INGREDIENTS FOR THE DRAWING OF EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE'S SPATIAL STRUCTURE

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The past few years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of Hungarian and international investigations and studies on East-Central Europe. From a geopolitical aspect this increase is warranted. This region is located between West and East. In an environment of fluctuating political emphases this position has been and will continue to be validated in unique ways. Analyses view the "Central European Boomerang" connecting the cities Gdansk-Poznan-Wroclaw-Prague-Brno-Bratislava-Budapest as East-Central Europe's western developmental zone. The countries of the region display a development pattern in which the levels of eastern and western regions are markedly different. A general tendency is for regional resources to be concentrated in capital cities and their wider agglomerations, which are consistently prominent. Beyond capital cities only a few large urban areas or regional centers are able to demonstrate a fast development dynamic. This article analyses the processes of spatial structure of the East-Central European region in detail, outlining current and anticipated spatial development directions.

This article has a daring title. This was chosen based partly on the research project we are now completing[1] and partly on the research we have been conducting for decades on spatial policy. The referenced research project's goal is not fully connected to the topic in the title, given that it concerned the vehicular industry situation of two Hungarian regions – Western Transanubia and Central Transdanubia. The research team conducted analyses of various combinations of East-Central European countries and their regions (NUTS 2), comparing economic and social situations primarily to interpret the service conditions for hosting economic organizations and also given territorial-level classification. As the leaders of the research project we had the op-

[1] In this research project we relied on the results of the project entitled "TÁMOP-4.2.1./B-09/1/KONV-2010-0003 Mobility and Environment: Vehicular, energy and environmental research projects in Central- and Western Transdanubia".

portunity to overview the analytical methods and to review the results, allowing us to gain knowledge of and to investigate East-Central Europe and its complex and rather interesting regional structure.

Another aspect of our interest in regions motivated us to write a monograph on the theory, application and methodological framework of territorial policy (*Rechnitzer, Smahó* 2011). This nearly five hundred page summary book reviews several concepts used in territorial research, looking for how interpretations of such affect various communal and private interventions in spatial processes. In this way we encountered the concept of spatial structure, which is oft used and interpreted in several ways. The same holds for theories related to the concept. We ourselves attempted to define and describe this concept as used in systemization, analysis and development interventions. Further, the review of territorial policy led us to the acknowledgment of the numerous specificities and divergences observable in the territorial structures of the countries of East-Central Europe. Some of these have to a degree already appeared or have played out in the western half of Europe, while others are characteristic of the given macro-region, and can only be observed and interpreted here.

This article connects two dimensions, i.e., two research projects, and harmonized the results thereof to allow us to attempt to describe the spatial structure of East-Central Europe.

The Region under Examination

What exactly is East-Central Europe? Attempts to define this region of Europe have given rise to several theories (*Szűcs, Hanák* 1986) and thoughtful analyses attempting to record the characteristics of this group of countries have been written. Valuable analyses of the development of social and economic structures after the regime changes are available (*Erlich, Révész, Tamási* 1994). Some studies have tried to describe territorial characteristics (*Horváth* 2000; *Illés* 2002) or the system of municipal networks and the characteristics of their definitive centers (*Csapó, Balogh* 2012; *Csomós* 2011; *Enyedi* 2010; *Tagai* 2010). Publications have appeared on the development of structural policies (*Fábián*, 2011), the territorial policies of specific countries, the tools of such (*Mezei* 2006, *Rechnitzer, Smahó* 2011), the modeling and transformation of economic and industrial structures (*Kuttor* 2012; *Lux* 2009; *Molnár* 2012) and the definition of regional competitiveness (*Lengyel* 2012). The past few years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of Hungarian and international investigations and studies on East-Central Europe, indicating that this group of countries has become a focus for professional researchers.

A review of publications reveals that there are differences and divergences in drawing the borders of the region. One group of researchers focuses on the countries of the Visegrád Cooperation initiative established in 1991 (Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia), while many researchers add Austria and call the region Central

Europe. Other analyses attach the eastern counties of Germany, or Bavaria, and also include western Balkan countries (*Horváth, Hajdú* 2010) like Slovenia and Romania and thus speak of East-Central Europe.

We preferred this more encompassing approach, given that the countries all joined the European Union at about the same time, or are about to join (Croatia in 2013, while Serbia's accession date remains uncertain). From a Hungarian point of view this group of countries has a number of historical similarities, while in the 20th century the given countries and by extension the region formed millions of economic, trade and historical-cultural threads that wove them together. Further, the countries of the region experienced like political systems, while the collapse of these regimes occurred at roughly the same time throughout the region, giving rise to similarities in regime transformations. Last but not least a unique geopolitical situation characterizes these countries. They are located between West and East and in an environment of fluctuating political emphases this position has been and will continue to be validated in unique ways.

As such, our study incorporates a bigger, and in our view more intensive collection of countries that is similar in terms of development and catalysts thereof. We thus view East-Central Europe as: the southern and eastern counties of Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Romania. It is within this group of countries[2] that we attempt to describe a spatial structure and its changes.

On Spatial Structure

In his outstanding study (2009) and later habilitation (2012) Pál Szabó summarizes Hungarian interpretations of spatial structure. He provides three approaches to the use of the term. In the first instance the elements (creation factors) and their spatial arrangement are viewed as the foundation of the definition, while a second interpretive approach categorizes based on statements emphasizing spatial component elements. Finally, the third approach is found in investigations where the relation of spatial elements to one another, i.e., the divergences in structures and analysis of their spatial distribution are focal points.

To make possible comparison, i.e., the illustration of divergence in spatial development, we will connect the other groupings mentioned by the author, which can be created through geographic or regionalist (territorial development) aspects. Szabó considers the connection of region and spatial structure, or the description of geographical spaces cut up by network elements (transportation, settlement networks)

[2] We considered the inclusion of Croatia and Serbia, given that these Western Balkan countries have strong and reinforcing historical, economic, infrastructure-related and cultural connections to the other countries in the study. However, access to data was problematic. This situation should improve with Croatia's accession to the EU (2013), while in Serbia's case candidate country status will make data better available.

to be geographical approaches. The regional approach covers those who draw borders based on the quantitative and qualitative differentiation among spatial structure elements and then based on such define given spatial development directions. Analyses focusing on one country can be based on administrative units (settlements, micro-regions, counties, planning-statistical regions), which are then typified and characterized as spatial formations. These are then differentiated from other spatial formations according to common characteristics as specified in the given analyses. Differentiation can also mean comparison to an assumed or real level of development, which can form the foundation for statements on spatial structure(s).

It is our position that the regional approach is directed at making it possible to define spatial developmental directions. We designate those structures upon which it is possible to describe the developmental characteristics of a part of a country, a country, or a group of countries or even a continent. Given the criterion for examination we can tailor directions for developmental interventions according to spatial distribution and differentiation in the spatial structure. All this is done with an eye to defining attainable (policy) goals and then assigning tools and institutions for execution.

Spatial structure is thus the defining of territorial units based on groups or combinations of distinguishable development paths independent of a country or group of countries' spatial position, and further based on groups of primarily economic, social, settlement-network factors (*Rechnitzer, Smahó* 2011). Like characteristics, e.g., differentiated structural, organizational units, form unique combinations that can be characterized and evaluated according to given criteria. These characterize or define like economic, social and settlement-network factors in one or several time periods. The units of spatial structure thus can be described as the state of a developmental path, evaluated according to expectations (e.g., development, separation), and defined in order to achieve change according to territorial policy goals (desired future development directions, transformation of situations and states, means and modes of intervention).

Spatial structure units are the concentrated appearance of similar or seemingly similar (interconnected), determining economic, social and settlement-network factors. Space has several layers and fields which pile on top of one another and which can strengthen or weaken one another (*Rechnitzer, Smahó* 2011). The specificities and differences of spatial fields depend on the geographical characteristics of various territories, their economic, social and political evaluation, or their level of support. In this way their role in the transformation of spatial structure can vary. One of the goals of spatial policy is to influence and contribute to the transformation of these spatial fields.

The various fields are layered upon one another in space, but their effect and strength in given spatial points (settlements) can vary. Some intensify and become concentrated while the presence of others wanes. Meanwhile the fields affect, build, destroy and weaken one another. The relations and destinations between fields change over time. Within a given span of time some gain in value, others become dormant or lose their previous significance and role. In the next span of time they can reappear in a new light or correlation, establish a relation with a further field and affecting those create new synergies. Change in the entirety of the spatial structure follows transformation of the fields or the appearance of new points of view and interrelations in the valuation of fields.

The goal of analyzing spatial structure is thus the determination of the composition of the examined territorial unit – be it a country or group/association of countries that displays common characteristics in terms of units and unifying criteria in space – in terms of definable composite elements, with an eye to the future direction of their change and development. The goal is the orientation of development and the review of what possible interventions are necessary to change or modify the described states. As such spatial structure analysis can encompass the registration of current states, the description of a desired future state, or the establishment/prediction of a developmental level. Such analyses can be viewed as tools of territorial policy used to define the direction of interventions. It follows that spatial structure analysis can be viewed as an analytical tool of such horizontal developmental policy. Given the above, spatial structure types can be defined as developmental levels, or differentiable spatial characteristics. We can move from states seen as developed toward undeveloped or – in terms of given conditions – designation as lagging or peripheral. The degrees of such, or the placement of demarked territorial units on a ladder of development, can change according to analyses and in light of territorial policy goals.

Finally, a definitive question is that of the mode or methodological foundation for designating spatial structure units or development types. Numerous analytical methods for qualifying territorial levels, registering their states or comparing them to one another are known or are being developed. To simplify, there are two paths we can take.

The first path is classification according to indicators of development. In such cases we utilize one or more well known indicators (these are usually indicators of territorial economic potential, e.g., GDP per person), separate the territorial units, and then using our further gathered knowledge refine and increase the precision of our picture. The other solution is to collect various economic, social and municipal indicators characterizing territorial units – essentially the field characteristics – and analyze them using complex evaluation methods (e.g., multivariable analyses, projection methods, simulation techniques, etc.).

Both approaches can be used successfully, while the combination of the two approaches can also be a solution. We should not forget that the goal of spatial structure analysis is the orientation of development and the establishment of its possible directions. As such territorial analysis makes necessary experience in synthesizing, creative problem solving and knowledge of the given territorial units. The method of presenting results is map diagrams, but this only helps envision observations in spatial terms. These – as spatial structure units – must be described with great precision and based on development-supporting relations.

East-Central Europe in European Spatial Structure

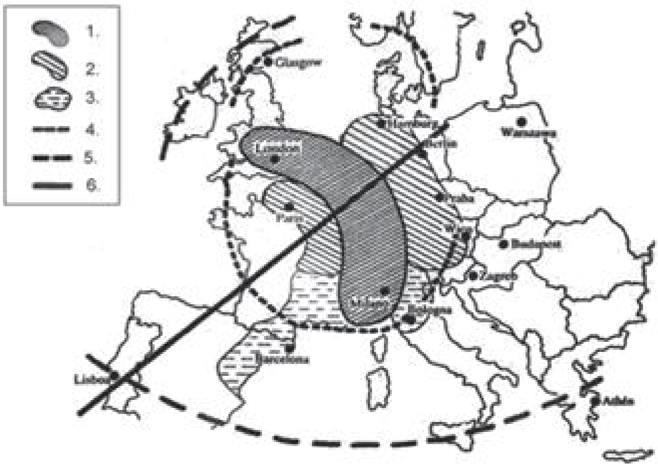
Spatial structure models of Europe appeared in the eighties and nineties of the previous centuries, with the goal of illustrating the developmental direction of European space. Illustrations and grandiose spatial demarcations were based on the classic principles of the center-periphery model. Central spaces – whose nodes were the large centers of Western Europe – housed concentrated economic resources as well as all institutions of political decision-making, and this well-defined space was the starting point of economic renewal and the concentration of innovation. This is how the Blue Banana[3] came to be, as Europe's economic – and historically interpretable — belt, which contained Western Europe's dominant centers and their spheres of influence (*Brunet* 1989). Rethinking of the models is resulting in the expansion of this belt through the inclusion of agglomerations and new centers. The forming developmental zone now stretches from London and Paris through the Ruhr area to Milan, encompassing Europe's definitive centers and their areas of influence (*Kunzmann* 1992).

The outlining of developmental zones continued in the nineties. The South European developmental zone appeared, encompassing the centers of Barcelona, Lyon, Marseille, Genoa, Milan, Venice and Rome, along with their agglomeration zones. This developmental axis – which has unique functions (service orientation, tourist, strengthening local economies, new type production systems and regional connections) — was named the North of the South, Europe's Sunbelt or the Second Banana (*Lever* 1995).

In addition to these was the outline of Europe's high-tech ring, which began in Glasgow, went through Barcelona and Milan to Vienna, broke in Central Europe, and then closed the circle from Malmo to the original starting point. This is where Vienna first appears, then as Europe's last stop, beyond which peripheral areas like East-Central Europe– which are unknown and undocumented — are to be found (Map 1.).

3 Pál Szabó (2009) impressively reviewed models of European spatial structure, including their various variables (polygons, shapes), labels, and the possibilities of their change and variation.

Map 1. – *The Spatial Structure Model of Europe's in the Nineties*



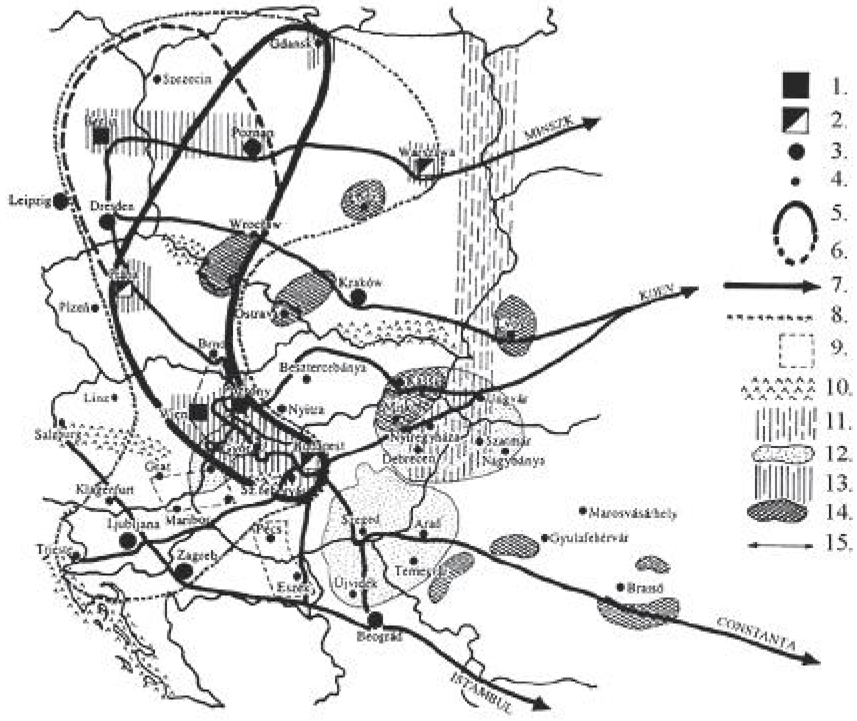
Legend:
1. Blue Banana;
2. The expansion of the Blue Banana, inducted zones;
3. North of the South (Sunbelt);
4. High-tech ring;
5. Undeveloped regions ring;
6. Problem region.

Source: *Rechnitzer (1998), p. 67.*

At the beginning of the nineties regional processes clearly showed that the economic integration of East-Central European countries would inevitably give rise to a regional integration form (*Enyedi* 1996). The established Visegrad Cooperation initiative, the countries of which had economic and institutional principles that made economic integration possible, could have initiated a concurrent territorial integration process not just with neighboring countries in what was then the European Community but with eastern, post-socialist neighbor countries as well. Some signs of such an integration process were recognizable in the emerging macro-regional structure of East-Central European countries[4] (*Gorzelak* 1996; *Rechnitzer* 1998), which displayed several particularities and at the same time certain directions of development (Map 2.).

[4] In this model it is too early to speak of East-Central Europe. The countries mentioned above are not present or are present only tangentially. However, the hope for and necessity of expansion in spatial structure analyses is clear.

Map 2. – *The Spatial Structure Model of East-Central Europe in the Nineties*



Jelmagyarázat: 1. Nemzetközi jelentőségű város; 2. Potenciálisan nemzetközi jelentőségű város; 3. Transznacionális jelentőségű város; 4. Regionális centrum, nemzeti jelentőséggel; 5. Jelenlegi fejlődési zóna; 6. Potenciális fejlődési zóna; 7. Európai közlekedési folyosó; 8. Észak-déli jövőbeli együttműködő térség fejlődési lehetőséggel; 9. Potenciális multiregionális együttműködés; 10. Idegenforgalmi körzet; 11. Periférikus térség; 12. Multiregionális együttműködés; 13. Fejlődési magterület; 14. Hagyományos ipari körzet; 15. Együttműködési irány.

Legend:

1. Internationally significant city
2. Potentially internationally significant city
3. Transnational significant city
4. Regional center with international significance
5. Current development zone
6. Potential development zone
7. European transportation corridor
8. North-South future cooperation region with development opportunities
9. Potential multiregional cooperation
10. Tourism region
11. Peripheral area
12. Multi-regional cooperation
13. Development core area
14. Traditional industrial area
15. Cooperation direction

Source: *Rechnitzer, Smahó (2011), p. 55.*

In the mechanism of macro-regions it is urban regions that embody connections. In Hungary this means the Budapest agglomeration; the agglomerations of Prague and Brno in the Czech Republic; Warsaw, Poznan, Wroclaw, Gdansk and Krakow in Poland; and the Bratislava area and the Kosice region in Slovakia. The west-east developmental slope in these countries was already present at the time, although approaching the eastern borders this continuity was broken and we experience a sharp drop to another level of development that is markedly unfavorable compared to the previous. As such the studies viewed the countries of the East-Central Europe region as the border zone of the west, which could lay a foundation for macro-regional and cross-border cooperation, whereas the eastern regions were the true periphery, with little chance for catching up.

The western developmental zone of East-Central Europe, which encompasses the major cities of Gdansk, Poznan, Wroclaw, Prague, Brno, Bratislava, Vienna and Budapest, was seen in analyses as the "Central European Banana" (or boomerang). This zone has a high concentration of capital cities and significant industrial and administrative centers. The organizations of such are directly connected to the Austrian and German economies. Major and mid-sized investors have settled in these regions. Further, these centers were able to absorb services and shopping tourism from the west in the middle of the nineties. Another unique aspect is that it was this zone in which the relatively developed areas of East-Central Europe – which largely had industrial potential and advantageous infrastructure – merged with the relatively undeveloped Austrian and German regions (which represented significant transformations). As a result a natural situation of competition arose among the areas. This not only covered Austrian-German relations, but also affected intraregional relations in the given countries. By this we mean that as a result of the inflow of western capital into these western-located or capital city-based regions the transformation of the economy was quicker – i.e., more successful – and hence the west-east or capital city-countryside division increased instead of diminished.

The Central European banana (or boomerang) can launch two potential development zones or expansions. One of the zones begins in Prague and includes the large industrial cities of the former East Germany (Berlin, Leipzig) – connecting to Berlin, and then turns to Poznan and back to the Czech capital. The Berlin-Warsaw axis is forming at a spectacular rate, not only as a new transportation and communications corridor (Pan-European Transport Corridor No 2) in the near future – opening toward Minsk and Moscow – but as a new innovation axis as well. This may result in a shift in the center of gravity in the spatial structure of East-Central Europe, as much of the transportation of goods can be "lured" here and new economic directions can be established that devalue and diminish earlier spatial connections. The entire spatial structure could be transformed as a result.

Another potential expansion of the Central European banana (or boomerang) is along a north-south axis that can connect the coast of the Adriatic Sea with the North Sea. This possible expansion can also emphasis the Berlin-Warsaw axis, but also activate Slovenia, Croatia and the eastern and southern counties of Austria. Due to the unique aspects of the spatial structure it can be assumed that the future fusion of East-Central Europe's northern and southeastern development areas will take place along the Prague-Brno-Vienna-Bratislava-Győr-Budapest axis. An economic and spatial structure turntable can form here (East-Central European mushroom) which can fuse East-Central Europe's future renewal zones with Eastern Europe – mainly eastern Slovakia and Ukraine – and the Balkans – largely Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria – transferring capital, knowledge and innovation to the latter two areas and their centers.

Beyond current and future development zones, transitional areas with various characteristics were also present in East-Central Europe in the nineties. Some of these were traditional industrial districts, transformational agricultural districts, mountainous zones with active tourism or those large cities or peripheries hoping to utilize cross-border cooperation. One could draw an "eastern wall" that broke the developmental slope and which encompassed the peripheral border areas – those touching Belorussia and the Ukraine — of the eastern part of the group of countries. Characteristically most of these areas were based on agriculture, provincial, contained a village and small-city settlement network, were unfavorably developed, and had poorer infrastructure than the national average. In other provincial cities the inner resources for renewal were lacking, there was scant interest on behalf of foreign capital, and tensions in employment and society were sharpened. Beyond the numerous disadvantages of being on the periphery, the fact that the post-Soviet areas bordered so-called "western" regions made it possible to activate various elements of resources and to establish new areas for relations. The dismantling of the "eastern wall", however, was obstructed by dilapidated and narrowly cross-sectioned transportation (and border crossing) infrastructure, by the slow development of post-Soviet state institutions, by the increased defense of the eastern borders of the European Union, by the flowering of the black market, and by markedly poor public safety.

The Competitiveness of the Regions of East-Central Europe

We conducted research on the regions (NUTS 2) of East-Central Europe by analyzing competitiveness. Our aim was to locate factors – economic, social and institutional – that strongly determined the whole of the examined region and its inner structure (which would determine its relations to other regions). Further, by ranking regions we could make recommendations to improve their position and strengthen their competitiveness.

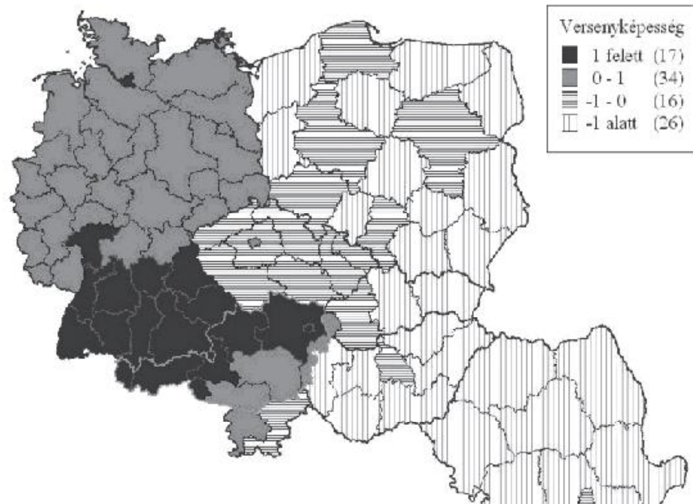
Readings of theoretical models of competitiveness and related studies contributed to our research by allowing us to build new elements into our existing model (*Lengyel* 2000; *Lengyel* 2012). Classic labor force productivity and employment categories were refined, and as a result we moved beyond the factors of research and development, human capital and operating capital to also incorporate parameters related to factors like social capital and the trading sector (branches producing for exports).

We compared the NUTS 2 units of eight countries for a total of 93 regions. We utilized 25 variables as a starting point, which we examined using various mathematical-statistical methods.

Analyzing factors underlying competitiveness like labor productivity and employment allows us to state that the East-Central Europe area is strongly differentiated and includes a well-defined cleavage. The separation can generally be described as a division between the developed western market economies (Germany, Austria) on the one hand and the developing regions of East-Central Europe on the other. These areas diverge from one another in an unambiguous way. The former is characterized by a pairing of high employment with high productivity, while regions in the other group are opposite, where low employment goes hand in hand with lower productivity.

That the area at large is deeply divided is made visible by clear west-east differences. The former socialist countries have a concentration of resources in their capital cities and marked differences between their own regions. Thus there are just a small number of recognizable developmental zones (series of regions with continuous development), whereas poorly developed and largely peripheral regions are present in large blocks (Map 3.).

Map 3. – *The Competitiveness of the Regions of East-Central Europe*



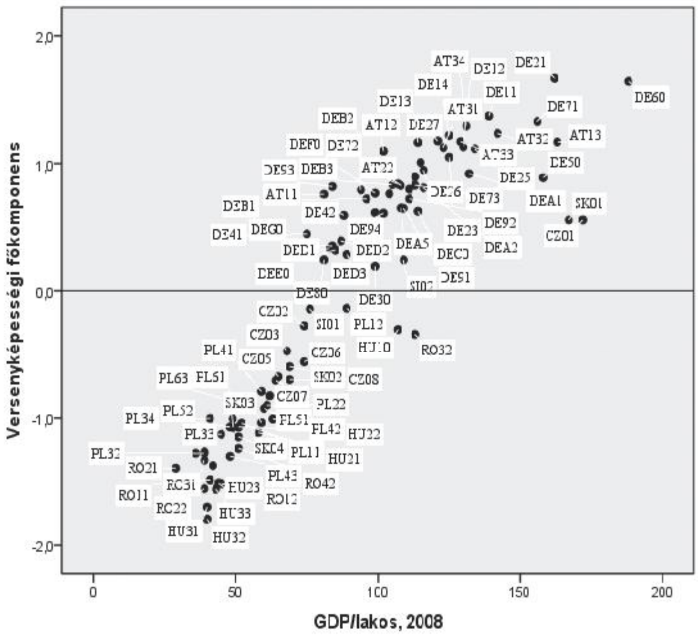
Legend:
1. "Versenyképesség" – Competitiveness
2. "1 felett" – Greater than 1
3. "-1 alatt" – Less than –1

Source: *Lengyel (2012), p. 214.*

In comparison to the regions of other post-socialist countries the regions of Hungary are not in an advantageous situation. Only the Central Hungary and West Transdanubia regions display measurable competitiveness, while the other regions are lagging behind significantly and fall into the weak competitiveness category. This is further confirmed by examining the key components of competitiveness – as concentrated expressions of the analyzed factors – are compared with GDP per person and the relations are systematized in a two-dimensional diagram (Diagram 1).

The division in the region at large is even more pronounced and evident when we observe that significant developmental differences have appeared in East-Central Europe. Beyond the above-mentioned German and Austrian regions, the cleavage was only transgressed by the regions of Prague and Bratislava (among all the regions of the post socialist states).[5] The Hungarian capital's competitiveness is at a moderate borderline level and has an advantageous specific GDP. The West Transdanubia and Central Transdanubia regions have GDP-s that approach the average, but with low competitiveness. This hold even truer for the rest of the Hungarian regions, which are ranked more in the middle than in the lower end of the underdeveloped sector.

Diagram 1. – The Relationship between the Key Components of Competitiveness and Economic Development (GDP per person)



Source: *Lengyel (2012), p. 215.o.*

5 The latest regional-level GDP data confirm this result. Of the European Union's 20 most developed regions the Bratislava region (Bratislavsky kraj) is at 178% of the EU average and ranks fifth, while the Prague regions (Praha) reached 175% of the EU average in 2009 and ranked seventh.

Further studies – inner analyses on factors affecting competitiveness — came to the conclusion that two factors define a region's position in competitiveness ranking. The first can be called human capital – this factor includes the development of the labor force, the ability to attract laborers and the existence of patents – that strongly divides the grand area but which gives a subtler picture when differentiated. Among the Hungarian regions the two mentioned above (West and Central Transdanubia) are more similar to the Czech and Polish border regions. The other Hungarian regions lag far behind and are similar to peripheral Romanian and Polish border regions. The other factor is that of research and development – research and development spending, proportion of workers in the high-tech sector, accumulation of capital assets, winning framework programs – that symbolizes the knowledge-based economy and the presence of innovative sectors. These factors better spread across the East-Central European region. In this mushroom-shaped division the Hungarian regions lag further behind primarily the Czech but also the Polish regions. The analysis confirms the Hungarian – but also East-Central European – uniqueness whereby the capital city is markedly different from the rest of the regions – in our case Budapest's situation is clear – and values here are closer to those of the Western European region, or are closer to the "head" of the mushroom. The "stem" is a lagging grouping in which we find a block of Hungarian regions, signifying that their research potential is disadvantageous and as such their competitiveness in East-Central Europe is markedly weak.

Summary of the Experiment

Researchers' interest in East-Central Europe has grown over the past few years. The reason for this is that the majority of countries in this region has joined or will soon join the European Union, and as such have become members of the European economic space and political community. The transition in the economy has been completed – though we encounter numerous corrections, new solutions and experiments – in the countries, but the spatial structure transformation has been slow to be initiated. Existing differences and anomalies are yet to be dismantled. An increasing number of signs point to the fact that territorial processes have not sped up. We cannot register cohesion and equalization according to European political expectations.

We can observe a development level split between western and eastern regions within the countries in question. Generally the capital cities and wider agglomeration regions have a high concentration of resources and stand out in terms of their country's income generation and human potential. Beyond the capital cities only some large cities and regional centers are able to produce a faster dynamic, largely those in which progressive branches that are capable of producing for the world market (e.g., vehicular, electronics industries) have undergone renewal, or where such branches recently took root, and where transportation processes are multifaceted. Among provincial regions built around smaller centers only those able to utilize or transform tourism advantages or unique agricultural cultures have seen convergence begin. These regions can successfully participate in integration processes. We further observe the gathering momentum of border-area relations and manifestations of forms thereof (e.g., macro-regional development strategies (Danube Strategy), construction of organizational systems (Euroregions), creation of new institutional frameworks (EGTC)) and the spread of spheres of influence and attraction of large cities located near national borders to cross-border areas. This trend is more and more pronounced.

The region as a whole is deeply divided. It is clear that the spatial structure manifestations of the processes mentioned above affect given countries in different ways. There are some where territorial development is more even while others have long-term and divisive structures being developed. Competition between the countries and regions of East-Central Europe is increasingly visible and is actually further fueled by the drawn out economic crisis and its effects, along with the divergence of reactions to it.

Research on the geopolitical situation, the economic- and social-structure, institutional systems and most importantly the spatial structure (settlement network) of East-Central Europe is necessary and indispensable. This study ought to be seen as a way to increase interest and spark debate.

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