

## CHRONICLE

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### **International workshop on metropolitan regions**

*Cluj-Napoca, 9–10 Nov. 2012*

The organisation of the workshop “Lessons from metropolitan region - building: socio-spatial polarisation and territorial development in Central and Eastern Europe” based on the quite tight relationship between the Leibniz Institute für Länderkunde (Leipzig, Germany) and Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography (Cluj-Napoca, Romania), more precisely the research co-ordinator of IfL, Thilo LANG and the leader of the Geographical Institute, József BENEDEK, exterior member of Hungarian Academy of Sciences on Regional Science. Fortunately, we had the opportunity to meet the young researchers of the Doctoral School of the Geographical Institute before and after the sessions.

Firstly, a few words about the background of the conference. In the last two decades there has been an increasing interest in metropolitan regions among researchers and practitioners dealing with regional policy issues. The idea of promoting metropolitan regions thereby seems to be based on a widespread big city enthusiasm for the the economic power of global cities and a dominant discourse describing the big agglomerations as being international, innovative, economically successful and in general future oriented and less vulnerable to crisis. As an emerging paradigm, the idea has spread from Western



The workshop members listen the presentation of the director in TETAROM Industrial Park



A short briefing before the field trip on Saturday morning by József BENEDEK



A warm welcome to the participants after the field trip

Europe to countries such as Poland and Romania. At the same time, the emergence of policies supporting the development of a smaller number of strong metropolitan regions has triggered a growing concern about socio-spatial polarization. Especially in Central and Eastern Europe where regional disparities often measured in demographic or economic terms have been growing.

A good example for the dominance of the bigger centres against other areas is the debate about metropolitan regions in Germany. With the definition of the first six in 1995, metropolitan regions nowadays cover nearly the whole area of Germany and can be seen as a current paradigm of spatial planning. This parallels similar political discourses in other EU-countries such as France, Hungary, the United Kingdom, Poland or Romania and at EU level. Whereas in Central and Eastern European countries the role of regional development policies was somewhat neglected in the early years after transition, a new debate has emerged in the last years. For example, in Hungary the re-orientation of regional policy with trends towards centralisation has been experienced since 1998 and it was further enhanced after recent national elections. Poland had struggles with metropolitan regional strategies provoking debates relating to core/periphery dualities.

In Poland, the debate has become more vigorous recently raising serious concerns in the context of the new National Strategy of Regional Development 2010–2020 and the emerging Conception of Poland's spatial organization. The role of regional policy has also gained importance in Romania since 1998 with the de- and re-limitation of 8 development regions. That was the first step towards the formation of metropolitan regions with European and national significance.

For a two-day workshop, the organisers invited presenters and discussants dealing with regional policy and territorial development in CEE and at European level. The aim of the workshop was to discuss the European and national paradigms following and opposing the metropolitan regions model. In doing so, the participants aimed to supplement research on regional policy in Central and Eastern Europe which has mainly dealt with the governance of metropolitan regions so far. Contributions to the workshop should deal with issues of uneven development in relation to different attempts to regional policy within a dominant EU policy framework.

The five key questions of the two-day workshop were:

- Why has the debate on metropolitan regions in Europe received such a noticeable character in the last two decades?
- How do governments try to achieve global economic significance with promoting metropolitan regions without neglecting other areas and furthering socio-economic polarization?
- What are the key lines of discourse between global competitiveness and territorial cohesion in that context?
- Which paradigms do governments follow in the interlinked debates and what new forms of governance are emerging?
- What is the relation between European, national and regional policies and which key actors are involved?

The official programme started on Friday morning with two presentations after a short welcome speech by the host institution. Thilo LANG illustrated the process of metropolitan region built in Germany and in a wider perspective in the CEE region. The new phenomena of EU Cohesion Policy after 2014 tend to national governments to react and reform their spatial/administrative structures to define urban/metropolitan regions which should be the new key actors in EU cohesion. Germany is an extreme example where 90% of the territory is covered by metropolitan areas. In Germany more than 60% of the whole area

were defined as less-developed, peripheral, sometimes rural a decade ago. József BENEDEK and Marius CRISTEA went back to the 'classic' theory of growth poles, as a basis of new trend in metropolization. Their case study area was the post-transition Romania where the most characteristic changes in urban hierarchy were highly influenced by the administrative reforms. The major break in the hierarchy of larger centres (over 100 thousands inhabitants) depended on the status of being 'metropolis'<sup>1</sup> or not, and having the function of 'regional centre' or not<sup>2</sup>.

After the coffee break, Zoltán Kovács gave us a scheme about the development of Budapest Metropolitan zone in the point of view of National Policies and local responses. As we could see, the local actors were proactive to co-operate with each other or with some other groups of actors in the agglomeration/suburban zone around the capital city during some periods, which correlated with the most impressive development phases of Budapest. Tomasz KACZMAREK and Lukasz MIKULA from Poland represented Poznań Metropolitan Region. They presented a very accurate method of region-building process and the first few steps of success to co-operation. The Polish system gave certain legal framework to improve metropolitan-regional collaboration through stimulating common development actions in infrastructure building, sharing costs of operating public services, state financed development funds for improving regional co-operation capacities.

During the first afternoon session, Marius CZEP CZYNSKI described the emerging metropolitan regions in Poland with the special interest on the Gdańsk–Gdynia–Sopot three-pole urban region. Spatial structure of Poland is historically based on regions, the traditional provinces with large cities, as centres in the core. That urban hierarchy and spatial structure should be an advantage in the new period of EU Cohesion Policy, because the government has tried to strengthen the role of metropolis regions with the reform of regional policy in the last decade. Comparing the Polish and German spatial structure, we can recognise that the influence of larger urban centres and zones in Poland seems much weaker. As we can see, at least 60–70% of the whole area of the country was defined as out of metropolis position without strong connections to the large urban centres.

Tassilo HERRSCHEL's key question was whether we were moving towards a post-regional perspective and Agenda in the EU? Concluding his presentation, the answer was dominantly yes. Both new elements of the renewing cohesion policy of EU – ITI, CLLD – based on metropolis regions, or urban–rural co-operation based local administrative units far from the NUTS2 based regional policy. In the Central and Western part of the EU, most of the national governments tend to the post-regional way of thinking in solving spatial imbalances, moderating the effect of uneven development. Those actions are visible in the Eastern part, too, but in a more sporadic way, and in a less complex form without radically reforming the existing regional policies.

Sophie MAGNON described the different phases of co-operation forms in the rural France following the 1950s administrative reform. We can find some similarities with the Hungarian system of small-regional (LAU1 level) collaboration systems established after 2004 reforms. Both national governments tried to find a more effective but less expensive

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<sup>1</sup> If an urban centre has the right, it has the opportunity to organise the development of the surrounding area (Zona Metropolitana) through public services, regional and physical planning.

<sup>2</sup> For example Timișoara and Cluj are regional centres with metropolis regions, Oradea has a metropolis zone, but without the role of regional centre, and Arad existing without these two status.

way of operation of local public services. The overall experience of the reforms showed both positive and negative effects, too.

The Hungarian and the French governments reacted to the facts differently: the French emerged the fiscal advantages to force small settlements to co-operate, while the Hungarian tried to solve the whole problem with a radical administrative reform (they dissolved small-regions and created 'járás' system). Last but not least, Judit TIMÁR and Gábor NAGY presented the "Changing 'metropolitan' – 'non-metropolitan' relations in the perceived and conceived spaces of Hungary". While Judit TIMÁR presented the theoretical concept based on Lefebvre's theory, namely, how and why Budapest had a unique role in the Hungarian regional policies, Gábor NAGY gave a wide range of samples, how and in which forms we could mark that central role with or without the agglomeration/suburban zone of the capital city in economy, administration, investments etc.

On Saturday morning, a field trip was organised by the host institution. We got some examples for the socialist urbanisation in a high-density residential area (Manastur) with large-scaled housing estate developments in Cluj. We visited the TETAROM Industrial Park which is an example for the economic restructuring of the city region. As we saw, there are five industrial parks in Cluj, the local economy is booming, however, Nokia left the whole area (small and medium-sized local firms and a large-scaled investor filled in its place). We got a set of urban and regional development projects: urban highways, motorway development (North Transylvania motorway construction<sup>3</sup>), railway station renewal, the development of an international airport (the third largest one following Bucharest and Timisoara in Romania with approximately 1 million travellers per year). We saw the marks of spatial and social segregation, the urban sprawl around the city as new poles of residential sub-urbanisation, recreational functions, and in some cases economic activities.

GÁBOR NAGY

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<sup>3</sup> In May 2013 the Romanian Government broke the contract with the developer Bechtel Co. (USA), because of high prices (34.7 million USD per km). The Company also tried to close this co-operation, because the state did not paid the price of the finished parts of the motorway.