

Preface

Settlement and urban geography is one of the most popular and successful segments of geography. The discipline which was squeezed into economic geography during the state socialism era is presently finding the very same position all over the post-socialist countries, therefore also in Hungary.

The reasons are obvious. Urbanization, which is one of the most fundamental processes of the globalizing world, is playing a determining role. This process is so strong, that it can still increase the share of urban dwellers within the rapidly growing population figure. The majority of the Earth's seven billion inhabitants can be found in urban areas, and the migration to urban areas is steadily continuing. It causes enormous crowdedness in certain cities, while empties rural communities and also distorts the demographic profile of both. Rehabilitation of cities in the developed world also emerges new challenges, the side effects of suburbanization and the modernization of rural settlements, while different ways and methods of environment management are also worth investigating. Significant differences can be felt with regard to the complexity of the issues depending on the location (Asia, Africa, America, or Europe) and also on the level (national or regional) of investigations. The regions are widely different in respect of their physical and social characters, their economic development and structure, and also in their interrelation of the aforementioned. The differences can be obviously felt the most in settlement level; therefore the analysis can guide us to draw more general conclusions.

One of the most important of these is that in the course of the globalizing the world and not the states is the one! playing the most influential role. Globalization has been gradually displaced by the urban concentrations (megalopolises). Research can reveal the background of their birth and formation, their developmental attributes, and trends and directions in their structural transformation, contributing to the understanding of globalized urban spatial transformations.

All of the above-mentioned processes and circumstances have reached Hungary recently. It means that researchers are to investigate in detail the specific problems, the development directions of the agglomeration, the suburbanization itself, and the strengthening international attraction of our only real-global city, Budapest.

The international regional functions of our counterbalancing cities are also to be strengthened; therefore the background researches are also fundamental for it. The size (328 units) and differentiation of the Hungarian urban network are questioned and debated by several disciplines. Nevertheless, from a public administration aspect the entire settlement network is nuclear and scattered; the research of future development directions cannot be postponed further. One of the key issues of that is the future of small villages, where public services cannot be guaranteed among present conditions for a limited population of one or two dozen people. Scattered farms in the Great Hungarian Plain are representing a unique speciality, the research of them is a fundamental duty expected from us by the international communities.

The division of the historically unified settlement network of the Carpathian basin after the Great War by artificial borders results in a common international task for the neighboring countries to investigate the backward consequences and to look for development directions and possibilities in the new common, European context. It is evident that it encourages and increases the number of cross-border co-operation contributing to the European pentagon, for the stronger and more intense linkages to the European development centers.

Consequently, settlement geography—certainly cooperating with further segments of geography and other disciplines—is conducting researches on the key issues of humanity (naturally including the Hungarians). Therefore it is a pleasure that settlement geographers are given the possibility for the seventh occasion now in Szombathely to share their new ideas and innovative thoughts in the course of conferences and also in this hard copy format.

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