

(Hi)stories of Migration, Mobility, and Travel:
Crossing Literary, Linguistic, and Historical Boundaries

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Edited by Balázs Venkovits and Gábor Pusztai



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Internal Migration in Hungary

After the Change of Regime

János Péntes

Introduction

The concept of internal migration balance is often used in investigations focusing on spatial development patterns because developed areas generally tend to attract migrants while more backward regions often face outmigration.¹ Due to the selective character of migration, cumulative demographic problems may occur.² In this chapter, the Hungarian settlement-level migration balances are analyzed in order to detect the most important spatial characteristics (without including international migration). The temporary and permanent migration databases from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) and the National Regional Development and Spatial Planning Information System (TeIR) were used in the analyses, in which relative values of the migration balance were also relied on (the difference between immigration and outmigration is compared to the population of the territory).

Historical Background

Internal migration has gone through significant changes regarding its trends and destinations within Hungary. After the Second World War, during the decades of socialism, rural-urban migration was dominant, lasting until 1990. An outstanding migration surplus characterized Budapest during the first half of the 20th century, which slowed down after 1960. Towns also realized gains in

¹ János Péntes' research is supported by the Bolyai János Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

² Nagy András, "A kedvezményezett térségek besorolásának alakulása, a lehatárolások módszertanának sajátosságai," *Területi Statisztika* 14, no. 51 (2) (2011): 151; Péntes János, "A kedvezményezett térségek lehatárolásának aktuális kérdései," *Területi Statisztika* 55, no. 3 (2015): 224; Péntes János, István Zoltán Pásztor, and Patrik Tátrai, "Demographic processes of developmentally peripheral areas in Hungary," *Stanovništvo* 53, no. 2 (2015): 104–105, doi: 10.2298/STNV1502087P; Ekéné Zamárdi Ilona, "A bihari kistérségek társadalmi degradációjának veszélyei a migráció tükrében," in *A településföldrajz helyzete és főbb kutatási irányai az ezredforduló után*, ed. Csapó Tamás, Zsolt Kocsis, and Tibor Lenner (Szombathely: Berzsényi Dániel Főiskola, 2005), 98–99.; Ekéné Zamárdi Ilona and Zoltán Dövényi, "Migráció és mobilitás," in *Világföldrajz*, ed. Tóth József (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2010), 376–377.

migration due to the development of larger cities (including the county seats) and the forced investments in the so-called socialist towns.³ At the same time, villages faced outstanding population loss caused by the outmigration of a primarily young and skilled group of people. The cumulative impact of this process was even more problematic concerning the demographic (and economic) trends because the reproduction of the rural population significantly weakened.⁴

The push factor in the case of rural settlements was represented by the radically decreasing level of local employment as a consequence of agricultural collectivization, whilst the forced industrialization generated a pull factor in the case of the towns preferred by the regime. These tensions were mitigated by temporary and permanent migration and by rural-urban commuting from the 1960s.⁵ As the accumulated result of these processes, a large contrast emerged between the rural and urban areas in terms of the migration patterns (as losing and winning areas regarding the migration balance).⁶

The Spatial Patterns of Internal Migration After the Political Transition ***Internal Migration Between the Political Transition and the Mid-2000s***

Following the political and economic transition from centrally-controlled planning to a free-market economy, migration also changed completely compared to the previous decades. Within a few years after the fundamental changes, the migration balances of the main categories of settlements were reversed (see Figure 1). Villages gained a migration surplus whilst outmigration exceeded the immigration in the case of Budapest, while the raw number of temporary and permanent migration decreased at the same time.⁷

This period spanning a whole decade represented the most outstanding years of suburbanization in Hungary (Stage I. on Figure 1). Suburbanization

³ Beluszky Pál, *Magyarország településföldrajza – Általános rész*, (Budapest–Pécs: Dialóg Campus Kiadó, 1999): 219–252; Dövényi Zoltán, “A belföldi vándormozgalom strukturális és területi sajátosságai Magyarországon,” *Demográfia* 50, no. 4 (2007): 336–39; Dövényi Zoltán, “A belső vándormozgalom Magyarországon: folyamatok és struktúrák,” *Statistikai Szemle* 87, no. 7–8 (2009): 749–52.

⁴ Ekéné Zamárdi, “A bihari kistelepülések,” 94–96.

⁵ Erdősi Ferenc, “Az ingázás területi-vonzáskörzeti szerkezete Magyarországon,” *Demográfia* 28, no. 4 (1985): 492–95.

⁶ Molnár Ernő and Péntes János, “A migráció szerepe Magyarország II. világháború utáni népesedésében,” *Debreceni Disputa* 5, no. 1 (2008): 48–52.; Dövényi, “A belső vándormozgalom Magyarországon,” 339–40.

⁷ Dövényi, “A belső vándormozgalom Magyarországon,” 339–40.

is a significant spatial restructuring (relative deconcentration) of the population living in the city that resulted in widespread and comprehensive consequences.⁸

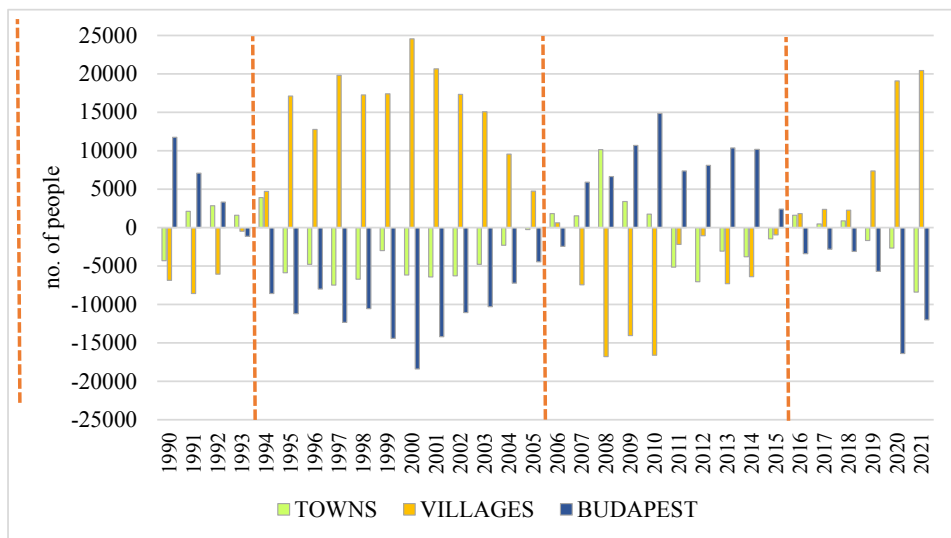


Figure 1. Internal migration balance of the towns, villages of Hungary and Budapest between 1990 and 2021, in no. of people (Source: calculated from the datasets of the National Regional Development and Spatial Planning Information System (TeIR))

Suburbanization—according to one of the explanations—is rooted in neoclassical economic theory, assuming goals of profit maximization or satisfaction (the former one for businessmen, the latter for residents). Important attracting forces in relation to the suburbs are the environmental advantage (clean air, less noise, and fewer traffic jams), the aesthetics of urban environment and family-centered lifestyle.⁹ At the same time, the mass migration

⁸ Enyedi György, “The Stages of Urban Growth,” in *Urban Sprawl in Europe: Similarities or Differences?* ed. Szirmai Viktoria (Budapest: Aula Publisher, 2011): 45–63; Bajmócy Péter, “A szuburbanizáció két évtizede Magyarországon,” *Észak-magyarországi Stratégiai Füzetek* 11, no. 2 (2014): 6–7; Oleksii Havryliuk, Oleksiy Gnatiuk and Konstantyn Mezentsev, “Suburbanization, but centralization? Migration patterns in the post-Soviet functional urban region – evidence from Kyiv,” *Folia Geographica* 63, no. 1 (2021): 64–68; Hegedűs László Dávid, Zoltán Túri, Norbert Apáti and János Pénzes, “Analysis of the Intra-Urban Suburbanization with GIS Methods – The Case of Debrecen Since the 1980s,” *Folia Geographica* 65, no. 1 (2023): 24–28.

⁹ Timár, Judit, “The Main Features of Suburbanization in the Great Hungarian Plain,” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 22, no. 2–4 (1993): 182–83. doi: 10.1016/0169-2046(92)90021-Q

to suburbs triggered massive environmental and infrastructural problems which are expected to be one of greatest challenges in the near future in light of climate change and sustainable development.¹⁰

Suburbanization became one of the most significant territorial processes including its social and economic consequences in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, after the collapse of the strongly state-controlled housing and construction sector.¹¹ The changes in the housing sector could be summarized as follows: drastic decline in the construction of new dwellings; decreasing real estate prices mostly in the case of declining territories reduced the outmigration of population; and the shrinking ratio of rental housing as the consequence of the selling of dwellings by the local governments.¹²

¹⁰ Lennert József, "A magyar vidék demográfiai jövőképe 2051-ig, különös tekintettel a klímaváltozás szerepére a belső vándormozgalom alakításában," *Területi Statisztika* 59, no. 5 (2019): 498–525. doi: 10.15196/TS590503; Kovács Zoltán, Jenő Zsolt Farkas, Tamás Egedy, Attila Csaba Kondor, Balázs Szabó, József Lennert, Dorián Baka, and Balázs Kohán, "Urban Sprawl and Land Conversion in Post-Socialist Cities: The Case of Metropolitan Budapest," *Cities* 92, (2019): 71–81. doi: 10.1016/j.cities.2019.03.018; Kovács Zoltán, Jenő Zsolt Farkas, Cecília Szigeti, Gábor Harangozó, "Assessing the Sustainability of Urbanization at the Sub-National Level: The Ecological Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts of the Budapest Metropolitan Region, Hungary," *Sustainable Cities and Society* 84, (2022): 1–12. doi: 10.1016/j.scs.2022.104022; Hardi Tamás, Gabriela Repaská, Ján Veselovský and Katarína Vilinová, "Environmental Consequences of the Urban Sprawl in the Suburban Zone of Nitra: An Analysis Based on Landcover Data," *Geographica Pannonica* 24, no. 3 (2020): 205–20. doi: 10.5937/gp24-25543; Csorba Péter, Bánóczki Krisztina, and Túri Zoltán, "Land Use Changes in Peri-Urban Open Spaces of Small Towns in Eastern Hungary," *Sustainability* 14, (2022) 1–18. doi: 10.3390/su141710680; Vasárus Gábor László and Lennert József, "Suburbanization Within City Limits in Hungary – A Challenge for Environmental and Social Sustainability," *Sustainability* 14 no. 8855 1–19. doi: 10.3390/su14148855

¹¹ Timár Judit and Váradi Monika Márta, "A szuburbanizáció egyenlőtlen fejlődése az 1990-es évek Magyarországon," in *Magyarország területi szerkezete és folyamatai az ezredfordulón*, ed. Rechnitzer János and Horváth Gyula, (Pécs: MTA Regionális Kutatások Központja, 2000), 153–56; Koós Bálint, "A szuburbanizációs folyamat a magyar gazdaságban," *Statisztikai Szemle* 54, no. 4 (2007): 338–47; Péntes János, "Északkelet-Magyarország jövedelmi térszerkezetének változásai a rendszerváltás után," *Területi Statisztika* 51, no. 2 (2011): 191–95.; Kiril Stanilov and Luděk Sýkora (eds), *Confronting Suburbanization: Urban Decentralization in Postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe*, (New York, NY, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 360; Lennert József, "A visegrádi országok vidéki tereinek rendszerváltás utáni vándorlási folyamatai," *Területi Statisztika* 57, no. 3 (2017): 272–93. doi: 10.15196/TS570302; Ulrike Sailer-Fliege, "Characteristics of Post-Socialist Urban Transformation in East Central Europe," *GeoJournal* 49, (1999): 11–15.

¹² Illés Sándor, *Belföldi vándormozgalom a XX. század utolsó évtizedeiben* (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Népeségstudományi Kutatóintézet, 2000), 65–66.

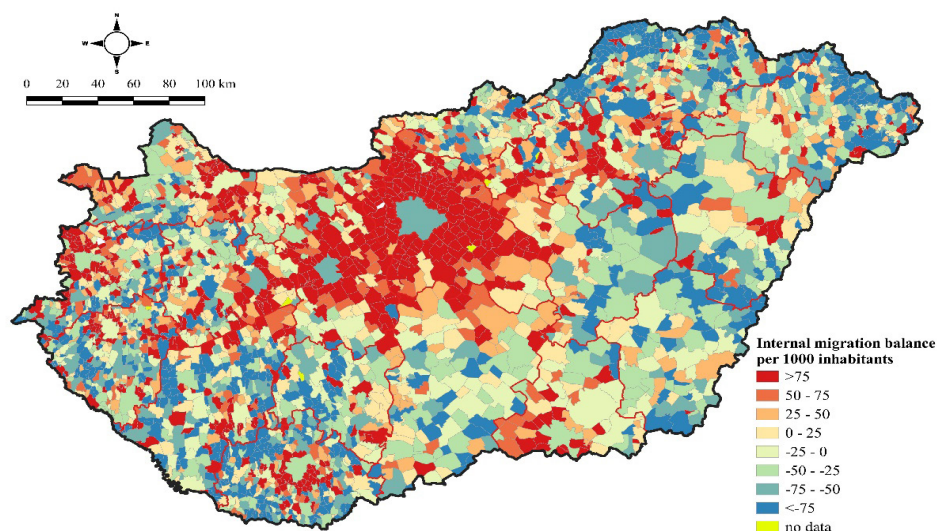


Figure 2. Territorial patterns of average internal migration between 1994 and 2006, in no. of people (Source: calculated from the datasets of the National Regional Development and Spatial Planning Information System (TeIR))

Post-socialist suburbanization partially differs from the process in capitalist countries regarding its motivations, too, because the social stratification of the associated population is more heterogeneous. The new residents moving out of the cities (or staying within the administrative boundaries) represent a large variety of people in terms of their age structure, social status, family situation, and even ethnicity.¹³ Some of the residents must have moved out of the city because of financial constraints or exclusion and some of them were mo-

¹³ Beluszky Pál and Timár Judit, "The Changing Political System and Urban Restructuring in Hungary," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 83, no. 5 (1992): 380–89. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9663.1992.tb00618.x.; Hirt Sonia, "Suburbanizing Sofia: Characteristics of Post-Socialist Peri-Urban Change," *Urban Geography* 28, no. 8 (2007): 755–80. doi: 10.2747/0272-3638.28.8.755.; Stanley D. Brunn, Kvetoslava Matlovičová, Alexander Mušinka and René Matlovič, "Policy implications of the vagaries in population estimates on the accuracy of sociographical mapping of contemporary Slovak Roma communities," *GeoJournal* 83 (2018): 855. doi: 10.1007/s10708-017-9804-9; Péntes János, Hegedűs László Dávid, Kanat Makhanov and Túri Zoltán, "Changes in the Patterns of Population Distribution and Built-up Areas of the Rural–Urban Fringe in Post-Socialist Context – A Central European Case Study," *Land* 12, no. 1682 (2023): 1–3. doi: 10.3390/land12091682.

tivated by a traditional agricultural purpose, and finally some of the affluent citizens had the possibility to create an exclusive living environment.¹⁴ The different groups of society shaped their living environments in distinctive ways and due to some local and national policies influencing the suburbanization in Hungary created not only prosperous areas for the middle and upper class of the society, but also social tension, segregation, and exclusion.¹⁵

We also need to note that some part of internal migration is hidden because it occurs outside the administrative areas of larger towns (these are not included in the current investigation), but former second homes or summer homes became the destination for citizens to reside there.¹⁶ Apart from this fact, spectacular suburbanization could be observed in the far surroundings of Budapest,¹⁷ and around some of the largest cities – including Debrecen,^{18,19,20} Miskolc,²¹ Pécs,²² Győr,²³ and Eger.²⁴

¹⁴ Timár, “The main features of suburbanization,” 178–79; Hirt, “Suburbanizing Sofia,” 755–80.; Csatári Bálint, Farkas Jenő Zsolt and Lennert József, “Land use changes in the rural-urban fringe of Kecskemét after the economic transition,” *Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning* 4, no. 2 (2013): 157–59; Vasárus Gábor László, “Városhatáron belüli szuburbanizáció Magyarországon – egy paradoxon feltárása,” *Területi Statisztika* 62, no. 4 (2022): 382–84. doi: 10.15196/TS620401.

¹⁵ Timár and Váradi, “A szuburbanizáció egyenlőtlen fejlődése,” 153–56; Nagy Gyula and Hegedűs Tamás, “Urban Sprawl or/and Suburbanisation? The Case of Zalaegerszeg,” *Belvedere Meridionale* 28, no. 3 (2016): 115–16. doi: 10.14232/belv.2016.3.8; Kristóf Andrea, “The Impact of Suburbanization on Social Differentiation in Hungary: A Case Study of the Miskolc Agglomeration,” *Geographica Pannonica* 22, no. 3 (2018): 181–84. doi: 10.5937/22-17081.

¹⁶ Kadri Leetmaa, Isolde Brade, Kristi Anniste, Mari Nuga, “Socialist Summer-Home Settlements in Post-Socialist Suburbanisation,” *Urban Studies* 49, no. 1 (2012): 3–21. doi: 10.1177/0042098010397399.

¹⁷ Dövényi Zoltán and Kovács Zoltán, “A szuburbanizáció térbeni-társadalmi jellemzői Budapest környékén,” *Földrajzi Értesítő* 48, no. 1–2 (1999): 33–57.

¹⁸ Timár, “The Main Features of Suburbanization,” 177–87.

¹⁹ Süli-Zakar István, “Debrecen és Kelet-Magyarország (Egy regionális központ és a regionalizmus országunk keleti részén),” in *Tanulmányok Debrecen városföldrajzából I.*, ed. Süli-Zakar István (Debrecen: KLTE Társadalomföldrajzi Tanszék, 1994), 7–72.

²⁰ Kozma Gábor, *A debreceni lakóterületek II. világháború utáni fejlődésének társadalomföldrajzi vizsgálata*, (Debrecen: Didakt Kiadó, 2016), 1–88.

²¹ Kristóf, “The Impact of Suburbanization,” 176–88.

²² Bajmócy Péter, “A “vidéki” szuburbanizáció Magyarországon, Pécs példáján,” *Tér és Társadalom* 14, no. 2–3 (2000): 323–30.

²³ Hardi Tamás and Márta Nárai, “Szuburbanizáció és közlekedés a győri agglomerációban,” *Tér és Társadalom* 19, no. 1 (2005): 81–101.

²⁴ Bodor Norbert and Péntes János, “Eger komplex vonzáskörzetének dinamikai vizsgálata,” *Tér és Társadalom* 26, no. 3 (2012) 30–47.

Internal Migration Between the Mid-2000s and Mid-2010s

Spectacular differences between the periods drew attention to the changing factors that affected internal migration. The first investigated time interval between 1994 and 2006 partly covered the structural crisis period and migration was large scale with spectacular destination areas (with migration gain) and continuous territories of outmigration. However, certain spatial trends could be identified by the patterns of internal migration (see Fig. 2-3-4).

Migration from east to west has been a traditional feature of Hungarian internal migration.²⁵ This fact was generally proved by the maps that illustrated the different periods of internal migration patterns (see Fig. 2-3-4), however, significant differences were detectable between them. The urban hinterlands of Western Transdanubia—e.g., Győr, Sopron and Szombathely—or Central Transdanubia (e.g., Székesfehérvár and Veszprém) were destinations for internal migration during the whole investigated period. However, the cities themselves faced migration loss as a consequence of the major period of suburbanization prior to the mid-2000s. In the case of Western Hungary, international migration must also be highlighted. Some cities—e.g., Sopron—are characterized by significant cross-border commuting of Hungarian citizens towards Austria. In the vicinity of Bratislava, cross-border suburbanization is also observed due to the moving of Slovakian citizens into the settlements on the Hungarian side of the state border (this process cannot be detected by the internal migration data).

The outstanding status of the agglomeration of Budapest is obvious in every period, however, a shrinking territorial expansion was detected between 2007 and 2015. The financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 had a major impact on internal migration including in the suburban zones of cities, especially on the edges of the Budapest agglomeration zone. The role of Budapest altered after the change of regime, but the agglomeration (mostly in the closer vicinity of the city) had a significant migration surplus during the whole period. With this fact, it was clearly seen that the population has been concentrated in the central part of Hungary, in Budapest and the agglomeration.

²⁵ Dövényi Zoltán, Kovács Zoltán, Kincses Áron, Bálint Lajos, Egedy Tamás, "Migration," in *National Atlas of Hungary Volume 3. Society*, ed. Kocsis Károly, Kovács Zoltán, Nemerikényi Zsombor, Gercsák Gábor, Kincses Áron and Tóth Géza, (Budapest: Geographical Institute, Research Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences, 2021), 51–52.

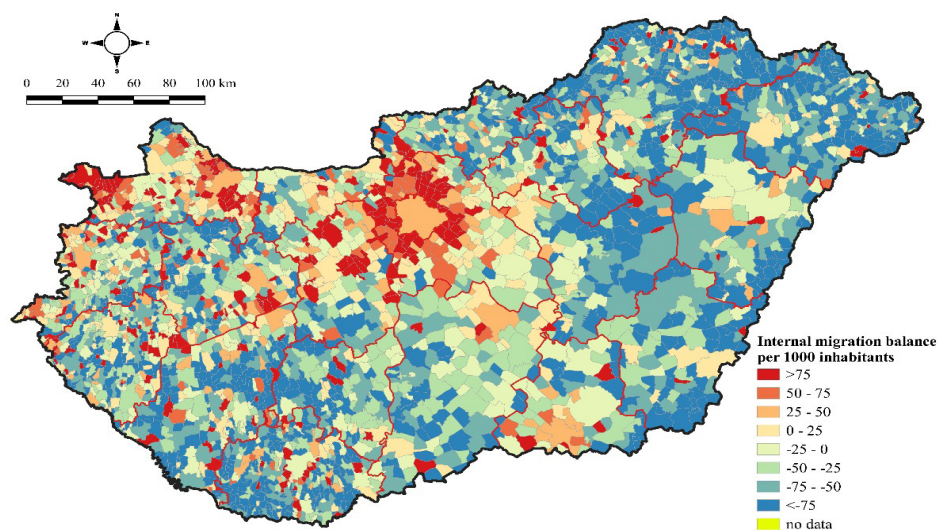


Figure 3. Territorial patterns of the average internal migration between 2007 and 2015, in no. of people (Source: calculated from the datasets of the National Regional Development and Spatial Planning Information System (TeIR))

Settlements located in the surroundings of Lake Balaton (and Lake Velence) became important and unambiguous targets for internal (and international) migration, which is specific to age structure and social stratification. Elderly and upper-class citizens tended to migrate there according to the changes in the demographic indicators.

Internal Migration in Recent Years

The last period of the current investigation represents characteristic changes compared to the previous one. A major migration gain appeared in the villages especially in 2020 and 2021. Two factors accelerated this process: the first one was better financial conditions for home purchasing as the governmental family and housing policy accelerated the moving of the population into villages (village family housing subsidy, so-called *village CSOK*). The other factor was the COVID-19 pandemic because it induced a rising demand for detached houses mostly among families with children.

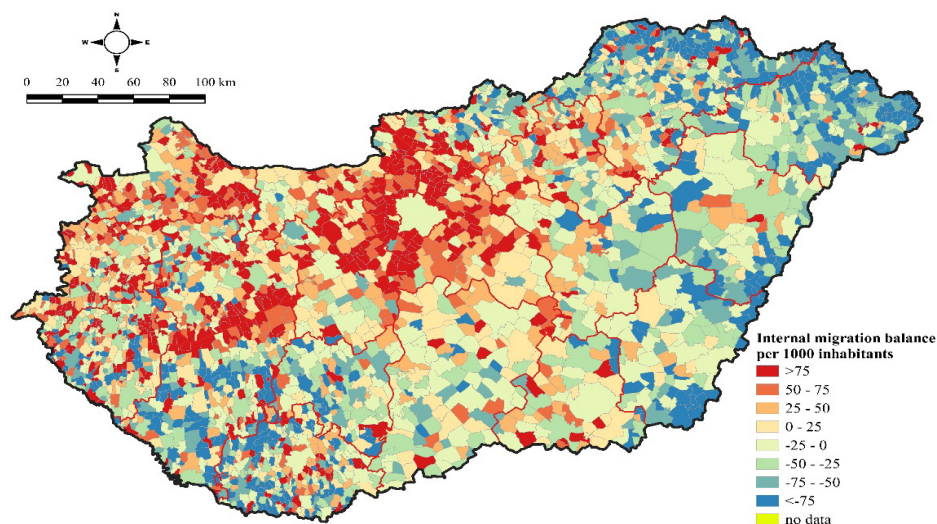


Figure 4. Territorial patterns of average internal migration after 2016, in no. of people
(Source: calculated from the datasets of the National Regional Development and Spatial
Planning Information System (TeIR))

At the same time, extended and contiguous areas of the country were characterized by stable migration loss during the investigated period, but most of these territories faced this process during the decades of socialism also. The areas along the Eastern Slovakian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Serbian, Croatian (apart from some smaller zones) borders are regarded as territories of outmigration. Besides these, numerous settlements were in this situation on the inner periphery of Hungary (e.g., in the middle Tisza area on the Great Hungarian Plain and in some parts of Somogy and Tolna counties to the south of the Lake Balaton).

Migration and Spatial Development

The spatial patterns of internal migration tended to represent a correlation between migration and spatial development, but this relation was not confirmed everywhere and in every period. However, it was assumed that populations (primarily the skilled and mobile part of the workforce) tend to migrate from the underdeveloped areas towards the dynamic economic centers providing more attractive job opportunities with better living conditions.

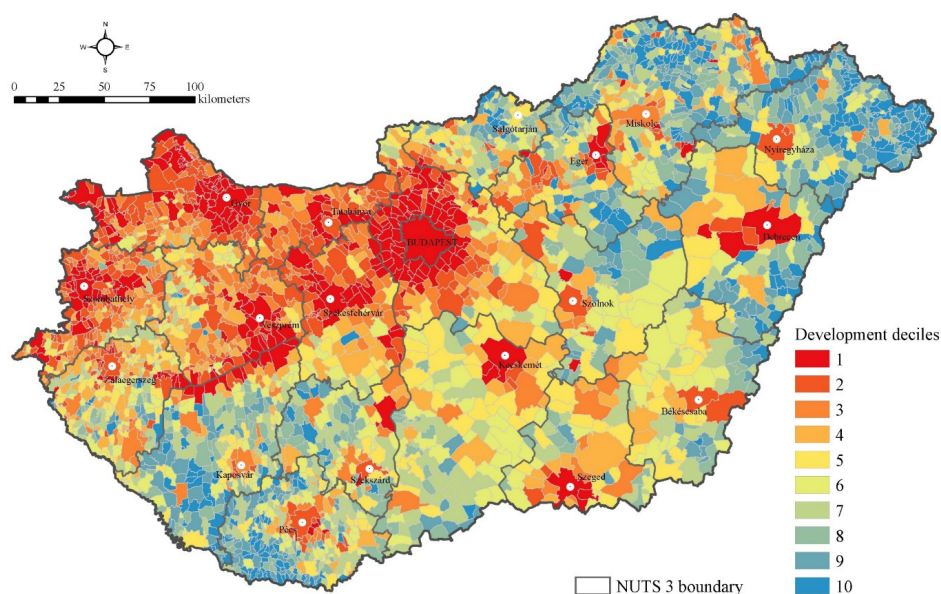


Figure 5. Development deciles of the territorial development index of the Hungarian settlements in 2016 (Source: calculated from the datasets of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) and the National Regional Development and Spatial Planning Information System (TeIR))

In different developmental studies, migration is not only applied as a descriptive or explanatory indicator, but the migration balance is used as one of the components to calculate composite indicators which were the basis for delimiting settlements and districts favored by regional policy.²⁶

In order to investigate this correlation, settlements were grouped according to their development levels in 2016. The settlement level development index was calculated with the methodology of the Territorial Development Index. Its methodology was based on a systematic filtering procedure of numerous developmental or related base indicators (see in the cited study).²⁷ The development categories were calculated by static results from 2016. The settlements of Hungary were ordered into deciles and the additional calculations of migration were computed for these groups. The migration balance

²⁶ Nagy, "A kedvezményezett térségek," 151; Péntzes János, *Periférikus térségek lehatárolása – dilemmák és lehetőségek* (Debrecen: Didakt Kiadó, 2014), 42.

²⁷ Péntzes János and Demeter Gábor, "Peripheral Areas and Their Distinctive Characteristics: The Case of Hungary," *Moravian Geographical Reports* 29, no. 3 (2021): 220–22. doi: 10.2478/mgr-2021-0016.

was calculated transforming these results to 1000 inhabitants to ensure comparability. Decile 1 contains the most, while decile 10 includes the least developed settlements in Hungary (see Fig. 5-6-7).

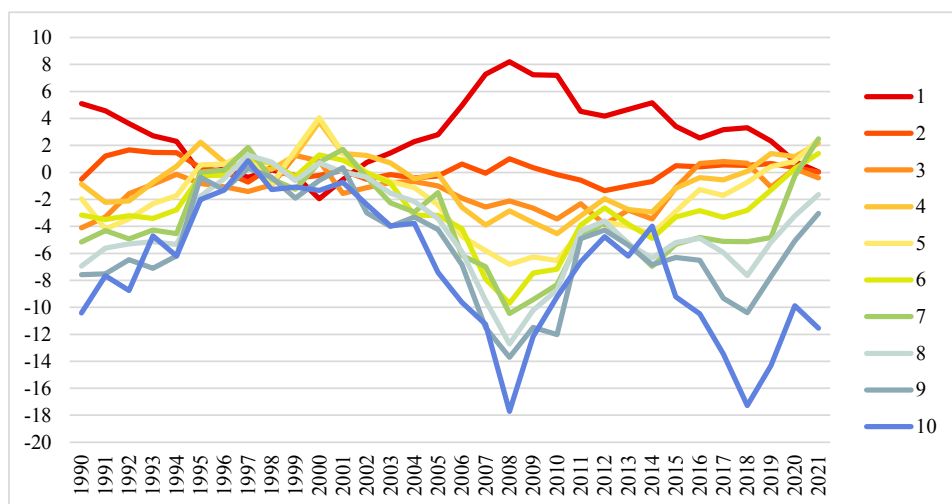


Figure 6. Internal migration balance per 1,000 inhabitants according to development deciles of the settlements between 1990 and 2021, in no. of people (Source: calculated from the datasets of the the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) and the National Regional Development and Spatial Planning Information System (TeIR))

In general, the curves of the graph (see Fig. 6) confirmed the assumed order with a massive migration gain of the most developed settlements and significant migration loss of underdeveloped ones; however, in some periods—from the mid-1990s until the early 2000s—completely different trends were detected. One of the reasons is that Budapest being part of the first group of settlements caused a distortion with its own tendencies. Besides this, the most characteristic period of suburbanization meant intense migration from towns to villages for various purposes (including the migration of poor, deprived or excluded persons towards peripheral villages as well). The impacts of the crisis in 2008 and of the “village CSOK” (village family housing subsidy) caused definite changes in the trends. After the millennium, migration tendencies supported the hypothesis about the positive correlation between spatial development and migration balance, however, the curves have been mixed during the last few years because of the reasons already mentioned.

In order to detect the trends of internal migration in the case of the villages, datasets were filtered according to the administrative division and villages were separated as illustrated by Fig. 7. The trends of internal migration clearly demonstrate the correlation with the development levels; the most developed villages are characteristically separated from the other groups and represented the highest values of migration gain among the villages. These villages are typically located in the close proximity of cities—including Budapest. At the same time, the most underdeveloped villages tended to demonstrate the lowest values from this respect, with negative ones during almost the whole investigated period. The values of internal migration balance were obviously formed according to the development levels.

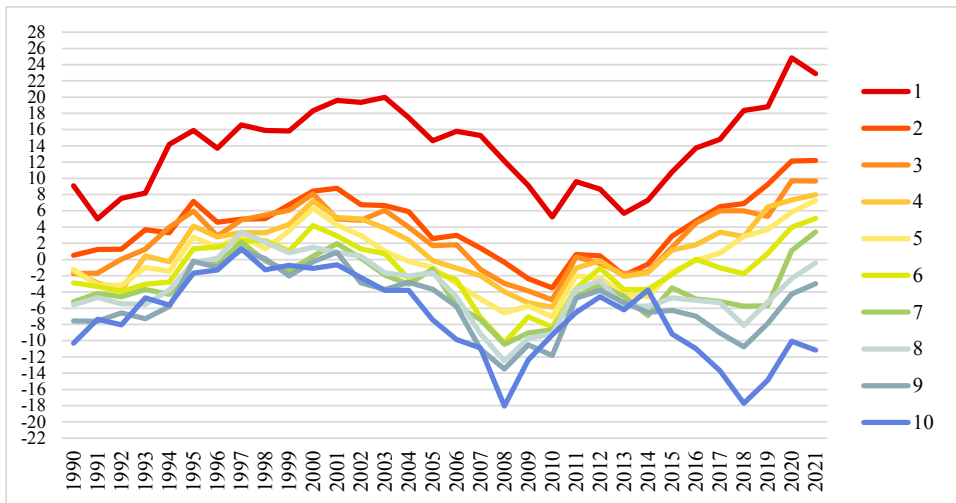


Figure 7. Internal migration balance per 1,000 inhabitants according to development deciles of villages between 1990 and 2021, in no. of people (Source: calculated from the datasets of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) and the National Regional Development and Spatial Planning Information System (TeIR))

An impressive fluctuation is seen in the values of average internal migration balance, confirming the tendencies illustrated by Fig. 1. The most significant period of suburbanization caused an outstanding rise in the migration surplus but typically in the case of the most developed villages. The period of financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 caused convergence in the migration balances of different development groups, but this tendency

changed after the mid-2010s. Large scale and extended polarization appeared that opened a large gap between the developed and underdeveloped villages.

Conclusion

The internal migration trends in Hungary represented post-socialist characteristics after the political transition in 1989 and characteristic stages could be separated in the tendencies according to the administrative division. Radical changes could be detected in the role of villages compared to the previous decades because they show a migration gain from the mid-1990s for one decade. This was identified as the most intense period of suburbanization in which the role of Budapest's agglomeration was outstanding; however, the migration (or so-called exclusion) of poor people from towns to villages (and to peripheral areas) could also be detected.

The changing role of Budapest was significant in terms of internal migration but permanent destination areas and "sending" territories could also be observed. The impact of the financial and economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Hungarian governmental support programs were also important in changing the migration tendencies within Hungary.

Internal migration has represented a dynamically-fluctuating relationship with the development levels of settlements with some constant characteristics. The most developed settlements, mostly the villages in the surroundings of the largest towns and Budapest, realized a significant migration gain during the whole period. The underdeveloped ones faced almost continuous migration loss after 1990 and increasing inequalities occurred in the last few years that caused an enormous rise in the polarization of migration tendencies.

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