

## Foreword

This volume is the follow-up of a series of conferences on the history, development, and future of Budapest, launched by the Institute for Economy and Competitiveness of the Eötvös József Research Centre in the framework of the Modern Cities programme. The interest shown in the presentations, which were attended by a large number of professionals, along with the upcoming 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Budapest's foundation, prompted the editors of this volume to draw on the ideas presented to formulate the most important topics for research on the country's capital.

As we approach the anniversary, it is essential to examine the place of Budapest within the system of Central European cities, particularly regarding the spatial distribution of its society and economy. The unification of the three cities – Pest on the left bank of the Danube and Buda and Óbuda on the right bank – enabled the capital to become a rival centre of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, alongside Vienna, and the focal point of the Carpathian Basin. At that time Budapest was the cornerstone of social and technical modernisation. It was the city's industry that played a pivotal role in its advancement, allowing it to enter the global markets with products that were considered major innovations. The industrial success was crucial in driving the city's development and shaping its international relations. For a long time, Budapest's industry not only spearheaded its growth but also determined the capital's position on the world stage. The regime change in 1989–1990 further consolidated this process, making Budapest one of the most dynamic cities in the region and giving it the opportunity to assume a significant position in the international network of cities in Eastern and Central Europe. This was partly due to the influx of foreign capital: multinational companies began establishing their networks in the capital because here they found everything they needed – a skilled and affordable workforce that was professionally adaptable and flexible, as well as a well-developed infrastructure and significant purchasing power potential.

Apart from a few brief periods in history, the capitals of East-Central Europe have rarely managed to exert a region-wide attraction, especially during the closed confines of the socialist decades. With the change of regime and deepening globalisation, however, cities in East-Central Europe have unquestionably become the driving forces of their countries. But can this transformation alone propel Budapest or its competitors to lead their metropolitan areas? Due to the European integration of the former socialist bloc, regional borders have become easily crossable and regional co-operations such as the V4 have gradually deepened. This raises the pertinent question of whether Eastern and

Central Europe has a defining ‘capital’ at all. Can Budapest, as the gateway to the Balkans and the primary centre of the Carpathian Basin, aspire to a leadership role within the Visegrád Group?

The volume also examines the specific, long historical development path that intertwines the capital with its agglomeration through myriad ties. This region, as the central, densely populated area of the Carpathian Basin, has been pivotal in the spatial structure of the country since pre-capitalist times. The unification of the city in 1873 formally acknowledged the early stages of agglomeration. The spatial development of this agglomeration gained particular emphasis after the regime change, when the relationships and the division of labour between Budapest and its suburbs entered a new phase. The evolution of the metropolitan transport network, unfolding across several stages, has played a key role in transforming Budapest into a metropolis. Over the span of a century and a half, this process has been characterised by a continuous network expansion, adapting to evolving travel demands. Simultaneously, it has been crucial for fostering multifaceted passenger transport links between the capital and its ever-expanding agglomeration, necessitating enhancements in fixed-route and road transport networks. The volume presents a brief assessment of the current state of the transport network in Budapest and its agglomeration, highlighting principal operational challenges. Then, on the one hand, it outlines strategic development objectives essential for shaping a liveable metropolis with an efficient and environmentally friendly transport system. On the other hand, it identifies all the development tools to achieve these objectives. The most important of these include: 1. establishing a safe, predictable, and integrated metropolitan transport system; 2. deepening and diversifying cooperation in transport links within the agglomeration; 3. promoting smart development of the network, emphasising energy efficiency, low pollution, and noise reduction; 4. achieving optimal balance between vehicular and pedestrian traffic in public spaces of the capital, while minimising conflicts; 5. expanding and enhancing passenger-centric intermodal transport connections.

For the past 150 years, Budapest has served as a place for entertainment, culture, sports, health, and active recreation. The capital has consistently offered its residents and visitors alike a wealth of “good venues” for both individual and social leisure, creating joyful and memorable experiences.

In today’s complex landscape, challenges such as the impacts of globalisation, Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence, and the ongoing growth demand effective urban development solutions. Consequently, research into smart cities has become a top priority. Since the turn of the millennium, Hungary has also witnessed the strengthening of its creative economy, particularly the remarkable growth of knowledge-intensive industries over the past two decades. As a result, the significance of Budapest has risen,

and the role of its agglomeration within the Hungarian creative economy has expanded significantly, which the crises could not substantially influence. These developments actively shape Budapest's contemporary landscape: the city's society, economy, and not least, its physical environment and geographical outlook are undergoing profound transformations.

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*The editors*