Chapter 6
Regional Elites, Networks and the Beauty of Regionalism in Hungary

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Abstract The rescaling of administrative structures and hierarchies is a Europe-wide phenomenon, often associated with democratisation and increased accountability. This is particularly true within the European Union, where the principle of regionalisation, often referred to as subsidiarity, is embraced in the Copenhagen criteria. Those states which joined the Union after the collapse of communism had to reorganise their spatial administrative hierarchies and decentralise national administration, often creating two or more new levels of government. This was the case in Hungary, where, before 1990, the main regional actors were counties, which were responsible for directing the allocation of resources and managing development. After 1990, local government reforms strengthened local governments at the expense of the counties and left a vacuum at the regional level. However, in the mid-1990s, the Hungarian government attempted to create new NUTS2 meso-level regions, partly in response to demands from the European Union and partly to instil a new regional orientation among policymakers. This paper, based on research undertaken in 2002–2008, examines some of the problems in creating new regions. The research found that top-down regionalisation, demanded by the European Union, and imposed from above, failed to create a regional identity. Respondents, taken from among regional policymakers and business leaders, are identified with their locality and county, but not the new region. Even national politicians appeared ambivalent, supporters of the regionalisation legislation fearing that it would complicate administration by adding a new layer of government and opponents arguing that it would weaken the central government. Regionalisation remained a relatively hollow administrative exercise from which civic, business, and non-governmental organisations felt excluded despite their nominal participation. The research also found that bottom-up regionalism was potentially more successful, but it was unlikely to succeed unless there was broad-based political support at all levels of the government.

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Introduction

The rescaling of power structures is a Europe-wide phenomenon (Guilani 2006), but the timing and the measures differ by country. This paper focuses on changes in Hungary since the collapse of communist rule. The collapse led to systemic change, and as a result, the spatial division of power underwent deep and rapid changes. Under communist rule, Hungary had three tiers of government: the national government, county governments (equivalent to NUTS3 regions), and local governments (equivalent to NUTS4 regions). In the case of Budapest, the city functioned as a county and had 20 districts. Local governments were little more than state enterprises, managing housing, transport, and local services and relying mainly on central government for funding. County governments, analogous to local interior ministries under communism, controlled local governments, allocating resources to them, monitoring performance, and overseeing local policy formation and implementation. Between 1945 and 1990, the number of local governments was progressively reduced through a series of amalgamations, based on the idea of eliminating small units of government on efficiency grounds.

In 1990 for the first time in Hungarian history, municipalities gained self-government. The power of the formerly dominant counties decreased because they were held in deep distrust by local governments and their residents. Under communist rule, they had played an unpopular role in controlling municipalities and distributing public resources. The Act on Local Governance in 1990 delegated only peripheral competences and tasks to county assemblies. Therefore, it left them unable to play a role in integrating local governments and local government activities. Local governments also became responsible for financing their activities. At the same time, there was an explosion in the number of local governments, from 1,470 in 1990 to 3,158 and 3,175 in 2010, as communities joined together under communism reclaimed their administrative independence. In addition, the Act on Local Governance gave all local governments the same legal status, regardless of their place in the administrative hierarchy. As a result, county governments had the same status as small villages, and Budapest as a capital had the same legal status as districts in Budapest.

As a result of this process of administrative reform, the local government sector started to expand. The country had a large number of relatively small local governments with a limited financial base, which tended to be concerned with local management issues. The result was that a regional perspective disappeared from local government agendas. This created a democratic deficit at the local level, since regional problems were largely unaddressed by elected local governments. National government was left to manage relations among local governments, particularly regarding spatial issues.

From the middle of the 1990s, measures were introduced to reduce the democratic deficit and reduce malfunctions in territorial governance. However, a reallocation of powers among different levels of government appeared to be politically infeasible, and the national government had to find alternative methods to simplify the administrative system and re-instil a regional perspective into local government. Among other things, the Act on Local Government was amended to strengthen county assemblies. Later, a number of public administrative reforms were announced with the aim of limiting and coordinating the central administration's role in managing regional issues, but they had limited success.

The rescaling and shifting of the public power structure accelerated as Hungary approached accession to the European Union in May, 2004. A special act on regional development was passed, setting up special institutions at a new tier of government, consisting of groups of counties (generally three), analogous to NUTS2 regions. These were created in response to European Union demands for a multitier administrative structure within new EU member states and were also created with the aim of accessing European Structural Funds. Each of these macro-regions had a development council which was responsible for elaborating and implementing a plan for regional development throughout the region.

The need to create this meso-level administrative region and European regional policy together led to the formulation of a new governmental programme in 2002 under the leadership of the Hungarian Socialist Party and its parliamentary allies. This programme declared that regional governments with elected assemblies would replace county governments by 2006. This programme appeared to finally solve a decade-long dilemma: the counties would be replaced by elected regions which would, at the same time democratise meso-level governance, decentralise the strongly centralised Hungarian state and provide for the efficient management for the European Structural Funds. However, the reform programme was never implemented, even though the government set up an expert committee with the mission of preparing and implementing the reforms in order to demonstrate its commitment towards regionalism. Between 2002 and 2006, no single concrete measure was taken to introduce any elements of regional change. In 2006, the newly elected government, again, a coalition led by the Hungarian Socialist Party, confirmed the regional reforms, submitting a complex amendment package of acts almost as large as the national constitution itself, containing among other things a law on local governments and a law on national elections. However, the parliament did not accept it because the legislation had not been preceded by broader political, social consultation. The requirement that legislation be passed by a two-third majority vote was, of course, a big obstacle, because the opposition Fidesz and its allies, who had a conservative-nationalist stance, did not want to support any government reforms in what has become a permanent feature in Hungary's polarised political life.

During the above attempts to reform the territorial system of administration, new actors emerged in the public sphere in the form of decision-making and consultative appointed bodies, organised according to "corporative" models, as opposed to traditional elected and bureaucratic forms. In an effort to gain legitimacy, they have

involved different institutions and social groups. The desire to create more democratic forms of governance could have been a sufficient explanation for the emergence of this jungle of actors, but in the eyes of many, the aim of the central government was to bypass and weaken county self-governments. An especially important step was the establishment of the so-called territorial development councils, based on the partnership principle found in European cohesion policy. These new territorial development councils have more decisive power and resources than the elected county assemblies. The institutionalised networks created from the top provide influence and informal power for the special elite who are appointed as members of these new types of organs and subvert the need for democratic decentralisation.

With hindsight, it appears that the comprehensive regional reform programme was too ambitious. Not only did it lack parliamentary support, but it also lacked professional support. The empirical analysis needed to support the reforms was also lacking. The most often-stated rationales for regional reforms were accession to the European Union and absorption of Structural Funds. However, these rationales no longer seemed convincing. The domestic management of the Structural Funds is strongly centralised, partly due to the pressure from Brussels, but also due to the centralising attitudes of the Hungarian government. This also suggests that the Hungarian national government places little trust in regional institutions and actors created by the government itself.

This does not mean that there is no need to strengthen the meso-level of public administration, but means that reform must be based on "just" our own needs and considerations. The reform of territorial public administration remains an issue among politicians and policymakers, and that is why there is a need to investigate the political conditions and processes between the top- and bottom-level power arenas and examine why the previous reform programmes failed. The question is whether top-down regional reform is realistic and to what extent it can expect local/regional support from below.

The paper deals with the content of the new Hungarian regions. It looks at how actors and their networks filled up these geographical voids which are still missing on the public administrative map of Hungary. The paper then attempts to draw lessons from the Hungarian experience to better understand aspects of "Europeanisation" and the role of culture and society in public administrative reforms.

Regionalism (Bottom-Up) vs. Regionalisation (Top-Down)

Regionalism might be defined as the construction of a regional identity from endogenous actors, that is, from within the region itself. Regionalisation might be defined as the construction of a region by exogenous forces, from above. In Hungary, the territorial reorganisation of public administration was not demand driven, but was initiated from the top-down by central government. Therefore, it makes sense to

investigate differences between regional reforms initiated from the top and those initiated from the bottom due to local initiatives.

In the 1980s and 1990s, reforms were implemented at the meso-level of governance in many Western European countries. The strengthening or establishing of regional structures occurred, on one side, as consequences of the organic development of national public administrations. This arose from the need to improve technical performance, services, and infrastructure to better meet social needs and to cope with the effects of globalisation in general, putting more emphasis on the role of institutions at regional scale. On the other side the firm intention of the EU played a crucial role in this process. The Union favoured the creation of meso-level regions and the devolution of power to such regions. It was argued that such regions contributed not only to the efficiency of European cohesion policy but helped to advance the integration process by lessening or limiting the power of national governments.

The two main models of regional change implemented within the pre-2004 European Union were, therefore, bottom-up regionalisation and top-down regionalisation, depending on whether the regional power structures were created on the initiative of the local social, political, and economic actors or by the central government under the label of modernisation and administrative rationality (Keating 2004). In the so-called cohesion countries (Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Spain), as the primary beneficiaries of the Structural and Cohesion Funds, the most important motivation of region building was the externally imposed need to adapt to European regional policy regulations.

In many cases, bottom-up and top-down reforms undoubtedly supported each other. The emergence of the European multilevel governance model, cooperation among the European regions, and the formal institutionalisation of regional representation in the frame of the Committee of the Regions had a salutary effect on both types of regionalisation (Bache 1998; Bovaird et al. 2002).

When taking a closer look at reforms implemented in the EU member states and at the special development partnership institutions established in order to adapt to the cohesion policy, it appears that there were two approaches. Most countries preserved their traditional public administrative units, and the new regions were established over and not instead of them (like Greece, France), or regional development institutions were built outside the "normal" public administration hierarchy (Ireland, Portugal). The other important feature is that these reforms were gradually introduced and implemented after decades-long preparation (France, Italy) even if regional structures had historical traditions, antecedents, and cultural roots (Larsson et al. 1999).

Recent analyses on the consequences of changes in regional administrative structures suggest that reforms implemented or at least supported from below are more successful and less conflictive; new institutions are easier and more organically built; and new institutions are strongly socially embedded (Knodt 2002; Elcock 2003).

Regional public administrative reforms in Central and Eastern European transitional countries are particularly interesting (Surazska et al. 1997; Pickvance 1997; Emilewicz and Wolek 2002; Hughes et al. 2004; Pálné Kovács 2007). Where the

reforms failed, they usually had not led to real decentralisation. However, in terms of success of or failure, there seem to be great differences between those reforms which were imposed by external agencies in the name of modernisation and those which were socially supported, "socialised", from below.

Therefore, it is obvious that the success of reforms depends to a large extent on multiple factors: the model chosen, the preparation before implementation, and the support or opposition of stakeholders, local society, and the political elite.

Theoretical Frames of the Research

The aim of this research, conducted at the University of Pécs and financed by the Hungarian National Research Fund (OTKA project No. 49453 in 2005–2008), was to investigate the internal cohesion of the NUTS2 regions, the extent to which they have developed the capacity to act as political units and the extent to which individual member governments and organisations had developed the ability to cooperate in forming and implementing policies. An additional aim was to determine the extent to which the regions had fostered regional identities. This chapter summarises the results of this research. They are based on two separate questionnaires administered in 2002 and 2007 to regional elites in the South Transdanubia region.

The definition of an action arena, following on the work of Elinor Ostrom, and the IAD (institutional analysis and development) model helped us to select the unit of our research and to assess interactions among actors by identifying the binding rules (position, boundaries, choice, aggregation, information, payoff, and scope) and to count the outcomes of the actors' actions (Ostrom 2005, 191).

We interpreted the region as an action arena. We assumed that particular actors and interactions determine a region, and there are common rules by which the region can be captured as "a part in the whole". Activities are determined by the context and where the efficiency of its actions depends on relationships among the actors of the arena, on driving forces, on knowledge of governance, and on internal cohesion.

Another pillar of our research was borrowed from the expanding scientific field dealing with networks which started in mathematics and technical and natural sciences, but which has reached many branches of the social sciences (sociology, psychology, economics) in the last decade.

Political science uses different approaches to analyse networks. A policy network approach was, for us, of special relevance. Policy network theory provides a lens through which to examine the interactions between groups or networks involved in policymaking and their influence on the policy process. Dowding (1995) and Marsh and Smith (2001) list four approaches to the study of policy networks: (1) the rational choice approach, (2) the personal interaction approach, (3) formal network analysis, and (4) the structural approach. In the governance model beyond hierarchical elements, horizontal network elements exist with different weights. As Kooiman (1993) noted, there are several definitions of governance. The British

one was especially important for our research. This definition defines governance as a self-regulating network in an era when governmental decision extended beyond the walls of Westminster and Whitehall (Rhodes 1997, 49). This is based on the recognition that the British government, by creating various organisations outside the public sector (often referred to as quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations, or QUANGOs), was able to bypass traditional public, state, and self-governmental institutions relocating more and more public tasks into this third sector. This method was useful not just for pluralising governance and decision-making and for introducing methods of New Public Management but also for creating a new governmental space, the region. Rhodes described this new type of governance as a self-regulating system of networks among institutions, where:

- There is mutual dependency among institutions involved.
- There are continuous interactions among the networks.
- These interactions are similar to games with defined rules and based on trust.
- The networks are independent from the state although, informally, it has a crucial governing impact on the networks (Rhodes 1997, 52).

A final approach to the study of networks, social capital theory, can also be regarded as relevant and is today found in numerous research projects analysing public policy decision-making. Little empirical research has been undertaken which lays the emphasis on civil society as a factor in region building, as opposed to those which analyse region building as a top-down or bottom-up process of institutionalisation. The value and the novelty of the latter approach are due to the fact that the very local scale is generally regarded as ideal for civil society participation, in contrast to the traditional approach focusing on public law and institutionalism. Putnam undertook a pioneering role (Putnam et al. 1993; Putnam 2000), directing attention to the role of civil society and social trust. Putnam distinguished three schools in researching institutional capacity and performance (Putnam et al. 1993, 9–10). The first one, based on the traditional formal *public law and institutionalist approach*, focuses on institutional design, declaring that the proper establishment of competences and the organisation of institutions is the most important condition for efficient and democratic governance. A number of works can be attached to this school, especially those by representatives of the *new institutional school.* Their research framework remains within the world of organisations and uses an organisational model to assess the efficiency of institutions. This approach has also emerged in the regional literature, emphasising the importance of development agencies, councils, etc. (Morgan 1999; Halkier et al. 1998; Danson et al 2000). The other school concentrates on the *socio-economic environment* of institutions. Dahl and Lipset represent this approach in modern political science. The third approach builds, according to Putnam, on the *sociocultural factors*, and his works follow this direction.

Putnam and his colleagues conducted empirical research in Italy two decades ago seeking to answer the question, "why do regional institutional systems produce different results and operate at different levels of efficiency in different parts of Italy?" In his work, he appears to have accepted the general opinion that "there is an

old wine in the new bottle" – that is, that institutions alone are not able to change social solidarity (Putnam et al. 1993, 18). Putnam's research showed that even 20 years of regional reforms were not enough to diminish the 100-year-old social and cultural differences between the South and North. In an active social and economic environment, both the state and the market functioned better and more efficiently. The contract binding civil society was not legal, but moral, based on 100-year-old traditions. The civil environment in the South was stable but based on mutual distrust and vertical dependency. This strongly limited the performance of the regions established by the Italian national government in the 1970s. Putnam's research pointed out, however, that new institutions set off a learning process and that the formal change produced informal changes which become self-sustaining (Putnam et al. 1993, 184).

Social trust is the result or "by-product" of two forms of social capital: social barter and civil participatory networks (Paraskevopoulos et al. 2006). Together, these determine the efficiency of public/civic actions. Therefore, the kinds of social capital and trust which motivate the region-building process make a difference in the outcome of region building which can be driven or limited by networks of institutional actors.

Three kinds of human capital, material, knowledge, and social capital (Coleman 1990) are needed in region building. Each can influence the development of the other. Social network analysis (SNA) serves as a methodological mean to measure social capital and the strength and direction of cooperation among actors.

In Hungarian sociological and political science literature, the region is often mentioned but rarely investigated. There are works dealing with regional institutional settings (Kaiser et al. 2007), and there are some experiments to measure the extent of regional identity (Bugovics 2004), but our research investigating relations among regional actors can be regarded as a pioneer. This means that there are few studies to compare it with, both in terms of methodology and results.

One should also note that there is relatively little research on the formation of regional identity and politics even in Western regionalised countries. There are some excellent exceptions dealing with cultural and identity factors (Stiens 1987; Dirven et al. 1993; Deffner et al. 2003; Bukowski et al. 2003) or with the networking of regions (Kohler-Koch 1998), but the recognition within political anthropology that political spaces are constructed by different levels and scales of networks (Abélés 2007, 134) has not yet inspired that part of the scientific community studying regionalism.

The Process of Region Building in South Transdanubia

This research attempted to follow the process of region building in one of the NUTS2 regions of Hungary: South Transdanubia. We selected this region because the first steps for regional cooperation in Hungary were taken here, and we could base our work on earlier research conducted by the Centre for Regional Studies of

the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, located in this region (Hajdú and Pálné Kovács 2003; Hajdú 2006).

The region, similarly to other Hungarian NUTS2 regions, has no traditions of institutional or political cooperation on this scale. The Hungarian government established the so-called territorial statistical regions in 1971. At that time, the South Transdanubian region consisted of four counties which were practically forced by the government to cooperate. Boundaries were drawn on the map, but no real cooperation evolved. The creation of a common development plan failed, and the redistribution of development resources remained within the competences of the counties.

The idea of regionalisation was struck from the agenda in the 1980s. Instead, the urban agglomeration became the geographical framework for regional integration motivated from the top.

Following this change, cooperation at the regional scale was even more neglected. However, in South Transdanubia the advantages of regional cooperation were recognised relatively early, possibly due to the role of the Centre of Regional Studies in promoting such cooperation. Within Hungary, regional-scale initiatives were born here, and this region is often referred to as the birthplace of Hungarian regionalisation and even regionalism. South Transdanubia was the first region to organise itself in the first half of the 1990s, when regionalisation was less popular. By the start of the 1990s, four county governments, cities, economic chambers, the research institute, and universities had established a regional development foundation. This organisation created the first regional development concept in the country, but the subsequent silent decline of this civil organisation highlighted the fact that lacking public power and resources, it was unable "to stimulate" regional cohesion. Subsequently, when regional development councils were established by the force of law, and as public actors took their seats in these institutions, the original informal organisation disappeared.

The amendment of the act on regional development in 1999 mandated the establishment of regional development councils in each NUTS2 region. The boundaries of the official NUTS2 region in South Transdanubia cover(ed) only three counties, although as we have mentioned, the bottom-up region was larger, which demonstrates that these new top-down imposed regions had no traditionally accepted boundaries. The regional development council is a so-called partnership organisation with members delegated by municipalities, county assemblies, and ministries. Its competences, resources, institutions, and processes are regulated by the law. In addition, as part of the reforms, regional development councils were created not just at the level of the NUTS2 region, but, in accordance with the act on regional development, at the micro-regional scale (174 NUTS4 units) and the county scale (19 NUTS3 units). The actors in this very fragmented system compete with each other, although they are partners at the same time, since they have seats at each council level. In approaching the EU accession, the macro-region (seven NUTS2 units) was strengthened vis-a-vis the lower units.

Within South Transdanubia, although the regional development council gradually became the dominant institutional setting for regional development activities,

another bottom-up attempt was made to create an institution for regional cooperation. This was a pilot regional programme in South Transdanubia, initiated by the charismatic mayor of the city of Pécs. The programme seemed to accord with the central government's intention to demonstrate its commitment towards regionalism at a time when political regionalisation had already been put on the agenda. Three county self-governments and two county seat cities in the region (the third one did not initially join because its mayor belonged to the opposition Alliance of Young Democrats, Fidesz) decided to find a self-government association in 2006, aiming to foster cooperation in fields which were not among the competences of the regional development council, like public services. The pilot programme did not promise to be successful, since the national government did not provide any special legal framework to foster such cooperation. Therefore, it had to operate within the existing regulation, and extra resources for common development projects were limited. Thus the relatively weak counties and relatively poor cities, facing financial and administrative constraints, were not able to build a strong region. The regional self-governmental association provided little added value or positive evidence that could have contributed to the formation and evolution of legislation on regional governance. Later, after local elections, the new regional-level leadership belonged to the opposition Fidesz party. Therefore, the national government lost its enthusiasm to support this bottom-up regionalisation. Participants in the association were also unwilling to share their power and resources in real cooperation. Instead, it appeared that the hope of obtaining extra money motivated them to stay in the association established by their predecessors. As the financial situation worsened, local actors lost their willingness to cooperate. This is a bad omen for the chances of "bottom-up" regionalisation.

In sum, the selected region seemed to be ideal for our research for three reasons. It is a region where regional cooperation is not motivated exclusively by the government but is rooted in the efforts of local actors as well. Second, it is a lagging region and is therefore strongly interested in accessing European Union development funds and therefore in adapting to the requirements of the Structural Funds. Finally, at the same time, a strong regional identity is missing even in this region. Moreover, there are sharp conflicts between counties, cities, and micro-regions constituting the region. It is an open question whether regional-scale politics and regional policy networks are able to cope with these conflicts and substitute for the missing regional identity.

Regional Networks at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century

Between 2001 and 2004, we had the opportunity to participate in a European Union's 5th Framework Programme of research (ADAPT 2001–2003; Pálné Kovács et al. 2004). The target of this research programme was to investigate how eligible cohesion regions were adapting to European regional policy. During this research a

so-called social network analysis (SNA) was conducted to assess the process of regional institutionalisation. Thirty structured interviews were undertaken with actors in the region, selected from among members of the regional development councils (mayors, presidents of the county assemblies, delegates of ministries) and stakeholders involved some way in regional development decision-making, such as the representatives from business, universities, and other non-governmental groups and institutions. We investigated the positions of different institutions within the network by several methods and found that the regional development council and the regional development agency possessed the greatest level of centrality, justifying the assumption that actors from government, or appointed by central government, are the only ones with an opportunity to weave together the region. They are most endowed with competences and public resources, while civil and business actors are relatively peripheral (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Freeman's degree-based centrality measures

No	Actor	Valued graph (B)	Scaled graph (B_4)	Binary graph (B_2)
12	South Transdanubian Regional Development Council	70.5	78.2	93.1
22	South Transdanubian Regional Development Agency	65.3	69.0	89.7
14	Somogy County Development Council	54.7	57.5	58.6
8	Assembly of Baranya County (elected)	55.9	56.3	58.6
20	University of Pécs	55.0	56.3	58.6
9	Assembly of Somogy County (elected)	51.2	51.7	55.2
13	Baranya County Development Council	48.2	51.7	48.3
15	Tolna County Development Council	47.3	49.4	44.8
17	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Baranya County	48.9	48.3	55.2
23	Local Government of the Town of Pécs with county rank (elected)	45.7	48.3	41.4
25	Local Government of the Town of Szekszárd with county rank (elected)	43.8	47.1	44.8
24	Local Government of the Town of Kaposvár with county rank (elected)	42.3	43.7	41.4
26	Micro-Regional Associations of Baranya County	41.2	41.4	41.4
16	South Transdanubian Regional Tourism Committee	40.6	41.4	44.8
3	National Development Centre	42.7	40.2	34.5
10	Regional Centre of Labour Force Training and Education	40.1	40.2	41.4
7	National Development Council	38.7	40.2	44.8
1	MARD regional and rural development divisions	37.5	37.9	41.4

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

No	Actor	Valued graph (B)	Scaled graph (B_4)	Binary graph (B_2)
5	Prime Minister's Office, State Secretariat of Regional Policy	38.9	35.6	34.5
18	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Somogy County	32.4	31.0	34.5
11	Hungarian Development Bank – regional unit	32.4	31.0	27.6
19	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tolna County	29.7	31.0	31.0
21	European Information and Development Ltd.	34.1	29.9	20.7
27	Micro-Regional Associations of Somogy County	30.0	26.4	20.7
30	Resource Centre Foundation	27.9	26.4	24.1
29	Industrial Park Pécs	26.9	25.3	20.7
2	MARD Sapard programme management	26.0	21.8	3.4
6	VÁTI – Territorial information system	23.4	21.8	17.2
28	Micro-Regional Associations of Tolna County	23.8	20.7	13.8
4	Ministry of Phare Affairs, Secretariat	24.4	18.4	13.8
	Mean	40.6	40.6	40.0
	Std. deviation	12.0	14.3	19.9

Source: ADAPT programme 2001–2003

Table 6.2 Connection densities between levels

	National	Regional	County	Micro-reg.
National	46.0	29.4	31.7	19.6
Regional	29.4	57.8	63.0	58.3
County	31.7	63.0	50.9	38.0
Micro-reg.	19.6	58.3	38.0	26.2

Source: ADAPT programme 2001–2003

The results showed that those institutions which were at the centre of the network and had the strongest integrating powers were those institutions based on the partnership principle (set up by the Act on regional development in 1996) and elected local and county governments.

Strikingly, as is shown in Table 6.2, the network was densest at the county scale, involving the largest number of actors investigated, although we found strong ties at the regional scale, due to regional development institutions (the council and the development agency) being able to contact organisations and actors in a wider environment. On the other hand, the larger cities were relatively isolated. Their desire to attract funding and development outweighed any desire to cooperate with smaller or less powerful jurisdictions in formulating regional development projects.

We used three models in approaching our research and interpreting the results. These were taken from the "development interest" constellation. The first was a public-dominated *developmental state*, where the public power designates the actors

participating in the decision-making. Only constituted public institutions have the chance to influence development policy, and there is one single aim of growth (Korea, Japan). The second was the *neo-corporative state*, where representatives of leading employers and their employees participate in decision-making, seeking solidarity and equity (Sweden, Holland, Ireland). The last was the *pluralistic model* (USA), where there is a distance between the public and private sphere, and the latter pushes the state from the side of the playing field (Wilson 2001).

The model adapted by the Hungarian central government initially favoured strong state/dominance, representing a special type within the first model. The power structure has an hourglass form. The meso-level is the pinch point; the elected county governments are one bulge and state organisations the other. The elected county governments are very weak, and deconcentrated state organisations both depend on and reflect the central government. To legitimise meso-level decision-making, the central government introduced some so-called neo-corporative or partnership types of bodies related to employment, youth, and development policies, which seemed to be more vigorous in trying to undertake redistributive and planning activity than the county governments. However, both the public and neo-corporative spheres remained weakly embedded in civil society. The relatively weak public part and the stronger "partnership/corporative" part of the system of meso-level governance are strongly interrelated and complementary. The almost absent representative mechanisms were replaced by partnership institutions. However, the evolution of these could not compensate for the democratic deficit at the meso-level. The result was that, as a whole, they were rather dysfunctional. Our research suggests that:

- The fragmentation of the meso-governance increased. Alongside elected county governments, a number of decentralised offices and new partnership organisations emerged.
- The frames of interest representation were diffuse not just organisationally but geographically too. Beside the county-scale institutions, a series of macro- and micro-regional institutions emerged without establishing stronger contacts among each other and therefore unable to contribute to regional cohesion.
- Partnership organisations broadened the circle of actors participating in meso-level governance, but the actors, aspects, and interests channelled into the decision-making remained exclusively selected. Links with the broader public did not grow. Civil society was not strengthened, and even the business sector, mainly through a chamber of commerce, had also just a limited voice.
- Experts and technocrats took on an overwhelming role in the preparation of plans and policies, which paradoxically re-narrowed the partnership dimension.
- The functioning of partnership bodies was characterised by intensive exclusivity and an almost complete lack of publicity. The members had no willingness to involve a broader circle of stakeholders. They were satisfied with the limited transparency.
- During the decade after the creation of meso-levels, a new meso-level elite emerged through delegation. This elite possessed a set of cumulated personal positions, giving it a strong influence on territorial level politics. However, their activities in several partnership bodies were and are not controllable by local society or even by the organs delegating them (municipalities, county governments).

This type of networking reproduced all the disadvantages which were already recognised and reported on in Western democracies. In Hungary, this neo-corporative jungle portended problems for two reasons: first, because here there was no strong "traditional" elected self-government behind the partnership organisations and informal networks and, second, the traditionally weak civil society was not able to enforce transparency and thus exercise oversight over the networks and the elite.

These phenomena underline the necessity of change in the meso-level governance: the legitimacy of this subnational sphere has to be strengthened. This political aim was supported by development policy considerations driven by EU Structural Funds, but coupled with aspects of public administration – that is, stable, strong meso-regions were needed to fulfil the slogan of a "Europe of regions".

As mentioned in the introduction, the reforms were postponed or cancelled after the party (Fidesz) taking the power in April 2010 failed to support any regionalisation. This failure can also possibly be explained by processes occurring in the regions which we have analysed during the last few years. The question was could the official, top-down regionalisation agenda change the landscape of regional networks?

Regional Networks at the End of the Decade

The OTKA project mentioned above gave us the opportunity to repeat our empirical research in 2007–2008 to compare the then current networking process with that which had been emerging at the beginning of the 2000s. The sample, with 200 interviewees from the regional elite or leadership, was representative of the institutional setting of the region. This sample was bigger than the earlier one because we involved actors from outside the narrow institutional framework of regional development policy, assuming that elected and party politicians, the leaders of the state administration, civil organisations, and the media were also important stakeholders regarding the governmental programme of political regionalisation. The survey consisted of 47 questions, which are presented in Palne Kovacs (2009).

First, it is useful to examine Table 6.3, which summarises the overall frequency of contacts between institutions. The table shows that local-scale contacts were dominant and the national centres like the parliament and national political parties as institutions were distant from regional networks. The relatively isolated situation of the regional institutions can be explained by the narrow scope of competences exercised at this level. The low presence of political parties in the regional system of contacts is misleading: this reflects national politicians and political institutions, such as the parliament, government, and national political parties, and does not include local politicians who serve in various regional-level positions (members in the development council, local governments, etc.).

If we look at the strengths of contacts between the four institutional levels shown in Table 6.2 (national, regional, county, micro-region), it is apparent that relationships among units of self-government, politicians, the media, and development organisations are strongest. Those within the non-governmental civil sector have the

Table 6.3 The frequency of institutional contacts in decreasing order

	Standard
Municipalities	3.60
Local media	3.41
County assembly	3.34
County-scale media	3.34
Local-scale business	3.31
Universities, colleges	3.23
Local non-profit organisations	3.13
County-scale business	3.12
Ministry, national administrative organ	3.03
Professional chambers	2.95
County non-profit organisations	2.91
Regional development council and agency	2.87
Research institutes	2.86
Regional-scale business	2.84
County development council and agency	2.70
Central government	2.67
National media	2.54
Nationwide business	2.43
National non-profit organisation	2.34
Churches	2.29
Political parties	2.23
Trade unions	2.21
Parliament	1.97

Source: OTKA 2005–2008
On a scale of 1–4, all the time *4*; sometimes *3*; rarely *2*; never *1*

weakest weight, although they and the universities considered relations with development organisations to be very important. It is interesting that non-governmental organisations did not regard their contacts with regional decision-makers as important, which can be explained by their view that although they were formally involved in decision-making, in practice they were largely ignored or excluded. This is shown in Table 6.4.

We also tried to measure the geographical frames of relationships (Fig. 6.1). Our results showed that a number of organisations have stronger ties outside the region (e.g. universities, the state administration, and media), while contacts of the development organisations and self-governments were mostly within the region (and, as already mentioned, at a smaller scale, within the county or micro-region).

Investigation of the networks led us to conclude that some changes occurred in terms of cooperation. The integrative role of the regional development organisations remains strong. However, local governments (cities and micro-regional associations) are more open and active than before and have gained increasing knowledge in how to absorb EU Structural Funds; they no longer need the assistance of development agencies in the way that they did a decade earlier. At the same time,

Table 6.4 The strength of contacts among institutional sectors

Importance + frequency	Civil org.	University	Business	Media	Political party	Development inst.	Public adm.	Local gov.	Sum
Civil organisation	2.63	2.31	2.32	2.59	2.92	2.80	2.16	*3.02*	2.56
University	*2.96*	*3.95*	2.91	2.88	*3.04*	*3.07*	2.91	*3.25*	3.13
Business	2.75	2.88	*2.95*	*3.08*	*3.29*	*3.16*	2.84	*3.28*	2.97
Media	*3.04*	*3.03*	*2.96*	*3.31*	*3.46*	*3.32*	*3.05*	*3.44*	3.16
Political party	1.51	1.68	2.53	2.71	*3.38*	2.64	1.48	*3.03*	2.15
Development institutions	2.74	2.46	*3.03*	*3.06*	*3.34*	*3.50*	2.37	*3.24*	2.87
State administration	2.36	2.84	2.31	2.08	*3.32*	*2.95*	2.64	*3.05*	2.68
Local/county government	*3.42*	*3.07*	*3.20*	*3.42*	*3.88*	*3.82*	*3.37*	*3.85*	*3.47*
Sum	2.67	2.78	2.77	2.89	*3.33*	3.16	2.60	*3.27*	2.87

Source: OTKA 2005–2008

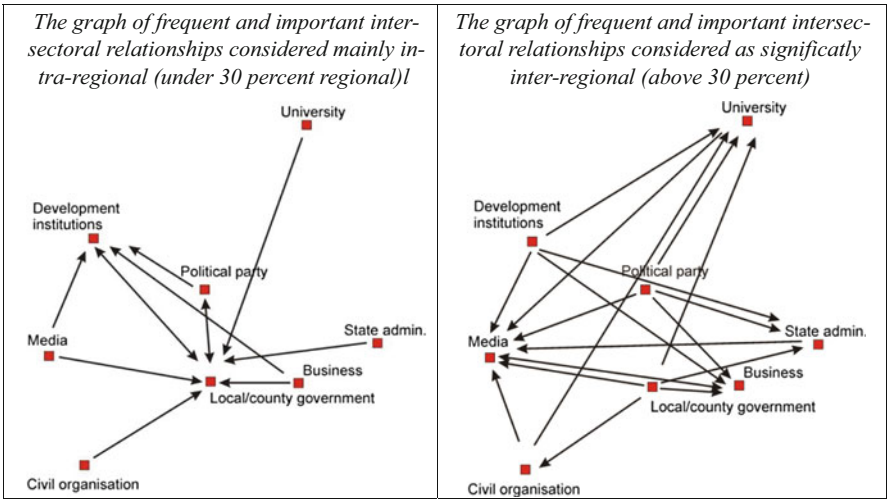

Fig. 6.1 Contacts within and beyond the region (Source: OTKA 2005–2008)

universities remain on the periphery of networks, in contrast to the official ambition of the regional development council of creating a knowledge-based economy.

Returning to the characteristics of the policy networks outlined by Rhodes (2000), it appears that, within Hungary, even as the central government wanted to change the system of regional administration by creating meso-level regions, changes in the last 6–8 years seem to have been necessary in any case. However, the policy networks formed as a result of regionalisation policies provide limited

participation, where the public sector is still the most influential and civil and business actors are on the periphery. The regional development council sits in the centre, integrating the network at the regional scale. Local governments and their micro-regional associations play a stronger role in integrating local actors, but on a smaller, subregional scale. It is interesting that although mayors, county assembly presidents, and the technocrats working for the regional development agency are members of a variety of networks, elected politicians, like members of the European and the National Parliament and national-level party politicians, are not embedded. This phenomenon shows the centralised nature of Hungarian political life where many national-level politicians think that it is not worthwhile "to act locally" or regionally.

The Opinion of the Regional Elite About the Reform

The survey devoted a separate block to the question of the reforms which were proposed at the time. The failures of those territorial administrative reforms which have been announced reflect the fact that implementation is the "missing link" (Dunn et al. 2006). There is a lack of any real social or political support for the reforms. It is theoretically supposed that a regional identity is an important precondition for their success, but the lack of a regional identity does not always explain the failures. Hungary has no tradition of regional-scale governance. Its territory and ethnic composition are relatively homogenous. Therefore, regionalisation is often viewed as a top-down process, driven by economic considerations, and even a wish to "modernise" public administration hierarchies. The question is whether this process has been supported at the bottom. The attitudes and relation of the local, regional elite towards regionalisation are key factors during both the preparation and implementation phases. Nunberg (2003) considered the case of Hungary to be especially interesting. After 1989, the country was ranked first in the region regarding the implementation of political and economic reforms, and the national government formulated very ambitious reforms in the field of public administration. These ambitions, however, were not shaped into a firm plan. Instead, they were implemented in incremental small steps, under the prodding of the EU. The so-called reform programmes were more like spontaneous reflexes shaped by the strong traditions of centralisation rather detailing a long-term process of implementation. The few partial successes are due mostly to EU requirements or, more recently, due to fiscal pressures resulting from the current (post-2009) financial crisis rather than being due to a widespread recognition of the need for change (Nunberg 2003).

The government set out the reform proposals, and created some regional frameworks, but has done little to translate proposals into action. It was therefore argued by the researchers that the general public, and even the political elite, was not convinced of the prospects of success of the regionalisation programme. Consequently, the research aimed to identify what kinds of obstructions hindered the implementation of the reforms.

In one question of the block, we asked to what extent the respondents agreed with statements concerning regional reforms. As Table 6.5 shows, the elite are aware of the top-down nature of the reform and link the reform strongly to the demands of the EU. Most of the respondents thought that the aim of the reform was to gain access to the Structural Funds. They were also aware that regional traditions and cohesion were missing, and they rejected the idea of adopting a regional identity as opposed to a county one. Opinions differed, however, about the content and the consequences of the reforms. There was no agreement concerning the statement that the reforms would result in greater centralisation and increase their distance from decision-making levels. Nor was there agreement that they would contribute to the improvement of public services and decrease costs. Opinions were especially diverse regarding the boundaries and seats of the regions. While most respondents did not consider the region to be too big, they did not accept the idea that the seat of the region should be the city of Pécs (the largest city in the region where, of course, several respondents live). This disagreement over the location of the regional seat, or capital, contrasts with the overall view regarding the boundaries of the regions

Table 6.5 Statements on the content of the regional reform

	Standard	Deviation
Contacts with the EU are managed easier at the regional level	3.16	0.92
The regions have no traditions	3.15	1.06
The reforms cause too much difficulties and uncertainties	3.13	0.86
The region has no cohesion and solidarity	3.08	0.93
Decision-making will be too far removed from citizens	2.89	1.11
Reform causes centralisation	2.76	1.08
The political elite know very little about the region	2.69	1.04
Regionalisation can cause macro-political conflicts	2.68	1.04
The region is more efficient in public administration	2.66	1.08
Public services could be managed more efficiently in the region	2.64	1.00
Regionalisation means cheaper public administration	2.64	1.14
Development problems can be solved only on the regional geographical scale	2.48	1.00
With the emergence of the regions, the problems of peripheral areas can be more easily resolved	2.45	1.06
The boundaries of the regions are questionable	2.35	1.19
Regional reform gives a chance to replace the current elite	2.32	1.10
The location of the seat of the region is questionable	2.27	1.27
Smaller settlements will better find their role and opportunities to represent their interest in the region	1.97	1.00
Due to its bigger scale, the region is a crucial counterweight to the centre	1.79	0.86
The region is too large	1.68	0.97
People identify themselves more with the region than with the county	1.47	0.72

Source: OTKA 2005–2008
1 strongly disagree at all, *2* somewhat disagree, *3* somewhat agree, *4* strongly agree

themselves. The designation of the number and boundaries of the NUTS2 region was based on the existing county boundaries, leaving their long-standing boundaries unchanged. However, there was no consensus on the question of the seat of the regions. Within each NUTS region, several cities – the existing county seats – were competing to be the regional seats, and the government was not brave enough to make the decision. Cities, especially the largest ones, were not enthusiastic about regionalisation, as they were afraid to lose their privileged status within counties. If we assume that a region is determined mostly by networks of its cities, then this rivalry seems to be a crucial obstacle to reaching consensus and developing support from the bottom.

It is likely that different opinions can be explained by the party affiliation of respondents. These reflect the views of the two main parties, one, Fidesz, conservative, and opposed to the regionalisation reform, and, the other, the Hungarian Socialist Party, left wing, and in ostensibly in favour of it. However, to a large extent, both parties were reluctant to undertake regional reforms, and the socialists undertook them in order to meet EU demands for the creation of NUTS2 regions. Fidesz and its socialists argued that regionalisation would limit the powers of the central government, and the Fidesz ant its allies argued that regionalisation would cause too many difficulties and uncertainties by creating a new layer of administration. On the other hand, there was full agreement with the statement in the questionnaire that regionalisation is disadvantageous for the small villages and also that regionalisation is advantageous from the aspect of economic competitiveness.

A separate block of questions dealt with the management of Structural Funds, since this was one of the most important motivations or driving forces behind the creation of new regions. Responses to questions concerning the Structural Funds, shown in Table 6.6, indicate the disappointment which emerged after Hungary's accession to the EU. There was not just disappointment in EU institutions, but in the Hungarian management. This was due to the centralised and bureaucratic style of Hungarian management, far beyond the required level set by the EU. The elite interviewed in our survey were also critical of various lobbying groups which seem to be unavoidable in this field.

Table 6.6 Structural funds

	Standard deviation	
The management of SF is bureaucratic	3.40	0.76
The management of SF provides an opportunity to lobby	3.21	0.85
The management of SF is centralised, leaving no space for the regions	3.08	0.96
The management of SF is not transparent	3.01	0.95
The management of SF is as the EU requires	2.60	1.05
The management of SF is correct, efficient, close enough to the stakeholders	1.97	0.82

Source: OTKA 2005–2008
1 strongly disagree, *2* somewhat disagree, *3* somewhat agree, *4* strongly agree

We asked the sample whether they supported the establishment of regional self-governments in general. Interestingly, the majority supported regional reform (68 %), but this support is not linked to satisfaction with the reform process and the performance of the government. This means that the elite involved in regional-scale policy formation and implementation, such as regional development councils or the recipients of European money, accept the popular concept of regionalisation. On the other hand, many of the respondents did not support the government's reform proposals and particularly disagreed with the way the government tried to implement them.

In sum we can conclude that the support for the reform is relatively high. The elite feel the necessity of change at the meso-level, which has become a jungle of different levels and institutions, and are therefore too weak to counterbalance the overweight of the centre. Returning to the model of Ostrom, the region is not yet an identifiable action arena in Hungary since, based on its competences, regulated relationships, and networks of actors, it cannot yet be distinguished as a free-standing administrative unit. Its networks are characteristically institutionalised from the top, and mainly involve only public-sector actors, and neither reflect nor contribute to the existence of a coherent region. This is not surprising, since on the basis of the uncertainties of the reform and the paradoxes in governmental policy, local actors are unlikely to build regions from the bottom-up on their own.

Conclusion: Paradoxes of Regionalisation

Our assumption was that 10 years after regionalisation became an official government policy, the region would have become the main policy arena, where political decisions were taken by legitimised regional actors. The research aimed at measuring the density of networks in order to determine the strength of the reforms and the future of regional management. Our research could not cover every aspect of regionalisation, but the results are sufficient to draw conclusions about the success of local government reform and formulate an agenda for further research.

In Hungary, regionalisation is not occurring, not in the context of comprehensive reforms based on broad consensus, but instead is infiltrating the public arena through the backdoor. It is true that the reform faced many political and social obstacles, but reform by stealth involves a number of paradoxes, and it appears that the results have not always matched expectations.

The first paradox is an economic one. As we emphasised, regionalisation first of all was aimed at modernising the administrative system and enhancing economic competitiveness. When investigating the economic structure of the country and the regions, we do not find real economic cohesion or clusters. The spatial economic processes follow the location and expansion of foreign investments. The economic space remains fragmented, structured alongside urban agglomerations, rail and river axes, and highways. The gap between the regions is deepening. Only regions lagging

behind show some homogeneity regarding their low GDP, high unemployment, and other negative indicators. It is possible to argue that regionalisation could not exploit advantages of agglomerative effects and economic development policy did not use regionalisation as a framework or lens through which to direct intervention and economic support for particular sectors or clusters. It appears that economic development was not and is not the focus of development policy. For this reason, economic actors – local chambers of commerce – were not able to influence regional development decisions because they were on the periphery of the networks. Public actors, like mayors, are interested mostly in the improvement of human and technical infrastructure. Therefore, there were no actors to represent economic issues. Thus, regional policies can be explained by the networks of decision-makers involved in regional policy formation.

The *second paradox is the regional development policy paradox.* European Union membership caused more losses than benefits for the regions. As the results of the survey demonstrated, expectations concerning accession to the European Union were closely based on the expectation that there would be some kind of regional decentralisation. This was due to the belief that regions would manage European Union Structural Funds. Consequently, it was a real shock when the regional actors were largely excluded from the domestic management of the Structural Funds. At the same time, the scope of action of domestic regional policy institutions, like development councils, was narrowed because domestic resources were used to complement project budgets financed by Structural Funds. So, the whole institutional setting, established in 1996, to prepare for EU accession, is essentially hollow. European cohesion policy created a one-off chance to modernise the country's administrative structure, but it could not result in the regionalisation of decision-making, and Hungarian regions were not able to become fully functional mid-level governments.

The *third paradox can be found in the realm of public administration*. The point of regionalisation should be decentralisation and consequently the more efficient representation of territorial interests than before. If we look at changes within the public administrative sector, political regions were not created. Instead, the emerging regions, without elected governments, and based on appointed bodies, represent the interests of the centre. This reform consequently cannot be regarded as a first step towards regional decentralisation. Instead, it is nothing else than the expansion of the central state at the regional level.

The last paradox is that of bottom-up regionalism. This refers to the process occurring in the region investigated. Although the regional reform was initiated from the top, its success depended to a large extent on support from below. There is no doubt that some kind of regional networking emerged, but the key actors of the networks were public quasi-governmental bodies and therefore dependent on the central government. In the real local institutions, actors have no dominant role. They just assist in the centralised distribution of the Structural Funds. It is no wonder, therefore, that local politicians and civil organisations identified themselves at a smaller geographical scale. They accepted the existence of a meso-level region, but considered it irrelevant as a framework for actions.

True regional decentralisation, the building of a political region, would require significantly more conscious and complex organisational activity. Local actors were able to accommodate and adapt to changing conditions and frameworks, but were not able to expand their competences and create denser networks. Our survey suggests that regionalisation in Hungary has failed due to the lack of complex preparation and consensus building. Further research could explain why this happened and examine whether the region building is only a question of strong will. We agree with the opinion that real power networks sometimes disfigure the official public boundaries (Abélés 2007, 134). The question is where is the real power, and who is able to shift it downwards?

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