

PÉCS AND THE BALKANS – HIGHER EDUCATION FUNCTIONS

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Abstract

Pécs is a Hungarian city in the country's south, close to the Croatian border. To define it as the gateway to the Balkans is an overstatement, but it has some potential. As a school town, it has the role of an intellectual gateway. In the Middle Ages, the (bishop's) city developed as a spiritual and intellectual bastion of Christianity on the southeastern periphery of the West. For centuries, the Church's missionary activity in Bosnia and Bulgaria gave a role to the Franciscan and Dominican monks who ran monasteries and schools in the city.

After the Ottoman-Turkish conquest, Pécs retained its multicultural and multiconfessional denominational school town character. In addition to the school system, which taught Muslim Sufism, there was also a Christian school. The dominant narrative of the intellectual centre was the expansion of Ottoman/Muslim rule in Central Europe.

Following the anti-Ottoman reconquest, it became a homogeneous Catholic fortress, which tended to develop unilateral relations only with the West. This also homogenised the school system (although Croatian language and culture were still studied through the Croatian school). As a result of 19th century industrialisation, civil transformation and imperial ambitions, as well as aspirations in the Balkans, its orientation gradually changed and partly turned southwards again.

For most of the 20th century, relations with the southern neighbour were characterised by hostile or distant relations. The social foundations of the southern Slavic relations system began to crumble as a result of emigration and assimilation, but the development of the school system was able to compensate for this to some extent. At the end of the 20th century, geopolitical changes reopened the possibility and the need for networking in the Balkans. The horizon is the same as it was at the beginning of the process in 1009: Slavonia, Bosnia and the Balkans beyond.

Keywords: Pécs, Balkans, school town, Christian, Muslim, madrasa, university

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an analysis of the changes in the role of Pécs in higher-level education, and later in higher education, over a vast period of 1000 years, in terms of when and how it impacted and affected the Balkans. It is not the aim of the authors to meticulously examine the historical sources, but rather to illustrate institutional changes and transformations and the underlying social, geopolitical processes and contexts.

Hungarian geography and historiography has dealt extensively with the characteristics of Hungary's relations with the Balkans (Cholnoky, 1917; Szabó, 1942; Hajdú, 2003; Sokcsevits,

2004; Glatz, 2007; Kitanics, 2013; Hajdú & Horeczki, 2023; Hajdú & Rácz, 2024). These works also explore transport connections, the economic role and the related connective roles of major Hungarian cities (Szeged, Pécs, Timișoara [Temesvár] Nagykanizsa, etc.) (Fodor, 1917a, 1917b; Varga, 1948; Illés, 2003; Erdősi, 2006). With regard to Pécs, the question of whether it could fulfil such a “southern gateway” role has already been raised several times (Hajdú, 2009; Pap, 2009; Pap et al., 2013).

Previous studies have mainly focused on the material, economic and transport links between Pécs and the Balkans. As these functions were not well developed in the region, the potential of a role as a “gateway” was considered instead. Zoltán Hajdú also suggested that Pécs is not a gateway, but rather a “bricked-up window”, precisely because of the lack of convincing data (Hajdú, 2009). In this paper we have undertaken to review the processes of the non-material or intellectual dimension, throughout the last thousand years. Around the 650th anniversary of the founding of the university, disputes about its mission became particularly heated (Kuráth et al., 2021), which have also been published in international journals. What intellectual and educational role did the city play, that made it suitable to be a gateway to the Balkans? This is the research question we are addressing. In this paper, the authors attempt to chronicle the changes in the function of the school city from the Middle Ages onwards, to identify the main strategic directions and the local and national demands for shaping the functions.

As a direct precursor to this paper, we also refer to the strategy manifesto of the University of Pécs from 2023, which states that the university should play the role of a “geopolitical link” towards the Balkans region (PTE Strategy, 2023). This is based on the institution-building efforts of the previous decades and the intellectual potential developed in the city.

DATA AND METHODS

The nature of this topic is historical and geopolitical, and the study is largely based on a secondary analysis of secondary sources, complemented by primary data collection and analysis of contemporary school relationships. Considering the territorial scope, our study covers the city of Pécs and its southern (often claimed to be Balkan) contact areas, and the northern region of the Balkan Peninsula.

Due to the limitations of the journal and its geographical orientation, the exploration and analysis of primary historical sources could not be taken into consideration as a method for the study. As the volume of written sources from the last 1000 years is enormous, we have been unable to carry out the processing of primary sources. Thus, only a couple of primary

written sources of particular importance have been examined, such as Evliya Çelebi's record of his visit to Pécs in 1663 and the institutional strategy of the University of Pécs from 2023.

We had the possibility to process secondary sources, and this also posed a great challenge in the studies, considering the fact that they are also very numerous and large in volume. (*Currently, the Hungarian Science Bibliography [MTMT] contains 3810 items selected for the search keyword "Balkans" [Balkán]*). Obviously, most of these are not related to this study topic, but nevertheless there are around 100 works to process from the publications of the last one and a half centuries. These belong to multiple groups.

Research papers about the period of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin and the establishment of the state are relevant due to their considerations of the Hungarian foreign relations system concerning the Balkans (Kristó, 1985; Györffy, 1963, 1977). An extensive literature is available on the foundation of the University of Pécs in the medieval period (1367). These reflect on serious, unresolved controversies of several kinds: the circumstances and reasons for establishing the institution, its specific location, the type of education provided and how long the studium generale survived (Koller, 1784; Békefi, 1909; Csizmadia, 1965, 1967a, 1967b; Gabriel, 1969; Petrovich, 1971, 1972; Klaniczay, 1974; G. Sándor, 1998; Gerő, Gy., Fejérdy T., Kuhlenthal, M., G. Sándor, M., 1999; Vones, 1998; Boda, 1999, 1992-1993; Petrovics, 2005; Rollo-Koster, 2015; Font, 2016; Fedeles, 2009, 2017; Schmelczer-Pohánka, 2017). Several papers cover Ottoman-era education, including the schools in Pécs (Karácson, 1904, Ágoston & Masters, 2008; Holovics, 1966; Vass & Szita, 1996; Fodor, 1999; Kéri, 1999; Varga, 2009; Sudár, 2010, 2012, 2020; Ács, 2022). The recent discovery of a dervish monastery between Pécs and Szigetvár and the works of one of its teachers is a significant added value in this case (Karic, 2020). This has given us a unique opportunity to gain insight into the life of such a school community. Studies on the period of the reconquest and Catholic revival accurately describe the school life of a purely Catholic town (Lengyel, 1967; Molnár, 2005; Nagy, 2010; Szögi, 2016b). The first Catholic Southern Slavic (Illyrian) school emerged in the city during this period (Filákovity, 1998; Frankovc, 2011). Modernisation and industrialisation in the 19th century, with the associated significant population changes also left a mark on the school system (Kaposi, 2006; Ács, 2017). The establishment of the seminary for priests and then a law school (Csizmadia, 1967a; Rajczi, 1998), as well as the military (officer training) school which gained importance due to the instability of the Balkans, are described in a different group of studies (Gál, 2001). The end of the First World War is traumatic in Hungarian historiography, including that of Pécs. Provisionally the city was occupied by Serb forces, and then the Erzsébet (Elisabeth) University was resettled to Pécs from Bratislava, which is extensively covered in scientific

literature (Szabó, 1940; Ravasz, 1992; Schneider, 2009; Popély, 2000; Lengvári, 2004; Gonda & Kaposi, 2022; Scott, 2022; Póla et al., 2022; Egyed & Rácz, 2020; Rácz & Egyed, 2023). The 650-year (Font, 2016; Szögi, 2016; Fedeles, 2017) anniversary of the initial foundation in 1367, and then the 100th anniversary of the establishment in 1923 initiated the development of numerous papers (Méreg, 2022; Polyák, 2023). There is a vast range of publications presenting events of the 20th and 21st centuries, providing an overview of the events in minute detail (Polyák, 2016; Szögi, 2016a; Fedeles et al., 2017).

The analysis method of this study applies geopolitical considerations. The aspects of the school foundations are identified, including those of founders and operators. The spatial determinants of operation are also taken into consideration, together with the social, political and economic context of the establishment. The analysis assesses the significance of the spatial connections of the institutions over the different periods.

Empirical methods and exploration of primary data are used only for the last period of the operation of the university. The contractual relations of the University of Pécs from the last decades, the specific features of the Balkan-related operations, and the considerations of the strategy adopted by the UP in 2023 are explored through interviews.

RESULT 1: SCHOOL TOWN OF THE MIDDLE AGES, BASTION OF CHRISTIANITY

After the defeat of “Black Hungarians” (1008) (Kristó, 1985), the founder of the state, King Saint Stephen founded the bishopric in Pécs in 1009, where he settled priests from the West. The first bishop of Pécs was Bonipert of Lombardy. The bishopric covered the counties of Baranya, Tolna, Pozsega (Požega) and Valkó (Vukovo). This means that the southern border of the bishopric coincided with the southern border of the Kingdom of Hungary, and was thus open in the direction of the “Balkans” (Figure 1). This put Pécs on the map of “Rome” (i.e. the Catholic Church), with a border position between “West” and “East”. This also determined its school system, since from the very beginning its duty was to disseminate Western knowledge. It was established as a missionary church, and in the coming centuries it operated in the immediate vicinity of missionary territories (Bosnia, Bulgaria and the wider Balkan region).

In 1367, King Louis I (the Great) founded the university in Pécs, which was confirmed in a papal bull by Pope Urban V. It was not an isolated case. Contemporary rulers undertook numerous similar initiatives. This was just one item in a series of newly established institutions, in which after Prague (1348), Kraków (1364) and Vienna (1365), the school, or *studium generale*, of Pécs was founded.

Figure 1 The Bishopric of Pécs covered the counties of Tolna, Baranya, Valkó and Pozsega, and extended as far south as the river Sava



Source: BTK TTI, István Tringli – Béla Nagy

Despite the scarcity of written sources, it is possible to sketch out the motivations behind the establishment of the university (Font, 2016; Fedeles, 2017). Unlike the other three universities in Central Europe, this was not established in a royal centre, but in Pécs, the seat of one of the country's richest dioceses. Funding was provided not by the king but by the local bishop, and the initiator was also the bishop of Pécs, William (Wilhelm) of Koppenbach. Several researchers agree that the place of establishment also reflected foreign policy goals and orientation (Csizmadia, 1965; Petrovics, 2005). The Hungarian Anjou kings had interests to the south, also reflected in their foreign policy practice and presumably in their thinking.

During this era Pécs was an intellectual bastion of the Christian world. Its role as a school city is a consequence of the country's peripheral position. The efforts of Pope Urban V in the East were typically aimed at defending and strengthening Christianity (Vones, 1998; Rollo-Koster, 2015). This was also reflected in his declaration of a crusade to the Middle East. The Pope collaborated closely with Louis I (the Great), relying on him in various conflicts. He sent missionaries to several parts of the Balkans (Bosnia, Bulgaria) to counter heresy. It is likely that this had also been the wider geopolitical context for the founding of the University of Pécs. However, we do have no exact knowledge about the local articulation of these ideas, due to a lack of sources.

The institution only operated for a short time (a few decades), yet the memory of the “University of Louis the Great” has persisted and acted as a motivating force for centuries. The fact that this vision could be permanently sustained suggests the existence of local intelligentsia sustaining it. Pécs had already been a school city before 1367 and preserved this status after the university was closed, to some extent even during the Ottoman occupation period. In addition to local circumstances, the city's position in the territorial organisation of the country also played a role.

Pécs has been an important intellectual centre of the southwestern part of the kingdom, practically since the foundation of the Hungarian state. Throughout its long history, different factors have shaped its development. At times, it was influenced by grape and wine production, trade, as well as certain industrial activities (leather, porcelain, mining), but its intellectual and public service role has nevertheless remained strong, making the city an important factor in processes both within the country and in the northern Balkans. The “university vision” of Pécs was finally fulfilled in 1923. That time, in addition to the local aspects and arguments for its establishment, geopolitical considerations also emerged: the city and the new university had a mission to the south, towards the Balkans.

The famous establishment of the university in 1367 was facilitated by the uniquely strong school system that had developed in the city by the 14th century. The city of Pécs itself was owned by the Bishop of Pécs, who had considerable financial resources. According to the sources, the bishop of Pécs had the largest income in the country after the archbishop of Esztergom. This is why William of Koppenbach, the educated and cosmopolitan priest (Figure 3) was able to finance the *studium generale*.

The schools were partly connected to the Bishop's Castle (in the vicinity of the present cathedral) and to other church buildings and monasteries, as shown in Figure 2, i.e. the school system encompassed the whole city. The location of the medieval university is still disputed. Some claim that it was located at the premises of the present-day medieval university exhibition (G. Sándor, 1998, 2010), others dispute this (Boda, 1999; 13; Boda, 1992-93), but it is certainly the case that the ecclesiastical buildings adjacent to the cathedral were used as accommodation for students and professors, as well as for teaching rooms.

From the time of its foundation by Saint Stephen, the church undertook to spread and strengthen Christianity in the region from Tolna County to the Sava River, and partly beyond. This task was carried out by priests who sometimes came from the West, mainly from Italy and Germany, as exemplified by William of Koppenbach. In the 14th century, the town had four monastic schools in addition to the cathedral chapter school. The Dominican Order, in

particular, operated a strong and respected school. This may have played an important role in papal deliberations prior to the establishment of the university in 1367. The spread of westernised Christian patterns, ideas and lifestyles, the strengthening of the licentiate model, and the peregrination between universities had a stabilising effect on the eastern fringes of Western Christianity. The school city of Pécs might as well have played an important role in achieving these goals.

Figure 2 Wilhelm Koppenbach, Bishop of Pécs, founder of the medieval university, at the gate of the Ifjúság street campus of the university. Sculptor: Ferenc Tischler (1999)



Photo: author (2023)

The target areas of missionary activities were located close. Importantly, in Bosnia beyond the Sava River, where the existence of the crkva Bosanska, the Bosnian Church (formerly incorrectly referred to as Bogomil heresy) had been challenging the Catholic Church for some time and where Pope Urban V sent missionaries. Catholic conversion in the Balkans was carried out mainly by the Dominicans and Franciscans, also in Bulgaria (around Vidin) in addition to Bosnia.

Each order had monasteries in the diocesan seat. Geopolitical and cultural marginalisation was also manifest in the fact that Louis I fought against Romanian principalities as well, which were linked to Orthodoxy. The distant Ottoman Turkish threat was also advancing on the peninsula from the southeast, as it emerged on the foreign policy agenda. Therefore the

peripheral status in denominations and geopolitics was very much apparent during the reign of King Louis. We have no understanding of the role the university in Pécs played in these processes during its brief period of operation, as no such sources have been preserved.

The university certainly had faculties of philosophy and law, and it definitely lacked a theological faculty, according to the papal bull issued on 1 September 1367. “*Bishop Urban, servant of the servants of God. For eternal memory. (...) we resolve and order that a studium generale be established in the aforementioned city of Pécs, where canon law and civil law, as well as all other respectable sciences except theology, shall be taught for all eternity*” (Szögi, 1995).

Nothing certain is known about the medical faculty. After the death of bishop William, the university experienced rapid decline. According to some sources, after 1395 it continued to function as a *schola maior*, a kind of episcopal college. Some assume (Kollerus, 1784; Békefi, 1909) that the university existed until the Battle of Mohács (1526), pointing to the fact that many students from Pécs fell on the “battlefield of the nation” and that according to Istvánffy 2000 students lived within its walls until the fall of the city in 1543 (Istvánffy, 2009). These assumptions, which have become a traditional memory of the city (Schmelczer-Pohánka, 2017), suggest that the school city character of Pécs survived the demise of the university itself. This may be demonstrated by the fact that during the 15th century several church leaders were committed to science, for example the humanist bishop Janus Pannonius had “every book in Latin” available in his library. During the term of office of provost György Handó, the cathedral chapter had a collection of books estimated at more than 300 volumes, enabling the acquisition of high-level scientific knowledge in Pécs (Boda, 1999).

The debate surrounding the reasons of the city, the church and the king for the establishment of the University of Pécs will certainly continue. Any sources that may yet come to light may reopen the debate, but it is already certain that the city played an important role as a kind of intellectual bastion in the sustenance and dissemination of Western Christian culture in the Middle Ages, on the northern edge of the Balkans, in the vicinity of Bosnia. There is dispute whether this applies to the university (Fedeles, 2017), but Pécs has certainly played such a role as a school city.

RESULT 2: OTTOMAN-ERA PÉCS AS AN INTELLECTUAL BASTION OF ISLAM

The city fell to Ottoman Turks on 20 July 1543. As a regional centre and one of the largest and most important cities of Ottoman Hungary, Pécs played an important role in the economic and intellectual life of this peripheral region of the empire.

During the Ottoman occupation, Pécs became part of Ottoman Rumelia (i.e. the Balkans) and although its cultural periphery status did not disappear, its content changed. This time it found itself on the northern fringe of Ottoman Turkish culture. Its character resembled that of the Balkans, especially Bosnia. Its new Muslim inhabitants also came mainly from this region. During the period of the conquest in the 16th century, the Bosnian Sokollu family (originally known as Sokolović) had a strong influence in the Southern Transdanubia region, including the area around Pécs. In a sense, the city and the region became part of Greater Bosnia, incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, as part of the formal and informal sphere of influence of the Sokollu family. Also, Bosnia was the western bastion of Islam in this era. The school system of Pécs reflected imperial, as well as cross-border and local demands.

Pécs became a flourishing Sufi cultural centre. In addition to the Mevlevi Order, the Bektashis and the Halvetis (Khalwatis) also had monasteries and schools in town. During a visit to Pécs in 1663, the traveller Evliya Çelebi recorded 11 elementary schools and 5 medreses, which he commemorated in his memoirs, the Book of Travels (*Seyahatnâme*), as follows: “*The Quran interpreters and ulemas have five schools. Among others, the divine Eflatun (Plato) has an old academic college in the inner castle, with seventy rooms with royal vaults and a castle-like interior. In each of these there is an arrangement designed according to a different kind of architectural science, the description of which is impossible merely with language... In former times in this college there were several students from the East and West, who, having seen all the exotic and wonderful sciences from their masters, perfected these...*” (Karácson, 1904). The text suggests that the memory of a western school, perhaps the medieval university or a monastic school, appears in this description.

The other medrese described in detail, as the “*most distinguished and most prominent*“, was located in the külliye of the Yakovalı Hasan Paşa Mosque, at the Sziget Gate of the city (Sudár, 2012) in the “*majestic Mevlana’s Mevlevi monastery*”. This was the northernmost Mevlevi institution in the empire, with the next monastery to the south located in Sarajevo. Evliya Çelebi also recorded that the Mevlevi taught in the Persian language in their medrese, reading the work of the mystical Persian poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (the founder of the order), titled *Masnavi*. The curriculum of the medreses in the Ottoman Empire suggests that students in Pécs may have also studied poetry, music and calligraphy (Ágoston & Masters, 2008).

The memory of the medieval university may have survived in Ottoman-era Pécs, as Evliya Çelebi's account suggests. János Cserneki recorded the following about the books kept in the cathedral of Pécs (which the Turks converted into “Sultan Suleiman's castle camii”, based on an episcopal visitation of bishop Miklós Dallos in 1620: “*In the church itself, the altars are*

intact, decorated with antependants as they were found when it was occupied. The gradual and antiphon books are also there, fastened to the wall by small chains, on which they hang.” (Holovics, 1966; Sudár, 2012, 2014). When Evliya Çelebi visited Pécs in 1663, he may have also seen these chained books, because in relation to the beauty of the cathedral building he stated: “it was constructed this way, because this place is where the book of Plato is safeguarded” (Sudár, 2012; Ács, 2022).

However, there is no continuity between the two cultures, despite the fact that the Ottomans in many respects carried on the imperial legacy of the Byzantine Empire, as well as the achievements of Greek culture. Their aims were imperial and under the rule of the Ottomans, they aimed at expanding the Islamic world.

In the religious colleges of Pécs, education was based on the study of the Quran. Our knowledge of the teachers and the teachings of the sheiks managing the monasteries is rather scarce. However, we know the life and ideas of a spiritual leader who taught in the nearby Halveti monastery (Fodor & Pap, 2016, 2018) and can be considered analogous for the purposes of our research.

Ali Dede al-Busnawi was from Mostar in Bosnia, and he was the long-lived founding sheikh of the Halveti community of the tomb of Suleiman, whose rich spiritual heritage (more than 150 texts and passages) has survived. This enables us to imagine how higher education was practised in Ottoman Hungary and which ideas were considered important to pass on in the medreses. These texts are about *gaza*, i.e. the war of faith against infidelity, the definition of ideological foes, and support for the House of Osman (Karic, 2020).

The most famous of the students who studied in the medreses of Pécs was İbrahim Peçevi, born in the city in 1574. Peçevi became world-famous for his historical works, and he had studied in the medrese of Pasha Qasim in the main square. According to the “Appointment Defter of Medrese Teachers” (Fodor, 1999) his knowledge was so acclaimed that he was considered a future teacher.

After 1543, the Ottoman rule was established over Pécs for a century and a half. The city remained an intellectual centre. However, the meaning of this changed compared to the previous period, the religious institutions and the school system primarily served the purpose of solidifying Ottoman Turkish rule. The city took on a Bosnian character, and an increasing number of its residents spoke southern Slavic languages. Remnants of the Bosnian character can still be seen in some places in the Tettye district. The population also began to segregate along sectarian lines, with Muslims concentrated inside city the walls and Christians outside.

The latter could practise their religion in the All Saints Church and also operated schools. Records of the Catholic and Unitarian schools have been preserved. In 1582 and 1583, Miklós Fazakas Bogáti, a famous songwriter who had fled from Transylvania to Pécs and was a follower of Ferenc Dávid, became a teacher in the Unitarian school. The school of the Unitarians was also mentioned by István Szini, a Jesuit monk who came to Pécs in 1613 (Vass & Szita, 1996: 83). The presence of high Christian theological literacy (e.g. a library or book collection) in the city is also evidenced by the fact that Miklós Fazakas Bogáti wrote his commentary titled *Apocalypse* and his famous psalm paraphrases during his stay in Pécs (Ács, 2017).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the denominational school city character of Pécs continued to exist in the Ottoman period. Islamic mysticism and the culture of the followers of Sufism became dominant in the spiritual life of the city. Sustaining this was the duty of the religious colleges attached to the dervish monasteries, i.e. the medreses. At the same time, it should also be noted that the conquerors constituted only 2-3% of the population in the occupied territory (Muslim population was concentrated in the walled cities). The overwhelming majority of society in Ottoman Hungary was Christian, with whom there was no alternative to sustaining cooperation. This also meant tolerating the sustained church organisation, including schools. The limited community autonomy present in the Ottoman imperial model allowed for this.

But there was also a shift from the pre-Ottoman situation. While *genius loci* had previously been determined by the high level of ecclesiastical education in the monastic and chaplaincy schools (*and for a short time the studium generale*), in the Ottoman period Christian education was conveyed by Protestant preachers and their followers, and from the 17th century onwards, by southern Slavic and Hungarian Catholics (Molnár, 2005). The school system reflected the specific cultural, social and political considerations of the Ottoman frontier.

RESULT 3: CATHOLIC “FORTRESS”, THEN GEOPOLITICAL CORNERSTONE

Pécs was retaken from the Turks by Holy League troops on 21-22 October 1686. Some of the Muslim residents fled, others were allowed to stay if they converted to and joined Catholicism. It was the effect of the reconquista that ended Muslim rule that the city became fully Catholic for a century. A significant proportion of its new settlers came from German Catholic areas.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the former Muslim inhabitants of the town were known as *Poturs* (single: Potur, plural: poturci, poturice), with the pejorative meaning of “Turkified, Islamicised”, because their way of life and clothing were reminiscent of Balkan Muslims, while their language remained mainly a dialect of southern Slavic typical of a Bosnian region (around Tešanj). They referred to themselves as Bosniaks. They were concentrated in the present-day Tettye district and the area below the Havihegy hill (*Poturluk, Zidina, Benga, Malomszeg*), many of them tanners. The Poturci were integrated into the Catholic institutions (no Muslim school could survive). Initially, their main religious centre was the Ágoston Square Catholic Church, the former mosque of the tanners. Later on, the small chapel on the Havihegy hill, which served as a pilgrimage site, also became very important. The Poturs practically disappeared by the end of the 19th century, as they assimilated into majority groups living in Pécs.

Muslim religious buildings have been taken over by the Catholic Church. Members of the Catholic clergy took over the former dervish monasteries and mosques. The buildings changed their function, housing the monastic orders and the institutions of the Bishopric of Pécs. The school city character prevailed, but within a purely Catholic institutional framework. After the reconquista, reconstruction works (in accordance with the prominent ideology) required mainly priests and lawyers.

The creation of a local priestly education can be seen as an important stage in the demand for higher education in the city from the Catholic clergy. After the expulsion of the Ottoman Turks, the bishop of Pécs, Zsigmond Berényi established a priest seminary, the cornerstone of which had been laid on 4 June 1742 and then it was consecrated on 4 September 1746 in honour of Saint Paul. Following Zsigmond Berényi, Bishop György Klimó was also committed to the operation of the seminary, increasing the number of students, setting up new departments and launching a philosophy course, increasing the period of study from two to four years, and further expanding the book collection begun by Berényi and opening the first public library in Hungary in 1774. After the death of Bishop Klimó in 1779, the Josephine policy of centralisation relocated the seminary to Buda, which was only returned to Pécs in 1791.

Bishop György Klimó was so committed to the cause of higher education in Pécs that in 1784 he applied for the establishment of a “Public Higher Education School” in the city. Following this request, the royal academy was moved from Győr to Pécs in 1785, and it operated in the city until 1802. Law students attended the two-year liberal arts and then the two-year law programme.

Figure 3 The entrance to the military training school. The inscription ARMIS ET LITTERIS, meaning “with arms and science”



Source: Gál, 2001

After the turn of the century, with the expansion of the Dual Monarchy, the vision of an important role in the Balkans emerged in Pécs. In this regard, several statements in the press of the time can be noted, for example, that of the future minister and then state secretary Kunó Klebelsberg, who told the local daily that “Pécs, this beautifully-situated Hungarian city should be the first major station of intellectual and economic culture from the Balkans, which could also stand in for the capital” (Pécsi Napló, 30 January 1916). However, there was no breakthrough. A few years later, by the end of First World War, when the empire collapsed, Pécs had transformed into the regional centre of a small state. Ambitions and needs had to be revised.

RESULT 4: A UNIVERSITY CITY ON THE NORTHERN EDGE OF THE BALKANS

The few years following the First World War were very special for Pécs, as the city and its surroundings came under Serbian occupation which ended on 22 August 1921. Serb troops were withdrawn and the Hungarian National Army entered the city. By this time it had become clear that Pécs would not (after Ottoman times) become the centre of the northern periphery of a Balkan-centric state (the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, or later Yugoslavia). Reorganisation, including that of the school system, started. The military training school moved back to the city, and even more significant events took place: Pécs set out on a path to becoming a modern European university city.

The transformation of Pécs from a school town to a university city was made possible by Act 25 of 1921 in response to the situation after the Treaty of Trianon (1920), stating in Article 1

that “*the Hungarian Royal Erzsébet University of Pozsony established by Act XXXVI of 1912 shall be temporarily relocated to Pécs.*”

Overall, the establishment of the university was a matter of necessity, with local and regional demands being the main considerations in making the decision. In addition to the sustenance and development of knowledge and culture, and the historical tradition (of the medieval university), the improvement of regional health care services was apparently the most decisive argument. Decision-makers hoped that regional health care access was going to improve. Apparently, not everyone was happy about these developments, and there were also counter-arguments and scepticism, stating that there were too few teachers, there was no adequate infrastructure available in the city. But the local majority was enthusiastic about the plan, and neither the pessimism nor the lofty rhetoric had any particular impact on the process. The national and local government and the Catholic Church joined forces and pushed through to establish the university and provide locations for institutes of the Erzsébet University. Geopolitical considerations only began to have an impact decades later.

The main actor in 1923, Kunó Klebelsberg, the minister of culture who oversaw the establishment of the university, formulated his concept of the possible role of Pécs in 1916 as state secretary: on the route from the Balkans towards Budapest, this city should be an intellectual centre of comparable importance to the capital. However, between 1916 and 1923, fundamental geopolitical changes took place: as a result of the lost world war, Pécs became the regional centre of a small state instead of an imperial power.

In 1923, the local Catholic clergy and the city administration also cooperated with the government in the resettlement and relocation efforts. County lord-lieutenant (főispán) Ferenc Fischer argued for the university's admission to the city on the grounds of its cultural mission: “*in the absence of other means, it is culture that raises us above the Balkan peoples*”, he stressed in volume 26 of the local daily Dunántúl, dated 01/02/1922. By this time, the visions of the local political elite already extended beyond the narrow borders of the city and the county.

In the context of the establishment of the University of Pécs in 1923, it is worth reviewing the higher education and research activities relevant to the Balkans from a broader perspective, enabling the proper assessment of ranks and importance. The first official efforts emerged in Hungary in the late 19th century. In addition to Budapest, several cities in the south played a role, but over time the city of Pécs and the University of Pécs came to play the dominant role.

Table 1 Main Hungarian Balkan “Institutes”

	Name	Location	Duration	Profile
1	Hungarian Oriental Cultures Centre (Magyar Keleti Kultúrközpont), then Hungarian Turan Society (Turán Társaság)	Budapest	1910-1943	Research of Turkic peoples, Bulgarians
2	Hungarian-Bosnian and Oriental Economic Centre (Magyar-Bosnyák és Keleti Gazdasági Központ)	Budapest	1908-1920 (?)	Economic research
3	Fiume Export Academy (Fiumei Kiviteli Akadémia)	Fiume (Rijeka)	1912-1919	Elite training, economics, geography, languages
4	Technical university oriental trade training site	Budapest	1914-1920	Elite economics training
5	Constantinople Hungarian Scientific Institute (Konstantinápolyi Magyar Tudományos Intézet)	Istanbul	1916-1919	Historical, turkological and Balkan studies research
6	Temesvár Balkans Bureau (Temesvári Balkáni Iroda)	Temesvár (Timișoara)	1917-1918 (?)	Research activities
7	Political Science (then Teleki Pál) Institute	Budapest	1926-1945 (?)	Complex research of Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes
8	Faculty of Economics (merged with the Oriental Trade Academy (Keleti Kereskedelmi Akadémia) in 1920, additionally Oriental Institute (Keleti Intézet) from 1926 to 1931)	Budapest	1920-	Education and research. Languages, economics and politics with a focus on the Middle East and the Balkans
9	Palatine Joseph University of Technology and Economics Oriental Institute (József Nádor Műszaki és Gazdaságtudományi Egyetem Keleti Intézete)	Budapest	1934-	Carries on Balkans research and education
10	Keleti Kereskedelmi Főiskola Balkán Intézet (Oriental Trade College Balkans Institute)	Újvidék (Novi Sad)	1942-1944	Commerce, economics, languages
11	Transdanubian Research Institute (Dunántúli Tudományos Intézet, DTI - instead of the planned Southern-Hungarian Research Institute)	Pécs	1943-today	Research of Transdanubia in Hungary, as well as the Balkans
12	The Oriental Trade College fled from Újvidék (Novi Sad) to Budapest in 1944, and then merged with the Palatine Joseph University of Technology and Economics Oriental Institute in 1946. It terminated in 1948 when the Hungarian University of Economics was established.	Budapest	1946-1948	Research and education with a focus on economics

	Name	Location	Duration	Profile
13	Hungarian Balkans Society (Magyar Balkán Társaság, MKT), Balkans Institute (Balkán Intézet), merged in late 1948 into the Eastern-European Research Institute (Keleteurópai Tudományos Intézet, formerly known as Teleki Pál Research Institute)	Budapest	1947-1948	Publishing activities: Balkán Füzetek (Balkans Volumes), Balkán Könyvtár (Balkans Library), Balkán Könyvek (Balkans Books), etc.
14	The DTI and the leaders of the Pécs university made great efforts in this period to make Pécs the “gateway to the Balkans” as a centre of research and higher education. Numerous rectors of the University of Pécs worked towards this goal. The list includes József Holub 1944-1945, Béla Entz, 1945-1946, Sándor Krisztics, 1946-1947, who (in addition to the re-establishment of the Faculty of Humanities) wanted to establish an organisation focusing on the Balkans under the name Faculty of Oriental Economics. To no avail.	Pécs	Planned, but failed to materialise.	
15	Janus Pannonius University (JPTE) Faculty of Teacher Education, History of the Balkans seminar	Pécs	1987-1993	Teaching regional history, individual research efforts of the participants
16	Janus Pannonius University (JPTE) East Mediterranean and Balkan Studies Centre	Pécs	1999- today	Research and teaching of the regional structure with a geography focus, operation of the Balkan MA and geopolitical doctoral programme
17	Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities (ELTE BTK) Institute of History Department of Eastern Europe Balkans Group	Budapest	2010-today	Teaching and research of the history of the Balkans (mainly Yugoslavia)
18	Teleki László Institute from 1999, Hungarian Institute of International Affairs (Magyar Külügyi Intézet) from 2006	Budapest	Throughout this period	Foreign policy background analyses, international relations marketing
19	Hungarian Academy of Sciences Szeged Committee (SZAB) South Research Centre (Délvidék Kutatóközpont)	Szeged	2010-today	Organising historical research, conferences
20	Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), then Eötvös Loránd Research Network (ELKH) then HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities Institute of History, History of South-Eastern Europe Theme Group	Budapest	2014-today	Historic research works in the Balkans

Author: own research based partly on Hajdú, 2003.

In summary, over the past one and a half hundred years, the 20 consultancy, research and education organisations with a “Balkans” profile that are listed and examined in the table were, for the most part, linked to the prevailing political course: each institution was close to the political elite. In addition to the dominant role played by Budapest, several cities in the south, including Pécs in particular, have played a role as main offices and an operating environment. Typically, these all operated with modest resources, mostly for short periods of time, mainly during periods of political upheaval. Accordingly, their achievements remained severely limited. At the same time, however, prominent members of the Hungarian scientific elite were involved in their work, hence in some cases significant individual achievements can be recognised. Their impact on Hungarian politics and policies was very limited, not to say insignificant, in all periods. Also, their international impact has remained minor, practically invisible even compared to the national one.

Several periods of institutionalisation can be distinguished. The first period lasted until the end of the First World War, the second was during the interbellum period, the third between 1946 and 1948, and then, after a long hiatus in activity, from the 1980s to the present day. In the first period (Table 1: 1-6), such organisations were active in the primarily economic expansion of Hungary in the Balkans, and secondly for conveying general knowledge of the region. Most of them were based in Budapest, with one each in Fiume (Rijeka), Temesvár (Timișoara) and Istanbul, a total of seven institutions. Perhaps this can be considered the golden age of Balkans research in Hungary.

In the period from 1918 to 1945, only five institutions are listed: in addition to Budapest, the names of Újvidék (Novi Sad) and Pécs also appear (Table 1: 7-11). At the same time, while during the existence of the Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, the Balkans as a whole, and even the Middle East were included in the focus topics, in the Horthy era the focus shifted more to the neighbouring states, and nothing beyond Romania and Yugoslavia. There is also some, but rather effective, activity during the brief democratic period after 1945 (Table 1: 12-14). However, the conflict with Tito’s Yugoslavia rendered any further relevant efforts impossible. Nevertheless, in Pécs the university rectors undertook significant efforts to establish a Faculty of Oriental Economics. The names of the rectors József Holub, Béla Entz and Sándor Krisztics should be mentioned in this regard. In the end, this endeavour did not succeed either.

The Transdanubian Research Institute (DTI) in Pécs - originally intended at least in part to have a Balkans profile - continued to operate, but any further development of the institution

and the establishment of “Balkan gateway” role of Pécs could not take place within the atmosphere of the Cold War.

Afterwards, Balkans research became impossible in Hungary for a long time. Only the “fellow Socialist” Bulgaria was suited for field research. The deep antagonism, which was only easing slowly, was not conducive to institution-building. Towards the end of the Kádár era in Hungary, the slow process of democratisation enabled resuming the reorganisation efforts. The centres of these endeavours were (just as before) Budapest, Pécs and Szeged (Table 1: 15-20). These organisations operated and continue to operate with a historical, political history, geopolitical and national security focus, in line with the challenges of the period, especially the break-up of Yugoslavia. The economics themes were only complementary, and this is what makes them so different from previous periods.

In the 20th century, the city's links to the Balkans faded. In the interbellum period, the confrontation with Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and in the early 1950s, the near-war with Tito's Yugoslavia, severely limited and made impossible the improvement of southern relations. Only the slow rapprochement following the Cold War period brought along some minor, symbolic changes. For instance, the sister city treaty between Pécs and Osijek was signed in 1973. The actual window of opportunity to restore links only opened after the transition to democracy in 1989/1990. The disintegration of the Yugoslav federal state, the tensions of war during 1990s did not allow for significant improvements. Hungary's accession to NATO and then to the EU in 2004 focused attention and efforts on the western direction of international relations. In this process, the Balkans emerged not as an opportunity but as a serious security risk. That fact that the region also holds economic and political potential was recognised by the post-2010 cabinets led by Viktor Orbán.

What kind of underlying social basis is available in this relationship? The intense social and cultural links of Pécs with the Balkans are primarily represented by the southern Slavic (Croat, Serb, Bosnian, Albanian) and Roma/Gypsy ethnic groups living in the city and its surroundings. Among the southern Slavs, Serbs have completely disappeared from the city, and the assimilation of the Croats is also progressing, but their numbers are still significant. However, there is no sign of such kind of awareness among the Roma. The established educational system therefore has a particular responsibility to take care of this function. What are the main actors in education?

In Pécs, following the historical precedents of the 18th century, regular education in “Serbo-Croatian” language started in 1952. From 1983, there was also a Serb-Croat secondary school offering secondary school exit certificates. Nowadays, the Miroslav Krleža Croatian

School offers education from kindergarten to secondary school for ethnic Croats in Hungary. University education is provided by the Institute of Slavic Studies of the University of Pécs. In addition to the educational institution, the Croatian Theatre and the nationality radio station were the main sources of transmitting Croatian cultural heritage.

Pécs is the only municipality where teaching in the Roma languages - Boyash/Beás and Lovari/Lovári - is available from kindergarten to university, mainly because of the Boyash (archaic Romanian-speaking) Romani people who resettled to Baranya from the Balkans. The Gandhi Secondary School, established in 1994, is a pioneer in this field, being the first in the country and the first in the European Union to offer secondary school exit certificates. The Department of Education Sociology and Romology at the University of Pécs Faculty of Humanities, the only such department in the country, has been conveying scientific knowledge about the Roma population since 1997.

At the University of Pécs and the Transdanubian Research Institute (today called in abbreviations HUN-REN KRTK RKI DTO), partly relying on the traditional contacts and reacting to the geopolitical changes in the wider region, a small number of lecturers and researchers with an interest in the Balkans have joined forces, but at the time of writing this paper it is the only such team in the country. They are currently operating low-key, as an informal knowledge centre. This centre is characterised by teaching (Croatian language and culture, Balkan Studies MA, PhD programme), journal and periodical publishing (Mediterrán és Balkán Fórum, Balkán Füzetek) activities, regular international academic publications and has built up a functioning academic network in Southeast Europe.

From the early 1990s, an institutionalisation process can be identified in the city, which started to support the active role of Pécs in the former Yugoslavia and throughout the Balkans, although the level of consciousness was rather low for a long time. Some examples include:

- During the Yugoslav Wars, Pécs was awarded the UNESCO prize “Cities for Peace” for providing a safe haven to Bosnian refugees (1992-1995). This had no major consequences, it was more of an anomaly that made the citizens of Pécs aware that they were living near a place at risk of explosion. The settlement of Bosniaks during this period was more noticeable in the towns of Siklós and Harkány. The Balkan Gate Mosque, a spiritual and community centre for local Bosniaks and Albanians, opened in Siklós-Máriagyűd in September 2022.
- In 2000, the University of Pécs was established through the integration of former higher education institutions. It has developed strong international functions. By 2023, the

number of international students had exceeded 5000. More than 1000 such students came from countries with a Muslim background. When the Islamic Centre of Pécs opened in September 2023, near the Pasha Qasim Mosque (the Pécs Downtown Parish Church) in the main square, the opening ceremony was attended by around 300 people. The city has once again become a multiconfessional place. The centre has started offering religious education and Arabic language training. Attendees are mostly from Arab countries and other states further in Asia and Africa. The number of Bosniaks and Albanians among them is small.

- In 2010, Pécs became a European Capital of Culture. The programme was implemented jointly with Istanbul and Essen, with the motto “Borderless City” and the slogan “Pécs, the gateway to the Balkans”. The programme was overambitious in its goals and the cultural gateway function was not achieved.
- Pannon EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) is an organisation established on the basis of an EU legal construction, which is a voluntary cross-border organisation of the municipal and state sectors in Hungary and Croatia.
- In early 2022, the University of Pécs underwent a change of operator: the institution is operated by a foundation. In this process it had to rethink its operating environment and increasingly has to rely on market revenues. This has led to a reassessment of its role in international relations and (although not entirely voluntarily) has also encouraged university fora to explore the opportunities of the Western Balkans as a potential market.

The strategy was adopted by the governing bodies of the university in July 2023. The document stated that the university should play a geopolitical mediating role between Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Page 15 of the strategy states the following:

e) “Establish a geopolitical link between Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. *The University's regional geographic position makes it suitable to act as a geopolitical link between regions of Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Based on its research and teaching tradition and current capabilities relevant to the Western Balkans, the University intends to strengthen these competences in order to play a key role in the future of maintaining and developing up-to-date knowledge on the Western Balkans. This knowledge has the potential to have a positive impact on the economic, commercial, touristic, cultural and innovation standing of the region.*”

At the time of writing this paper, it is not yet clear which of these ambitious goals will be realised, but it seems clear that the position of being on the cultural periphery has been reproduced and prompted (and still does) a rethinking of the mission of Pécs to the Balkans (Sipos et al., 2021).

DISCUSSION

The topic addressed by this paper touches on several academic debates. One is whether Pécs can be considered a gateway city or not. Did the establishment of the medieval university of Pécs reflect geopolitical considerations? Is the Ottoman occupation period a part of the organic development of Pécs? In a broader sense, it is an important, unresolved, and possibly never-ending debate whether Hungary is the southern border of Central Europe and thus is in a peripheral location. This raises the question of whether it has an organic link with southeastern Europe, and what kind of link it is.

Pécs is a Hungarian regional centre whose functions not only cover former Hungarian territories to the south but also the Balkans. According to the analyses published so far, defining Pécs as a gateway city to the Balkans is an overstatement: it does not have any economic or infrastructural role that would make this gateway function meaningful, even if it does have such potential features (Hajdú, 2009; Pap et al., 2013). It features a frontier character: as a border region centre of church/civilisation, empires, as well as of Euro-Atlantic integration, it has mostly participated in the territorial system of the northern, and less often the southern, side of the border. On the basis of this analysis, if not in economic and transport terms, but in intellectual terms, as a school city, the gateway role does appear from time to time, and in these functions the relevant social, economic, political changes and geopolitical challenges can be perceived.

In the context of establishing the university in 1367, there has been a debate about whether geopolitical considerations (related to the Balkans) played a role in the foundation of this *studium generale* (Csizmadia, 1965; Petrovics, 2005). According to one view, this could only be proven if it had had a theological faculty (Fedeles, 2017). Our analysis in this debate has not been able to uncover decisive direct evidence, but indirect evidence suggests that such a consideration did exist. In the Middle Ages, the bishopric's seat of Pécs developed as a spiritual and intellectual bastion of Christianity on the southeastern fringe of western Christianity. The bishopric itself was established as a missionary institution after the defeat of the so-called "Black Hungarians", near the southern fringes of the country, with a territory

spreading to the Sava river. For centuries, the missionary activity of the Church in Bosnia and Bulgaria gave a missionary role to the Franciscan and Dominican orders that maintained monasteries and schools in the city. This was the social context of the university, and its founders could hardly ignore it.

According to the majority approach of historians, the Ottoman Turkish conquest left the central part of the Kingdom of Hungary, including Pécs and the other occupied settlements, outside the historical development of Hungary for a century and a half, and they suffered heavy losses in human life and material assets as well. It was only after the end of the 17th century that the Central European model of normality and development was restored (Pálffy, 2010; Fodor, 2017). In this approach, recognition of the intellectual achievements of the Ottoman period was little acknowledged, or if acknowledged, it was seen as part of the inner workings of the Ottoman Empire. The balance sheet of this period is - rightly - short on positives. The building of Turkish baths and mosques, the introduction of a few dishes and plants, a few poems by Bálint Balassi with Turkish melodies, or Turkish embroidery are just some of the examples that are usually mentioned, among the many negatives. In addition to the overall image of undeniably heavy losses, the war period also provided cultural opportunities in some protected cities, including Pécs, and led to the establishment of schools, the nature of which differed greatly from those of the past.

The intellectual character of the city was very different from that of the pre-Turkish and post-Turkish periods, but there are also indications that its intellectual life was not entirely isolated from Hungary. The city became a *de facto* northern outpost of Greater Bosnia and an outpost of Islam, but its demographic characteristics and complex culture gave it the character of a multicultural and multiconfessional denominational school town. A Christian denominational school coexisted with a school system that taught Islam and several branches of Sufism as well. The dominant narrative of the intellectual centre was the extension of Ottoman rule. Not only was the Unitarian school influential, but elements of Ottoman intellectual achievement were also transferred to Hungarian culture and the school system. At the same time, in the Catholic school system and cultural life which later became dominant, Islam and strict monotheistic Unitarianism could only appear as alien, heretical and hostile.

CONCLUSION

Pécs is an important cultural centre in Hungary, which carries in its spiritual and intellectual heritage the aspirations of about a millennium. Geopolitical determinants can be detected in

its development trajectory. As one of the regional centres of the southern border region of Central Europe, it has had to reorganise its southern (ecclesiastical, educational, cultural) contact functions and, although with a limited territorial scope, its school functions as well. The city has a southern character, a rich cultural heritage and traditionally in its cultural heritage and functions cultural-educational activities with southern Slavic peoples (Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks) play a role.

Some sharp divisions can be detected in the process of its organisation of such links and contacts. Following Ottoman conquest (1543), Pécs found itself on the “other” side of the Central European border zone, but in a similar role. After the reconquest wars, it switched sides again (1686) and became a kind of Catholic fortress. The modernisation process in the 19th century once again opened it up culturally, and in the Austro-Hungarian Empire it became a geopolitical cornerstone of Balkan ambitions, a military and school city with minor imperial ambitions. After the First World War, it was first under Serbian occupation and again threatened by having to “switch sides”, but eventually became the southern regional centre of the small Hungarian state in a much smaller, more restricted territorial framework than before. Hungary's accession to NATO and then the European Union brought it into a larger framework that offered new opportunities for links with the southern neighbourhood. In a sense, ambitions similar to those of the Austria-Hungary era were expressed. This influenced the thinking of the city and especially of the University of Pécs about its relations with the south. At the same time, the social foundations of the political ambitions and the increasingly modest resources had to be taken into consideration with great emphasis.

For most of the 20th century, hostile, or at least distant, relations with the southern neighbours were typical. The social foundations of the southern Slavic relations therefore began to crumble as a result of emigration and assimilation, but the development of the school system was able to compensate for this to some extent. In the late 20th century, geopolitical changes reopened the possibility and the need for building networks of international relationships in the Balkans. Today's horizon is the same as at the beginning of the process in 1009: Slavonia, Bosnia and the Balkans beyond have been in focus.

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