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THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF CENTRAL EUROPE IN LIGHT OF THE CASCADENESS OF THE HISTORICAL PROCESS

1. Introduction

Economic dualism in modern Europe has been considered one of the greatest paradoxes in the history of the European continent in the late 16th and the early 17th century, and one that has permanently influenced the contemporary shape of Central Europe. However, distinct features in the development of Central European countries such as Poland, Bohemia and Hungary came into existence as far back as in early feudal times, i.e., from the 9th to 12th centuries. Feudalism in those countries followed a different course from that in Western Europe. Central European societies remained outside Roman influences and the Carolinian succession, where private ownership of land and the system of suzerain-vassal dependencies were formed. Instead, a system of prince’s law developed in Central Europe, under which the peasantry was inferior to the ruling class by virtue of public (prince’s) and not private law.\(^1\) In the 12th and 13th centuries that system started to disappear gradually in all Central European countries. By way of bestowing immunities first upon the Church and then upon individual feudal lords, the prince’s authority granted land together with peasants living on it. It followed that the prince gave up his economic and legal interests in the land and the peasantry. In the course of such processes, the feudal class, typical of Western European societies, came into existence in that region.

From the 13th to 15th centuries both parts of Europe, eastern and western, developed analogically: towns expanded, the monetary economy prevailed over kind economy, compulsory service was being replaced with rent, and the feudal control over the peasantry lessened. But since

\(^1\) Modzelewski (1975) and (1987).

the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, the developmental distinctiveness gradually increased in Central European countries compared with Western Europe. The river Elbe became the borderline between the two economic zones. West of the river, towns as well as crafts and manufacture vigorously expanded, while peasants gained freedom from feudal dependencies. The social balance between the burghers and the nobility enabled the state to gain in power and transform in the modern period from the estate monarchy into absolutist monarchy. By contrast, east of the Elbe, the towns of that region clearly witnessed a crisis: a decrease in population and craftsmen’s production. In the rural economy, the development of the manorial-serf economy superseded the earlier monetary economy. That process was accompanied by the growth of compulsory labor imposed by the lords over the peasantry and the introduction of the second serfdom. The economic superiority of the nobility was also strengthened in politics: in all societies of Central Europe, the burghers exerted a minor influence upon public life in comparison with Western Europe, whereas the state was subordinated to the vital interests of the nobility. The rise and development of the manorial-serf economy, which aggravated the exploitation of the peasantry was a basic factor leading to the emergence of two economic zones in modern Europe.

In this essay, I aim to interpret the emergence of the Central European line of development on the basis of the concept of the cascadeness of historical process. The course of development in Central Europe relied on many insignificant factors. However, their joint influence outweighed the impact of developmental regularities according to which societies in Western Europe evolved, and which within a short period also reached the societies of Central Europe. Factors that appear in the cascade of European differentiation include its core, i.e., a set of variables which operated in each of the societies under study, i.e., Polish, Bohemian and Hungarian societies, as well as specific factors responsible for the development of each of those Central European societies.

2. The Core of the Cascade of European Differentiation

The factor that initiated the process of European differentiation was the shortage of manpower. The disproportion between Western and Central Europe in population density derived from the times of the Roman

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2 For the concept of the cascadeness of the historical process see: Brzechczyn, Methodological Peculiarities . . . , reprinted in this volume, pp. 137-157.
The Distinctiveness of Central Europe

In the 1st century AD, the Roman part of the European continent, namely the area west of the Rhine and south of the Danube was inhabited by ca. 70% of the continent’s population. Ten centuries later, ca. 65% of the continent’s population still lived in the area. In the 10th century, about 49 million people inhabited Europe. At that time, the population of France was 9 million, compared with 7 million in Italy, 5.4 million in Germany, and 5 million in England and Wales. Central European countries of those times were respectively less populated: Poland had a population of 1.25 million, Bohemia and Moravia that of 1 million, and Hungary about 1 million. Population density in particular countries was just as diverse, e.g., 24 people per square km in Italy on the one square km, compared with 16 in France, 10 in Germany and 8 on British Isles, whereas in Poland the respective figure was 5 people and 8 people in Bohemia.¹

In the late Middle Ages, one could identify three population zones. The most densely populated zone with the density above 20 people per square km stretched from England to the Apennine Peninsula and included such countries as Italy, central and northern France, western and southern Germany and England. Along both sides of that strip there stretched the terrains with a population density between 8 and 15 people per square km. To the west of that zone southern France, Spain and Portugal were situated, and to the east were Denmark, Mecklenburg, Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and the Baltic states. Apart from these two zones, the authors cited above distinguish an area of the lowest population density (up to 2 people per square km) with Russia and the Scandinavian countries. Hence, the societies of Central Europe were located between the second and third zone.⁴

The population growth in the countries of Western Europe was disrupted in the middle of the 14th century by the plague epidemic, which reduced the continent’s population by 25% in comparison to its initial state.⁵ The loss of population was spread unevenly because in particular areas of England it was equal to 23-45%, compared with 25% to 35% in France, from 40% to 60% in north Italian towns, 30% in Spain, and from 25% to 75% in Germany in comparison to its initial state.⁶ The epidemic of the plague did not affect the countries of Central Europe, which saw a population growth from the 13th to 17th centuries.⁷

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¹ Malowist (1973), pp. 18-21.
⁵ Russel (1975), p. 41.
14th century, the population of Poland increased to 1.8 million people, of Bohemia to 2 million, and of Hungary to 2.5-3 million. In modern times, the population of Hungary was equal to 4 million of people (turn of the 15th and 16th centuries), Bohemia had a population of 2.5 million (end of 16th century), and Poland 4 million (turn of the 15th and 16th century). A considerable decrease in the population of Central European countries was a consequence of the wars, famine and epidemics in the 17th century. As a result, the population of Hungary at the close of the 17th century fell to 2.5-3 million, of Bohemia and Moravia to 0.9 million and of Poland (at the beginning of the 18th century) to 6 million people (a drop from 10 million in the mid-17th century).8

A low level of population density in Central Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries stimulated feudal lords to make concessions to the peasantry. To a certain extent, the feudal class relinquished their prerogatives obtained from the political authorities. The feudal lords granted wide-ranging privileges to the settling population of peasants. The direct cause of the colonization undertaken by the grand landowners was their desire to raise their income. Under the circumstances of scarce population in the societies of Central Europe, the increase in the number of serfs was the only way to ensure income stability. According to Marian Małowist, it is the factor of the scarcity of manpower that is essential in understanding the mechanisms of colonization undertaken by the grand feudal landowners:

the relatively small population in the countries of Central Eastern and Eastern Europe was a decisive prerequisite for the liquidity of manpower in the villages. Low population density forced the rulers and aristocracy to revoke economic stimuli which would bring about the influx of foreign and domestic people, put the end to their flight and persuade them to intensify their work.9

An additional factor that facilitated colonization and settlement was an increasing overpopulation of Western European societies. From the 12th to the 14th century, Germany, neighboring with Poland and Bohemia:

Which at that time had a population density of ca. 20 people per 1 square km, reached the highest possible stage of population growth at the level of productive forces that were characteristic of that time; hence, it sent its population surplus to the European East, similarly to France, which sent its to the distant lands of the crusades.10

First of all, the initiators of the settlement were grand landowners, because they belonged to a social group which was the first to obtain

immunity from the prince’s authority and was able to bear the costs of integrating agricultural land, importation of settlers and above all costs of securing their proper economic conditions. These usually included dozen or so years of exemption from taxes and obligations. The feudal lords used legal solutions which, under the name German Law, were transferred from Western to Central Europe and applied with respect to the peasantry. German Law endowed peasants with personal freedom, the right to leave the village and guaranteed them hereditary ownership of land. Within their class, peasants could dispose of their land as they wished, selling or renting it. However, the sale of land to the representative of another estate required separate consent from the lord. Inhabitants of villages founded on the German Law also enjoyed the guarantee of irremovability from land which they cultivated. The village, moreover, obtained judicial self-government. Settlement on new terrains was accompanied by prolonged exemptions from payments and taxes (ca. 10-15 years). These rights were vested not in individuals but in village communes. The privileges which were initially granted only to settlers were furthermore extended to the domestic population.

German settlement led to an increased population potential of the countries where the colonized terrains were located. Population density of Bohemia, which was 6 people per square km in the 11th century, increased to 14. Hungary saw a similar population growth. In the year 1000, the country had a population of about 1 million. In the mid-13th century, in spite of the destruction brought about by the Tartar invasion, the Hungarian society had 2 million people, and the figure doubled at the beginning of the 16th century. At that time, Poland observed a similar demographic increase. In the 11th century, the average population density was 5 people per square km. In the mid-14th century, the average density was 8 people per square km and reached 15 in the 16th century.

German settlement and colonization based on German Law concurred to support the growth of productive forces in the societies of Central Europe. Most changes in that respect were caused by the spread of the three-field system. The average family in the alternate-fallow system needed 34 ha of cultivated soil to make a living; whereas the whole area that it used was equal to 100 ha. In the three-field system, on the other hand, the average family used 4-8 ha of cultivated soil. This meant that the area of cultivated land equal to 100 ha in the three-field system could

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nourish from 30 to 60 people. The 13th and 14th centuries witnessed a widespread dissemination of agricultural tools that had not been known before. One of the most important tools was the iron plough. Thanks to its iron parts, it could open heavier and more fertile soils, which were inaccessible to a shovel plough. In the same period of time, apart from the iron plough, other agricultural tools such as: frame harrows, scythes, spades and axes came into common use.

Following the changes in agricultural technology, a considerable increase in crop yield was recorded. In the 10th and 11th centuries, the average harvest was about 1.5-3 grains from one seed. Half of it was reserved for next year’s sowing. The other half, after the diminution of levies and tributes, remained at the farmer’s disposal. As a result of changes in cultivation technology, the yield increased in the 13th and 14th centuries to 3-4 grains from one seed and to 5 grains on certain lands. The average harvest at that time ranged from 4 to 5 grains from one seed. From the mid-12th to the mid-14th century, agricultural production in Central Europe rose by ca. 30-65%, and in certain areas it even doubled.

As early as in the 12th century, German settlement and colonization based on German Law included the terrains between the Oder and the Elbe. At that time, certain groups of Romance origin were settling in Hungary. In the 13th and 14th centuries, German colonization reached Silesia, Pomerania, Wielkopolska, Małopolska, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, Transylvania, and Hungary as well as Prussia and Livonia. The true center of German settlement was Silesia, where about 1200 villages were founded in the years 1200-1350. From the 12th to the 14th century, according to German historiographic estimates, about 180,000-200,000 settlers were to have reached that land. Another important agglomeration of German settlement was Eastern Prussia. About 1400 villages were founded there, inhabited by 150,000 settlers.

Population density in Central European countries also influenced the development of the urban economy in that region of the continent. First of all, cities in both parts of Europe originated and developed in different periods of time. In the West, they emerged earlier, i.e., at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. In Central Europe, cities emerged later, at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries. These temporal differences were the result of unequal technological advancement. In the West, under the pressure

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16 Piskorski (1990), pp. 242-245.
17 Aubin (1942), pp. 396-397.
from the population, technological progress was achieved earlier, whereas it was in fact imported to Central Europe from the Western part of the continent.

The emergence of towns in both parts of Europe occurred in different social conditions, which were shaped principally by relations between the feudal class and the peasantry. In Western Europe, the urban sphere emerged at the stage of the peasantry’s declining economic situation. As a result of migration to cities, peasants could increase their income and enlarge the urban population. In Central Europe, instead, the rise of towns emerged at the stage of the improvement in the economic situation of the peasantry, what was manifested by the growth in settlement based on German Law. That was why the migration of peasants to towns was more limited and hence the proportion of the urban population in Central Europe was also respectively smaller. An argument supporting that thesis might be a considerable percentage of German, Armenian, and Jewish residents in towns of Central Europe (in the 13th and 14th Jewish settlement began in Poland centuries as a result of persecution in Western Europe). In certain strata of the society (the patriciate), the population of foreign origin even gained absolute advantage over the native population.

Let us follow these processes in detail. In the 12th and 13th centuries technological progress, as well as related phenomena such as a growth in output, specialization and division of labor, gave rise to the development of towns in Central Europe. Urban reform usually began by granting legal autonomy to foreign merchants who lived in proto-urban settlements. The so-called location was the second stage. It usually led to founding towns on greenfield sites or to reconstructing existing settlements, because the centers of population making a living outside farming existed in that part of the continent as early as in the period from the 10th to 12th century, and even in the pre-state period. Municipal reform in this sense started at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries. The promoters of location, that the founding of the completely new towns or granting rights to the centers of settlements which had existed before location, were the monarchs, grand lords or the Church. Both kinds of locations brought profit to all the parties involved: the owner, the burghers-settlers and to the promoter of location. The feudal lord, in consequence of successful location, exercised control over rent that he received from the plots on lease, and obtained merchant and market fees, rent paid by craftsmen, and similar profits.

The settlers, on the other hand, enjoyed suitable conditions for initiating business activity. They acquired their own jurisdiction, and

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obtained exemptions from levies. The feudal lord also bestowed on them privileges which made business and commercial activity easier. One of the privileges was, for example, the privilege to set up a marketplace, to get exempted from levies, to have goods in stock, and the so-called “mile law” that restricted competition within rural craft by indicating the radius within which trade was prohibited.

Finally, location was rewarding for its promoter. He usually became the commune officer (wójt), i.e., a representative of the feudal lord who was the founder of the town. The promoter usually received a larger plot of land, he enjoyed the right to use the lord’s woods and waters. Since he represented the owner, he also had a judicial and supervisory authority, and enjoyed revenue and tax privileges. Municipal law in the towns of Central Europe was based on the Magdeburg Law, whereas the organization of the Baltic towns was based on the Lübeck Law.19

In the mid-14th century, 144 town centers were affected by such reform. The number included 60 towns, i.e., 24% of proto-urban centers in Poland, and 14 towns, i.e., 14% of proto-urban centers in Bohemia.20 Location should not be identified with urban self-government, which usually appeared later, simultaneously with the formation of the town council. In the initial period, urban authority belonged to the representative of the feudal lord, i.e., the commune officer. However, after a longer or shorter period of diarchy, the town council usually bought out the rights of the owner of the town. Purchase of the commune officer’s rights was considered the third stage in the evolution of Central European cities. It occurred later, in the 14th and 15th centuries.21

It is evident from the above presentation that towns in Central Europe developed under the patronage of rather than in opposition to the great ownership. Therefore, Central Europe did not witness the urban revolution of the 10th and 11th centuries that was characteristic of the development of Western Europe. In the course of these events, the burghers gained independence and autonomy from feudal lords. Another characteristic trait of towns in Central Europe was their small size. Comparing towns of Western and Eastern Europe, Henryk Samsonowicz states, for instance, that around 1450 Europe had about 4,000 settlements called towns.22 About two thirds of that number were rural settlements. Out of 14 largest cities (with a population of over 40,000) only three ones were situated in Eastern Europe: Moscow, Prague, and Constantinopole.

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22 Samsonowicz (1977), pp. 94-96.
Out of those three, only Prague, ranking low within the category of the largest cities, was situated in Central Europe. Out of the 40 large cities with a population ranging from 20,000 to 40,000, five were situated in Eastern Europe. They were Lübeck, Gdańsk, Nowogród, Wrocław, and Thessaloniki. Thus, Central Europe in the mid-15th century had only 3 large cities. About 80 towns belonged to the category of medium towns, with a population ranging from 8,000 to 20,000 inhabitants. In Eastern Europe, there were about 30 towns that belonged to that category. They included Kraków (Cracow), Toruń, Elbląg, Lwów, a few Silesian cities, Królewiec, Riga, Szczecin, Wismar, Stralsund, Rostock, Magdeburg, and a few Russian, Bohemian, and Balkan cities. In Central Europe of that period there were around 20 medium-sized cities, that is ca. 25% of the overall number of cities from that category. About 400 small towns with a population of 2,000 to 4,000 included ca. 120 towns of that size in Eastern Europe.

The fact that towns originated in both parts of the continent at different periods affected the nature of trade ties between Western and Central Europe. The products of Central European craftsmanship appeared on the European market later, so they had to compete with the products of the earlier and more advanced Western European craft. This barrier of the later start was never overcome. Since the late medieval age, Central European societies specialized in exporting raw materials, minerals, and food products. On the other hand, Western Europe became the producer of highly processed craft and later manufactured products which were sold to countries in Central Europe. Such a state of affairs was maintained and even extended in the modern period. What took place at that time was a shift in trade routes: Levantine and Mediterranean commerce lost its importance, replaced by Atlantic and Baltic trade. Another phenomenon was a change in the type of commodities that were traded: mass-consumption products gained advantage over luxury articles. In the course of trade exchange, the countries of the Baltic region, i.e., Poland, Prussia, Lithuania, Brandenburg, and Pomerania exported mainly raw materials and food products: cereal, hemp, flax, wood, tar, birch tar, leather, and furs. At the same time they imported from Western Europe highly processed craft products, especially woolen cloth, textile goods, and luxury articles. More advanced development in Western Europe, which forced a specific type of economic ties,
strengthened the backward economic structure of Central European countries.\footnote{Maćzak (1967), p. 12.}

An additional factor consolidating this type of economic exchange was the so-called price boom which occurred in the 16th century. In the course of this century, prices increased from four to seven times on average (with an annual increase amounting to ca. 2-3\%).\footnote{Koenigsberger and Mosse (1968), pp. 22-23.} The impact of that phenomenon depended upon an unequal increase in prices, which was higher for agricultural and animal produce, and lower for craft products. The price boom strengthened the agricultural structure of Eastern European countries and the monopolistic position of the nobility because the same amount of crops could be sold for the price of a greater number of craft products.\footnote{Hoszowski (1961), p. 308; Małowist (1959a); (1961), pp. 315-320; Hroch and Petran (1964), pp. 5-7.}

The above-mentioned factors determined the urbanization crisis which at different times affected the above-mentioned countries of Central Europe. Its symptoms were at first visible in Hungary, since it occurred there as early as at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. Bohemian cities were afflicted in the second half of the 16th century and the urban sector in Poland at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries.\footnote{Bogucka (1981), p. 7.}

The economic weakness of urban production was reflected in the lesser social importance of the burghers in comparison to Western Europe. In her studies on the social activity of Central European burghers, Maria Bogucka adopts E. Louise’s categories of the three levels of estate awareness.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 22-23.} This is said to be composed of

(i) the ability to form occasional coalitions of defensive nature,
(ii) the ability to create permanent alliances in defense of common interests,
(iii) the ability to force out estate privileges.

According to Bogucka, Polish burghers achieved the first level of awareness. This social group was able to form temporary confederations to protect its interests and take part in the confederations of the nobility. This capability was characteristic of Polish cities only until the mid-15th century. Since the second half of the 15th century, they have not even formed occasional, defensive confederations. Bohemian and Hungarian cities achieved the second stage of estate awareness. The burghers in
those countries took part in the Hussite Revolution and Reformation, and joined the nobility in the struggle against the Habsburgs; also, they had the right to send its representatives to Parliament. However, the basic feature of political systems in Hungary, Bohemia and Poland was the domination of the nobility in representative institutions. That advantage gave the nobility the necessary influence to enact law and control the activity of the state which served the interests of the predominant social class. As early as in the first half of the 15th century (in 1437 in Bohemia, in 1496 in Poland and in 1514 in Hungary) they issued legal acts against the migration of peasants. The state regulations, which limited freedom of the peasantry, were considerably easier to enforce due to the weakness of the burghers and insignificant role of the urban labor market.

According to the comparison made by Arcadius Kahan:

The role of the cities was also different in the Western and Eastern Europe. While in the West most of the cities developed into corporate bodies with charters guaranteeing the freedom of the city-dweller and therefore sometimes served as an escape route from serfdom, in Eastern Europe many of the cities did not possess such charters, or were owned by large serf owners and could not provide the escape valve for serfs.

In view of the shortage of manpower, the political domination of the nobility was the next factor influencing the development of Central European societies. This factor facilitated the introduction of serfdom and restrictions on the development of cities of that region.

First of all, a prerequisite to understanding the causes of the emergence of the manorial-serf economy is the analysis of social relations between the estate of the nobility and the peasantry. The shortage of manpower was an important factor influencing those relations. In agreement with the prevailing opinions of historians, the introduction of the second serfdom in Central Europe was caused by the deficit of manpower. Bounding the peasant to the land, which was supposed to counteract instances of escapes, was a reaction of the owners to the increasing demand for the manpower of the peasants.

Other conditions for the second serfdom were the relations between the nobility and the burghers as well as between the nobility and the state authority. The guarantee of economic exploitation of the peasantry relied upon the ability of the nobility to carry its interests in both social relations. The state authority, subjected to the interests of the nobility, withdrew from regulating the agricultural economic system. The nobility gained additional instruments of state coercion, which could be used

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against the peasantry. The weakness of the authority also influenced the relations between the burghers and nobility. The subjugation of the state to the interests of the nobility increased the advantage of that estate over the burghers. Such a situation was possible as a result of the weakness of Central European cities. Limiting through political means the development of urban economy lessened the competitiveness of that sphere of production, which indirectly strengthened the position of the nobility against the peasantry. The superiority of the nobility in one social sub-arrangement conditioned the achievement of this same superiority in the other one.

In that configuration of factors that were constantly present in the cascade of European differentiation, the shortage of manpower had different functions at various stages of social development. When the owners could not resort to the coercion used by the centralized state apparatus (the period of feudal divisions), the scarcity of manpower extorted from the nobility concessions granted to the direct producers. When, however, the nobility succeeded in subjugating the state and limited the influence of the urban sphere (its weakness was among other things conditioned by a low level of population) that factor stimulated the restoration of serfdom and a considerable growth in exploitation. The core of the cascade of the European differentiation, which occurred in each of three Central European societies under analysis, can be depicted in the following visual form:

Fig. 1. The core of the cascade of European differentiation

In accordance with the above schema, scarce supply of manpower tempered the exploitation of peasantry. However, the improvement in the economic situation of that social group hindered the growth of cities and
at the same time made it difficult to obtain sufficient manpower. Underdevelopment of cities enabled the nobility to subordinate the state to its interests. As a result, the nobility could further weaken the position of cities in the society and intensify the relations of exploitation in agriculture. The decline of peasants’ income brought about the decrease of the purchasing power of the largest social group and blocked the prospects for the cities’ growth. An additional factor which played the role of the catalyst of social changes was the demand for crops, both domestic and foreign, which accelerated the differentiation of developmental directions of the societies in both parts of Europe.

The distinctive developmental course of Central Europe was not influenced by the one principle factor but was a consequence of a multi-factor influence. At a certain moment, a gradual accumulation of these variables predominated over the influence of basic developmental mechanisms that were characteristic of the evolution of societies in Western Europe because such a number of counteractive factors did not appear there. These intuitions are shared by many historians who deal with the history of that region. For example, Peter Longworth is the author of the following opinion:

And there was a plethora of other factors which intervened at various point with varying intensity to influence the course things took. Linguistic differences, for example, sometimes fed into religious and political struggles; and social classes sometimes gained and lost constitutional rights according to the religion they embraced at particular moment. Low population density in Poland-Lithuania contributed to the enserfment of the peasant; . . . The Baltic grain boom had helped to promote serfdom, yet the end of the boom around the turn of the century served not to remove serfdom but entrench it . . . . The interactions of circumstances and catalysts that shaped Eastern Europe in the period from 1526 to 1648 far exceeded in complexity the most complicated transmutation process in any alchemist’s laboratory.32

Within the cascade of the European differentiation one can distinguish factors which form its core as well as those which are characteristic only of the developmental directions of particular societies. The presence of the latter led to an uneven development of the manorial-serf economy in each of the three societies discussed above. In Poland, the manorial-serf economy appeared in the course of the 16th century, in Hungary in the second half of that century and in Bohemia in the 17th century. This allows to discern regional variants which shaped the distinctive nature of development, namely the Polish, Hungarian and Bohemian variants of the cascade of the European differentiation.

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32 Longworth (1992), p. 183; see also Żytkowicz (1974).
3. The Polish Variant of the Cascade

In 12th and 13th century Poland, prince’s law disintegrated definitively. During that period, grand feudal ownership formed and strove for increasing income through the development of German colonization and settlement based on German Law, which improved the wealth of the peasantry. Economic changes were already in progress and contributed to the development of urban economy at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries. In the estate society, the advantage over other social groups was gradually gained by the knighthood which later transformed into the nobility.

That process can be best traced with reference to the example of the development of the nobility privileges and the formation of the system of democracy of nobility. As early as in 1372, the Polish king reduced the tax paid by the nobility from 14 groszy to 2 groszy from 1 łan (ca. 15 ha) and announced that he would not impose any new taxes without consent of the nobility. The privilege of 1422 forbade the confiscation of estates owned by the nobility, and another one of 1433 prohibited imprisonment of a nobleman without a binding court order. The privileges which were initially granted to the nobility included the guarantees of their civil rights and economic property. In the second half of the 15th century, the principles of the system of the democracy of nobility were formed. In 1454 in Nieszawa, Casimir Jagiellonian accepted the principle that all important decisions, such as proclaiming new rights and summoning a mass levy would require the consent of the nobility, expressed at regional assemblies (sejmiki). At the end of the 15th century the General Sejm (parliamentary assembly), composed of the delegates of the nobility chosen at the regional assemblies was constituted. In 1505, that new institution was strengthened by the Nihil Novi law which prohibited the king from laying down new laws without prior consent of the Sejm. The position of the nobility was further strengthened at the expense of the prerogatives of the central authorities after the extinction of the dynasty of Jagiellonians and the introduction of the elective throne. Every newly elected king had to sign the so-called Henrician Articles (Artykuły Henrykowskie) and the Pacta Conventa. The Henrician Articles were a collection of fundamental laws which formed the backbone the political system of the Republic. They guaranteed the elective succession of the throne and religious tolerance, imposed the duty to call the Sejm for 6 weeks at least once every two years and prohibited new taxes without a prior consent of the Chamber of Deputies. Should these provisions be infringed upon, the nobility would have the right to refuse obedience to
the King. In the 17th century, the process of decentralizing the Republic was initiated. In the face of the growing paralysis of central state institutions (since 1648 the resolutions of the Sejm had to be unanimous by virtue of the liberum veto), more and more competencies concentrated in local institutions, at the level of regional assemblies. Those changes were accompanied by changes in the estate of the nobility, i.e., the declining importance of the middle nobility, which supported the reform movement in the 16th century, and the rise of the significance of the magnates.

One of the decisive factors that were responsible for such a course of social evolution was the weakness of the cities. Apart from conditions which were characteristic of the whole region under discussion, there were also cascade factors which were found solely in the Polish society. One of them was the ethnic descent of the burghers. The urban patriciate, mainly of German origin, was not interested in uniting the Polish state by the Piast dynasty in the 13th and 14th centuries. In that period, the patriciate representatives supported the idea of uniting Polish lands with the Bohemian and Hungarian states. The choice of this political option was affected by trade contacts that representatives of this social group had with the European countries situated in the south of Poland. This faulty policy of burgher elites was also repeated later. When the political foundations of the Republic were emerging, the burghers were not interested in participating in the representative bodies which were dominated by the nobility, since they preferred to negotiate directly with the king in matters of concern to them. The structure of the burgher estate exerted certain influence upon the political weakness of the city-dwellers. The fact remains that were no ethnically Polish burgher elites which would have sufficient financial potential to conduct effective policy. Moreover, in Poland, because of the decentralization of power and the enormous significance of the nobility there was a lack of substantial reasons for the alliance between the throne and the burghers. As Antoni Maćzek maintains:

In order to engage in the matters of the state, the cities required a strong impulse. According to the Western model, it might have been an alliance between burgher elites and the state apparatus. In most monarchies, this apparatus expanded and the rulers sought loyal as well professional officials. In Poland, the self-government of the nobility did not offer satisfactory conditions: the state apparatus did not expand and there was no place in it for the plebeians.

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33 Bogucka and Samsonowicz (1986), p. 293.
36 Ibid., pp. 124-125.
The decentralized political system of the Republic blocking the careers of burgher elites was, according to Maćzak, a result of territorial vastness manifested in the time it took for information to be disseminated, and the privileges of the nobility which eliminated the rise of the king’s absolutism:

It could be put as follows: the space to be controlled by the authority was too vast for the Republic to function efficiently as a state while preserving the privileges of the nobility at the same time. Actual decentralization was a consequence of many factors – connected with the political (privileges), technical (poor social communication) and finally social-economical (concentration of property). The authority of magnates understood as a counterbalance to the monarchy was in a certain sense a function of the territorial size of state.37

The domination of the nobility within the state, resulting from the weakness of the burghers was self-perpetuating in nature. The political authority controlled by the nobility was a tool of regulating the urban sphere of production. Such a state regulation was performed for the social interests of the nobility. The statisation of the urban sector limited the developmental potential of burghers, which undermined social balance between the nobility and the burghers. This subsequently restricted the room for maneuver of the political authority and led to yet more evident subordination of the state to the social interests of the nobility. As a result, the nobility (which not only had at its disposal the means of production but also subjected the state apparatus) entirely dominated the social life.

The symptoms of anti-municipal policy were visible at the end of the 15th century.38 In 1496, a ban was issued prohibiting the purchase of land by burghers, and burghers were removed from higher church and state offices: including land, starostwo, crown and court offices. In 1496 and 1509, after the exemption of the nobility from customs duties, the whole burden of paying duties was imposed on burghers, whereas the nobility could import and export any quantity of commodities duty-free. In 1538 there was a failed attempt at abolishing the guilds. At the same time, political authority opened the domestic market to foreign merchants. Until that moment, merchants could run businesses only as wholesalers. Simultaneously, in 1565, local burghers were forbidden to leave Poland in order to engage in foreign trade. However, the regulations were usually not observed. In mid-16th century, fixed price rates were introduced, set by the local wojewoda (provincial governor) for town products. It is worth mentioning that the price of crops, which were a

basic farm product at that time, was shaped by a free market. Another attempt to weaken the position of the cities was the so-called jurydyki. They were properties of the nobility within the cities which were outside municipal jurisdiction. Very often, the nobles settled craftsmen there to carry out production beyond guild regulations. The control over economic life by the state authority was exercised solely in the nobility’s interests. That social group also forced the burghers out of the most profitable activities. For example, in the 16th century ca. 70% of rafting down the Vistula river was controlled by the nobility.

In the following centuries the degradation of the burghers intensified. In the 17th and 18th century, the burghers were allowed neither to take over any of remunerated state offices nor hold church functions. They were also deprived of the right to serve in the army, which was the only way of raising to the rank of the nobility. In the same period, the judicial autonomy and urban self-government were practically abolished. The history of the urban sphere in the Republic was, as Maria Bogucka and Henryk Samsonowicz maintain, completely incomparable with the development of cities in Western Europe:

The main trait of the modern epoch was just a rapid emancipation of the burghers and their development which brought about fundamental changes in class, economic and hierarchical arrangements of contemporary societies. Against this background, the Republic was an exceptional terrain: the monopolization of social, economic, and political life by the nobility reached the level that was unparalleled anywhere else. Many researchers also point out that the particular situation of our cities and their inhabitants from the 16th to the 18th century was one of the main factors to have caused unfavorable peculiarities and a dangerous distortion of the whole Polish historical process in that epoch.39

Social consequences of that developmental distortion led to the weakening of the state authority. As H. Samsonowicz remarks:

Almost in all places where the urban population played the same or no less important role that the nobility in the life of the country, due to the privileges as and real financial opportunities, and antagonistic interests were involved among various professional groups, the king’s authority grew as a mediator of conflict between estates. There, strong modern states were also formed. . . . The weakness of any of social forces led to the undermining the position of the state.40

Subordinating the political authority to the nobility allowed achieving two things simultaneously. Firstly, the nobility was able to impose restrictions on the social role of the burghers and the urban labor market. Secondly, the impairment of the burghers’ social position allowed the use

39 Ibid., p. 328.
of tools of state regulation for maximizing the income in the agrarian sector of economy. The weakness of the burghers and urban production was essential for social relations between the state and nobility as well as for economic relations between the nobility and the peasantry.

In the typical Western society, the urban sphere of the economy formed the alternative labor market. As long as a relatively high level of economic prosperity prevailed in that sector of economy, it forced out, in fear of the migration of the peasantry to the cities, a similar high level of prosperity in agriculture. The crisis of the urban sphere at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries in the Polish economy diminished the influence of the competitive labor market and allowed the nobility to impose more burdens on the peasantry.

The declining economic situation of the peasantry was occurred in the organizational and institutional framework of the manorial-serf economy. However, the strengthening of serfdom was a prerequisite for the development of villein service. This in turn was possible as a result of subjecting the state law to the nobility. The Wiślicki Statute proclaimed by Casimir the Great imposed restrictions on leaving the village without the lord’s consent to just one peasant family annually. The Wielkopolski Statute imposed additional requirements of leaving the farm in good condition. As Leonid Żytkowicz points out, that was only the beginning of future serfdom. The development of serfdom should be linked with the increase in the villein service which at that period was insignificant since it amounted to a dozen or so days annually. Binding the peasant to his land was caused by the following situation:

grand ownership systematically realized the deficit of the settler who would be indispensable for the management of the estate (let us remember that it was the period of rent not the manor economy). In a reversed situation, if there were no candidates to settle on the lord’s land, it would probably not come to the growth of glæbae adscriptio. It was in the interest of the feudal class to retain the settler in the country in order to secure the feudal lord’s income in the form of tributes and rents.41

The next stage in serfdom imposition occurred in the second half of the 15th century. The Piotrków Sejm in 1496 limited the right to leave the village, subject to the lord’s consent, to one family annually. The Sejm provisions from 1501-1511 additionally tightened those regulations and at the same time extended them to include children of peasants’ families. The regulations were supposed to protect the nobility against the desertion of peasants and the danger of depopulation in the country.42

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42 Ibid., p. 20.
That process was accompanied by another one, i.e., the development of the manorial economy, independent of the intensification of serfdom. It is assumed that the manors of the nobility descended from the ordinary knighthood’s own farms (praedium militarae) which were intended for subsistence farming. With the rise of the monetary economy, the output of the nobility-owned manors shifted toward commercial production. The acreage of the manors was enlarged. The manors developed at the expense of fallow, uncultivated lands and buying out village officers’ manors (folwarki soltysie). Another way to expand a noble’s manor was through evictions (rugi), i.e., acquiring a better land farmed by the peasantry in exchange for lower-quality land. Summing up, in the 16th century, the landowner’s farm of the manor covered ca. 25% of arable land used by the village, which amounted to about 3.5 lany (ca. 60 ha).

The basic type of peasant services guaranteeing the demesne’s economic profitability was villein service, defined weekly or yearly. Kmiecie, i.e., peasants who owned a farm composed of 1 full lan performed their villein service aided by beasts of draught, whereas zagrodnicy, i.e., the landless peasants, performed it on foot. According to Andrzej Wyczanski’s calculations, in the 16th century manor of an average acreage that belonged to a nobleman the villein service was not the only kind of labor used on a farm. Additionally, hired labor was also used. According to the general balance of manpower, villein service accounted for ca. 41.2% of workdays, whereas hired labor for 58.8%. The considerable share of hired labor resulted from the fact of hiring workmen for the usual period of 300 full days during the year, whereas peasants who possessed their own farms worked less, depending on the time of the year, from 1 to 4 days weekly. However, the larger the acreage of the manor and hence the number of villages, the more considerable was the share of the villein service. The profitability of manorial production relied upon the possibility of using this kind of compulsory labor.

The peasants had to perform other kinds of labor apart from villein service. One of them was rent of 30 to 60 groszy paid from one peasant lan. Apart from pecuniary performances, the peasants were obliged to bring tributes in kind. Among them were sepy, equal to 1-6 bushels of

44 Wyczanski (1960), pp. 50-54; Rutkowski (1956), pp. 65-81.
48 Ibid., pp. 136-138.
oats or 1-2 bushels of rye or wheat from one peasant lan. Moreover, peasants gave certain amounts of eggs, poultry, and cheese. As well as permanent ones there were also occasional obligations such as: powaby, which were additional labor services at the time of extraordinary accumulation of work, or conveyances in a form of transporting various goods to specified places, most often a point of rafting crops or a mill. At the end of the 16th century a watch service, that is an obligation to keep watch over the manor at night, began to spread.

Villein service was also the main burden imposed upon the peasantry; its scope in the course of 16th century was gradually increasing. In 1520, the Bydgoszcz-Toruń Statutes set the service load at 1 day weekly per 1 lan of peasant land. The real increase in villein service that occurred later was not reflected in the provisions of the Sejm. Based on A. Wyczanski’s calculations, it grew from 1 to 3-4 days a week in the course of the 16th century.

The nobility demesne was specializing in the cultivation of crops for sale. According A. Wyczanski’s calculations, ca. 60% of the manorial production was sold on the market, both domestic and foreign. The demand for Polish crops had persisted since the late Middle Ages. From the 16th century onwards, the impulse to develop exports was provided by the increase in the prices of agricultural goods on the European market. Between the first and eighth decade of the 16th century there the average price rise for four crops was 292%, compared with 166% for animal products and only 45% for craft products. The reaction to that variation in prices was an export of Polish crops. Annual sales abroad amounted to ca. 100,000 tons of crops. That accounted for 2.5% of the total production of crops in Poland.

The development of the manorial-serf economy based on villein service caused the decline in the productivity of peasant farms. That in turn brought about a growing naturalization of the peasant economy. Peasants, after performing their villein service, could produce livestock for their own living, and their beasts of draught which were used in field work. The decline in peasant production also limited their market contacts with the city. The peasants were not only a seller of their own goods but also purchasers of craftsmen’s articles. The dwindling peasant income undermined the foundations of domestic craft production. As a

50 Grodecki (1947), pp. 64-69.
51 Wyczanski (1960), pp. 222 and 227-228.
result, in the 17th and 18th centuries the urban sector of economy was reduced in a degree which was regulated by the demand of direct producers from the rural sphere of production. Let us now present visually the impact of factors in the Polish version of the cascade of developmental differentiation:

**Fig. 2.** The Polish variant of the cascade of developmental differentiation.

4. The Hungarian Variant of the Cascade

In 13th-century Hungary, the system of prince’s law existed, which then gradually disappeared in a result of granting immunities to the Church and feudal lords. At that time, the feudal class came into existence and Hungarian society transformed into the standard estate system. In the circumstances of the shortage of manpower (in the 10th century, the country was inhabited by ca. 1 million people), the feudal class sought to increase of income through the development of German colonization and settlement based on German Law. The economic growth in the 13th and 14th centuries contributed to the birth of urban economy. However, the
latter was confronted with the same barriers as in the rest of Central Europe, i.e., scarce population resulting in insufficient manpower, competition from Western European craft, and privileges of the nobility. The above-mentioned factors influenced the size of cities and the significance of the burgheers in the Hungarian society. In the peak period of the growth of the urban economy, i.e., in the 15th century, there were ca. 30-35 cities in Hungary. By European standards, most of them were small. The largest, Buda, had a population of 8,000, compared with 4,000-5,000 in the next largest cities, i.e., Bratislava, Sopron, Koszyce, and Cluj. Generally speaking, in the above-mentioned period, city-dwellers accounted for 3% of the Hungarian population.\(^{54}\)

A characteristic trait of the development of cities in Hungary was the so-called oppidia. They were centers without the legal and political status of the city. Their dwellers were subordinated to feudal jurisdiction: they had to pay tributes to the owner of the oppidium and even perform villein service. People in those centers engaged partly in farming and partly in non-agricultural activities. Because oppidia had institutions such as schools, hospitals or churches, they fulfilled the social functions of cities. In that period, there were about 800 such centers, each with about 500-1000 residents.\(^{55}\)

The development of Hungarian cities was also adversely affected by the international economic situation:

> The large-trends of international economic development were not favorable to urban development in Hungary. The impetus of industrialization was already lost by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. The agrarian boom of the sixteenth century then definitively prevented Hungarian domestic trade and crafts from breaking the mold of conservative guild, since the international movement of prices permitted the import of much more textile and metal goods than before in returns for the same quantity of cattle or wine. During the agrarian boom the returns for agricultural producers were not invested in industry; actually, they were not invested in agriculture either.\(^{56}\)

Additional factors which hindered the development of cities were wars and the destruction that they caused. For example, after the loss of independence in 1526 and the division of the country into three parts, the biggest cities of Hungary: Buda and Pest were reduced to the role of Turkish military garrisons.

In turn the weakness of the burgheers contributed to strengthening the position of nobility in the Hungarian society. This social estate gradually

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\(^{54}\) Bogucka (1985), p. 98.
\(^{55}\) Ibid.
gained exclusive influence on political authority. After the period of strengthening the state authority in the course of the development of the Hungarian society, there was a visible trend that was typical Central European societies, namely an upward trend in the sphere of autonomy and political prerogatives of the nobility and a drop in authority regulations. In Hungary, that process already began in the early 13th century. In 1222, the king of Hungary Andrew II announced the Golden Bull. That document put the magnates on a par with ordinary knighthood, the latter social group making up 5% of the Hungarian society. By virtue of that law act, the so-called serwienci, i.e., the lower stratum of the knighthood were exempted from taxes and granted jurisdiction over the peasants. The Golden Bull also limited military service duty of that social group to defensive wars. Since that time, the Hungarian nobility could not be imprisoned without a court sentence. Moreover, capital the representatives of this estate could suffer capital punishment only subject to separate royal approval. The king was obliged to call estate assemblies once a year. If these provisions were contravened, the Golden Bull granted the nobility the right to resist the monarch. Those provisions were repeated in the golden bull issued in 1351 by Louis I.

The social weakness of the burghers stemming from the economic underdevelopment of cities was reflected in a scarce participation of representatives of that social group in estate assemblies. Since 1445, the deputies of cities and specifically of eight urban centers: Buda, Pest, Bratislava, Sopron, Turnawa, Bardyjów, Preszow, and Koszyce began to participate in the Sejm debates, yet as early as in 1458, the role of city representatives was limited to hearing the resolutions and reporting the debates to its electorate. In the 16th century, urban delegates were collectively granted one vote. 57

Another factor weakening the role of state authority was frequent changes of dynasties. For two hundred years since 1301, i.e., the date of extinction of the Arpad dynasty, the Hungarians were ruled by the kings from the Angevin, Luxemburgian, Hunyiady, and Jagiellonian dynasties. Each time, a new monarch had to confirm privileges which were granted by the predecessors before he could establish his position.

The subordination of the state to the nobility let the latter use the instruments of state control in order to carry out their anti-municipal policy and limit the development of cities. In 1550, for example, the Hungarian nobility obtained the right to buy up agricultural produce from their serfs. In 1617, the nobility became exempted from customs duties and taxes, whereas a few years later, by using instruments of state

authority, they subjected prices and wages to their own regulations. Another form of controlling the economy was the introduction of the nobility monopolies of inns, slaughterhouses, mills, and the exclusive use of waters and forests.

In the 15th century, the economic structure of Hungary was characterized by heavy concentration of property. Around 1440 the sixty biggest magnates owned ca. 40% of all villages. However, the feudal lords’ personal manors were small and the majority of their land was grown by landholders who paid the rent in cash and kind. On account of the small size of lords’ farms, serfdom was of little importance in the overall structure of peasant obligations in the 15th century, as it amounted only to 1-2 days annually. Relatively more important was rent in kind. Peasants were obliged to supply certain quantities of bread, cheese, butter, eggs, poultry, and all kinds of meat from 2 to 5 times a year. Apart from food, the rural population had to deliver tributes in crops and wine. In 1351, obligations imposed on rural farms increased, because peasants had to exact additional tributes in crops: the so-called ninthe (on analogy to the tithe), i.e., a ninth of the harvested crops.

During that period, the most significant element in the structure of peasant obligations was cash rent. The rent was paid by villages founded pursuant to German Law. The average amount of rent was equal at that time to 1-1.5 florin per one adult male peasant. In the second half of the 15th century, burdens imposed on the rural population increased as a result of introducing another tax, the so-called census. It was paid in 2-5 installments and the rate depended on the number of livestock. The tax was almost as significant as the remaining pecuniary performances. In the second part of the 15th century, landowners imposed on the peasantry a number of additional, extraordinary payments. They were levied for the use of forests, meadows, and waters. Since the end of the 14th century, the growing obligations imposed on the peasantry caused their economic situation to deteriorate gradually. That process was accompanied by limiting the freedom to leave the village. At the end of the 15th century, by virtue of the state laws issued in 1486 and reaffirmed in 1496, peasants could not leave the village without the lord’s prior consent. In the second half of the 15th century, the imposition of serfdom and increase of economic burdens gave rise to a series of peasant revolts in the country.58

One of such these events was the peasants’ uprising in the south of Transylvania, in the 1437-38. Within a short period, it was supported by pauperized burghers and small nobility. Very soon, the peasant revolt

transformed into a military confrontation, in which the insurgents originally won the victory in the battle at Des. That fact forced the ruling camp to sign a treaty in Kolozsmontar. However, after the burghers and petty the nobility passed over to the king’s camp, the peasant insurgents were left alone. Finally, the uprising ended with the defeat at Kolozsvár.

The result of the unsuccessful peasant revolt was the limitation of peasants’ personal freedom and the revocation of a part of privileges and rights of the cities which supported the Transylvanian uprising.

The next peasant revolt was the Dózsa’s uprising. It started in 1514 when peasant militias mobilized for the expedition against the Turks refused to be sent home and rose in open revolt. The rebels demanded the abolition of serfdom and class differences, a division of land and revoking nobility jurisdiction. The rebellion which was soon joined by the burghers transformed into military confrontation. The defeat at Temeszwar in 1514 ended the revolt. After suppressing the rebellion, the authorities resorted to mass terror, murdering about 50,000 rebels, with the peasant leader Dózsa burnt on a wooden throne. Quelling the revolt was followed by codifying a body of legislation termed the Tripartitum, which strengthened the authority of the nobility over peasantry. Since that moment, peasants were not allowed to leave their village freely and were forbidden to carry arms. They also had to pay damages. That social group was denied opportunities of social advancement because the peasants could not hold high ranking church offices. The Tripartitum imposed the obligation to pay additional tax in the amount of one florin and perform one day of villein service. Together with the development of manorial-serf economy, the villein service became the basic duty of the peasantry. In the course of the 16th century, it grew from 1 day to 3-4 days a week. In the same century the acreage of manorial land increased from 10% to 40%. Another form of economic exploitation was monopolies established by the Hungarian nobility. In the 16th century, the nobility in Hungary established the exclusive right to own inns, slaughterhouses, to purchase the mandatory quota of wine and crops from the peasantry, the right to fish and collect acorns in the woods (pigs were fed on acorns). In that period they also introduced the compulsory purchase of alcohol and others goods such as salt in lord’s inns and the grinding crops in lord’s mills.

60 Király (1975), p. 269.
The manorial-serf economy in Hungary developed in the period of the
collapse of the medieval trade exchange, of which luxury goods were
staple commodities, and the maturing of trade exchange characteristic of
modern times. The main objects of that exchange were goods of mass
consumption. The Hungarian economy integrated into a new structure
of international trade. The demand for agricultural products was one of
the factors which accelerated the transformation of the agricultural
system of that state. However, unlike in Poland, crops did not play an
important role in Hungarian exports. This was due to the lack of
convenient communication tracks (river passages and seaways), which
precluded sending huge amounts of crops abroad. Hungary sold wine
and cattle. Since the half of the 14th century, the country was a big
exporter of cattle. It was sold to Bohemia, Austria, southern Germany,
and northern Italy. On average (16th-17th century), from 100,000 to
200,000 heads of cattle were exported annually, which at that time
accounted for 2.5-5% of the overall production of cattle.

Another export article was wine. In 1550-1650, ca. 100,000 hl of wine
(about 10-15% of domestic production) was sent abroad. Out of the total
value of Hungarian exports in the 16th and 17th century, oxen accounted
for ca. 26%, wine for 8.1%, crops for 15.2%, wool for 11%, and minerals
for 39% of the sale value. The imports were highly processed industrial
articles, textiles and luxury goods.

The event that disrupted the development of the country was the
Turkish invasion in 1526. As a consequence, the southern part of
Hungary was under the rule of the Habsburgs for over 100 years. One
third of the former kingdom of Hungary, the principality of Transylvania,
retained independence. After the defeat of Turkey at Vienna in 1687-99
all lands of St. Stephan’s crown found themselves under the new
authority of the Habsburgs. The Turkish slavery was a period of war
destruction, considerable decline of the population and a collapse of the
urban sector of the economy. In that sense, the Turkish occupation was
another factor in the Hungarian variant of the cascade of European
differentiation which contributed to the developmental distinctiveness of
that society.

One may present the Hungarian variant of the cascade of European
differentiation in the graphic form:

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5. The Bohemian Variant of the Cascade

In the 13th century, the Bohemian system of prince’s law gradually disappeared as a result of granting immunities to feudal lords and the Church. The feudal class that emerged from that process strove to raise their income through the development of settlement and colonization based on German Law. In comparison with other countries in Central Europe, Bohemia was characterized by a slightly larger population, which rose substantially as a result of intensive German colonization. Hence the development of the urban sphere was confronted in that country with relatively weaker barriers than in Poland and Hungary.

The percentage of people who lived in the cities was higher than in the remaining Central European countries, as it accounted for about 20% of the population. The largest city in Central Europe was Prague, with 30,000-40,000 inhabitants. In other Bohemian cities, the population ranged from 5,000 to 10,000 each. Such strength of Bohemian burghers was reflected in the newly forming estate system. Delegates of royal...
cities (ca. 30) took part in the Sejm and assemblies of the local nobility as early as in the 15th century. A strong position of the cities influenced the situation in the rural sector of the economy, limiting feudal control over the peasantry:

The sociopolitical significance of Czech towns contributed to the state of affairs whereby it was more difficult to free vassals because the towns strengthened by their gains during the Hussite revolution, felt the need for workers and encouraged them both to settle in the towns and to learn a craft, and even to complete university studies. The diet passed decrees insisting that the towns should returns vassals to their masters, when they had left without permission; but in fact it was impossible to put these decrees into effect and to prevent the natural flow of the population from the villages to the towns. 68

At the turn of 15th and 16th centuries, a sign of political domination of the nobility was the attempt to limit political privileges of the burghers while devising new legislation, the so-called Vladislaus Land Statutes. The reaction of the burghers was the formation of the league included 32 cities. In consequence of municipal protests, the nobility granted Bohemian burghers full representation in estate assemblies in the so-called Świętałowski Agreement of 1517.

Since the direct limitation of burghers’ rights by the nobility was impossible, though tendencies of that kind could be observed as early as the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, the nobility sought other ways to undermine the social position of the burghers. One of them was the foundation of private towns and villages by landowners. The inhabitants of those centers did not enjoy full autonomy though they fulfilled all economic functions of a town. From 1434 to 1620 almost 40 towns and 150 villages of the nobility came into existence. 69 That led to an autarchy of the rural economy. The nobility closed the borders of its manors to craft products manufactured in royal cities. In exchange for this, it forced its serfs to buy products manufactured in private towns. It was where the trade turnover concentrated and most profits from it, in the form of customs duties, tolls, etc., were obtained by the owners of towns. The prospects for the development of the urban sphere of production were diminished after the rural market was closed to town products by administrative methods. In consequence, it led to the weakening of burghers’ social position.

The relative balance of influences among main social forces, i.e., the burghers, the nobility and the political authority, influenced the situation of the peasantry. Though in 1487 the Bohemian Parliament issued an act

69 Mika (1960), p. 15.
limiting the emigration of the peasantry, this decision of the Parliament was not put into practice. In the 15th century and most of the 16th century, the population in the country was still personally free and the burden of the villein service was not heavier than 12 days a year.

The factor responsible for undermining the balance between the nobility and the burghers as well as for the accelerating the differentiation of the Bohemian course of development was the imposition of the Habsburg rule over the Bohemian society. In the 15th century, after the death of George of Podiebrad, Bohemia and Hungary were ruled jointly by king Louis Jagiellonian. After his death in the battle at Mohacz in 1526, the rule over Bohemia was transferred to Ferdinand I Habsburg. In this way, the lands of St. Vaclav’s crown were incorporated into the Habsburg empire. The Habsburg rule meant strengthening the prerogatives of the central authority, the growth of fiscal stringency and the limitation of estate privileges, both for the nobility and burghers. In 1546-47, during the war of Ferdinand I with the Schmalkalden Union, the uprising of Bohemian estates against the Habsburgs broke out. The pretext for the outbreak of the uprising was the levy in mass summoned by the Emperor without prior consent of the Sejm, which was supposed to be used in the war in Germany. Both burghers and the nobility participated in that rebellion. The insurgents refused to take part in the war in Germany and established their own government with armed forces. However, after the victory over the Schmalkalden Union, Ferdinand I suppressed the revolt of the Bohemian estates. In 1547, the sovereign struck a compromise with the nobility but at the same time persecuted the burghers. As a consequence of the repressive measures the solidarity within the Bohemia was broken. After futile attempts to resist the authority of the Habsburgs confiscated military equipment belonged to the cities and forbade burghers to carry arms. The repression of the central authority undermined the economic privileges of the burghers: cities were deprived of most of the estates, and burghers were burdened with heavy taxes. The Habsburgs imposed restrictions on the autonomy of Bohemian towns through revoking urban and guild privileges. City deputies were deprived of the right to participate in debates during the estate assemblies. From that moment, matters of public order in cities were to be controlled by royal police officers and royal clerks who supervised guild organizations. By establishing the national court of appeal in Prague in 1548, Emperor Ferdinand I abolished the judicial autonomy of the burghers.70

70 Husa (1967), pp. 96-98.
A consequence of undermining the social balance between the two estates was the deterioration of situation of the peasantry in the second half of the 16th century. During that period, the transformation of the nobility demesne began. Also, in the second half of the 16th century, gradual concentration of land began: there were more and more manors with an area from 5 to 10 lans.\textsuperscript{71} In the 16th-century Bohemia, the production of crops for export was not of great importance.\textsuperscript{72} Producing for the domestic market was more important. The basic types of production that the nobility manors engaged in included fishing, beer brewing, and sheep breeding. Landowners established a number of craft works: mills, brickyards, sawmills, etc. Due to the rights granted to the nobility by the political authorities, the privileged estate secured, for example, the monopoly for grinding crops or the sale of beer to its subjects. In the same period, the plight of the peasantry steadily worsened. Village residents faced additional charges for the use of meadows and forests, fishing and the export of goods for sale to cities. In the first half of the 16th century, villein service was still insubstantial: it amounted 12 days per year maximum, and the average was 6 days.\textsuperscript{73} However, in the second half of the 16th century it was lengthened to several dozen days annually. Apart from compulsory villein service, the nobility burdened rural population with an obligation to perform all kinds of occasional work for the manors. In 1575, the liberty to seek hired labor by landless peasants and small holders was limited to four weeks annually.\textsuperscript{74} That course of social events was possible due to the weaker position of burghers and the compromise reached by the Habsburgs with the Bohemian nobility. As early as at the end of the 16th century, the gradual deterioration of the economic situation of the peasantry bred first, local signs of resistance. In 1575, there was unrest in the vicinity of Przybram and Rozmital. A year later, peasants from Mlada Boleslaw revolted. At the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries a number of local but sustained conflicts broke out in the manors: Skaly at Broumow (1592-1618), Hukwaldach (1588-1617), and Jablonne (1609-1610).

The next factor in the Bohemian variant of the cascade of European differentiation, exerting the greatest influence on the developmental course of the country, were the consequences of the failed anti-Habsburg uprising and the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648). In 1618, another anti-Habsburg uprising broke out, in which united forces of burghers and the

\textsuperscript{71} Mika (1960), pp. 16-17.
\textsuperscript{72} Sadova (1960), p. 37.
\textsuperscript{74} Heck and Orzechowski (1969), p. 147.
nobility took part once again. After the defeat at Biała Góra (1620), in which about 21,000 Bohemian nobles were killed, the Habsburgs used mass repression against the mutinous states, including the confiscation of about three fourths of nobility estates. The manors were distributed among the population that was loyal to the political authority, mainly Germans, Italians, Frenchmen, and Walloons. The effect of the resulting change in the ethnic make-up of the nobility was that they no longer shared the ethnic awareness with the peasantry. This contributed to a growing exploitation of the rural sector of production. William E. Wright describes the economic consequences of Biała Góra as follows:

The old Bohemian aristocracy which had accepted the restraints of custom and law and had exhibited a certain degree of paternalism in their relation with the peasant were decimated by exile and confiscation of property after the imperial victories. A new aristocracy replaced the old, took possession of much of the landed property of Bohemia and therewith took control also of a large segment of the Bohemian peasant population. These new men were mostly foreigners and conquerors being rewarded for their services in defeating the “heretics” of Bohemia. They felt in no ways bound by the ancient and paternalistic restraints or the ameliorating customs and laws which tempered the old lords actions towards the peasants.76

Apart from the change in the ethnic composition of the nobility, another result of both anti-Habsburg uprising and military operations was the vast war damage. In Bohemia, 80 towns and 813 villages were devastated and in Moravia 22 towns and 333 villages were destroyed.77 The people of Bohemia also suffered catastrophic losses: the population of Bohemia fell from 1.7 million (1618) to 0.9 million (1648), which represented a drop of 40%.78 War damage undermined the development of the urban sphere. Thus, the alternative sector of the economy disappeared, though its presence somehow tempered the growth in the exploitation of the rural sector of production. The confiscation of estates which were the property of the Bohemian nobility thus helped to remove the barriers to a firm alliance between the political authority and grand ownership. The reason for that was the withdrawal of aristocracy from any attempts to control actions of the royal authority in the political sphere. In return, they earned the guarantees and support of political authority in an almost unlimited exploitation of the peasantry. The Thirty Years’ War, affecting the change in social relations among main classes

75 Ibid., p. 161.
76 Wright (1975), p. 246.
78 Klima (1979), p. 52.
in the Bohemian society was a decisive point in the history of Bohemia.\textsuperscript{79} One of the consequences of the war damage was drastic shortage of manpower, which was:

counterbalanced by imposing an increased burden of villein service on serfs. Before the defeat at Biała Góra, the villeins were obliged to serve for only a few days annually, whereas after the Thirty Years’ War the rise in villein duty was incomparable. Landowners introduced almost day long villein work and, to make matters worse, for a longer part of the year. Thus, the peasants cultivated their own land at nights, on Sundays and holidays. Beside the mandatory villein work they had to cope with the obligations to pay rent and tributes.\textsuperscript{80}

Another result of the decrease of rural population was the increase in uncultivated land, which facilitated the concentration of land by nobles and founding demesnes.

Such was the picture of the Bohemian society in the mid-17\textsuperscript{th} century. War damage largely devastated the urban economy. Landowners, whose ethnic origins were different from the remaining part of the Bohemian society, could easily call for the assistance of the state authority. According to Anton Klima:

\begin{quote}
this fundamental economic relationship [serfdom; footnote by K.B.] was reinforced and strengthened by the fact that, here as elsewhere, the serf was also subject in political and legal matters to the jurisdiction of his lord, who was thus empowered to coerce and constrain the serf as and when circumstances required.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

After 1620, villein service was increased to 3 days per week. That considerable increase in exploitation provoked an outbreak of anti-Habsburg uprising of peasants which was directed against the authority and ownership at the same time. The uprising continued from 1626 to 1628 in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. The unrest was suppressed by the authorities. After the defeat of the anti-Habsburg uprising the political authority and the allied ownership initiated the “Land Arrangements”: in 1627 in Bohemia, in 1628 in Moravia, and in 1652 in Silesia. In line with those arrangements, serfs could not leave their village without the prior consent of the lord. The subjects could not contract marriages independently, i.e., without the approval of the village owner. Serfdom was also imposed upon peasant children. They were forbidden to train in craft and change the profession inherited after their parents. A principle was enforced under which children born of woman serfs automatically became serfs of the same owner. The limitation of peasants’ personal liberty was accompanied by the growth in the villein service to 4 days a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 50.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Husa (1967), p. 115; see also Klima (1979), pp. 50-51.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Klima (1979), p. 51.
\end{itemize}
week. Moreover, peasants were obliged to pay taxes to the state and church. The overall burdens imposed on peasants in the 17th century were 60% of gross income. Increasing exploitation was also accompanied by political pressure which was manifested, e.g., very harsh penalties for insubordination:

The lord had the right to punish serfs for desertion, for heresy and even poaching, with the death penalty. For lesser offenses or default of duties in relation to the landowner they used flogging and tortures, burnt out shameful marks, put in a pillory and tormented in other ways. The extent of punishment depended solely upon the feudal lord or his steward.

In the second half of the 17th century, the manorial-serf economy finally assumed mature shape in the Bohemian society (see Figure 4).

Fig. 4. The Bohemian variant of the cascade of developmental differentiation.

This type of Bohemian economy was crucial in defining the developmental distinctiveness of that society in the next centuries.

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83 Husa (1967), pp. 116-117.
6. Summary

Let us briefly sum up our considerations. The factor which initiated the process of the cascade growth was the shortage of manpower. In the initial stage, namely until Central European nobility was managed to resort to instruments of state repression, that factor improved the situation of the peasantry. Paradoxically, an economic betterment of the situation in the country, as a result of colonization based on German Law, limited the scope of peasant migration to towns. Consequently, the cities in Central Europe were less numerous than in Western Europe. That led to a weaker development of the urban sphere and undermined the social balance between the burghers and the nobility. As long as the nobility was not able to dominate political and social life of Central European societies, the economic development of the cities and the peasantry could continue unobstructed. By this, in the course of the 15th and 16th century, the nobility was able to subordinate the state authority to their interests. The basic feature of political systems in Hungary, Bohemia and Poland was the domination of the estate of nobles in parliamentary institutions. The political advantage of the nobility allowed limiting the development of towns, aggravating serfdom, and founding own demesnes. The increase in economic exploitation occurred within the institutionalized frame of the manorial-serf economy. Those processes were accompanied by the demand for crops from Western Europe.

The above-mentioned factors were in operation in each of Central European societies discussed above. However, the developmental course taken by each of them was marked by some specific factors. In the case of Poland, these were, e.g., the defective strategy of burgher elites limiting the influence of towns upon state matters. In Bohemian case, it was the domination of the Habsburgs and the outcome of the Thirty Years’ War. In Hungary, the specific factors were Turkish occupation and frequent changes of dynasties, etc. The impact of the core factors and accidental factors brought about further differentiation of developmental roads of each of the societies investigated, but located within the Central European course of development.

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