

LITERATURE

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Kocsis, K. and Schweitzer, F. (eds.): Hungary in Maps. Geographical Research Institute Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 2009, 211 pp.

The latest, third volume of a series of atlases published by the Geographical Research Institute presents the geography of Hungary. The first volume presented a region, South Eastern Europe and the Balkans (2005, 2007), and the second Ukraine (2008), one of the largest and most populous countries of the continent. The new member of regional atlases, a comprehensive overview of a comparatively small country, Hungary, is the most voluminous of them. This publication can really be called an atlas as the descriptions and analyses on more than 200 pages are illustrated by 172 full-colour maps and diagrams. In addition, 52 tables accompany the clear and authoritative explanatory notes. On average, each page of the atlas contains at least one colour figure or a statistical set. The volume consistently follows a clear editorial philosophy in content, structure, outward appearance and execution (size, cover, paper quality, letter types, page setting, and illustrations. This is a unique publication combining the best features of a book and atlas. No such work was published in Hungary in the past few decades.

The Hungarian geographers always thought it important to present their country for foreign readers. After World War I, several geography books and lots of maps were published on Hungary and its geographical environment. They were published first of all in French, English and German languages, and they showed the catastrophic effect of the peace treaty (1920) on Hungary and the Carpathian Basin. Later, since the 1960s, after a break of two decades, the studies and two national atlases concentrated on presenting the large scale changes in the socialist society and economy. They were published in Russian, German and English.

Twenty years after the great political changes and the second edition of the National Atlas of Hungary in 1989, it was high time again publishing a concise book or atlas to reflect the current state of the country in English. According to the editors, this project served as a preliminary study for the new, third edition of the National Atlas of Hungary to be co-ordinated by the Geographical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The two editors and their excellent staff have tested their capacity of collecting the data from Hungarian and international sources, writing the detailed explanations and organizing a huge scientific project. As an outcome of these efforts, a distinguished team of more than thirty contributors presented the results of their research in almost all the fields of earth sciences. An impressive amount of information in the maps and graphs supported with textual comments make the atlas a comprehensive handbook. Although the emphasis is largely placed on contemporary Hungary, important sections are devoted to the historical development of the natural and human environment as well.

The work is divided into five parts, two shorter introductory and three longer analyzing chapters. The first, short chapter positions Hungary, its geographical location and geopolitical situation in the world. The subsections briefly describe the stability and change in the ethnic and state territory in the past 1100 years, administrative divisions, and give an overview of the changes in the international relations and economic development after 1989. The comparative figures also reveal the dramatic scale of transformation

of some European economies at the turn of the 20th and 21st century. The second, shortest chapter is an outline of the history of the Hungarian state since the very beginning to the past years, when Hungary became a member of the European Union. An excellent map series on the states in the Carpathian Basin between 1000 and 2009 accompanies the story of the Hungarians.

The third chapter follows with the topographical and physical-geographical description of Hungary. This analysis of the natural environment comprises almost a third of the total pages of the volume. Compared to the former atlases in the series, this part is given a major attention. The relatively detailed description demonstrates that the study of the geography of Hungary has been traditionally strongly rooted in understanding the natural conditions of the land. The subchapters begin with addressing the topic of geophysics (tackling the earthquakes in the whole Pannonian Basin) and – relatively shortly – geology. The part on the relief and landscape types is richly accompanied by maps. The subchapter dedicated on climate includes long-term trends, which are of great importance for the agriculture in Hungary. A section on hydrography follows, which convincingly demonstrates that the scientific study of waters, the drainage system and the water management is of crucial importance for the urgent flood control in Hungary, a country set in the middle of a large basin. Another subchapter explains why the fertile soils of Hungary form a major asset of the national wealth, though land degradation has been endangering their quality. The parts on the flora and fauna analyze the question in a broader perspective both in time and space. The state of nature conservation and environmental protection in Hungary is extensively presented in two subchapters not forgetting about the international environmental conflicts.

The chapter on the population and settlements is somewhat underrepresented in the atlas compared to the extent of similar chapters in the former two publications. This is certainly explained by the fact that the population of Hungary is much more homogeneous than that of the Balkans or Ukraine. However, the maps and tables and the explanations on relatively fewer pages give a comprehensive overview of the demographic features of the country: the size and distribution of the population, the population movement in historical perspective, and internal and international migration. Intriguing topics are discussed and presented here: the general population decline, ageing, increase in unemployment, the Roma population at home, the situation of Hungarian minorities abroad, and new trends in urban development. The subchapter on ethnicity and religion is another part of the book that will raise a great interest among foreign readers although the latest data (from 2001) are relatively old. The national census planned for 2011 will surely provide the editors with up-to-date data on the ethnic and lingual patterns as well as on church and religion. The subchapter on settlements is more detailed and gives current data on the settlement system and urbanization of Hungary.

The final, and – just like in the other atlases in this series – by far the most extensive chapter deals with the economy of the country. After an outline of the economic history of Hungary, important passages describe the transition to a market economy (including the privatization and the controversial economic and social consequences as a result of the transition) and the main features of the new economic structure, not leaving the subject of the massive influx of foreign direct investment. A time series of maps illustrates the regional processes of the past three decades. A detailed analysis of economic sectors follows: agriculture, mining with the perspectives on the exploitation of mineral resources, problems in the energy supply and electricity generation, industry and transport. Telecommunications and the banking network with an increasing spatial concentration of services focused on

Budapest as well as the internal trade and capital exports each received a subchapter. The final part deals with tourism in Hungary.

It is a great asset of the atlas that the maps and figures clearly orientate the reader to discover the regional patterns and differences within Hungary. Unfortunately, the dark colours of symbols block the reading of some maps, while in some other cases the colours are too much reduced. Although the use of geographical names is not always consistent, the maps always help identify the objects or places mentioned in the explanations. The graphs and tables of international indicators help the interested to place the economy of Hungary first of all in a European dimension. Most of the data are surprisingly fresh – due to the computers that can wait until the last days to process the latest data either in table or map form and to the scientists who interpreted the data and the trends.

A book like this is surely an important source of information for geographers and other earth scientists. Although writing this volume did not need direct international cooperation, the publication will surely generate an echo outside Hungary. I wish that *Hungary in Maps* become a popular publication with the international readers: this book may also serve as a nice and useful gift for visitors including not only the professionals of the scientific community, but also businessmen, politicians or the sophisticated readers. It also satisfies the interest of those readers who wish to learn about the land and inhabitants of the Hungarian state and want to have a reliable guide to the modern image of the country in a European context and on a global scale. The price of this professional guide is most advantageous!

This atlas makes Hungary even more attractive to visit.

GÁBOR GERCSÁK

OECD Environmental Performance Reviews Hungary. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, 2008, 226 p.

The review of public policies and country performance is a core function of the OECD, whose aim is to help member countries improve their individual and collective performances in environmental management and sustainable development. OECD also reviews environmental performance of key non-Member countries. To date, OECD has completed reviews of Chile, China and of the Russian Federation.

The Environmental Performance Review of Hungary, published in 2008 in English, French and Hungarian examines Hungary's progress since the previous OECD Environmental Performance Review in 2000, and the extent to which the country had met its domestic objectives and international commitments. The OECD report also reviews Hungary's progress in the context of the OECD Environmental Strategy for the First Decade of the 21st Century. Some 46 recommendations were made that should contribute to further environmental progress in Hungary. It addresses the combined efforts of government and civil society (including industry, labour, households and environmental NGOs).

The first environmental review of Hungary assessed the progress made between 1990 and 2000, a period marked by Hungary's accession to the OECD (in 1996). It was very timely to release the second report, covering the period since 2000, after accession of Hungary to the EU and after more than 10 years of co-operation with OECD. Since 2000,