

Sikos, T.T. and Molnár, D. (eds.): Budapest: Past and Future. Budapest, Ludovika University Press, 2025. 304 p.

Budapest, 150 years old, is not only the capital of Hungary, by far the country's most populous city, the most important regional centre of the Carpathian Basin, but also the country's dominant industrial, commercial, financial, and logistical centre. In this book, fifteen authors pay tribute to the "one and a half century old" metropolis by reviewing, analysing, and evaluating the long way the present-day city has travelled in "space and time" from the early Middle Ages to the present day.

Edited by Tamás SIKOS T. and Dóra MOLNÁR, the volume is structured in eleven thematic chapters and "walks around" the historical-geographical processes of today's capital city, from the natural endowments determining the development of settlements, through the analysis of the effects of infrastructure and networking, to the discussion of several important social and economic factors such as population, agglomeration, transport, trade, and tourism. It is particularly welcome that the authors have not overlooked the issues of prosperity, digitalisation, and creativity.

In the first chapter of the volume, the author (Pál BELUSZKY) deals with the history of the development

of the capital and its geographical causes from antiquity to the present day. In the first half of the chapter, the author discusses the natural geography of the 'urban genesis', the city's landscape, its place in international trade (flow of goods), and its role. The historical-geographical chapter, based on important sources of statistical data and richly illustrated with maps, visualises the spatial and temporal development of the capital city, together with its economic and social aspects. Of particular value is the fact that the author not only reviews the spatial and temporal dimensions of development in a descriptive manner, but also explains the socio-economic aspects of the development process. The chapter puts into context the milestones and turning points in the development of the international metropolis, the strategic role of the Danube and the importance of the closely related trade in cereals, but also its macro-regional determinants in a European context, from the great geographical discoveries to the impact of the industrial revolution. The human geography dimension of development is not overlooked by the author either: in addition to quantitative trends in population change, we can learn about the important milestones in Budapest's development as a financial and cultural centre, and the impact of the capital becoming a dominant macro-regional centre on the country as a whole and its network systems. The strength of the chapter is that it not only gives an insight into the history of Budapest, but also provides a thorough and easy-to-understand introduction to the general theory of urban development, and the spatial and temporal context of urban development, from micro-localisation issues (crossing the Danube), through the strengthening of the regional role (e.g. transport links, becoming a financial centre), to the macro-regional dimension (the city's place in Europe, in the European division of labour).

The second chapter of the work (László JENY) deals with the macro-regional place and role of Budapest in the East-Central European context, in a Polish-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian comparison. For centuries, this region has been, on a historical scale, the territory of multi-ethnic empires without national sovereignty. The author of this chapter rightly takes this period as his starting point, outlining the medieval framework for the development of the cities of Buda and Pest in comparison with Prague, Warsaw, and Bratislava. He then goes on to present the framework of urbanisation and metropolitan development in three main periods. First, the independence movements of the 19th century, then the new framework of independent statehood, followed by socialist-style



urbanisation, and finally the urbanising effects of the era of globalisation and European integration. The chapter not only discusses the comparison of large cities with each other, but also describes the specific processes of urban networking and the characteristics of urban hierarchies in each country, supported by statistical data. It is interesting to note how the four countries under study have very different characteristics in terms of urban structure, and to what historical reasons the monocentric urban development of Hungary and Budapest can be attributed. The author has made good use of the available space, capturing the key moments of metropolitan development in Central and Eastern Europe, but has not gone far enough in explaining the deeper context of metropolitan competition.

In the third chapter, the author (Dóra MOLNÁR) reviews the development of the administrative system of the capital, discusses the administrative functioning of the period following the creation of a unified Budapest in 1873 (from the previously separate towns of Buda, Óbuda, and Pest), linking it to important historical milestones. The reader is given an insight into the administration of the unified city created in the second half of the 19th century, followed by the basic features of the district system in the post-World War I period, and then the main features of the 'Greater Budapest' concepts are presented: 23 municipalities are added to the 14 districts of the capital, thus, creating the capital as we know it today with 22 districts (23 from 1990, with Csepel becoming an independent district). The second half of the chapter deals with two topical and important issues. On the one hand, it briefly and clearly describes the specificities of the functioning of the administrative system after 2010 and the relationship between the metropolitan and district governments, and on the other hand, it deals with the relationship between the capital and the agglomeration. Three maps provide an overview of the different versions of the Greater Budapest concept, the changes in the capital and the agglomeration, its complexity and the relations between the municipal administrations of the agglomeration. The author gives a thorough presentation of the fragmented administrative system of the metropolis and its catchment area, points out the importance of suburbanisation processes, and highlights the concepts and models of administrative anomalies that have appeared so far. However, the author does not formulate her own proposals, it would have been worthwhile to outline several variants of solutions and international best-practices for a more efficient organisation of public administration in the metropolitan agglomeration.

The main finding of the chapter on the development of the housing market in the capital (Zoltán KOVÁCS and Gáborné SZÉKELY) is that housing con-

struction cycles were more in line with economic cycles than demographic processes, and the authors distinguished four characteristic cycles. In each period, the authors have focused on the typical developments, their financing (public, private, municipal), and their social implications. The focus is on housing problems in the pre-World War I period, the challenges posed by migration from annexed territories in the interwar period, the massive public investment and nationalisation of property development in the socialist period, and private development in the post-war period. The analysis of the 'current' situation of the housing stock is very thorough, with numerous map illustrations (year of construction, size, floor area). It is unfortunate that the authors analyse the city's housing structure based on 2011 statistics, which are now a decade and a half old. It would have been worthwhile to focus on the evolution of housing by comfort level, but it is welcome that the analysis of house prices is included in the chapter.

The volume devotes a separate, extensive chapter to the analysis of the health status of the metropolitan society and the functional characteristics of the health care system (Viktor PÁL and Annamária UZZOLI). This endeavour is closely linked to the fact that the health situation of Hungarian society, especially in European comparison, can be considered as very poor. In the introduction to the chapter, the authors devote a special section to clarifying the conceptual framework of quality of life and to defining the objective and subjective elements of quality of life. The objective elements of quality of life are then examined: trends in mortality and morbidity rates, morbidity statistics, life expectancy at birth, etc. It is important to note that, in order to gain a better understanding of the data, the authors examine county-level or even national (district-level) statistics for a number of statistics, and assess the health statistics of the districts of Budapest. In relation to the subjective, personal experience of the health situation, data from the EHIS (European Health Interview Survey) are presented in a Hungarian, regional comparison. In the context of "current health issues", candidates will analyse the local impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the capital and the territorial specificities of primary care, hospital care and private health care in Budapest. It is interesting to note that no close spatial relationship between vacant primary care practices and private care can be identified. The chapter provides a detailed picture of the health situation of the population in the capital, the structure of care, and current health system regulatory issues.

An earlier chapter dealt with the administrative framework of the capital and its agglomeration. The chapter on the agglomeration processes of Budapest clarifies the conceptual framework and the specific di-

mensions of agglomeration: demography, economy, networks, ecology, urban architecture and morphology. The authors (Zoltán Kovács and Zoltán Dövényi) trace the agglomeration processes of Budapest from the 19th century onwards, presenting the spatial traces of the agglomeration process in the municipalities surrounding the capital. The available data provide insights into demographic and economic trends, industrial investment, population growth trends, and the mobility of social groups in the capital, the suburbs and the outer agglomeration ring, as well as in other areas of the country. More emphasis is given to the period of agglomeration processes under state socialism and after the change of regime, and the available spatial data are more detailed and more disaggregated. Accordingly, a number of map visualisations help to understand the last thirty years of agglomeration processes, providing a spatial cross-section of population change, spatial patterns of commuting and housing market changes. A map showing the functional structure of the Budapest agglomeration illustrates the diverse structure of the capital's attractiveness, which the authors present and analyse in the context of international literature. It is regrettable that this chapter does not include data on spatial trends over the last decade and a half.

The next chapter presenting the transport network of the capital and its agglomeration is more concerned with the development directions and possibilities of the transport infrastructure than with its current state. In the chapter, the author (Tibor Tiner) points out the transport conflicts and their background in his own model, and builds on this to present the current transport situation in the capital, highlighting the most conflicting parts: individual vs. development of public transport, lack of transversal network connections, challenges of suburban public transport, cycling, P+R and B+R connections, ageing vehicle fleet, fragmented regulation, outdated sectoral approach to development, etc. Following a brief overview of the situation, the author discusses the short and longer term objectives, their feasibility and the benefits to be achieved. It presents strategic transport network developments that could greatly improve the organisation of increasingly intensive suburban traffic, the preference for public transport over passenger transport, the accessibility of major transport hubs, and faster and easier transport through inter-modality. The developments outlined by the author follow the most modern sustainability principles, pointing to the development of rail transport modes of (also) high priority in Budapest (tram network, development of rail access to Liszt Ferenc International Airport), the expansion of Danube bridges and crossing capacities (e.g. Galvani Bridge), the development of pedestrian and cycling transport, the development of intermodal

nodes (e.g. Kelenföld), major rail developments to link the main stations (Southern Circular Railway, linking the Western and Southern Railway Stations with tunnels), and more intensive development of the agglomeration and the capital's rail network (development of the suburban railway [HÉV] and rail lines). As the time horizon for such developments is measured in decades rather than years, it is welcome that the author is more concerned with the future rather than the present, with the 'should be' rather than the 'is'.

The capital's retail sector has seen dynamic development over the past decades, especially after the change of regime, in parallel with the transition to a market economy. It is therefore not surprising that the author (Tamás Sikos T.) focuses on this period and analyses the retail structure of the capital and the immediate agglomeration together. One of the emblematic processes of the market economy transformation following the regime change was the transformation of the retail sector from a state-owned, supply-driven operation to a private, demand-driven one, which was accompanied by the emergence of new retail formats (shopping centres, hypermarkets) in the capital city, which significantly redrew the retail map of the capital and the whole country. The author presents and analyses the spatial elements of this process of change, showing not only the transformation and expansion of retailing zones in the capital (commercial zones), but also changes in shopping habits. The chapter examines not only the location and role of the transformation processes and new retail centres within the administrative boundaries of the capital, but also the expansion of retail functions (hypermarkets, shopping centres, outlet centres) in the agglomeration zone, with particular reference to the 'edge city' (Budaörs–Törökbálint). The author deals not only with the 'winners' but also with the 'losers' of the transformation process, pointing out the decline in the importance of the ring road (secondary zone) and the significant centre investments in both the capital and the agglomeration (GL Outlet, M1 outlet), which failed to succeed from a business point of view. It is important that the author also mentions the current issues of retail transformation, such as the rise of online sales and the Russian-Ukrainian war, but he does not give them much space, even though the impact of online retailing in particular on shopping habits and, thus, indirectly on the sustainability of store networks and large-scale facilities is of crucial importance.

An important "quality" issue in Budapest's urban development is which "good places", in addition to homes and workplaces, are also important determinants of quality of life. The authors (Mariann Fonyódi, Kornélia Kiss, and Gábor Michalkó) invite the reader on a historical walk and present the "good

places” of three historical periods, outlining the socio-cultural context in which the given “good place” is given meaning, role, and significance. The first period is the period up to the end of World War II, an era still “without tourism”, the “good places” being used and experienced by the locals, mainly the middle class and the upper social strata. The second period is the period of state socialism, in which the “good places” have changed due to increased mobility, domestic and international tourism and the emergence of a “socialist lifestyle”. A characteristic feature of the period is that the ‘good places’ of the domestic population and foreign tourists are completely separated, they travel, consume, and experience recreation differently. The third period is the period up to the present day, the era of postmodernism, in which almost all forms of tourism are present: individual and group, slow and fast, eco-sustainable and over-tourism, luxury and mass, domestic and foreign, etc. New trends such as the impact of social media, new forms of accommodation (Airbnb and Booking.com), festival tourism (Sziget [or Island] Festival in Budapest), the impact of COVID-19 and war are also present, but mobility and the experience and communication of “good places” (Tripadvisor) are becoming part of everyday life.

The penultimate chapter of the volume (Dóra SZENDI) discusses the “smart city” aspects of Budapest. The context of the chapter is quite different from the chapters discussed so far, as the capital is discussed in an international metropolitan comparison, mainly in comparison with other Central and Eastern European cities. The chapter first clarifies the conceptual approaches to the smart city and its development, and then presents the availability of smart city strategies in the metropolitan areas (Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava, Vienna, Budapest, Ljubljana). Afterwards, the main features of Budapest’s smart city strategy are presented, and finally, the rest of the chapter evaluates the position of each of the Central and Eastern European capitals in the smart city rankings (IMD smart city index; IESE Cities in Motion Index). The chapter is a thorough exploratory and analytical work, but it does not focus much on the actual opportunities that Budapest has to further develop into a real smart city, or on the challenges that are important obstacles to this process.

The last chapter of the volume (Tamás EGEDY) deals with the creative economy. It is welcome that the historical-geographical work, prepared for the 150th anniversary of the capital, also includes innovative topics such as the smart city or the analysis of the position of creative and knowledge-intensive industries. The chapter is divided into three main sections: the first section clarifies the concept and importance of the creative industries and the creative class, the

second section provides a statistical analysis of the relative position of the capital (in the country), and the third section presents the main findings of an empirical study of the members of the creative class in the capital, including the current situation of the capital for creative workers and creative industries, and the future opportunities, threats and threats facing the capital. The author gives a good description of the dominant position of Budapest and the agglomeration in this sector and highlights the challenges that the whole creative industry is facing today.

All in all, the volume *Budapest: Past and Future* is a wide-ranging yet thorough work, written by many authors, primarily a historical-geographical work, which pays tribute to the 150th anniversary of the capital city of Budapest with scientific rigour but in a readable way.

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