



The Land of Storms and the region where the country's heart beats: changing images of peripherality in Hungary

Péter Balogh (ER1)

Alföld Department, Institute for Regional Studies, CERS-HAS

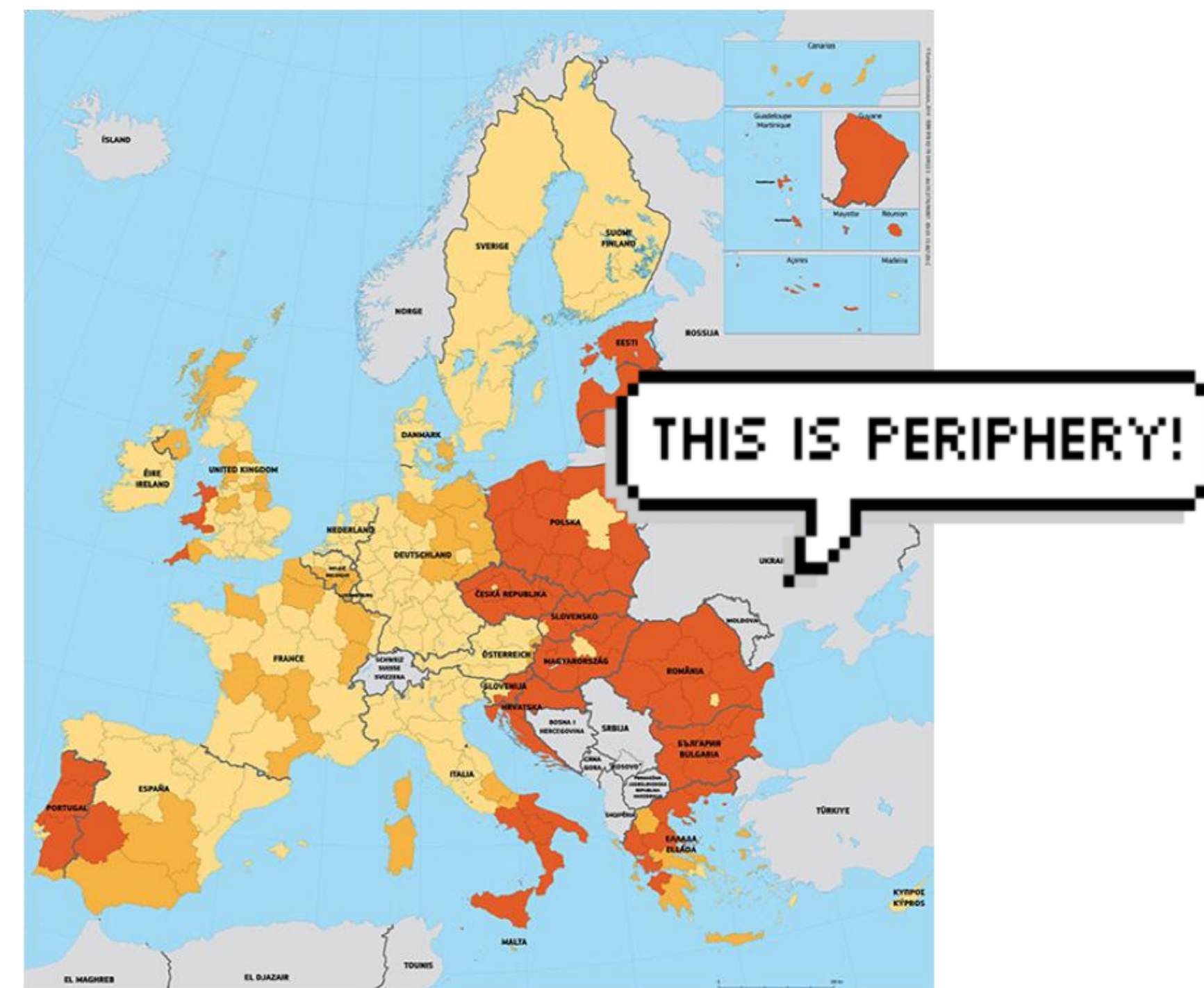
Background

Over the past years, the intensifying processes of peripheralisation have been studied from political economic (Smith & Timár 2010; Nagy *et al.* 2012), structural-territorial (Pénzes 2013), hinterland development (*cf.* Timár & Kovács 2009), and discursive (Meyer & Miggelbrink 2013) angles. There is at the same time an emerging body of literature that tries to connect the material with the discursive (Beetz 2008; Lang 2012), to which this study aimed to contribute.

What kind of notions and images have typically been produced of so-called peripheral areas in Hungary, and why? How can these affect public notions of such places and thereby their development chances?

Objectives

- **showing how socio-material and discursive processes can co-constitute centre-periphery relations** in the case of Hungarian regions and places
- While considering a number of examples, particular attention was paid to Békés County, often regarded as one of the most peripheral parts of Hungary. This and other regions' relations and positions were considered not least vis-à-vis the (admin.) region of Central Hungary and especially the capital city Budapest.



Contribution to RegPol²

Centre-periphery relations are predominantly studied from socio-economic/material/policy perspectives, including in the project at large. Thus my approach can be regarded as an enrichment to the scholarly diversity in the project.

Language is a powerful tool! Thus be reflexive about the words and notions used regarding centre-periphery relations.

Methodology

A **critical analysis** of materials from the following two groups of sources

- **non-fiction books as well as films** were chosen that deal with rural and peripheral areas in Hungary and especially in Békés County; 8–9 recent and older sources that remain relevant.
- **articles in popular but still demanding publications**, especially in *A Földgömb*, the popular scientific journal of the Hungarian Geographical Society (issued in 21,700 copies ten times annually; over 6,000 subscribers and around 70,000 readers).

Conclusions

Images of peripheral areas have significantly altered over time. While the "Land of Storms" – an epithet associated with Békés County – for instance has typically stood for toughness and combat-readiness up until the 1950s, it has been connected more with passivity and tardiness since the 1980s. Despite the changing nature of **these images** they **have curiously always been attributed to peripherality**, even though a rising spirit for instance has not been a typical feature of peripheries in Hungary. **Popular scientific articles** are usually **written from the centre's perspective, targeting the centre's audience.** Further, **certain places** are peripheralised by being **depicted as forgotten or remote**; the natural endowments of rural and sparsely populated areas are not rarely **exotified and romanticised.** **Such descriptions** may present so-called peripheries more interesting for readers (in the centres), yet – in line with Beetz (2008: 13) – they also maintain old images of such areas that **can considerably affect their development potentials.**

