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SZEGED AS HINTERLAND BETWEEN 1915–1917

Summary. The article discusses six aspects, which identified the stability of hinterland. Beside the sparse bibliographical sources, it mostly uses primary archival sources like mayor documents of Szeged, council documents of Szeged and lord lieutenant documents of Szeged. Additionally, it uses Délmagyarország newspaper from the four daily newspapers of Szeged, which has more than 70 articles about the theme, that can reflect the daily life of during the period. It handles all topics properly in proportion and in importance. It describes in the ways of catering provisions of grain, flour, meat and eggs. In the theme of military aid takes a look to the value of sacrifice on this the donate skills in the city. It discusses another important topic as well, the situation of women and children who went to the factories after the men marched into the army and specifically what happened with the factories. The second major part of the article are the finance, the public security and the health care. The finance and the public security are good evidence of the well managed background of the city's needs. Inside of the health care is really important factor the ordinary health situation, defense against epidemics and activity of the field hospitals. As attachments and imagery, I tried to insert the archival documents, posters, pictures of the Móra Ferenc Museum which are connected with this theme and term.

Keywords: Hinterland, Szeged, Hungary, First World War, local history

Introduction

A person may assume, that we know almost everything about the First World War and it's an old topic, which we should close, as we can't find anything new. The centenary of the world war has shown us, that we had little knowledge from this time. Topic of the hinterland was one of the most popular. In Hungary every city started to research about their town during the Great War. Thanks to this, the microhistory started to be important again and help us to show, that

nothing was black or white during this wartime, the regions, different cities could react differently, especially the capital city. I started my research in this topic in 2016, as a competition work. At the time I thought I could do a complex study, but the hinterland topic showed, that it is broader and more difficult than just for quick research. Now I would like to present a part of this work and show how was the life in Szeged during this time and which difficulties they battled.



Fig. 1. Dr. Szilveszter Somogyi mayor of Szeged. (Source: Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged)

The chronological boundary of the study is 1915–1917. It begins with 1915, because the end of 1914 brought the most serious loss of lives. From then the obituaries also multiplied in Szeged. This time the lack of men in families and in workplaces became visible, and the first questions appeared between people about how the hinterland could last, but even with the knowledge that how they could persevere. There are several events that are part of the starting date. Szeged was declared an operational area from January 22nd, 1915 due to the war in Serbia, and the 46th Infantry Regiment of k.u.k. Szeged became part of the horrors of the front, first serving in Ukraine and Serbia, and later from June 1915 till 1917 they were in the Italian, Isonzo front line. On January 30th,

1915, the mayor György Lázár passed away and was succeeded by Dr. Szilveszter Somogyi (Fig. 1). For the closing date, I chose the importance of the military and emergency hospitals and reopened schools. In my opinion, the years 1915–1917 during the war were the most important stage in the adaptability of the hinterland to new challenges. Also, at that time the institutes and methods of the emergency situation started to form and work.

As sources, I used the mayoral and council documents of the Archives of Szeged and the articles from *Délmagyarország* newspaper. Since archival

sources are in some places incompleting I filled the gaps with relevant information from the press. Interesting cultural history addition: the lack of resources is due to the lack of paper in the 1950s, which forced archives to destroy documents by the political leadership.

Purveyance

We can say that food and its supply were the main tasks that a city's town hall had to provide. This is a cardinal issue that had an impact on all segments of life, similar to the issue of public security or the social situation.

The supply of grain, flour and bread, along with their production and transport, was the biggest task of the city. The supplies were very incomplete, as the soldiers had to be supplied by the (Hungarian) hinterland, as well as allied Germany and our partner Austria. From the beginning of December 1914, started the setting of food prices by the office, the requisition of grain, share flour and bread vouchers to keep normal life on level. The first major grain requisition was between April 15th–17th, 1915, ordered by the Ministry.¹ To oversee this, the police department had made a draft about the stock of grain in households. But the requisition wasn't just for the households, but for mills and breweries as well.² In this period the requisitions get permanent and hit mostly the egg barley makers, but they could get back some flour from the Ministry, because it was the main source for them. The requisitioned crops by the city were milled by Back Bernát and Sons mill.³ The Back mill was the most important mill in the area during the war, and most of the purchased crops were ground by them, making a great profit, making them one of the companies that became rich during the war. The data of the first major requisition: 1746 q wheat, 300 q rye, 100 q barley.⁴ The importance of the city is also shown by the spread of crops, which was seized by the National Economic Committee across the country. Szeged received 1662 q wheat and 383 q rye, more than some counties, such as Temes

¹ Hungarian National Archive – Csongrád-Csanád County Archive, Szeged: Mayor's documents (hereinafter: HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD), sign. IV.B.1407; 8210/1915.

² HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 1525/1915.

³ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 1730/1915.

⁴ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 3356/1915.

and Torontál counties, where Temes got 500 q wheat and 700 q rye and Torontál got 500 q wheat and 200 q rye.⁵

These data also shows that Szeged's food supply was better than in other cities and counties. Of course, this wasn't satisfying at the local level, compared to the prewar situation, which was shown by the citizens, who were sowing various vegetables in Rákóczi Square (Fig. 2, 3), which was an empty square at that time. Still, the situation was better than in most areas of the country.

This is confirmed by the decision issued by Dr. Szilveszter Somogyi on November 6, 1915, reducing the daily amount of flour to 2 kg per family (exceptions for egg barley makers). Soldiers were not allowed to shop, unless they are local citizens and buying for their families, thus preventing the inhabitants and stationed Czech soldiers here (k.u.k. 28th Infantry Regiment in Prague) from sending the rest of their rations to their relatives and families in other parts of the monarchy.⁶ This decision wasn't popular between the local military command. We know from the letters between the command and the town hall that the command didn't support the decision, because most of the soldiers didn't receive food, but got vouchers from the military treasury to redeem it for flour or bread. The mayor's office alluded to, that from August 15, 1915 purchased 910 wagons of wheat from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Commerce and Agriculture for one year, which should have been enough for the inhabitants. Till November, the city had received 510 wagons, which was barely the end of the month. The remaining 400 wagons of wheat would have been supplied by Warcrops Co., promising to deliver 60 wagons per month, but only 40 of them arrived, purposed only for the citizens, because the military was supplied by the military treasury. Despite this, the mayor's office and the local military command have agreed that the city will choose some bakeries for soldiers where they can redeem their vouchers for food rations, until the military treasury can take further action.⁷

The city set up a victualling office, for this a factory and later for them a professional council. These functioned until the end of the war, trying to supply the city. The local prices of the food were set by the victualling office.

⁵ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 4808/1915.

⁶ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 10376/ 1915.

⁷ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 11180/1915; 11541/ 1915



Fig. 2. Rákóczi square. (Source: Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged)



Fig. 3. Rákóczi square. (Source: Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged)

From the beginning of the office it was making losses, and its real meaningful activity was only to insure the food supply and setting its price, which was generally close to the ministry's price setting.⁸

Maximising or even lowering food prices has caused serious problems for the city. Battle against the expensiveness during that period was tilting at windmills. Several attempts and ideas were made to stop prices, but all of these ended unsuccessfully. It was thought that if Szeged and its agriculture area were to be commercially locked down, food wouldn't flow out, the city would no longer be in need of such imports, could be almost self-supplying. But an area like this couldn't be taken under control (Fig. 4).⁹

For food saving, the flour and bread rationing has been introduced country-wide to everyone who has access to basic food (Fig. 5). In Szeged, the rationing was introduced on April 1st, 1915. It can be a success that till April 17th, bread prices were able to be lowered by 44 pennies. Of course, this decrease was only temporary, but at least during the Great War the price of bread did not increase as greatly as that other products did. The perfectionize of the system was permanent,¹⁰ and from September 16th, 1915 was almost perfect, entered the flour and bread booklet as a voucher. Every family in Szeged, who needed public care (most of the citizens) was able to get a booklet. All families in need were assigned to a flour merchant or a bakery, where the booklet was addressed. That's the only place where they could redeem the ticket, not anywhere else. On the cover of the booklet there was recorded the name of the head of the family, his residence, the number of family members, the amount of food they were entitled to each day, the assigned shop and the booklet identification number. If the booklet was lost, it had to be reported, its ID number was deleted and then they got a new booklet with a new number. The booklet had 12 sheets (like months) and 30 or 31 lines were drawn on each page – depending on how many days were in the month – the daily dose was written, as on the front page. If the family redeemed a daily quantity, the merchant ripped the note out of it. It was like a raffle ticket.

⁸ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: Council's documents: IV.B.1406; 10127/1917; "Délmagyarország" 1916, January 16th, pp. 5–6; January 19th, pp. 3–4; January 20th, pp. 3–4; March 3rd, p. 3; March 10th, pp. 4–5; March 14th, p. 3.

⁹ "Délmagyarország" 1915, June 10th, p. 4; June 11th, p. 6; June 16th, p. 4; June 17th, pp. 3–4; August 20th, pp. 6–7; September 26th, p. 3; September 29th, p. 5.

¹⁰ "Délmagyarország" 1915, April 17th, p. 4.

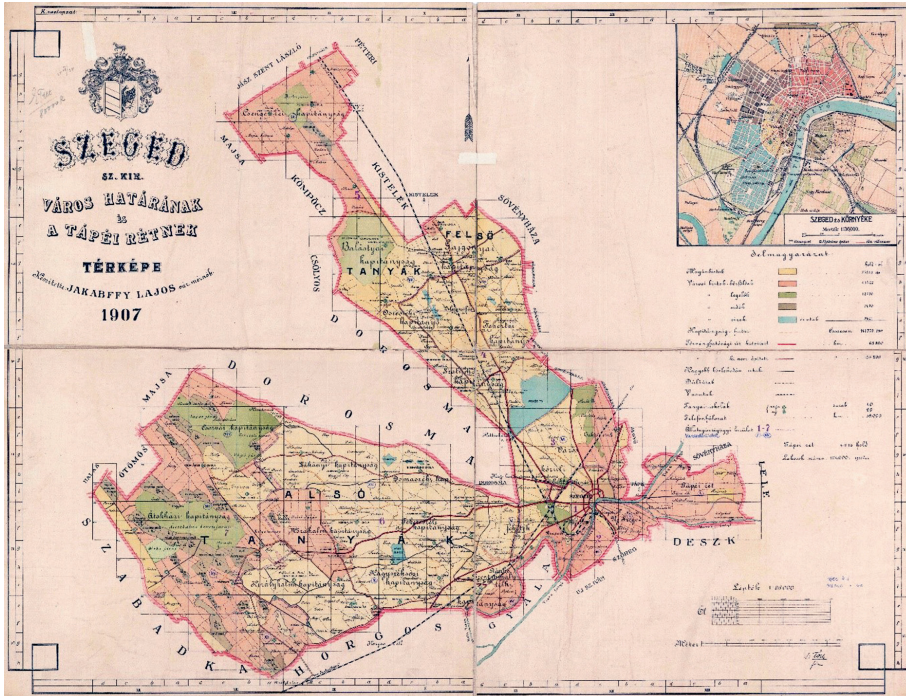


Fig. 4. Map of Szeged free royal city. The city and the agriculture area (Source: Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged)



Fig. 5. Bread-line in front of the victualling office (Source: Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged)

The redemption was not mandatory daily, it could have happened every week or every half-month, as families had money. The booklet could be transferred if a family no longer needed flour or had no money to redeem more. In this case, the remaining daily doses could be given to a family that needed additional doses.¹¹ The price of bread on July 30th, 1914 was 34 pennies, on July 2nd, 1916 it was 1 crown, by February 9th, 1917 it had already reached more than 1 crown 80 pennies. In more than 2,5 years, the price of bread has increased by 5,3 times.¹² Also made problem in food supplying the prisoners of war, who were deported to the city and the refugees from the other parts of the monarchy. So the city should supply for 130 000 people (10 000 refugees + 120 000 inhabitants).¹³

The consumption of meat in wartime was not as standard as the grain. That's why, it is not surprising that during the Great War the consumption of meat has fallen sharply. This is partly due to the greater need for meat on the front line and partly the restrictions of meat consumption in the hinterland and the increase of the price of meat. From July 8th, 1915, two days a week, Tuesdays and Fridays banned the consumption of meat.¹⁴ Later, from September 22nd, 1916, this regulation was supplemented by the ban on slaughtering two days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the use of meals, serving to shops and restaurants on Mondays, which requires the use of fat.¹⁵ Interesting that people move from the consumption of pork to sheep and lamb. It could be, because the pork was cheaper and it was profitable to get it to the front. This is also shown by the 1915's slaughterhouse count of Szeged's Meat and Market Co., which is compared to the 1914s data.¹⁶

If the third-year slaughter data of 1916 is compared to a third-year slaughter average of 1915, it can be accurately observed that the cuts have more than halved or even decreased by a quarter.

¹¹ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: Council's documents: IV.B.1406; 41355/ 1916.

¹² HNA-CCCA, Szeged: Council's documents: IV.B.1406; 13552/1916; "Délmagyarország" 1914, July 30th, p. 3; 1916, September 30th, p. 3; 1917, February 9th, p. 5.

¹³ "Délmagyarország" 1917, October 3rd, p. 3.

¹⁴ "Délmagyarország" 1915, July 6th, p. 5.

¹⁵ "Délmagyarország" 1916, September 22nd, p. 5.

¹⁶ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: Council's documents: IV.B.1406; 14180/1916.

Table 1

Slaughterhouse accounting, 1915 (in piece)

Year	Beef	Veal	Sheep, lamb	Pork
1914	9757	7110	29 755	39 874
1915	10 052	4277	32 248	24 815

The slaughterhouse data from April to July 1916 also shows the same.¹⁷

Table 2

Third-year slaughter data, 1916 (in piece)

1916	Beef	Veal	Sheep, lamb	Pork
April	476	435	2575	912
May	289	185	1785	652
June	221	303	958	762
July	221	359	615	932
Sum	1207	1282	5933	3258

Emergency support, aid

The aid was one of the most important during the war. It helped ease, eased the extra burden of war, inflation, and expensiveness. The level of support was determined by the Ministry of Interior and the Hungarian Royal Directorate of Finance. Dr. Szilveszter Somogyi didn't like the system considered good by the government. From his letter to the Finance Directorate on January 7th, 1915, we can read that he is critical of the time when the aid is scattered and referred. He thought that the citizens's aid and the most important they don't receive it in time. The mayor has requested that the city should determine the level of aid. This letter has been left unanswered.¹⁸

¹⁷ "Délmagyarország" 1916, August 3rd, p. 3.

¹⁸ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 816/1915; 1997/1916.

We know the amount of the support, in June, 1915 the basic amount was 78 pennies per day, per person. Our most accurate data is on the second aid for administrative personnel. This was for one year from November 1st, 1916, and the Ministry of Interior decided the amounts according to the category of people, divided into 4 groups.

- Close administrative staff: this included tax and publicans or customs. Their aid rate was between 308 and 840 crown per year.
- Administrative staff not closely involved: this includes, for example, registrar, librarian, music teacher, coachman, machinist, gardener, etc. Their aid was from 300 to 1320 crown a year. The 1320 crown was awarded to István Tömörkény, director of museums and libraries, more than the mayor got
- Administrative officials: this shall mean officials, doctors, councillors, messengers, prosecutors, office servants, the mayor, the police chief, the auxiliary and treating staff. They received between 200 and 1280 crown a year.
- Per diems: this is where each per diems is taken. They received 300 crowns a year uniformly. We know that one person received about 1–3 crowns a day, so this allowance is about half their salary.

Not everyone was satisfied with this, especially the per diems, who submitted applications for increase of their support, which resulted that their daily allowance being extended by 1 crown, giving them 2–4 crowns at least a day.¹⁹

Public support

In every important city, like in Wien, Bratislava, Székesfehérvár, Sieben, Budapest and also in Szeged had stood a statue of a soldier, which have tried to symbolize the service of human sacrifice, public subscription. These statues were made of wood or iron. Their goal was to encourage charity, to help the civilian population, to care for the widows and orphans of soldiers, who had gone to war. Anyone, who threw any donation into a box in front of the statues, as exchange for help could beat a metal scale into the wooden soldier. The movement was so successful that the wooden soldiers were completely covered by

¹⁹ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: Council's documents: IV.B.1406; 42826/1916.

the metal scales. The wooden soldier of Szegeď was the third statue in the monarchy, after Wien and Bratislava. The wooden soldier of Szegeď had stood publicly, in Széchenyi Square on September 8th, 1915. It was successful, the statue was/is almost fully covered.²⁰ (Fig. 6, 7)

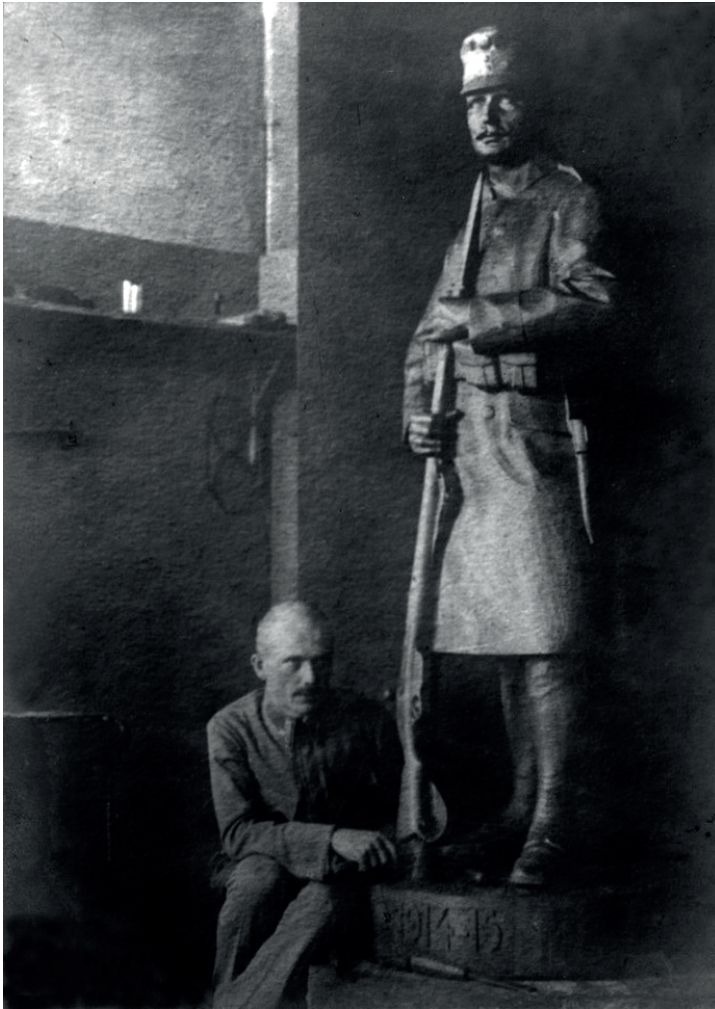


Fig. 6. The wooden soldier and his maker, István Szentgyörgyi
(Source: Móra Ferenc Museum, Szegeď)

²⁰ D. SZABÓ, *A nemzeti áldozatkészség szobra. (Avagy fából vaskatona)*, “Budapesti Negyed” 1994, vol. 3, pp. 59–84.



Fig. 7. The wooden soldier on the Széchenyi square
(Source: Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged)

Women, children, factories

At first, it may be strange that these three things are connected to each other, but they are closely connected. As a result of the war, most of the war-age men had been sent to the front. The Witch-Island (Boszorkánysziget) street was the first place in Szeged, where had to lose all its male inhabitants.²¹ According to the ministry's decision, the leadership of the city called all the factories in Szeged, like Bugyi's and Soós's iron foundry, Pálffy brothers' paprika factory, Back Bernát and Sons mill, that they can't stop the production in order to support the war effort, so that they can keep the fronts and the economy alive.²² This was very difficult to implement, so much so that in October–November 1917, several factories were forced to shut down due to the coal shortages.²³ While all the men were on front, the factories had given permission to invite the wives of the fighting workers to work instead of their husbands, or even hire female workers to keep the continuity of production. The women were needed not only in factories, also in military and emergency hospitals.²⁴ Unfortunately, this situation has the fact, that women were not at home in the household, leaving children alone. Children became more susceptible for street vagrancy and debauchery, which had integrated into their daily routines. The situation has been aggravated by two things. The first was, that children under the age of 15 were not allowed to go to the cinema without permission, so a kind of cinema ban has been placed.²⁵ It was explained by trying to protect them from the harmful side effects of watching movies, that they would not be able to react well to certain life situations, instead of finding a solution, they would only create panic. They were also banned from going to the pubs and smoking cigarettes.²⁶

The second was the expansion of military and emergency hospitals to heal the injured soldiers from the front. On the grounds of this expansion, the schools had to close to earn more space for the hospitals. There was a unified school, but

²¹ "Délmagyarország" 1916, February 22nd, p. 3.

²² HNA-CCCA, Szeged: Council's documents: IV.B.1406; 25279/1916.

²³ "Délmagyarország" 1917, November 8th, p. 3.

²⁴ "Délmagyarország" 1917, December 3rd, p. 3.

²⁵ "Délmagyarország" 1916, February 16th, p. 4.

²⁶ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: Council's documents: IV.B.1406; 11114/1916; "Délmagyarország" 1916, February 6th, p. 4.

it could take only limited number of children. Thus, children not only in the afternoons, but all day long were in the streets. These factors are followed by the juvenile delinquency increase. Against the crime the city organized children police.²⁷ Until January 1917, approximately 1200 youngsters had been brought to the justice. After all the struggles the city ordered to close the emergency hospitals and reopen the schools.²⁸

Public safety

Public safety was the third-most important factor in the life of the hinterland. The city administration also knew that if they could provide food and supply the citizens, they could keep public safety in order. It is important to mention that it was forbidden for the press to spread bad or scaremongering news, which could distress panic. We can say that the number of crimes has not risen as much as before the war. From the monthly reports of Police Chief József Szalay, we can see that the number of burglaries, thefts and murders during the war was among the same values as before. The juvenile delinquency were higher than in pre-war times. The abuse of food was of course an understandable behaviour. More people wanted to have cheaper food or flour merchants and bakeries wanted to sell their remaining flour illegally.²⁹ During the war, political leaders across the country, such as in Szeged, were worried about the danger of workers and socialists rebelling against power to starting a revolution (as it happened October, 1918). The Interior Ministry requested the lord lieutenant in the country to observe socialist party members, industrial and railway workers, socialist party leaders and to check the post of these people. József Szalay reports that there was no sign of any agitation. However, socialist leaders and their posts are still being monitored. The postmaster also has been informed about this matter, and if there is any emergency, they are prepared to take immediate action against them.³⁰ During the war, there wasn't any precedent, everybody focused on the common problems.

²⁷ I. TÓTH, *Gyermekszociális gondoskodás Szegeden a századelőn (1914–1918)*, "A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve. Studia Historica" 2000, No. 3, pp. 127–149.

²⁸ "Délmagyarország" 1917; January 4th, p. 3.

²⁹ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 5007/1915; 9786/1915.

³⁰ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: Lord lieutenant's documents: IV.B.1401; 268/1915.

Health



Fig. 8. Emergency hospital at School of Rókus (Saint Roch)
(Source: Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged)

The importance of health care is also indisputable. During the war the living standard decreased, which may have led to a rise in diseases, epidemics. The city council warned doctors to take extra care for illnesses, if necessary, start taking precautions. Thanks to the extra care, the diseases, like scarlet fever, rubeola, respiratory disease, brain and spinal cord inflammation, typhus couldn't spread that much to create an epidemic in the city.³¹ The number of births fell significantly during the war. The first observation on this can be found in the mayor's monthly report of April 1915, when the number of births fell sharply compared to March. Of course, because the war started exactly 9 months earlier.³² These numbers didn't get better this period, because later even more men went to the fronts. Also, the war and emergency hospitals played a big role in the life

³¹ HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 2693/1915; 5007/1915; 9164/1915; "Délmagyarország" 1915, October 8th, p. 4.

³² HNA-CCCA, Szeged: MD, IV.B.1407; 5007/1915.

of Szeged, changing in several ways the everyday life of the city. For example, the Red Cross, Catholic Woman Society, Jewish Woman Society, Freemasons operated emergency hospitals. The citizens, as much as they could, tried to help to donate to these hospitals.³³ In Szeged approximately 23 hospitals worked during the Great War (Fig. 8, 9). But we must not forget the downsides of the hospitals. As I mentioned earlier, most of the emergency hospitals were placed instead of schools. That's why the schools got closed, the children were in the streets and the juvenile delinquency increased. For this reason, after January, 1917 the emergency hospitals closed and schools reopened. We can say, that in these two years these emergency hospitals performed really well, but the rest of the wartime only the war and military hospitals were at work.³⁴



Fig. 9. Emergency hospital in the Black house
(Source: Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged)

³³ "Délmagyarország" 1914, November 8th, p. 3.

³⁴ "Délmagyarország" 1917, January 4th, p. 3.

Conclusion

We can say that Szeged has done well to supply the hinterland. The common goal was to keep the people at home calm and to stabilize their life prospects, to survive the trial of the wartime, the leaders of the city and the citizens worked together well, they have managed to avoid collapse. The previously calm rhythm of life was broken and they were able to adapt their life to the ongoing situation. The growing social tensions also were regulated by the city, that tried to find a solution for it. We can't say that the life was easy and perfect that time, but with sacrifices they could survive the bad, hard, though times with smaller problems and less chaos than the other parts of the country.

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