



THE METROPOLISATION PROCESS AT THE REGIONAL SCALE – RECOMMENDATIONS, POLICY OPTIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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GRINCOH WP 6 Task 6

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement “Growth-Innovation-Competitiveness: Fostering Cohesion in Central and Eastern Europe” (GRNCOH)

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Metropolisation process at the regional scale – recommendations, policy options and future prospects

Introduction

The key findings from the empirical research on the metropolisation process in the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) regarding the relationship between the metropolis and the region can be summarised as follows:

- The positive spread effects of metropolitan development are largely limited to the direct surroundings of the metropolis (usually within a radius of 40 km from the city centre), strongly integrated functionally with the core city.
- In the more distant surroundings of the metropolis, negative backwash effects prevail, although in the recent years this process has been increasingly balanced (also as a result of the deconcentration of the economic potential within the metropolitan area, facilitating daily commuting to work from the regional hinterland), which has considerably slowed down the widening scale of disparities in the development level between the metropolis and its regional hinterland.
- The differences in the economic structure are the main cause of the disparities in the development level between the metropolis and the region, while examples of local successes in the regional hinterland are few and far between.

On this basis, we can formulate the recommendations for the development of metropolitan areas; the development scenarios for metropolitan areas dependent on the actions of the public authorities and, last but not least, the future challenges for the national regional policies, also those implemented at the level of metropolitan macroregions.

1) Policy recommendations for metropolitan areas development

The major recommendations concerning the functioning of metropolitan areas include:

- Strengthening of metropolitan functions through improving soft factors of enterprise location. This can be achieved e.g. by improving the quality of urban space and halting the increasing spatial chaos in the metropolitan suburban zone that occurs as a result of urban sprawl processes.
- Reinforcing of international and national transport systems connecting the capital city regions of the CEECs with other metropolises. In the spatial dimension, this should include the development of detailed development plans for the local systems situated within the main transport corridors and airports.
- Improving the integration of the transport systems within the metropolis. In particular, efforts should be made to associate suburbanisation processes with the development of transport and public transportation systems, notably rail transport.
- Promoting cooperation between municipalities of the metropolitan area, including its institutionalisation and building a metropolitan identity. Work should be commenced on

development plans for the metropolitan area, also with the use of structural funds which could provide the basis for promotional activities.

2) Development scenarios and policy recommendations for regional hinterlands

Three potential scenarios for the development of the non-metropolitan hinterland can be proposed regarding the relationships between the metropolis and the region which are informed by the development mechanisms discussed above. The first assumes a reactive response of the public authorities to the existing problems, whereas the other two are more likely to take place in the context of proactive efforts of the public authorities.

Scenario 1. Depopulation and reactive policies of the public authorities

The first scenario envisages depopulation of the regional hinterland of the metropolis due to the migration of people in productive age and ongoing population ageing processes. The pace of this process will largely depend on the expansion of housing construction in the metropolis and price availability of flats for purchase or rent on the one hand, and on the other – on the accessibility of the metropolitan labour market for the residents of the regional hinterland.

It should also be assumed that the number of the population living in the regional hinterland will fall in the long term. However, with adequate measures and initiatives on the part of the public authorities, this will not necessarily impoverish the regional surroundings. Such necessary activities of the public authorities should include in particular:

- Measures aimed to foster development of the main subregional centres,
- Measures aimed to prolong the period of professional activity and foster an economy inclusive of elderly people,
- Measures aimed to improve the quality of human capital,
- Maintaining access to, and improving the quality of public services,
- Development of public transport, including improved transport accessibility of subregional centres.

Scenario 2 External investments driven by improved attractiveness of the regional hinterland

The second scenario predicts that the macroregion's functional integration will be enhanced following the development of the regional manufacturing system. The main factor determining the competitiveness of the regional hinterland will include lower cost and better availability of the factors of production compared to the metropolitan area. The probability of this scenario will increase with a rapid development of the metropolitan area, coupled with concurrent planning restrictions mitigating urban sprawl in the direct vicinity of the metropolis.

In this scenario, the role of the authorities is to improve transport connections between the metropolis and the main subregional centres, accompanied by building the necessary technical infrastructure in the form of industrial parks where inward investors could locate their business. To this end, efforts should be made to improve the system of secondary education.

Scenario 3 Endogenous development of the regional hinterland in the conditions of external intervention

The third scenario foresees a remodelling of the economic and social structure of non-metropolitan areas mainly due to investments fostering the development of human capital and increased access to state-of-the-art technologies. Such changes must be initiated by the public authorities or else, based on the trends observable so far, the likelihood of such a scenario being enacted will not be very strong.

In particular, measures taken by the authorities should involve the development of the SME sector; such enterprises should receive supports in the form of access to workers with the required qualifications (role of the education system and employment services), a viable business environment (information, consulting, financial services), access to technology (role of technology transfer, R&D centres and higher education institutions), and incorporating their needs in the development strategies of the major urban centres. This will require such policies to be coordinated at the regional level and relevant support to be offered to local governments as they stand little chance of coping with such challenges on their own.

All this could trigger endogenous development processes, especially in the subregional centres furnished with relevant infrastructure, and help stop the widening of the disparities between the metropolis and the rest of the region. It should be noted, however, that only cities with sufficient quality of local leadership and strategic planning are likely to successfully embrace this development model. Choosing such a development trajectory should curb activities petrifying the existing regional economic structure, especially those that help sustain high employment in low-productivity agriculture.

Summary

All the above scenarios are based on contemporarily observable development mechanisms, which leads to the adoption of the polarisation and diffusion model as the basis for the discussions on the future of the metropolitan regions. With no proactive approach on the part of the public authorities, the first scenario is the one most likely to occur. The remaining two scenarios depend on the direction and scale of public intervention and on its coordination with the efforts of the local authorities, especially within the metropolitan area, and with the policies pursued by the authorities of the regions' major urban centres.

3. Future prospects

The metropolisation processes observed in the CEECs are converging this macroregion to the more developed countries of Western Europe. As demonstrated by several studies, recent economic crisis has not changed their direction - even in the countries deeply affected, one could observe only some slowdown and not a reversal of the trend. Undoubtedly, these processes pose a challenge for the regional policy in the CEECs also at the level of metropolitan macroregions .

However, before a package of measures is adopted as part of regional policy aimed to shape the spatial structures of the CEECs in a desirable manner, two questions should be answered:

- Whether, and to what extent, are economic polarisation processes negative socially and environmentally?
- Which is more effective: to maintain the levels of public transfers to problem areas with a simultaneous removal of barriers hindering migration to better-developed regions or to unlock the endogenous potential for growth, using public resources coupled with lack of interventions in the housing market in metropolitan areas (which will in fact obstruct migration processes)?

Regardless of what answer is given to these questions, it should be assumed that the attempts made so far with a view to equalising the development level between and within regions should be rather replaced by efforts aimed to increase functional cohesion, which would involve greater integration and fostering of linkages and flows between the core and peripheral areas of individual countries and metropolitan macroregions.