

Municipal Self-Government in Prešov during the 18th Century: Urban Administration in an Era of State Transformation

This research examines the transformation of municipal self-government in the royal free city of Prešov throughout the 18th century, a period that witnessed fundamental changes in state administration across Europe. Using Prešov as a case study, the research illuminates how the Habsburg monarchy's drive toward administrative centralization and rationalization intersected with traditional urban autonomies, making it a valuable contribution to understanding broader European patterns of state formation and administrative modernization in the 18th century.

The study's significance lies in its exploration of a critical transition period when traditional municipal self-government encountered new concepts of state administration. This transformation in Prešov reflects larger European trends in the development of modern state apparatus and bureaucracy, particularly in how enlightened absolutism reshaped relationships between central authority and municipal institutions.

The research focuses on three interconnected areas:

1. The institutional framework and operational mechanisms of municipal self-government, examining how traditional urban administrative structures adapted to new state requirements. This analysis reveals how Habsburg administrative reforms, particularly under Maria Theresa, represented part of a broader European movement toward administrative standardization and professionalization of public service.
2. The evolving relationship between municipal autonomy and state control, particularly through the Hungarian Chamber system and the Royal Council of Governor. This aspect of the research illuminates how the Habsburg monarchy developed new mechanisms of state control that paralleled similar developments in other European states, while maintaining distinct regional characteristics within the Hungarian kingdom.

3. The professionalization of municipal administration, including the transformation of electoral systems and office-holding patterns. These changes exemplify the broader European trend toward more rationalized and bureaucratic forms of urban governance, marking a crucial step in the development of modern administrative structures.

The study draws on extensive archival sources from municipal, state, and imperial repositories, providing a multi-layered view of administrative transformation. By examining how Prešov's traditional urban institutions adapted to, resisted, and were transformed by new administrative requirements, this research contributes to our understanding of how early modern European states developed their administrative capacities through interaction with existing municipal structures.

This research is particularly significant as it addresses a crucial gap in current historiography regarding the implementation of enlightened absolutist reforms at the municipal level. While much attention has been paid to state-level reforms in the Habsburg monarchy, less is known about how these changes were implemented and negotiated at the urban level, especially in the context of Hungarian royal free cities with their strong traditions of autonomy.

The research demonstrates how Prešov's experience reflects broader patterns in European urban governance during the 18th century, as cities throughout Europe navigated between maintaining traditional privileges and adapting to new forms of state authority. This makes the study relevant not only for Hungarian urban history but also for comparative European administrative history and the study of state formation processes.

Keywords: Municipal administration, Habsburg state formation, Administrative modernization, Prešov, Self-government, 18th century, Maria Theresa, Enlightened absolutism, European urban governance, State bureaucratization

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