

The Polycentric Spatial Structure as a Basis for a Balanced Socio-Economic Structure

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Abstract

The spatial development concept of polycentrism plays a determining role in the development documents of the European Union. The evolution of these documents has a past of more decades, the conception of the multi-central sustainable urban networks emerged in the ages of the postmodern era of the continent. Territorial planning institutions, as well as the research sphere treats the polycentric idea as a positive future objective. As a succeeding of the Community documents, the national governments allocated transfers to change the urban systems towards a more complex polycentric system. Since these questions are complex and problematical, a plenty of future debate will follow the present conceptions. Political path searches are taking place in Europe the debates on the decision-making competencies affect the regional policy, as well. Therefore it is worth to take a look at the settlement structure of the European Union and Hungary, and summarize the experiences and the future opportunities.

Keywords: polycentrism, territorial development, urban structure, settlement networks

JEL Classification: O18, R58

1 Introduction

Regional science deals with the current processes of settlement networks and spatial structures thoroughly. The balanced regional development, coupled with the achievements of polycentric spatial structures can be seen as an essential element of the future objectives of the European Union's competitive economic development. We need to reconsider the center-periphery economic relationships (Borzán 2013), since some researchers, on theoretical level, has already called for new economics, serving sustainable development (Tóth 2009, 2013). The elaboration of the topic is particularly relevant these days, since – regarding the EU's new financial programming period between 2014 and 2020 – a significant change can be expected in the community policies, which have been mainly focusing recently on the development of peripheral areas.

Thus, using the assets of the Europe-wide regional policy directly, it may be able to influence the competitiveness of the continent. This can be based on the recognition that a certain regional – a sub-regional, a nation state or a supranational macro-regional – entity's spatial structure is closely related to its social structure (Borzán 2004). The former can be seen as an impression of the latter, as physical manifestations of the spatial satisfactions of needs. Consequently, long-term economic prosperity cannot be achieved without its social and regional aspects.

In the first part of the study we delineate that what can be seen as a polycentric structure, including two dominant interpretations from the literature of this concept. In the second part we place regional policy, associated with polycentric urban structure, in the context of center and periphery relations, also discuss the aspects of fairness and competitiveness regarding these ideas (Schneider 2009). Then, we also touch upon some of the main EU documents that contain the objectives of urban policies and transformation of urban networks.

The following part of the study deals with the pragmatic experiences of the whole settlement network of the European Union, with an emphasis on Hungary, since the set of problems and deficiencies also may have several overlapping.

2 Polycentric Spatial Structures

According to the primary interpretation, a polycentric settlement structure or settlement network means that in a given functional region – which is an area, bound by spatial economic processes, in which businesses and consumers, and the producers of public goods find their partners to meet their needs – multiple central spaces can be found. If there is only one center located in a functional region, but it's not overly dominant – not more than a given proportion from the regional GDP is concentrated from the production, consumption and income side – it can be also called polycentric, especially if the adjacent territorial entities are able to compensate for its dominant local central role.

2.1 About the concept of polycentrism

The polycentric urban structure is an idea of the territorial planning. An important step of the practical implementation of this idea is the counterbalancing of the powerful centers with more centers. The direct political tool of this progress is the so-called decentralization instead of the deconcentration. The decentralization is associated with the reasonable distribution of decision-making functions and financial sources. Globalization is associated with changes in the frequency of acceleration; areas with ability to self-made decisions can be more successful in the long run (Faragó 2006).

In the literature we can read more detailed and stricter definitions, as well. The idea of the so-called polycentric urban regions (PUR - Polycentric Urban Region) is another concept; its definition is involved in the study of Tamás Fleischer published in 2009. Key features of polycentric urban regions are as follows: a network of separate cities; which is not characterized of a continuous metropolitan texture; a spatial densification, which is separate from the immediate environment; relationships between the members of the network are hierarchical; there is a strong and mutual relationship between members of the network; the individual centers specialize, the members of the networks form collaborations.

Polycentric urban regions are not identical with the multi-polar urban areas, or the homogeneous region without internal structure or the centralized region, or neither with normal city regions. These urban regions were created in order to counterbalance the single-center of a nation, with regions that are predominantly the capitals of the agglomerations.

Tab. 1 Differences between polycentric urban regions and urban networks

The features of categories	Polycentric urban regions	Polycentric urban networks
Territorial extension	Lower than nation-state level	Minimum nation-state level
The boundaries of the area	Reaching through administrative borders	Enclosed by administrative boundaries
The direction of development	Bottom-up	Top-down
Most important driving forces	Decisions of microeconomic actors	Actors of the development-policy
Intervention roads	Liberal and horizontal directions	Conservative and vertical directions
Political development tools	Legal framework, supportive environment	Transfers, infrastructure improvements

Source: Authors' Editing

The purpose of the table above is to distinguish the polycentric urban regions and polycentric urban networks. The so-called polycentric urban regions are linked to the conception of Fleischer's work. Usually such regions are formed by industrialized urban densifications of the countries, often spreading across traditional nation-state boundaries. Common feature of these areas, that due to their common development, they are bound to similar economic areas which had been serving as drivers and had developed these areas typically in a bottom-up manner. It should be also noted, that regional policies can have an important role in the development of these areas with the help of soft and flexible legal frames (Rechnitzer - Smahó 2011).

In contrast, the settlement policy of the nation-states and the EU aims the conversion of the urban structures of administrative territorial entities. The main purpose of these actions is the creation of a polycentric urban network. Determinate features of these networks are that they tend to be confined between concrete boundaries, their development is greatly influenced by the traditional, harder tools of regional policy, and government financial transfers play prominent roles. In the macro-region of Central-Eastern-Europe emerged some development policy documents – for instance in Bulgaria, Poland and Romania (Borzán 2008) – in which the decision-makers elevated the role of the secondary growth poles.

Subsequently we will write predominantly about the ideas of the polycentric urban network's development. The positioning of the concept within the regional planning praxis is intended to show, that what kind of everyday challenges have to be faced by the drafters of the pragmatic steps. The EU plays a crucial role in the preparation of the comprehensive documents of the regional development and in the financing of certain projects, that it will be described later in the study.

2.2 Polycentrism in the context of regional planning

The development of a polycentric urban structure may affect the direction of the spatial balance and leverage. In general – or as a premise –, it can be stated, that in a particular area, a polycentric spatial structure can be considered to be more equitable, more efficient and more sustainable than the mono-centric ones (Gerőházi-Tosics, 2005). Spatial and settlement structures with multiple centers are related to an increasing degree of decentralization, and as

a result, a polycentric territorial development can become more accessible and sustainable.¹ In this context, of course, many other questions can arise. The criteria of balanced settlements networks may vary, which is why we shouldn't forget about the assessments of polycentric structures, when we are thinking about them as possible or desired options. In this connection, in the case of a certain region, the criteria and the number of the levels of differentiation are also important factors. Other difficulties may arise from the aspect, whether it is interpreted within a certain level, or at multiple levels. In connection with the principle of subsidiarity², we can talk about decentralization and deconcentration, since they often can be seen as closely related issues. A further problem or question should be also noted; the basic principles and means of the creation and reinforcement of sub-centers also have to be determined (Lengyel – Rechnitzer 2004).

To use the various functions effectively, in multiple centers and poles decentralization, and in some cases, at the same time, in line with recentralization, the return of some functions to the center can be also required. Other important elements of the process are the development of networks and the utilization of the potentials, the opportunities and the benefits of sharing certain functions, as well. The question can also arise; at which levels can the idea of polycentrism be understood and implemented? In this regards, in addition to a more traditional interpretation of the idea of polycentrism – which itself conceals a number of options in this area –, it's also worth to mention the new related EU policy.

According to the dimensions of the traditional approach, based on the size of the areas, we can talk about levels within cities, between urban regions – that can be considered as polycentric regions – and the levels of regions (Kovács – Szabó 2013). Polycentric urban regions³ include urban areas, which are in close proximity to each other, with no strong hierarchy between them typically, however, with various co-operations, based on function-sharing that may appear between them. Examples for this phenomenon can be seen at the “polycenters” of Randstad, Katowice, or Köln (ESPON, 2007).

Different territorial categories are also distinguished by the new EU policy (ESPON); their essential elements, as basic units are the regions of cities with multiple centers. This partition consists of the following elements; the world, which classifies different areas by the three poles of center-periphery relations, and Europe, where center and periphery relations predominate, with major emphases on the global integration zones⁴. In addition, the examined areas can be divided into three further categories, such as macro-regions, national and regional, i.e. polycentric city-regions.

It's an essential task for the policy-makers, participants and the managers of the processes to tackle with the problems above; to solve them in practice and to achieve fairness to grant access to certain opportunities under these directives. Example for these could be the increase of the availability of products or services or to “move” consumers to a variety of associated

¹ One of the advantages of the decentralisation is that the local actors (civil organisations, citizens, firms) have the opportunity to mediate their ideas and to shape the future of their settlement (Reisinger, 2012). The participation of the actors means that they take responsibility for the society (Reisinger, 2013).

² One of the EU's regional policy principles is the principle of subsidiarity. According to it, the making and especially the implementation of policy decisions should be taken at the lowest possible administrative level since sufficient number and quality of information can only be available on this level. However, there are resource limitations regarding the realization of this principle.

³ Also known as PUR (Polycentric Urban Region).

⁴ Abbreviated as GIZ.

goods, in traditional, physical means, or in electronic, virtual forms⁵, as well. It is important to make multi-directional and multi-transport options available, as they can greatly promote the goals above.

Similarly, we can conclude that territorial conflicts appear regularly and inevitably, and generally they are not one-dimensional, and the regional, as well as international and communal dimensions can be also approached and evaluated in different ways, so shifting in the direction of a polycentric spatial structure, i.e. handling these usually involve complex tasks and challenges for the participants of the processes.

The competitiveness and efficiency, however, are dominant concepts and phenomena, affecting the regional processes at micro and enterprise levels, too and we can expect changes at this level. The development of the policies at European and nation-state levels should take account of the needs of regions, concentrating on the innovative and dynamic drivers of economic development. Polycentric development practices can serve exactly that, by equilibrating and mitigating the conflicts between the social levels and these demands. The problem of sustainability can be also related to the issue of equity and cohesion, and it's also important, that which patterns of urban development would be able to promote the development of regions, measured by appropriate indicators of innovative and sustainability ideas (Szigeti, 2013).

In addition, it should also be emphasized that attempts for the estimation of optimal size of settlements have been already made. In addition to the economic and social aspects communication, anthropological and ethical considerations should be also mentioned (Somogyi, 2012). According to these, new ideas can be formed about the development of the settlements.

2.3 Polycentrism in the EU development documents⁶

The requirements of the polycentric settlement network planning can be found from the end of the nineties in the EU policy documents. However, the guiding principle has been demonstrated only partially. It is based on a premise that the polycentric spatial structure more efficient, equitable and sustainable than the monocentric ones (Faragó, 2009). The EU's structural policy supports this direction, however, in many cases; a variety of spatial factors can inhibit the realization of the idea.

The concept and approach of polycentric regional development can be unfolded along two forces simultaneously; on one hand, to its potentials, the benefits in practice, and in addition to the decentralization processes, the impacts of regional concentrations should be also taken into account. Besides this, another aspect can be also essential for the further enhancement of competitiveness, regarding the economic and social problems in urban areas, which is the increasing of the need for the networks between them. The associated paradigm shift can be observed by examining the EU member countries. To achieve the objectives above, more centers could provide a better, more sustainable structure. It should be also noted, that these

⁵ Interestingly, these forms are more prevalent for example in the case of cultural goods and services (Gombos, 2014).

⁶ The research, which served as a basis for the chapter *Polycentrism in the EU development documents* was supported by the project *TÁMOP-4.2.2.A-11/1/KONV-2012-0010* The Vehicle Industry Zone in Győr, as the new way and method of regional development, supported by the Hungarian Government and the European Union, in the co-financing of the European Social Fund.

two principles from above can interact with each other. Due to the complexity of this issue, it can be also perceived that it would take a long time to achieve the goals of the settlement network in the development policy at community levels.

The development concepts of city network had been developed in various planning document by the European Union. Since the early 1990s, five determinative documents were born, which are the following ones:

- Aalborg Charter – Charter of European Cities & Towns Towards Sustainability;
- ESDP – European Spatial Development Perspective;
- Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities;
- Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2007;
- Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020.

Signed in 1994, the Aalborg Charter specifically focused on environmental sustainability (Barta 2009). The Charter was built up from three main chapters. In the first part of the Charter, 14 areas have been designated by the signatories. With these steps, the parties intended to establish the conditions of sustainable development. Not only the development of greener and cleaner cities was considered to be important, but the reduction of social tensions and the resolution of conflicts also appeared among the goals. In addition, they also sought to strengthen the role of the local civilians in the decision making system, to be closer to a self-sustaining urban concept (Charter of ... 1994).

In the second part of the charter the topic of The European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign was also outlined. According to the campaign, the development of urban networks is initiated in order to promote mutual exchange of positive urban experience. In addition, the involvement of media tools draws attention to the importance of the change in the thinking about the city. The final goal of this campaign was to create indicators to measure the development of a controllable urban development. In the third part of the Charter the need for compliance with local city development action plans is determined.

The need towards the polycentric urban structure was articulated directly in the ESDP, formulated in 1999. The social projections of sustainability, beside to the ecological projections came also to the front. For the common financial planning period between 2000 and 2006, the writers of the documents expressed the need for the conversion of the settlement structure and the functional (not administrative) network to a polycentric concept. This served for the reduction the urban-rural conflict; innovations based on endogenous resources emerged as well as the establishment of equilibrium in the social sense of the quality of the environment (ESDP, 1999).

The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European put the European urban policy into a broader context than it had been included in the Aalborg Charter. They formulated as a requirement towards the cities, which they should work as a basic unit of the territorial cohesion policy and process. In order to achieve these goals, cities have to be considered as a continent-wide network in the European Union. With the help of six potential action topics, they facilitated to strengthen the competitiveness of the city regions (Leipzig Charter, 2007).

Adopted in 2007, the Leipzig Charter is closely related to the Territorial Agenda, which was also issued in 2007. This document assessed some of the spatial characteristics from the aspect of the regional policy in a complex way. The demand of the creation of the polycentric urban network on the continent – as in the former mentioned ESDP – also appeared in this document (Territorial Agenda 2007).

For the forming of multi-centered, balanced settlement structures, the authors of the document put an emphasis on the building of the settlement networks. As the key factors of the development, these networks include the transport and ICT sphere, as well as research institutes and universities. To enhance the competitiveness of the driving forces of economic growth – the metropolitan spaces – these have to be strengthened by multiple manners of development channels, and greater latitude for local governments and non-governmental forces also should be provided (Csiszárík-Kocsir, 2007). It is also important to note, that instead of the point-like interpretation of the urban areas, the document presented that the examination of the city with its region would be more desirable. These are called functional urban regions. In addition, more flexible responses to the environmental, ecological and social crises and a stronger protection of the historic and cultural heritage were also treated as main goals.

The Territorial Agenda 2020 is a political document with a strong connection to the Europe 2020 Strategy. The economic and social crisis of the EU since 2007 and the increase of the climate change, as well as the fallback of the continent in terms of competitiveness prompted the decision-makers to formulate careful objectives along with a more complex approach. Ranging up to 2020 six priorities was expressed to influence the spatial structure changes (Territorial Agenda 2020).

To support the implementation of the priorities of the EU institutions, the Member States and the supervisors of the regions should seek the development of cooperative networks. To fulfill these goals, the document essentially considers the creation of a single indicator system at Community level, which would help to create elaborated regional plans.

The implementation of the actions has been defined not only at national level, but also highlighted the role of local communities, social groups and municipalities. In addition to these, of course, at the level of the European Union policies the implementation of these strategies had been also supported, by ensuring the comprehensive development of the programs and resources at community levels, as well.

The European Union announced over the period between 2014 and 2020 a reformed cohesion policy and regional policy. Based on the reform package that is concentrated in ten points, it seems to be clear, that in Brussels, the main development goal is to enhance the economic performance. In this, a key role is being given to innovative small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as to the areas where these businesses are concentrated. The seventh point of the package clearly emphasizes the strengthening of the urban dimension. This notion means clearly the development of the polycentric settlement system, which stretches across national borders, and can be interpreted at community level.⁷

As already discussed above, ESPON has led several international research projects between 2007 and 2013, which can be associated with polycentric urban networks. The SGPT (Secondary Growth Poles and Territorial Development in Europe: Performance, Policies and Prospects) project deals with the concept of urban policy in some of the European countries, specifically for secondary growth poles (second tier cities) and urban networks. In the final report of the project, the authors took an attempt to identify and classify the development manners of the nations in the EU. The POLYCE project (Metropolisation and Polycentric Development in Central Europe: Evidence Based Strategic Options) takes into account the

⁷ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-1011_en.htm [02.02.2014.]

functionally integrated socio-spatial units, with the inclusion of European examples. In the final report of the project we can find an analysis on the international integration of the agglomeration zones of Ljubljana, Bratislava, Vienna, Prague and Budapest. The project called FOCI (Future Orientations for Cities) deals with the future challenges faced by the European cities, and sketches possible solution paths, future perspectives on this field.

2.4 Europe from the perspective of polycentrism

When we're discussing the reinforcement of polycentric urban regions, it is worth to briefly evaluate Europe at higher regional levels. From the 1990s in Europe, a strong regional concentration process prevails.

As mentioned in the introduction, the settlement character of Europe can be seen as unipolar. At macro level, the "Pentagon" includes 14% of the area and 32% of the population. In this respect, a sense of disproportion is appearing, which continues to grow, and it becomes clear, if we examine the distribution of GDP – since 47% of the GDP is focusing in the region – a strong monocentrism can be observed (Faragó, 2009). What is strengthening the above characteristic even further is the 75 percent concentration of the R & D in this area (ESPON in Progress, 2003). Thus, it can be seen that it would be necessary to support other socio-geographical formations other than the one presented above. These could be the new Global Integration Zones, bound by the cities of Vienna–Budapest–Prague, Berlin–Zagreb–Ljubljana–Budapest–Warsaw, and further on, the area of Athens–Belgrade–Bucharest. After the macro level comes the mezzo or national level. For this level, a key element would be the division of tasks between the cities. Moving forward we can get to the micro-level, i.e. the level of urban regions, where urban features and collaborations within the region would receive more emphasis. Functional urban⁸ areas are the smallest units of the spatial structure; they include the urban centers as well as those surroundings (rural and / or urban) areas, and are broadly consistent with the local labor catchment areas (Illés-Somlyódiné, 2005).

Currently, there are more than 76 urban growth zones in Europe. They have a significant weight – based on a set of quantitative indicators related to the population and their economies -they are competitive – on the basis of GDP / capita indicators⁹, and according to them, the headquarters of the largest European companies are located in area – and they are essential elements of networking – including multi-modal access, based on the number of passengers at their airports – and also, they have a significant knowledge base as well – according the proportion of university graduates, the number of R & D employees (ESPON in Progress, 2003), highlighting London and Paris, as global centers¹⁰.

⁸ Abbreviated as FUA.

⁹ Due to the impact of the economic crisis, the professional interest toward the reform of macroeconomic indicators has increased and since the report of Stiglitz – Sen – Fitoussi dealing with the limits of the GDP index, the accepted opinion is that the present clearing of accounts system is untenable, which appears not only in the theories and research findings of alternative economists but also in the decision making of economic policy (Szigeti et al. 2013; Farkas-Szigeti 2011).

¹⁰ As mentioned above polycentric settlement structures are interpreted regarding to functional regions bounded by spatial economic processes. The nature and intensity of economic processes, the resources that are used and the products that are sold show differences between regions. The available resources and their prices initially influence what kind of economic activities could be viable in the specific area, given that there are significant differences in the cost structure of economic activities (Bereczk 2010). New, large-scale investments shape the local production structure, which are also in connection with resource prices. In a research including all double-entry book-keeping companies (Bereczk 2014) found that in Hungary there is not a negative correlation between labor prices and investments in manufacturing sectors, but there is a weak positive correlation (the higher the wages are the higher the investments), reflecting the demand for highly skilled labor. This means no comparative advantage for East-Hungarian regions with significantly lower wages. However in a given sector there could be

2.5 Polycentrism in Hungary

Hungary has one of the most monocentric spatial structures in Europe; compared to the settlement network, Budapest sits significantly higher in these relations, with the big cities falling short regarding the size required for the multi-centered spatial structure (Kovacs - Szabó, 2013). Our country has the "flattest" distribution in Europe, therefore, if we disregarded Budapest, Hungary would have Europe's most balanced and "most polycentric" settlement network. The question may arise; can the planning methods, related to polycentric ideas be adapted in Hungary? If so, since the settlement network would basically provide an appropriate structure for that- apart from Budapest and some of the bigger cities –, then how? When examining the GDP of various cities and the ranks related to these criteria, similar results may be obtained to the ones above. In this regard, Budapest has an over-representation – with values more than five times of other areas -, while larger cities are underperforming, compared to the cities of other countries. As we move towards the level of smaller cities, this difference slightly fades, in some places it can even turn around. In addition, it is also important that the slope of the line of the cities of Hungary in these relations is considered to be low for the European level (-0.72) (ESPON, 2007).

Based on the phenomena above, we can say that Hungary is basically considered to be monocentric. It's difficult to change the role, the characteristics and the position of Budapest – which can be considered as a metropolitan area at national level, according to its high economic gravity and history. It could not be a realistic idea either; on one hand, due to the factors above, affecting the processes are still valid. On the other hand, to correct such effects can hardly be effectively and efficiently achieved, since these forces have significant interactions with each other and are able to show correlations.

Increasing the economic strength of cities and different economic factors from above – mainly the GDP of a city or an area – can be useful and accessible to the target for the decisions makers and implementers. Also, it's not always practical to delegate certain national and international functions to the following or lower levels or to other major cities in the respective levels, due to difficulties of sharing and availability. Budapest's dominance, with its fairly good geographical and infrastructural availability, international role, and the peripheral position of large cities of Hungary are able to substantiate the above. The metropolitan character of Budapest entails other contexts as well, so it should be also taken into account, that the functional area of Budapest can outreach its county borders in several aspects. In this case, the county, as an area, correspond roughly to the region of the city and its associated agglomeration. Bigger cities are required to be supplied with differentiated responsibilities and tasks that should be delegated according to their rank and shall to be distributed as efficiently as possible, with a close relationship with their role (Sütő, 2008). It can be also said that a city category is lacking in Hungary (Faragó, 2009), so the distribution of certain functions is therefore slightly different from a structure that may be considered to be the ideal.

Two alternatives can be outlined, which could grant the basics of a strategy towards the development of a spatial structure with multiple centers. On one hand, we can talk about concentrated decentralization, which involves the development of key functional metropolitan areas; they could also be regional centers of their areas. In the future, they could play a more significant role internationally, so in this aspect, positioning of the developments remains an

significant differences in the cost structure of the companies depending on the stage the company represent along the supply chain (Bereczk 2013).

important factor. In addition to these alternatives, the use of the agglomerative advantages and the utilization of the possibilities of vertical integrations can also be key elements of the development. In addition to the trend above, the regional centers and with them, regional focal points based on agglomerative relations, as well as the urban hierarchy, could gain strength, since the potentials and interactions between cities would affect these processes, too. If we take a look on the map of Hungary, we can presume, that such decisions would reduce the backlog of metropolitan areas, in parallel with the decrease of the dominance of Budapest and as a result, a polycentric structure would be easier to achieve and obtain. Another alternative could be the continuation of the previous strategy's implementation, in which regional functions would be shared between multiple destinations. As a result, a more balanced spatial structure, and wider sharing of functions would become available. Most probably this would decrease the ecological footprint of the whole structure, which has a deficit since the early 1970s, currently at the height of 152 per cent (Szigeti - Tóth 2014). In this process, an emphasis would be laid on the weight of horizontal cooperation, and the hierarchy pyramid would be relatively flat, as in this case, due to the lack of both higher levels, they would take smaller roles in the processes. The regional level – opposed to the level of counties – would be weakened, losing its importance. However, in addition to the above, it should also be also noted that this strategy would be more difficult to achieve, since the current weak economic relations, the low levels of competitiveness, and the lack of regional identity would raise a number of problems. In terms of the development of a future spatial structure, a complex, long-term strategy, requiring continuous updates, reconsideration, monitoring should be considered by the participants of the processes.

3 Conclusions

The scientific interest on the cities and regions is considered to be high today. Findings can indicate that for the competitiveness and sustainable development of a country or even of a continent the aspects of the area's urban network are prominently important. These innovations, the driving forces of economic growth, the additional benefits of spatial densifications are such resources that are not sufficiently exploited, and which should be utilized more in the future.

The study presented of the main concepts of the polycentric urban regions and networks. For the member states, the biggest driving force seem to be the European Union's regional policy, Brussels is increasingly opting for the dominant urban policy. It is expected that between 2014 and 2020, that development funds, made available for the member states, would be more beneficial for the dynamic countries with polycentric structure. This is a new challenge for the new member states and also for the candidates.

Taking into account the current trends the future development of the settlement network is characterized by the further enhancements of bigger cities and the broadening of their functions, the stabilization of the medium-sized towns and small cities and also, by the expansion of their sub-regional roles. Where the city is not able to make the network stronger, beside to the slow degradation of its institutions and services the rearrangement and stabilization of its structure have to be addressed. The competition and integration of large cities into the European networks in a more complete way will be typical across the EU. They will be main leaders in the networks, and the makers of the regional structure, too.

The achievement of polycentric urban networks at Community level show promising perspectives. Development funds coming into our countries can be a great help, along with the reform of regional policy, which may contribute to the change of a very monocentric spatial structure in a favorable direction.

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