


**RECHNITZER, J., & PÁTHY, Á. (EDS. 2022): NAGYVÁROSOK
KELET- ÉS KÖZÉP-EURÓPÁBAN = CITIES IN CENTRAL AND
EASTERN EUROPE (PUBLIKON – KRTK, GYŐR, P. 334)**

Ildikó EGYED^a

^a CERS Institute for Regional Studies, 7621 Pécs, Papnövelde u. 22., egyed.ildiko@krtk.hun-ren.hu 

Cite this article: Egyed, I. (2023). Rechnitzer, J., & Páthy, Á. (Eds. 2022): Nagyvárosok Kelet- és Közép-Európában = Cities in Central and Eastern Europe (Publikon – KRTK, Győr, p. 334). *Deturope*, 15(2): 154-158.

The comprehensive and comparative study of regional centers, which form the second tier of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) urban network, has received scant scholarly attention in the domestic literature so far. This important gap was addressed by the OTKA-research project „The role of territorial capital and innovative milieu in the development of Central and Eastern European regional centers”, funded by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office. The results of the project were summarized in a book (in Hungarian), which, in addition to unearthing the spatial structure of the major cities of the CEE region and identifying their primary socio-economic development trajectories, examined regional centers from multiple perspectives such as knowledge production, partner networks and the presence of global consultancy firms.

The focus of the research programme was on cities with a population of more than 100,000 (excluding the capital cities), with a broader, more inclusive understanding of the CEE region. Hence, a total of 95 cities from 10 countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia – were included among the study areas. Besides aiming to identify the internal hierarchy and typology of regional centers and the key determining factors of their unique development paths, our analytical approach sought to broaden the horizon by highlighting their specificities and commonalities in relation to metropolitan networks of the EU's core regions, and some elements acting as potential entry points into European urban competition and cooperation networks. In addition to describing the general trends of the Central and Eastern European urban network, the purpose of the volume is to offer the academic community fresh perspectives and inspiration for further reflection and research on second-tier cities of the CEE region.

The aim of the authors was to organize the structure of the volume to move from general to specific themes in the presentation of development processes of major Central and Eastern European cities. The volume contains ten thematic chapters and one summary chapter.

In the first chapter of the book, János Rechnitzer synthesizes the existing – mostly domestic – research conducted on the major cities of the region, including those international inquiries that can lay the groundwork for the analysis of urban functions shaping the spatial structure and the urban hierarchy of the CEE region. A review of the evolution of the spatial structural models in the CEE context demonstrates the spectacular rise of cities and the emergence of development zones organized around city regions. Moreover, capital city-centricity – as a long-standing characteristic of the region – far from being mitigated by the changes of the recent decades, has been strengthened in some respects. As a result, a large number of regional centers remain „in the shadows”, struggling to fulfil their spatial organizing role, particularly in areas with scant opportunities for integration into global processes. An important conclusion of the chapter is that the complex set of functions used in our classification of the major CEE cities are highly specific to the region, and a full catching-up with the EU's core has not been realized over the last three decades. The Chapter's summary and review of existing literature on the spatial structure and urban network of the region is complemented by a scientific metrics appendix that provides a comprehensive overview of domestic publication activity conducted in the field over the last three decades.

In the next chapter, Ádám Páthy explores the historical context of urban development in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to reviewing these processes, the author outlines global interpretive frameworks based on an understanding of CEE as a geographical and historical-cultural space, and, on the other hand, through an account of the distinctive features of the region relative to Western Europe. Among the latter, the Chapter highlights the semi-peripheral situation, dependent development, different economic structure, a greater exposure to external processes and specific power-political factors. The historical processes are discussed from the Middle Ages onwards, with a brief overview of the period of imitation and the subsequent break with Western models, and a detailed discussion of general trends of modern urban development beginning with the period of belated modernisation in the 19th century. The Chapter also investigates the homogenizing effect of State Socialist state formations on the respective cities and their urban functions, in order to determine to what extent the Socialist legacy has survived into the late phase of the transition process and continues to constrain and hamper integration into the European space. Among the frameworks shaping urban development since the systemic transitions, global processes, new

forms of spatial competition and the capacity (or failure) to overcome previous structural constraints are given special emphasis.

In the third chapter, Pál Szabó scrutinizes the key notions and terminological concepts illuminating the region-specific traits of metropolitan development. In addition to defining the concept of „regional center” in the context of the study region, he delves into the possibilities for adapting the notions of territorial capital and innovation milieu – as the interpretive frameworks of the research project – to the specific context of urban spaces. The Chapter takes account of the central functions (e.g. education, the innovation rationale of scientific research, the concentration of cultural consumption, the presence of large firms and high value added services, organizing transport and mobility) which, beyond economic development and competitiveness, are essential to creating a typology of second-tier cities in the region. The dilemma of spontaneity vs. planning is given special attention in the context of central functions, which is particularly relevant for investigating the main trends of territorial planning under Socialism and its surviving legacy in the study region. The author also emphasizes the duality of regional central functions from the perspective of universal and particular elements.

In the chapter entitled „Central and Eastern European Cities in Space and Time”, János Rechnitzer takes stock of the evolution of major demographic and economic indicators of the case study cities and investigates the role of cities in spatial planning and spatial policy practice in the context of the CEE countries. The Chapter attempts to position CEE cities in the wider European space from two different aspects, i.e. the spatial structural models specific to the continent and global and European evaluation systems and urban rankings. Through an individual assessment of spatial policy strategies of the given countries, the study highlights important gaps for instance in polycentric development policy and the macro-regional connectivity of the urban system. The hierarchical structure of the urban network in the region is used as a basis for the assessment of population dynamics, economic performance and employment structure and their evolution over the past two decades. In addition, the unique circumstances and features of urban competition in the CEE context and integration into the European competitive space are examined from the perspective of sectoral specificities, the presence of large firms and indicators of knowledge production.

Taking into account regional disparities of economic development in the CEE region, the spatial economic analysis of Zoltán Egri investigates the concentration of resources in metropolitan regions. Capital city-centricity documented in previous chapters and the competitive advantage and greater embeddedness of manufacturing regions is confirmed by

the analysis using indicators of economic competitiveness and productivity. The results of the multivariate analysis suggest that the existence of a more hierarchical urban network by itself is insufficient to induce agglomeration.

In the next chapter, György Csomós analyzes R&D and innovation activities of the major CEE cities, drawing on data on scientific output, innovation potential and the absorption of R&D resources. The study examines the performance of second-tier cities in the CEE within the framework of the integrated European R&D system. In terms of innovation activity, it appears that the major cities of the CEE region have a marginal position in continental standards; while in terms of knowledge production, capital cities show an outstanding activity. In the case of the regional centers, another factor worth considering besides economies of scale is the capacity of the respective countries to promote their science policy interests and the availability of funds connected to European integration, which, like the major socio-economic factors, point towards the existence of a west-east regional slope. The study provides a detailed picture of the ranking of second-tier cities in the CEE space in terms of R&D&I and the resulting urban hierarchy in the context of the knowledge economy.

Petra Kinga Kézai reflects on the possibilities of embedding the major Central and Eastern European cities in the wider European region, analyzing the emergence and position of the examined cities in terms of rankings and indicators focusing primarily on urban competitiveness. As demonstrated by the examined indicators, the urban network of the region is characterized by capital city-centricity, and second-tier Central and Eastern European cities emerge only sporadically in European rankings, underlining the weak or incomplete functions of second-tier cities of CEE.

The presence of global consultancy firms in the region and the specifics of their location choices are explored in a study by Katalin Döbrönte. A three-tier hierarchy of location decisions is shown to characterize the region in question. Behind the capital cities, the second tier concentrates the sites of APS management firms, while the third tier is dominated by networks of audit firms. Overall, apart from the capital cities – as the main points of concentration – the cities located in the western parts of the region, mostly in the Czech Republic and Poland, and city clusters with large populations (Trojmiasto, Upper Silesia) are emerging on the European market for high value-added business services.

The study of Petra Kinga Kézai explores intra-and trans-regional linkages and the network embeddedness of regional centers from the perspective of twin cities networks. No evidence of a clear-cut hierarchy of twinning cooperation is found among the regional centers of

Central and Eastern Europe, no nodal densification has been detected in partner networks, and no centers with larger populations or greater economic resources can be identified either.

In the concluding chapter of the book, János Rechnitzer and Ádám Páthy review the factors that divide or connect the major cities of the CEE region, offering a typology based on their transformation dynamics over the past decades and their performance indicators, which summarizes the conclusions yielded by various analytical dimensions of the network of cities of the CEE region. The constraints related to the geographical position of the region and embeddedness in the continental division of labour are highlighted as important commonalities of the studied cities. Furthermore, the remnants of the Socialist past deserve special mention as factors causing a significant rupture in urban development in all of the countries of the region, apart from of Austria. The dominance of capital cities in the region, the different nature of urban-rural relations relative to Western Europe and the resulting duality have left their mark on the role of regional centers and their development resources, giving rise to „insular” and desintegrated city regions in many cases.