

Some conflicts in the territorial governance of Hungary: the example of the Budapest Agglomeration Plan

Hanna Szemző

Metropolitan Research Institute

The history of the Budapest Agglomeration Plan

- Hungarian Parliament passed Act LXIV on Spatial Planning in the Agglomeration of Budapest in July, 2005
- The work began on it in 1998 – the ensuing 7 years were rather turbulent in political terms
- Its first version was ready by 2001, but then the government decided not to submit it due to its possible political consequences

The requirements of Act XXI

- Its preparation was prescribed by Act XXI on Spatial Development and Spatial Planning in 1996.
- Here 16 special regions were defined, covering almost the whole territory of the country
- two of which (around the Lake Balaton and that of the Agglomeration of Budapest) would require having a spatial regulatory plan codified in law
- the preparation of which is to be commissioned by the government.

The Budapest Agglomeration Area

- the agglomeration area itself consists of 80 settlements (which are situated in Pest County) and the capital
- its territory is 2538 km² big
- 2.412. 000 people live here (it houses approximately 1/4 of the Hungarian population)
- the number of inhabitants seems quite stable – has largely remained unchanged between 2001 and 2004
- some inner restructuring occurred: due to the strong suburbanization tendencies the capital lost population, whereas the agglomeration belt around it, gained
- it is one the motors of economic development in Hungary.

The decision of the Constitutional Court

- **This ruling (886/B/1996)was trying to create order in the legislative confusion created by two Acts – the one on local government from 1990 an the other on spatial planning stemming from 1996 – which were contradictory with regard to the responsibilities of spatial planning and regulation**
- **The Constitutional Court protected the importance and superiority of countywide, regional and national spatial plans**
- **upheld the right of self-determination of any local government with regard to its own tasks, specified by the Act on Local Governments and other legislation**
- **So: the spatial plan of the agglomeration area deliberately only dealt with subjects that were unquestionably of national and regional interest**

The aim of the Budapest Agglomeration Plan 1.

Original aim:

- To lay down the spatial framework for a sustainable development in the future for the whole area
- To stop the eroding of the green belt around Budapest and tame land use: the conversion of green areas into building areas
- To create a balance between the **local, regional and national** interests, to combine different **sectoral** interests

Final aim: To pass it!!!!

Its context: the administrative system of local governments 1.

- It is embedded into the rapid changes of the 1990s, which brought about a completely new administrative structure.
- Although during these years a thorough decentralization of policy making was carried out in many different policy fields, the monocentric structure of the country hasn't been altered significantly
- The essence of the decentralizing attempts was carried out by the establishment of the highly independent system of local governments

Its context: the administrative system of local governments 2.

- Almost 3200 local governments – each with it elected mayor and own assembly – in Hungary
- They are delegated all the **planning and decision making competencies above their territory (including issuing a building permit or preparing the local spatial regulatory plan)**
- were transferred many of the former state assets – ownership of housing, the former state enterprises and the ownership of the utility companies.
- They became responsible for providing a wide range of public services on their territory – health care, primary education, social services, maintenance of basic infrastructure and provision of services (public transportation or street lighting)

Its context: the administrative system of local governments 3.

Local governments enjoy great political independence combined with great financial dependence from the central authorities

Consequently:

- while, preparing the spatial regulatory plan for the agglomeration, many local governments had the chance and power to lobby successfully for their own interests and against a more restrictive agglomeration plan
- Secondly, their struggle, was not only due to political short-sightedness on their side, but also because of the financial difficulties many settlements were facing
- their involvement practically stripped the agglomeration plan from its holistic view

Who participated in the process? 1.

Core team

- Pestterv
- Territorial and Settlement Planning Department (Területi és Településrendezési Főosztály)

National level

- Hungarian Parliament
- All ministries of the government
- Different bodies and organizations consulted as a result of the governmental decree of 184/1996

Who participated in the process? 2.

County level

- Chief Architect's Office of Pest County
- Chief Architect's Office of the City Municipality of Budapest, its different committees

Local level

- 80 local governments of the agglomeration belt
- 23 district governments of Budapest
- NGOs at the local level

Vertical cooperation 1.

Formal:

- In the different phases (planning, preparatory, cabinet) all local governments were contacted (they almost never took it seriously)
- After 2000 – when the possibility of a moratorium and the passing of the act arose – they began modifying their settlement spatial regulatory plans
- the planners had to follow the modifications
- central government was unwilling to pay compensation
- Pest County and the City Municipality started to play the role of a moderator, but with different powers

Vertical cooperation 2.

Informal:

- Through private lobbying (both local politicians and entrepreneurs)
- Through a face-to-face negotiation with the parliamentary committee of the largest faction

Horizontal cooperation

- Consultation with the different professional bodies, universities, chambers, etc. regulated by the governmental decree of 184/1996
- Consultation among the different ministries
- Consultations among the different committees within the Municipality of Budapest
- Failed consultation among the different territorial participants: the case of the Tétényi plateau

NGOs: or the lack of them 1.

The governmental decree of 184/1996. It explicitly lists all those organizations that have to be consulted in the process of making a spatial regulatory plan for the special regions:

- 18 different bodies and organizations – some are government related some are not
- ranging from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the effected higher education institutions to all the professional chambers in the territory for whom the plan could be of interest, the national chambers of architects, planner, entrepreneurs
- It is a formalized process

NGOs: or the lack of them 2.

- There are no civil organizations involved – although currently there is talk about its necessity
- Their involvement was restricted to the local level, where:
 - **they could attend all public hearings**
 - **could request a hearing at the local government**
 - **their biggest strength lay with mobilizing the press and staging protests with the help of the residents**

NGOs: or the lack of them 3.

- The presence of the business sphere was widely felt, but its clear influence remained unknown
- Public participation was almost always viewed as something of a burden
- The biggest problem with this is the fact that the most important decisions were mad locally

What can we learn from the process? 1.

- The whole process represents the inner contradictions the young Hungarian democracy struggles with:
 - How the questions of self determination of the local governments contested with protecting the public interests:
 - **decentralization vs. centralization**
 - **the sacrifice of progressive, long term-goals for short priorities**

What can we learn from the process? 2.

- what does governance mean in the Hungarian context:
 - **no real democracy at the local level**
 - **high level of political intervention**
 - **very little influence of NGOs but high influence of the private investors**
- Shall we, in the realm of territorial planning, rigidly separate spatial planning from spatial development

What can we learn from the process? 3.

- Despite its obvious failures, the process carried many features of good territorial governance:
 - participation of different spatial entities
 - participation of different sectoral entities
 - excellent planning team and good working relations between the commissioner and the planning team and some other participants

Thank you very much for your
attention

szemzo@mri.hu