



Municipal Twinning as Paradiplomatic Practice: The Bulgarian–Hungarian Experience

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Extended abstract

Abstract

The number and share of employees who commute daily are growing across Europe, and these mobility patterns are a sensitive indicator of the spatial restructuring of regions and states. Our study examines whether economic transformation and growth have led to a shift towards polycentric development in Hungary, a country characterised by an extremely monocentric spatial structure, over the past two decades. What is new about our approach is that we do not examine the medium-sized urban centres directly, but rather the structure and dynamics of the small centres surrounding them as a quantitative and qualitative imprint of the development of the given urban region. We consider small centres to be settlements that receive fewer than 5,000 commuters.

Our analysis is based on census data from 2001, 2011, and 2022, combining commuters' residence and workplace data with socio-economic indicators for workplace settlements and their labour catchment areas. Using cluster analysis, we identified nine types of small centres that differ markedly in terms of quality and regional location. The most important dividing line is between "agglomeration" and "rural" small centres. The spatial pattern of the types sensitively reflects the transformation of the country's spatial structure. It provides a more nuanced picture of the development of medium-sized cities than the examination of the cities themselves.

According to our results, the monocentric nature did not weaken but strengthened during the period under review: Budapest and its agglomeration are increasingly concentrating commuting. Only a few medium-sized cities have seen significant agglomeration development, mainly in the northwestern part of the country, where cross-border relations—especially the influence of the Vienna and Bratislava agglomerations—are also evident. In contrast, in the southern and southeastern parts of the country, the spatial structure is more rural, with medium-sized cities not standing out significantly from smaller centres. Overall, the results suggest that economic growth alone did not lead to a polycentric restructuring, but rather to a further strengthening of the capital's dominance.

Keywords: Commuting patterns, Polycentric development, Monocentric spatial structure, Small urban centres, Agglomeration processes, Regional economic transformation

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