

CONCLUSIONS: THE SOCIO-SPATIAL INEQUALITIES OF EUROPEAN AND HUNGARIAN URBAN AREAS AND THEIR SPECIAL FEATURES IN CENTRAL EUROPE¹⁸

Similarly to their European counterparts Hungarian metropolitan areas are also playing an increasing role in national (and international) economy, in social processes and in global social and economic competition. The results of the comparative analyses of our research are also verifying the outstanding strategic importance of Hungarian metropolitan areas in them. Hungarian cities successfully tackled down the socio-economic crisis originating from the historic eras before the regime change and were able to manage the whole process of economic restructuring. Today they are the driving engines of economic development in Hungary. Our socio-statistical analyses have demonstrated the relative competitive advantages of some urban areas in the fields of economic, social and infrastructure development in comparison with the national average. They have also pointed out that mostly high qualified and the richest social classes are concentrated in metropolitan areas. It has also been revealed that there are big differences among Hungarian metropolitan areas concerning their regional and historical background and their skills to integrate into global economy. Socio-economic differences among metropolitan areas are partially originating from the development differences between the metropolitan area of Budapest and other Hungarian cities. In this latter group of provincial cities the urban areas of Győr and Székesfehérvár have achieved the largest advancement in economic development while

¹⁸Besides the above-presented research results this summary is based on the following background studies and papers: Baráth G. – Molnár B. – Szépvölgyi Á.: A várostérségi területi egyenlőtlenségek rendszere. Kutatási résztanulmány [The System of Spatial Disparities in Urban Areas. An Interim Research Paper], MTA RKK NYUTI, 2005.; Balázné Varga M.: A várostérségek társadalmi egyenlőtlenségei – társadalomstatistikai elemzés. Kutatási részjelentés [The Social inequalities of Urban Areas – A Socio-statistical Analysis. An Interim Research Report], MTA SZKI, 2005.; Molnár B.: A nagyvárosi térségek gazdasági egyenlőtlenségei Magyarországon [The Economic Disparities of Urban Areas in Hungary]. MTA RKK NYUTI, 2006.; Szirmai V. – Váradi Zs. (2006): A nagyvárosi térségek urbanizációs egyenlőtlenségei Magyarországon [The Urbanizational Disparities of Urban Areas in Hungary]. MTA SZKI, 2006.; Balogh E. – Huszár Á.: A magyarországi várostérségek gazdasági és társadalmi versenyképessége [The Economic and Social Competitiveness of Urban Areas in Hungary]. MTA RKK – SZRVA, 2007.; Szirmai V.: A globalizáció és térbeli társadalmi szerkezet alakulása: nemzetközi trendek [The Socio-spatial Structure of Globalization: International Trends]. MTA SZKI, részelemzés, 2007.; Szirmai V.: A globalizáció várostérségi hatásai Magyarországon [The Impacts of Globalization on Urban Areas in Hungary]. MTA SZKI, részelemzés, 2007.

the urban areas of Miskolc, Nyíregyháza and Kecskemét are lagging far behind them. Regarding development potentials traditional regional centres such as Debrecen, Pécs and Szeged are in an intermediary position, though their development was fairly good during our research period. Our research results indicate significant development differences between the internal parts of urban areas as well. The division of socio-economic development resources within metropolitan areas is rather inhomogenous between cities and their environment as well as within the inner parts of urban areas.

The socio-spatial inequalities of Hungarian urban areas are all following the overall European trends of global urbanization and the mechanisms of global economy but their outcomes have also been influenced by the special historical background of the Hungarian society. This is even true for comparing their similar and different features with those in the state socialist regime of the past. Global trends originating partially from the past, such as socio-economic concentration, the high density of urban population, the concentration of economic activities and global capital resources in metropolitan areas are true for Hungarian urban spaces as well. However we can also see country size dependent differences in the processes we have investigated (Illés 2002, 74). The degree of residential concentration in cities (and in the capital city) is the highest in Poland with over 100 thousand inhabitants as an average. Poland is followed by Hungary and the Czech Republic in the ranking of the residential concentration of big cities (and the capital city). It is the citizens of Austria who live in the least populated cities with 25–55 thousand inhabitants as an average. (The number of Austrian cities with over 100 thousand inhabitants, including Vienna, is 5 only.)

The intensive, space consuming expansion of urban agglomerations, the increasing commuting and transport activities are typical phenomena of our time but they are extensively damaging the environment and reducing the territory of green areas. It is mostly the metropolitan area of Budapest that is most badly hit by these phenomena but the urban areas of Győr Székesfehérvár and Nyíregyháza, the provincial cities most involve areas of global economy driven dynamic development are neither excluded from these processes.

The intensity of suburbanisation and the outmigration of middle classes from city centres to suburbs have significantly increased not only in Hungarian but also in Czech cities. The new trends of economy (the inflow of foreign direct investments) and social changes increased land values in certain suburbs and periurban settlements. All they have reshaped the relationship between core areas and peripheries and also changed the attitudes towards them.

The signs of 'dual' spatial society (Castells 1993) and its different internal structures, the different chances of integration to global economy with their advantageous and disadvantageous socio-spatial processes as an impact, can clearly be identified. The intensive development of big cities and their urban areas is

shadowed by the increasing socio-spatial polarization between core areas and peripheries and between the different parts of cities. The results of Hungarian, Austrian, Czech (and other international) comparative researches can be summarized by stating that the basic features of socio-economic inequalities of urban areas are following a similar trend. The social positions of citizens living in the different zones of urban areas are very different: the presence of high classes is dominating in core areas while peripheries are mostly inhabited by low or poor classes. This trend however does not seem to contradict to the fact that suburban zones also provide homes for high classes and low classes: they (low educated groups with low salaries employed mostly in the industrial sector) are rather located in the external parts of cities (preferably in transitional zones or suburbs) and in less favoured periurban settlements. However some differences can also be discovered in the spatial location of poor classes in central urban quarters as well. A case study in Vienna revealed that the ratio of poor classes (the unemployed) in the inner parts of cities is by far higher than in Hungarian big cities (Unemployment is concentrated in the city of Vienna approaching a ratio of 10%. This figure is about half in the neighbour regions of Vienna. Unemployment in the Hungarian big cities involved in our research is everywhere lower than in their neighbourhood.

Comparative researches have verified that on the ecological slopes of cities involved in our research citizens living in different urban zones are adapting and integrating their life to global processes in various ways, therefore it differs how they utilize the benefits of integration for their own purposes. High and upper middle classes living in the elite residential quarters of urban areas are more tightly embedded into global (or national and local) socio-economic environment: it is they are who most heavily use the modern metropolitan infrastructure and institutional facilities, and it is they are who can turn employment chances offering high salaries and opportunities for running independent businesses with the highest efficiency for their own benefits, and it is also they are whose lifestyle is less bound to a concrete place of residence. People living in the urban quarters of lower middle classes or in workers' districts (frequently through a deep dependency system or being even in a defenceless situation) are less embedded into their global (or national and local) environment and they less intensively utilize the advantages their urban area offers for their own purposes than the members of the previous group and their life is more strongly bound to their place of residence. The marginal (partially city centre and partially suburban or periurban) parts are the areas of handicapped classes having been 'pushed off' from the labour market and of underclasses who not (or very rarely only through the state's or the local municipality's social aiding programme) can utilize the socio-economic advantages of their global (and national or local) environment, of modern infrastructural and institutional facilities for their own benefits. Thus, spatial dimension is a key

component of the transmission mechanisms of global impacts and of social inequalities. The socio-spatial units formulating in the ecological and social slopes of metropolises (indicating differences in infrastructural, institutional supply and economic development level) are both indicators and creators of social inequalities at the same time.