

Explore Hungary!

On behalf of the editorial board of *Regional Statistics*, I would like to recommend this selection to the attention of readers. *Regional Statistics* was launched over half a century ago as the scientific periodical of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, which has been ranked highly among scientific journals by the competent committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It has a wide range of authors and researchers in the fields of geography, and social and economic studies. In addition to statisticians its contributors include planners, officials and decision-makers in the areas of regional and settlement development, whose articles fill each issue month by month.

Regional aspects have always had a key role in public thinking in Hungary. Saint Stephen, our first king, organised a modern, single state on a territorial basis in the 11th century, which replaced the former social model of tribes and families. The public and church administration and territorial division established at the time still constitute the basis of the public administration system today. In the 16th and 17th centuries Hungary was split into three due to Ottoman expansion, which had an impact on the territorial development of the different parts of the country for centuries. The part of the country that came under Ottoman rule, which lasted for a hundred and fifty years, was practically laid waste and depopulated, and only earlier tax assessments and church ruins suggest a once dense settlement network. After liberation from Ottoman rule, the country had to be resettled and repopulated, which further differentiated its ethnic composition, the way of life and the settlement structure in the country. Settlements with long boundaries and large populations were created on the Great Plain with a specific symbiosis between towns and their environs.

In the Carpathian Basin a special regional economic division of labour was established built on geographical endowments, in line with transport possibilities and the system of relations between settlements. This organically developing whole was torn apart by the Treaty of Trianon after World War I. The counterpoles of Budapest became part of new nation states, and Budapest suddenly became over dominant in the country shrunk to one-third of its former size. At the same time, the arrival of intellectuals, forced to leave the succession states, exacerbated the excess weight of the capital in numerical, economic and intellectual terms. The growing preponderance of the capital and inequalities at regional and settlement levels further compounded the importance of the territorial approach.

Reducing territorial disparities, creating new urban poles and helping the countryside catch up became important political issues even in the “socialist” system, which strove for strong centralisation.

Research at the turn of the 1990s demonstrated that territorial status indices had a decisive role in social stratification. The social status of an individual or a family shows a very high correlation with their status of residence. From this one can deduct with high probability an individual’s income and property status, position in the division of labour, social prestige and cultural position.

Therefore spatial questions have always been political issues as well in Hungary, and a full knowledge of the country can only be acquired through an awareness of territorial circumstances.

Very significant intellectual capital has been accumulated in the area of spatial research in Hungary. Spatial research is very widespread in regional statistics, and serves as a basis for exploring further spatial dimensions of regional development and sectoral policies, and for preparing concepts and plans. We wish to present some extracts of these diverse and thorough research activities performed in the past two years.

In the European Union's Treaty of Lisbon socio-economic cohesion, included in its earlier treaties, was complemented by territorial cohesion, and the relevant chapter was entitled "social, economic and territorial cohesion". This modification started an intensive intellectual discussion in the community as a whole on the interpretation and practical application of territorial cohesion.

The questions which have arisen can only be answered cooperatively with others in the knowledge of the spatial aspects of one's country.

When we in Hungary examine regional disparities, the determining impact of the spatial structure, the effect of the crisis on Hungarian industry, the relation between the transformation of railways and accessibility, transport and health care in a particular region, or for example the role of the Romanian workforce in the Hungarian employment system, we do not only consider developments in Hungary but also invite others to think together with us.

A good example of thinking together is a subject chosen by the Hungarian EU Presidency: the impacts of European demographic trends and migration on the development of towns. Our study on this subject was well received and encouraged serious debate, and its effect can be perceived in the latest version of the new regulation of cohesion policy.

The study entitled "The role of neighbourhood in the regional distribution of Europe" also provides a European comparison. However, this European outlook as well as the rest of the studies report primarily on spatial conditions in Hungary.

We invite you to explore Hungary!

Péter Szaló

Editor in Chief