



BOOK REVIEW

Gyula Horváth, *Spaces and Places in Central and Eastern Europe*, Routledge, 2015

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When Professor Gyula Horváth offered me this book on *Spaces and Places in Central and Eastern Europe* (Routledge, 2015) – the latest at that time – on the occasion of his participation as special guest and keynote speaker in the 10th International Conference of the Romanian Regional Science Association in Suceava, in May 2015 – nobody could have imagined, even in the darkest thoughts, that it would be the last one... The fate, which cut his life much too early, made this book an impressive expression of the legacy left by Professor Horváth for the international scientific community, in particular for the Central and Eastern Europe one. Indeed, he was so much concerned with bringing together the CEE regional scientists and their research so as to become a powerful voice in the larger European landscape!

This book is about the regional development trajectories in CEE, providing a comprehensive, highly relevant image on the regional policy objectives, instruments and institutions meant to serve this process in this part of Europe, with interesting country case studies. The processes, frameworks and driving forces of regional development are examined in relation to the regional transformations during the whole 20th century, the coordinates of regional policy modernisation, the frameworks of power and the knowledge-based regional development.

Thus, the regional transformations in CEE highlight the historical trends in the 20th century and the socio-economic disparities between regions, with emphasis on the radical changes in the economic structures determined by the transition to the market economy. The urbanization degree and the sectoral distribution of economic activities are seen as key issues able to influence the regional economic performance.

Then, the modernisation of the regional development policy is analysed in close relationship with the institutional developments required by the accession to the EU and the integration in its Cohesion Policy framework. In this context a serious criticism is formulated with regard to the still

centralised decision-making process which “does not support the reduction of spatial disparities but their increase” (p.59).

Therefore, in the next chapter regions are approached as frameworks of power, the development tasks at intermediate level being discussed. Various decentralisation models are examined, compared but, in the end, the conclusion is that “in Eastern and Central Europe today, the future of the division of power between state and region still seems uncertain. The prospects of decentralisation depend on the success of economic efficiency and the results of the ‘top to bottom’ managed change of regime, but the preconditions at regional level for setting-up power are unfavourable” (p.77).

In a broader view it is argued that the further development of Europe depends to a high extent on the spreading of growth factors across its regions. A particular emphasis is put on knowledge based regional development, the current regional differences in R&D being considered an important reason for the lower level of competitiveness compared to the absolute winners at global scale.

The setting-up and geographical distribution of institutions able to support the economic and social innovation are addressed from a historical perspective, starting from the medieval times, when the first universities arose in Europe. A wonderful inquiry into the role of universities over centuries in various European countries is provided, with a special section devoted to the organisation of scientific institutions in CEE between 1950 and 1990 and beyond. A major conclusion in this chapter envisages the criteria that have to be met for a higher education network to develop ‘integration tasks’ as component of the innovation system. They refer to research as a core function of higher education, the cooperation between higher education and the economy supported by a national technology policy and regional institutions, the capacity of higher education structure to generate economic and technological innovation and the geographical decentralization of higher education.

The second part of the book offers very interesting country case studies focusing on Germany, Russia and Hungary.

In the case of Germany the research has concentrated on Eastern Germany’s regional development, with challenging remarks on the ‘Sovietisation of Central Germany’, ‘the regional impacts of the collapse of GDR’, the price and impacts required by its reintegration and the role of industry and R&D as driving forces of sustainable development of East German regions.

The regional transformations in Russia are analysed in relation to the spatial aspects of the power structure, the regional social problems and the defining features for a new regional development strategy.

When it comes to Hungary, sensitive questions are raised, such as the decline of competitiveness in regional development policy, the ‘one-pole country’ particularity, etc., accompanied by the remarks with clear impact for practice like those regarding the building-up the appropriate institutions, the future images of the regional tier and the National Development Plan.

The third part of the book deals with the inter-regional co-operation in Central Europe, with working communities and Euroregions as the main foci.

The Alps-Adriatic working community’s experience of more than three decade-long operation is examined, with significant lessons drawn for Hungary in order to integrate, on a regional basis, into Europe.

The Carpathian Basin is also taken into discussion, a long list of highly relevant topics being identified with regard to planning partnership in this area, such as: the development of cross-border infrastructure and labour market co-operation, neighbourhood partnership, the development of the large cities located in the frontier proximity into dominant national knowledge centres, the development of the regional airports placed in the frontier proximity, the increase in the number of regional policy experts and training centres for organizing the transfer of professional knowledge, etc.

The whole book is full of high quality insights and original ideas and proposals able to contribute to a real improvement of institutions and regional development policy in CEE, based on an interdisciplinary approach and a close co-operation between regional scientists and policy-makers.

I am deeply confident that the seeds so carefully selected and imbedded in this book will generate very productive, successful outcomes and it is so very sad that our dear colleague and friend, Professor Gyula Horváth, cannot enjoy the results of his fantastic, tremendous work. But it seems that, beyond the short existence on the Earth, this is what makes great personalities really great: their creations will remain alive and will continue to inspire not only actual but also future generations of scientists. And Professor Gyula Horváth definitely has his place in this very special ‘club’. Moreover, I like to imagine his soul watching us with his enormous love not only for science but also – at least equally important – for life and for people who were profoundly inspired by his life, academic and scientific activity and friendship and who will continue to admire and love him very, very much.