

VILLAGES OF PORABJE: INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS OF THE HUNGARIAN SETTLEMENT NETWORK

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UDK: 911.37

COBISS: 1.01

Abstract

Villages of Porabje: Individual elements of the Hungarian settlement network

Special feature of Porabje settlements can be detected on some geographical aspects within the national settlement network. Unique features of these settlements even these features are not exclusive in themselves regarding all the administratively independent settlements form such a specific region of Hungary on the base of that the following can be stated. The Vend-region occupies prominent place among the regions of Hungary. These special features are studied in this study on the base of the following aspects: spatial location, history, ethnic composition, ethnographic aspects, small village and sporadic settlement characteristic and development possibilities. However Szentgotthárd (Monošter) played important role in life of the Slovenians in Hungary too the essay focuses on the analysis of the settlements in the Porabje region.

Key words

Porabje, Slovenians in Hungary, ethnographical region, small villages, sporadic settlements, development possibilities

1. Introduction

The Slovenians count indigenous national minority in Hungary who belong ethnically to the Slovenians living mainly in Slovenia, Carinthia and Styria in Austria and in the Italian border provinces. The majority of the Slovenians live in the surroundings of Szentgotthárd (Monošter) in county Vas in the Western corner of the country (Kozár 2007). This area is called the Vend-region and its Slovenian name is Porabje. The naming 'Vend' became dominant from the end of the 19th century until then Hungarians named 'Tót' the population living here and talking Slavic (Beluszky 2005). Name of the folk occurred first in our area today Rábatótfalu (in Slovenian: Slovenska ves, part of Monošter) mentioned as 'villa Sclavorum' that means 'Slavic village' in a charter of the year 1221. Latin version of the phrase 'vend' appeared in the title of a Slovenian ritual book 'Agenda Vandalica' (Kozár 1999) first in 1587.

Porabje is a specific ethnic-related region of Hungary that preserves its culture till today. Settlements of the region are not ethnically homogeneous Slovenian villages but cohabitation is realized with the Hungarians and other minorities in several villages (eg. Germans, Slovaks). The unique ethnic composition, small size of the villages in Porabje, sporadic feature, and the traditional farming methods and the construction modes in a protected natural environment in the Western border area of Hungary in relative isolation make this region extremely interesting research theme. We try to analyze these features in our study.

2. Schematic history of Porabje's Slovenians

The ancestors of the Slovenians as the most western nation of the southern Slavs arrived and settled down in the area of the Rába, Dráva, Mura and Száva in the 6th century. In other words the arriving Hungarians found them in this area during the conquest. When establishing counties and bishoprics the western border zone was missed so the Slovenian villages between the Rába and Mura got administratively to Vas and Zala counties and Zagreb and Győr dioceses in the 11th century (Kozár 1998, 2007). Number of the Slovenians rose due to introduction and further moving into the area and the Cistercian abbey founded by Béla III in 1183 also played a key role in this. Monastic majors so called 'Grangias' formed on the cleared lands conquered from the forest in the area. A manor is a double concept: it means a piece of land that is the management and administrative centre of a large estate, and in addition, it is a form of settlement, where the farming workers or even the owner of the estate live (Balogh, Bajmócy, 2011, 2014). Villages of Porabje developed from these manors and the sporadic feature of these settlements can be account to this partly. Although majority of the settlements are first mentioned in the charters mainly in the second part of the 14th century settling of the Slovenians happened later in the 16th century (Kozár 1998).

Slovenian-majority villages were found in Porabje in the census in 1910. After the 1st World War the newly organized South-Slavic state so called Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom established on 1st December 1918 laid claim to this area. As a result of the Treaty of Trianon the language borders and the borderline of the county were not coincided with each other, so nine villages could stay in Hungary (Benczik 1998). The historic Porabje was much larger than today and included the area of Prekmurje that is part of Slovenia nowadays. Six administratively independent villages formed out of the nine Slovenian-majority municipalities around Monošter remained in Hungary as a result of coupling and merging of villages: Alsószőlnök (Slovenian

name: Dolnji Senik), Felsőszölnök (Gornji Senik), Orfalu (Andovci), Szakonyfalu (Sakalovci), Apátistvánfalva or Števanovci (the formerly independent Újbalázsfalva in other words Otkovci was connected here). Kétvölgy (Verica-Ritkarovci) was born due to its name by merging two former villages (Vashegyalja – Verica and Ritkaháza – Ritkarovci) in 1951. The 9th formerly independent village was Rábatótfalu (Slovenska ves) that was connected to Monošter in 1983.

3. Spatial location

The area of Porabje today is less than 100 km² and the number of inhabitants is under 3000. It is located in the western corner of Vas County and Gornji Senik is the westernmost settlement of Hungary (Fig. 1). The triangle border stone (Tromejnik) can be found 4 km far from the centre of the village at the meeting point of the three countries Slovenia, Austria and Hungary.

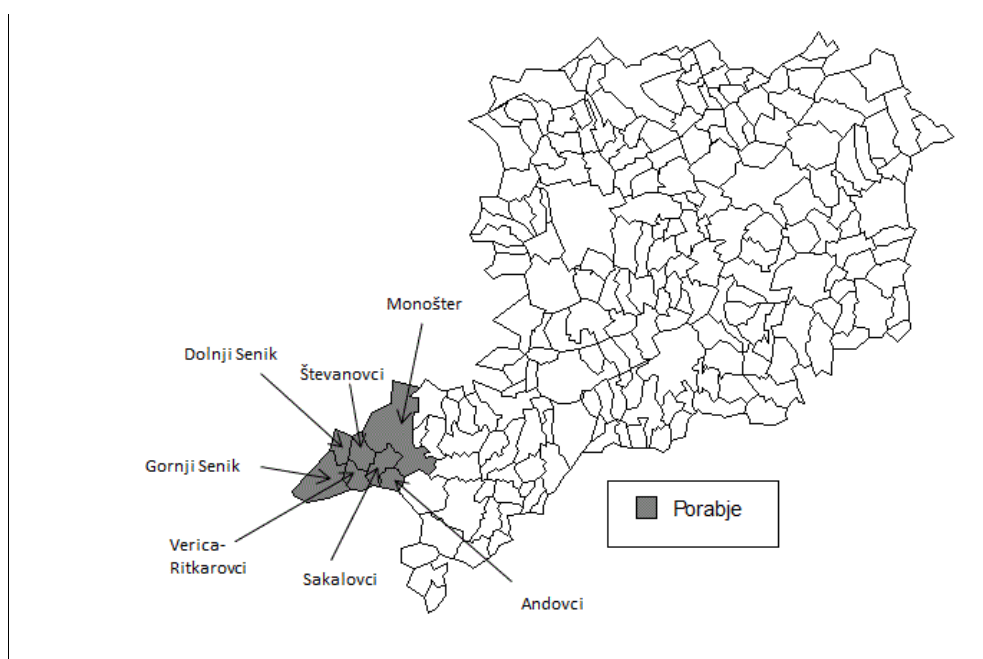


Fig.1: Spatial location of Porabje in Vas county.

Source: own construction.

Porabje is divided into two parts on the base of its accessibility. Gornji Senik, Dolnji Senik and Sakalovci can be reached only through Monošter but Andovci, Števanovci and Verica-Ritkarovci are located in the other corner of the area. The area was closed as border stripe during the period of socialism and was avoided by nationalization and collectivization of agriculture. Today this area is under nature protection as part of Órség Natural Park and began to develop after opening the borders. The name of Porabje physical geographically is different: this area is 'Vas Mountain Ridge' according to the small land cadaster. This name is quite strange for the local inhabitants because the Hungarian-inhabited settlements with prefix 'Hegyhát' (Hegyhátszentjakab, Hegyhátszentpéter, Hegyhátsál and Hegyháthodász) are located in the East.

4. Population changes and ethnic minorities

We can get information about the exact number of inhabitants of the Slovenian nationality people in Hungary only at the census in every 10 year. The data prove that number of Slovenians in Hungary decreased continuously in the 20th century as population of the Slovenian settlements. The rate varied over the centuries moreover there were growth phases mainly between the periods of the two world wars but altogether everywhere exceeded 50% it means that all of the Slovenian villages lost more than half of the inhabitants. The loss was quite drastic in some municipalities e.g.: while 431 people lived in Verica-Ritkarovci in 1900 then only 97 people lived in 2015. The situation is similar in case of Andovci number of inhabitants was 364 in 1900 and 71 in 2015. Thus these two settlements lost around 80% of the inhabitants in the examined period. If we examine only the situation after 1990 it can be stated that Andovci could stop the negative tendency during the past more than quarter century. Of course it is not enough to balance the decrease of the previous decades. Andovci is the smallest Slovenian village in Hungary. Reduction of Verica-Ritkarovci is very spectacular since 1990 and number of the inhabitants decreased fewer than 100 by nowadays (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Changes in the number of population between 1991-2015 in Porabje's villages.

| Villages | Population | | | | | Population change 1991-2015 (%) |
|-------------------|------------|------|------|------|------|---------------------------------|
| | 1991 | 1997 | 2003 | 2009 | 2015 | |
| Gornji Senik | 736 | 733 | 659 | 584 | 584 | -20,7 |
| Števanovci | 435 | 415 | 400 | 369 | 377 | -13,3 |
| Dolnji Senik | 438 | 427 | 418 | 363 | 368 | -16,0 |
| Sakalovci | 367 | 377 | 369 | 354 | 351 | -4,4 |
| Verica-Ritkarovci | 159 | 151 | 138 | 127 | 97 | -39,0 |
| Andovci | 69 | 72 | 65 | 60 | 71 | +2,9 |

Source: Gazetteer of Hungary.

Concerning the Slovenian minority, they live in different number and rate in the villages of Porabje. The official census data help in measuring but some problems are also raised. The ethnic affiliation was asked in every case after the 2nd World War in Hungary except the year of 1970. Response became voluntary since 2001 at the same time the ethnic affiliation is judged on the base of several criteria (more questions). Today there are two questions to clear the ethnic affiliation (in order to estimate exactly who has double identity) one regarding the mother tongue and the other regarding the language used with family or friends. Since everyone could mark more nationalities one person is listed repeatedly for those ethnic affiliations what he/she marked at the question (Kovács 2013). This is the reason why the total rate of those who declare themselves as Hungarian and Slovenian exceeds 100% in the villages of Porabje (Fig. 2).

Three-fourth of the inhabitants declared themselves Slovenian too in Gornji Senik. This is the highest rate among the villages of Porabje. Dolnji Senik is at the other end of the list with the rate of 17,6 % of Slovenian population. Significant difference can be between the data of census and the reality. Number of the Slovenians is around five thousand in Hungary according to the advocacy of minority boards instead of three thousand given by statistics. Besides Hungarians and Slovenians other minorities also live in the most villages in Porabje, primarily Germans and Slovaks.

Germans live in the highest rate (26,8%) in Dolnji Senik and Slovaks (6,6%) in Andovci.

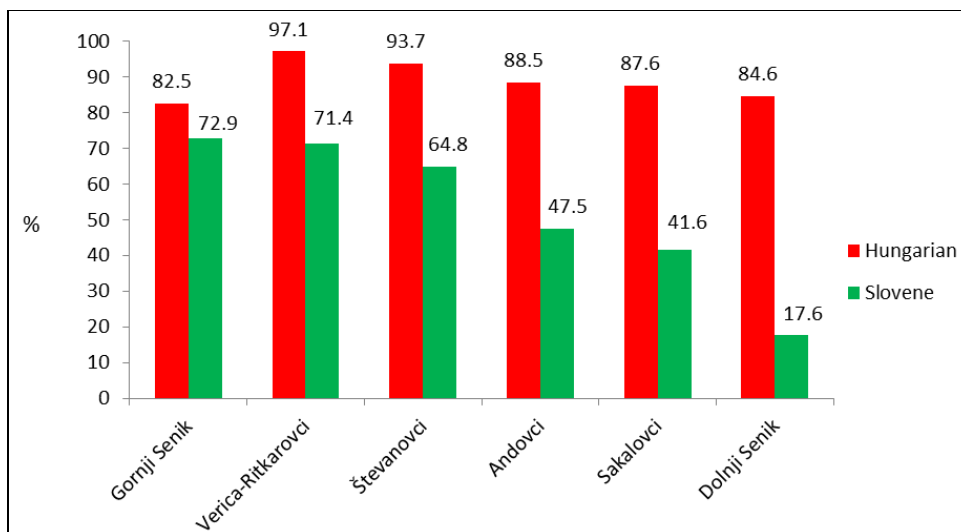


Fig. 2: The share of Hungarian and Slovenian population in villages of Porabje.
Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, Census of 2011.

Ten Slovenian nationality local governments were elected as the result of the election held on 12th October 2014 in Hungary. The local governments were established by Slovenians in six villages of Porabje and in Monošter, Szombathely, Budapest and Mosonmagyaróvár. Center of the National Slovenian Local Government (Državna slovenska samouprava) operates in Gornji Senik and there is only a representation in Budapest. Bilingual primary school and a kindergarten operate in Gornji Senik and Števanovci, a kindergarten in Dolnji Senik and Monošter and an associated kindergarten in Sakalovci. Professionals having Slovenian pedagogue diploma and Slovenian-speaking teachers work in every institution. There is possibility to learn ethnic Slovenian language in two secondary grammar schools in Monošter and the high-degree Slovenian language teaching takes place in Savaria University Centre of the University of West Hungary (www.slovenci.hu).

5. Settlement patterns

Settlement means an administratively independent unit in every case on the base of the most frequently applied criterion when standardization the Hungarian settlements. According to this on the base of spatial position of the houses the certain types diverse from each other.

Houses can be located in groups and sporadically (and between these two types in transition as well). The settlement consists of one single bigger group unit in the first case. These are the classic villages and towns. In the second case the settlements are built up by single houses so we cannot talk about closed core of settlement. The buildings are located sporadically in space and these form an administratively independent settlement. Villages of Porabje belong to this type (Fig. 3).

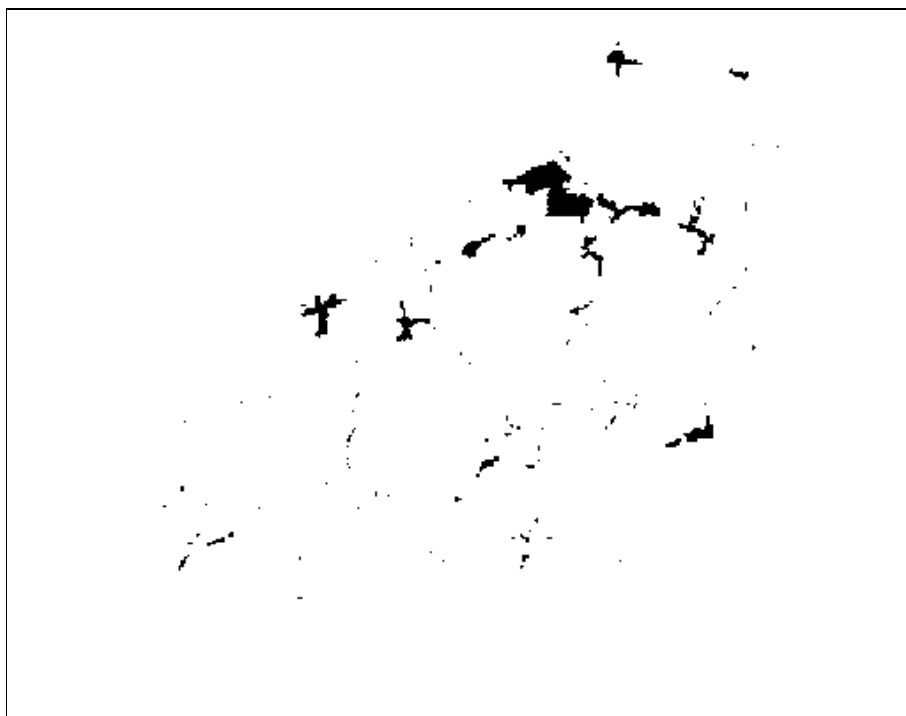


Fig. 3: Settlement patterns of Slovenian villages and Monošter.

Notation: The lines indicate borders of the settlements and the black spots indicate the interarea.

Source: Zentai, Kercksmár, Veress 2016.

Villages of Porabje are mainly sporadic settlements that were developed from granges where single homes are on the hillsides and combs originally. Every single house was surrounded by the pasture belonging directly to the property the kitchen garden and the orchard. Then the forest was the next. Raspberry plantations are found on the fringe of the forest. Lands without vegetation almost can be seen. The original landscape in case of many villages changed in the course of time by increasing the number of inhabitants of the settlement. The houses started to thicken and became such the so-called 'szeres' villages in Órség that means that no single houses but groups of houses built on the hilltops and combs. Lines of streets developed from the separately built homes and the lands in crop separated from the living area. Sporadic settlements remained only in Gornji Senik, Števanovci, Verica-Ritkarovci and Andovci nowadays (Fig. 4).

The most beautiful, most spectacular sporadic settlement Verica-Ritkarovci is located above 300-360 meters above sea level (www.ketvolgy.hu). The administrative area is 6,28 km² out of that the inner area is 13 hectares. The village with 15,5 persons / km² population density is one of the least densely populated settlement in Hungary. Huge green hills, forests and meadows are located among the sporadic houses (Fig. 5).

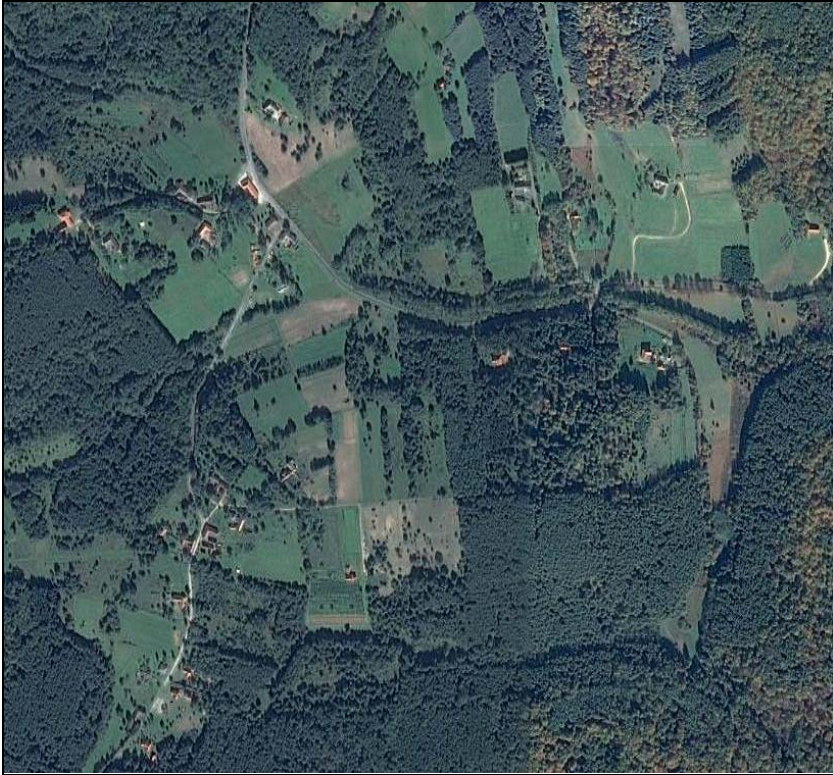


Fig. 4: Sporadicity in Andovci.
Source: mapygon.com.



Fig. 5: Lonely house in Verica-Ritkarovci.
Source: Zentai 2016.

The other part of the Slovenian settlements show the picture of a more close ribbon-plot village in the areas where cultivation is possible. There are not arables, pastures among the homes. Such like Dolnji Senik by nowadays (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Densely located houses of main street in Dolnji Senik.
Source: mapygon.com.

6. Folk architecture

The folk architecture and culture of Porabje carries parallel features with Órség but there is also its local uniqueness and characteristics. Comparing Porabje to Órség (that is not the same as Órség National Park because the area of the Natural Park is much bigger and involves the whole Porabje) as ethnographic landscape it can be said that one of the most significant difference was that houses were bigger in the Slovenian landscape but the furniture was simpler (Nagy 1998). Conformation of the fate and lifestyle of the nation settled down in the area of Porabje was determined by the natural environment basically. The landscape can be characterized by significant woodland (Zentai, Kercksmár, Veress 2016). The houses were built on the assart by the local people. The cultivated area gained by burning cut-over surrounded the houses like a ring. Wood was the natural building material in this wooded area evidently until the middle of the 18th century. Wood construction started to be neglected due to the forest protection measures of the landlords then the general provision number 1767 of Maria Theresa and the next severities of landlords from the middle of the 18th century. These restrictive measures were more enforced in the hilly area than in the area of Órség. Houses made of compact land and raw brick houses appeared here (Bíró 2016). ‘Open-fire house’ was widespread in Porabje like in Órség which represents the most ancient house type of this land. It has got only one huge living place with an opened stove (there’s no chimney at all). The stove was used for

heating, cooking and baking. The smoke left the place through the upper part of the door and the plank windows. The 'U-shaped building' also was very common in the hilly western part of Hungary. This structure was developed by the economic system based on animal farming. The inner place is defended by buildings around it against thieves and wolves. Three and four-sided pale houses were built out of that only a part of it remained later on. There is a house on the main street of the village in Verica-Ritkarovci out of that only the kitchen and the bedroom remained then it was completed with new building parts (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Bended layout building of pale house in Verica-Ritkarovci.

Source: <http://www.gatterfogado.hu/>.

Bended layout or 'L-shaped residential building' generally nor formed in this way but those were built as such. The longer branch of the building was used as residential house and the shorter one as farm building (Fig. 8). The separated chamber was typical porter's lodge the so-called 'kástu'. These houses were used for food storage not for living. Retting evaporators or hemp evaporators were separated buildings of the wealthy porter's lodge of Porabje and Órség where washing of canvas was prepared (Biró 2016).

Every house had own name in Porabje. These ancient more thousand names of houses reveal a lot of things. One group refers to the location of the house e.g.: Nákámlinî – people living in gravel place, Graboštjî – people living in the valley. Significant part shows occupation of the original inhabitants for example Goslárnî – The Fiddlers; Kováčinî – The Smiths; Lončárinî – The Potters; Mlijnârstjî – The Millers; Sâbaulinî – The Tailors. Names of houses hiding information about moving of people refer to ethnic origin e.g.: Kráincinî – The Krainaian; Rovátinî – The Croatians; Štajèrnî – The Styrians; etc. Other names invoke the social status or nickname of ancestors: Ercédjinî – The Dukes; Grofostjî – The Earls; Žlárinî – The Cottars etc. (www.galambdokter.hu).

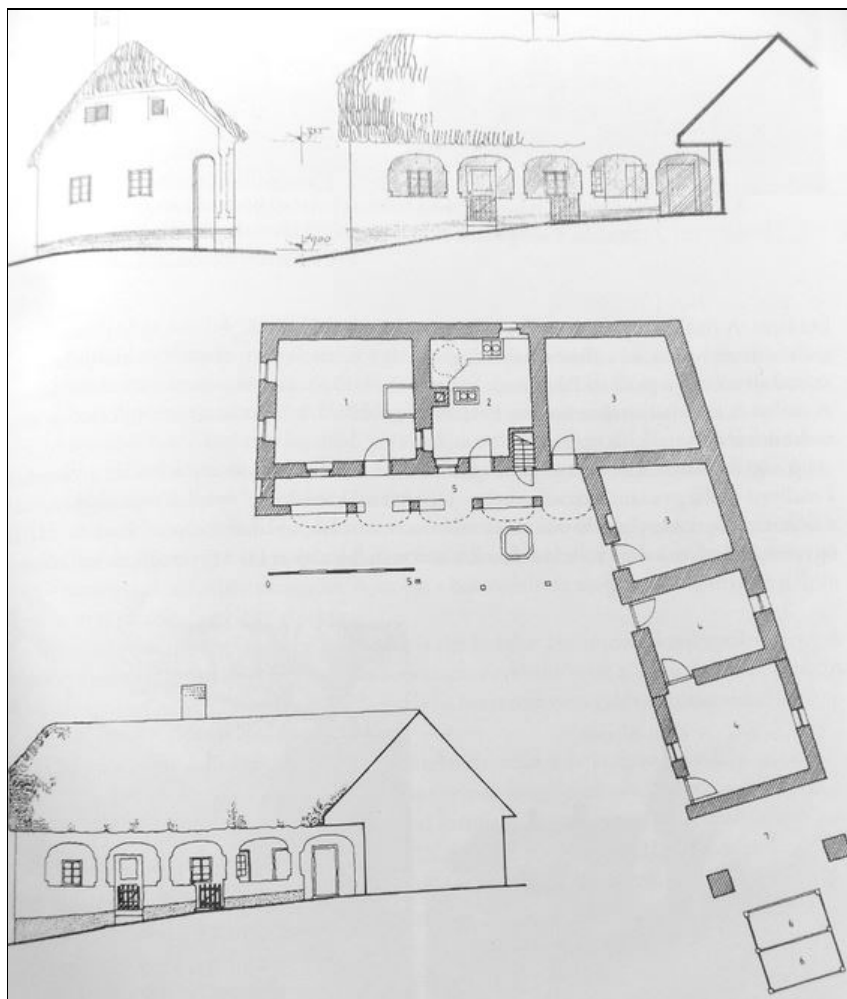


Fig. 8: Bended layout of house with porch, Andovci, 1973.
Source: Bíró 2016.

7. Development possibilities

Majority of villages of Porabje are sporadic and the number of inhabitants is also low. Except Gornji Senik all the small villages having less than five hundred people has many of the features of small village syndrome like as hilly landscape, poor transport links, quick and selective outward migration, ageing originating from old age structure, strong economic and social dependency on the central function settlement etc. Ethnic variability and border location that operated as a filter zone for decades complicate the situation in Porabje. Nowadays there are many forms of cross-border cooperation that is supported by the European Union. Several developments were implemented in the frame of Phare CBC (1999-2003) and Interreg III/A (2000-2006). Convention about promotion of the cross-border cooperation was signed in the first Hungarian-Slovenian joint government session between the local and regional authorities in 2007 then after two year preparation the Hungarian-Slovenian Cross-

border Joint Committee was formed in November 2009. Association of the Hungarian Slovenians founded the Slovenian Region Ltd in order to contribute in the frame of public interest activity of the company to the cultural, touristic and economic development of the Rába area (www.szlovenvidek.hu). The main projects were 'Neighbour to neighbour' and 'UPKAČ – Pearls of the tall trees'. The most important document of the cooperation is the Interreg V-A Slovenian-Hungarian Cooperation Program in the 2014-2020 economical period. The main objectives of the Program are better utilization of the natural and cultural values during cooperation in tourism, development of the local economy and preservation of the natural and cultural resources etc.

The main development possibilities and opportunities of Porabje are in the field of bio farming and tourism. Bio-production and local products have a market niche that has not been fully exploited yet. Local farmers, who manage farms in the Vend-region, can ask for support to cultivate their fields – if they do this in a nature-friendly way and conserve agricultural biodiversity (Csapó 2006). The unspoiled countryside with its rich forests and hunting grounds and an advantageous position at the open triple border between Austria, Hungary and Slovenia are factors which could enable successful development of farm tourism as a new sector. The nature protected area offers possibilities for creative tourism, active holidays on farms and cultural tourism (Baranyai, Csapó 2009). E feladatokban természetesen nem kerülhető meg az Őrségi Nemzeti Park. The National Park has an outstanding role in the economic development of the region, the growth of tourism and nature protection. The National Park is the constant organizer of farmer's forums, and helps the local farmers with guides introducing ecologically desired, sustainable farming practices. The National Park is the regional organizer of ecotourism, coordinating numerous programs and presenting nature trails (Baranyai, Baranyai, Tóth 2016).

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Summary

The Vend-region or Porabje in Slovenian is a very particular and special unique area of Hungary. The Slovenian minority living here with other nationalities primarily with Hungarians form the living population of the six classified villages. These villages were born from the former demesne lands that also played role in formation of the sporadic feature beyond history and natural, landscape features. It is significantly outlined on the map still today and in front of the visitor's eyes in case of several settlements. Porabje was one of the most isolated areas of Hungary for a long time in that the geopolitical situation after 1920 and the socialist development aspects of the decades after the 2nd World War also played role. Its closeness dissolved after the regime change thanks to the cross-border cooperation, application opportunities and taking the role of Órség National Park. All of these are the guarantee that these beautiful and diverse small settlements having unique natural and cultural values, and rich history in order to preserve much more besides their identity for the future.

