



ANTÓNIO PORTUGAL DUARTE
SRDJAN REDZEPAGIC
FÁTIMA SOL MURTA
COORD.

THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS

CRISIS AND RESILIENCE
IN THE AFTERMATH
OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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The process of European integration is considered the most innovative example of regionalism in the world. The Covid-19 pandemic crisis, which the world experienced since the beginning of 2020, caused a brutal negative shock on the economies. It raised new doubts and challenges about the European integration project, making the prospect of the EU's dissolution something possible, even if undesirable. The book analyses these events, counting with the contribution of 41 authors, from universities and research centers of several European countries, and also from other continents. Its objective is to gather four perspectives to the European integration in a post-pandemic context: i) that of the countries of the Eurozone; ii) that of the Eurozone candidate countries; iii) the East "look" of EU candidate countries, and iv) the view of the rest of the world. The book is divided into four parts, each corresponding to one of these inputs, for a total of 24 chapters.



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WHAT FUTURE FOR HUNGARY AFTER THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK?

Réka Horeczki

Institute for Regional Studies, ELKH CERS, Hungary

horeczki.reka@krtk.hu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3131-681X>

ABSTRACT: Major economic, natural and social shocks always bring new insights, to regions as well, which call for new directions for development activities and related actions. The Covid-19 epidemic broke out, swept across the world in 2019, and has radically transformed almost every aspect of life. The change in meaning caused by the Covid-19 has also affected the rhetoric of countries and their role in the European Union. Isolationist processes have slowed down and fragmented integration into the EU. In this challenging period, we again witness a shift in the role of rural space (shelter, safe space) and its changing interpretation and also the reversal of negative connotations associated with the countryside: loneliness, self-sufficiency, distance. Therefore, the study focuses on the factors that have the potential to further enhance these positive values, and do not increase the resilience of rural areas.

Keywords: Hungary, Covid-19, rural areas, economic policy

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1. Possible scenarios for Hungary after Covid-19

For Europe and the integration, the last two years have been incredibly eventful. Many questions have arisen as to whether these emerging factors have helped deepen integration or are holding it back. During the Brexit process, the EU was surprisingly united. However, the Covid-crisis has had far-reaching political, economic and social consequences. Throughout history, major pandemics have been associated with a reduction in economic inequalities. The Covid-virus may be the only shock in the world that can be associated with a continuation or increase in current levels of inequality (Balázs 2020, DemNet blog). The pandemic has shown us the weakness of the EU's institutional systems, and the Member States have remained the key actors in crisis management. The lack of individual strategies and action plans and the lack of solidarity between Member States has led to serious difficulties in terms of integration (Molnár et al., 2020). The epidemic situation does not empower the EU institutions with more community competences, but at most – based on the experience of the last year and a half – helps Member States to develop crisis scenarios, such as recommendations for the accommodation and admission of patients across borders, the transfer and sharing of medical staff between Member States (Balázs, 2020). The isolationist politics of the Covid-19 has become a barrier to cooperation. Krekó et al. (2020) developed three scenarios for the future: Progressives' Paradise: Welfare and Democratic Expansion; The rule of Leviathan: Bureaucratic stranglehold; and Progress of hybrid regimes, Drifting.

In the optimistic scenario, the crisis could lead to achievements that would put an end to social injustices and the limitation of economic resources. A picture of a strong state would emerge, building on the current welfare systems of solidarity and democracy, and mitigating the damage through redistribution. In Europe, this is the direction that is unfolding in Germany, Austria, Denmark and Finland. The pessimistic vision predicts the completion of state centralisation, with the “abuse of power” (Krekó et al., 2020, p. 5.) in this particular crisis situation being intensified, thus providing opportunities for manipulation, citizen control and corruption.

Such trends can be observed in Poland, Hungary and Serbia. The third scenario is drifting, which is far from having a positive meaning. Weak state engagement leads to disintegration; new structures emerge alongside the current ones that are dysfunctional or failing, international cooperation capacity is weakened, and new types of political cooperation may emerge. Factors that contribute to the unfolding of all three scenarios can be found in each country. In Hungary, a good example of the optimistic scenario is the growing confidence in scientists and science and the disciplined behaviour of the population. Disappointing are the results of surveys (e.g. Tárki¹) showing a deterioration of the personal circumstances, both in terms of income and psychological conditions.

1.1. Main social and economic impacts

In 2020, the EU's GDP will have fallen by 6.2% compared to the previous year. The euro area also suffered a recession of 6.6% (Molnár et al. 2021). The Hungarian economy has endured further the shocks of the economic downturn and restrictive measures; its GDP fell by 5.1%, second only to that of the Visegrad countries (Poland 2.7%). Construction (9.4%) and agriculture (6.7%) are among the sectors that fell most significantly in added value. Growth was more significant in two sectors: information and communication and financial and insurance activities. Hungary will receive 504 million EUR from Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) (European Commission 2020). It can use the financial support received to cover part of the costs linked to the introduction or extension of reduced working time ("Kurzarbeit") at national level. The conditions for participation in the wage subsidy scheme introduced in the country were rather narrow, with little real help for companies and workers. Only retail or catering establishments whose employees were working full-time continuously from 2019 onwards, and were not dismissed

¹ More information about the research of Tárki: <https://tarki.hu/2020>

during the lock-downs, benefited from the support (Hungarian Blogs 2020)². The government wants to boost tourism and catering primarily through direct transfers and employment incentives, but there is also a strong clientelism³ approach behind these measures – which is clearly reflected in the list of the main beneficiaries of tourism subsidies (Krekó et al. 2020). The Hungarian Reinvention Programme consisted of 6-8 weeks of retraining, which taught unemployed jobseekers basic programming and IT skills. These courses existed before Covid-19, but are now available free of charge⁴ (Bogóné Jehoda et al., 2021). In 2021, the average annual unemployment rate will be around 4%, with good figures forecast for the coming years. The damage from the mass redundancies in 2020 seems to be levelling off in the recovery phases. However, the very significant increase in the minimum wage at the end of 2021 (also driven by electoral considerations) has triggered a further large increase in wage costs. “It is doubtful how less productive and/or more vulnerable firms will be able to cope with wage increase demands and social pressures; this is one of the hard-to-measure risks for 2022” (Bod et al. 2021. p. 78.).

In some countries, the pandemic has also changed party preferences and levels of trust. In Hungary, support for the governing party has

² For more details see Hungarian blogs: <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20200410/itt-a-kormany-unnepi-ajandeka-megjelent-a-magyar-kurzarbeit-szabalyozas-425460>; <https://g7.hu/kozelet/20200414/biztosan-nem-fogja-megmenteni-a-vallalatokat-amit-a-kormany-kitalalt/>; https://www.napi.hu/magyar_vallalatok/bucsut-vehetunk-a-beremelesektol---ez-lesz-a-veszni-hagyott-100-ezernyi-munkahely-nyomaban.706509.html .

³ In the clientelism model, the most important task of the municipality and local economic actors is the so-called “flattery or patronage”, since this is how they obtain development funds from the state. Although centralised, governance is effective by supporting local initiative, where the role of the local community is active. In terms of the use of public funds the allocation of resources is subjective, based on individual judgement. In this model, the role of the individual is particularly important (László, 1998).

⁴ More information: <https://kormany.hu/hirek/ujratervezes-program-matol-ismet-lehet-jelentkezni-az-ingyenes-informatikai-kepzesre>

remained high; the majority of people are satisfied with the government's response to the epidemic (Medián⁵ and Publicus⁶ research 2020).

2. Resilience during the coronavirus

Resilience, as a horizontal analysis criterion, has an impact on all areas of self-governance. The concept of resilience has covered a long path in the literature, from classical risk management to complex learning and adaptive capacity and sustainability in ecological, natural science, psychological, sociological and governance contexts (Welsh 2014). In the study, we do not limit the concept of resilience to natural disasters and economic shocks, but we analyse the capacity to adapt to change, based on social, economic and public capacities. The approach is also relatively specific in that we limit the governance dimension of resilience to the less researched local scale. The mainstream neoliberal approach argues that decentralised, community-dominated governance systems are not only more democratic, but also more effective (Pálné 2014), though the 2008 crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, have provided particularly strong arguments for those who argue in favour of a centralised, state-centred, neo-Weberian governance model. In fact, both the hierarchical and network mechanisms of coordination are present in governance (Bouckaert-Peters-Verhoest 2010), but the question is how the proportion of these is differentiated. Limited capacity for self-governance is also a feature of highly centralised governance systems in general, regardless of the size and status of local governments (Warner-Hefetz 2008). In local development policy and spatial planning, areas formed along different functions may create diverse networks by enforcing economies of scale and subsidiarity. Vanier (2008) refers to the spatial structure resulting

⁵ About Medián research: https://hvg.hu/360/20200610_A_jarvany_enyhulesevel_eroso_dott_a_Fidesz_de_a_30_ev_alattiak_kozt_elverezne

⁶ About Publicus Institute research: <https://publicus.hu/blog/partok-tamogatottsaga-2020-majus/>

from these networks as ‘spatial galaxies’. The resilience of metropolitan areas is much more complex, relies on more substantial resources and has an international dimension. In contrast to the internationalising ‘new municipalism’ of metropolitan areas, Thompson (2020) assumes that the scope and geographical action of local governments in rural areas, with little power/connection and administrative capacity and limited competence, is much narrower, with reserves that can increase their capacity for self-government only in the area of local-scale, horizontal cooperation and social embeddedness. In rural spaces with a small urban centre, many of the conditions for self-governance are prominently lacking, which can be an obstacle to local economic development, but also to accessing EU development funds from the EU (Taylor 2016). The local self-governance capability encompasses the most important conditions for the functioning and development of local governments as self-governing entities (Finta 2019).

2.1. Vulnerability in rural areas in Hungary

Each country has responded differently in terms of governance measures; governance culture, structure and social relations have had a significant impact on response (Bouckaert et al., 2020). These processes required rapid decisions, which resulted in a new approach and implementation approach at European level in the city/county/state relationship. The OECD Reports (2020) have highlighted the benefits of using digital technologies, fine-tuning economic support, and the increased power of communication, discipline and awareness. Mayors have been shown to play a crucial role in local communication, as they have done in the past, and a number of measures were introduced to enforce social distancing. The vulnerability and social sensitivity of rural areas was repeatedly highlighted during the Covid-19 outbreak. The strength of local communities has worked well in previous crises; so, in this situation, they provided support in the areas of local food supply, health care support systems and the transition to digital education. Transport constraints have adversely affected rural areas, and labour-intensive sectors

that relied on seasonal and guest workers⁷ have been hit hard. From the social risk perspective, higher rates of ageing, insufficient health services, long distance to hospitals, more limited opportunities for teleworking and working from home (as digital infrastructure is not always adequate) are risk factors (Horeczki-Egyed 2021). As restrictions were eased, more people travelled to rural areas and moved there temporarily. The epidemic has led to new perspectives: commuting by car became also a symbol of a green environment, comfortable travel; most of the commuting was from the suburbs, within a 5-20 km radius of the major cities. Most of the total administrative area of these municipalities is green land (forest, arable land, gardens, vineyards) and not urban or industrial land. So, commuters could feel more like rural dwellers in these second homes than urban citizens in the real one. The small-town properties are cheaper and larger than in bigger cities (work-life separation due to changes in work patterns), small towns do not have to face the problems metropolitan cities face (crowds, noise, traffic chaos, etc.). Physical distance to prevent the spread of Covid-19 is easier to achieve and maintain in a small town: e-commerce has accelerated, mobile shops and home delivery (due to the closure of restaurants) are becoming common practice. However, statistics show that most rural areas are vulnerable in more than one way. The lack of general practitioners, paediatricians, basic infrastructure (e.g., sewers), fewer commercial and catering outlets (more crowding) are all extreme risk-factors.

The population of rural areas in Hungary changed significantly during the pandemic. Groupama's⁸ (2020) survey showed that one in ten residents of the capital city (Budapest) spent weeks in their weekend homes during quarantine, and 50% of those surveyed planned to buy a holiday home or holiday property during the quarantine period, mainly

⁷ Mirror translation to the German word "gastarbaiter" or the Hungarian word "vendégmunkás". The real mean: Foreign national who is permitted to live and work temporarily in a host country.

⁸ Read more about the survey: <https://www.groupama.hu/hu/Sajtoszoba/Sajtokozlemenyek.html?name=/hu/>

in rural areas and small towns. A report by the Hétfa Research Institute (2020) estimated the number of holiday homes for domestic travellers, mainly from Budapest, during the pandemic period. The number of people moving temporarily to the countryside was expected to be high in the Lake Balaton area, the Venice resort area, the Gyöngyös district, and the Orfű and Siklós-Villány areas. A higher proportion of temporary migration to the South Transdanubian region could create a number of problems, as this is a peripheral region, whose economic backwardness and small village structure impact its infrastructure negatively. The construction of the M6, M7 and R67 roads has fostered the development of linear infrastructure. A fundamental problem in the region is the concentration of economic activity in the county capitals, the high number of slums and the negative change in the age composition. The region's settlement structure is characterised by a high proportion of small villages of less than 500 inhabitants, the region's 41 towns are evenly distributed, but the post-2000s urbanisation wave has resulted in a high number of small towns with a lack of urban functions. Institutionalisation and level of development can be treated separately for these towns. Institutional provision is characterised by the absence of the four main institutions: the document office, a bank branch, a secondary education establishment or a retail sector offering a wide range of products. The majority of small towns in areas of urban deprivation had one function (typically spa, resort, or other micro-regional roles). Institutions have been created by specialisation, e.g. the small towns on the shores of Lake Balaton have all the functions that are important for tourism (commercial services, accommodation, public safety, etc.) but not all or none of the other functions (e.g. education, public services, document offices, land registry, etc.). Small towns, located 30-50 minutes by road from the county centres, have emerged as a major travel destinations as the epidemic situation has eased. The health risk in the region is also reflected in the fact that the number of patients per general practitioner is increasing (1876 on average in 2018) despite the decline in population, and has increased significantly (by 18%) in all three counties over the last twenty years. The population served is particularly high in the Komló, Siófok and Pécsvárad

areas. In terms of the number of paediatricians, the figures are much worse: the number of patients per paediatricians is almost three times higher than the national and county averages in the districts of Szigetvár, Lengyeltóti, Sellyei and Siklós. The number of pharmacies has increased significantly in the region since 2000, but the quality of care and the range of products available are limited.

A municipal survey (2020) conducted by the Institute for Regional Studies of the CERS assessed how the coronavirus epidemic was managed at different levels of the municipal hierarchy. The survey addressed 44 municipal leaders, twelve of whom manage traditional small urban areas in Transdanubia and two in the lowlands, six in small towns with a population of less than 10,000 inhabitants (small towns, of which are three district centre and three non-district centre). Response of the small urban areas in the survey to the epidemiological situation are presented below. Epidemiological measures in small towns can be divided into five main categories: restrictive (most of the tasks are centrally managed), facilitative (provision of services), organisational (tasks that determine reorganisation), information and health protection. Among the compulsory tasks, the following centrally defined tasks have been carried out: celebrations and events have been cancelled or not organised; restrictions have been imposed on customer services; crèches, kindergartens, community spaces – Library, Community Centre have been closed. Most of the support measures were targeted at the vulnerable age group: the municipality organised care for people in official quarantine, care for the population over 70 years and public catering. Municipalities were responsible for delivering services and had to organise themselves accordingly: employees were present in the office for matters requiring physical presence; the increase in the rent of municipal rental housing was postponed in the district municipalities; electronic administration was introduced where possible; the enrolment policy for nurseries and kindergartens was changed. Outreach measures have continued, and several small towns use social media to inform the population as widely as possible; websites have been used to indicate how many people are under official quarantine. In the field of health protection and prevention, the following tasks were carried out: provision of protective equipment (masks, hand sanitizer) for office workers, and for

the entire population, with the involvement of civil society; disinfection in public areas and institutions; protective equipment was also provided for general practitioners. The survey also examined voluntary and compulsory tasks and priorities, prevention and social care being managed at local level by the municipalities, as identified by municipal leaders.

3. Summary

The pandemic has broken the fragile bonds of international cooperation within Europe and between member countries. The first reaction was isolation and the defence of internal borders rather than unity. Border controls were lifted again, including within Schengen area, to prevent the spread of the virus. The first shock came in the area of health, where the EU was not united in its approach to the virus. To make up for the latter, economic matters are now being addressed collectively. The situation caused by the Covid-19 will not only leave a lasting mark upon people's lives, but will change the balance of power and "power games".

Loss in the epidemic includes the lives that were lost, the social distancing that outlasted the epidemic, economic decline, the jobs that disappeared. Consumption and lost income are catching up as businesses and services reopen, but the general and local governments continue to be the main problem-solving organisations.

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