are referred to as the so-called 'hundred mounds', which also appear in the name of the city. Báté is first mentioned in medieval records only in 1318. During the time Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin the current Százhalombatta, as it was recorded by Anonymus, was part of the personal fiefdom of the Grand Prince of the Hungarian tribes.¹ The actual settlement of the area can be dated to the 10th and 11th centuries; at the site of the former Roman army camp the medieval village of Báté was built. The local inhabitants constructed their Christian temple from the stones and building material they found on hand, mostly from the remnants of the derelict Roman fortress. This is attested by a mention from the period of Charles I's reign. In a document drafted by the Diocese of Buda about the grant of the village of Éti (Érd) to the Treasurer Tisza, Báté on the Danube is referred to as adjacent to it. Báté during the late Middle Ages split into two villages Higher and Lower Báté.

The medieval center of Százhalom can be found at the site of the current historic downtown district; its name likely derived from the mounds nearby. Simon Kézai, medieval chronicler, used the name „Zazholm.” Following the departure of the Turks Százhalom reemerged again; called by the new Serbian settlers Batta.

During the 17th century many local inhabitants received land grants as an incentive to promote settlement in this sparsely populated region. Nevertheless, the trickle of settlers became a substantial sum only during the 18th century.

¹ Handbook of the South-Buda micro region. Budapest, 2003. CEBA Könyvkiadó. 34. p.

According to the census of 1784–1787, ordered by the King Joseph II., 493 individuals were registered as living in the locality.

By 1863 the town had 882 inhabitants, including Serbs, Slovaks, and Hungarians. The residents mostly depended on agriculture and fishing for their livelihoods. Local employment in the burgeoning industrial sector of Hungary was only possible following the opening of the brick factory of the Bhon-Drasse company.

The plant commenced its operations in 1896, set up by the Bhon-Drasse company, headquartered in Óbuda. The site selected for the plant was at the southern slopes of the loess hills between Érd and Batta on the bank of the Danube. The other buildings found on the premises of the brick factory, such as the house of culture and workers dwellings were constructed from locally manufactured bricks as well. Subsequently port facilities were completed adjacent to the brickworks, which made it possible to utilize barges to ship bricks to southern Hungarian towns. The factory closed its doors in 1916, then in the 1920s an attempt was made to re-launch production, but this was done only on a temporary basis. In 1903 the name of the town was changed from Batta to Százhalombatta, some sources claim that the new name came use as early as 1898. The renaming was largely against the desires of the local municipal council since they showed a marked preference for other names, e.g. Dunabatta, Árpádbatta, Budabatta, and Magyarbatta. However, these name requests were not turned down by the National Municipal Register Committee.

The living environs of the town gradually also came to serve the needs of the local residents; therefore various business entities were founded including a convenience store, set up in 1908, and a restaurant operated under the auspices of the Hangya (ant) cooperative, in 1920 the milk cooperative started to operate, and in 1921 a loan society. Another great stride forward in the development of the town would have been the re-zoning of the area according to the plan as advocated by the landowners Dr. Árpád Matta and József András at the end of the 1930s. In the proposed scheme they envisioned the creation of a spa/bath district. The planners intended to build on the strip of land next to the Danube a new spa town called “Árpád-fürdőváros” and “András-Dunatelep” which with its seven kilometer-long beach could have become the Hungarian equivalent of the French Riviera. For this end they even began selling plots in the area. In their call for buyers they emphasized the nearness of the capital, the good transportation infrastructure, the chance of relocating to a qualitatively better living environment, and a 10 percent discount for civil servants. Despite all the efforts and incentives the proposal languished without appropriate support. In the years following WWII the growth of the town was halted temporarily, which was finally reversed by the state’s industrial policies in the 1950s. As a result of the decision of the then reigning government the building of a thermal power station and an oil refinery at Százhalombatta commenced. At the final phase of socialist industrial expansion the MOL Plc. and the Danube Power Plant Plc. became deeply entrenched actors in the life of the city, which will even in the long-term contribute to its stable economic condition. The financial position of the Danube Power Plant Plc. following the regime change deteriorated, while the MOL Plc. expanded to become Hungary’s premier industrial enterprise. As a result of the extensive industrial development the city

went through rapid expansion; the number of residents climbed sharply as both white- and blue-collar workers flocked here from all parts of the country. Parallel to the construction of the industrial facilities, in 1962 they began the erection of suitable housing estates, meant for the laborers in the two new industrial complexes. Together with the residential blocks the commercial services infrastructure also began to materialize; various shops appeared catering for different needs, small kiosks and tobacconists inundated the town, a medical center, the first pharmacy, kindergartens, and schools were built, as well as cultural and entertainment centers took root.

In 1970 the Presidential Council of the Hungarian People's Republic issued executive order 6/1970. which declared Százhalombatta a town. With this decision further development projects could take off in both aspects of urbanization. The results of urbanization in essence and in form were becoming ever more obvious. As a proof of this, several public schools opened their doors in 1966 the No. 1. Elementary School, in 1973 the Eötvös Loránd Elementary School, and in 1978 the Arany János Elementary School and Eight-grade Secondary School. Additionally, in 1977 one of the main symbols of the town's socialist architecture and an indispensable element in the welfare services for the local population, the Municipal Health Center was completed.

Of the cultural and educational institutions the sports arena and the municipal outdoor swimming pools stand out, both opening in 1982. In 1985 the Barátság (Fraternity) Culture Center and City Library, now called 'Hamvas Béla' were turned over to the interested public. To satisfy the thirst for cultural programs and events several clubs and circles commenced their activities, which served a crucial role in the safeguarding and reorganization of small grassroots groups/communities. Furthermore, they were also active in the preservation of traditions and the formation of lasting bonds between the newcomers and the longtime residents of the town. Finally, in 1987 the 'Matrica' Museum was completed and the Széchenyi Ferenc Vocational School commenced its academic work mostly catering for the labor requirements of local industries. In the life of the town the regime change did not bring a major trauma as Százhalombatta maintained its status as a leading industrial center both nationally and as part of the capital's metropolitan area.

Following the regime change the construction of large housing estates was suspended, thus the expansion of the residential areas moved toward a more suburban-like model with detached houses in the new 'Urbárium' district. The quality of life has improved considerably; since from the 1960s the town council aimed to create a livable and likable living environment. This policy is supported by the fact that by the early 1990s the municipal council treated the question of environmental pollution caused by the local industrial enterprises as an utmost challenge to deal with. Besides the local government the two main polluters, the MOL Plc. and the Danube Power Plant Plc., also showed sincere inclination to tackle this problem in a mutually satisfying manner. By the end of the 1990s with the introduction of new technological solutions the threat of environmental pollution virtually ceased to exist.

Another major challenge has been the preservation and further development of the local community. From the 1990s there has been a sharp increase in the number of daily commuters to Budapest and other municipalities nearby. In the

case of Százhalombatta the figure reached roughly 3,000-3,500 individuals. The majority of commuters within a few years usually decides to physically move closer to his/her place of employment, establishing an entirely new living environment. This phenomenon is most common among white-collar professionals and skilled workers. Therefore we can see a sizable transformation in the make up of the professionally active residents of the town. The majority of the remaining white-collar workers is mainly employed by the local industrial enterprises, or is on the staff of one of the educational, cultural organizations, or organs of the municipal government. They are mostly local residents or live in surrounding municipalities. As a consequence of this process a certain measure of fracturing of the local community is observable. To remedy it the town council has launched initiatives and programs in the realms of culture, healthcare, and education which aim to entice the locals to remain in the town preventing in the future any unwelcome departures.

Százhalombatta at the dawn of the third millennium proved that economically, socially, as well as politically it must be reckoned with as one of Hungary's principal cities. To sustain this coveted status it is indispensable to furnish the proper living environs and ample job opportunities for the local residents. Furthermore, to achieve the desired quality of living for the residents the continuous renovation and proper maintenance of old housing is a necessity, just as the inducement of investors to launch new projects in the town in real estate and other areas.

Through these aims it is obvious that the town views sustainability as a primary objective and in the long-term wishes to create a superior living environment for its residents. The arrival of new businesses, the construction of modern residential areas, and the opportunity for purchasing real-estate at subsidized rates are all policy options that the local government must embark on. The local government's decision-making process should be characterized by professionalism and social utility, always in the service of the welfare of the town itself.

For the realization of sustainable and qualitatively improving living conditions at the threshold of the new millennium the town aims to embark on five development paths. Among these are included the plans for rationalizing the operations of the various public organs of the municipality, elevation in the quality or at least the maintenance at the current levels of public services aimed directly at the local inhabitants, strengthening the role the town plays in the surrounding region, and the nurturing of existing and the creation of new links with other municipalities and regions. The town to a great extent relies on local entrepreneurs, emphasizing the importance of their uninterrupted prosperity, and also the need to welcome businesses which are fully independent of the large mammoth companies now dominating the local industrial landscape. All of these are goals are pursued by paying attention to the town's heritage, while focusing on the present and even more so on the future through the involvement of the local residents for their own benefit.

Development plans following the turn of the millennium

In the past twenty years the municipal authorities have prepared numerous plans and initiatives for the development of the town. The social, economic, political initiatives launched aim today, just as during the 1960s and 1970s, to craft an improving living environment for the locals. Special attention must be paid to the Equal Opportunities in Public Education Action Plan (2007) and the Urban Development Concept for Százhalombatta (2008, 2011), which is the general instrument for all the development initiatives for the town. An indispensable prerequisite for successful participation in EU regional development programs is the updated version of the latter instrument, the Integrated Urban Development Strategy (2008). The contents of the concept, upon a thorough analysis, are realistic and the funds needed for their realization are still at the disposal of the city government, however the development thrusts to be realized still largely hinge upon the business fortunes of the two industrial enterprises dominating local economic life.

In the continuous development of the town domestic and international support instruments are crucial. In the 2009 the municipality was able to gain funding in the sum of 800 million Forints from EU programs for the reconstruction of the main town square. Development goals are as important today as in the 1960s with one notable difference; the initiative and drive stem from the town itself, but, of course, are not entirely disengaged from politics.

In conclusion

Százhalombatta, this small pleasant town 30 kilometers south of Budapest was able to preserve its traditional industrial character by the application of technological innovations. The local population of 18,641 (2014.) is currently the recipient of numerous social and welfare benefits; nevertheless the municipal council has to find the means to maintain the continuity and sustainability of these programs. As a result of this, following the turn of the century, the town's innovative programs and concepts made substantial advances in the retention rates of the local population and, in parallel, also articulated the authorities' expectations and demands vis-à-vis the residents. The town's concepts on equal opportunities in public education pay ample attention to the students and their parents who utilize fully or partially the opportunities presented by the system. The Plan will be deemed successful when the representatives of local society exploit in increasing numbers the various segments of the local educational infrastructure, continuing their education locally by realizing that the local institutions are able to offer the educational quality they aspire to. Naturally, this raises the specter of another dilemma, referring to the constructive power of community spirit and initiative.

All this also depends on whether for its residents the town of Százhalombatta is able to offer the place of employment and residence, and as well as the right living environment. Development plants in every case denote additional future steps to be taken for a town, in this instance for Százhalombatta, since well-

composed long-term development projects are critical in the making of desirable living environments.

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