
Vulnerability and resilience at the lower level of the Hungarian urban network

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Abstract

The post-socialist transition has changed the frames and conditions of the urbanisation process all over in Central- and Eastern-Europe. In Hungary, like in many countries in this region, the era of the planned economy resulted the accelerated growth of urban centres, not only the big cities and symbolic industrial locations, but – in a different scale – the small towns as well – especially in the 1970's and 1980's. The growth of small towns has largely been based on the central redistribution of resources, the (artificial) decentralisation of the industrialisation and the prospects of some typical small-town economic branches in the frameworks of East-European markets. During the 1990's, traditional economic sectors (not only heavy- but the light industry, food processing and the former highly specialised and intensive agriculture as well) have been collapsed and central sources of development ran dry. These huge external shocks have been revealed and strengthened the effects of some long term fundamental transformation, like the second demographic transition and economic restructuring. Unlike some well-urbanised and high-density urban zones, where the bases of the new economy took shape relatively quickly, rural areas showed high vulnerability in the globalised stage they forced to play on. The rural hinterland and the small towns themselves have to face challenges without the having resources and experience of handling similar situations. The conditions of a resilient answer have evolved crucially slow, resulting a long-lasting crisis of small towns during the years before and after 2000. In this perception, the further urbanisation of small towns after the transition is nothing more than a kind of a selective erosion in the rural settlement network: some places were simple more vulnerable to changes than others. The aim of this paper is to analyse the factors of success and failures of Hungarian small towns according to the concepts of resilience and vulnerability. Resilience of a place is largely determined by a sort of external factors like geographical position and accessibility, but there are some others based on the capability of the smart combination of local resources. Our research is based on quantitative and qualitative evaluation of local investment activity and bid of external resources, the analysis of local planning activities and policies. With empirical surveys (questionnaires, interviews) conducted in six Hungarian small towns authors tried to measure the differences in social capital and its effects on resilience.

Keywords: resilience, small town, social capital, post, socialist transition, Hungary

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