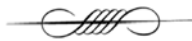


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Divergence Instead of Convergence or Whoever Stays Out is Left Behind¹



ABSTRACT

Topic: Development potentials of small and medium-sized towns in Hungary's spatial structure, with an outlook to the Carpathian Basin.

Objective: To introduce and evaluate the spatial planning objectives of OTK 2005 (National Settlement Development Concept) and OFTK 2014 (National Development and Territorial Development Concept), and the actual territorial development practice compared to that, as well as to introduce the tendencies, perspectives and potentials.

Method: Comparative analysis, charts, thematic maps

Outline of contents: Outline the failure of OTK. Criticism and abandonment of the Pole Programme, the "Paris and the Sea" syndrome (or the "Modern Cities Programme"). New findings about the OFTK spatial structure. (Extended) interpretations of the terms "Centre" and "Peripherals". European central areas and (semi-)peripheral areas (blue banana, blue star, red octopus). The appearance of the "octopus" in Hungary. Why is it a problem? Well-known statements by well-known people. How does it happen in broad strokes: spatial distribution of infrastructure developments, in the past and present. Attempt to expand the delimitation of the "octopus", the real causes of the unwanted trend. Old/new urban planning perspectives. Perspectives beyond urban planning.

Conclusions: Territorial development objectives that have been declared for decades have not been implemented in Hungary. The alleviation of the central spatial structure cannot be seen, quite to the contrary, in fact. This tendency can be expected both on short and medium term. The small and medium-sized towns located in the semi-peripheral, peripheral areas have to face this perspective. This process should be evaluated in conjunction with the development and the spatial structure position of the Hungarian cities that are now across the border. In order to stop the trend of divergence it is not sufficient to issues declarations in each cycle; scientifically based radical solutions should be proposed.

¹ This study was originally produced in form of presentation at the conference of the Hungarian Regional Science Society which was organized in Nagyvárad (Oradea) on 15–16 September, 2016. The topic of the conference was "The role of small and middle-sized towns in the local development". The technical translation was made by Hunnect Ltd. with the assist of the Csongrad County Urbanistic Organization, we are very grateful for that.

KEYWORDS

decentralization, regionalism, convergence, divergence, regional development, spatial structure, territorial interest mechanisms

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INTRODUCTION: PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

Theorem Statement

The role and future positioning of small and medium-sized towns can be assessed in the light of the development of the spatial structure being comprised of a basically distorted structure (cf. hydrocephalus phenomenon); which hidden/not generally known factors the spatial structure development depends/depended on should be examined, as well as what the possible perspectives are based on this knowledge.

Decree No. 97/2005 (XII. 25.) of the Hungarian Parliament on the National Spatial Development Concept

The planning document and the Hungarian Parliament's very important decree on this subject – in line with the European integration process – include the territorial policy principles as clearly identified objectives. Among other things, they identify the objectives of alleviating the monocentricity of Hungary, decentralisation and regionalisation (with regards to this also offering alternatives):

Decentralisation and Regionalism: A considerable part of development policy and implementation decisions as well as of the development funds should be decentralised. To this end, it is important to strengthen the developmental role played by the regions and the competences required for this (...)'

Territorial Cohesion: Mitigating the most serious, significant spatially underdeveloped areas which are detrimental to societal equal opportunities and which limit the effective functioning of the economy: a) creating social and economic cohesion of areas permanently lagging with regard to their development, the dynamisation of external and internal peripherals; b) ensuring fundamental life chances in every settlement of Hungary; c) alleviating the excessively monocentral spatial structure.'

It is important to note that even the former territorial plans defined similar objectives with regard to spatial structure that spans of decades. Thus the recognition and handling of Hungarian territorial processes (i.e. not only involving studies, but also plans and interventions on a national scale) have been present on the stage of large-scale politics. The first comprehensive planning material, *the Regional Planning and the Hungarian Settlement System* (PERCZEL – GERLE 1966), was of significant importance in the history of Hungarian urban planning despite the fact that it lacked political legitimacy, because not only did it establish the monocentricity of the country and its components, but it also included a professional proposal package to alleviate this distorted, monocentric spatial structure. The National Settlement Development Concept (Országos Településhálózat-fejlesztési Koncepció, OTK) was prepared and approved based on this in 1970, then in its revised versions, all of which were later evaluated as having been “*implemented*” one-sidedly or without success (PERCZEL 1989). This is indicated very clearly by the quoted statements of the OTK issued 35 years on, in 2005. That means that the territorial structural anomalies recorded by Károly Perczel and his colleagues continue to exist, thus the objectives always remain the same. Based on this it might seem that although the prevailing policy declared certain important objectives, it is as if they did not take it too seriously. However, after a decade’s time there was an important change in direction when the planning document was revised. Namely, if the territorial objectives are not met, there must be a problem with the objectives.

OFTK: Decree No. 1/2014. (I.3.) of the Hungarian Parliament on the National Development and Territorial Development Concept

In the planning document made ten years after Hungary’s accession to the EU and subsequently to the closing of the first EU budgeting cycle it was established that the territorial policy objectives set forth in the OTK of 2005 had failed: *‘the competitiveness of the areas have not improved, cohesion has come to a standstill, the extent of territorial cohesion has not been sufficient and the social disparities have become larger’*. This statement is especially serious since it all happened despite the EU aid aimed at territorial policy goals (ERFA, Cohesion Funds, Structural Funds).

However, the assessment did not reveal the real causes of the failing convergence, and as a result the design document was characteristically supplemented with territorial objectives written in subdued language and with new points of emphasis (almost as a criticism of the OTK): *‘Area-specific Objectives: (among others) an urban network ensuring a multcentred spatial structure (...), reducing territorial disparities, regional cohesion and promoting economic recovery’*.

It can be established that there was a clear setback compared to the former territorial policy objectives. Since the planning document of 2014 replacing the OTK document of 2005 no longer included the need for *the alleviation of the monocentered nature of Hungary, the decentralisation, or the regionalisation*. Which means that this is a much more half-hearted planning document defining more restrained directions and making unfortunate compromises. It seems that large-scale politics and the underlying policy decision-making preparation put up a white flag about the failure of the European convergence programme, settled for the principle of mitigating territorial disparities and discarded the former territorial policy objectives by qualifying them as being “*utopian*”. It has to be assessed in conjunction with the fact that – according to Eurostat data and Hungarian surveys – it is especially true for Hungary that the phenomenon of “*divergence instead of convergence*” is an existing problem (NAGY 2007). That is to say regional disparities have become more pronounced and the migration from the underdeveloped regions to the more developed ones

and/or abroad is a seemingly unmanageable social phenomenon which is also recognised by large-scale politics. Is it the failure of the EU convergence programme? Do we have to discard the need for cohesion? Such questions are justified, since there have been a large number of studies on this topic also in international literature about the so-called new economic geography, agglomeration, cluster and trade-off theories. (KRUGMAN 1990; PORTER 1998; FRATESI 2005; HALMAI 2009; KERTÉSZ 2006, 2013). This could even serve as a kind of consolation for Hungary. Saying, for example, that without the convergence programme the situation would be much worse as regards the balanced territorial development. In any case, the Hungarian convergence programme aimed at the cohesion of less developed European regions (and the “*implementation*” of the programme) continues in the budgeting period between 2014 and 2020, with an emphasis on innovation, research and economic development. Nevertheless, its success is strongly questionable (if we disregard the self-justifying statements of the large-scale politicians). The root of the problem – the abnormally distorted spatial structure – will certainly persist. What substantive findings can be expected in a new National Development and Territorial Development Concept after 2020?

On the one hand, a sobering assessment can be expected about the failure of convergence, i.e. about further divergence as regards the less developed Hungarian and European regions (this is also confirmed by the latest publications). At a national level, the best case scenario is a statement that if there had not been territorial development aid, the territorial discrepancies would have increased at a higher rate. In turn, even more subdued plans will be drawn up based on these research assessments, followed by the Sisyphean tasks of divergence research, then publication and replanning which repeat themselves from cycle to cycle. Might it happen that convergence programme (as a need) would disappear altogether? This would also be tantamount to choosing a second-degree Europe. In this case, will the term “*divergence*” be generally accepted and will we have to live with the divergence in Hungary instead of denying it? Meaning: *lagging* will be the accepted state, the “*normal*” one, and not only in public discourse. The very role of *spatial planning* may become questionable. Obviously *research* would remain. The territorial and social discrepancies in Hungary already have a huge amount of literature, the development of territorial processes will definitely provide work to be done for the researchers, even in the future.

Quotes to be Quoted

The development in Hungarian territorial discrepancies can be described as a process of *centralisation*. In the well-known, vulgar phrasing, it is the so-called “*hydrocephalus phenomenon*”. Nevertheless, there is no literature (I could not find any – I.N.) that would describe the process itself, within the framework of a comprehensive analysis. Could it be a taboo? Since our topic is closely linked to the value system of the prevailing public authority – although it is difficult to seek out – and to its role as an anointed intervening, correcting, money-giving actor, it is nothing to be surprised about. One thing is for sure, along the lines of interests, concealment is strong and there is no discussion about this topic in public discourse. No wonder that certain radical-sounding statements by a few well-known and established researchers drew public attention (and naturally were “*forgotten about*” afterwards, see National Development and Territorial Development Concept). This “*selection*” here is provided because the statements based on these studies provided an expressive description about the *various dimensions of centralisation*, it is worth a brief examination to assess to what extent they are currently relevant:

Public authority dimension

'This state is utterly over-centralised...', said Dr. Ilona Kovács Pálné, a constitutional law expert researching the potentials of municipal administration, when interviewed publicly in the news programme of the public television broadcasting company back in 1993. After 15 years the situation is the same: *"Due to the lack of a strong mid-level the central administration is overloaded with operational tasks....The Hungarian State is a centralised state where not even the advantages of centralisation are present"* (PÁLNÉ 2007). The survival of the *"hourglass model"* characteristic of Hungarian state organisation familiar from public administration research – which features extreme mid-level weakness – is to be expected, the only change being that by now the *"foot"* of the hourglass is also leaner. The central public authority level has become extremely strong (with clearly autocratic characteristics) and it has taken possession of the mid and district levels with its government offices. The regional administration level seems to vanishing; the functions of the county-level local governments have been limited to exclusively performing regional planning (this is, however, a one-sided/hypocritical role, since development funds are allocated by the ministries), the public authority functions of the local governments of settlements have been limited (e.g. school maintenance, certain public authority tasks) and their relevant sources of revenue have been reduced. (See in more detail: *Why Did We Let It Happen?* (PÁLNÉ 2013))

Dimension of revenue creation and allocation

The well-known Hungarian geographer Dr. Bálint Csátári, a researcher of sub-regions, predicted in an interview published in *Népszabadság* in 1995 that *'a fearsome indolence will characterise our country if the local-interest communities do not manage to make their role against the very strong money-allocating centre official'*. This latter forecast unfortunately has become a reality. They did not manage the task; what is more, during the period since then the fund-allocating county and regional development councils have been closed. The EU application criteria are set by the government bodies. The Centre and the Central Authority reigning in the Centre thus have become even more oversized. Due to the redistribution of internal resources a certain *"autocratic redistribution"* – for lack of a better word let us call it such – emerged, almost as a logical outcome.

Urban planning – political science dimension

'Budapest will reach out its octopus arms far out towards Tatabánya, Vác and Gödöllő; these settlements will fuse together, forming a megapolis', predicted Dr. László Lengyel in 1993 as the invited lecturer at the Savaria Urban Planning Summer University. Then, responding to a debate article: *'Of course it is the fault of the prevailing government... of course it is acting contrary to the spatial plans... thus chaos is formed, and chaos becomes a system... chaos itself will become the system'*. The debate article responding by I. N. to the lecture (*"Who Feeds the Octopus?"*) was published in the journal *Urbanisztika* (Urban Planning); the material statement of the article underpinned with facts is that the prevailing government actively participates in the creation of the disparities between the centre and the peripherals. Where does this process stand at present? On the one hand, it can be said that the truth of the prediction is indicated by the prioritisation of suburban public transportation being extended to a radius of 100 km, which is considered to be a primary concern; by now the majority of the settlements in the agglomeration around Budapest have become urbanised small towns and Érd has become a municipality of 100,000 inhabitants; these *'sleeper'* settlements can be regarded almost as the outer districts of Budapest. On the other hand – and several researchers agree –

the distribution system has become chaotic, and this means a higher number of institutionalised cases of corruption or suspected corruption among other things. It can be said that the anomalies that surfaced in the media (e.g. uncontrolled surplus spending, delays in announcing/evaluating applications) are a result of the proliferation of the centre positions/functions; and this is (almost) a logical outcome.

Urban planning – economic geography dimension

The observations made by Dr. Gyula Horváth (Director of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Centre for Regional Studies) can almost be taken as a summary of the above statements and forecasts, who declared the above characterised centralisation phenomenon as a basic economic problem: *'In Central Europe it is a unique and centuries-long trend that the central regions, Budapest and its agglomeration have an unshakable position. Changing this trend is the key to Hungarian modernisation, as well as the determinant cause of its failures so far.'* He called attention to the key problem of the centralisation process in series of studies and lectures, virtually with no success. Perhaps because *"...there is resistance against the bottom-up initiatives where (e.g. in Hungary) the central area has dominant, even strengthening positions in production factors which improve competitiveness"* (HORVÁTH 1998). Arbitrarily naming this trend, it could be called an (almost) ever strengthening, unstoppable *"permanent centralisation"*. Taking this as a starting point the position and future of Hungarian small and medium-sized towns can only be realistically evaluated by examining it in conjunction with the effects of the large city. Failing this, only false statements can be made from a professional point of view. My material statement is that the Hungarian centralisation is a series of deliberate public authority *"deus ex machina"* activities, and it can be characterised by the above four dimensions. These dimensions are strongly interconnected and the (group interest based) activities within them strengthened each other during the years of contemporary history of Hungary's centralisation. (NAGY 2001)

Important findings of well-known and renowned Hungarian researchers have been forgotten by now, leaving no echoes, *their prophecies remained Cassandra prophecies*. The taboo of the monocentred spatial structure remained with us and researchers still owe us a comprehensive analysis. There have been marginally related analyses and studies; however, they stayed within professional bounds, not reaching the response threshold of policy/decision-makers.

ANALYSING THE PROBLEM, WITH NEGATIVE FORECASTS

Why is it important to analyse the problem? In other words, why would the discontinuance of the trend be the key to modernisation? There are several aspects to this.

Economical aspect

It is an axiom of the regional economics that in a well-delimited geographical space social cohesion mobilises the local resources (1). Its logical outcomes are *competitiveness and economic activity*.

From this follows the inverted statement that in the case of lacking social and economic cohesion, the local resources are unexploited and inactive (2). Not only formal logic, but also practical experiences prove that this results in *competitive disadvantage and economic stagnation* (3).

It can be observed that the phenomenon under (1) is characteristic of the regionalised or decentralised systems (having partial or full autonomy), while that under (2) is characteristic mainly of centralised systems (4).

Hungary is an *extremely centralised country* (5). Thus, statements (3), (4) and (5) jointly mean a permanent competitive disadvantage and permanent divergence – at the national economy level (6).

Concentration of population as an accompaniment/component of centralisation

After the Middle Ages, at the dawn of the new era the Hungarian “*large cities*” of that time were at about the same level; the dynamic population movements towards the central area started in the Hungarian Reform Era, and is still continuing as a result of the deliberate territorial policy across regimes and political systems. It is well-known that the growth of population across the borders is not only a spontaneous urban planning/economic geography process, but also a deliberate territorial policy, as a result of which the population of e.g. Temesvár and Kolozsvár were boosted compared to that of the Hungarian “*large cities*”.

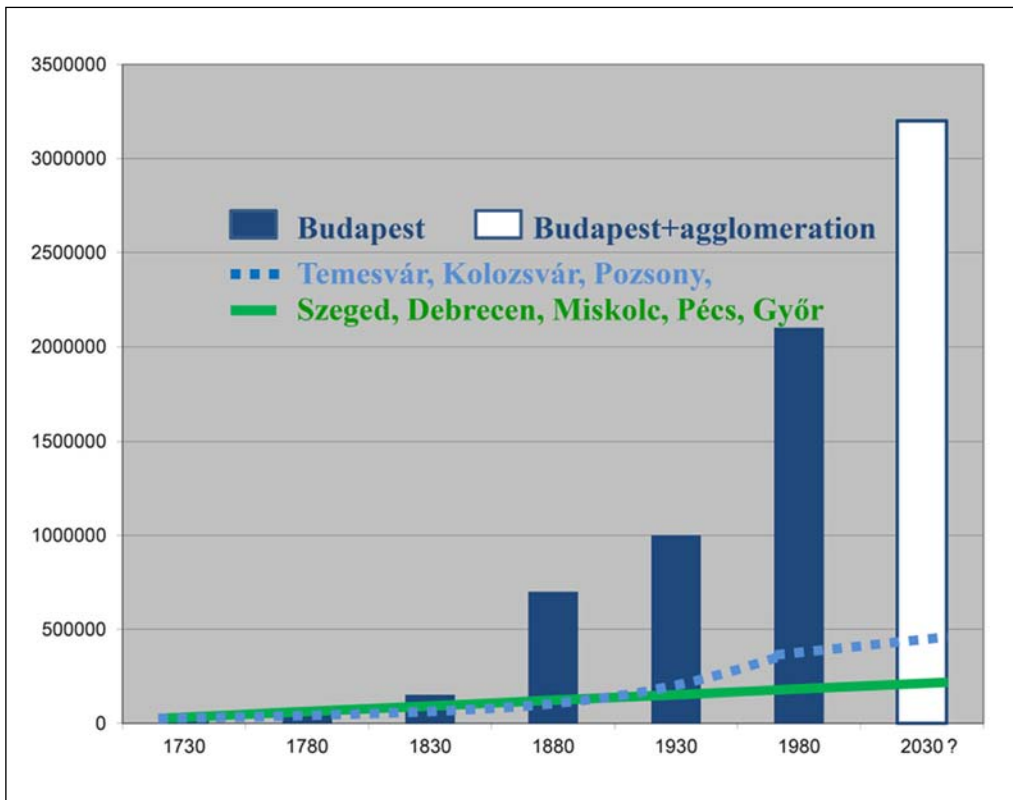


FIGURE 1 Centralisation and population concentration: changes in the population of the “largest cities” of the Carpathian Basin (Source: KSH [Hungarian Central Statistical Office], own drafting)

Beginning from the eighties up to now, there seems to be break in the process of centralisation: the population of Budapest started to decrease. However, in reality it is due to the phenomenon of suburbanisation, being nothing else than a territorial expansion (i.e. the expansion and territorial growth of the city). The total population number increased: the population of the more liveable agglomeration region increased through internal and external migration: the population of Budapest and the agglomeration jointly accounts for one-fourth of Hungary's population. Nowadays, it can be stated with a slight exaggeration that Szentendre, Dunakeszi, Gödöllő, Vecsés, Érd, Százhalombatta, etc. can be considered as outer districts of Budapest. The only difference is that the settlements are not merged (yet).

According to the recent statistics a "reflow" to Budapest has started, based on the balance of inward and outward moves. The development of new, more liveable quarters and/or decentres attracts people, while the disadvantages of daily mobilisation is unattractive, thus garden suburbs are becoming more and more dense. It can be forecast that as a result of the joint action of agglomeration-based and external migration the outward migration will not decrease anymore. If this tendency continues, agglomeration will grow, also in terms of area (not only in population number). At the moment, being at "halfway" point, we have a population of 2.5 million, and by 2030 there will be a metropolitan zone of 3 million residents.

Comparative analysis

Single-pole central field of force with local government of settlements not having real functions

It is based on a hierarchic, single-centred resource collection and allocation with an insignificant amount of locally created / locally allocated resources and with a lack of territorial competences. Characteristics resulting from the essence of the model: There is no effective regional centre, maybe up to the quasi-mid-level. Large cities, medium-sized cities, small towns and small settlements are basically handled as belonging to the same category. The lack of cohesion is "natural", there nothing other than formal relationships. The 'divide and conquer' principle prevails, it is also a "natural" element of the model. There is no communication between the regions. There is no cohesion, not even within the regions; and this is contrary to the regional territorial policy of the EU, in which the creation of cohesion is of a primary importance.

Polycentric urban network based on regionality

Its essence is the decentralised collection and allocation of resources, with a significant amount of resources remaining in place. In this model (sample country: USA) the individual/entrepreneur pays taxes to the settlement, the settlement pay taxes to the county, the county pays taxes to the state and the state pays taxes to the federal government. Characteristics resulting from the essence of the model: The regional centres organise the economics of the region (based on interests). Regional autonomy is natural, with the internal division of tasks between the cooperating large cities, medium-sized cities, small towns and small settlements. As a result of the model, cohesion is natural.

Comparing the two models, if we are counting on an intensification of centralisation, this will also mean that we can give up on the "dream model" and the resulting advantages for the national economy.

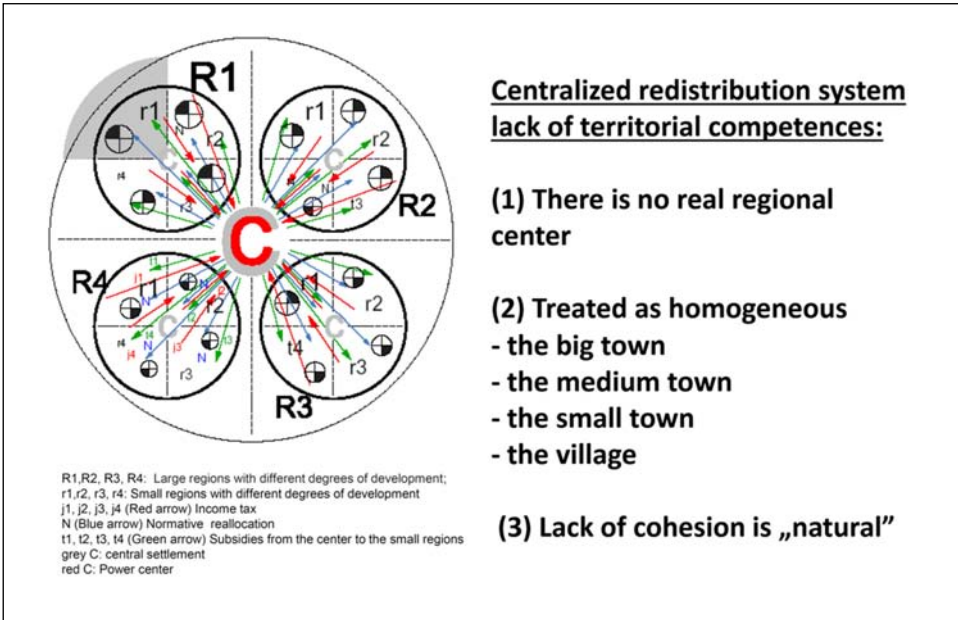


FIGURE 2 Central spatial structure model /pattern of the current Hungarian urban network/ (Source: own drafting)

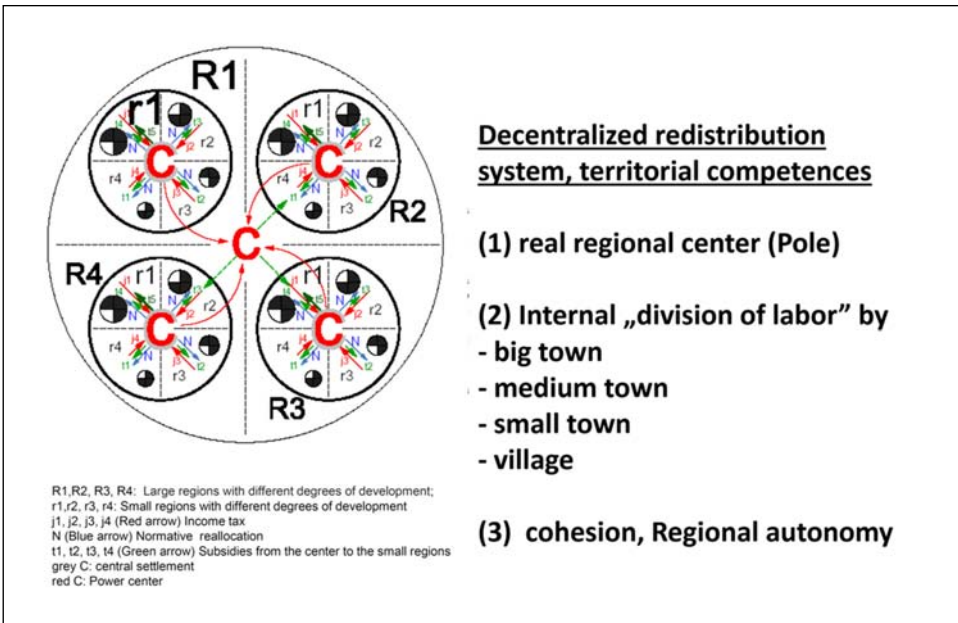


FIGURE 3 Decentralised spatial structure model (dream) / idealised urban structure model (Source: own drafting)

Approach based on the centre/peripheral spatial structures (it is worth it to review this approach and try to imagine Hungary in this context):

The earlier known centre delimitations are the “*blue banana and sunshine belt*”, where the spatial delimitation has been made based on GDP (1989, by French geographers).

The “*blue star*” central area delimitation became “*well-known*” when the importance of transport corridors was recognised (DOMERGUES 1992.). The “*red monkey*” or “*red octopus*”: the new element is the role of transport corridors; then, the recognition of the organising role of large cities in economic development. Later, together with the transport corridors, the role of *urban networks* appeared in the public awareness of researchers, and as a visual equivalent the *grape motif* appeared. (VAN DE MEER 1998; LEVER 1999)

Here, the so-called “*suction cups*” are the large cities in the axes of cities formed by the transport corridors, as well as the dynamic large cities on the tentacles (Copenhagen, Berlin, Warsaw, Vienna, Budapest, Rome, Barcelona, Madrid). It is important that the model is based on the system of relationships based on real economic interests of the “*functional*” information-transport channels (and their narrow areas) between these cities.

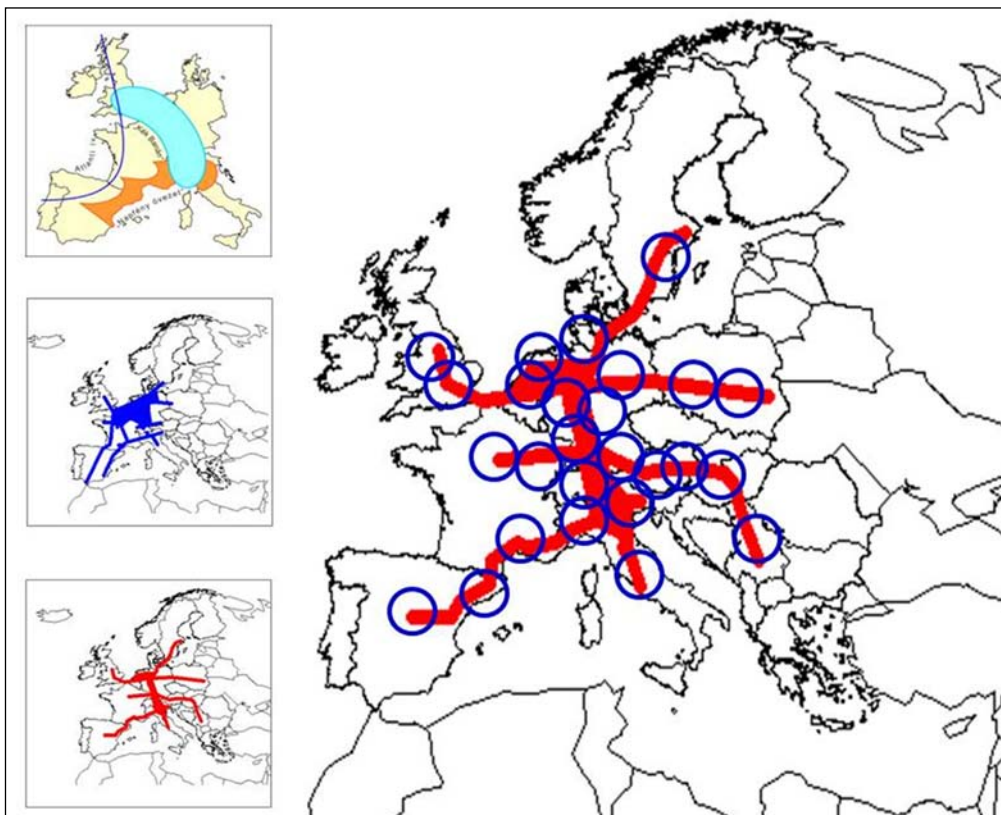


FIGURE 4 The “*blue grape*” and “*red octopus*” centre zone delimitations, indicated jointly, are the most similar to the convergence maps according to the Eurostat report (Source: own drafting)

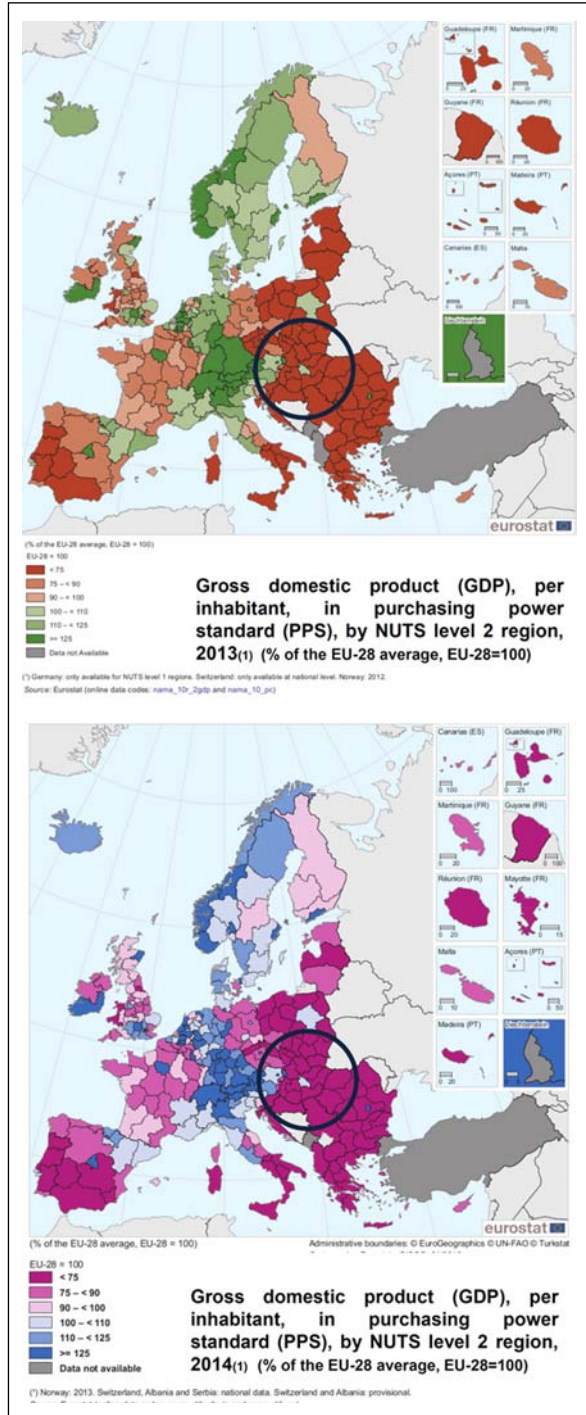


FIGURE 5 Reducing European territorial disparities: convergence programme (Source: EUROSTAT)

These well-known research delimitations, by now possessing a symbolic meaning – i.e. the development of the EU convergence programme – are confirmed by the EUROSTAT reports on thematic region maps in the form of official reports and they also provide an evaluation, informing the citizens of Member States in each language, as well as serving as an important basis for regional researchers. The position of small and medium-sized towns should be interpreted in the light of this.

The effects of the EU policy aimed at reducing regional disparities have been recorded in studies. It has been established, among other things, that certain “convergence clubs” have formed (regardless of the aid provided) and the developed areas progress together, as do as the less developed ones. Even the effectiveness of the EU territorial policy was questioned, but analysts chose to approach the matter with the opinion that *without the support system the divergence would be larger*. The material findings of the researches: *Apart from the phenomenon of convergence, divergence is also present. Convergence may happen only over the longer term.* (BARRY 2000)

According to the present trend, Budapest and its area belongs to the elite convergence club, like an island. The Western regions of Hungary remain at a stable level, while the others are lagging behind relatively speaking; all this is applicable to small and medium-sized towns. From among the regions with a Hungarian population, this is increasingly true of those located in Romania; there, too, the centre settlements are the dominant ones. This confirms the research findings of the National Development and Territorial Development Concept evaluating the territorial processes.

The Hungarian “octopus” i.e. the European and regional transport corridors and the “suction cups” which have an advantage of position, i.e. the medium-sized and small towns located along this axis and which have a development potential. This model provides a more nuanced picture of the convergence/divergence spatial structure provided by Eurostat. We can interpret this together as the dynamically growing “octopus” starting from the centre, named so by László Lengyel in his urban planning analysis in which he states that this process is a natural one. (Explanation: black tone: dynamically growing *central area*; dark grey tone: transport communication axes

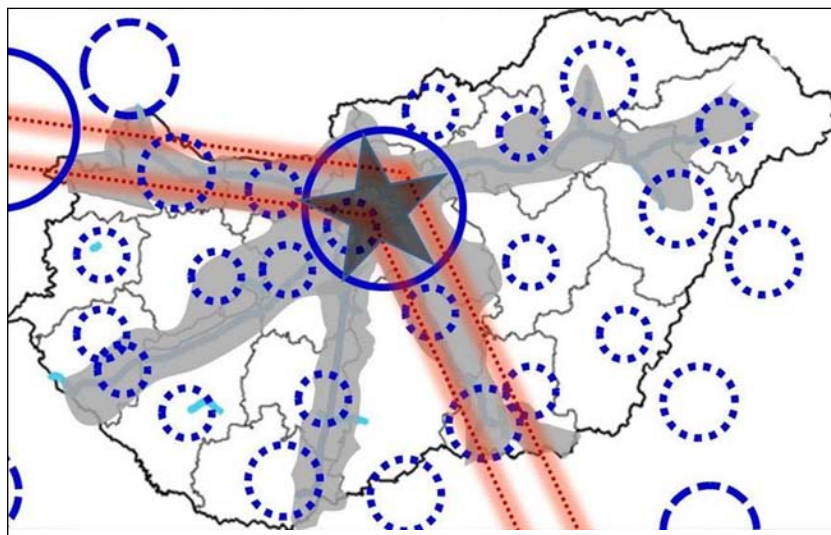


FIGURE 6 The Hungarian projection of the “red octopus/blue grape” central area delimitation (Source: own drafting)

strengthening the central area – in my view, these are semi-peripheral. The areas not indicated are – also depending on the secondary bypasses – semi-peripheral or peripheral areas).

If the current trend continues, the “*black octopus*” will gain further ground, the settlements in this area will (actually) merge, the “*tentacles*” and the “*cup*” will be lagging only relatively; however, the peripheral areas – if all goes according to the trend – will have no chance to rise. Seeing as – as if forced, autonomously – everything is focused in the centre. The implementation of East-West bound elements of the network is delayed (in this the counter-interest of the *Centre* for an area of position is presented). Although the Danube bridges of both Dunaújváros and Szekszárd have been ready for years now.

Comparing this to the European tendencies, the need for regional competitiveness and economic-social cohesion with the promise of an economic recovery should be placed and evaluated in this dynamically changing central spatial structure.

WHY IS IT GOING THE WAY IT IS GOING? WHAT MAKES THIS THE TREND?

Network of Hungarian airports

The size of the symbols indicate the rate of traffic at the civil airports. The Ferihegy Airport of Budapest has implemented several megaprojects; however, since the 1960s, decision-makers have not considered it to be a public responsibility to develop the airports outside Budapest: the development of regional airports are dismissed as being a “*regional issue*” (but we know that there are no regions, just EU statistics on regional level). As the Association of Provincial Airports indicated in its announcement: ‘*Maintenance of the operation of provincial airports is a primary national interest, since these airports significantly improve the competitiveness and the ability to attract investments in the surrounding regions. The Association mentions that while in countries of a similar territory the market share of regional airports is around 35–55 percent beside the central airports, in Hungary this figure is less than 1 percent.*’ (Source: Magyar Távirati Iroda, MTI.)

Railway, public roads networks

Railway, public roads networks all roads lead to Budapest. The radial railway and public roads networks built at the end of the 1800s concentrated the traffic – and through that the working capital – deliberately to help create/strengthen a national capital; and the spatial structure has not changed significantly.

Internal population movement

The distorted central spatial structure resulted in an attracting/repelling impact, as well as migration characterised by a population concentration process since several decades and the quitting of peripheral areas which resulted in turn from that; the prevailing attraction is the more favourable living standards/subsistence. This grew and strengthened the Centre continuously. In recent history, even the population movements arriving from across borders is primarily attracted by the Central settlement (45% in 2015, source: KSH)

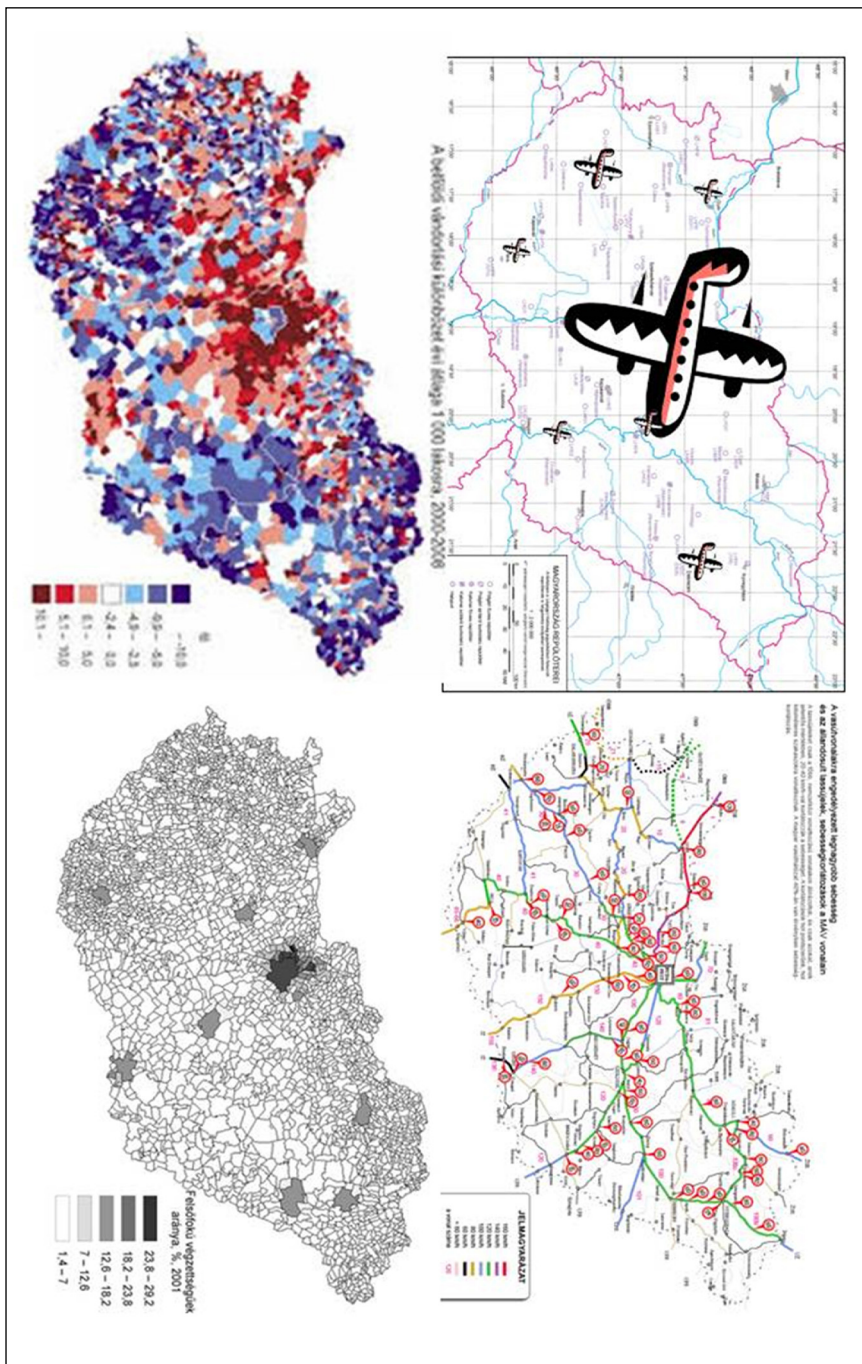


FIGURE 7 Overview of the main components, characteristics of the central spatial structure (Source: own drafting, VÁTI and KSH)

Proportion of higher education graduates

The increase in the capital weight of the Central settlement is at the same time a result and a cause, characterised by the proportion of higher education graduates. This also indicates the competitive disadvantage of the peripheral areas, and ultimately represents an adverse effect on the national economy. (In the case of any other economy-related thematic map the same distorted picture would be indicated).

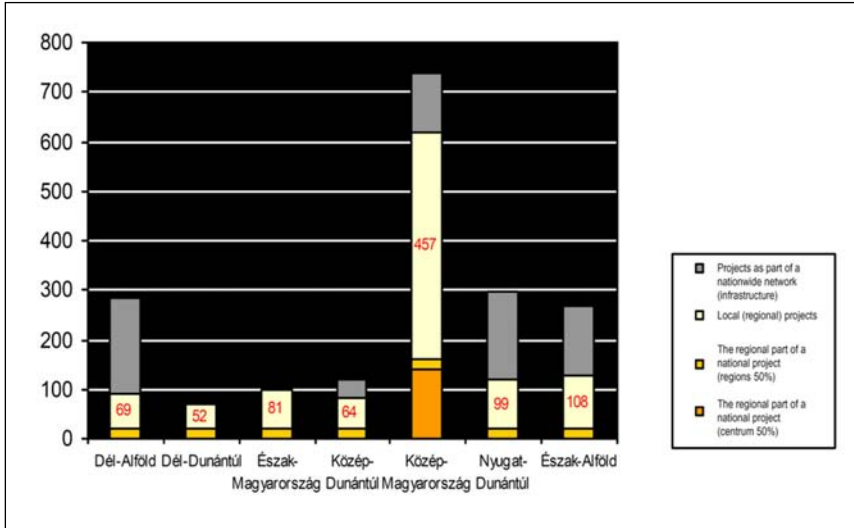


FIGURE 8 Territorial allocation of priority projects, milliard HUF, 2007–2009 (Source: own drafting and NFÜ [National Development Agency])

EU developments strengthening the Centre

When combining the investment values of supported priority projects – (source: website of the National Development Agency; own adaptation) – it can be observed that the majority of these are aimed at the Central region of Hungary (and within this, naturally the larger part is aimed at the metropolitan area)... This is interesting, to say the least, considering that the EU does not support the crowded, over-developed metropolitan areas.

During the period of 2004–2013, in the territorial allocation of the Transport Development Operational Programme (KÖZOP) the investments strengthening the Central area were dominant. The problems is not that such projects are present (naturally they are needed), but that they are dominant, and the intention to alleviate the central spatial structure – included in the National Spatial Development Concept – cannot be felt.

For the implementation of the Integrated Transport Development Operational Programme a government resolution named the transport development (large) projects for the 2014–2020 programming period. Indicated on the map it can be clearly seen that network developments pointing toward the direction of the Centre, thus further strengthening its role and position, are dominant; the development of East-West relations did not take place.

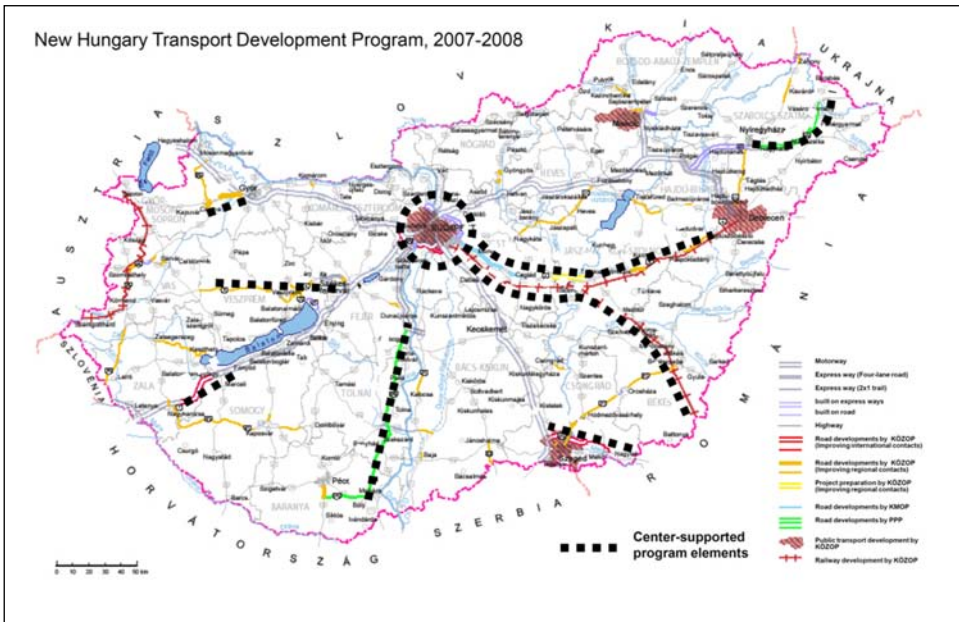


FIGURE 9 The Transport Development Operational Programme (KÖZOP) strengthening the Centre (Source: own drafting and NFÜ)

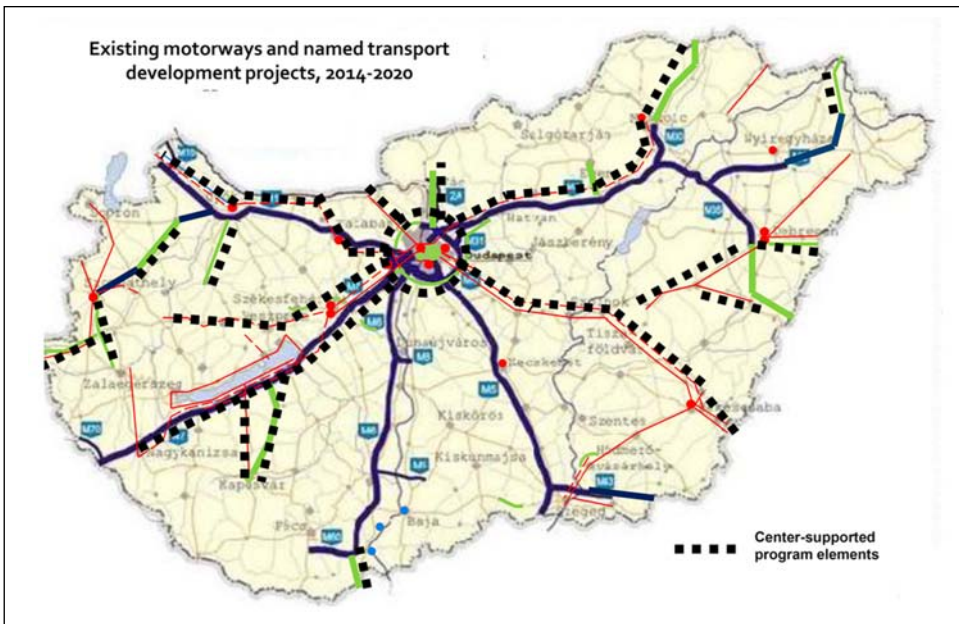


FIGURE 10 The Integrated Transport Development Operational Programme (IKOP) strengthening the Centre (Source: own drafting and Hungarian Official Gazette ([Magyar Közlöny])

Brief introduction of brakes, traps, contradictions acting against the reduction of territorial discrepancies

There is a Decree of the Hungarian Parliament on the transport development policy of Hungary: this act declares that the network development should follow the traffic needs. / According to the contract concluded with the operator of the Budapest Airport, the Hungarian State cannot develop an airport within 200 km. / The original proposal in the Decree of the Hungarian Parliament of 2005 on the designation of “pole cities” – in theory anti-poles – was adopted with an amendment: Budapest is a pole-city as well. / In the current budgeting period the “Pole Programme” aimed at alleviating the spatial structure was replaced by the “Modern Cities Programme” – including all larger cities, all county seats. Thus recovering the “Budapest and the Sea” syndrome, the term originating from the French decentralisation, at the time of designating the anti-poles, to overcome the “Paris and the Sea” spatial structure in the 1970s; based on the growth pole theory by Boudeville. / Beside the declared objective of reducing the territorial discrepancies, it is contradictory that there is an objective to develop the capital into a metropolis. / The tender documents of the Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) are sometimes contradictory to the declared territorial development objectives (e.g. the requirement of economic return when establishing the basic infrastructure of a technological industrial park within the framework of the Szeged Biopolis Pole Programme). / In the light of the ‘divide and conquer’ principle, at the beginning of the political transformation in the 1990s there was a deliberate distribution of public authority tasks in the form of increasing the number of municipal cities; since then the citizens of such cities, including also the county seats (!) still do not have local government representation in the given county (from an economic geography and urban planning aspect this is an irrational, “hole in the cheese” syndrome). / In the light of the ‘divide and conquer’ principle, beginning from 1990 the mid-level local government competences have been deliberately reduced to meaninglessness. / For the Central Hungary Region a special status has been obtained from the EU (regardless of the fact that here the GDP per capita is above the 75% of the EU average, regional developments can still be supported for certain objectives, although to a limited degree: this has been funded by reallocating a part of the EU funds for the less developed Hungarian regions). / For the regions, where EU support cannot be provided, funds from the state budget can be made available based on a Government resolution. / Surplus State investments from the budget, being contrary to the territorial development objectives, and the spatial policy of the European Union (e.g. in connection with the EXPO Budapest or the Olympic Games in Budapest) / There have been/are serious cover-ups in connection with EU assistances, the public opinion was informed through the media that certain investments can be supported by EU funds, however, they are contrary to the territorial policy principles of the EU. There is no real public awareness in this area, it is hard to connect the dots with such low levels of information provided.

In the face of all this, as a self-contradictory situation, the capital...is suffocating

The radial highway development based on traffic needs further strengthen the single-pole spatial structure. The concentration of Hungarian and foreign capital and the strengthening of the centre role further increases the “professional traffic” targeted here. The intense suburbanisation also strengthens this process, together they “route in” the target traffic. The M0 ring road does not help at all, since it serves only for routing the transit traffic. All this increases traffic congestion, the adverse effects of urbanisation and the potential and actual environmental damages that have to be treated, naturally from public resources and state subsidies. Among

other things, this is the reason why this city is not really liveable, why public transportation is problematic and why main roads are regularly jammed. These problems force newer and newer urban developments. The modern environment results in people moving in, new investments, jobs, higher standards of living; the city further expands; the traffic further increases, etc...

QUO VADIS? (OLD/NEW THEORETICAL SOLUTIONS, PERSPECTIVES, SCENARIOS)

Zero solution (nothing is done...)

The divergence process in Hungary continues > Hungarian GDP is concentrated here > the concentration of the investment capital and of the population continues > an extremely distorted spatial structure is formed, where one-third of the population of the country lives in the central zone. A metropolis capital of 3 million inhabitants expanded in size becomes the objective and although it is a “*European*” city, it is in strong contradiction with the settlements that are permanently in a semi-peripheral or peripheral situation. The small and medium-sized towns that are outside of the development axes will be left behind... It has to be taken into consideration that the country could be “*torn into two parts*”, especially if we do not care about it or support these processes for selfish reasons. Even the form of this is questionable, even as a hypocritical professional debate agenda: a central conurbation with a city ring(?) or a regional city(?) should be created or another urban form should be created(?) And: the central territorial structure may result in the further strengthening of the central public authority surviving (!) in a political rotation, making it encased, as a natural consequence (since the two process is connected, they strengthen each other).

Actively deciding to reverse the trend, urban planning dimension

Organic scenario

Connecting the traffic networks included in the national plans is a priority; slowly but consistently the East-West direction network elements are implemented > the former cross-border traffic relations are rebuilt at a higher service provision level > a “*net-like*”, more balanced spatial structure is created, based on Western European (Dutch) examples > the potential for polycentric urban development is ensured in the Carpathian Basin. It is an important question to know what all of this means if the public authority, institutional and international central functions continue to be concentrated in the Centre, but it may become a reality when the reviving local economy forces regional autonomy out.

Radical scenario

Adoption of the National Spatial Development Plan (unified concept and territorial development) by the legislation > reincarnation of the abandoned Pole Programme, declaring the formed pole cities as anti-poles > radically promoting the innovation-based development of provincial university cities > subsidised construction of scientific-technological parks > developing regional airports into international airports with support from the State > connecting Pole Cities with the Southern highway ring, being a “*civilian*” initiative, formerly supported by the counties, but discarded by the government, completed with East-West/North-South network connections > promoting the connecting into the network of small towns and small settlements, and promoting their regional economy organisations > establishment of a regional autonomy.

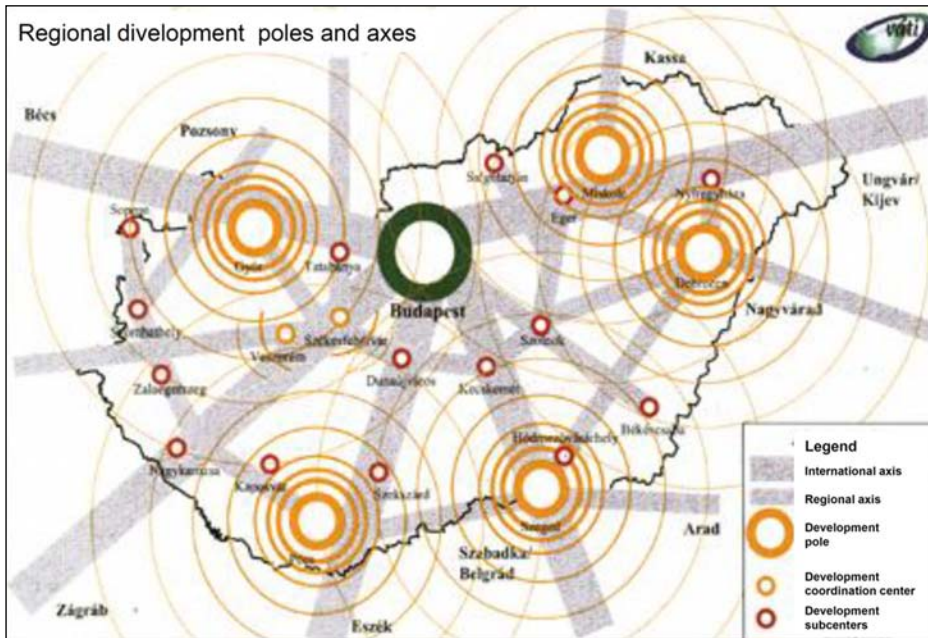


FIGURE 11 The spatial structure scheme of the Hungarian Pole Programme (Source: VÁTI, OTK 2005)

Actively deciding to reverse the trend, state organisation/political dimension

Organic solutions in the light of a cooperative state organisation, in the name of a wise “Good Governance”

Deconcentration version

Well thought-out decision about the relocation of centre-making public authority functions > “Version A”: relocating the ministries and other government offices in pole cities, or in other small cities suitable for this purpose (there have been such attempts, without success, perhaps not by chance, to have the Constitutional Court in Esztergom and the State Secretariat for Rural Development in Kecskemét) > “Version B”: selecting and planning a new capital > (there was an unsuccessful attempt for this in Hungary (Dunaújváros); there are well-known examples in Europe and on other continents (e.g. German government offices in Bonn, or Holland parliament and government offices in Hága) > relocating government offices > relocating other public institutes > the capital will be exempt from a part of the traffic resulting from professional reasons > etc.

Decentralisation version

Adopting a decentralisation law based on a European example > distribution of public authority on a territorial basis > moving certain authorities down to the mid-level, overlapping the tasks of county government offices > establishing strong mid-level local governments > establishing autonomous regions > regional local governments > Regional Development Plans (unifying the concept and the territorial development plan) at the mid-level etc.

Radical scenario (forcing out regional autonomy)

“Waking up” of the local economy, promotion of interests, social initiatives > Action by the programme party “For Decentralisation” > determinant role in the public authority > avoiding the brakes and traps through legislation > self-reduction of the public authority to a territorial level, creating regional autonomy > the above detailed potential urban planning solutions, initiated from below, based on regional decisions.

CONCLUSION

Territorial development objectives that have been declared for decades have not been implemented in Hungary. The alleviation of the central spatial structure cannot be seen, quite to the contrary, in fact. This tendency can be expected both on short and medium term. The small and medium-sized towns located in the semi-peripheral, peripheral areas have to face this perspective. This process should be evaluated in conjunction with the development and the spatial structure position of the Hungarian cities that are now across the border. In order to stop the trend of divergence it is not sufficient to issues declarations in each cycle; scientifically based radical solutions should be proposed.

Territorial development??? There is no such thing. Or to put it more precisely, there is a characteristic Hungarian territorial interest mechanism instead of it. The result of which is a self-contained, self-inducing process across political systems and ideologies, having been and being strengthening by the central spatial structure, and harming the competitiveness of the regions in peripheral positions. Hungary’s capability for convergence depends also on the Hungarian spatial development (balanced/sustainable spatial development or permanent divergence). If the large-scale politics fail to recognise this and the prevailing (!) political actions contradict the territorial policy of the European Union promising convergence, then the only possibility is to go through a negative scenario.

The Pole Programme was abandoned, forgotten, as if it had been completed... And it was replaced by the developmental and territorial development concept including only moderate objectives. Knowing the interest mechanisms it is to be feared that the decisions set forth in it – being favourable for the national economy – will not be met. If we could get to a point when one of the scenarios are considered, or the Pole Programme is reloaded – interpreted even as anti-poles – it could all take place. Just a closing thought for this. The pole / anti-pole dichotomy is not a special enemy vision; there are mutual advantages to be found. This served as a helping power as regards Vienna and Buda-Pest when the need to establish a national capital surfaced in the 19th century. Another analogy would be the relation between positive and negative electrons, or Yin and Yang in Eastern philosophies: “*The basic law of life is the constant interaction of anti-poles. This interaction is the source of all experiences, all developments.*”

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