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How Sofia became a capital or the story of a fatal attraction

Abstract: The article examines the issues of the demographic dynamics in the capital city of the new Bulgarian state during the period from the Berlin Congress to the beginning of the Balkan War. When Sofia was selected for new governmental centre of the principality, it represented a miserable and forgotten by the authorities provincial town, which was turned into a European city and a complete national centre by the Bulgarian government in few short decades. The study of the demographic changes accompanying this process, creates an appropriate occasion to delineate the main features of the modernization of the Bulgarian society.

Key words: demographic dynamics, statistics, Sofia, capital, urbanization, modernization

The following text is an attempt to present the population dynamics as part of a process of an extreme modernisation in the period of the last decades of the 19th century until 1912, during which Sofia becomes Bulgarian capital.¹ Until the beginning of the Balkan wars the new central city of Bulgaria is experiencing unprecedented renewal. With its metropolitan status Sofia gets a variety of new responsibilities as well. First of all, it should be transformed into ethnic Bulgarian city. At the same time it should establish its role as a center of the state administration, then an industrial center, a commercial factor of national importance and not at last, an example of social and infrastructural modernisation. Only for few decades Sofia achieves demographic, economic, cultural and civilizing domination over the entire country. How positive is that metropolitan quality and how could it be proven by the demographic dynamics?

Usually the demographic data is used as a main source for research of certain laws and trends in the existence of a given society. The long rows of numbers and

¹ Sofia becomes capital of the Bulgarian Principality on 3rd April 1879.

classifying concepts in which statistics turns its social life, allow us to make a relatively neutral assessment of the social development. Their formal remoteness from real life situations makes the profile of the social picture clearer and the dynamics of processes taking place in it – easily traceable. However, statistics is often accused of subjectivism and even of concealing the objective truth unintentionally with the lack of personal stories, cultural messages, everyday problems and entire social experiences. On the other hand, the benefits of statistics hardly need to be explained – not only because of the many facts that it provides, but also because it itself as such is a fact that reflects the level of institutional development and state priorities.

The main sources used here are the official collections issued by the Statistical Office of the Bulgarian state. This institution aims to collect relatively complete information about the demographic status of the new nation-state and to bring its work utmost closest to the European practices. Bulgaria adopts the model of the Belgian administration. The biggest challenge for statistics in the country is the continuously variable demographic picture due to permanent migration, increased urbanisation and changing lifestyle of a large percentage of the population.²

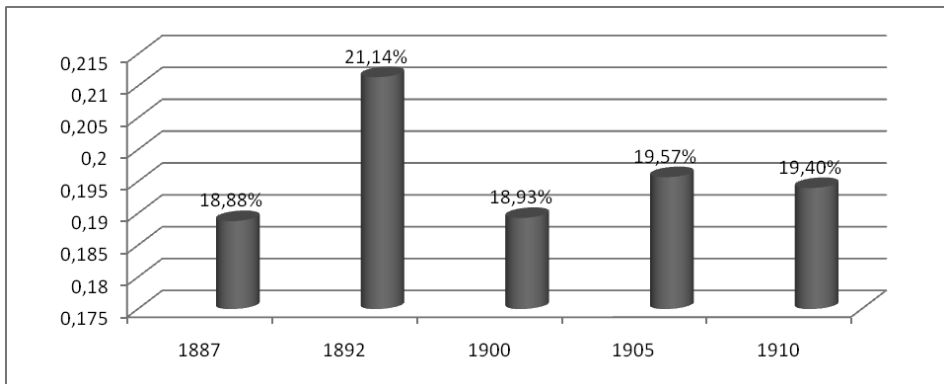
According to the Protocol of Constantinople Tophane Conference from 5th April 1886 Eastern Rumelia is annexed to the Principality of Bulgaria, except the Kardjali district, which is ceded to Turkey (along with its 1600 square miles and 32 350 inhabitants). The first census in Northern Bulgaria is made on 31st December, 1880, according to a law issued on 31st December the same year. It only applies to the Principality of Bulgaria. In May 1880 Eastern Rumelian Directorate undertakes a census in the autonomous region, but its results cannot be considered accurate as it is not done by regular tellers and not by established regulations. On 31st December 1884 an accurate census is already done in Eastern Rumelia according to newly accepted official regulations. Its results are processed by the Statistical Office of the Principality after the Unification of Bulgaria and published in 1888. The first general census in the united principality is made on 31st December 1887. The ones that followed are taken on 31st December 1892, 31st December 1900, 31st December 1905, and 31st December 1910.

Despite the regular censuses, which are conducted in the country, until World War I Bulgarian statistics is in the pioneer phase of its development. The data col-

² The following expose will skip quoting all the data from the statistical collections in order to keep the underline text simpler. Large part of the percentage ratios listed here are derived from personal calculations of the author. The basic sources of information are as it follows: *Обици резултати от преброяване на населението в Княжество България на 1 януари 1893 г.*, Sofia, 1897; *Обици резултати от преброяване на населението на Княжество България на 31 декември 1900 г.*, Sofia, 1/1906, 2/1905; *Обици резултати от преброяване на населението на Царство България на 31 декември 1905 г.*, 1 – 2, Sofia, 1912; *Обици резултати от преброяване на населението в Царство България на 31 декември 1910 г.*, 1, Sofia, 1923; *Статистически годишник на Българското царство 1910*, Sofia, 1911.

lected since 1880 is published as collections with the overall results of population censuses in Bulgaria. Although the necessity of statistical yearbook for the needs of the official state institutions or individuals is obvious, its first volume appears late in 1910, and the second one straight the following year. In the present study it is used data from both collections with the overall results, and the Statistical Yearbook of the Bulgarian Kingdom – year I, 1909 (1910), and year II, 1910 (1911). The yearbooks are based primarily on data collected by government statistics, as well as on official publications and archives of various state and public institutions, however, they cannot claim to be complete and systematic presentation. The editions of the overall results of the censuses held in the 80s and the early 90s of the 19th century are very general and provide information for particular municipalities, counties and districts; there is no attention paid to the single settlements. After 1897 the development of statistics marks a qualitative change which is most likely due to the approved on 15th December the same year “*Act for general censuses and counting of buildings and domestic cattle in the Principality of Bulgaria*”. Now the specific data for all urban settlements in the country can be examined. Despite the dangers of statistical errors and formality, this data is quite a reliable source by which the main demographic characteristics of the newborn phenomenon of Bulgarian metropolitan life may be identified, tracked and summarized.

Figure 1. Urban population in Bulgaria in the late 19th and early 20th century.



Bulgarian lands welcome their liberation with a relatively dense network of urban settlements. This condition is observed so far by the first census within the Principality. In 1880 within the new state 62 settlements are with urban status, and 19 of them have a population of over 10 000 people. Out of these, six cities have more than 20 000 people, eleven between 10 000 and 15 000 and two of them are between 15 000 and 20 000. Sofia is actually smaller than Plovdiv, Varna, Rouse

and Shumen. Among the cities with over 20 000 inhabitants only Sliven is smaller than the new Bulgarian capital.³ Dobrich, Dupnitsa, Kazanlak, Kyustendil, Lom and Samokov back in 1880 are with population between 5000 and 10 000 but at the beginning of the new century they all exceed 10 000.

It is interesting to note that the former sultan province Eastern Rumelia enters the united principality with more urbanized settlement structure, represented by relatively large settlements. In 1887 in its former territories are located 10 of 21 cities with a total population of over 10 000 people which forms 15,6% of the residents of the affiliated area. In the years following the Unification Plovdiv is still the largest city in the country with 33 032 inhabitants. In the same year within the eleven cities of Northern Bulgaria lives only 11,06% of its population. For the country that makes 12,4% of the residents of large cities.

Table 1. Ratio between urban population in the former territory of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia in 1887.

	Total population	Cities with more than 10 000 inhabitants	Percentage of the total population
Principality of Bulgaria	2 179 632	241 035	11,06%
Eastern Rumelia	957 873	149 499	15,60%

The third census in 1892 observes 84 urban settlements with a total population of 699 216 people. For statistics, however, it is difficult to reveal the exact number of the citizens of the country, as the total counts declare as “urban” every village with more than 2000 people. So in this typologisation enter many of the largest villages in Bulgaria and the number of “citizens” grows to the whopping number of 996 216. On the other hand, some of the oldest urban settlements which have lost some of their luster and inhabitants are still present in the list of cities for its traditional urban economy.⁴ The big cities with over 10 000 inhabitants are listed once again 21, five of them with more than 20 000 inhabitants, nevertheless, out of them only Sofia and Plovdiv are with more than 30 000. It is the first time when the capital becomes important in terms of demographics on a national scale and the first time it outstrips

³ Statistical collections are issued after the Unification and the data in them which refers to the time before 1885 is in summarized form in different sections for the Principality of Bulgaria and for Eastern Rumelia.

⁴ These are Messemvria (nowadays Nessebar), which in 1893 had only 1808 inhabitants and Klissura – with 1594 people. Often villages are converted into cities because of the need to establish an administrative center, and not infrequently in the new statute a political importance is implied. So in 1883 the old Bulgarian capital Preslav, which for centuries was marked on the map as a village again became a city. In 1889 the village of Haji Eles becomes a city which in 1894 was renamed Borisovgrad and the village Goljama Kutlovitsa in 1891 became a town named Ferdinand with 1773 people population.

Plovdiv with the number of its population. In 1905 it is already four times bigger compared to the data from the 80s and the next two biggest cities in the country can fit in it. (Table 2.)

In the early 20th century, the citizens in Bulgaria are almost 20% of the total population in the country, most of them – 13,12% in 1905 – live in cities with over 10 000 inhabitants. The statistics for the same year counts 26 of these settlements which gather 67% of the total urban population. Until the end of the examined period this trend continues and in 1910 there are 27 major cities where 70% of all the citizens in the country live. Most of them (13) are those with population between 10 and 15 000 people, five are between 15 and 20 000 and eight are over 20 000. In the head of the last group is Sofia, outstripping Plovdiv, Varna and Rousse whose growth rates started from the second half of the 19th century to decrease at the expense of the capital ones. (Table 2.) Despite the increase of urban population, instead of increasing the number of urban settlements in Bulgaria during the period remained almost unchanged⁵, which makes some authors talk about “de-urbanisation“ of the Bulgarian lands after the Liberation.⁶

But to what extent the proportion between city and village can be a unique indicator of the development of urban life? And how can we speak of de-urbanisation in the Bulgarian lands after the liberation? Undoubtedly, the separation of most of the territories of the Ottoman state led to major changes in the demographic structure of both village and city. Between 1880 and 1910 the country’s population increased by one million and three hundred thousand people, representing one-third (33,74%) of its residents on the eve of the Balkan Wars, which means an increase of 1,53% per year. Between 1887 and 1910, i.e. within roughly a generation, the population increases by 27,14% or 1,62% per year, and for the period 1892 – 1910 – by 23,5% or with an average of 1,71%. As the demographics of the urban structure of Bulgaria is concerned, the data for its dynamics is marked by certain volatility. Immediately after the Unification and in the period between the two censuses from 1887 to 1892 there has been a real demographic boom in the cities, while for the rest of the period the data is much lower than the national total. Thus, for the period from 1887 to 1910 statistics notes an increasement of the number of citizens with 1,78% per year,

⁵ Almost throughout the entire period, the number of settlements with city status is around 80.

⁶ The Thesis of the de-urbanisation in the Bulgarian lands became popular thanks to Michael Palairret in Палапе, М, *Балканските икономики 1800 – 1914. Еволюция без развитие*, София, 2005. (original edition *Balkan economies, the 1800 – 1914. Evolution without Development*, Cambridge, 1997), and some of his articles on the topic. His main argument is related to the facts about the decline in agriculture due to the changed political and economic situation after the Liberation in an otherwise highly urbanized (15 – 18%) and economic developed (by the standards of the Ottoman Empire) Bulgarian lands before. See for example p. 213.

and for the period 1892 – 1910 – with 1,03%.⁷ Overall balance shows that, though slightly, the rate of population growth is faster in the city than in the countryside. Between 1887 and 1910 the citizens increase by 29%, while the rural population – by 26,7%. This lead is mainly due to the dynamics of the development of large cities with population over 10 000 inhabitants, recording a growth of 40,3% for the same period, which means an average of 2,93 percent per year.

The trends in the urban development are a direct reflection of the changes that come as a result of the political freedom and socio-economic condition in the Bulgarian lands. The dense network of small pre-industrial centers characterized mainly by their Bulgarian ethnic character, existing before the Liberation, is in a decline. Remarkable in the past pre-industrial and commercial centers as Panagiurishte, Samokov and Gabrovo now stagnate in demographic terms. The smaller towns even have marked a decline in the number of their residents. From the 80s of the 19th to the early 20th century the number of inhabitants of Kotel shrank by a quarter. The same is the fate of Koprivshitsa.⁸ Bulgarian population takes an advantage of the opportunities found in the vacated by the Turks city space and gradually promotes their development, which to some extent explains the intensity of their growth. According to Christopher Bailey such a trend is typical for the process of urbanisation in rural communities in the 19th century, whose population has rapid rates of growth. These demographic changes lead to new forms of commercial and semi-industrial cities whose development is offset by the decline of the older centers, as it happens in Bulgaria.⁹ In this case, apart from better economic and social conditions, to the attractiveness of large cities also contributes the administration located there. After two decades of Bulgarian state the regional centers in the country are becoming cities with the largest population within their administrative units.¹⁰ Most of them are being shaped as important craft and merchant centers back from the Ottoman times, and the new state continues their development as industrial and government centers. Such examples give Varna, Plovdiv and Dobrich which mark the extraordinary growth

⁷ Between 1887 and 1892 the Bulgarian cities' population increased by 104 083 people, which makes 3,49% per year, while for the eight years until the next census in 1900 the number of citizens grew by only 45 762, until 1905 the increase was by 44 129, and until 1910 – by 50 145 inhabitants. Between 1887 and 1892 was recorded the highest population growth in the country – with 2,13%, which is reflected in the capital, as noted below.

⁸ Between 1884 and 1905 the population of Kotel declined from 6010 to 4362 (- 23,04%) and of Koprivshitsa – from 4811 to 3679 (-21,49%). Meanwhile in Sopot residents fell by 4,18% in Tryavna – with 5,69% in Karlovo – with 2,79%.

⁹ Bayly, C. *Die Geburt der modernen Welt: eine Globalgeschichte 1780 – 1914*, Frankfurt, 2006, p. 228. (Original edition: *The birth of modern world, 1780 – 1914: global connections and comparisons*, New York, 2004.)

¹⁰ Only Tarnovo makes an exception. In 1905 in the city lived 12 185 people, and in the western Danube port of Svishtov – 13 439. At the end of 1899 the old Bulgarian capital was passed over by the railway line Sofia – Varna, which passed through the neighboring Gorna Oriahovitsa.

for the country in the number of residents around the year 1905 in comparison with 1880 – a growth by 52,4%, 36,7% and 60,9%.¹¹

In order to better explain the dynamic development of the Bulgarian town in the early decades of free public life, we have to see what happens with the Bulgarian village. With the conclusion of the Ottoman rule began a migration processes that led to major changes in the settlement structure in the country. To greatest extent the demographic dynamics reflects on the settlements in northern Bulgaria, and fewer in the south. Many villages in the northern regions of the Balkan Mountains, inhabited by Turkish, Cherkess and Tatar population were depopulated or totally disappeared. There were many cases in Bulgarian villages whose inhabitants left them entirely. According to Georgi Georgiev, the depopulated villages in these areas reach nearly a quarter of the total for the country.¹² In their place, of course, appear new, particularly in the lowland areas, but more remarkable is the growth of some of the other still existing old Bulgarian villages. Immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, Serbia, Hungary and Romania settled there and formed new neighborhoods, leading to the development of those settlements, some of which soon began to resemble towns of agrarian type.

The economic changes taking place in the village along with the political liberation, are usually explained by historiography as “agrarian revolution”¹³. It leads to widespread fragmentation of agricultural land, the vast majority of which back under the Ottoman rule is a possession of large owners (chifliks), most commonly Turkish managers and owners who rushed to sell it or just left it with the onset of the Russian troops. So the Bulgarian peasants acquire many small and scattered pieces of rural land.¹⁴ For the new owners this land becomes a symbol of the liberation from economic oppression of the old Ottoman system, but yet its successful management was a major challenge for them. In the last decades of the 19th century bank loans for agricultural development which are so well known in Europe remain unattainable practice in Bulgaria. This pushes the Bulgarian peasants to borrow from moneylenders and accordingly to acquire long-term debts. In post-liberation Bulgarian villages as a whole lack modern equipment (in the late 19th century there is neither iron nor

¹¹ There are also examples of the opposite. One of the most important cities of the Ottomans in the Bulgarian lands – Shumen, lost its place in the new country, and between 1889 and 1905 declined in the number of residents with 3,85%.

¹² Георгиев, Г. „Преустройство на традиционната селищна система в резултат на Освобождението“, In: *Исторически преглед*, 5 – 6, 1977, p. 112.

¹³ See: Даскалов, Румен, *Българското общество 1878 – 1939 г.*, 1, 2005, p. 255 and the literature referred to therein.

¹⁴ Maybe Edward Dacey is right when describing Bulgaria in the late 19th century as a country entirely permeated by small holder mentality and rural way of life that was convincingly moving into the city, and this is one element of the Bulgarian modernisation. See: Dacey, E. *The Peasant State. An Account of Bulgaria in 1894*, London 1894.

semi-iron plows, and on the eve of the Balkan War only one fifth of the farmers have acquired such) and efforts to make rationalization and to achieve better productivity remain minimal. The economic and financial crisis of 1898 – 1902, in Bulgaria is followed by years of economic expansion and change for all sectors in the country. The village farmers gradually absorb relatively modern operating principles, and agricultural loans already grant them some security for utilization and exploitation of larger lands. At the end, for almost 80% of the Bulgarian population the village before the wars remains if not the best at least the safest place to live in. Small proportion of them risk starting a new one in the cities and even less in the capital.

Table 2. Population growth in the first four cities in Bulgaria in absolute terms.

	1880	1887	1892	1900	1905	1910
Sofia	20 854	30 501	46 593	67 789	82 621	102 812
Plovdiv	33 442	33 032	36 033	43 033	45 707	47 981
Varna	24 555	25 256	28 179	34 922	37 417	41 419
Rousse	26 163	27 194	28 121	32 712	33 632	36 255
Total for Bulgaria	2 007 919 ¹⁹	3 154 375	3 310 713	3 744 283	4 035 575	4 329 108
	860 910 ²⁰					

At the beginning of the century the Bulgarian capital occupies a relatively small (even for the Balkans)¹⁷ share of the total population by collecting only 2,05% of it. Around 10,4 percent of all urban dwellers in the country and 15,6% of those living in large cities with more than 10 000 people live there. The increase of the capital city is impressive mostly because of the insignificant dimensions at the beginning of the period compared to the entire urban situation in the country. The fastest growth of

¹⁵ The Data for the general population in Bulgaria in this column refers separately to the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia.

¹⁶ The Data for the total population is from 1882, the one from 1880 is missing.

¹⁷ In 1910, already living in Sofia is 2,4% of Bulgaria's population, but its share nationwide remains small compared to Belgrade (3,1%). Bucharest did develop as a true Balkan giant counting 4,7% of Romania's population, but failed to reach the proportions of London and Paris at the same time (7,2%). Solely, Athens managed to get close to these values, collecting 6,3 percent of Greeks in 1907. Data from: Lampe, J. "Modernization and Social Structure: The Case of the pre-1914 Balkan Capitals", in: *Southeastern Europe*, 5, 2/1979, pp. 13–14. (further: Lampe, J., "Modernisation and Social Structure...")

metropolitan population is recorded in the first decades after the Liberation.¹⁸ During the first thirty years of its new story Sofia increases five times in size, while the three largest cities in the country have failed even to double their population in that time.¹⁹ The expansion of the Bulgarian capital makes an impression in comparison with other Balkan neighbors as well. Between 1880 and 1912 Sofia grows by an average of 5% per year, which is twice the rate of Belgrade and even Bucharest for the same period.²⁰

Figure 2. Population growth in Bulgaria in the four largest cities in the country from 1887 to 1910 as percentage graphics.

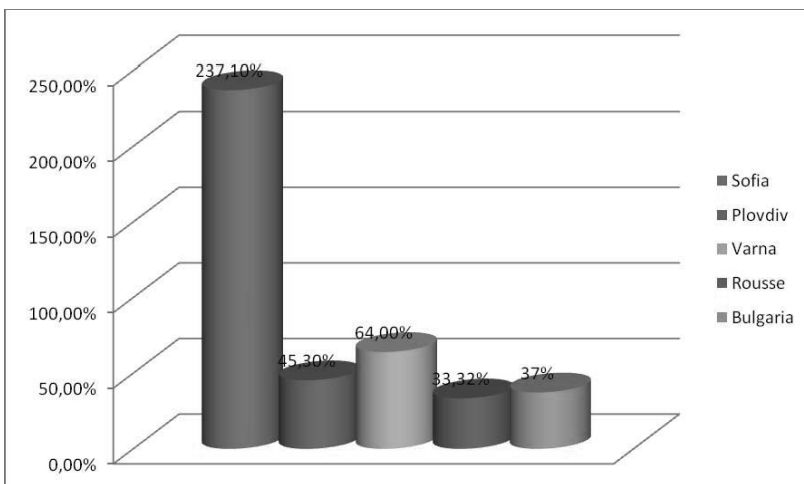


Figure 3 reveals that in the early 80s of the 19th century only Plovdiv resembles a real demographic center of the territories whose center it is. But after the Unification (1885) only Sofia manages to maintain its upward position to the new demographic conditions in the principality and is the only one in the list of largest cities with a steady increasing demographic growth. Between 1887 and 1910 the population of the capital increases by 237,1%. By all Bulgarian cities, which in the early 20th century can be marked as “large” for this lapse of twenty years or one generation only Bourgas notes a similar pace in the growth of its population – 159% and this represents an

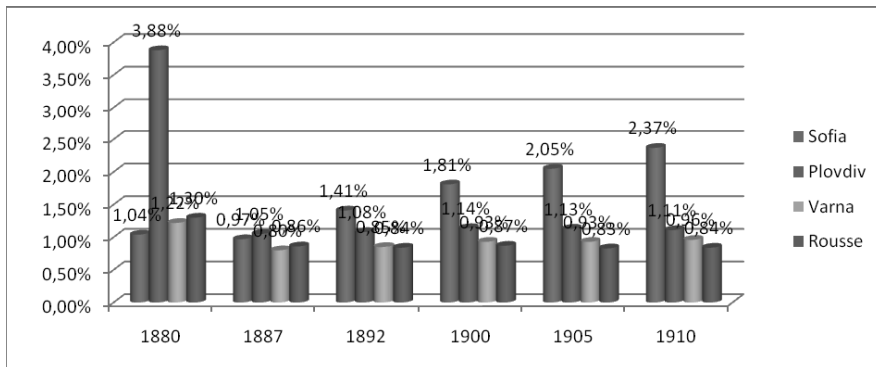
¹⁸ Between 1880 and 1887 the capital’s population increases by 6,9% on average annually; 1887 – 1892 – by 10,1%; 1892 – 1900 – by 5,7%; 1900 – 1905 – by 4,4%; 1905 – 1910 – by 4,9%. Data from: *Статистически годишник на столица София 1934 – 1941*, Sofia 1942, p. 7.

¹⁹ In fact amongst the big cities such achievements have only Bourgas (which in 1880 has 5865 inhabitants and in 1905 they were already 12 946) and Pleven with 11 474 in 1880 and 21 145 in 1905.

²⁰ Lampe, J. *Modernisation and Social Structure...*, p. 23.

outstanding example of urbanisation in the country. If we look at the data for a wider period of time, its demographic boom makes even greater impression. Immediately after the Liberation the town was obscure fishing village with about 3000 people population – mostly non-Bulgarians, in 1887 – 5749 people live there and in 1910 the citizens of Burgas are already 14 897, most of which – Bulgarian Thracian refugees from the nearby areas remaining under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

Figure 3. The population of the four largest cities as a percentage of the total for Bulgaria.²¹



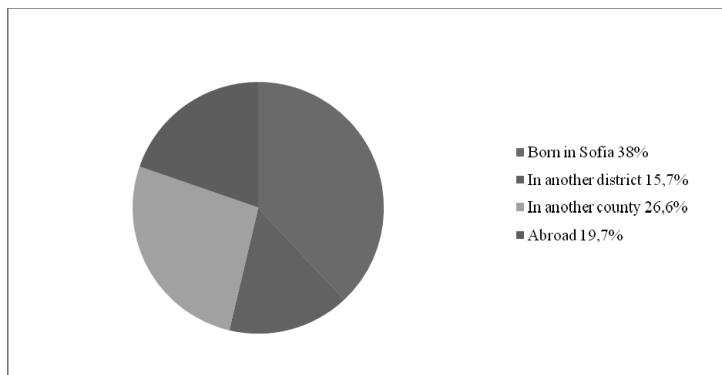
From all the remarks made so far it becomes clear that perhaps Sofia has the conditions to evolve into a truly urban environment, taking into account of course the modest capabilities of the Balkan societies. In fact, during the examined period the Bulgarian capital stands on the top of a long list of big cities, amid which it stands out more due to its economic and administrative functions, rather than to the size of its population. If we accept the claim of Bayley that urbanisation is a process that reflects the growth of the share of the population in cities with more than 10 000 inhabitants and mostly reflects the cultural change that leads to the increasing dominance of urban over rural values and simultaneously creates conditions for the emergence of new social relations and more intensive exchange of information²², in the capital of Bulgaria such a qualitative social changes should be mostly expressed, but certainly they can be observed in other major cities as well.

²¹ For 1880 the percentage of Plovdiv reflects only the comparison with the population of the autonomous region of Eastern Rumelia, and Sofia, Varna and Rouse – the comparison with the population of the Principality of Bulgaria.

²² Bayly, C. *Die Geburt der modernen Welt: eine Globalgeschichte 1780–1914*, Frankfurt 2006, p. 228 (original edition Bayly Christopher. *The birth of modern world, 1780-1914: global connections and comparisons*, New York, 2004).

In fact, compared with the population of Plovdiv, Varna, Rousse, which always stand at the top of the list of major urban centers in the country, Sofia residents have the most to learn of urban life. In the beginning of its history as the capital of the new Principality the native population of Sofia is only 11 395 people, representing 55,6% of all its inhabitants. Among them 4146 are Jews, 788 – Gypsies and 535 – Turks. According to statistical calculations, the Bulgarians should be about 5750 people, which data is confirmed by the ecclesiastical lists of that time.²³ Later the city begins to grow rapidly as an annual average for the period from 1880 to 1905 new 2367 people start living in it, of which 735 are born there, and the outsiders are 1629. In 1905, only 38% of Sofia residents are born in the capital, 15,6% come from another district in the same county, and 26,6% are born in another district of the country. During the same year 16 284 residents born abroad are counted in Sofia, representing 19,7% of its population and 13% of all urban residents in Bulgaria who are born outside the country. For comparison, the reckoned by their birthplace total for Bulgaria is 82,74%. For the more mobile urban population the number is 69,25%, much more than in Serbia most likely due to the traditionally existing urban culture in the Bulgarian lands. In national terms, 3,49 percent of the population has migrated from one district to another, and in urban terms – 4,69%. Only 4,39% of the entire population of Bulgaria in the early 20th century, or 10,76% of the citizens have moved from one county to another, and 7,52% have arrived from abroad, with country average percentage 3,11%.

Figure 4. The population of Sofia according to the place of birth in the time of the census of 1905.



²³ Data from: Иширков, А. „Статистически бележки върху населението на София“, in: *Списание на Българското икономическо дружество*, IX, 8 – 9, 1905, p. 504.

The largest part of immigrants to the Bulgarian lands arrives from the Ottoman Empire – mainly from the populated mostly by Bulgarians areas of Macedonia and Eastern Thrace. Large part of the settlers from the Ottoman territories, mostly from Macedonia, is seeking urban settlements. According to the data from 1905, of all the 74 390 people from the remaining under Ottoman rule Bulgarian lands, 32 763 prefer to live in cities. In Sofia have settled 9576 people from them, forming 11,6% of the metropolitan population. Among the rest “foreign-born” the most significant is the number of those from Russia, Romania and Hungary, who go to live mainly in the countryside, while migrants from inland areas of Turkey, Serbia, Austria and some Western European countries prefer the city. By the long statistical tables it is difficult to ascertain how much of these “foreigners” are Bulgarians who return to their free country or foreign nationals who are looking for new opportunities in the post-liberation Bulgarian environment. The indicator for “citizenship” gives some more specific information in this regard. Foreign nationals in the country in the early 20th century are about 24% of the whole population and about 7% of the urban residents. In time, their number decreased and in 1910 their share in the cities is only 4%. In the capital, the absolute numbers for almost 10 years do not change – a little over eight thousand people. In 1900 they include 4246 Turkish citizens, 365 Greek, 588 Serbian, 1887 Austro-Hungarian, 182 Russian, 210 Romanian, 174 French, 265 Italian and 428 others. Being 12% at the end of the 19th century, in 1910 their share is already 8,5%. In the other three largest cities in Bulgaria the foreign citizens have relatively larger share in the shaping of their demographic image. In 1900 in Plovdiv they are 11%, in Varna – 19% and in Rouse – 14%.²⁴

Even more diverse picture of the metropolitan population presents the data for the native language of its inhabitants. By Table 3 it becomes clear that most often heard languages after the Bulgarian in Sofia are Jewish (i.e. Spaniel, which is spoken by almost all the Jews in Sofia) and Gypsy. The number of the representatives of these two communities for three decades is increased about three times, but their share in the metropolitan population is greatly reduced at the end of the period at the expense of increasing the majority of residents whose native language is Bulgarian. The same trend is observed also with other non-Slavic language speaking residents of Sofia – mainly French, German, Italian, Hungarian and Albanian.

²⁴ Ten years later, their share of the total population of Plovdiv is 7,5%, of Varna – 13%, of Rouse – 11%.

Table 3. The population of Sofia for a period of thirty years by native language.²⁵

Native language	1880				1900				1910			
	men	women	total	%	men	women	total	%	men	women	total	%
Bulgarian	8171	5024	13195	64,6	29751	21594	51345	77,8	44896	36610	81506	79,3
Jewish	2013	2133	4146	20,2	4096	4133	8202	12,1	6101	5961	12062	11,7
Gypsy	407	381	788	3,9	839	803	1642	2,42	1150	1093	2243	2,2
Tsintsar ²⁶	180	45	225	1,1	458	281	739	1,09				
Romanian					64	120	184	0,27	524	505	1029	1
Greek	167	79	246	1,2	409	304	713	1,05	257	255	512	0,5
Turkish	358	177	535	2,6	353	128	481	0,71	152	90	242	0,24
Serbian	143	83	226	1,1	247	184	431	0,64	385	259	644	0,63
Armenian					237	102	339	0,5	283	192	475	0,46
Russian					105	102	207	0,31	109	159	268	0,26
Other Slavic ls					236	311	547	0,8	456	511	967	0,94
Other non-Slavic	730	410	1140	5,47	1472	1537	3009	4,44	1322	1542	2864	2,8

At the end of the period, according to the native language of its inhabitants the capital is closer to the national average than to the one of urban population. Nationally, 18,77% speaks a language other than Bulgarian, while for the urban population as a whole they are 201 810 people, or 24,32% for 1910. In the largest city in the country only 20,7% of residents have native language other than Bulgarian. Sofia in this respect makes an exception to the trends observed in the other significant cities in the country. At the same time 31,7% of the residents of Plovdiv and 40,8% of those in Varna are with different from the Bulgarian native language.

The same correlation can be observed with the data for the national affiliation, which almost replicate those of the native language. In the late 19th century, 77,14% of the people in Bulgaria are identified as Bulgarians, 71% of the urban population and 75,7% of Sofia. With its development as a political center of the young Principality the population of Sofia is becoming with more prominent Bulgarian nature, which is not typical for the other two largest cities in the country. (Figure 5) In contrast to the citizens of Sofia, only 45% of the citizens of Varna, 60% of the citizens of Plovdiv and 58% of the citizens of Rousse for 1900 are recorded as Bulgarians. The largest part of non-Bulgarian²⁷ urban population consists of Turks, Greeks, Gypsies, Jews and Armenians, followed by numbers of Romanians, Tatars and an aggregated group of

²⁵ Data for 1880 from Иширков, А. *Op. cit.*, p. 506.

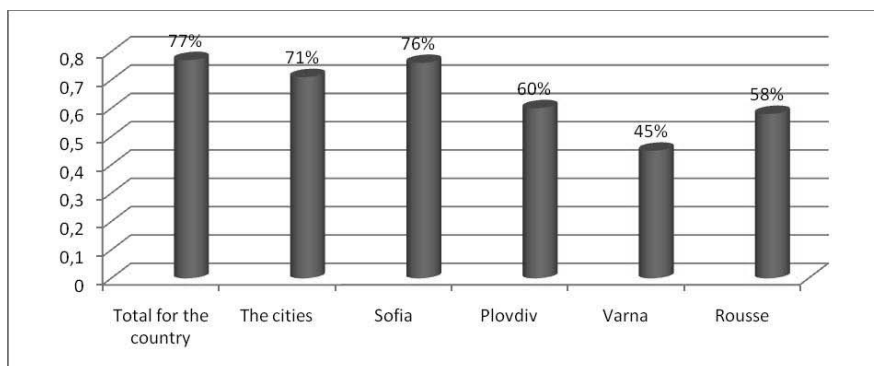
²⁶ For 1880 the data on the number of Sofia residents whose native language is Tsintsar and Romanian is united.

²⁷ This definition is used to refer to all members of the population who are with different from Bulgarian ethnic background. Many of them are born in Bulgaria and their ethnic groups for centuries

representatives of various European nations. In contrast to Plovdiv and Varna, where Turks and Greeks form the largest share of non-Bulgarian population, and then come the Jews and Armenians, in the case of Sofia, the Jewish ethnicity occupies the leading position amongst the representatives of non-Bulgarian communities in the city. (Table 3.) During the first decades of the history of Sofia as capital they represent more than half of its non-Bulgarian citizens and their share remains constant throughout the period. By the end of the period, the Jewish community in Plovdiv goes ahead of the Turkish and Greek population in numbers and the Bulgarian nationality in the city is increasingly dominating with almost 69% on the eve of the Balkan War. In Varna even at the end of the period the Turkish population is the most numerous amongst the non-Bulgarian population. The Armenians sharply increase in numbers in the first decade of the 20th century at the expense of the Jews, whose numbers are dramatically reduced by more than a half compared to the end of the previous century. Thus, Turks, Greeks and Armenians constitute 28% of the population of Varna city at the beginning of the new century, while the Bulgarian population is rising to the modest 59%.

The data for the religious appurtenance in Sofia reconfirm just the outlined trends. In the late 19th century 53 506 Orthodox Christians live in the capital, and they represent 79% of its population. On the usual second place with 12% rank are placed its inhabitants professing the Jewish religion, and on the third with 3,7% are the Catholics, the majority of which are of foreign origin. Nationally, 80,6% of the population professes Orthodox Christianity. The largest share amongst the non-Orthodox in the country occupy the Muslims who are 17% of all the residents in Bulgaria in the late 19th century, and the Israelites are on the distant third position with 0,9%. In Sofia, the proportion of Muslims is only 3% of the population, and with this the city is an exception since its early years as a capital, while the other major cities follow the general trends of the country. In Plovdiv the Orthodox religion is professed by 62% of the residents and Islam – by 16%, about the same is the ratio in Varna – 66% to Orthodox and 17% to the Muslim religion. At the end of the period, the ratio between the main confessions in the country is maintained but the demographic development affects mostly the Eastern Orthodox citizens of the Kingdom, which in pre-war years occupy 84% of the total population, followed by Muslims – with 13 percent and Jews – by 0,9%. During this period 81% of the citizens of Sofia are Orthodox, 12,5% profess Judaism, while the proportion of the Catholics has dropped to 2,6%.

have been a traditional part of the public image of the Bulgarian lands, so that the definitions “foreign” or “foreigners” in this case would not be adequate.

Figure 5. Nationality “Bulgarian” in 1900.

The influx of people to the independent state remains high until the end of the period and affects all the elements of the social structure in the Bulgarian lands. In the late 19th century the male population in the country prevails and this is mainly due to the high number of Bulgarians who arrived from the remained under the rule of the Ottoman Empire Bulgarian areas. According to the data from the Census of 1900 from all 59 689 Bulgarians who are born outside their home country, 33 447 are men from Macedonia and Eastern Thrace, 15 869 of whom have gone to live in the city. Ten years later, the ratio is almost the same – from 78 512 Bulgarians who are born abroad, 38 710 are men from the Bulgarian territories under the Ottoman rule, of which 19 148 have gone to live in the big cities where they comprised 17 051 from the male foreigners. With no other nationality in the country there is such a striking difference in the gender ratio. Among the Turks, Greeks, Armenians and Gypsies the men dominate according to the data both the population throughout the country and the one in the cities but the percentage difference is too small to be a determining trend for the gender dynamics of the population.²⁸

Although one of the most characteristic features of the social modernisation in the 19th century is the large proportion of young unmarried men in the urban areas, at the end of the century in the Bulgarian city live only 3,45% more representatives of the male gender. Despite the great number of urban settlements in Bulgaria they are rarely able to differentiate from the typical agricultural country look that defines the work commitments of their inhabitants and the absence of movement within them. The vast dynamic in the demographic structure is usually associated with the rapid development of the opportunities for economic realization, which involve mostly the

²⁸ Among the Turkish population in the late 19th century in Bulgaria the men are only with 2% more than women. The men Greeks are 1513 or 2,27% more than the women Greeks, and the men Gypsies – with 2,4%. Only the Armenians make an impression with 16,4% more male population, but it is only 2395 people nationwide.

male population. If the higher number of the men can be an indicator of economic and social progress, Sofia and Burgas are the leaders of the country in this respect, accordingly with 12,67% and 19% share of the male population in 1900, when the inflow to these cities is with still lower levels than the one in the 80s.²⁹ Despite their size and central position Varna and Plovdiv cannot boast similar values – they have respectively 7,6% and 4% for the year.

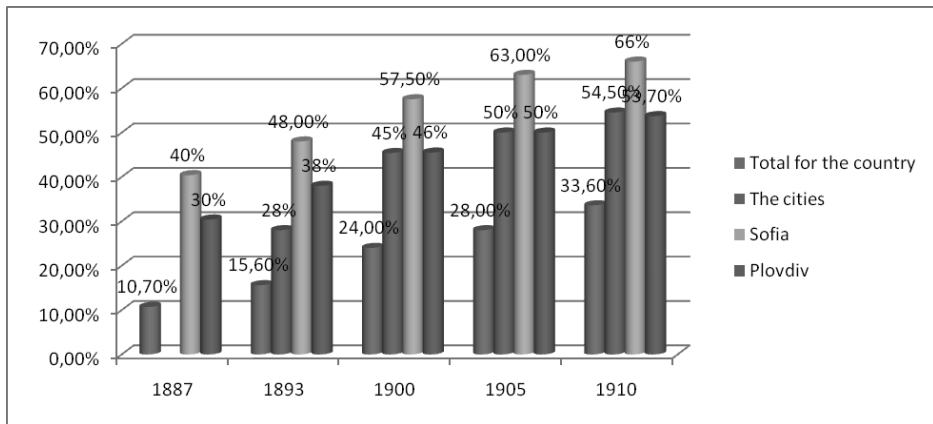
The dynamics of the socio-economic conditions in Bulgaria in the late 19th and early 20th century reflects the level of literacy among the population. For the condition of the post-Ottoman societies in the Balkans, the country has a relatively long tradition of education back in the Ottoman period, especially when the enlightenment struggles begin in the first half of the 19th century, when the Bulgarian education becomes a matter of self-initiative. Indicative in this respect is the fact that the network of primary schools in the country in the late 19th century owes its existence almost entirely to the municipalities and their inhabitants.³⁰ The data for the total literacy of the Bulgarian population is impressive, considering the relatively late start in the organization of a modern, educational system in the country.³¹ In the early 20th century in primary schools throughout the country are recorded almost 7% of the Bulgarian youth. The participation in the educational system is not a prerequisite for entering into the statistical column “literate”. “But usually” – writes a contemporary of the late 19th century – “anyone is considered literate if he only knows to read and write; and this knowledge is not uniform: some are capable only to read a little, others know how to read and write, others have done only two or three classes and so on. This is how literacy was understood at the time of the census and we have no doubt that all those who only knew how to read and who in fact were probably very few are marked and recorded as literate.”³²

²⁹ The data of the censuses in the 80s and early 90s of the 19th century show that in the first years after the Liberation the male population in the capital has a significant preponderance in the ratio of 600 to 400 per 1000 inhabitants and this trend continues until the end of century. In the first decade of the 20th century, Sofia, as well as other major cities in the country declined in the proportion of male population (8,2% in Sofia, Plovdiv 3,2%, 5,4% in Bulgaria, 14% Burgas), while in the smaller urban settlements the male population began to take an increasing share.

³⁰ For the financial and governmental support of the primary education in Bulgaria and Serbia: Кайчев, Наум, *Македонию, възжелана... Армията, училището и градежът на нацията в Сърбия и България (1878 – 1912)*, Sofia 2003, p. 44. (further: Кайчев, Н., *Македонию, възжелана...*)

³¹ The educational legislation started with the adoption of the Turnovo Constitution in 1879, but the National Educational Act was passed barely in 1891. More details: Кайчев, Н., *Македонию, възжелана...*, pp. 43–56.

³² „Но, обикновено, счита се за грамотен всеки, който знае само да чете и пише; а и това знание не е еднакво: едни знаят само да четат малко, други знаят да четат и пишат, трети са свършили само две или три отделения и пр. Тъй се е разбирала грамотността при преброяването и ние не се съмняваме, че всички ония, които са знаяли само да четат и които впрочем трябва да са твърде малко, са отбелязани и вписани като грамотни.“ Иванович, Т., „Грамотност на населението в България”, in: *Училищен преглед*, I, 1/1896, p. 28.

Figure 6. Literacy in Bulgaria in percentages.

The relatively high percentage of literate (at different levels) at national scale means high values in percentages of literate population in cities where the literacy is an important element of the social and economic integration.³³ Assuming also that the literacy in Modern times is one of the main indicators of acquired urban culture, for the diverse population collected in Sofia in the first decades of its growth outburst, it is a necessary condition for more full-bodied participation in the metropolitan life. So better chance to integrate in the development of Sofia society on the border of the two centuries have the Bulgarian men, 72% of whom are literate according to the general data for the Bulgarian nationality of 60,5% overall literacy, followed by the Jewish (58,09%) at 40,58% overall literacy of the ethnicity. The Gypsy and the Turkish population highly decreased the overall level of written culture in the capital with respectively 2,56% and 15,38% literates, while to the other nations these rates are significantly higher: 76,25% by the Germans are literate and 62,92% of the Tsintsars.

With very few exceptions during the “long nineteenth century” the demographic development of the capital cities in Europe is reciprocal to the political and economic claims, which they noted as public centers of the modernizing national societies around them. To be more precise, on the Balkans Belgrade, Bucharest and Athens at this time

³³ Interesting examples for literacy give Koprivshitsa and Kotel which after the Liberation note a serious decline in the population and changes in their economies where the agricultural sector more convincingly started to dominate. However, 54% of the residents of both cities in the late 19th century are literate – values closer to those of Sofia at the same time.

can also be referred as examples of experienced modernisation transformations which could be clearly detected by the data for the demographic dynamics. The Bulgarian capital, which is the subject of this study of course is a part of these processes. Its particular example gives a reason the governmental center to be thought not only as a source of evolutionary changes that affect the whole community, but also as a kind of magnet that is able to pull towards it the potential distributed among the other urban centers in the country, especially in a centralized country like Bulgaria. The circle is closed – the strengthened political and socio-economic functions of the main city contribute to its demographic development and the concentration of population in it and determine its leading role in the national processes.

Statistically speaking, during the period considered the Bulgarian capital has all the chances to act as a true national metropolis: Sofia is the new largest city of Bulgaria from a long list of traditional large cities, surrounded by sustainable rural environment whose natural urban development from the previous period is broken with the advent of the new governmental center. Meanwhile beyond the range of statistics a society permanently oriented in a European direction is being formed, which implies to its capital city a too responsible role – the one of a national legitimizing factor and the picture of the demographic dynamics underlies a number of supporting arguments for this. The special attraction which Sofia acquired is due to the huge financial and management energy which the state invests in its modernisation. The capital becomes a showcase of the new government. It acquires the largest industrial projects, the most modern communal facilities and the most current architectural solutions. At the end of the 19th century the demographic clustering leads to qualitative changes and the mediocre Ottoman town converted into Bulgarian capital, for a few turbulent decades manages to displace the traditional urban centers since the Ottoman times. At the end of the 70s years of the 19th century, Rouse, Varna or Plovdiv have much more reasons to take the place of the main city of the Principality and long after the declaration of Sofia for capital it cannot overtake them in demographics. By the end of the period considered, however, it is the major commercial and industrial factor in the Bulgarian lands, and at the same time – a hub of the social elites.

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Резиме

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Како је Софија постала престоница или прича о фаталној привлачности

Софија је 3. априла 1879. године изабрана за престоницу Бугарске кнежевине. Град је до тада представљао само једно од неразвијених и сиромашних провинцијских места у Османској империји, са око 20 000 становника и са веома разноликим националним и етничким становништвом. Тек једна четвртина тог становништва су били Бугари. У кратком временском периоду од неколико динамичних деценија до почетка Балканских ратова, Софија је прерасла у национални центар младе бугарске државе, окупљајући на својој територији око 2% укупног становништва земље (око 100 000 становника), међу којима су доминирали Бугари. Та демографска динамика је била последица централне политичке улоге коју је град стекао, као и неизбежних економских последица до којих је тај процес довео. Са проглашењем Софије за престоницу, град је постао магнет за хиљаде миграната који су убрзано тражили боље услове за живот у близини управних институција. Тако је град убрзо постао персонификација нове националне легитимности за Бугаре, док јој је демографски потенцијал у високом степену осигурао водећу економску и друштвену улогу у земљи. Истовремено је демографски пораст у Софији одузео водећу улогу неким традиционалним градским центрима попут Пловдива, Варне или Русе, који више никада у том смислу нису успели да се опораве.